

GREATER KANSAS CITY AND THE URBAN CRISIS, 1830-1968

by

VAN WILLIAM HUTCHISON

B.A., Indiana State University, 1999

M.A., Indiana State University, 2001

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History  
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

2013

## **Abstract**

In the last two decades, the study of postwar American cities has gone through a significant revisionist reinterpretation that overturned an older story of urban decay and decline beginning with the tumultuous 1960s and the notion that a conservative white suburban backlash politics against civil rights and liberalism appeared only after 1966. These new studies have shown that, in fact, American cities had been in jeopardy as far back as the 1940s and that white right-wing backlash against civil rights was also much older than previously thought. This “urban crisis” scholarship also directly rebutted neoconservative and New Right arguments that Great Society liberal programs were at fault for the decline of inner-city African American neighborhoods in the past few decades by showing that the private sector real estate industry and 1930s New Deal housing programs, influenced by biased industry guidelines, caused those conditions through redlining.

My case study similarly recasts the history of American inner cities in the last half of the twentieth century. It uses the Greater Kansas City metropolitan area, especially Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas City, Kansas, as a case study. I deliberately chose Kansas City because traditional urban histories and labor histories have tended to ignore it in favor of cities further east or on the west coast. Furthermore, I concur with recent trends in the historical scholarship of the Civil Rights Movement towards more of a focus on northern racism and locating the beginning of the movement in the early twentieth century. In this study, I found evidence of civil rights activism in Kansas City, Missouri as far back as the late 1860s and 1870s. I trace the metropolitan area’s history all the way back to its antebellum beginnings, when slavery still divided the nation and a national railroad system was being built. I weave both labor and changes in transportation over time into the story of the city and its African-American population over

time.

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Approved by:

Major Professor  
Sue Zschoche

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## **Abstract**

In the last decade to fifteen years, the study of postwar American major cities has gone through a significant revisionist reinterpretation that overturns the older stories of urban decay and decline as beginning with the tumultuous 1960s and the notion that a conservative white suburban backlash politics against civil rights and liberalism appeared only after 1966 by showing that, in fact, American cities had been in trouble as far back as the 1940s and that right-wing backlash politics itself was also much older than previously thought. This “urban crisis” scholarship also directly rebutted neoconservative and New Right arguments that Great Society liberal programs were at fault for the conditions of inner-city African American neighborhoods by showing that, in fact, it had been the private sector real estate industry and 1930s New Deal housing programs influenced by biased industry guidelines that had caused those conditions through redlining.

My case study is in this vein of revisionism towards the history of American inner cities in the last half of the twentieth century, using the Greater Kansas City metropolitan area, especially as pertains to Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas City, Kansas, as my case study. I deliberately chose Kansas City as an additional iconoclastic move, since traditional urban histories and labor histories have tended to ignore it in favor of cities further east or on the west coast. Furthermore, I concur with recent trends in studying the history of the civil rights movement that focus more on northern racism and which moves the beginning of the movement back to the early twentieth century. In fact, in this study, I found evidence of civil rights activism in Kansas City, Missouri as far back as the late 1860s and 1870s. I trace the metropolitan area’s history all the way back to its antebellum beginnings, when slavery was dividing the nation and a national railroad system was being built. I weave both labor and changes in transportation over

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ix
Dedication.....	xiv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE: ROOTS: KANSAS CITY, KANSAS AND KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, 1850-1900.....	21
CHAPTER TWO: JIM CROW AND THE ORIGINS OF THE URBAN CRISIS IN GREATER KANSAS CITY, 1900-1920.....	52
CHAPTER THREE: ORIGINS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS AND BLACK FREEDOM MOVEMENT IN GREATER KANSAS CITY, 1870-1920.....	85
CHAPTER FOUR: KANSAS CITY'S BLACK WORKING-CLASS, POLITICS, AND ORGANIZED LABOR IN AN URBAN CRISIS, 1920-32.....	121
CHAPTER FIVE: TRANSPORTATION, RACE, WORLD WAR II, AND URBAN CRISIS IN THE TWO KANSAS CITIES, 1890-1945.....	171
CHAPTER SIX: GREATER KANSAS CITY IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA, 1940-68.....	221
Bibliography.....	333



## Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my committee, past and present members both, here at Kansas State University for helping me through not only the final stages of this project but also through my entire growth as an historian. The entire Department has been wonderful to me, and I greatly appreciate their advice, instruction, and dedication to my academic progress throughout the years. I especially want to thank my committee chair and advisor, Dr. Sue Zschoche, for making this project possible first through both introducing me to Thomas Sugrue and the literature on the urban crisis in the first place and subsequently, by agreeing to let me take it on despite how large and foreboding tackling a history project of this size and scope can be. In making this project possible, I would also like to thank the staff at the Missouri Valley Special Collections Room at the Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, especially the very knowledgeable and helpful archivist Dr. John A. Horner for his assistance in locating Kansas City's rich archival record relating to its African-American citizens over two centuries within the Missouri Valley Special Collections' considerable stacks of file folders, boxes, and microfiche. I would additionally like to thank the Kansas State Archives at the Historical Society in Topeka and the Missouri State Archives in Jefferson City for their assistance as well. The staff in Jefferson City was especially kind, gracious, and helpful to me during my stays there in July and early September. I also wish to thank the Graduate School outside committee member, Michelle Jannette for filling in at the last minute when needed. Last but not least, I'd like to thank our Department's secretary and manager, Shelly Reves, for helping Dr. Zschoche and myself speed this dissertation up to Graduate School standards six months early, as it turned out.

I also want to thank Professor Sue Zschoche for everything she has done over the years to assist me, encourage me, counsel me, and make me feel at home here in Manhattan, Kansas. I

came here in 2003 as a labor and social movements historian, and she took on advising me in spite of the fact that my specialization was unusual for most history graduate students here. I thank her immensely for that, as well as Professors Lou Williams, Jack Holl, James Franke, and Derek Hoff for working with me and contributing what they knew of labor history. I think that, as a result, my perspective as a labor and social movements historian has broadened and been enriched greatly. Zschoche's course on history and collective memory my first year here was very influential in adding another tool with which to analyze history.

Dr. Lou Williams was actually the first member of the faculty I met. This was in the summer of 2003, before the Fall semester began. My parents and I were tired after having moved me and my belongings five hundred and forty miles west on I-70 from Terre Haute, Indiana in two cars, stopping only at my Grandfather's house in Lawrence overnight. She was very friendly and helpful in showing me and my folks around the Department for the very first time. She and Zschoche were both excellent in reminding me during this process that through all of the large intellectual concepts, ideologies, facts, and large segments of time that a given history deals with, that it is *human beings* and their stories who matter most. As someone who had written a master's thesis on W.E.B. DuBois, a significant part of my labor and social movement specialization has been civil rights and the link between the black freedom struggle and the labor movement. Dr. Williams' southern history seminar enriched this knowledge with its histories Fannie Lou Hamer and Robin Kelley's classic work on the 1930s Communist Party in Birmingham, *Hammer and Hoe*. I want to thank Dr. Williams as well as my friend and colleague Dr. Mike S. Davis for helping nurture my scholarly knowledge in this area. To Williams and Davis, and to my former Indiana State M.A. Committee member, Dr. Keith Byerman, I am eternally grateful for their assistance to me in my pursuit of African-American history throughout

my graduate career. Finally, I owe both Dr. Williams and Dr. Charles Sanders tremendously for sharpening my knowledge of nineteenth century American history, knowledge without which one cannot truly understand the twentieth.

Dr. James Franke helped me to hone a kind of history that was already tilted in a direction that had considerable overlap with political science by having me write on Richard Hofstadter for my graduate credit in his Political Science course and on labor history for a readings course. Along with History Department Chair Dr. Louise Breen, Dr. Franke gave me a clearer understanding of James Madison and the mindset of the much mythologized “Founding Fathers” at the genesis of American history. Republicanism, already familiar to me from my M.A. work, came through these readings into sharper focus. Special thanks should also be given to Professors Franke and Hoff for serving on both my main committee and my preliminary examination committee.

I would like to thank Dr. Derek Hoff and Dr. Michael Krysko for agreeing to carry the committee forward and assist me on my dissertation when Professors Jack Holl and Michael Ramsay had to leave and thank both of them for their input. Dr. Hoff was kind enough to look at the rough draft of my proposal when Dr. Zschoche was seriously ill a few years ago; his assistance there, as well as bringing my attention to a body of historical literature on the urban crisis beyond Sugrue’s work were invaluable in this study and I am in great debt to him for such gracious assistance. Dr. Krysko helped me to shape Chapter 5, focusing on transportation, by pointing to James Flink’s definitive study of the rise of the automobile.

I would like to thank all of those who have assisted my development of teaching skills over the years, beginning with Dr. Holl’s twentieth century seminar and its mock syllabus exercise of an “ideal class” to Professors Chuck Sanders, Michael Ramsay, Bonnie Lynn-Sherow,

and Don Mrozek, as well as my friend and colleague Todd Thummel. There is also the matter of my publications: without Professors Jack Holl, Al Hamscher, and M.J. Morgan, I don't know where I'd be. That gratitude most definitely extends to the Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas and their former staff members Jim Leyerzapf, Dwight Standberg, and David Haight. For Dr. Hamscher and Dr. Morgan, two additional assists that made this project possible merit further thanks: Hamscher got me to knock off overly long paragraphs and to write better, while the training Morgan gave me in the Broughton Project proved to be just what I needed to learn how to write local case studies. I merely transferred the setting to a giant metropolitan area from a lost small town. Beyond this, conversations with Professors Zschoche, Sanders, Holl, Mrozek, Ramsay, Hoff, Sherow, and others have been greatly fruitful in prompting fresh ways to look at familiar historical questions.

Last but certainly not least, I'd like to thank the Indiana State University professors on my M.A. committee who signed the recommendations letters to bring me here: Professors Richard Schneirov and Ann Chirhart of ISU's History Department and Dr. Byerman of the English Department at ISU. Liberalism and republicanism were already familiar to me when I got here thanks to Schneirov's rigorous courses in labor, Gilded Age, and Progressive Era history that were heavy with "big picture" periodization. A former SDS activist from Chicago, "Rich" Schneirov ran a tight ship there. He had me, fresh out of undergraduate studies, read Hofstadter, Hartz, Wiebe, and Thorstein Veblen. It was Schneirov who gave me the field of labor and social movements as specialization after being impressed with my undergraduate love of history; I had taken his course on the 1960s and loved it. As for Dr. Chirhart, I took a seminar on Women's History as required coursework and was greatly enriched for the experience. Thanks to both Chirhart and Zschoche, I have developed a view of labor history that synthesizes labor, civil

rights, and women's rights as broad based human rights movements against intersecting modes of oppression. As for Byerman, he had been on my committee because he taught African American Folklore and knew probably more than anyone else on Indiana State's campus about Black culture and history. He himself had studied DuBois at IU some thirty years earlier. I'd also like to thank another ISU History Professor, Donald Layton, for taking me into a Summer Honors Program when I was still in High School to take a World War II history course. Like Professors Sanders and Franke in particular, Layton has a great sense of humor and used it while teaching to his advantage and I thoroughly enjoyed his World War II and Russian History courses. Then there are the many friends I have made over the years here among graduate students and other K-State/Manhattan residents: Dr. Margaret Bickers, Sandra Reddish, Dr. Kent LaCombe and Dr. Michelle Khrehbiel, Dr. Michael S. Davis, Tim Hoheisel, Jon and Susan Berhow, Christina Fishback, Alex Herd, Chris Vancil, Brian Jones, Leif Urseth, Shannon Schwaller, Todd Thummel, Dr. Nick Khrehbiel and Cathia Khrehbiel , Dr. Jason C. Martin and Amanda Martin-Willey, Dr. William MacEvoy, Dr. Aaron Carlstrom and Tara Baillargeon, Fideleon Damian, Dr. David Vail, Chad Fitzloff, and many others. I will miss everyone here and the city of Manhattan.

## **Dedication**

To the memory my of Grandfather John M. Nugent (1923-2006), archivist at Watson and Spencer Libraries at KU from 1950 to 1993, who contributed two books to this dissertation and who was born and raised in Wyandotte County. Also, to my Grandmother Bessie Mae Hutchison (1925-2012), who was pulling for me to finish until the very last weeks of her life last year. Last but not least, to the memories of Howard Zinn (1922-2010) and Studs Terkel (1912-2008), two of my scholarly influences; Terkel had been a particular favorite of my Grandfather as well.

## INTRODUCTION

“What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun . . . Maybe it just sags like a heavy load. *Or does it explode?*”—Langston Hughes, “Harlem,”(1951)<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the following study is to illuminate Greater Kansas City in the twentieth century as an exemplar of the phenomenon known as the “urban crisis.” The term “urban crisis” has become the historiographical short-hand for the complex trend that pulled both capital and jobs from America’s central cities into the suburbs during the twentieth century. The process accelerated following World War II, transforming those central cities into areas with decaying infrastructure, failing schools, high poverty rates, and majority African American populations. The result was a concentrated and racialized urban poverty.<sup>2</sup>

As a topic of discussion, the urban crisis attracted little sustained attention until the rebellions of African Americans, typically referred to as the “riots,” jolted American cities between 1965 and 1968, beginning with the 1965 Watts uprising. The contours of the debate were set early in its appearance. In his 1965 report on the state of the black family, Johnson administration cabinet official Daniel Patrick Moynihan (citing the work of E. Franklin Frazier in the 1930s) was one of the earliest commentators to argue that a “crisis” in the African American nuclear family, manifested by an increase in single female-headed households, was responsible for the crisis in the inner cities.<sup>3</sup> Neoconservative writers such as Charles Murray used

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<sup>1</sup> Langston Hughes, “Harlem,” *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (New York: Random House, 1990)

<sup>2</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> See Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Negro Family: A Case For National Action* (Washington D.C.:US Department of Labor, 1965)

Moynihan's family structure arguments to scapegoat the inner city poor and justify right-wing political attacks on Great Society antipoverty programs during the 1980s.<sup>4</sup> Other earlier interpretations centered on structural issues. William Julius Wilson, for example, argued that the shift away from manufacturing in U.S. and global capitalism was primarily responsible for the crisis in American cities in the late twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> Still others, such as Gary Orfield, asserted that race discrimination in housing policy and suburbanization were at the root of the crisis.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of their strong disagreements over the cause of the crisis, almost all interpretations of the urban crisis appearing between the 1960s and early 1990s followed a narrative that assumed American cities were stable and prosperous throughout the early postwar decades.<sup>7</sup> In doing so, these studies implicitly confused the “flash point” of the crisis – the rioting – with the crisis itself. This confusion reflected the broader assumption, rooted in the early postwar era, that the United States was a society of overwhelming abundance and social stability in which social problems had been solved either by New Deal social programs or by the promise of continual economic growth. A corollary of this mythical postwar stability and shared prosperity was the notion that the United States was a society with a political culture based on consensus. When the events of the late 1960s and early 1970s rendered both assumptions untenable, notions that American cities had been stable and healthy in the 1940s and 1950s nonetheless held sway.

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the main argument in Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-80* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), cited in Sugrue, 4.

<sup>5</sup> William J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: the Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 12.

<sup>6</sup> Gary Orfield, “Ghettoization and its Alternatives” in Paul E. Peterson, *The New Urban Reality* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institute, 1985), 161-93; see also Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1-5.

<sup>7</sup> Sugrue, 4, 155; economist John Kenneth Galbraith admitted that he had failed to fully account for a trend towards worsening public services in the cities in his forward to the 1984 edition of *The Affluent Society*. See John K. Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin Co., 1984), xxii-xiii.



A notable exception was British historian Godfrey Hodgson, who wrote in his 1976 work *America In Our Time* that the 1950s and early 1960s were “a fool’s paradise” of “dangerous illusions,” with consequences far beyond urban policy.<sup>8</sup> Hodgson was the first major historian to assert that the roots of multiple crises of the 1960s—including the urban crisis—dated back to the 1940s and to identify the root cause of the urban crisis as the combination of “the black migration from the South” with “the conscious, if veiled, efforts of middle-class whites, especially the real estate and credit interests” to surround black inner cities with predominantly white suburbs.<sup>9</sup> This observation was his key argument concerning the urban crisis. Along these lines, Hodgson chastised the naivety of mid-century U.S. liberals for believing that “economic growth would generate the resources for solving social problems” even in a case such as mid-century urban environments in which all of “the growth is in one place and the problems are left behind in another.”<sup>10</sup> In this way, Hodgson prepared the way for later historians to upend decades of myths and misconceptions about the 1960s urban crisis.

For Hodgson, the process of suburbanization was the key factor in the deterioration of central cities. The process of suburbanization, that is, the movement of middle- and upper-class whites leaving central cities and business districts for neighborhoods outside the city’s limits, dates as far back as 1890 in the United States.<sup>11</sup> Further, the origins of suburban enclaves as peripheral towns to major cities date back further still, to at least 1840, when such enclaves often stressed their links to urban greatness.<sup>12</sup> The notion that suburbs had a distinct identity separate

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<sup>8</sup> Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1976), 16.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 420-21.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 420.

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 46.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

from large cities was a new development at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> A related idea, that suburbs were defined in opposition to the negative aspects of city life was a new development at the end of the nineteenth century. Kenneth Jackson traced this shift in the meaning of suburbs to a late nineteenth century white middle-class consciousness of the distinction between two different types of community living. These were *Gemeinschaft*—or home and family—and *Gesellschaft*—or the impersonal relations of the outside world of work.<sup>14</sup> Increasingly, the modern industrial city was seen as full of vice and danger, and therefore unsuited as a community space to raise a family that prided itself on social status.

New technology and modes of transportation made the geographical separation of one's home and the central city possible in the late nineteenth century. Electricity, telephones, and the streetcars helped to create the conditions in which this new middle and upper-class lifestyle could be sustained and grown over the decades after 1890.<sup>15</sup> Suburbanization after 1890 was tied directly to social class (and in places like Boston, ethnicity), but did not become directly linked to racism and racial disparities until the modern real estate industry began to tie property values to the racial and ethnic compositions of neighborhoods beginning in the 1910s.<sup>16</sup> World War II and postwar prosperity therefore did not cause suburbanization, which predated those time periods by half a century. What was new in the postwar era was instead the acceleration of suburbanization thanks to the automobile, the New Deal housing programs, and after 1956, the Interstate Highway System. The growth and development of suburbs occurred at the expense of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 31.

<sup>16</sup> David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 15.

cities by the turn of the century, but the process was not completely racialized until a half century later. In the years following World War II, federal subsidizing of suburban expansion and the simultaneous institutionalization of the idea that the racial composition of neighborhoods was a primary consideration in evaluating the worth of property worked to lock in an extremely unequal pattern of urban development: increasingly, the suburban and urban dichotomy became synonymous with the color line.

Building on the insights of Hodgson as well as histories of suburbia by Kenneth T. Jackson and Samuel Bass Warner, a group of newer historians have challenged the older narratives of the urban crisis. In the last two decades, historians such as Thomas Sugrue, David Freund, Amanda Seligman, and Robert Self have forged a more complex interpretation. The urban crisis, they argue, was a result of the interaction of racial segregation and discrimination, housing policies at both the federal and local level, the rise and expansion of suburbs, and the long-term decline of the manufacturing sector of the US economy.<sup>17</sup> All three explicitly rebut long-standing assumptions which had held that American major cities fell into crisis because of either the urban riots of the late 1960s or because of the economic and oil crises of the 1970s. Instead, they demonstrated that American cities were in trouble as far back as the 1940s, due to “the overdevelopment of the suburbs and the underdevelopment of cities” in terms of capital investment and the commitment of public resources.<sup>18</sup> Sugrue and others have thus shifted the periodization of the narrative of urban crisis to earlier decades once assumed to be marked by stability, prosperity, and consensus.

In addition to expanding the specific historical time frame of urban crisis, these historians

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<sup>17</sup> Sugrue, 5; Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 1-2; Amanda I. Seligman, *Block By Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 6.

<sup>18</sup> Sugrue, 6-7, 12; Self, 1.

have challenged earlier notions of what specifically caused the crisis in late-twentieth century American cities. Instead of pointing to single causes in the manner of earlier commentators and scholars, they assert that there were instead multiple, overlapping causes for the urban crisis. They find many of the older interpretations to be simplistic and ahistorical. They upend, for example, Charles Murray's assertions that Great Society antipoverty programs were at fault by demonstrating that, on the contrary, the liberal state's housing policies subsidized white middle-class suburbia at the expense of the inner cities between the thirties and the sixties.<sup>19</sup> They build on William J. Wilson's economic arguments and Gary Orfield's identification of suburbanization as a major cause of the crisis, but again, challenge their overall time frames which had placed the crisis in the late 1960s.

Freund, for example, notes that New Deal programs as well as subsequent federal programs such as the Federal Housing Administration, the Homeowners' Loan Corporation, the Public Housing Administration, and the Urban Renewal Administration played crucial roles in exacerbating existing racial discrimination in housing.<sup>20</sup> Such discriminatory practices included explicitly racist evaluations of neighborhoods' market value by the Homeowners Loan Corporation based on whether or not neighborhoods were populated exclusively by middle-class white Christians, especially Protestants.<sup>21</sup> HOLC maps were color coded, and were the source of the term "redlining": "red" connoted "undesirable" neighborhoods that were, by definition, those dominated by racial or ethnic minorities. More subtly, especially after the Supreme Court outlawed race-restrictive neighborhood covenants in 1948, the FHA and other agencies continued to give preference to homeowners over renters and to excuse existing racial

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<sup>19</sup> Freund, 177; Self, 1, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Freund, 5-7.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

inequalities as unavoidable parts of a “free market” in housing.<sup>22</sup> The Eisenhower administration and Congress made matters worse throughout the 1950s by never providing enough funding for those meager public housing provisions that existed, with the 1954 Omnibus Housing Act undermining public housing in favor of “urban renewal” and slum clearance.<sup>23</sup> In identifying which particular policies of the Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower administrations and corresponding congressional legislation were responsible for accelerating suburbanization and exacerbating the urban crisis, Freund fills in much needed details missing from Orfield’s interpretation of the crisis. Orfield had identified suburbanization and housing discrimination as at fault for the crisis but had neglected the role of federal policy in the perpetuation of both.<sup>24</sup>

This new interpretation of the urban crisis has several consequences for twentieth century US historiography. Sugrue and Freund explicitly state that in order to truly understand the postwar era, it is critical that historians expand their geographical understanding of the civil rights struggle beyond the South to the North and West. They also urge historians to revise the historical time frame backward in attempts to locate the origins of right-wing “white backlash” politics.<sup>25</sup> In both northern and southern cities, these scholars contend, it is critical to understand that white residents did not simply leave for the suburbs once their neighborhoods began to be integrated: rather, they resisted violently and asserted new rationales for their behavior that were framed in the language of “homeowners rights” or “taxes” rather than race.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the new literature on the “urban crisis” also challenges historians to recognize that, as Robert Self put it,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 177, 206.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 186

<sup>24</sup> Orfield, “Ghettoization and its Alternatives” in Peterson, *New Urban Reality*, 161-63.

<sup>25</sup> Sugrue, 10; Self, 11; Freund, 6; Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 11.

<sup>26</sup> Seilgman, 6; Freund, 3, 6, 10; Kruse, 10-11, 238; Self, 2.

“African-Americans as a whole constituted the group in national life most deeply engaged in challenging urban decline and imagining remedies to the urban crisis.”<sup>27</sup>

This study of the Greater Kansas City area builds on these recent studies of the urban crisis. Consistent with these studies, I will argue that the full-blown emergence of the urban crisis between the 1940s and 1960s was a result of two interacting historical developments: first, persistent racial discrimination and segregation in housing beginning in the early decades of the twentieth century (and still ongoing today) and second, postwar macroeconomic shifts away from an industrial economy spurred on by a shift to the suburbs that developed from several causes.

However, I differ from Sugrue, Self, and Freund by asserting that the transition to an automobile-based transportation system and the decline of labor unions and industrial capitalism were also crucial to the urban crisis. Despite how fashionable it has been in recent decades to believe so, it is simply not true that “market forces” are independent of public policies that subsidize suburbanization and certain modes of transportation over others. In the same vein, markets are not exempt from societal characteristics such as institutional racism. Instead of faceless macroeconomic forces destroying the old unionized industrial urban order, decades of subsidizing cars, roads, and white-only suburbs shaped the emerging urban landscape of Kansas City between 1945 and 1980. Indeed, capital went to suburban locations both because more affluent whites took their purchasing power there and because suburbs were places where unions were weak or nonexistent. White racism, the eclipse of railroads and streetcars by the car culture, urban renewal and freeway construction, and capital chasing white middle-class consumer dollars to conveniently non-union locations all did their part to exacerbate the urban crisis,

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<sup>27</sup> Self, 1.

undermine the labor unions, and undo urban industrial capitalism. As Chapters 5 and 6 document, the urban crisis had fully developed by the 1940s in the black neighborhoods of Kansas City, Missouri.<sup>28</sup> I would also add to Sugrue's and others' revision of postwar American history my own observation that the postwar capital-labor accord has been greatly exaggerated in its importance. Strikes and repeated legislative and ballot initiatives designed to weaken unions as well as other conflicts over the direction of the US economy and society continued into the 1950s.<sup>29</sup>

I chose Greater Kansas City as a case study for my entry into the urban crisis scholarship for two main reasons. First, it is fresh scholarly ground. Apart from Kevin Fox Gotham's sociological study of urban segregation and some local histories, Kansas City was largely ignored in the scholarly literature. Unlike metropolises further east, west, or south, scholars have devoted little attention to Kansas City's urban history of either organized labor or the "urban crisis," despite the fact that both were present. This may be because older labor historians have tended to focus their attention on industrial metropolises much further east, while newer historians and social scientists searching for "suburban warriors" in the Sunbelt may have concluded that Kansas City is too far north.<sup>30</sup>

Secondly, Kansas City fits some patterns seen in other local case studies in urban crisis scholarship, but in other ways, the city's history and characteristics are completely different from Detroit, Atlanta, Oakland, and Chicago. If Kansas City, Missouri, matches Sugrue's timeline for

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas A. Webster, "Urban League of Kansas City Annual Report, 1942," p. 5, found in the Kansas City Urban League Administrative Records, M331, File 6, Box KCULP-2: Publications, 1934-89, in Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, MO; Kevin Fox Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development: the Kansas City Experience, 1900-2000* (Albany NY: University of New York Press, 2002), 115.

<sup>29</sup> See Van W. Hutchison, "Eisenhower Era Politics and the 1959 Steel Strike," *Madison Historical Review* (Volume 3: September 2006)

<sup>30</sup> See Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origin of the New American Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001)

the development of conditions of urban crisis by showing signs of it around 1939-40, in other ways the situation in Greater Kansas City was entirely different from Detroit's experience in these decades. Kansas City, Kansas, for example, did not experience urban crisis conditions until later, after World War II. More importantly—and this sets the metro apart from other large cities in a striking way—the effects of the Great Migration on KCMO occurred later than elsewhere in the urban North, as it was not until World War II that the city attracted large numbers of blacks from the Deep South (at the rate of a thousand a month) in the national Great Migration wave.<sup>31</sup> In other words, KCMO had mass black migration both earlier and later than was the norm for northern industrial cities, as the World War I-era wave was negligible there compared to the 1879-81 Exoduster migration before or the migration after, in the 1940s.

There are other differences as well. As Sugrue had shown, the problem in Detroit was a scarcity of housing that helped fuel racial violence; in KCMO, housing booms occurred in the 1920s and 1950s that had little effect on the prevailing racial discrimination and violence that occurred throughout the area between 1911 and 1962.<sup>32</sup> This is not to say housing was not a problem at crisis levels for KCMO's blacks. Instead, crisis conditions in housing were caused by blatant race discrimination alone rather than Detroit's pattern of scarcity for all combined with racial discrimination. In their studies of the white racial politics of suburbanization, Freund and Kevin Kruse stress the importance of a new white language for speaking about race. This language coded overt racism in a language of "individual choice" and "free markets in housing."

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas A. Webster, "Annual Report 1942: Urban League of Kansas City," p.5, M331, File 6, Box KCULP-2: Publications, 1934-89, Kansas City Urban League Administrative Records, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, MO; "Confidential: Report on Negro In-Migration in the Kansas City Area," October 15, 1943, Community War Services, found in M-330, Box H-1: Historical Records, 1920-46, Kansas City Urban League Administrative Records, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, MO.

<sup>32</sup> Sugrue, 52 ; *Kansas City Times*, "Criminal Terrorism," May 23, 1952, as found in the John Ramos Collection, Vertical File: Civil Rights-KC-Bombings, located in the Missouri Valley Special Collections at the Kansas City, Missouri Public Library; The Kansas City Call, "Raytown Mayor Deplores Attack on Cater Home," April 20, 1962.



In Kansas City, Missouri, overt racism was not so carefully circumscribed: John Birchers and white tavern owners often combined this newer discourse with older and overtly racist rhetoric about “race mixing.”<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the political climate in both Kansas Cities during the urban crisis was also starkly different from that of, say, Chicago or Detroit. Instead of the phenomenon of white blue-collar Democrats voting for Republican mayors that Sugrue identified in 1940s Detroit, in KCMO it was a paternalistic “clean-government” city management that enforced a racial segregation rooted in local custom.<sup>34</sup>

My study differs from the existing urban crisis literature in additional ways. The varying historical context in which the African American community formed and developed political and social institutions in Kansas City, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri, over time is addressed. Second, instead of being a single urban core with surrounding suburbs, here two urban cores on each side of the state line are present, along with their surrounding suburbs. Third, I begin my study in the mid-nineteenth century, rather than in the 1940s, because the history of urban development and racial discrimination in the Kansas City area was initially, and directly, tied to the conflict over slavery. Furthermore, the type of white racism and discrimination African Americans encountered in each municipality was directly tied to Kansas’ and Missouri’s respective historical records on the question of slavery. Missouri was a slave state and whites there had strong Confederate sympathies, while Kansas was mostly antislavery, but as Eric S. Foner and others have pointed out in recent historiographical scholarship, the latter often

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<sup>33</sup> *Kansas City Star*, “Tavern Owners: Letter From President,” March 30, 1964, as found in the John Ramos Collection, Vertical File: KC-Civil Rights, located in Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City, Missouri Public Library.

<sup>34</sup> Sugrue, 81-83, 267; *Kansas City Call*, August 7, 1942. Editor Chester Franklin noted the attitude overlapped with that of business leaders, who like city managers stressed that the local custom was necessary to appease white patrons.

translated to “free soil” notions of a “white republic.”<sup>35</sup> Of the large urban crisis studies, only Kruse’s Atlanta seems to share KCMO’s history of antebellum slavery; however, the twentieth century Atlanta that Kruse explores was actually newer than Kansas City, Missouri, having rebuilt from scratch after the Union Army burnt it to the ground. St. Louis, at the other end of the state, would probably be closest to KCMO’s history in that it too existed as an antebellum slave society in a Union state, but I am unaware of any major urban crisis studies exclusively focusing on St. Louis in the literature. Moreover, the divided nature of the Kansas side of the area as “free” and the Missouri side as “slave” appears nowhere else in urban case studies; its relevance to this discussion is that the area attracted significant African American migration decades before the Great Migration attracted large black populations to Chicago, Detroit, or Oakland. The “free soil” debate over whether white antislavery activists should embrace African-Americans and their rights is important to understanding the roots of Jim Crow racism in what would become Kansas City, Kansas because it provided a precedent for racism in a town with an antislavery heritage.

Local histories, particularly those of Avila University History Professor Sherry Lamb Schirmer, Kansas City Star journalist Charles Coulter, University of South Florida anthropology Professor Susan Greenbaum, Tulane University Sociology Professor Kevin Fox Gotham, and Kansas University Geology Professor James R. Shortridge were enormously helpful. Along with the primary sources, they provided portraits of African-American life in both KCMO and KCK in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Of these works, Dr. Gotham’s is the closest to an urban crisis study of the Kansas City metropolitan area, and it applies Douglas Massey and Nancy

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<sup>35</sup> James N. Leiker, “Race Relations in the Sunflower State,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains*, Autumn 2002, 25: 3, 220-221; Eric S. Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 261-62, 264-65.

Denton's contributions to the literature in *American Apartheid* to his analysis of race and housing in Kansas City.<sup>36</sup> Massey and Denton argue that, contrary to myth, segregation in the United States did not end in 1965, but in fact intensified in large cities in the decades after 1965 to the point of isolation of inner-city African-Americans from other demographic groups. What really ended, they argued, was the legal Jim Crow regime in the South that enshrined segregation into state laws.

Dr. Schirmer's contribution to understanding the nature of Kansas City, Missouri's historical racism lies in her main thesis. She maintains in her study of Kansas City race relations in the first half of the twentieth century, *A City Divided*, that Kansas City, Missouri developed its own form of Jim Crow that was highly class-inflected and gendered in the early decades of the twentieth century; she argues that this system was rooted in white middle-class anxieties over status and urban space.<sup>37</sup> Though she never mentions him by name, Schirmer's diagnosis of the characteristics of KCMO's version of Jim Crow obviously owes a lot to Robert H. Wiebe's seminal *The Search For Order*, which argued that one of the main motivators for progressive reform was white middle-class anxiety over the new urban landscape and loss of "island communities."<sup>38</sup> The component of her thesis surrounding "status anxiety" harkens to another landmark study of the Progressive Era, Richard Hofstadter's *Age of Reform*.<sup>39</sup> What would become KCK had none of this dynamic: the area was a predominantly working-class industrial area after the 1870s, where socialism would become a significant force by 1904 by virtue of

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<sup>36</sup> Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1-5.

<sup>37</sup> Sherry Lamb Schirmer, *A City Divided: The Racial Landscape of Kansas City, 1900-60* (Columbia MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 57.

<sup>38</sup> Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search For Order, 1877-1920: The Making of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 81-82, 111.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 131.

drawing crowds “just three and a half times the size of the combined crowd of the democrats [sic] and republicans [sic] a few nights before.”<sup>40</sup>

Beyond the urban crisis literature and the secondary sources, I’ve made extensive use of the primary sources available in the state archival collections in both Kansas and Missouri pertaining to the papers of the NAACP and the Urban League. Additionally, the Kansas City Public Library’s considerable Missouri Valley Special Collections covering the city’s local history—especially that of its black citizens—dating back to the late nineteenth century was of immense help. The John Ramos Collection in particular is a treasure trove of local African American history. Additionally, I have made extensive use of black newspapers from the era, as they are often the only surviving records of important events in a deeply racist era in which white-run mainline newspapers often ignored the black community and its experiences altogether.

In synthesizing these sources with the available primary sources, I trace several stories within this time frame and place. These are as follows: the story of the meteoric rise of a major metropolitan area from very small settlements that originally had little to do with one another; a struggle for basic human rights by the black population of Kansas City, Missouri, going all the way back to the late 1860s and through the twentieth century to the 1968 riots; mass migration from the Deep South to the metro area in repeated waves between 1850 and 1960; the rise of the automobile to complete domination of American transportation between 1900 and 1950; the rise of real estate companies and the beginning of the practice of evaluation and appraisal of property on the basis of race and ethnicity after the 1910s; and the rapid decentralization and suburbanization of the metro starting in the 1930s. Again, the key argument of this study is that

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<sup>40</sup> “Wyandotte County Campaign,” *Line-Up: A Class-Conscious Socialist Paper*, November 15, 1904, p.1, found on microfilm in File K-729, Kansas Newspapers, Kansas State Archives, Topeka KS.

the urban crisis, the shift to automobiles, and the decline of unions are linked together by decades of subsidized suburbanization that undid industrial capitalism in American cities.

I deliberately chose to research and write this study from the perspective of local African American activists in order to illustrate the tenacity and frustrations inherent in the long struggle for equal rights against a backdrop of emerging urban crisis, and to give these men and women agency. It cannot be stressed enough that the forces of institutional racism they confronted were close to overwhelming, as developer J.C. Nichols and the city's political and economic elite locked in a system that perpetuated racist housing policies as a corollary of bourgeois and elite anxieties about urban space and status. Against ferocious opposition, these activists won a series of significant battles against Kansas City's version of Jim Crow. That their efforts were not, in the end, enough to defuse a full-blown crisis is testimony, not to their lack of effort, but rather to the power of the institutionalized forces arrayed against them.

This study is divided into six chapters. Chapter one covers the years from 1830 to 1900. The chapter discusses the origins of each city--KCMO in the 1830s, and KCK as a cluster of several small settlements in the 1850s—and their development side by side, with their respective territory/state on opposite sides of the national divide over the issue of slavery. It documents the formation of both cities' African-American communities in the decade before the Civil War and how subsequent migrations, both from the Deep South and from Missouri outside of KCMO, increased the population of both black communities between 1850 and 1885. The fight over slavery within both communities before the Civil War, and how this shaped both cities' emerging identities in the mid-nineteenth century, is given critical attention. The role of the railroads was crucial in ensuring the phenomenal growth of KCMO and the surrounding area generally between the end of the Civil War and 1900, and in bringing the stockyards and packinghouses to

the area in the 1870s. The meatpacking plants, stockyards, and railroads then acted as a catalyst for further urbanization, industrialization, migration of rural Missouri and southern blacks, immigration from Eastern Europe and Mexico, and the development of an industrial labor force and labor movement between 1869 and 1900. The fusion of several smaller towns on the Kansas side into KCK in 1886 will be tied to the emergence of a unified Greater Kansas City metropolitan area by the turn of the century and explained as a consequence of the growth of the area. Finally, this chapter establishes that the civil rights movement in Kansas City began not in the 1950s or even the early twentieth century—but instead during Missouri’s own peculiar version of Reconstruction in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Chapter One hence introduces both cities’ earliest activists for black freedom.

Chapter two covers the rise of Kansas City, Missouri’s own particular brand of Jim Crow and its parallel rise in KCK between 1905 and 1920. Rooted in both Missouri’s slave past and a developing sense of anxiety over urban space on the part of the city’s white middle-class, this type of racism emphasized distance from black people as synonymous with distance from urban vice. This kind of ideology was perfect for a nascent real estate industry that contended that the best quality neighborhoods were white and that the presence of African-Americans undermined property values. The earliest white terror bombings and arsons of black homes purchased in “white only” neighborhoods took place in this period. These developments occurred during the national context of the nadir in US race relations between the 1880s and 1920s. Both cities, the record shows, could have easily experienced a lynching or a race riot in these years but did not. In the case of KCK, the trigger could have been a 1904 altercation between a black teenage boy and group of white teenage boys, and in KCMO in 1919 an incident between a black physician and a white postal worker nearly triggered violence. KCMO’s white middle class was especially

anxious over the idea of interracial romantic or sexual relationships and espoused a racism that was not only class-inflected, but highly gendered. By the end of the 1910s, all that remained integrated among the city's public accommodations were its streetcars, and only because political calculations by Democratic Party machines in city wards and opposition by operators to the extra cost of segregated seating killed proposals to segregate them. Factional political fights in both the Democratic and Republican Parties between the machines and "good government" reformers also shaped city policy towards blacks, as both this chapter and chapters four and five show, with anti-machine reformers often being deeply hostile to the city's black citizens.

Chapter three demonstrates how African American activists responded to the intensification of Jim Crow and white racism in these same years between 1900 and 1920. While chapter two studies the city's white middle-class and its development of a racist ideology, chapter three looks at the black middle-class and elite of the community, and how these men and women fought back against worsening racial discrimination, exclusion, and segregation, continuing the struggle begun in the late nineteenth century. These men and women were often black Kansas City's teachers, newspaper owners and reporters, physicians, and ministers who built the institutional heart and soul of black Kansas City.

Chapter four traces the history of the relationship between organized labor and the African American community in Greater Kansas City from the turn of the century through the Great Depression, noting a wide range of attitudes even in the early 1900s. These ranged from interracial strike actions to complete exclusion from other trade unions. Additionally, the chapter examines carefully the record of the broader Left, such as the Socialist Party of Eugene Debs in the 1910s and the Communist Party USA in the 1930s, in both the relative influence they had in the area, and in their attitudes towards African Americans. Critical national African-American

national leaders such as A. Philip Randolph and Marcus Garvey will be noted for the impact their respective political organizations had on Kansas City's black population. Additionally, Chapter four examines the 1920s and concludes with the simultaneous election of Franklin Roosevelt and Tom Pendergast's gaining of control over Kansas City in 1932.

Chapter five discusses the history of the streetcars in Kansas City and the slow rise of the automobile industry in the US from under the shadows of the vehicle's French and German inventors and the railroads in 1900 to increasing dominance by World War Two. This shift was greatly aided by two highway bills, one from 1916 and the other from 1921, and the beginning of the use of the gas tax to fund highways in the 1920s. It will then tie this story directly in with the experiences of Kansas City's African American population during the Depression, noting the mixed record of Roosevelt's New Deal in regard to helping or harming the community and Pendergast's shortcomings on civil rights beyond the issue of police brutality and some patronage, despite his—and his late brother Jim's—successful courting of the city's black vote over the preceding two decades. The New Deal's importance to Greater Kansas City in the 1930s is critical, especially its housing policies. Special attention will be given to the history of the Homeowners' Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration in adopting exclusionary private real estate practices that became known as “redlining.” Chapter five connects the rise of the car and decline of the streetcars and rail to racial inequality in two ways: one, by emphasizing how most urban dwellers and especially poor and working-class people did not own a car until after 1950 and, two, by describing and documenting new forms of Jim Crow that rose to discriminate against blacks who could afford automobiles in the 1930s. The chapter will conclude by linking the Fairfax World War II munitions plant in KCK to a major wartime event—the Randolph March on Washington movement—which helped force FDR to issue an



executive order banning discrimination in defense plants.

Finally, Chapter Six covers the time period between World War II and the 1968 riots in KCMO. Themes will include the development of a new kind of white ally and civil rights activist in the 1940s who came from Christian or ecumenical pacifist circles, the emergence of urban crisis conditions in overcrowding as early as 1939, the long struggle against Jim Crow in public accommodations between 1945 and 1964, the emergence of urban renewal, rapid racial turnover and white flight in KCMO neighborhoods between 1949 and 1968, the resistance of tavern owners and the John Birch Society to municipal civil rights ordinances, and the conditions that led to the 1968 riot. The paradox of victories for civil rights in public accommodations is that these victories occurred at the same time that whole black neighborhoods east of Troost Avenue—a major north and south artery in KCMO—had been cut off from the job market by redlining and the outright destruction of black owned businesses by urban renewal and urban interstate construction.

In examining the story of the urban crisis in Greater Kansas City and its historical roots, one finds familiar patterns from other case studies as well as unique wrinkles in the local story peculiar to the story of the development of the area. The familiar stories are overcrowding, white terror and violence against blacks moving into “white” neighborhoods, police brutality, and an urban rebellion (i.e., the 1968 riot). On the other hand, KCMO’s mixture of southern cultural characteristics with those of a northern industrial urban setting led by an elite political culture that combined status, anxiety over urban space, and racism is enough to guarantee this. Likewise, KCK’s interdependent but distinctly different character in terms of origins and class composition makes for a case study in which patterns of urban crisis are put to the test to discern which are close to universal for all American cities and which do not hold up in every case. At much of the

heart of this metropolitan area's unique character lies the question of what exactly its regional identity is. A casual observer might suggest that the metro, as with Kansas and Missouri generally, is a "Plains" city. To assert as much both begs the question of what a "Plains" city's or state's characteristics are and masks debates over (especially) Missouri's identity. For example, is Missouri a Plains state, a Midwestern state, or a southern state? Likewise, Kansas has sometimes been identified as a western or even southwestern state. Kansas' antebellum role as a "free" state that was a refuge for escaped slaves even more dramatically sets the history of the metro apart from other American metropolitan areas, which had no equivalent. What plays out in the Greater KC metropolitan area is a struggle for civil rights which enfold a push for an integrated or open public space over the period of half a century, with housing being among the most frustrating and difficult struggles of all.

## CHAPTER ONE: ROOTS: KANSAS CITY, KANSAS AND KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, 1850-1900

Before proceeding to examine and analyze twentieth century Greater Kansas City and its place in the unfolding of the urban crisis, it is necessary to provide historical background. The earliest references to a unified Greater Kansas City metropolitan area encompassing both Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas City, Kansas appear to date back to the early twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> It is most crucial to note that notions of a unified “Greater Kansas City” metropolitan area combining Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas City, Kansas were far from inevitable; given such a history of late antebellum and Civil War-era conflict, the emergence of Greater Kansas City as a unified metropolitan area was extremely unlikely. Each city had a distinct identity from the other. During the formative years of both cities in the mid-1800s, the nationwide sectional crisis over slavery and civil war sharply divided and further marked the two as entirely separate cities.<sup>2</sup> As shall be shown, the division between Kansas and Missouri over slavery in the mid-nineteenth century would strongly shape the divergent historical identities of each city but paradoxically, that same history for African-Americans would render “the boundary between the two Kansas Cities” as “permeable.”<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, each city’s origin occurred independently of the other. Kansas City, Missouri, was

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<sup>1</sup> “Greater K.C. Yearbook, 1904-05,” found in Missouri Valley Special Collections, Vertical File: Quindaro, Kansas City, Missouri Public Library.

<sup>2</sup> Henry C. Haskell and Richard B. Fowler, *Notes on the City of the Future: A Narrative History of Kansas City, 1850-1950* (Kansas City: Frank Glenn Publishing Co., 1950), 30-31, 36-37; Joseph H. McDowell, *Building A City: A Detailed History of Kansas City, Kansas* (Kansas City: Kansas Citian, 1969), 4, 11; Greenbaum, 8-22.

<sup>3</sup> Coulter, 19.

originally called the “Town of Kansas” in 1838.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to what one might expect, the town in Missouri was named “Kansas” sixteen years before the territory was; both were named after the river.<sup>5</sup> What would become Kansas City, Missouri had been primarily Native American lands held by the Osage nation between 1821 and 1833.<sup>6</sup> As a result of the 1820 Missouri Compromise in Congress between slave states and free states over the question of whether new states created out of the Louisiana Purchase would be slave or free, Missouri’s status as a slave state was well-established by the time the “Town of Kansas” was incorporated.

Accordingly, between 1831 and 1838, the population began to drastically change, as large numbers of migrants from Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee came to the area.<sup>7</sup> The majority of African Americans living in Jackson County before the Civil War were brought to the area as slaves by planters from those three states.<sup>8</sup> The first conflict in the area was not, however, between free and slave state forces but between the planter class and a large and growing Mormon settlement in Jackson County. In 1831, a Mormon settlement in the Missouri Town of Kansas was established in accordance with Joseph Smith’s designation of Jackson County as a holy land for the Latter Day Saints.<sup>9</sup> Unlike their new neighbors in Missouri, the Mormons had originated not from Southern or border slave states but from upstate New York, and most of their followers were from non-slave states like Ohio and Illinois; the religious sect had emerged as

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<sup>4</sup> Haskell and Fowler, 28.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 24; Carrie Westlake Whitney, *Kansas City, Missouri: Its History and its People, 1808-1908* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1908), 648.

<sup>7</sup> Whitney, 647-48.

<sup>8</sup> Coulter, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen C. LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia MO: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 16.

part of the Second Great Awakening in New York.<sup>10</sup> The lands around what are now the Plaza, the Paseo, and Blue Ridge Cutoff were Latter Day Saints lands until 1833, when the Mormons were expelled from Jackson County.<sup>11</sup> Mormons in the county were attacked by a vigilante mob that destroyed their printing presses and drove them from their homes.<sup>12</sup> This violent reaction against the Mormons was motivated by a combination of distaste for the Latter Day Saints beliefs that they constituted a “chosen people” of God, a distrust of Mormon economic practices, and the suspicion that the Saints were an abolitionist sect bent on encouraging slave rebellion.<sup>13</sup> These suspicions probably were rooted in southern and border-state perceptions of Northerners and especially Northern religious groups which were usually seen as synonymous with radical abolitionism.

The economic and business practices of the Mormons in Jackson County were more communitarian in orientation than was the norm for the other settlers and were considered especially threatening. Latter Day Saints used their Church funds to buy land and start businesses, causing fear among speculators and businessmen that they would be frozen out by their Mormon competitors.<sup>14</sup> The Mormons were also suspected of encouraging Native American resistance to the non-Mormon settlers in Missouri.<sup>15</sup> Mormon expulsion from the area that would become KCMO was a prelude to a full-blown war in Northwestern Missouri, resulting in their expulsion from Missouri generally in 1838.<sup>16</sup> Coincidentally, Missouri's Governor at the time,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>11</sup> Haskell and Fowler, 28-29.

<sup>12</sup> LeSueuer, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 17, 84-85.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 230.

Lilburn W. Boggs, was originally from Independence, Missouri.<sup>17</sup> Given that conflict in Jackson County between Mormons and non-Mormons had directly preceded the 1838 war, it could be reasonably inferred that Boggs's decision to expel the Latter Day Saints from Missouri was influenced as much by his hometown as by popular demands by Missourians in the aftermath of the war. Subsequent inquiry into the causes of the war by the state courts found no evidence at all for the accusations that the Saints were abolitionists or encouraging Native warfare against Missouri settlers but did find that the Mormons had formed military units without state approval and had committed attacks on troops, property, and towns during the war.<sup>18</sup> By May 1839 nearly all Mormons had left the state of Missouri except for a few who renounced the Mormon faith and/or allegiance to Joseph Smith.<sup>19</sup>

Once the Mormons were removed as a competing group for political and social control of the “Town of Kansas,” plantation owners from southern and border states brought their slaves with them to Jackson County, Missouri, and proceeded to reproduce the plantation system in the areas surrounding what would become the Greater Kansas City, Missouri area between 1838 and 1865, especially in Independence, Missouri.<sup>20</sup> By the 1850s, Jackson County Missouri’s wealth was directly tied to slavery.<sup>21</sup> The county had 3,944 slaves mostly located in Independence and Westport.<sup>22</sup> Jackson and Clay Counties were part of a thirteen county region of the state along the Missouri river known as “Little Dixie” for plantation slavery, mostly in small-scale production of

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 196-214.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 255, 259.

<sup>20</sup> Whitney, 648-49.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 648.

<sup>22</sup> Coulter, 20.

cotton, tobacco, and hemp.<sup>23</sup> In KCMO, most slaves were domestics or helpers and those who owned slaves in the city usually owned few, sometimes only one or two.<sup>24</sup> Free African Americans in Kansas City, Missouri were rigidly segregated in the 1850s, along with the Irish, to the east of Knob Hill in an area called “East Kansas.”<sup>25</sup> “East Kansas” was an area of considerable poverty, directly linked to racial and ethnic discrimination.<sup>26</sup> Very early in the history of the city, therefore, precedent had been set for residential segregation by race (and ethnicity). This was in addition to the race-based bondage that characterized the system of slavery both in Missouri and throughout the South.

However, in KCMO itself slavery was not as firmly established as it was in the rest of the state; St. Louis’ slave population, for example, greatly outnumbered KCMO’s, and even in Jackson County, most slaves were in Independence and Westport.<sup>27</sup> The presence of Pennsylvania abolitionist Kersey Coates among the early boosters of KCMO in the 1850s would undermine slavery in the city as would subsequent European immigration.<sup>28</sup> Coates had come to the city in 1854 primarily in order to invest for Philadelphia business interests, but he was also strong financial supporter of the antislavery cause across the border, even shielding the anti-slavery Kansas governor Andrew Reeder when he was pursued by a pro-slavery mob.<sup>29</sup> Coates

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Shirl Kasper, “Kansas City in the 19th Century: A City Divided,” *Kansas City Star*, September 14, 1997, as found in the Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Missouri Public Library.

<sup>25</sup> Schirmer, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Coulter, 20.

<sup>28</sup> Haskell and Fowler, 30-33.

<sup>29</sup> Vertical File: Kersey Coates (Mr. and Mrs.), Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, “Kersey Coates Funded Early Business Life”; “Kersey Coates Built His City in Both Business and Culture,” *Kansas City Times*, October 13, 1962, found in Vertical File: Kersey Coates (Mr. and Mrs.), Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

was so devoted to the cause against slavery that he chose to legally represent anti-slavery Kansas Governor Charles Robinson in Lecompton, Kansas against charges of treason by the pro-slavery Lecompton government.<sup>30</sup> In Westport, and then again once Coates arrived in Lecompton, he was threatened with death if he did not abandon his support of Robinson or leave Lecompton immediately.<sup>31</sup> Despite warnings by the Territorial Governor that he could not be given any protection, Coates refused to be intimidated, stating that “I am not aware that I am violating any law and shall remain in Lecompton until I have transacted the business I have in hand.”<sup>32</sup>

Coates was the first prominent antislavery northerner to settle in KCMO and, in fact, his father had been the first president of William Lloyd Garrison’s American Anti-Slavery Society.<sup>33</sup> Before coming to KCMO, Coates had studied law in Lancaster, Pennsylvania under the abolitionist and Radical Republican icon, Pennsylvania Congressman Thaddeus Stevens.<sup>34</sup> Given how unpopular Coates’s views were in a Missouri county that a mere decade and a half before had expelled Mormons violently on mere suspicion of abolitionism, Kersey Coates and his wife each kept loaded pistols under their pillows while they slept and a Sharps rifle within reach of their bed.<sup>35</sup> Sarah Coates, his wife, was also a pivotal figure in early KCMO history: she would found nine women’s clubs in the city between 1870 and 1890 and was a committed woman’s suffragist and advocate of women’s education in fields such as “the business, science,

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<sup>30</sup> “Col. Kersey Coates: A Big Kansas Citian,” *Kansas City Star*, June 1, 1914, as found in Vertical File: Kersey Coates, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> “Kersey Coates Built His City in Both Business and Culture,” *Kansas City Times*, 1962, found in Vertical File: Coates, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.



and literary” worlds.<sup>36</sup> Most fatefully, Kersey Coates’ signature investment in the city would be lobbying for the main railroad to pass through the city.<sup>37</sup> As we shall see, both Coates spouses were often the connection between the antebellum issues of slavery and railroad development and the late 19th century development of middle-class reform movements surrounding “uplift” and the management of urban space.<sup>38</sup>

In contrast, Kansas City, Kansas, was not created until long after the Civil War, in an 1886 incorporation of several smaller Kansas towns: Wyandotte, Kansas City, Armourdale, Riverview, and Armstrong (these lands also included the former town of Quindaro). During the 1850s, in sharp contrast to the Missouri side, those small communities experienced conflict and division over the unresolved status of slavery within the Kansas Territory. As noted previously, Missouri had been declared a slave state by an act of Congress since 1820, while Kansas’ status as a “free” or “slave” territory was undetermined until the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1853 provided the impetus for direct conflict between opposing forces on the issue of slavery after a long assumption that the Missouri Compromise meant the eventual status of the territory would be free. In KCMO, despite the fears of planters, the Mormons had never really been a threat to the slave system; in Wyandotte County, slavery was challenged from the beginning. Slavery was a divisive topic among both the Wyandots who held the lands in the 1840s and white settlers who arrived in the 1850s.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, surrounding towns in Northeastern Kansas were divided

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<sup>36</sup> “Believer in Women’s Capabilities,” *Kansas City Star*, February 7, 1975, found in Vertical File: Kersey Coates, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library; “Missouri Heritage,” *Kansas City Times*, May 4, 1968, as found in Vertical File: Kersey Coates, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

<sup>37</sup> “Col. Kersey Coates a Big Kansas Citian,” *Kansas City Star*, Monday, June 1, 1914, found in Vertical File: Kersey Coates, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

<sup>38</sup> Schirmer, 11-12.

<sup>39</sup> Greenbaum, 2-5.

between pro-slavery and anti-slavery towns, creating a fluid situation that differed from the near political and social monopoly slave society enjoyed in Missouri. The dynamic also differed in that the original Osage population in the KCMO area did not have nearly the role in the formation of the city's society and politics that the Wyandotts did in what would become KCK.

For example, Atchison—just upriver on the Missouri River from KCK—was notorious by the 1850s as what one historian termed “the most violent pro-slavery town” in all of the Kansas Territory.<sup>40</sup> This reflected the political allegiances of the man who founded the town and lent it his name: Missouri Senator David R. Atchison.<sup>41</sup> Atchison was so pro-slavery that he and the town named for him refused to do business with New England traders.<sup>42</sup> Leavenworth, in between Atchison and KCK, was also founded by Missourians from slave-owning backgrounds, but they chose to keep politics surrounding slavery relatively quiet so as to avoid the loss of much-needed capital from potential investors.<sup>43</sup> Such cautious tendencies were only reinforced by the backlash against and subsequent decline of the city of Atchison after 1857, when Kansas Territory became “free soil” in political orientation.<sup>44</sup> Lawrence, by contrast, was the opposite of Atchison: it was an openly abolitionist stronghold from its founding in October 1854 by Eli Thayer and the New England Emigrant Aid Company.<sup>45</sup> The Kansas Territory itself had two competing capitals: Topeka (free) and Lecompton (slave) throughout the protracted violence that constituted “Bleeding Kansas” in the 1850s.

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<sup>40</sup> John N. Holloway, *History of Kansas: From the First Exploration of the Mississippi Valley, to Its Admission to the Union* (Lafayette, IN: James, Emmons and Co., 1868), 109, as quoted in James R. Shortridge, *Cities on the Plains: the Evolution of Urban Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 64.

<sup>41</sup> Shortridge, 62.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-71.

Complicating matters further was the fact that Missourians Thomas H. Swope and Hiram Northrup directly financed Wyandotte's development as a city from 1856 to 1857, making the slavery issue more delicate.<sup>46</sup> Swope, Northrup, three Wyandot leaders, and three Kansans were able to attract significant capital investment to the settlement between 1856 and the outbreak of the Civil War in anticipation of the railroad companies' planning for a rail line connecting KCMO and Wyandotte near the junction of the Kansas and Missouri Rivers.<sup>47</sup> The role of transportation in shaping the contours of the development of the future metro area was therefore present from very in each settlement's history. Over time, changing transportation patterns would interact with patterns of racial discrimination and economic distribution as an integral part of the story of urban crisis in Greater Kansas City. A product itself of capital, the new railroad transportation system in the long term would become a magnet for capital accumulation and development, accelerating the urban development of both areas, and in the process altering labor-capital relations. In the short term, Swope's participation in boosting "free" Wyandotte and Coates' in boosting KCMO also demonstrated the power of railroad capital to mute the tensions over slavery ripping the area and nation apart, even up to the point of bloodshed and full-blown Civil War.

Despite the financial pressures against overt abolitionism as well as the fact that some Wyandots held slaves, by 1850 the predominant opinion of the Wyandots tribe opposed slavery.<sup>48</sup> Patterns of settlement differed from KCMO from the beginning: both the Wyandots and whites who came to the territory were from non-slave societies. The Wyandots, for their part, had been

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 91-92.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.; Haskell and Fowler, 35.

<sup>48</sup> Greenbaum, 2-5.

expelled from Ohio by the US government between 1830 and 1840.<sup>49</sup> One of the most influential religious figures in Wyandot life in Ohio had been the Methodist minister John Stewart, who taught an egalitarian form of Methodism and was of mixed African, European, and Native American descent.<sup>50</sup> This gave the settlement—before 1856 known as Wyandot Purchase—a sharply different character not only from KCMO but other surrounding pro-slavery settlements such as Leavenworth and Atchison.

Further developments reinforced the anti-slavery politics of the area that would become KCK. Again, white settlers who came to Wyandotte County were quite different from those who came to KCMO. Instead of the southern and border-state white settlers who came to KCMO, whites who emigrated to the area that would become KCK were overwhelmingly from states without slavery.<sup>51</sup> Among them was a small but influential number of abolitionists from New England. The national context of controversy over the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act provided the catalyst for antislavery activists in Massachusetts to begin funding organized, large scale migration to Kansas, including the Wyandot Purchase and especially the Quindaro settlement.<sup>52</sup> The Kansas-Nebraska Act had amended the Missouri Compromise so that Kansas and Nebraska could vote over their status as free or slave territories: that created a scramble between Missouri slaveowners and whites from non-slave states further east that pro-slavery forces ultimately lost. Although most of the “Bleeding Kansas” violence occurred quite a bit to the west of what would become KCK, it could not be said that it was entirely unaffected by the fighting. In Wyandotte, mobs from both sides of the slavery debate burnt both the abolitionist Methodist Church North

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 3-4.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

and the pro-slavery Methodist Church South to the ground in 1856; these events were the catalyst for the formation of Quindaro.<sup>53</sup> The close proximity of pro-slavery Leavenworth and especially Atchison to Wyandotte also added to the sense of peril felt by abolitionists and blacks, inducing moves to Quindaro.<sup>54</sup>

Neighboring Quindaro accordingly became the more staunchly anti-slavery settlement in what would become KCK, and a haven for escaped slaves and free state advocates from New England.<sup>55</sup> Located in a valley on the Kansas side of the Missouri River bend to its south, Quindaro was a separate town from Wyandot in the 1850s located to Wyandot's north. It was founded by an Ohio free-state supporter, Abelard Guthrie, who named the town after his Wyandot wife.<sup>56</sup> Guthrie and his wife Nancy Brown (Quindaro) founded the town around their property in 1856; by 1859, the town incorporated the former site of the Methodist Episcopal Church North.<sup>57</sup> The town's name literally translated to "bundle of sticks," but it was interpreted by residents to mean "strength through union."<sup>58</sup> Oral histories of former slaves passed down to their descendants have long claimed that Quindaro was a major center of the Underground Railroad in Kansas.<sup>59</sup> With the aid of the New England Emigrant Aid Company, Quindaro boomed between 1857 and 1859.<sup>60</sup> Quindaro was in fact so well known as a refuge for escaped

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<sup>53</sup> Greenbaum, 10.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> "Old Quindaro: A Memory", *Kansas City Star*, August 24, 1905, found in Quindaro: Vertical File, KCMO Public Library; "Kansas Side of Kansas City", *Greater K.C. Yearbook*, 1904-05, p.77, found in Quindaro: Vertical File, KCMO Public Library, Missouri Valley Room Collections.

<sup>56</sup> "Kansas City in the 19th Century," *Kansas City Star*, September 14, 1997.

<sup>57</sup> Greenbaum, 10.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> "Lecturer Uses Family Tree to Relate Escape of Slave", *Kansas City Star*, February 24, 1994 and "Look Again at Quindaro", *Kansas City Times*, May 22, 1989, both found in Quindaro: Vertical File, KCMO Public Library.

<sup>60</sup> Greenbaum, 10.

slaves that it was widely despised by pro-slavery Missourians throughout Jackson County.<sup>61</sup>

This did not mean, however, that what would become Kansas City, Kansas would not have racial segregation or be a bastion of racial equality. Most whites who came to Wyandot Purchase and the Kansas Territory were “free soilers” who opposed slavery in Kansas but thought abolitionists were too radical.<sup>62</sup> As Eric Foner noted was the case with the “free soil” movement nationally, “free soilers” in Wyandot were anti-black; the Wyandot constitution denied suffrage to blacks and permitted segregated schools.<sup>63</sup> In fact, a provision to forbid blacks from settling in Kansas was only narrowly defeated during the process of approving the territorial constitution and a similar provision had earlier been passed by the “free” territorial legislature without dissent.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, “free soilers” considered abolitionists felons for violating the Fugitive Slave Act. Despite their disagreements, both groups soon clashed with pro-slavery “Border -Ruffians” from Missouri, who were paid to cross the border by Missouri politicians such as David Atchison to prevent the Kansas Territory from becoming an antislavery stronghold.<sup>65</sup>

Both cities, then, had established precedents for racial segregation and discrimination early in their histories despite their fundamental disagreement over slavery as a political, social, and economic order. Each reflected the larger patterns of race relations that prevailed in their respective territory/state. In the case of Missouri, that meant a society and economy organized around race-based slavery; in the case of Kansas, this meant a “free labor” society in which there

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<sup>61</sup> “Kansas City in the 19th Century,” *Kansas City Star*, September 14, 1997.

<sup>62</sup> Greenbaum, 6.

<sup>63</sup> Eric Foner. *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 261-62, 265, 296-97 ; James N. Leiker, “Race Relations in the Sunflower State” *Kansas History* (Autumn 2003) 25:3 , 220-21, 222; Greenbaum, 22; McDowell, 4.

<sup>64</sup> Greenbaum, 6, 22.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 5-6.

was “tension between a commitment to blacks’ legal freedom and a hesitance to embrace the full realization of that freedom through extension of political and social equality.”<sup>66</sup> Again, as Foner and others document, such contradictions stemmed from the uneasy combination of anti-slavery principles and antiblack racism that characterized the antebellum “free soil” movement.<sup>67</sup> This contradiction would have tremendous consequences for the future of what would become KCK, Kansas, and the rest of the nation and would prove one of the factors dooming Reconstruction in the South after the war.

Despite the presence of racial segregation and discrimination in both settlements and political dissent against slavery in KCMO , the distinction for antebellum African-Americans was a sharp and clear one: KCMO was a slave society, while the area that would become KCK, especially Quindaro, was a place of escape from bondage.<sup>68</sup> Reflecting this development, by the late 1850s, free blacks had replaced slaves as the majority of the black population in the Kansas Territory as a whole.<sup>69</sup> In fact, so many slaves in Jackson County either escaped or were aided in escaping to Quindaro and other parts of Kansas that KCMO imposed a curfew in November of 1855 forbidding “Negroes or mulattoes” to be on the streets from 10 pm to 4 am or to assemble.<sup>70</sup> The passage of the 1859 Kansas territorial constitution prohibiting slavery in Kansas merely served to make such a distinction official.<sup>71</sup> However, the Fugitive Slave Act and the bounty hunters who accompanied it made life in the area for escaped slaves (and blacks

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<sup>66</sup> Leiker, 221.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.; Foner, 296-97.

<sup>68</sup> Greenbaum, 12-14.

<sup>69</sup> *Historic Preservation in Kansas Black Historical Sites: A Beginning Point* (KSHS: Historic Sites Survey, 1977), p.6, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.

<sup>70</sup> “Kansas City in the 19th Century,” *Kansas City Star*, September 1997.

<sup>71</sup> Greenbaum, 14.

generally) quite precarious and perilous until the outbreak of the Civil War, especially in the aftermath of the 1857 Supreme Court Dred Scott decision.<sup>72</sup> For this very reason, most escaped slaves did not permanently settle in the area and chose Quindaro as temporary refuge in a journey to far western Kansas territory or north to Nebraska or Canada, which were much more safely out of the reach of slave catchers and bounty hunters.<sup>73</sup>

Both the Wyandotte town and KCMO enjoyed sustained economic and population growth between the 1850s and the beginning of the Civil War in spite of the “Bleeding Kansas” border violence, owing to railroad investors and speculators.<sup>74</sup> In the case of KCMO, the California Gold Rush of the late 1840s-early 1850s provided an added impetus for growth.<sup>75</sup> Between 1850 and 1859, KCMO’s population shot up to 40,000 from only 700.<sup>76</sup> More amazingly, this growth rate occurred despite a deadly cholera outbreak in the city between 1849 and 1851.<sup>77</sup> As for Wyandotte, its population doubled twice in the years between 1856 and 1860.<sup>78</sup> Much of this growth was fuelled by Irish immigration to both cities and by African American migration to Wyandotte from both Missouri and the South.<sup>79</sup> In contrast to cities like Detroit and Chicago, where large-scale black migration to urban neighborhoods only came about during the Great Migration of the first half of the twentieth century, such demographic changes were already underway over half a century earlier in what would become KCK. This migration coincided with

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 14-15.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>74</sup> Haskell and Fowler, 35; Shortridge, 91-92.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 28.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> Shortridge, 91-92.

<sup>79</sup> McDowell, 11-12.



the wave of European immigration of the 1840s and 1850s from countries such as Ireland and Germany.

Once the war was underway, bounty hunters trying to capture slaves became less brazen in Wyandotte County as the area around KCMO became a battlefield. What would become KCK thus escaped the war relatively unscathed. The closest the war came to threatening the area was the Battle of Westport later in October 1864, but Union victory there turned back Confederate advances towards the area.<sup>80</sup> Quindaro, however, was another story. It had been in decline as a competing urban center in Wyandotte county after the city of Wyandotte became the county seat.<sup>81</sup> This was despite the fact that Quindaro's population had been growing along with Wyandotte's and KCMO's in the 1850s, becoming nearly as large as Wyandotte by 1859.<sup>82</sup> The war proved its undoing, but Quindaro ironically did not meet this fate at the hands of the Confederate Army or border ruffians; it was instead the Second Kansas Cavalry under Col. A.C. Davis that destroyed rows of houses for firewood after evacuating the population to Wyandotte in order to protect it against Missouri raiders.<sup>83</sup> By 1862, Quindaro lost its town charter, which was revoked by the state assembly in Topeka.<sup>84</sup> Quindaro's loss benefitted Wyandotte, as former black residents were relocated there. The African-American population in Wyandotte grew steadily during the war: in addition to the ex-residents of Quindaro evacuated there, a wave of escaped slaves from Missouri poured into Wyandotte between 1863 and the end of the war.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Greenbaum, 14-15. For some perspective, historic Westport sat on the land that now includes The Plaza, famous for its holiday lights: this was perilously close to both cities, especially KCMO.

<sup>81</sup> McDowell, 4.

<sup>82</sup> Greenbaum, 14.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 16.

The first thing many former slave men did once they got to Kansas was to enlist in the Union Army.<sup>86</sup> Contemporaries described this development as “an exodus.”<sup>87</sup> That turn of phrase would reappear in both the city and the State of Kansas’s assessment of an even larger emigration after the war, in the late 1870s and early 1880s. By 1870, the Black population in Wyandotte County had increased to seventy times the number it had been just ten years earlier.<sup>88</sup>

Initially, the official policy was that African-American men were not eligible for Union Army service, in Kansas or nationally.<sup>89</sup> The decision by the Lincoln administration to exclude black men from the Union Army was no doubt politically motivated: as noted above, even antislavery and Republican politics had a strong “free soil” contingent that was deeply racist and hostile to African Americans. Additionally, as we will see with KCMO, Missouri and a few other slave states chose to remain in the Union. To argue against this policy and urge risking free soil and border state ire, abolitionists and blacks argued that former slaves had the deepest stake in the outcome of the war, that martial combat against the Confederacy would prove a worthy basis for citizenship, and that the additional manpower of black soldiers would support and relieve overburdened white Union soldiers. It would not be until the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1863 that the Union Army would officially admit black soldiers, in Kansas, or elsewhere. Once the Union started openly recruiting blacks, black enlistees in Wyandotte outnumbered their white counterparts by 483 to 477.<sup>90</sup>

Unofficially, however, there had been an irregular use of escaped slaves and free blacks

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 16

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

somewhat earlier. General James Lane of Kansas was among the first to recruit and mobilize “Colored Regiments” as early as 1862, with a total of 206 recruits to the First Colored Regiment of Kansas in Wyandotte by the fall of that year.<sup>91</sup> A number of the recruits were residents of Wyandotte and ex-residents of Quindaro, but the bulk were escaped slaves from Missouri. Kansas eventually sent four African-American brigades in total to fight the Confederacy, with Lane’s First Colored Regiment sent to Rolla, Missouri, to fight the Battle of Prairie Grove. Subsequently, the First would fight Confederate forces in Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi before disbanding in July 1865. They paid a heavy price: of the 206 original enlistees, only 52 survived. At the war’s end, military service had definitely left its mark on KCK’s African American community: the most common occupation listed for black men in the 1865 census in Wyandotte was that of “soldier.”<sup>92</sup>

KCMO, by contrast, was in greater danger of invasion by the Confederate Army and, consequently, was significantly disrupted by the outbreak of the war. To make matters worse, KCMO was much closer to the Battle of Westport than Wyandotte, and the Confederate Army under General Price occupied the land just east of Independence, Missouri, effectively flanking the city to its south and east.<sup>93</sup> Although a slave state, Missouri had officially chosen to remain in the Union, like Kentucky, West Virginia, and Maryland. The loyalties of its population, however, were sharply divided between the Union and Confederacy; in KCMO, already divided over slavery itself, this was an understatement.<sup>94</sup> There had been a special municipal election in 1861 over the secession issue in which the Unionists prevailed, but the Mayor of KCMO had

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Haskell and Fowler, 38.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 36.

been forced to call in the Union Army from Fort Leavenworth after Confederate sympathizers raised the Confederate flag over an intersection in the city.<sup>95</sup> The Union Army occupied the city for the remainder of the war. The city was effectively cut off from the outside by warring abolitionist and pro-slavery guerilla armies throughout the war.<sup>96</sup> The effect on commerce was devastating: businesses closed, gold and silver disappeared from circulation and large firms relocated to New York (the banking company Northrup and Chick) or Fort Leavenworth (the shipping firm Tussell Majors and Waddell).<sup>97</sup>

In an effort to stop “bushwhacking” pro-Confederate raiding into Kansas, the Union Army confined several female relatives of the guerilla raiders to a building on Grand Avenue.<sup>98</sup> Unfortunately, that building collapsed in August 1862, killing four of the women held there. Partially in retaliation, Quantrill led his infamous raid into Lawrence. Days after Quantrill’s raid, Union Brigadier General Thomas Ewing issued General Order No. 11, which decreed that all residents of Jackson, Cass, Bates, and northern Vernon counties were ordered to leave their rural homes within fifteen days unless they lived within a mile of KCMO, Independence, or three military posts. In addition to that command, Order Number 11 also authorized the expulsion of those residents who did not demonstrate their loyalty to the Union cause from the area. The results of the order were the loss of two-thirds of the populations of the effected counties and scores of homes and farms burnt to the ground. By 1863, the situation in KCMO was quite tense: visitors noted that “everyone carried arms and slept with revolvers under their pillows.” The Coates’s daughter, Laura, later recalled indiscriminate shooting on the outskirts of town in

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>97</sup> “Kansas City in the 19th Century,” *Kansas City Star*, 1997.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

1863-64 that resulted in a bullet striking the family bedroom on one occasion.<sup>99</sup> By the end of the war, KCMO was briefly threatened with eclipse by St. Joseph or Leavenworth, Kansas as the urban center of the region as its trade on the Missouri River had been ruined by the war and never completely recovered.<sup>100</sup>

The railroad's eclipse of river trade and travel both locally and nationally allowed KCMO to escape such a fate and it proved very fortunate that prewar plans of a rail line through KCMO and Wyandotte were revived during the war. Those plans received an added boost from St. Louis business and rail interests lobbying heavily for that very routing and it was written into law in the form of the 1862 Pacific Railroad Act.<sup>101</sup> Additionally, Chicago business leaders who had toyed with the idea of a main rail link to Kansas via St. Joseph and Hannibal abandoned it in favor of a direct routing to California via Iowa and Nebraska, which they and New York business interests deemed more direct than diversion into Kansas via Atchison or Leavenworth.<sup>102</sup> Despite that change, Coates kept lines of communications open to Chicago business interests and lobbied hard for the St. Joseph and Hannibal Railroad to build a branch from Cameron, Missouri that would cross the Missouri river at KCMO. They had approached eastern businessmen during the war, but failed to interest them. It was the fortuitous accident of focusing on a rising executive at the Boston firm who controlled the Burlington Rail Company in Chicago named James Joy that turned the situation around within a year. Joy was a manager of the St. Joseph and Hannibal who had a great appetite for real estate: Coates and the other Kansas City investors gave him land and

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Haskell and Fowler, 41.

<sup>101</sup> Shortridge, 101.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

financial control over the “Cameron to KCMO branch” rail proposal.<sup>103</sup> Joy lobbied Congress hard for Coates’ bridge and additionally got Congress to agree to build a rail link to the Galveston, Lawrence, and Leavenworth rail line to Olathe from Ottawa.<sup>104</sup> With the completion of the Missouri River Bridge in 1869 that had been a dream of Kersey Coates’ for over a decade, KCMO became positioned to become the urban center of the region and the seeds for the rise of a Greater Kansas City metropolitan area were in place.<sup>105</sup> The Olathe link additionally redirected Texas rail traffic into what would become KCK— at the expense of both Leavenworth and Lawrence; the two towns had evidently been too busy fighting each other over a railroad bridge to notice.<sup>106</sup>

Instead of the eclipse by Leavenworth, Atchison, or St. Joseph feared by KCMO civic leaders at the end of the Civil War, KCMO experienced a rapid rise as an urban center in the late 1860s, one that would expand greatly in subsequent decades.<sup>107</sup> This growth in such a relatively short period of time is usually attributed to single-minded ambition on the part of KCMO boosters and to its competitors' mistakes. While there is truth to both of these assertions, again, the decisions of St. Louis business and rail interests to push for a routing through KCMO and Wyandotte rather than to Leavenworth was a crucial factor which was largely outside the control of any of the cities in the region.<sup>108</sup> The backroom dealing of Coates and Joy was, if anything, even less controllable by such competitors.

The establishment of KCMO and neighboring Wyandotte as urban and rail hub would

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 116-17.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.; McDowell, 7.

<sup>106</sup> Shortridge, 115-17.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

attract, as with other cities in the United States in the latter half of the nineteenth century, a large wave of immigrants from Europe to fill jobs as rail and industrial workers. In addition to this nationwide development in the late nineteenth century, trends of black migration to both of these cities from rural Missouri and the Deep South would continue, and vastly accelerate during the 1879-81 “Exoduster” wave.<sup>109</sup> European immigration and black migration to both cities reinforced both Kansas Cities’ urbanization and industrialization, while the railroad and the capital investment it attracted to both cities encouraged the growth of KCK on the Kansas side and ultimately, the reality of KCK and KCMO as a semi-unified metropolitan area. By 1880, seventeen percent of KCMO’s population was foreign born and fifteen percent was black.<sup>110</sup> In 1870, twenty-four percent of KCMO’s population had been foreign born; the decline in percentage reflected the massive growth of the city in those ten years and the effect of the Exoduster migration.<sup>111</sup> The city’s population jumped from 32, 260 in 1870 to 163, 752 with the greatest increase of black population occurring in the census year 1880 and the greatest in immigrant population occurring in 1890. Strikingly, KCMO’s black population increased by sixty-eight percent in the 1880s while Jackson County as a whole had a forty percent decline in its black population; over the next three decades the city’s black population tripled while the state of Missouri’s black population only grew by eight percent.<sup>112</sup>

The stockyards and packinghouses that developed along the state line after 1870 attracted freedmen in postwar Missouri who were unable to find work in surrounding towns such as Lexington and Chillicothe and who chose, after slavery ended, to leave agricultural and rural

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<sup>109</sup> Coulter, 24.

<sup>110</sup> Schirmer, 29.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

lives for cities and towns.<sup>113</sup> This was the case before the Exoduster migration from southern states, a decade later. The first of these massive packinghouse plants was built along the Missouri River's west bottoms in 1870 by the Plankinton and Armour firm.<sup>114</sup> Job choices were sharply limited in a climate consisting of small towns in which more African-American job hunters existed than jobs and in which Missouri's former status as a slave state meant considerable white racial prejudice in large cities such as KCMO.<sup>115</sup> The meatpacking industry was an exception in that it welcomed black workers, although it limited the types of jobs for which African-Americans were eligible.<sup>116</sup>

As historian Sherry Lamb Schirmer has noted, in KCMO "relations between black and white Kansas Citians in the latter nineteenth century were shaped in part by Missouri law."<sup>117</sup> Missouri abolished slavery in 1865 at the war's end and the Republican postwar state government extended most civil rights to blacks except the right to vote or hold public office.<sup>118</sup> In response to the legislature's failure to extend the franchise, African American activists in Missouri formed the Missouri Equal Rights League to press for voting rights. Given how limited early postwar civil rights were in the state, it is not surprising that employment in the private sector was so racially discriminatory in nature. However, Missouri never enacted the infamous "black codes" so crushing to black liberty that characterized the states of the former Confederacy before Radical Reconstruction.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Coulter, 20.

<sup>114</sup> Greenbaum, 22.

<sup>115</sup> Coulter, 20, 24.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>117</sup> Schirmer, 28.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*



Here, it is instructive to compare the two states's prevailing racial policies. In comparing what historian James N. Leiker called Kansas' "libertarian" patterns of historical racism and segregation to Missouri's record, one sees similarities and differences. Both the Kansas Territory before the war and postwar Missouri had attempted to constitutionally deny black voting rights; both could be described as having what Leiker characterized as Kansas's "tension between commitment to blacks' legal freedom and a hesitance to embrace the full realization of that freedom through the extension of political and social equality."<sup>120</sup> But Kansas had failed to insert the denial of political and civil rights for blacks into its state constitution, while, as we shall see, the Missouri government managed to deny voting rights to African-Americans for several years despite strong protests from the black community.<sup>121</sup> Ironically, precisely because of the Confederate defeat and the end of slavery that was its outcome, Missouri's postwar government actually took a more active role in promoting civil rights during Reconstruction. However, Missouri definitely fit a more "southern" pattern in its outlawing of interracial marriage between whites and blacks or those with one-fourth black ancestry in 1869.<sup>122</sup> Once Reconstruction ended nationally, Missouri revised this statute to ban all marriage between whites and those of one-eighth black ancestry; this remained state law until the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court decision. In contrast, Kansas lacked such a statute. As we shall see, the segregation of schools happened quite a bit later in KCK than in KCMO, and was enacted by the state in KCMO but by the city in KCK.<sup>123</sup>

Both Kansas Cities (KCK emerged as a city after 1886) did develop a cadre of educated

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<sup>120</sup> Leikner, 221, 226. Use of "libertarian" as an adjective for Kansas race relations and ideology on p. 226.

<sup>121</sup> Schirmer, 29.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Greenbaum, 54; Schirmer, 29

black leaders as early as the 1870s, but such men and women were far from typical of the majority of black men and women who moved to both KCMO and KCK between 1865 and 1875.<sup>124</sup> Many came from Kentucky and Tennessee after the end of slavery in those states.<sup>125</sup> This group of migrants numbered in the thousands and was distinct from the Exodusters who came after them, but would inspire the latter group by setting up colonies in Northwestern and Southeastern Kansas.<sup>126</sup> Most late nineteenth century African-Americans in KCMO worked as day laborers, domestics, or teamsters.<sup>127</sup> Most late nineteenth century blacks in KCMO lived with a racism driven by custom rather than legal statutes enacted by either the state or the city, with the exceptions of state laws against intermarriage and—after 1889—the state prohibition against teaching children of different races in the same schools.<sup>128</sup> In addition to hiring discrimination, theaters and hotels continued to segregate or exclude black patrons despite the 1875 Missouri civil rights law passed during Missouri’s Reconstruction; most whites expected the law to change nothing in terms of “the place” of blacks in society.<sup>129</sup> Police brutality and harassment were also rampant, becoming so bad that black residents and activists formed a Protective League in 1882.<sup>130</sup> Adequate housing was also hard to come by, but ironically not because of residential race segregation.<sup>131</sup> Residential segregation by race was virtually

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<sup>124</sup> Coulter, 23.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Schirmer, 37.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>131</sup> Coulter, 24.

unknown in late-nineteenth century KCMO.<sup>132</sup> The 1870 census of the city listed many boardinghouses and bordellos as including both black and white residents and areas of the city that were strongly black in the 1880s also housed significant numbers of whites.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, no evidence has been found of white neighbors in these neighborhoods being particularly hostile to blacks before 1900.<sup>134</sup> That fact should not be read as assertion or evidence of any belief in racial equality on the part of the city's whites. The more typical attitude of whites towards blacks in KCMO was a paternalistic kind of racism that mocked them as childish and, more often than not, chose to ignore blacks and their political needs, as voiced by the newspaper *The Kansas City Times*.<sup>135</sup> For example, the *Times* opined that more rigid segregation was unnecessary because "the colored people evidently know their place and are possessed of too much common sense to attempt to force themselves on the white people."<sup>136</sup> A black woman who was charged with the misdemeanor of assaulting her fiancé four years earlier was made the clownish punchline of the paper's observation that she "loved, and loved too well."<sup>137</sup>

As frustrating as rampant race discrimination was and as terrible as police abuses were in KCMO, those migrants known as "The Exodusters" who came to the area between 1879 and early 1880 were fleeing the worst conditions of agropeonage and racial oppression (often terror) that emerged in states like Louisiana, Texas, and Mississippi after the end of Reconstruction in

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 24-25.; Schirmer, 32-33; Kevin Fox Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development: The Kansas City Experience, 1900-2000* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 21, 30-32.

<sup>133</sup> Coulter, 24; Schirmer, 32.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 30, 32.

<sup>136</sup> *Kansas City Times*, March 20, 1875.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., October 10, 1871.

the South.<sup>138</sup> Fears of disenfranchisement by the new Democratic governments and actual assassinations and race-based violence by so-called “bulldozer” white Democrats in Louisiana and Mississippi in 1878 drove the migration; that migration was often accompanied with millenarian hopes that Kansas was a promised land.<sup>139</sup> Benjamin “Pap” Singleton, born into slavery in Nashville, had been encouraging migration of African Americans to Cherokee County Kansas since 1876 and he took credit for inspiring the Exodus.<sup>140</sup> Those from Mississippi and Louisiana traveled up the Mississippi River to St. Louis and then on to Kansas via the Missouri River.<sup>141</sup> Knowing that Missouri had been a slave state, most of these migrants wanted to get to Wyandotte and not stop anywhere else west of St. Louis, including KCMO.<sup>142</sup> However, some landed in the city anyway because they had no other choice; one historian estimated that as many as a third of some fifteen to twenty-thousand migrants may have been stranded in either KCMO or Wyandotte after their travels funds were used up.<sup>143</sup> Often, they had hoped to reach all-black communities such as Nicodemus in northwestern Kansas or Benjamin “Pap” Singleton’s towns in Southeast Kansas.<sup>144</sup> The first large numbers reached the two cities along the state line in March 1879.<sup>145</sup>

KCMO’s reaction was varied: newspapers such as *The Kansas City Times* were

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<sup>138</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1986), 181, 183, 191-92; Greenbaum, 23.

<sup>139</sup> Painter, 183, 191-92.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 149

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-87.

<sup>142</sup> Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas, 1879-80* (Lawrence KS: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), 37.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*; Schirmer, 27.

<sup>144</sup> Coulter, 24.

<sup>145</sup> Greenbaum, 24.

downright hateful and even threatening to the Exodusters, calling them “rubbish” and “paupers and thieves” who carried diseases that Wyandotte should “garrison the town against.”<sup>146</sup> Among ordinary residents, however, whites as well as blacks contributed food, clothes, and money to help these emigrants on their journey.<sup>147</sup> However, that did not mean they welcomed them to stay. When Wyandotte stopped accepting further refugees, the captain of a ship carrying Exodusters instead dropped two hundred and forty passengers off at the Plankinton and Armour packing plant in KCMO to loud protests from city officials.<sup>148</sup> Authorities had to temporarily accept them due to lack of a city ordinance dealing with the mass migration, but arranged them to be shipped off to Manhattan, Kansas as soon as funds were available.<sup>149</sup> Officially, civic leaders in both cities coordinated a plan to deal with the sudden influx that combined relief with plans to eventually disperse the large number of migrants across the state of Kansas.<sup>150</sup> KCMO’s Mayor George M. Shelley pleaded with the Secretary of War to allow use of a portion of Fort Leavenworth for the refugees and was refused; Secretary George McCrary told him he had to consult Congress.<sup>151</sup> Reverend B.F. Watson of the Allen Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church was the key figure in KCMO’s black community in aiding the migrants and assimilating them into the city’s African-American community.<sup>152</sup> Those Exodusters who were stranded in KCMO settled in several areas around the city: along the Missouri River in the East Bottoms,

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<sup>146</sup> Athearn, 37; Schirmer, 31.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Athearn, 42.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Athearn, 39.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Coulter, 24-25.

along the West Bottoms, and on the southern edge of the city.<sup>153</sup>

In Wyandotte, in March 1879, newspapers appealed to the American public directly for financial and material donations to help the overwhelming number of refugees.<sup>154</sup> Again, Corvine Patterson and other local prominent blacks such as Henry Reed pressured and pled with Wyandotte municipal leaders to allow the migrants to remain and managed to convince some powerful whites such as the Northrup banking family to support allowing the refugees to remain in the city.<sup>155</sup> Like in KCMO, many of the refugees who stayed in Wyandotte settled along the river bottom and formed small communities such as Juniper Town and Mississippi Town that later yielded a permanent black settlement along the Kansas River. Rattlebone Hollow, north of present-day KCK and Hogg's Town, on the western edge of the city, grew from origins as Exoduster squatter settlements as well.<sup>156</sup>

However, given that Wyandotte had much larger arrivals of Exodusters than KCMO and was quite a bit smaller in population, such generosity was severely tested fairly rapidly.<sup>157</sup> Older African American residents as well as whites became opposed to further migration to their city from Mississippi and Louisiana. Local blacks, according to a newspaper editor, did "not want anything to do with them [the Exodusters]" and the two groups almost never associated in 1880.<sup>158</sup> Locals and business leaders reacted negatively to the refugees taking relief without agreeing to work, which violated cherished cultural mores surrounding the Protestant work ethic.

The Mayor of Wyandotte, J.S. Stockton, appealed for calm and continued generosity

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>154</sup> Athearn, 39-40.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 40-42.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 41.

towards those already there but decided to put a freeze on further migration to Wyandotte in April of 1879.<sup>159</sup> By late April, there was ominous talk of vigilante action against further migrants.<sup>160</sup> To avert this, Stockton had arranged for the steamboats carrying refugees rerouted upriver to Atchison and Leavenworth, paying their way.<sup>161</sup> Stockton and other Wyandotte officials telegraphed St. Louis relief officials that Wyandotte had reached its limit for refugees and that Topeka was a much better choice for Exoduster settlement among cities in Eastern Kansas.<sup>162</sup> Wyandotte also paid a dollar a head to ship large numbers off to Ellis, Kansas.<sup>163</sup> Thus whites as well as blacks in both KCMO and Wyandotte displayed a strange mixture of a genuine sense of charity towards the refugees combined with a fear and disgust directed against them for being poor and sick. The impulse to help the refugees tended to be the initial reaction in both cities, although KCMO exhibited hostile attitudes from the beginning.<sup>164</sup> The Exodus of blacks from Mississippi, Texas, and Louisiana to Kansas lasted about a year and a half, with at least forty thousand blacks making the journey to Kansas before being halted by the pressure exerted on transit companies by both southern planters and state governments.<sup>165</sup>

Even given how intense local resentments surrounding the Exodus was in both cities, once it had ended, those who remained in KCK and KCMO were absorbed quite rapidly into the respective black communities between 1880 and 1900.<sup>166</sup> Nor did the Exodus prompt the kind of

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<sup>159</sup> Greenbaum, 24.

<sup>160</sup> Athearn, 43.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 45-46.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 37, 41.

<sup>165</sup> Greenbaum, 24-25.

<sup>166</sup> Schirmer, 34

rigid residential race segregation seen in twentieth-century cities.<sup>167</sup> In the case of KCMO, one of the 1880 Exoduster settlements in the West Bottoms called Hell's Half Acre consisted of two-thirds Missouri born blacks by the turn of the century.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, this area was a mixture of black and white households with a third of its white population being Irish or German.<sup>169</sup> Located near the stockyards, warehouses, and packinghouses, its cheap housing lacked proper sanitation and clean water and was notorious for prostitution and city toughs who hung around the train depot and saloons in the area. Hell's Half Acre had a high turnover of Black, Irish, and German families who moved out of these miserable conditions as soon as they could. Interestingly enough, even this tough neighborhood was not segregated by social class either: mingled in with the poorest black and white industrial proletariat were at least a fifth of whites who were small business owners or white-collar workers.<sup>170</sup>

In KCK, the Exodus had the effect of more than doubling the black population. In the same year, KCK was flooded with German, Swedish, and Irish immigrants who had come to seek jobs in the meatpacking industry, many coming from working in Chicago earlier.<sup>171</sup> An excellent example of a former Exoduster enclave in KCK that became a neighborhood with a mixture of black and white residents was Rattlebone Hollow.<sup>172</sup> There, German, Jewish, Catholic, and Slavic immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe lived alongside former Exodusters and local-born African Americans alike.<sup>173</sup> Unlike the rough Hell's Half Acre,

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>171</sup> Greenbaum, 27.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.



Rattlebone Hollow was semi-agricultural rather than industrial and was much more diverse in terms of social class.<sup>174</sup> Income levels ranged from the very poor to the richest citizens of the city.<sup>175</sup> Despite the presence of livestock and its semi-agricultural character, it had streetcar service in the 1880s.

At the close of the nineteenth century, both cities were growing rapidly. Both cities had streetcars by 1885 and KCMO had its first skyscraper, the New York Life Building, by 1890. KCK as a city rather than a combination of smaller towns such as Wyandotte and Armourdale was less than a decade and a half old. Both cities had come through the turbulence of civil war and border violence and against unlikely odds, rose to regional metropolitan status thanks to the railroad and African-Americans and European immigrants searching for a better life. Racism could be found in each city, but real estate had not yet drawn the color line that already permeated custom and in Missouri, was imposed legally on its school system and upon marriage.

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER TWO: JIM CROW AND THE ORIGINS OF THE URBAN CRISIS IN GREATER KANSAS CITY, 1900-1920

The urban crisis that occurred in KCMO between 1940 and 1968 had seeds extending as far back as the first decade of the twentieth century. Residential segregation and racial discrimination in both KCMO and KCK at the turn of the twentieth century need to be understood as part of a nadir of American race relations, between the 1890s through the 1920s, marked by national consensus—among whites—around white supremacy and racism.<sup>1</sup> Codified as the law of the land by 1896’s *Plessy v. Ferguson*, “separate but equal” underpinned a new white supremacist southern legal order known as Jim Crow that found subtle and not so subtle echoes elsewhere. It was a brutal period marked by lynchings and race riots nationwide. This development was bolstered by an academic and intellectual climate that boosted pseudoscience around racial groups’ supposed superiority and inferiority, which, in a global context, was used to justify Western colonialism and imperialism. In the US, this same racist ideology not only justified the recent American empire-building after the Spanish-American War and the complete conquest of Native American lands before 1890—but also served purposes of healing sectional division from the Civil War at the expense of blacks.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, America went through a great metamorphosis from proprietary-based capitalism to a new industrialized corporate capitalism that prompted “a search for order” in the form of middle-class reform movements aimed at regulating corporate power and reordering the

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<sup>1</sup> See Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 22-23. Despite the focus on the South, Hale notes this was nationwide by 1910.; also see C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955 )

<sup>2</sup> See especially a key thesis of David W. Blight’s *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Boston: Harvard University, 2001)

new urban space.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, what was then called “the labor question” simultaneously occupied national attention, with frequent violent clashes between strikers and employers’ hired muscle over the right to unionize and workers’ living conditions. For African Americans, the fall of the more inclusive and multiracial Knights of Labor and the rise of Samuel Gompers’ American Federation of Labor as the dominant labor organization encouraged their exclusion from the labor movement, as the AFL was openly racist. It would not be until the late 1920s appearance of A. Philip Randolph, the great African-American socialist and sleepingcar porter labor leader, and the 1935 formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations that this situation would begin to change.

The Great Migration, beginning just before US entry into World War I and lasting until 1970, was a mass migration of the nation’s black population away from the rural South to urban centers in the Northeast, Midwest, and West Coast. The Great Migration was driven by continuing severe racial oppression and terror directed against rural southern blacks, capital’s need for sufficient industrial labor once the war—and later, immigration restriction by Congress—interrupted the flow of European immigration, and the devastation of cotton growing by the boll weevil insect infestation in the 1910s and 1920s that led to the collapse of cotton prices by the late 1920s.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately for the newly arrived black residents of major cities, their arrival in northern and western cities occurred at the same time as the emergence of racist real estate practices nationwide. Over time, in US major cities, real estate judgments of property

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<sup>3</sup> Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search For Order, 1877-1920: The Making of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 81-82, 111; Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890-1916: The Market, The Law, and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 14-20; Martin J. Sklar, *The US as a Developing Country: Studies in U.S. History in the Progressive Era and the 1920s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 68-69.

<sup>4</sup> David M. P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 14, 94; Gotham, 33-40.

values being tied to “ethnic character” of neighborhoods would combine with overcrowding in segregated black sections of towns to contribute to what historians term the “Urban Crisis,” which would not be noticed by whites, the government, or the American press until the mid-to-late 1960s urban rebellions that included Kansas City, Missouri by 1968.<sup>5</sup> The Urban League, however, had been warning of housing crises for blacks in KCMO as far back as 1940.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, it is in this time period, from 1900 to 1920, that the proverbial seeds were planted that would germinate fully in the Kansas City, Missouri Urban Crisis in the decades between the Second World War and 1968. One of the key characteristics of the urban crisis in every city was massive residential segregation by race; this time period was critical as the starting point for the development of the pattern of black inner-city poverty, hypersegregation, and isolation surrounded by predominantly white middle-class suburbs.

As has been seen, both KCK and KCMO in the late nineteenth centuries had heavily African American neighborhoods that nonetheless also included a significant number of white residents, both native-born and immigrant.<sup>7</sup> The only parallel in either city’s history to the kind of residential race segregation that would soon mark Greater Kansas City and all other American major cities in the early decades of the twentieth century was found in the antebellum segregation of KCMO’s free blacks and Irish into a slum called “East Kansas”.<sup>8</sup> Even here, however, one did not see a sharply drawn color line between “white” Irish and African-

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 281

<sup>6</sup> “Race Relations in the Heart of America: Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Urban League of Kansas City,” p.4, M-331, File 5, Box KCULP-2: Publications, 1934-89, Kansas City Urban League Administrative Records, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, MO; Thomas A. Webster, “Annual Report 1942: Urban League of Kansas City,” p.5, M-331, File 6, Box KCULP-2: Publications, 1934-89, Kansas City Urban League Administrative Records, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, MO.

<sup>7</sup> Schirmer, 35; Greenbaum, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Schirmer, 13.

Americans in the manner that the real estate industry would adopt in the early twentieth century. Racial discrimination and the struggles against it were nothing new: what was new was the racial segregation of urban space. This chapter will tell the story of how, within the space of four decades, KCMO changed from a place in which racial segregation and discrimination had been mostly by custom into what by 1923 future NAACP president Roy Wilkins termed “a Jim Crow Town right down to its bootstraps” which segregated everything except streetcars.<sup>9</sup> He added that the city “was as thoroughly segregated as anything in Memphis” and “might as well have been Gulfport, Mississippi” in its racial attitudes.<sup>10</sup> Subsequent Urban League studies concurred with this assessment, nicknaming KCMO the “Northern City with a Southern Exposure.”<sup>11</sup>

In the case of KCMO, according to historian Sherry Lamb Schirmer, the city’s pattern of racial discrimination extended precisely from the middle-class “ordering” impulses that Robert Wiebe identified that would exacerbate the developing pattern of urban racial segregation of neighborhoods in the early twentieth century. Schirmer noted that the early twentieth century in KCMO witnessed a fusion of “concerns about social status and urban space” among the city’s white middle-class and elites that would shape the way the city’s middle-class whites would respond to race and to the city’s black population.<sup>12</sup> At first, this emerging ideology of status and urban space was rooted in developments and realities that had very little to do with race. Rather, it was a byproduct instead of local class formation and growing upper-class consciousness of its own social class. The anxiety around urban space was rooted in the origins of the city in the

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<sup>9</sup> Roy Wilkins, *Standing Fast: The Autobiography of Roy Wilkins* (New York: The Viking Press, 1982), 60-61.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 61.

<sup>11</sup> “The ‘Northern City With a Southern Exposure,’” *Matter-Of-Fact: Newsletter of the Urban League of Kansas City, Missouri*, p. 1, July 1945, M-331, File 1: Vol.1, Box KCULP-1: Publications, 1945-60, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, MO.

<sup>12</sup> Schirmer, 11.

1830s, when it was notorious for being an ugly, dirty, and small settlement. Even when the city grew after the Civil War from migration and immigration, industrialization, and the railroads, its elites lacked pretensions and protocols that marked established eastern cities' "high society;" anyone who possessed "absolute respectability" and "full allegiance to the town's welfare" was welcomed.<sup>13</sup> Within a decade, that situation changed completely, and Sarah Coates, prominent KCMO clubwoman and spouse of antislavery city booster Kersey Coates, began to complain about her fellow upper-class citizens' growing snobbery and focus on entertainment. The city's famous urban improvement efforts between the 1880s and 1920s known as "the city beautiful movement" did much to spread an ideology of class status tied directly to the hygienic maintenance of urban space in KCMO.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1880s, KCMO's elite began to distance themselves from the rest of the city's citizenry.<sup>15</sup> They began to hold more selective and exclusive gatherings ironically referred to as "open houses" that made the newspapers for their elegance and extravagance.<sup>16</sup> These included the city's first major country clubs. In order to maintain their status and separation from the social classes below them, KCMO's upper class had to move several times as the city grew and as factories, working-class, poor, and middle-class residents began encroaching on the older upper-crust neighborhoods. In the same decade that saw the maturation of the city's upper class, a real estate boom occurred as speculators moved to capitalize on a phenomenal two-hundred

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>14</sup> William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement in Kansas City* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1964), xv.

<sup>15</sup> Schirmer, 12.

<sup>16</sup> "Society," ca. 1890, Mounted Clippings File, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

and forty percent growth the city enjoyed in the 1880s.<sup>17</sup> Both the possibility of further encroachment on well-to-do neighborhoods from population growth and the remaining ugliness of the city despite its growth upset the city's rich greatly. As late as 1880, none of the city's streets were paved, and fewer than a third of homes were connected to the city's sewer system. Those who developed the elite Hyde Park and Kenwood neighborhoods in 1886 adopted control measures such as deed restrictions that required high-quality home construction.<sup>18</sup> One of the developers, George Kessler, went on to propose a park and boulevard system of urban beautification by 1893.<sup>19</sup> One of Kessler's models for KCMO's beautification was the famous "White City" exhibit at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago.<sup>20</sup> By the close of the century, the city's elite had established social and physical distance between themselves and the rest of the city.<sup>21</sup> The beautiful parks, winding boulevards, and civic monuments in KCMO are a legacy of the upper-class drive for both separation from other social classes and urban cleanliness.

KCMO's middle class reacted to this development in two ways. First, it embraced the upper-class fixation on cleanliness and urban spaces, adopting it as their own.<sup>22</sup> And secondly, the realization that they had not insulated themselves from the lower classes or urban vice such as prostitution increased their anxiety by highlighting the precariousness of middle-class identity. This middle-class anxiety outlined the contours of local politics for the decades between the 1890s and 1910s: from the Pendergast machine to clean government reformers and from wealthy

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<sup>17</sup> Schirmer, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Wilson, 46.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>21</sup> Schirmer, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

manufacturers like William Volker to democratic-socialist lawyer Frank P. Walsh, the focus was on combatting city vice. Especially in the face of the wave of moral panic over “white slavery” that characterized the early teens, this issue was moved to the forefront.<sup>23</sup> Racial prejudice that already existed among the city’s whites would be folded into this emerging white middle-class milieu of anxiety over being exposed to poorer social classes and urban vice over the first two decades of the twentieth century. Given that the “white slavery” discourse around the stories of native-born white Protestant girls being forced into prostitution was itself deeply racist and xenophobic (Jews, Catholics, and Chinese immigrants were most often accused of this), it probably contributed to white middle-class perceptions of vice becoming racist.<sup>24</sup>

These anxieties played out in a fiercely partisan political climate that would witness the rise of one of the major urban Democratic machines of the era: that of Jim and Tom Pendergast. From 1892 until 1911, Jim Pendergast had controlled the West Bottoms as the Democratic First Ward, allowing him to “guide” a full half of the votes cast in the city in later years.<sup>25</sup> Such political dominance was far from preordained: in 1894, he was one of only two Democrats who survived a municipal Republican sweep, despite the fact that the Republican alliance with a militant nativist organization known as the American Protective Association drove German immigrant voters away from the Republicans.<sup>26</sup> While his party suffered from deep divisions between 1894 and 1900, Jim Pendergast continued to rack up majorities in his ward that stunned

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 19; For the panic surrounding “white slavery” in the 1910s, see James A. Morone, *Hellfire Nation: the Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 260-61.

<sup>24</sup> Morone, 260-65.

<sup>25</sup> Schirmer, 21; William M. Reddig, *Tom’s Town: Kansas City and the Pendergast Legend* (New York: J.B. Lippincot and Co., 1947), 30.

<sup>26</sup> Reddig, 31.



contemporaries.<sup>27</sup> Republicans accused him of receiving fraudulent votes from Kansans who crossed the state line, along with voter intimidation and stuffing ballots, accusations quite common in this era. Pendergast denied these allegations and dismissed the common reformer's condemnation of the spoils system in which he rewarded his friends and supporters with municipal positions. Jim, however, claimed a code of ethics so strong that he boasted of "never having taken a cent in exchange for political favor."<sup>28</sup> After Jim's death in 1911, Tom Pendergast took over the First Ward and his brother's rivalry with Democratic ward boss Joseph Shannon.<sup>29</sup> Tom Pendergast would be the figure in the 1930s who would elevate the Pendergast machine to control of KCMO, rendering it "Tom's Town," owing considerably to his considerable political skills. He would expand his working-class Irish coalition into an unlikely large alliance of Irish, Italian, African American, and some of the very middle-class native-born white voters most uneasy with "commercialized vice."<sup>30</sup>

At first, the response to growing middle-class pressure to act against urban vices yielded a policy of containment.<sup>31</sup> In 1908, Missouri had elected a clean government and reform-minded Republican named Herbert Hadley as governor, who proceeded to appoint a like-minded attorney named Thomas Marks from KCMO to head the city's Board of Police Commissioners. As commissioner, Marks likened vice and prostitution to "measles," which could not be eradicated entirely but whose spread could be checked by quarantine.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, the city's policing

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>30</sup> Schirmer, 65.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>32</sup> Reddig, 69.

aimed to keep its urban vices in a red-light district on the city's North End and away from both the affluent and the middle-classes.<sup>33</sup> To do so, they would discreetly collect fines from brothels of thirty dollars per month—with an additional fee of twenty extra dollars if the brothel served liquor—in exchange for the owner's promise to run an “orderly” brothel and to keep such activities in the city's North End. Unfortunately for the city's African-American community, the North End happened to have a significant black population, whose living standards worsened in the 1910s. This policy continued for three years. African-Americans were not the only group living in the North End; Jewish and Italian Americans also lived in sections of the neighborhood. In addition to prejudice against all three groups, the decision of the Marks strategy to contain vice in the North End reflected the previous flight of the wealthy, commercial interests, and the middle class from the North End over the years.

In pushing urban vice into an area that included a predominantly black neighborhood, the Marks policy served to begin the process of racializing white middle-class perceptions of urban vice. Italians and Jews who lived in the North End area were also, as was the case nationally in the early 1900s, viewed as “nonwhite” groups by both white elites and older, more established European ethnics.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the “othering” of certain urban spaces in the minds of middle-class whites was not affected by the presence of non-black groups. As Kevin Fox Gotham noted, this development was in contrast to the late nineteenth century, during which KCMO's residents not only failed to link urban vice to blacks specifically, but also did not make “a connection between black ‘culture’ and a particular ‘place’ occupied exclusively by blacks.”<sup>35</sup> This was

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<sup>33</sup> Schimer, 19.

<sup>34</sup> Freund, 55.

<sup>35</sup> Gotham, 31.

because, again, most of the city's black families had lived on streets with whites, albeit of different social classes.<sup>36</sup>

The Marks' strategy had the benefit from the point of view of the city's politicians of transcending divides between reformers and the Pendergast machine, as the city's Democratic machine also pledged to keep vice out of middle-class neighborhoods and wards that voted Democratic.<sup>37</sup> In fact, from the machine's point of view, this Republican good government containment plan was truly ideal: the machine could both court middle-class voters in Democratic wards by keeping vice away from them while continuing to receive political donations and funding from owners of brothels and saloons.<sup>38</sup> So too, in its own way, did the Pendergast machine advance KCMO's upper and middle-class agendas of managing and cleaning up "selected urban spaces."<sup>39</sup>

However, consensus around containing vice soon unraveled. KCMO's clubwomen and clergy were horrified by a New York social worker's conclusion that the Marks police force strategy had essentially licensed immorality by enacting the fines system and that over four hundred white girls worked as sex workers in the city.<sup>40</sup> The latter finding, of course, fed into what was then not only a local but a national scare over "white slavery," i.e., stories and rumors of young white Protestant girls forced into prostitution against their will by racial or religious "others." The Church Federation of Kansas City was especially outraged by the fact that

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>37</sup> Schirmer, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>39</sup> *Kansas City Post*, May 25, 1911; *Kansas City Times*, September 20, 1913.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

“decent” men and women had to cross the North End to get to the city hall and courthouse.<sup>41</sup> In addition, they charged that by compromising with vice, the city was guilty of enabling “white slavery,” propagating venereal disease, and creating disrespect for law and order by involving the police in deals with operators of prostitution rings.

Instead, from 1911 through 1913, these upper- and middle-class moral guardians campaigned for nothing less than the eradication of vice and the destruction of the red-light district in the North End as a means to achieve their vision of a city free of vice.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, the Church Federation organized the Society For the Suppression of Commercialized Vice. The position of the KCMO police was not helped by the fact that in September 1913, the moral reformers convinced enough voters to reverse a 1905 ordinance that had kept saloons out of residential wards.<sup>43</sup> Facing middle-class outrage, the police shut down the red-light district in a series of night time raids that evicted the women from all of the brothels in the North End.

The result was disastrous. The opposite of the intent of the reformers occurred: prostitution spread out of the North End into the northern end of the Paseo, hotels in the central business district and became more closely linked to the illicit drug trade than before.<sup>44</sup> The political consequences, too, were the exact opposite of what moral reformers wished to see: the North End became solidly Democratic, and aligned with the Joseph Shannon machine Democrats at that.<sup>45</sup>

The Society For the Suppression of Commercialized Vice desperately brought suits to

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<sup>41</sup> Reddig, 69.

<sup>42</sup> Schirmer, 19-20.

<sup>43</sup> Reddig, 69.

<sup>44</sup> Schirmer, 20

<sup>45</sup> Reddig, 69.

close down the brothels as public nuisances, but the Missouri Supreme Court ruled against the notion that a brothel was a public nuisance and threw out the suits.<sup>46</sup> By the time of the First World War, the situation was so out of hand that it caused an outbreak of venereal disease in Kansas military encampments.<sup>47</sup> In 1917, Attorney General Palmer threatened that the military would post sentries at Union Station to stop soldiers from going to the city if KCMO neglected to enact a city ordinance for mandatory medical inspections and isolation of prostitutes. By 1918, the War Department directly intervened, setting up a vice free zone within five miles in each direction of an army encampment. The Society, which had five years earlier sought to eradicate vice altogether in the city, now merely applauded federal wartime attempts to restore some control over it.

At the same time the World War I-era debacle around vice and venereal disease in KCMO unfolded, KCMO's version of Jim Crow and its complete residential segregation of blacks into urban ghettos fully emerged as a social order. This development occurred relatively rapidly, mainly between 1900 and 1920.<sup>48</sup> As late as 1900, only a quarter of the population of the Vine Street district was black, mixed in with white-collar whites who were ninety percent native born. About twelve percent of Vine Street blacks in 1900 were skilled Pullman Porters, while about six percent were white-collar workers.

In addition to the national climate encouraging overt racism and local middle-class anxieties over space and status, what changed after 1900 was that the city's Kesslerian beautification projects and its real estate market dynamics began to rearrange black residential

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<sup>46</sup> Schirmer, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 39.

patterns in ways that concentrated the African American population of the city.<sup>49</sup> The construction of the parks and Union Station, along with new industrial and commercial districts, uprooted former integrated neighborhoods. The West Bottoms integrated neighborhoods were particularly hard-hit by the expansion of the new industrial districts in the first decade of the new century. The result was an increasing concentration of the city's black population in the North End and the Vine Street area.

By 1907, the African American press began to note the rise of discriminatory practices among white realtors.<sup>50</sup> These included refusing to sell or rent to blacks in middle-class “respectable” neighborhoods, attempting to force out those who lived in majority white neighborhoods, and steering black families away from majority white neighborhoods. In 1908, Jackson County began enacting racially restrictive covenants.<sup>51</sup> If any of these tactics failed to deter prospective black residents, white vigilantes made death threats and torched or bombed black homes.<sup>52</sup> These changes locally coincided with the 1908 formation of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, which disseminated the notion that blacks' presence in neighborhoods destabilized them and led to lower property values in pamphlets, periodicals, and textbooks nationwide.<sup>53</sup> By 1910-11, there had been a total of six black homes bombed on Montgall Avenue, which was just east of a predominantly black neighborhood.<sup>54</sup> All of this occurred before the Great Migration began nationally and before KCMO had any set of official

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>51</sup> Gotham, 39.

<sup>52</sup> Schirmer, 42.

<sup>53</sup> Gotham, 34.

<sup>54</sup> *The Crisis* (February 1912), 162.

studies by sociologists that rationalized such discrimination. At least in the case of KCMO, such a study would come two years after the Montgall bombings.

This increasing residential segregation complemented the tightening of both customary race segregation and state-enforced legal race segregation outside of housing and real estate. As early as 1904, the city's state-mandated school segregation was extended to KCMO's School District teachers' meetings.<sup>55</sup> Before then, even though white and black children went to separate schools, black teachers and other faculty had sat on panels presenting scholarly papers with their white counterparts and had otherwise socially mingled with them. At the same time, owners of meeting halls began to refuse to rent these halls to blacks. By 1907, KCMO's cemeteries owned by whites refused to bury the black dead and white doctors began turning away black patients.<sup>56</sup> Railcar segregation was barely averted at the state level each time it came up in 1903, 1907, and 1917, and then only because the Democratic machines in both KCMO and St. Louis bucked their party's national white supremacist stance in favor of courting black voters and because the owner of the KCMO streetcar system was opposed to the cost of segregating the cars.<sup>57</sup> In this case, the nascent local civil rights movement represented in the Negro Protective League of Kansas City had some unexpected allies, but were fighting an uphill fight against a deepening local, state, and national climate of extreme racial oppression and intolerance. Also, the lack of segregation in public transportation in the city was more than tempered by the fact that black passengers were frequently attacked or insulted by white passengers and drivers

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<sup>55</sup> Schirmer, 42.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 42-43; "We Must Get Closer Together," *Rising Son*, p.4, April 13, 1907 discussed white undertakers' racism and pled for blacks to use black undertakers in the city instead

<sup>57</sup> "If 'Jim Crow' Bill Should Pass," *Rising Son*, p.1, February 20, 1903; "Will It Be A Jim Crow Law," *Rising Son*, p.4, February 2, 1907; Editorial without a title, *Rising Son*, p.1, March 2, 1907; "Kansas City Negroes Aroused," *Kansas City Sun*, March 10, 1917, "Jim Crow Law is Defeated," *Kansas City Sun*, March 17, 1917.

alike.<sup>58</sup>

Party politics at the local and state level also encouraged white middle-class racism: this was especially true in the elections of 1906 and 1908.<sup>59</sup> Before moving on to discuss how this was so, some brief background in local party politics before 1906 is necessary. As was common nationally, in the late nineteenth-century, the majority of African American voters in KCMO were Republicans. As the next chapter documents, there was already a local black protest movement against discrimination and unequal law enforcement. When black protest became more visible to the city's native-born whites after the turn of the century, it only increased KCMO whites' racial hostility. Black protest and resistance against the emerging Jim Crow order will be discussed in much more detail in the next chapter. For the purposes of setting the context for the 1906 election, it needs to be understood that the tie between African-Americans and the Republican Party in the late nineteenth century was often expressed through patronage; KCMO was no exception. However, in KCMO, this long-standing coalition was in trouble as far back as 1907, when the staunchly "Square Deal" Republican black paper *Rising Son* began to bitterly condemn local white Republicans, President Roosevelt's discharge of black soldiers at Brownsville, Texas (an act that had also enraged DuBois) and the "lilly-white" movement behind William Howard Taft's 1908 nomination.<sup>60</sup> In these cases, when local Republicans became too neglectful of black voters' needs, local activists would threaten to form a third party or withhold the black vote.<sup>61</sup> Lewis Woods, editor of the black newspaper *Rising Son* and Nelson Crews, one

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<sup>58</sup> Coulter, 52.

<sup>59</sup> Schirmer, 65-70, 72.

<sup>60</sup> "The Great Republican Ship of Jackson County is Tottering," *Rising Son*, January 5, 1907; *Rising Son*, March 2, 1907; "Has the Republican Party of Jackson County Kept its Pledge to the 5,000 of Negro Voters?," *Rising Son*, March 9, 1907; "Has The Great Republican Ship of this Country Lost its Anchor?," *Rising Son*, May 4, 1907

<sup>61</sup> Schirmer, 70-72.



of KCMO's most prominent African American Republicans and editor of the *Kansas City Sun*, frequently used this tactic. Incidentally, Woods and Crews despised each other despite their common Republicanism and dissatisfaction with the direction of the party.<sup>62</sup> In any case, their threats to leave the party were seldom effective, as the local Republicans would simply lure defectors back by promising more patronage, which they rarely kept in full.

If the Republicans were disappointing to their African-American constituents, the Democrats were more divided still. In the city, they were badly divided between machine and clean-government (called "independent" Democrats) wings of the party.<sup>63</sup> As noted already, the machines of the city, such as the Pendergasts, often moved to take advantage of black dissatisfaction with the Republican Party. One of the first black Democratic Party organizations was the Negro Central League, formed in 1900, which attracted considerable middle-class black support; Dr. William J. Thompkins was one of the first outspoken African-American Democrats in the city.<sup>64</sup> In 1906, there was a bruising primary in which the antiboss "independents" tried to take control of the party from the Pendergast and Shannon machines; they were also known as "rabbits" while the Pendergast and Shannon machine Democrats were known as "goats."<sup>65</sup> The party "independents" used race-baiting tactics against the machine Democrats, and continued to do so even after the machine-backed mayoral candidate won.<sup>66</sup> Thus, African American voters who began to vote for the city's machine Democrats out of frustration with the Republican Party

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<sup>62</sup> "Great Republican Ship," *Rising Son*, Jan. 5, 1907; "The Begging of the Downfall of Nelson Crews," *Rising Son*, June 15, 1907.

<sup>63</sup> Schirmer, 65.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*; William Reddig, *Tom's Town*, 94.

<sup>66</sup> Schirmer, 65.

found themselves caught right in the middle of deep divisions within the city's Democratic Party and directly scapegoated by a rival faction of the party. Egged on by rural Democrats in Missouri who were openly white supremacist, the "independents" began to attack the Republicans as a force for putting KCMO under "Negro domination" in their paper, *The Kansas City Post*.<sup>67</sup> The paper singled out Nelson Crews by name as the Republican politician at the center of this supposed "scheme" to take over KCMO.<sup>68</sup>

These accusations were not only racist but outlandish given the fact that Crews was once again fighting with white Republicans over patronage.<sup>69</sup> To further inflame white racial hatred of blacks and thus make these attacks stick, the *Post* seized on a 1905 "scandal" broken the previous year by another KC paper, the *Kansas City World*. The scandal involved a city workhouse in which a black male guard had beaten a white female inmate with a hose.<sup>70</sup> The local branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the middle-class moral uplift organization, launched an investigation immediately through a committee. The WCTU was outraged and shocked to find out that white female inmates sometimes bathed in the presence of black guards, that white women and black women were housed in the same cells, and that prominent black physician T.C. Unthank was allowed to treat white female prisoners.<sup>71</sup> The WCTU recommended building a separate prison facility for white women prisoners and releasing the most well-behaved prisoners in order to alleviate overcrowding. The sole Democrat on the committee, an alderman named S.C. Woodson, exploded with rage against the Republican

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<sup>67</sup> *Kansas City Post*, March 27, 1906.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, March 31, 1906.

<sup>69</sup> Schirmer, 66.

<sup>70</sup> *Kansas City World*, December 22, 1905.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, December 29, 1905; January 1, 1906.

city council. Woodson unloaded racial invectives against blacks: “negro brutes” who were “whip[ping] white women” and the “unnatural” sight of “white women and negresses in the same cells” demanded intense racial segregation.<sup>72</sup> Above all, he was horrified at any physical contact between white women and blacks, violent or intimate, since it raised the possibility of sexual relations between the white female inmates and the black male guards.

By the time of the ensuing 1906 election, the Republican city council had not enacted the WCTU-proposed reforms of the workhouse or punished its administrators. This proved the perfect opportunity for the “independent” Democrats and the *Post* to further demagogue along racial lines.<sup>73</sup> The paper and Democrats seized on the workhouse scandal as an example of what Republican patronage for blacks entailed and demonized blacks and Republicans ruthlessly. They appealed to “the better class of white Republicans” to turn against their party lest “this magnificent city” become “the stronghold of negro equality” and thus be “turned over to the negroes.”<sup>74</sup> This invocation of Southern Democratic anti-Reconstruction discourse was quite deliberate on their parts and predated its use nationally by D.W. Griffith in film by nearly a decade. Even pro-labor and democratic-socialist Democrats like Frank Walsh spoke out at city rallies denouncing “negro atrocities” and the Republican city council.<sup>75</sup> Machine Democrats, perhaps embarrassed by their primary rivals’ blatant race-baiting, kept relatively silent on the topic, as did their candidate, Robert Gregory. Neither the independents’ race-baiting nor Gregory’s pet issue, opposition to extending the street railway, saved Gregory from defeat at the

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<sup>72</sup> *Kansas City Journal*, January 5, 1906.

<sup>73</sup> Schirmer, 68.

<sup>74</sup> *Kansas City Post*, March 30, 1906.

<sup>75</sup> Schirmer, 68.

hands of the Republicans as part of a sweep in 1906.<sup>76</sup>

Undeterred by that poor showing, the *Post* instead continued to fear-monger on the basis of race and Republican political ties to blacks and preferred to blame the bosses and their machines for the crushing losses to the Republicans. The paper invoked images of lines of Crews' friends lining up for appointments and "white women of the city" seeing "the kinds of clerks that will transact their business."<sup>77</sup> Ironically, the Republicans once again broke their promises of patronage to black constituents, so the reality could not be further removed from such editorial bluster.

Independent Democrats returned to a race-baiting strategy in 1908, this time succeeding politically. They took over the Democratic Party and elected one of their own, Thomas Crittenden, as mayor. In fact, the Democrats swept every office in Jackson County in 1908.<sup>78</sup> What, then, accounted for such a drastic shift in fortunes in such a short time if they employed the same tactic? As it turned out, an unforeseen development that was tailor-made for the race-baiting independents occurred. Charles Zueblin, one of the few sociologists of his day who openly disagreed with scientific racism, came to speak at a series of lectures in KCMO public schools. He condemned racial prejudice and was quoted as suggesting that racial intermarriage would benefit humankind by erasing social division.<sup>79</sup> Zueblin later denied he had advocated marriage between whites and blacks, but the Democrats ran with the issue nonetheless. The *Post* thundered against "negro domination" that "Hadleyism [Hadley was the Republican candidate]

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<sup>76</sup> *Kansas City Star*, April 4, 1906.

<sup>77</sup> *Kansas City Post*, April 5, 1906.

<sup>78</sup> Schirmer., 70; *Kansas City Star*, November 4, 1908; *Kansas City Times*, November 5, 1908.

<sup>79</sup> Schirmer, 69.

and Zueblinism abroad in the land” threatened.<sup>80</sup> It accused Republicans of throwing into question whether “Missouri [shall] be a white man’s state and a white woman’s home?”<sup>81</sup> This time, Republicans themselves also attacked Zueblin, and echoed independent Democratic demands that the city board of education bar speakers advocating “degrading theories about women” or “miscegenation.”<sup>82</sup> Hadley himself race-baited the Democrats as good as they did him, accusing Democratic gubernatorial opponent William Cowherd of “appointing criminal negroes” while KC mayor.<sup>83</sup> The only figures in the city who kept silent on race were Jim Pendergast and Joe Shannon, who nonetheless supported the Democratic ticket in full. As a result, what began as a factional struggle within the KCMO Democratic Party in 1906 led by the end of the 1908 election to a bipartisan discourse over race that was highly gendered. After the 1908 election, the resurgence of machine influence over the Democratic Party reduced the amount of Democratic race baiting at the local level, but the damage had been done. Urban space and vice anxieties were now given a racial inflection by the rhetoric of the 1906 and 1908 campaigns, one that was intertwined with notions of “sexual morality.”<sup>84</sup>

Finally, the other local factor that influenced KCMO’s tightening of Jim Crow and the rise of its own residential segregation even before the Great Migration began was the ties between the city’s African American population and the strike-prone labor movement. This relationship, as with the city’s Democratic Party, was highly atypical for the times; elsewhere in the 1900s and 1910s, blacks and white unionists were often bitter opponents due to AFL racism.

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<sup>80</sup> *Kansas City Post*, October 27, 1908.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, November 2, 1908.

<sup>82</sup> *Kansas City Journal*, October 24, 1908.

<sup>83</sup> Schirmer, 70.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

The full history of the labor movement in Greater Kansas City and its ties to the African-American community will be examined more thoroughly in Chapter Four. For now, what is critical is the impact of a series of strikes between 1904 and 1918 on both attempts at interracial labor solidarity in KCMO and growing white middle-class anxiety, here linking the fear of labor and class violence to a “black assertiveness.”<sup>85</sup>

Labor unions in KCMO had a mixed record supporting black workers, as they often racially excluded African Americans from membership<sup>86</sup>. However, in some trades such as hod-carrying in the Buildings Trades, they would support unions in which black workers were the majority.<sup>87</sup> In the first two decades of the twentieth century, African American workers not only engaged in strikes but often helped to launch them. Overall, hod carriers in the Building Trade unions were much more open to black unionism than was the case for the labor movement nationally.

Examples of interracial labor strikes include the 1904 hack drivers’ strike against transfer companies, in which the highest officers of the hack drivers’ local included African Americans.<sup>88</sup> Remarkably for 1904, this strike was fully backed by the Teamsters’ Union. The employers were the ones who attempted to incite racial divisions among the workers, by offering to rehire only the striking white drivers to settle the strike. White union leadership not only saw through the tactic but complained to the *Kansas City Star* about owners “exciting a dangerous race feeling”

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Urban League of Kansas City, “The Negro Worker of Kansas City,” p.11, July 1940, M331, File 2, Box KCULP-3: Publications, 1930-95, Kansas City Urban League Administrative Records, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, MO.

<sup>88</sup> Schirmer, 58.

against “the negroes [who] are the backbone of the strike.”<sup>89</sup> This was the reverse of the usual national pattern of management use of racism to break strikes, as they normally undercut racist unions by hiring black strikebreakers in the early twentieth century.

Later in 1904, the Amalgamated Meat Cutters went on strike in KCMO and in eight other cities to seek union recognition and better pay.<sup>90</sup> Here, the packinghouse owners kept their plants open with scab labor, which included African Americans from KCMO and elsewhere; in some cases, these nonunion workers were deputized as private detectives and issued firearms.<sup>91</sup> Given the slave-holding history of Missouri, the tactic of arming black strikebreakers could and did inflame white racist feelings among white strikers.<sup>92</sup> In this respect, the meat cutters’ strike would seem to be much more typical for the era in terms of the relationship between labor unions and African-Americans. However, in this case, black workers were actually active on both sides of the strike. The meat cutters’ union had been organizing black and Eastern European immigrant workers for several years before the strike in order to reduce the available nonunion labor for management. Ultimately, the 1904 strike failed due to a destructive local flood rather than any racial division among workers.<sup>93</sup> The immediate results were disastrous for the union: Amalgamated Meat Cutters union membership dropped sharply for the next thirteen years, to the point that the plants were nearly unorganized after 1904.<sup>94</sup> However, the number of African-American workers in the packing plants jumped to nearly twenty-percent of the packingworker

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<sup>89</sup> *Kansas City Star*, March 3, 1904.

<sup>90</sup> *Kansas City Times*, February 8, 1904.

<sup>91</sup> *Kansas City World*, July 29, 1904.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Kansas City Labor Herald*, September 9, 1904.

<sup>94</sup> Schirmer, 60.

labor force by 1917.<sup>95</sup> Rather than being a force to keep unions out as management had hoped, black men and women breathed new life into the local packinghouse labor movement by launching a massive wildcat strike in September 1917.<sup>96</sup>

This time, the interracial group of laborers who launched the strike was comprised of women, and nearly half were African American.<sup>97</sup> Around sixty black and white women canners walked off the job at the Cudahy plant demanding a living wage for women. All but sixty of the Cudahy plant's workers were on strike by the end of the day and were calling on other packinghouse workers to join them in struggling for an eight-hour day. When the strikers asked for the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen's International unions to help organize the strike, black workers in other plants assured them of solidarity with the strike. Having spread from women to men, now the interracial strike expanded to include freight handlers and soap factory workers. Some five meatpacking plants were shut down, and especially given that it was wartime, city elites panicked over the "strike epidemic."<sup>98</sup> The Wilson administration directly intervened, sending a mediator by the name of Patrick Gill, just as a general strike in the city was being considered. Before it came to that, Gill ended the strike by securing a pledge from management to increase pay and rehire all strikers.

In Chicago, where a similar strike had led to similar federal mediation, KCMO's Amalgamated local sent T. A. McCresh—its organizer—to attend those hearings and so get agreements from meatpacking firms headquartered in Chicago that operated in Kansas City.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> *Kansas City Labor Herald*, September 14, 1917.

<sup>97</sup> *Kansas City Journal*, September 7, 1917.

<sup>98</sup> Schirmer, 61.

<sup>99</sup> *Kansas City Journal*, February 15, 1918.



McCreash noted that KCMO's packers had substituted lower-paid female workers for males and that most of these female workers were black. Instead of demanding exclusion of blacks and women as was common in the era of Samuel Gompers' AFL, McCreash instead asked for the federal judge mediating the strike in Chicago to grant equal wages to workers of both sexes and races.<sup>100</sup> In March 1918, Judge Samuel Alschuler agreed to the eight-hour day, time and a quarter for overtime, and amazingly for 1918, equal pay for men and women.<sup>101</sup> However, he refused to order the companies to recognize the union, another defeat for Amalgamated.

A few months afterwards, KCMO had another interracial wildcat strike, this time in the laundries and streetcars, that ignited a city-wide general strike.<sup>102</sup> The city's commercialized laundries had some of the worst working conditions in the city in the 1910s, and although black women constituted less than a third of commercial laundresses, the laundries were often an entry point for black women into industrial labor since no other industrial employers other than the packinghouses and two bag factories would hire black women.<sup>103</sup> There were several attempts to unionize the laundries throughout the decade before World War I, all of them unsuccessful. Much of this was due to the Laundry Owner's Association's dogged determination to keep the laundries as open shop workplaces. On February 14, 1918, around three hundred women walked out demanding a union.

By February 19, 1918, an estimated one thousand workers, men and women as well as black and white as with the packinghouse strike, were on the picket lines or throwing stones at

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<sup>100</sup> Schirmer, 61-62.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> *Kansas City Star*, February 18, 1918.

<sup>103</sup> Schirmer, 62.

scab laundry drivers.<sup>104</sup> Again, the federal government sent Paul Gill to Kansas City, who was joined by the Women's Trade Union League's Sarah Green, in order to settle the strike. However, the Hotel Muehlebach, the agreed site of the hearings, refused to allow black strikers into the building. This display of local Jim Crow ruined any chances of stopping the strike before it grew into a general strike, as white strikers refused to testify in segregated hearings.<sup>105</sup> As a result, the general strike that followed ended up "tying up streetcar service, bakeries, restaurants, building sites, breweries and buildings with elevator service" during wartime.<sup>106</sup> The intervention of the Missouri National Guard wasn't enough to end the strike either; it lasted six days after the Guard's arrival until union leaders accepted a wage offer from management. If KCMO's working class failed to establish a truly interracial unionism, these strikes show that this failure resulted not from a lack of effort, and that working-class laborers interacted with one another in these endeavors in ways that the "better element" of whites could never imagine.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, the mainstream press emphasized the races of the strikers in its reporting while the labor press made almost no mention of race. Instead, elite and middle-class whites of the city now considered blacks more associated with disorder due to the strikes and labor activism than before.

A strong sense of class consciousness among workers confounded management's attempt to play white and black workers against each other. Rucker Smith, a barber and chef organizer of the National Council of Colored Workers, urged KCMO's blacks "not to be a scab, remember you belong to the working-class, and if the unions offer to be fair with you, join hands with them

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> *Kansas City Journal*, February 20, 1918.

<sup>106</sup> Schirmer, 63

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 64.

in the struggle, capital against labor.”<sup>108</sup> To oversimplify, KCMO was almost a textbook case of Marxist notions of class consciousness, with both “proletarian” and “bourgeois” class identities developing. This was no accident. Such ideas were highly popular across the state line in KCK, which was a hotbed of industrial unionism and labor radicalism.<sup>109</sup> In both cities, and across the region, Eugene V. Debs’ Socialist Party was very popular between 1904 and 1912.<sup>110</sup> As Schirmer has noted, KCMO’s twentieth century patterns of racism were themselves a partial byproduct of class consciousness, but of a different class altogether: the city’s bourgeois.

It was against the previously discussed political and social backdrop that the relatively new profession of sociology began to explore urban space through the preconception that character and physical environment were directly linked.<sup>111</sup> At the same time, real estate was coming into its own as an industry. In KCMO, it was the publication of civics teacher Asa Martin’s *Our Negro Population* in 1913 that provided the official justification for residential segregation.<sup>112</sup> Martin described the local African American community in vicious ways, using language dripping with racist stereotyping and contempt. He opined that “social workers say that no class of people with whom they have to deal is so shiftless, indolent, and lazy as the Negro” and proceeded to link blacks with moral laxity, bad personal character, disorderly conduct,

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<sup>108</sup> *Kansas City Sun*, September 22, 1917.

<sup>109</sup> “Wyandotte County Campaign,” *Line-Up: A Class-Conscious Socialist Paper*, November 1904, K729, Kansas Newspapers, Kansas State Archives, Topeka KS.

<sup>110</sup> “Socialist Vote A Surprise: The Party Almost Three Times As Strong Here As in 1900,” *Line-Up*, November 30, 1904, KS State Archives, Topeka; “Mother Jones At Swope Park,” *Line-Up*, June 20, 1905, KS State Archives, Topeka.

<sup>111</sup> Schirmer, 71.

<sup>112</sup> Gotham, 36.

criminality, and property devaluation.<sup>113</sup> Martin continued to cement the link between race, urban space, homeownership, and property value by noting that “cleanliness, sense of security, modesty, health, and good citizenship all depend of the kind of houses in which people live,” which he contrasted with “the unsanitary condition of the streets and alleys in Negro districts” arising from “negligence” and “ignorance and carelessness.”<sup>114</sup> Such a description automatically drew a color line around middle-class respectability at a time in which the black middle-class in KCMO was beginning to assert itself locally. Martin in truth put into writing the kinds of assumptions whites already made about African-Americans and their homes. Conscious of this, *The Rising Son* as early as 1907 begged black renters to “be more careful in these houses” and “not be such destroyers,” lest whites have ammunition for these prejudices.<sup>115</sup> Ironically, such a study laced with racist diatribe was commissioned by KCMO’s first public welfare agency (and first welfare agency in the nation), the Bureau of Public Welfare, in 1910.<sup>116</sup> The Bureau itself was what came out of 1908 investigations into the workhouse scandal.<sup>117</sup>

In addition to Martin’s work, the bureau-produced *Report on Housing* in 1912 and *The Social Prospectus of Kansas City* in 1913 drew similar conclusions; what had begun as part of a response to the 1908 workhouse scandal by 1913 resulted in justifications for housing discrimination.<sup>118</sup> The *Report on Housing* infamously singled out African-Americans as “a negative social force”, while *Social Prospectus* described black neighborhoods as having “low

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<sup>113</sup> Asa Martin, *Our Negro Population: A Sociological Study of Negroes of Kansas City, Missouri* (Kansas City: Franklin Hudson Publishing, 1913), 18, 98, 106.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>115</sup> *Rising Son*, November 30, 1907, p.4

<sup>116</sup> Gotham, 36.

<sup>117</sup> Schirmer, 71.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

civilization” and black residents as “steeped in crime.”<sup>119</sup> Taken together, these three studies racialized urban space by linking place, race, and behavior.<sup>120</sup>

Martin was one of two leading influential figures who helped create the conditions for which residential segregation by race intensified in KCMO. The other figure was the powerful developer J.C. Nichols, famous for creating the Plaza district in the 1920s, who would astutely use the New Deal housing agencies to construct much of Johnson County, Kansas’ wealthiest enclaves—Shawnee-Mission, Overland Park, Lenexa—as a sort of Levittowns of the Plains between the Depression and early sixties.<sup>121</sup> Nichols made extensive use of whites-only covenants and managed to skirt the 1948 *Shelley v. Kraemer* Supreme Court decision outlawing them until the early 1960s. These exclusionary covenants barred Jews as well as African-Americans from Nichols’ suburban developments.<sup>122</sup>

Together with interracial labor strikes, the workhouse scandal, the race-baiting 1906 and 1908 elections, and expansion of vice throughout the city after the closure of the red-light district, the three studies on housing and race would shape middle-class white Kansas Citians’ perception of race and African Americans.<sup>123</sup> This white bourgeois discourse identified black men as sexual aggressors years before D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of A Nation* projected that image on film for a national audience, was anxious about immorality coming near the home, and linked the presence of blacks to property value deterioration.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Gotham, 37.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Jackson, 177.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 178; Gotham, 60.

<sup>123</sup> Schirmer, 72-73.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 73.

Sadly, KCK witnessed a similar process of deterioration of race relations and growing discrimination in the years of the early twentieth century. Unlike in KCMO and most other places in the US at the turn of the century, racial segregation was far from universal in early twentieth century KCK.<sup>125</sup> Although most white Kansans were opposed to the idea of meaningful racial equality for blacks, attempts to codify a racial order in law were very rare in the state of Kansas generally, including KCK.<sup>126</sup> An exception was an ongoing campaign underway by white segregationists in KCK to try to lobby the city and state governments segregate the local high school system.<sup>127</sup> Although white advocates of school segregation were very careful to deny racial animosity as a motive and insisted that racial segregation of the high schools would benefit both races, KCK's black population was not fooled by such pretensions in the slightest.<sup>128</sup>

The high school in KCK was racially integrated with relative harmony, except for an incident in 1890 in which a white student refused to sit next to a black student at the commencement ceremonies; another white student swapping places with him ended the matter.<sup>129</sup> An altercation between a black teenage employee of the Swift meatpacking plant named Louis Gregory and two white teenagers from the high school baseball team led to an explosive situation that would prove the opening advocates of school segregation had been

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<sup>125</sup> David Trowbridge, "Drawing the Color Line in Kansas City: The Creation of Sumner High School," *Kansas History*, 27 (Autumn 2005): 190.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>129</sup> Greenbaum, 64-65.

looking for.<sup>130</sup> Gregory was catching frogs in a pond with a twenty-two caliber shotgun with him; it was common for bullfrog hunters to carry rifles in those days. As he was walking along the pond, two teenage boys approached him with the intent of making fun of him and making him leave his frogs. An argument followed, resulting in one of the white baseball players attacking him with a baseball bat. As a result, Gregory grabbed his rifle, picked it up, and then fired it. One of the baseball players, a very popular student named Roy Martin, was hit and the shot killed him.<sup>131</sup> Gregory was then arrested and taken to the Wyandotte County Jail at 7th and State Avenue.

In the aftermath of this incident, race relations had deteriorated so badly that there was nearly a lynching. White-run major newspapers in KCMO , Republican as well as Democratic in partisan allegiance, ran incendiary headlines proclaiming “race war” was possible the following school day.<sup>132</sup> Despite such fears, these predicted calamitous outcomes did not materialize on that day, but the situation was dire enough. A mob of white boys formed a line across the schoolyard in front of the white girls, who barred the doorway to the high school building in order to keep black students out.<sup>133</sup> When officers arrived, the white students refused to disperse.<sup>134</sup> Instead of breaking up the students, city police formed their own line in front of the white boys, becoming accomplices to the physical exclusion of black students from the school. When a group of black senior boys finally broke through the lines using football game tactics, they were kicked and beaten by white students of both sexes and told to go home “to avoid

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.; Trowbridge, *Kansas History*, 27 (Autumn 2005):190-91.

<sup>131</sup> Greenbaum, 65; Trowbridge, *Kansas History*, 27 (Autumn 2005): 191; “How Martin Was Killed: School Boy Shot Down By Gregory, the Negro,” *Kansas City Star*, April 13, 1904.

<sup>132</sup> *Kansas City Journal*, April 13, 1904.

<sup>133</sup> *Kansas City Times*, April 15, 1904.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

further trouble” by white school officials.<sup>135</sup>

Given such a climate, KCK’s blacks were very worried for their own safety and for Gregory. Ominously, an angry white mob (with most from Missouri) assembled with the intent of removing Gregory from his cell.<sup>136</sup> In response, the African American community of KCK mobilized its own “vigilance committee” composed of fifteen uniformed veterans of the Spanish-American War with rifles in hand, with the Reverends George McNeal and Thomas Kapper at their sides. They gathered in front of the jailhouse door. As the mob approached, Reverend McNeal thundered, “The first man among you who crosses this line is eating breakfast in Hell in the morning.”<sup>137</sup> The Spanish-American War veterans readied their rifles as the words were spoken; the mob dispersed. Gregory was thus spared lynching, but received a very harsh prison sentence.

Reaction to the confrontation varied throughout the city. It was clear that KCK’s usual law enforcement had failed to adequately protect a prisoner in their custody from mob assault.<sup>138</sup> As a result, members of the African American community had been forced to take the law into their own hands and two normally peaceful clergymen had been forced to oversee the use of deadly force in self-defense. Still, bloodshed had been avoided, and several of the veterans involved were appointed as KCK police officers.

Within a large segment of the white population, however, this incident increased racial hostility.<sup>139</sup> To avoid further violence at the high school, the students were put on racially

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<sup>135</sup> *Kansas City Star*, April 13, 1904.

<sup>136</sup> Greenbaum, 65-66.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*



divided half-day shifts. This proved the preliminary step that ultimately led to the creation of a separate all-black high school, named Sumner High School after abolitionist Charles Sumner.<sup>140</sup> The school opened in fall 1905. In order to legitimize this move, the state legislature passed a law exempting KCK's school district from (at the time) state law banning segregated schools.<sup>141</sup> If such a law existed, one might ask, how then to explain the *Brown v. Board of Education* case in Topeka some half a century later? The answer lies in the fact that the state had allowed for race segregation of grammar schools in towns larger than fifteen thousand people, which was written into state law in 1879.<sup>142</sup> The ban had been aimed at high schools only.

In terms of residential segregation, KCK and what would become the Kansas side of the Greater Kansas City Metro Area generally also saw housing discrimination and black urban isolation occur. In KCK's case, this process happened much more slowly and later than in KCMO, as the bulk of "white flight" to suburbs in western Wyandotte County and south to Johnson County occurred there after the Second World War.<sup>143</sup> Late-nineteenth-century integrated enclaves in KCK such as Rattlebone Hollow over time became black neighborhoods not because whites moved out, but because whites stopped moving there after the 1900s.<sup>144</sup> Residential segregation on both sides of the state line in Greater KC was boosted by both Kansas and Missouri state Supreme Court decisions endorsing racial covenants as legal between 1918

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.; David Trowbridge, "Drawing the Color Line in Kansas City: The Creation of Sumner High School," *Kansas History*, 27 (Autumn 2005): 190.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Greenbaum, 104.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

and the 1920s.<sup>145</sup> Out of all the Kansas counties in the Kansas City metro area, it was Johnson County that had whites-only neighborhood covenants for the longest duration.<sup>146</sup> Johnson County initiated its racially restrictive covenants in 1917 and they were in effect until 1962; a whopping ninety-six percent of subdivisions had these covenants.<sup>147</sup> By contrast, KCMO itself and all of Jackson County only had sixty-two percent of its subdivisions under these covenants.<sup>148</sup> The Nichols company was responsible for a large share of subdivisions with exclusionary covenants.

By the end of the first two decades of the twentieth century, then, both KCMO and KCK were becoming more segregated, reflecting of the national nadir of race relations. Like in other major cities in the twentieth century, systematic housing discrimination coincided with the mass migration of Southern rural blacks to urban spaces. Notions of race, urban space, anxieties over morality and women's sexuality, and class status combined in KCMO to shape the way its story of urban crisis would unfold. A lot of this chapter has been spent analyzing the city's white middle-class and its form of racism driving Jim Crow segregation in KCMO. The next chapter addresses the struggle against this increasing discrimination and the role of the black middle-class in resisting racism.

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<sup>145</sup> Gotham, 38.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

## **CHAPTER THREE: ORIGINS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS AND BLACK FREEDOM MOVEMENT IN GREATER KANSAS CITY, 1870-1920**

African American citizens of KCK and KCMO did not resign themselves to the growing racial discrimination and oppression in the social climates of both cities after 1904. Indeed, the struggle for the basic human rights of KCMO's black citizens had begun in the 1870s, when the shortcomings of Missouri's Reconstruction regime led to successful protests for the right to vote, among other basic rights. Fights for the vote and equality in education had begun in the late nineteenth century; the success of the former meant that Southern-style disfranchisement attempts in Missouri would not be attempted. The fight for the latter, on the other hand, would continue into the twentieth century despite the tightening of racial segregation and discrimination in the early twentieth century. The housing issue, which would become the impetus for the urban crisis by 1940, would also see activists engage in protest against discriminatory real estate practices and white terror bombings by the 1910s. These activities would lay the groundwork for over fifty years of struggle for fair and integrated housing. The individuals whose stories are told here formed part of a local black middle- and upper-class that would push back against Jim Crow and housing discrimination and who would correctly warn of the urban crisis's development. They shared KCMO's white middle-classes' premiums on respectability, status, and orderly urban spaces free of vice, and demanded inclusion into the "city beautiful" and all it signified at the very moment the white middle-class shut black people entirely out of such suburban whimsy.

In both KCK and KCMO, the nucleus of a black civic elite formed after the Civil War,

quite removed from the rough conditions of the packing plants and the black industrial workforce. In KCMO, James Dallas Bowser rose to preeminence as a newspaper writer and intellectual by the early twentieth century. He had been born into slavery in North Carolina in 1846, but his mother escaped with him to Ohio later in the year.<sup>1</sup> Bowser came to KCMO in 1868 from Ohio at age twenty-two with his parents and brother by train, by his own account lured by stories of great wealth that could be made in the city. Bowser's father had been one of the first black teachers in Chillicothe, Ohio; accordingly, the young Bowser initially followed his father's footsteps into teaching and education. He taught at the Penn School for black children in Westport for a year before taking over Lincoln School in the Kansas City school district; he was principal at Lincoln for twelve years, until 1879.<sup>2</sup>

From his background in education, Bowser branched out into local politics, serving a stint as a railroad postal clerk in the 1880s; his ambition and drive led him to edit one of KCMO's first black oriented newspapers, *The Gate City Press*, at the same time he was principal at another school, the Attucks School.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Bowser was a political activist for Republican and civil rights causes by the turn of the century and held a number of patronage jobs in the federal government during Republican administrations. He was a shrewd businessman as well; through a series of real estate deals, Bowser gained a fortune valued at seventy-five thousand dollars by 1906. By the 1920s, he had one of the finest homes in the African American community on The Paseo. In the early twentieth century, Bowser was KCMO's leading black intellectual and activist. He was one of the staunchest and earliest supporters of the NAACP in

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<sup>1</sup> Coulter, 21.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

the city after its national inception in 1909 and a member of the Inter-Racial Committee of Twelve, a local group of black and white civil rights activists formed in 1920.<sup>4</sup>

In 1899, Bowser wrote a rebuttal to Rudyard Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden," which was circulated nationally. It read:

Take up the Black Man's burden—  
    "Send forth the best ye breed"  
To judge with righteous judgment  
The Black Man's worth and need  
To set down naught with malice  
    In hate or prejudice  
    To tell the truth about him  
    To paint him as he is.  
Take up the Black Man's burden  
    Ye of the bold and strong  
And might makes right as only  
    It does no weak race wrong;  
When yours—his chances equal,  
    Give him the fairest test  
Then "hands off" be your motto  
    And he will do the rest.

Take up the Black Man's burden  
    Don't curse him in advance  
He can not lift a White Man's load  
    Without a White Man's chance  
Shut out from mill and workshop  
    From counting-room and store  
    By caste and labor unions  
    You close industry's door.

Take up the Black Man's burden  
    Don't crush him with his load  
    Nor heap it up in courses  
    By scoff and jeers bestowed  
    The haughty Anglo-Saxon  
    Was savage and untaught  
    A thousand years of freedom  
A wondrous change has wrought.

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<sup>4</sup> "Kansas City, Missouri, Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: Membership List," June 11, 1918, NAACP Papers, Kansas Branch NAACP Files: Columbus to Kansas City, 1917-39, Kansas State Archives, Topeka KS.

Take up the Black Man's burden  
Black men of every clime  
What though your cross be heavy  
Your sun but darkly shine  
Stoop with a freedman's ardor  
Lift high a freedman's hand  
Strand with a freedman's firmness  
March with a freeman's head.<sup>5</sup>

Another key figure in the development of a black intelligentsia in KCMO was James Milton Turner. He had come to the city in the 1868 from St. Louis, where he had been a slave until the end of the Civil War.<sup>6</sup> Turner was the first black teacher in Kansas City. Like Bowser after him, Turner had been principal of Lincoln School before entering into local prominence through pursuit of other vocations that his talents helped him succeed in. In Bowser's case, these had been newspaper writing and business decisions in real estate; in Turner's, his subsequent careers were in politics and the law. In fact, Turner was the only African American to hold statewide office in Reconstruction-era Missouri and had been a key spokesman and organizer for the Missouri Equal Rights League.<sup>7</sup> Despite the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1870, the Missouri legislature took until 1872 to finally extend voting rights to black men. Both Turner and Bowser's jump into activism and politics from education was quite logical in that another key political struggle for post-Civil War Missouri blacks was over the quality of education black children received in the state. Activists campaigned throughout the 1860s and 1870s for an increase in both the number of schools and improvement in the quality of existing schools for black children. In response, Missouri passed a revised state constitution in

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<sup>5</sup> James D. Bowser, "Take Up the Black Man's Burden," *Colored American* (Washington DC), April 8, 1899.

<sup>6</sup> Coulter, 22-23.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.; see also Gary Kremer, *James Milton Turner and the Promise of America: The Public Life of a Post-Civil War Black Leader* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991).

1875 that required districts with at least fifteen black school-aged children to provide separate schools for African-American children.<sup>8</sup>

In KCK (not incorporated as such until 1886), Union Army veteran Corvine Patterson was similarly a pillar of the postwar black community. Arriving in Wyandotte in 1868, Patterson had served in the Union Army 65th Regiment, Company 9 of the U.S. Colored Troops.<sup>9</sup> He enlisted in Glasgow Missouri in 1864 and served until 1867. The son of slaves, Patterson was largely self-educated. He opened a grocery store with considerable success in 1872, and his prominence grew from there. Patterson ran the store until after the arrival of the Exodusters.<sup>10</sup> Patterson would play a major role during the Exodusters' arrival, arranging for assistance to the refugees and convincing other community leaders in the area to allow the Exodusters to settle. Like his counterparts in KCMO, Patterson was able to launch a significant political career from relatively humble origins. Also much like Bowser and Turner in KCMO, Patterson had a passion for black education and held prominent positions in the local educational system.<sup>11</sup> In 1872, he was elected to serve on Wyandotte County's Board of Education, the first of many political positions he would hold throughout the late nineteenth century as Wyandotte and the other towns in the area eventually merged into KCK around him. Patterson remained a central figure in the African American educational system of the county for decades; as late as 1905, he was directly consulted in naming Sumner High School, an all-black school founded after KCK segregated its schools. Even outside of the KCK area, Patterson had educational influence, as he sat on the

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<sup>8</sup> Schirmer, 28-29.

<sup>9</sup> Jen Laughlin, "Corvine Patterson," *Historical Journal of Wyandotte County*: 2:7, June 28, 2005, p. 319, as found in Vertical File: Corvine Patterson, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

board of Lincoln Institute which later became Lincoln University in Jefferson City.<sup>12</sup> Beyond education, Patterson was the first African-American appointed to the KCK city police force after the city's incorporation in 1886.<sup>13</sup> By 1889, he was elected street commissioner in addition to holding posts as the city marshal and deputy sheriff. Tragically, Patterson committed suicide in 1913 after being unable to bear the premature death of his son two years earlier.

As noted earlier, the impetus for this protest activism initially was with a small but growing black middle-class in both KCMO and KCK in the late nineteenth century. Buried in Asa Martin's infamously racist report that maligned the character of most of the city's blacks was his finding that by 1910, between eight hundred and one thousand African Americans owned real estate.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the struggle for civil rights in the new century, it would be from among this small but very influential group that the leadership of many activist movements would come from. In the years to come, African American women and ministers as well as men and secular activists would pick up where Bowser, Turner, and Patterson had left off in the late nineteenth century. To do full justice to this story, it is necessary to backtrack somewhat back to the end of the nineteenth century, when this constellation of activists, intellectuals, and organizations began to emerge to fight for full equality.

One such activist was G.N. Grisham. Like Bowser and Turner, he had a background in teaching in the local high school and had been principal of the first and most prominent high schools for blacks in KCMO, the Lincoln School in 1890.<sup>15</sup> From there, Grisham helped fellow activists Richard T. Coles and Paul Gaston to form a short-lived black political party in the late

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Martin, 30.

<sup>15</sup> Coulter, 31.



nineteenth century as an alternative to the Republicans.<sup>16</sup>

By 1897, Grisham was invited to join the American Negro Academy, a society of national black scholars that included W.E.B. DuBois and one of DuBois's intellectual influences and mentors, Bishop Alexander Crummell.<sup>17</sup> Even before the Niagara Falls movement of 1905 in which DuBois formally challenged Booker T. Washington's leadership style and strategy, DuBois, Crummell, and the rest of the Academy had denounced Washington's acceptance of menial labor for blacks at expense of the life of the mind and the high arts.<sup>18</sup> Grisham couldn't agree more with DuBois's advocacy of a robust black public intellectual and intellectual culture and delivered an eloquent speech in favor of it in Washington D.C. in December 1897.<sup>19</sup> Far from taking the advance of KCMO's Jim Crow laying down, turn of the century black KCMO intellectuals such as Grisham were ready to directly do battle with Booker T. Washington's counsel of accommodation with segregation.

In his 1898 address "The Negro Scholar," Grisham directly repudiated Washington's advice against pursuit of higher education for black men, especially southern black men, Grisham boldly stated that "the Negro graduate is here" whether or not Washington or anyone else chose to acknowledge the fact.<sup>20</sup> Beyond this, Grisham disagreed even more strongly with the very premise that lay behind Washington's advocacy for vocational training instead of academic achievement. To Grisham, the black scholar was most important as a force for direct political activism, a view that went directly against the accommodationist approach that

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> G.N. Grisham, "The Negro Scholar," *Colored American* (Washington DC), March 16, 1898.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Washington championed. Stressing the point further, Grisham noted that while it was true that once “there was a time when the scholar stood aloof from the practical world, as if he formed no part of it,” that no longer was a defensible conception of the function of the intellectual.<sup>21</sup> “Scholarship cannot create and breathe an atmosphere all its own,” Grisham insisted.<sup>22</sup> While it was “commendable to search for the truth as the thing best worth knowing,” such a pursuit needed to be responsive to the needs of the present-day world.<sup>23</sup> In particular, Grisham asserted, it was the duty of the black intelligentsia to provide leadership to the African-American community, both morally and politically. A couple of years before DuBois coined the term “talented tenth,” Grisham was providing a skeletal outline for the meaning of the concept. In just eight short years, Grisham had risen to national recognition as an intellectual and activist. Though Grisham would quit the American Negro Academy ten years later, citing the great distance to the East Coast from KCMO, he had already made a national impression beyond Greater Kansas City for black activism. He would remain committed to the struggle until his death in 1930.<sup>24</sup>

Grisham’s partner in the short-lived KCMO black political party, Richard T. Coles, also had a distinguished background at KCMO’s Lincoln School. Unlike Grisham, of whom little is known before 1890, Coles is known to have been born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1860 to a father, Nathaniel Coles, who had escaped slavery and become a shoemaker and a mother who was a local and highly educated.<sup>25</sup> Richard’s mother, Mary Ann, in fact had attended not only public

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> *Kansas City Call*, September 19, 1930.

<sup>25</sup> Coulter, 35.

schools but colleges in the state of Pennsylvania, and had passed that love of learning to her nine children. Accordingly, Richard was not the only child of hers who became an educator; three of his siblings did as well. In the mid-1870s, the family moved to Ohio; Nathaniel Coles became politically active in the Republican Party in those years and would eventually hold a patronage position in the Grant administration.<sup>26</sup> Just as he would inherit his mother's love for education, Richard Coles would later inherit his father's political activism. After living in Poland, Ohio for a few years, the family moved again to Farmville, Virginia, where Richard Coates enrolled in Hampton Institute. The Institute was one of the first schools established for former slaves after the Civil War and though it offered a "classical education," it additionally had a strong manual arts curriculum in which students were taught practical skills. In fact, Booker T. Washington was one of Coates's classmates at Hampton and had been so enthralled with Hampton's manual arts curriculum that he modeled his entire Tuskegee school after it.

Richard Coles graduated from Hampton in 1879 with honors and shortly thereafter, came to Kansas City to take a position at the Sumner high school as a teacher that he held for two years.<sup>27</sup> In 1881, Coles took a teaching position at the Lincoln School; due to his training at Hampton, like Washington, Coles strongly advocated manual education. Five years later, Coles started his own school called the Pleasant Green School. By 1890, the Pleasant Green School was absorbed into the Kansas City School District and renamed the Garrison School.<sup>28</sup> The KCMO school board was reluctant to include manual training in the Garrison curriculum, believing it not to be a necessary part of public education. Coles was relentless in lobbying for

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.; *Kansas City Times*, June 19, 1930 in Ramos Vertical File: Coles, R.T., Ramos Collection, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

manual education's place in the school and eventually persuaded the superintendent of its importance. Coles was also good friends with James Dallas Bowser and, like Bowser, edited a weekly newspaper—*The Kansas City Dispatch*—in the 1880s.<sup>29</sup> In 1920, Coles and Bowser would both serve on the Inter-Racial Committee of Twelve, a committee set up by the Kansas City Citizens' League in reaction to the nationwide wave of race riots in 1919.<sup>30</sup>

W.W. Yates was another such figure bridging the era of Bowser and Turner's early activism to twentieth century civil rights struggles. Much less is known about him than either Coles or Grisham, but like them, Yates served on the Lincoln School Faculty.<sup>31</sup> In the late 1880s, he became principal of the Wendell Phillips School. Yates would hold that position until his death in 1910. In those years, in addition to presiding over Wendell Phillips School as an administrator, Yates was very active on a number of other fronts. He joined with Grisham and others in founding KCMO's black YMCA.<sup>32</sup> Yates also was likely a member of the city's black men's club, the Attucks Club, and may have helped Coles operate the *Dispatch*.<sup>33</sup> Among all else Yates was known for, however, was that he was married to one of the most prominent activists among black women in the city, Josephine Silone Yates.

Josephine Silone Yates was a leader in KCMO's African-American women's clubs and the movement around them. A teacher herself and a gifted speaker, she lead the Kansas City Colored Women's League as well as the National Association of Colored Women.<sup>34</sup> Born

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> *Kansas City Journal*, July 30, 1919; *Citizens League Bulletin*, September 1919, October 1919.

<sup>31</sup> Coulter, 36.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Josephine Silone in 1859 in Mannituck, New York to a prominent family, Silone's mother began educating her at an early age.<sup>35</sup> As a result, Silone had an almost prodigal mastery of reading, writing, and mathematics by the time she started going to school. Even though she was the only black child at the school, Silone quickly became a favorite of her teachers because of her thirst for learning. By age nine, she was studying physiology, physics, and advanced forms of math. Silone was already an avid reader and an accomplished writer. One of her biographers noted that Silone's teacher sent one of her stories to a New York newspaper; the paper rejected her work but sent her a letter that encouraged her to continue writing.<sup>36</sup> At age eleven, she went to live with an uncle who was an ordained minister in Philadelphia; he wanted her to be able to attend the Institution for Colored Youth, which was the most acclaimed educational institution for blacks in the eastern U.S.<sup>37</sup> The Institution offered instruction in the classics in addition to the regular curriculum.<sup>38</sup> Silone attended only one year, but under the tutelage of Fannie Jackson-Coppin, she learned Latin, Greek, and German. After that, she went to live with an aunt in Newport, Rhode Island to finish high school there, and became the first African American graduate and valedictorian at Newport's Rogers High School in 1877. Silone then enrolled in the Rhode Island State Normal School, graduating from there with honors in 1879.<sup>39</sup>

Silone came to Missouri in 1881, joining the faculty of Lincoln University, an all-black college, in Jefferson City, Missouri.<sup>40</sup> She began there as chair of the Chemistry Department but

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> The biographer in question is Monroe A. Majors, in *Noted Negro Women: Their Triumphs and Activities.*, (1893. Reprint, Chicago: Donohue and Hennebery, 1971), 44-48.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 47.

was soon promoted to chair of the school's entire Science Department. Silone remained there until 1889, when she resigned, moved to Kansas City, and married Yates.<sup>41</sup> She had to resign upon marriage because in the late nineteenth century, married women were commonly forbidden to teach or hold high academic positions. As a result, Josephine Silone Yates turned—as many married middle-class women did who were her contemporaries, both black and white—to the women's club movement.

As noted earlier, Sarah Coates was one of the founders of the earliest white KCMO women's clubs, founding about nine of them between 1870 and 1890.<sup>42</sup> By the late nineteenth century, both the Coates-led KCMO clubs and Yates's parallel women's clubs, like their national counterparts, were stretching the standard gendered notions of “separate spheres” to issues in politics that could be tied to women and/or their homes.<sup>43</sup> These issues included temperance, suffrage, secure spaces for children to play, and the creation of kindergartens. For black women, however, such issues were secondary to more pressing issues of basic human rights and equality and the project of moral “uplift of the race.”<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, black clubwomen in KCMO and nationally supplemented black male activist voices and organizations calling for racial equality and civil rights. African American clubwomen also saw their duty as assistance to the poor in the community. Due to both race discrimination in most white women's clubs and different priorities, African American women formed their own clubs in the 1890s.<sup>45</sup> It was against this national backdrop that Josephine Yates, her friend Anna Jones, and two other women formed the

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> “Believer in Women's Capabilities,” *Kansas City Star*, February 7, 1975, as found in Vertical File: Kersey Coates, Missouri Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>43</sup> Coulter, 37.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

Kansas City Colored Women's League in 1893.

Josephine Yates was the main force behind the club, as she was the League's first president and regularly wrote a column for the national black clubwomen's publication, *Woman's Era* called "The Kansas City Letter," a regular report on the club's activities in KCMO.<sup>46</sup> Yates and the League planned to raise five hundred dollars to purchase land for an industrial arts school, but apparently weren't able to do so since there is no record of the school's existence or of the plan succeeding. They did offer sewing classes on Wednesdays and Saturdays for the young and old, which served multiple purposes. In addition to training girls and women in how to make dresses, aprons, and undergarments, these classes also produced overgarments for the needy in winter and clothing that could be sold to cover the league's costs.<sup>47</sup> Much of the league's work was charity-oriented. Although the league's stated mission was to improve the condition of African American women in the city, its first work was providing funding for the return trip of an invalid boy to his home in the South.<sup>48</sup> The league gave temporary lodging to female new arrivals to the city, aided an orphan in seeking a home, and provided clothing to blind children.<sup>49</sup> They also had a junior auxiliary for girls at least fourteen years old.

The league also stepped in when political events warranted. In June 1893, an African American woman was sentenced to death by hanging in KCMO. After investigating the case, the KC Colored Women's League proclaimed that both justice for the individual woman sentenced and "above all to the womanhood of our race" demanded commutation of the death sentence.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Josephine Yates, "Kansas City Letter," *Woman's Era*, March 24, 1894, 2-3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

The governor of Missouri relented under their pressure, commuting the sentence to fifty years in prison.<sup>51</sup> Josephine Yates, in the remaining two years she chaired the league, was a frequent contributor to black magazines of the era such as the aforementioned *Women's Era* and *Voice of the Negro*.<sup>52</sup> In her columns for these periodicals, she stressed the themes and agendas of racial uplift, Booker T. Washington's work-first industrial education, and appealed to blacks to stand strong against racial oppression.

After she stepped down as president of the league, Yates was one of five women representing women's clubs in the state of Missouri at the Congress of Colored Women at the Atlanta Exposition in December 1895.<sup>53</sup> Her address there, "How Best to Raise the Moral Status of the Race," drew praise from Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois was also impressed by Yates's oratory. DuBois judged Yates's address the best paper given at the conference and said of her that "perhaps the finest specimen of Negro womanhood was Mrs. Josephine Yates of Kansas City, a dark brown matron with a quiet air of dignity and earnestness."<sup>54</sup> The previous year, she had delivered a paper called "Modern Education as Influenced by the Reformation" to the Greenwood Club, a group of some of the most prominent white men in Kansas City brought together by the superintendent of KCMO schools James Mickleborough Greenwood.<sup>55</sup> At the National Association of Colored Women's 1899 convention, Yates delivered an address entitled "Social Necessity of an Equal Moral Standard for Men and Women."<sup>56</sup> In addition to all of this

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Coulter, 39.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>54</sup> Herbert Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the U.S., Vol. II (1877-1910)* (New York: Citadel Press, 1968), 777.

<sup>55</sup> Yates, *Woman's Era*, November 1894, 15-16.

<sup>56</sup> Coulter, 41.



political activism, Yates was established and accomplished essayist and poet and wrote short stories and poems under the pen name R.K. Potter that were published. She continued to write for various publications, most notably writing “The Equipment of the Teacher” in a June 1904 issue of *Voice of the Negro*, in which she thundered that failure by black educators to take their duty seriously would mark them as “traitors to the race.”<sup>57</sup>

Yates succeeded Mary Church Terrell as president of the National Association of Colored Women in 1901 and served with distinction until 1906.<sup>58</sup> After she stepped down in 1906 from the national organization, Yates was elected the following year to the presidency of the Missouri Association of Colored Women’s Clubs in Sedalia.<sup>59</sup> She served as president of the state organization until 1910. Yates was also among the women who addressed the National Afro-American League, a nineteenth century civil rights organization and in 1910, was a member of the Committee of One Hundred, the founding body of what would become the NAACP.<sup>60</sup> After her husband’s death, Josephine Yates returned to teaching until her own sudden death in 1912. Quite impressive was the fact that she had signed what would become the local NAACP Constitution of March 1913 shortly before her death, showing her activism in the civil rights organization was as dedicated as her teaching career.<sup>61</sup> She left a mighty legacy in both Kansas Cities as well as nationally, and accordingly, KCK’s YWCA was named after her in 1919.<sup>62</sup>

After 1895, the presidency of the KC Colored Women’s League had passed to Yates’s

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<sup>57</sup> Josephine Yates, “The Equipment of the Teacher,” *Voice of the Negro*, 1:6 (June 1904): 248-52.

<sup>58</sup> Coulter, 40.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> “NAACP Constitution,” March 25, 1913, NAACP Papers, Kansas Branch NAACP Office Files: Columbus to Kansas City, Kansas State Archives, Topeka, KS. Yates’ signature appears posthumously on this document.

<sup>62</sup> Greenbaum, 59-61.

friend, Anna Jones.<sup>63</sup> Jones was born in Canada in 1860 to a father who had escaped slavery via the Underground Railroad and a mother who was originally from New Jersey. We know very little of her early life.<sup>64</sup> Jones was president of the Missouri Association of Colored Women's Clubs from 1903 to 1906.<sup>65</sup> The Kansas City Club was one of the first local clubs affiliated with the national Colored Women's League, and Anna Jones was picked to represent the D.C.-based Colored Women's League in talks that led to a merger with the Boston-based National Federation of African American Women by 1900. The result was the new national organization, The National Association of Colored Women. Jones wrote for several black publications, including *The Voice of the Negro*. In 1905, Jones wrote an article in *Voice of the Negro* detailing the educational accomplishments of African-American women, which ran in two parts.<sup>66</sup> In the article, Jones pointed to Yates's mentor at the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia, Fannie Jackson-Coppin, the educated black women involved in the racial uplift and club movements, and to the female principals across the nation as examples of black female educational achievement.<sup>67</sup> Jones noted the growing number of African American women graduating from colleges across the nation, including ten from Kansas State University.<sup>68</sup>

Like so many other prominent black activists and intellectuals, Jones held a teaching position at the Lincoln School by 1910.<sup>69</sup> In 1911, Jones was the first black woman in KCMO to

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<sup>63</sup> Coulter, 39.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>66</sup> Anna Jones, "A Century's Progress for the American Colored Woman," *Voice of the Negro* 2:9 (September 1905):631-33; Jones, "American Colored Woman," *Voice of the Negro* 2:10 (October 1905): 692-94.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Coulter, 40.

serve as principal of a school when she was appointed to the position at the Douglass School on the city's west side.<sup>70</sup> Prophetically, Jones was one of the first local activists to warn of the city's discriminatory housing conditions, writing a letter to W.E.B. DuBois in 1911 describing it in detail.<sup>71</sup> By 1916, Jones was on the faculty at Lincoln, where she remained until her retirement in 1919.<sup>72</sup> During this time, she was active in the YWCA and instrumental in establishing KCMO's YMCA at 19th Street and The Paseo. She was also a giant in the local NAACP. Jones served alongside James Bowser and future *Kansas City Call* editor Charles A. Franklin on the local executive committee by 1917. She, like Yates, had signed the 1913 Kansas City NAACP Constitution.<sup>73</sup>

KCK's civil rights activists had long stressed the importance of cross-town and state ties with the movement for equality in KCMO.<sup>74</sup> Such a perspective was a written clause in the local NAACP constitution, which stressed the critical importance of ameliorating "the industrial, social, and civic conditions of the colored peoples of the two Kansas Cities."<sup>75</sup> This was especially true of black women who were activists in their own right in KCK. As mentioned already, the YWCA in KCK was posthumously named after Yates; this was because Yates and

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Jones to W.E.B. DuBois, 1911, W.E.B. DuBois Papers, Series 1A (Part 1): General Correspondance, 1877-1932, Reel 4:46, Call no.: MS 312, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst, found online at [www.library.umass.edu/spcoll/ead/mums312\\_1a1.html](http://www.library.umass.edu/spcoll/ead/mums312_1a1.html).

<sup>72</sup> *Kansas City Sun*, April 12, 1919.

<sup>73</sup> "Kansas City, Missouri, Branch of the National Association For the Advancement of Colored People," January 11, 1917, NAACP Papers, Kansas Branch NAACP Office Files: Columbus to Kansas City, c. 1917-39, Kansas State Archives, Topeka; "NAACP Constitution," March 25, 1913, NAACP Papers, Kansas Branch NAACP Office Files, Columbus to Kansas City, 1917-39, Kansas State Archives, Topeka.

<sup>74</sup> "A Greater Kansas City," *The American Citizen*, June 2, 1905, Kansas Newspapers, Kansas State Archives, Topeka KS; "NAACP Constitution," March 25, 1913, found in NAACP Papers, Kansas Branch NAACP Office Files: Columbus to Kansas City, c. 1917-39, Kansas State Archives, Topeka, KS.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

Jones had joined Ida M. Becks in doing the work to establish a YWCA on the Kansas side of the metropolitan area.<sup>76</sup> Becks, who worked at a rescue home in Topeka, was a featured speaker along with Jones at a mass civil rights rally in March 1911. Although not based in KCK herself, Becks was another example of KCMO activists' commitment to advancing civil rights and conditions for blacks in KCK as well as KCMO.

Becks had a history of civil rights and racial uplift activism in both Dayton, Ohio and Wichita before moving to the KC area.<sup>77</sup> She had been born Ida M. Bowman in 1880 in Armstrong, Missouri.<sup>78</sup> Her father died when she was eleven, leaving her mother to care for her and seven other children. After completing public school, Bowman moved to Carrollton, Missouri before enrolling at Lincoln Institute in Jefferson City. In order to finance her education there, Bowman worked as a domestic in the home of a private family for a dollar a week. She graduated from Lincoln in 1899 as the class valedictorian, one among nine women who received degrees there that year.<sup>79</sup> Becks spent a year in Wichita after that before moving to Cleveland, where she made the decision to dedicate her life to activism. Shortly thereafter, she moved to Dayton and joined the local Colored Women's League.<sup>80</sup> Bowman met H.W. Becks in Dayton, and they married in 1907. The couple moved to Kansas City in 1908, and H.W. Becks was appointed to the US Postal Service.

Ida M. Becks continued her activism: for two years, she was a field representative for the Florence Crittendon Home in Topeka and also served as field representative for the National

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<sup>76</sup> Coulter, 41; Greenbaum, 59-61.

<sup>77</sup> William Bacote, *Who's Who Among the Colored Baptists of the United States* (Kansas City, MO: Franklin Hudson, 1913), 108-10.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Training School in Washington D.C.<sup>81</sup> Becks' work led to the formation of the Urban League's local branch in Kansas City and by 1920, she was an important figure within state and national Baptist organizations, within Missouri's black women's club movement, and in African American communities in both KCMO and KCK. Becks was a staunch supporter of women's suffrage and like many activist African American women of her time, Becks fiercely resisted the twin oppressors of racism and sexism.<sup>82</sup> Like Yates, Becks was a public speaker whose oratory skills were much in demand. Upon former president Theodore Roosevelt's passing in 1919, Becks spoke of his views on women's suffrage at KCMO's Second Baptist Church.<sup>83</sup> She led a debate over women's suffrage later that year at the Ebenezer AME Church.<sup>84</sup>

Fearless in the face of political fights with individuals of either race, Becks in 1921 passionately argued in favor of a school bond issue that some in the black community opposed.<sup>85</sup> Using the moral authority of black religious language, she argued that financial resources were needed to mitigate congestion in the schools, particularly Lincoln.<sup>86</sup> As the urban crisis began to develop almost two decades later, congestion at Lincoln and other African-American schools would become much worse than it already was in 1921 and despite the bond passing and construction of the new school, the Paseo High School, during the 1920s.

Ida and H.W. Becks were both members and leaders of KCMO's Second Baptist Church, in which they were deeply active through World War I. Ida Becks was additionally active in the

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>83</sup> *Western Messenger*, January 24, 1919. *The Western Messenger* was originally a black newspaper based out of Jefferson City that moved first to St. Louis, and then to KC by the late 1910s.

<sup>84</sup> *Kansas City Sun*, March 1, 1919.

<sup>85</sup> Ida M. Becks, "Why We Should Vote For School Bonds," *Kansas City Sun*, April 2, 1921.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

Red Cross in 1919, served on the board of directors of Wheatley-Provident Hospital in the early 1920s, and she was one of five KCMO delegates to the 1921 NAACP convention in Detroit.<sup>87</sup> That same year, the Negro Women's National Republican League appointed Becks to organize a chapter in KCMO, which she was subsequently elected chair of.<sup>88</sup>

An even more powerful demonstration of the connection between the activists of both KCMO and KCK was the career of KCK activist Kathryn Johnson. Johnson would link Corvine Patterson's legacy with the firmament of the black clubwomen's movement over the state line in KCMO. Johnson was also able to build on the success of KCK's black-oriented newspaper, *The American Citizen*. Originally begun in Topeka in 1888, *American Citizen* would move to KCK the following year.<sup>89</sup> Until 1907, it was in continuous publication and was published weekly between 1897 and 1900. John L. Waller, a prominent Republican in Topeka, had founded the paper, but he sold it to H.F. Johnson and George Dudley in KCK.<sup>90</sup> H.F. Johnson was a former Exoduster who owned a grocery store and invested in real estate, while George Dudley arrived in the area right after the Civil War from Xenia, Ohio. Dudley was elected to City Council of Wyandotte in 1879 and then in 1885, elected deputy city marshal.<sup>91</sup> Critically, *American Citizen*, like other black-owned newspapers around the country offered a medium for disseminating news that would not be covered by the mainstream press and by presenting black viewpoints on race that would not be covered by the mainstream press. Such newspapers connected the black community and gave it a voice.

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<sup>87</sup> *Kansas City Sun*, November 22, 1919; *Western Messenger*, January 23, 1920; *Kansas City Sun*, February 5, 1921.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* June 25, 1921.

<sup>89</sup> Greenbaum, 83.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

Other activists in KCK who Johnson built upon included B.S. Smith and I.F. Bradley, Sr. Smith was a graduate of the University of Michigan Law School and had received his degree in 1886; he arrived in KCK in 1887.<sup>92</sup> Smith soon became active in civic affairs after establishing a law office. He served as deputy city attorney and was elected councilman in KCK's Third Ward in 1892. B.S. Smith had been involved in negotiating the conditions surrounding the creating of Sumner High School in 1904. Smith became a charter member of DuBois's Niagara Movement in 1905.

I.F. Bradley was also a charter member of the Niagara Movement in 1905.<sup>93</sup> Also like Smith, Bradley was a lawyer and elected official. Bradley had been born in Cambridge, Missouri in 1862 and received his law degree from KU in 1887, where he graduated from with honors.<sup>94</sup> In 1889, he was elected justice of the peace. From then until his death in 1938, I.F. Bradley, Sr. played a leading role in KCK's civic and political affairs. Bradley was elected county attorney in 1894 after his term as justice of the peace. He served as a Republican presidential elector for Kansas in 1900 and was nominated to be attorney general in 1908.<sup>95</sup> Like Yates and Jones, Bradley was a signatory to the local NAACP constitution.<sup>96</sup> In addition to the NAACP, he was a charter member of the National Afro-American Council and a founder of the Civic League of Kansas City, Kansas, which promoted voter registration, political participation, and better inter-ethnic relations.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> "NAACP Constitution," March 25, 1913, NAACP Papers, Kansas Branch Office Files, KS State Archives, Topeka.

Kathryn Johnson was born in Ohio in 1878, where she also grew up.<sup>97</sup> Johnson attended Wilberforce University in 1897-98, and, after graduating, taught in Ohio and Indiana public school systems. Johnson accepted a teaching position in 1904 in North Carolina and then in 1906, became dean of women at Shorter College in Little Rock, Arkansas. Foreshadowing her political turn, she wrote a pamphlet in 1905 on the life of Fredrick Douglass entitled *Fredrick Douglass: The Voice For the Silent Millions*.<sup>98</sup> Johnson moved to KCK in 1910, where she dedicated herself to “race work.”<sup>99</sup> Johnson was among those who organized the KCK YWCA facility. She was also a charter member of the NAACP and for the first half of the 1910s was what Mary White Ovington called the organization’s “first fieldworker” in that Johnson made her living by making small amounts of money off of branch memberships and subscriptions to the *Crisis*.<sup>100</sup> In 1913, Johnson expanded her work by travelling throughout the South and West educating blacks on the work of the NAACP and helping to establish branches of the organization.<sup>101</sup> By 1916, Johnson was publicly recognized by the NAACP for her work on its behalf; six months later, however, she left the organization.

Johnson then focused on work on behalf of the YWCA and was among three black women who worked for the YWCA in France during World War I.<sup>102</sup> After World War I, she made a living off of sales commissions for works by and about African-Americans on behalf of

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<sup>97</sup> Mary White Ovington, “The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,” *Journal of Negro History* 9:2 (April 1924), 107-16.

<sup>98</sup> Kathryn M. Johnson, *Fredrick Douglass: The Voice For the Silent Millions*, April 10, 1905, as found in the Ramos-Lincoln Collection, Vertical File: Douglass, Fredrick , Box 1, Folder 21, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

<sup>99</sup> Coulter, 42.

<sup>100</sup> Ovington, 115..

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.



Associated Publishers and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Although Johnson had taught, like Yates and Jones, she was not as intellectually gifted as they.<sup>103</sup> However, what she lacked in that area she more than made up for with her organizational and strategic gifts at the grassroots level that were fired by a tenacious spirit.

Despite leaving work inside the NAACP, she continued to work with them as allies. An excellent example of this was her May 1921 protest against the KKK outside a New York theater that was showing *Birth of A Nation*.<sup>104</sup> Johnson and four other men and women were arrested and convicted for distributing leaflets against the KKK in front of the theater.<sup>105</sup> Six months later, the convictions were overturned, and Johnson and her fellow activists were released from jail.<sup>106</sup> Her release generated front-page headlines in the *Kansas City Sun*, which also took note that the judge's opinion had established the rights of citizens to protest against a movement which they believed threatened their rights.<sup>107</sup> Johnson would continue her outspoken advocacy and activism on behalf of freedom, justice, and equality for African Americans for the next three decades; she passed away in 1955.<sup>108</sup>

Grisham, Coles, Yates, Jones, Becks, Smith, Bradley, and Johnson had carried on what Bowser, Turner, and Patterson had begun in the nineteenth century fighting for the rights of blacks as citizens in both KCMO and KCK. Together, beyond that, they had established a powerful framework of activism and egalitarian ideas to combat the KCMO middle-class white

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>104</sup> *Kansas City Sun*, November 12, 1921.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Coulter, 43.

racism of urban spaces and social status and Jim Crow in both cities with a black middle-class vision of racial equality, black educational and intellectual excellence, “Social Gospel” religious tendencies, and in the case of female activists especially, support for women’s rights and suffrage. In the first decades of the twentieth century, they advanced an alternative, racially egalitarian vision of progressivism. The interdependency of black freedom movements in KCMO and KCK that Yates, Jones, Becks, and Johnson had encouraged and nourished continued to grow over the years, as organizations that would cover both Kansas Cities would be formed in the remaining decades of the first half of the twentieth century.

There were others who emerged as leaders of the community in those years, who benefitted from and complimented the activist work of Grisham, Coles, Yates, Jones, Becks, Smith, Bradley, and Johnson. As hinted at earlier, the black clergy were an important part of this group of organizations struggling for justice. One of the most important KCMO ministers was the Reverends Samuel William Bacote, T.H. Ewing, and James Wesley Hurse.<sup>109</sup> From the perspective of the story of civil rights struggle and fight for open housing in Kansas City, Ewing and Hurse were the two most important figures by far. Ewing would encourage home ownership by African Americans, while Hurse would encourage tactics of boycott of white discriminatory businesses and institutions in favor of their black-owned and operated counterparts.

T.H. Ewing came to KCMO in 1887, right at the point where the city was undergoing a metamorphosis from a small frontier trading post into an industrial metropolis on the Plains.<sup>110</sup> The Vine Street Baptist Church was struggling then, but Ewing was determined to be a force for change. Ewing’s target was the poverty of his parishioners; Ewing preached that acquisition of

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

property was the key to earthly salvation.<sup>111</sup> He stressed saving as the key to achieve this goal and advised his congregation to save ten cents a day out of weekly incomes sometimes as low as six dollars. He described multiple ways his parishioners could save: by walking instead of riding streetcars, buy groceries in bulk with cash, and eschew credit. Living within their means and avoiding frivolous and superfluous spending was critical, Ewing told his congregation. They were to avoid saloons and movie theaters especially. Instead, he encouraged them to open bank accounts and start looking to purchase a home. He organized an economic club designed to get members of his Vine Street congregation into homes as soon as possible.<sup>112</sup> In 1904, Ewing began promoting three financial clubs—one for men and two for women—in which members pooled their resources and invested in real estate.<sup>113</sup> Ewing practiced what he preached: upon his death in 1930, he owned considerable land, not just in KCMO, but properties in Oklahoma and Kansas (including KCK and Leavenworth) as well.<sup>114</sup> James Wesley Hurse helped form St. Stephen's Baptist Church in the early 1900s.<sup>115</sup> Hurse was born in 1866 to former slaves in Collierville, Tennessee.<sup>116</sup> Hurse had little formal education and moved to Memphis at about age nineteen in 1885. There, he worked first at a cotton gin and then as a roustabout on a steamboat on the Mississippi River. He worked at the latter job for over seven years but was increasingly distressed at the discrimination and racism he faced in Memphis and moved to KCMO in

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<sup>111</sup> Martin, 38-39.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> *Kansas City Call*, June 13, 1930.

<sup>115</sup> Coulter, 47.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

1896.<sup>117</sup> Already ordained as a minister five years before, he briefly worked for the city street crews before he was called to be minister at St. Stephen's.

Hurse was one of the most powerful orators of all of the Baptist preachers in KCMO and in the black community generally.<sup>118</sup> By the end of the First World War, Hurse's congregation swelled to over eight hundred. Like Ewing, he preached financial awareness and responsibility. However, Hurse also stressed that his parishioners be more racially conscious with how they spent their money. Hurse encouraged them to patronize black-owned businesses; reportedly in 1915, when one parishioner chose a white undertaker instead of available African American undertaking services, Hurse refused to deliver a funeral service. Such awareness would help to influence Kansas City's local civil rights movement in the tactic of using consumer patronage as a weapon against race discrimination. Hurse was an active member of the National Baptist Convention of America, the second largest black Baptist organization in the country. He was president of the organization from 1930 to 1933. In 1924, Hurse became the first African American in KCMO nominated for alderman by either party.<sup>119</sup> Although he lost the election, Hurse remained active in KCMO's black community until his 1935 death.

Finally, one of the most important figures in early twentieth century black Kansas City was T.C. Unthank, a physician.<sup>120</sup> Through his tireless activism and lobbying, Unthank helped to establish three medical facilities for blacks in both KCMO and KCK.<sup>121</sup> Thomas C. Unthank had

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Urban League of Kansas City, "Social and Economic Setting: Historical Background," 1945, p.5, M-330, Box H-1, Historic Records: 1920-46, Kansas City Urban League Administrative Records, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>121</sup> Coulter, 50.

been born in 1866 in Greensboro, North Carolina. He enrolled in Howard University's Medical School in 1894, and after graduation in 1898, he moved to Kansas City. Shortly after arriving, he began working with black doctors on the Kansas side to establish a private hospital for blacks in KCK.<sup>122</sup> One of these doctors was Dr. S.H. Thompson, Sr., a close ally of I.F. Bradley. The new hospital was badly needed because, as was previously noted, white doctors started turning away black patients and black doctors were not permitted to perform surgery or attend patients in the existing hospitals.<sup>123</sup> Named for the Reverend Calvin Douglass of Western University, Douglass Hospital opened in KCK in 1898. The hospital immediately drew patients from both KCK and KCMO and soon became overcrowded.

By 1902, Unthank helped to establish the John Lange Hospital in KCMO for black patients.<sup>124</sup> It was named for John Lange, the wealthy business manager of a popular musical performer. Lange Hospital proved to be too reliant on Lange the man, however, and closed in 1920, four years after Lange's death due to financial difficulties. Douglass Hospital outlasted Lange by quite a lot; it closed in 1978, mainly because of the end of legal race segregation in the 1960s nationwide.

However, neither hospital in their heyday was adequate to handle the number of black patients in the area.<sup>125</sup> KCMO's black population was particularly distrustful of the city hospital, where neglect, segregation, and discrimination were commonplace. Particularly disgraceful in this regard was the treatment black and Mexican victims of the 1903 flood received by white

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.; Greenbaum, 92.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>124</sup> Coulter, 50.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

hospital staff at a makeshift shelter in the city's Convention Hall.<sup>126</sup> Unthank was enraged by the mistreatment patients of color had received and began pressuring the city for a separate hospital for blacks. If his proposal generated any controversy among other activists, no record of such survives.<sup>127</sup> This is noteworthy because in many other cases nationwide, African American elites were sharply divided over the question of separate facilities versus integrated ones and if segregation should be compromised with at all. In any event, the end result was General Hospital Number 2, of which Unthank was one of the first superintendents.

With all of these intellectuals, teachers, ministers, activists, lawyers, and doctors and their new organization and institutions as inspiration, black newspapers and editorialists were prepared to take head-on the kind of white racism discussed in the previous chapter. They examined whites' perceptions and calculated how they would affect black Kansas City.<sup>128</sup> Middle-class blacks and whites both believed in home ownership as a symbol of achievement and agreed on the importance of morality and gender roles. In KCMO, these points of agreement would be used by race-conscious African Americans to attack racial injustice.

Ewing had been merely one influential voice in a group of educators and clergymen urging black homeownership since the 1890s as a means of promoting thrift, providing economic security, and encouraging wholesome living standards. A 1903 editorial in the black newspaper *Rising Son* noted the political purposes of home ownership; a black community in which home ownership was widely dispersed would be best equipped to advance its own interests.<sup>129</sup> Charles Starks, an advertising copywriter and local NAACP officer, by 1914 was exploring more radical

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Schirmer, 81.

<sup>129</sup> *Rising Son*, September 12, 1903.

consequences of black home ownership. Writing in the *Kansas City Sun*, Starks reasoned that home ownership was among the most basic rights of American citizenship as it was vital step in the pursuit of happiness.<sup>130</sup> Starks urged African Americans to purchase homes in predominantly white neighborhoods as both an exercise of liberty and assertion of their civil rights.<sup>131</sup> Whites who objected, Starks said, were simply enemies of the most basic rights for African-Americans.<sup>132</sup>

Another writer for the *Sun*, W.E. Griffen, uncovered another motive behind whites' segregation of the city's neighborhoods after 1904: economics and status.<sup>133</sup> Griffen stated that "race prejudice is almost wholly an economic question" and noted that "when [whites] denounce 'social equality' they unwittingly mean economic equality."<sup>134</sup> When blacks purchased homes in comfortable middle-class neighborhoods, Griffen noted that this signaled their achievement of an economic status equivalent to those of their white neighbors, which triggered what Griffen called "a terrifying fear" that whites and their neighborhoods' status was diminished.<sup>135</sup> He concluded that, no matter what whites said about black people, deep down "the great middle class of white people are by no means convinced of the Negro's inferiority. In fact, they are keenly alive to the fact that Negroes cannot be held down and in that they sense great danger to themselves."<sup>136</sup>

Nelson Crews, whose political wrangling with the local Republicans were previously discussed, was quite blunt in accusing middle-class whites of racist bigotry and highlighting the

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<sup>130</sup> Charles Starks, "Segregation the Crime of the Age," *Kansas City Sun*, November 28, 1914, p.4

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> *Kansas City Sun*, November 11, 1914.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

worst of their hypocrisy: he wrote of white opposition to Western College that “our people are constantly being urged to lead intelligent, religious lives, yet when decent facilities for such progress are being sought, opposition rises and the unchristian spirit of race hatred bursts into flame.”<sup>137</sup> Crews concluded that it was precisely the self-styled “better classes” of whites who were behind such racist opposition to black institutions, heaping scorn on the “so-called refined, fair, Christian people” who had “met and solemnly vowed that the school will not come near them and that they will keep it away at any cost.”<sup>138</sup> Seeing though such whites’ sense of superiority to “mobs” that attacked black homes in Montgall, Crews linked their attitudes directly to white terrorism by stating “we know what ‘any cost’ means to Negro haters. We knew what it meant out on Montgall Avenue and other parts of the city.”<sup>139</sup> Thus, Ewing, Starks, Griffen, and Crews launched some of the first editorial advocacy for what would become the long struggle by the city’s open housing movement against residential segregation. It would be especially this part of the civil rights movement that, in KCMO and nationwide, would see its work largely unfinished by the end of the twentieth century. White flight, white violence, the real estate industry, and—after 1933—the federal government would all provide strong headwinds against any real progress made on this front for decades to come.

Starks also saw through KCMO middle-class whites’ and white officials’ duplicity on race, noting how “the enemies of the race” sought to “‘politely’ and ‘graciously’ enslave us.”<sup>140</sup> City officials were in fact notorious for denying any responsibility for segregation or discriminatory treatment of the city’s African-American population. An example of this was a

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<sup>137</sup> Nelson Crews, *Kansas City Sun*, August 8, 1914.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Starks, *Kansas City Sun*, November 28, 1914.



1918 incident at Paseo Parkway near the black business district in which park watchmen removed Julia Morrisson from the parkway and told her, “you niggers are not going to light this parkway between Ninth and Twelfth Streets.”<sup>141</sup> When she and her allies complained, members of the park board denied they had ordered any segregation of the park and refused to act.<sup>142</sup> In another incident at a music store, white management made excuses for the store’s discriminatory treatment of black customers by blaming white customers’ prejudice and the supposed “obnoxious behavior” of two black customers they never identified.<sup>143</sup> The Sun incredulously and wryly noted that “these two men are always handy when wanted,” citing a list of other instances in which whites used apocryphal stories of two rowdy black men to excuse racial discrimination.<sup>144</sup>

Black middle-class intellectuals were also worried about the impact of urban vice, but drew very different conclusions from its presence. While some expressed class resentment at “bad Negroes” among the lower class and poor “sullyng the race’s image,” more often black intellectuals and the black press condemned black participation in vices such as crime and immorality as undermining uplift, racial solidarity, and political activism.<sup>145</sup> Starks in particular believed vice was not a victimless crime because it vented lower-class frustrations in ways that were counterproductive to their well-being without changing the racist social order responsible for their condition.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> *Kansas City Sun*, August 17, 1918.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> *Kansas City Sun*, March 24, 1917.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> *Rising Son*, January 16, 1903; *Kansas City Sun*, January 20, 1917.

<sup>146</sup> *Kansas City Sun*, February 16, 1918.

As for the white middle-class perception that crime and vice were inherent flaws in blacks' character as a race, here too outraged black editorialists and intellectuals found rampant white hypocrisy and exposed it. *The Sun* thundered in one editorial that "some of the most vicious and notorious dives that ever infested the city are run by WHITE MEN for the debauchery and degradation of Negroes."<sup>147</sup> They countered whites' and the white-owned real estate industry's assertions that blacks were threatening to bring vice to white middle-class neighborhoods by arguing that it was whites who encouraged urban vice among blacks to keep them oppressed.<sup>148</sup> The truth to this was apparent in the Marks' Plan for making the North End a Red Light district in 1909-11.

Worst of all, Starks noted, the racist and brutal behavior of KCMO police towards the city's African Americans encouraged vice by undermining respect for the law even among the most elite black citizenry.<sup>149</sup> Black citizens of KCMO "displayed a positive horror and antipathy" towards police due to "the exercise of an unwarrantable tyranny on the part of White Policemen whose ignorance overlaps their duty and discretion and who imagine that Cruelty instead of intelligence is the watchword in handling and adjusting cases coming under their care."<sup>150</sup> Black middle-class writers sought the same "respectability" in terms of bourgeois virtues as middle-class whites and fumed at a social environment created by whites in which blacks were rendered incapable of living respectably if they so chose.

One of the strongest examples of the kind of respectability black activists advocated for and were denied by white society was that of black female respectability. Like white middle-

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., March 24, 1917.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

class figures who were often their opponents, black middle-class activists believed in a gendered notion of bourgeois values in which the strength of the family and social morality was underpinned by the status of a middle-class woman as measured in feminine virtue.<sup>151</sup> This racist slight was itself a carryover from slavery, which was held together by white owners having sexually exploited black women with impunity.<sup>152</sup> That impunity in turn had led owners to characterize slave women as amoral which not only was used to justify the rape but also was absorbed into owners' racist ideology justifying slavery. After Reconstruction, rape was used as a weapon against black women in the Deep South the way lynching was against black men. Given this history, black intellectuals and opinion leaders feared that KCMO's urban vice was having the same effect in degrading and devaluing black women.<sup>153</sup>

Lewis Woods decried the fact that the city's racist social order—and nationally, by extension—inscribed a double standard in defining black and white women's gender roles.<sup>154</sup> When whites insulted black women or consorted with degraded black girls and women in houses of prostitution, Woods argued, they disregarded the moral worth of every black person and family.<sup>155</sup> Worse, the failure to defend the womanly virtue of black women by white men when other white men assaulted it exposed the sad fact that “the black home itself stood outside the guardianship of organized society” which was officially “pledged to the sanctity of the home” when white women and white homes were involved.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Schirmer, 86.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Moria Morris, “Plea For the Negro Race,” *Kansas City Times*, August 3, 1890; *Rising Son*, March 3, 1905.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

The most outrageous examples were of a white judge who dismissed a rape charge against a white man who had raped a three year old black girl and a 1915 incident in which a black teenage boy named Kenneth Oden had been arrested for kicking a white man who insulting his female cousins while they rode in a streetcar.<sup>157</sup> *The Sun* bitterly noted that Oden's response should be considered the normal one whenever "a big burly white man ogles and winks and insults a colored girl as many of them have done before in a crowded street car, feeling secure that whatever he does will be endorsed by his fellows and that no punishment will come to him on account of the cowardice . . . of the Negroes present."<sup>158</sup> The paper further raged against the double standard of justice that discouraged black gentlemen for standing up for black women; could one imagine, the editorial noted, if the situation had been the reverse and it had been a black man behaving that way towards a white woman?<sup>159</sup> "Every white man in the car would have felt it his bounden duty to have administered a blow or kick" and "would have been liberated with words of praise from the court" while the perpetrator "would have administered to him the severest penalty upon the statute books."<sup>160</sup>

With racial tensions running high in the city in the late teens, white elites looked at the East St. Louis race riot of 1917 and, later, at the 1919 Chicago and Omaha race riots with growing alarm.<sup>161</sup> The existing white middle-class moral anxiety over blacks as part of urban vice that threatened their property values and status, the emerging "New Negro" intellectual and social outlook of retuning African-American World War I veterans who had been treated better in

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<sup>157</sup> "White Man Brutally Ravishes A Three Year Old Negro Girl," *Rising Son*, April 6, 1907; *Kansas City Sun*, January 30, 1915.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> *Kansas City Journal*, July 30, 1919.

France and Belgium than at home and who were determined to resist Jim Crow in order to make the homefront “safe for democracy,” and a housing industry determined to draw color lines were on a collision course at the close of the teens. The revival of the Ku Klux Klan nationally after the success of the 1915 film *Birth of a Nation* only made the situation that much more tense, and the interracial labor ties locally raised the specter of “the Red Menace” with the wave of labor violence nationwide in 1919. Accordingly, *The Kansas City Post* warned in the face of a national wave of racial violence and labor insurrection that “any man who takes the law into his own hands, whether striker, Ku Klux, or bolshevist, will run slap up against the machine gun of public opinion.”<sup>162</sup> A special committee of both prominent blacks and whites was called by the Mayor to mediate housing disputes, squelch rumors among both races that were inflammatory, and condemn violence and arbitrary regulation of black residence.<sup>163</sup>

KCMO and KCK both managed to escape the kind of racial violence that had engulfed Omaha and Chicago in 1919. It had been a close shave, however. On the Kansas side, increased racial tension had emerged over a proposed anti-miscegenation bill in 1913 that only went down to defeat after much NAACP effort against it and only in the Kansas Senate.<sup>164</sup> Only a short time before this committee was convened over housing, two black homes were burned and a black church dynamited following KCMO’s screening of *Birth of a Nation*. Indeed, *The Citizens’ League Bulletin* warned that same year that KCMO “was sitting on a volcano” when it came to race. Another example of a close call was the fact that in October, a black physician had told the *Bulletin* that he had intended to take a gun to a post office with intent to pistol-whip a white

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<sup>162</sup> *Kansas City Post*, April 1919, also quoted in *Kansas City Sun*, April 26, 1919..

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, May 3, 1919.

<sup>164</sup> *Crisis* (March 1913): 220.

postal worker who had insulted his wife but decided against it. It was this climate that led to the formation of the Inter-Racial Committee of Twelve in 1920.

The story of organized labor and the African-American community of KCK and KCMO between 1890 and the Second World War is at the heart of the next chapter. The importance of the 1920s and 1930s manifested themselves in the shaping shifting political alliances, civil rights activism, and urban development. At the end of this period, the earliest signs of urban crisis began to accumulate, but because of the ongoing Great Depression, few blacks or whites would pay attention.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: KANSAS CITY'S BLACK WORKING-CLASS, POLITICS, AND ORGANIZED LABOR IN AN URBAN CRISIS, 1920-32**

Most African Americans in both KCK and KCMO in the early twentieth century were working-class or poor, and as such, far removed from the world of the city's black elite intelligentsia discussed in the previous chapter. In educational access, status, and economic well-being, to name but a few means of measuring the class gap within the African American community, the distinction was sharp. What both groups shared was the humiliation and oppression built in to the city's local variant of Jim Crow at the hands of whites. It is precisely this African American working class, sharing with elite blacks the common experience of racial oppression but otherwise comprising an entirely different set of experiences in early twentieth Kansas City, who will be the focus of this chapter. As in other cities, it would be the African American working class who would be hit the hardest when the urban crisis fully developed at the end of the 1930s and early 1940s. To fully measure the damage the urban crisis did to this majority of the city's black community, it is necessary to first examine the primary occupations, livelihoods, and position relative to both the labor movement and corporate employers black workers held before the crisis hit full force.

The 1920s and 1930s would have important consequences for Greater Kansas City in shifting long standing political alliances, the rise and fall of vital industries for workers of all backgrounds, the rise of a newer more inclusive unionism, and economic catastrophe late in this time period drastically altering the landscape of everyday life for working-class blacks and everyone else. Despite these sweeping changes, a constant in city life remained the strong color

line drawn through housing policy and neighborhood planning, one which would help to cause urban crisis when combined with the Great Depression and eventual World War II-era Great Migration to the city from the rural South.

As already noted in chapter two, labor unrest in KCMO represented one factor shaping white middle-class anxieties around race. The complex but often symbiotic relationship between white unionists and the black community in both KCMO and KCK was highly atypical for the country at the turn of the previous century. The national context of the relationship between mainstream organized labor and the black community, after all, was deeply adversarial until the 1930s. From the late nineteenth century until the 1930s, unions normally excluded African Americans, while industries normally used African American workers to break strikes. Not surprisingly, given the AFL's hostility to blacks and other racial minorities, that norm was also often coupled with black intellectual opposition to the labor movement. The story of the interaction between Kansas City's African American community and its labor unions relates to the urban crisis in two important ways. First, organized labor represented a potential, if far from fully realized, ally outside of KCMO's African-American community in the fight against Jim Crow discrimination, including the housing discrimination that lay at the heart of the urban crisis. Secondly, when the urban crisis did hit, it helped to accelerate the process by which labor was undermined by the demise of the urban industrial base.

Charles E. Coulter accounted for this local exception to a national picture of mutual hostility between labor unions and the African-American community by using regional terms as metaphors for the strictness of racial hierarchical orders; as he put it, "Kansas City was both northern and western enough to allow some gaps in the city's racially based strictures."<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Coulter, 52.



“western enough” metaphor for the city’s racial attitudes invokes the ways in which KCMO fit James Leikner’s description of the neighboring state of Kansas as “libertarian.”<sup>2</sup> This had contradictory consequences for the relationship between blacks and labor specifically in the city. On the one hand, like in the rest of the country, “the major unions rejected African-American workers.”<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, “the black hod-carriers union was recognized by labor leaders, and the major unions in the meatpacking industry organized both black and white labor.”<sup>4</sup> Additionally, as has already been discussed, some of the largest strikes in the 1910s were started by wildcat actions of both black and white workers in certain industries, including women as well as men of both races.

Given that black workers were mostly concentrated in “the packinghouses and related industries,” and that the packinghouses were of predominant importance among local industries, the relationship between working-class blacks and white unionists locally was far more friendly than was the case almost everywhere else in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> As previously noted, the ties between the city’s black workers and the meatpacking plants went all the way back to the 1870s so those relationships were well established. In other industries, the attitudes of labor union locals and their officials varied widely in regards to African Americans.

In addition to the hod-carriers and packinghouse workers, KCMO’s Building Trades, Iron Workers, Rock Quarrymen, and Truck Drivers union locals all were open to full African-

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<sup>2</sup> Leikner, 226.

<sup>3</sup> Coulter, 52.

<sup>4</sup> Urban League of Kansas City, *The Negro Worker of Kansas City: A Study of Trade Union and Organized Labor Relations* (Kansas City: Urban League of Kansas City, 1939) p.11, M-331, File 2, Box KCULP-3: Publications, 1930-95, as found in the Kansas City Urban League Administrative Records, MO State Archives, Jefferson City

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

American participation.<sup>6</sup> The Musicians' Union, Organization of Hotel and Restaurant Employees, Journeymen Barbers, and Laundry Workers' unions, however, only admitted black workers as part of segregated union locals. Still others, such as bricklayers, carpenters, cement finishers, electricians, painters, plasterers, plumbers, stonemasons, and tile setters would only hire blacks as "helpers" to white workers in those jobs.<sup>7</sup> Finally, there was a significant set of organized labor unions that froze out African-Americans entirely: asbestos workers, carpet layers, elevator constructors, glaziers, hoisting engineers, insulators, lathers, marble setters, roofers, sheet metal workers, sign writers, and steamfitters all refused to admit black workers into their locals. Some railroad brotherhoods excluded not only African Americans, but Mexican-Americans and American Indians as well.<sup>8</sup> So while it would be false to claim that there was true interracial solidarity among Kansas City's working-class, it was definitely the case that interracial labor actions weren't as rare as elsewhere in the United States. Incidentally, KCK had been an international headquarters of the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers, and Helpers since 1893; this union permitted separate black locals but barred blacks from promotion to blacksmiths.<sup>9</sup>

Beyond this wide variation in policy towards African Americans by the city's labor locals lay the reality of the overall poor living conditions for working-class blacks. The Urban League of Kansas City conducted two major surveys of black employment in 1926 and 1940, respectively.<sup>10</sup> Of the two reports, the 1940 report was the most blunt, reflecting as it did the full

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>9</sup> McDowell, 42.

<sup>10</sup> *Opportunity* 4:3 (March 1926): 94; Thomas A. Webster, *The Negro Worker of Kansas City*, p.10, M-331, File 2,

ravages of a decade of the Great Depression. The 1926 report downplayed discrimination with euphemisms such as its assertion that the city's black workers held "no unusual positions in industry" and in its insistence that black bricklayers and carpenters made "good money" in spite of those trades' locals blatant racial discrimination.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, the 1940 report explicitly described the consequences of job discrimination and identified the cause of it: employers' and the AFL's discriminatory policies.

The study began in 1930, the year after the Stock Market Crash.<sup>12</sup> Surveying the first year of the Depression among black workers in KCMO, the study noted that "two-thirds of all African-American workers were gainfully employed."<sup>13</sup> For male workers, blacks were engaged in 139 of 155 occupations listed, while for female workers, 41 of 59 occupations listed were open to blacks. However, these numbers were misleading given that elsewhere in the survey, it noted that for 43 of the occupations listed for men, fewer than ten black men were engaged, while fewer than a dozen black women were engaged in the 16 of 41 occupations open to black women in KCMO. The study also noticed that two-thirds of the black workforce of the city was concentrated in two areas: manufacturing and domestic services. In fact, the domestic percentage was higher than the industrial manufacturing percentage, some 34.3 percent to 30.8 percent, and these numbers did not include women workers.<sup>14</sup> Census data from the year independent of the Urban League survey shows that eighty percent of teenage black girls and women were servants,

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Box KCULP-3, Kansas City Urban League Papers, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>11</sup> *Opportunity*: 94.

<sup>12</sup> *Negro Worker*, p.8, Kansas City Urban League Papers, MO State Archives.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

hairdressers, boardinghouse operators, laundresses, or waitresses.<sup>15</sup>

Those unlucky enough to be seeking jobs outside of the packinghouse industry or the other occupations whose labor locals were open to black workers faced the near impossible task of finding work without union membership.<sup>16</sup> Training in skilled work often went hand in hand with labor membership, so such discrimination kept black workers unskilled, lessening their chances for employment. The report noted that employer discrimination in KCMO was also rampant, as “many employers are reluctant to hire Negroes except as a last resort and in the least desirable jobs.”<sup>17</sup> Inside and outside of unions, the study noted, “many white workers object to working in company with Negroes” altogether.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, at the beginning of the Depression, only thirty percent of businesses in the city employed black workers, with half of those black workers being porters.

The result of such discriminatory practices for living standards among black working families was disastrous: the Urban League determined that of the aforementioned thirty percent lucky enough to be employed by the city’s businesses, the average wage was twenty-one dollars and fifty cents a week, half of what their white counterparts earned.<sup>19</sup> Nine years earlier, during the “good times” of the 1920s boom, the Bureau of Labor Statistics had found that a family of five needed twice that amount for basic housing, food, and clothing.<sup>20</sup>

Examples of low wages and discrimination that the report described abound in the

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<sup>15</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930* (Washington D.C.: US Govt. Print Office, 1931)

<sup>16</sup> *Negro Worker*, p.11, KCULP, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Coulter, 59.

primary sources of the times, especially in the black press. In 1921, for example, one of the department stores in the city fired four hundred and seventy men and women, only rehiring those that would accept a pay cut to fifteen dollars a week from the twenty-two dollars and fifty cents weekly rate the store had paid during the war.<sup>21</sup> When Chevrolet opened a plant in the city in 1929, it hired black workers only as janitors and paid them only fifteen dollars a week, a practice that editor Chester Franklin of *The Kansas City Call* denounced bitterly as a denial of “the living wage of the automobile industry” in favor of “Kansas City’s less-than-\$20-a-week” wages for black men and women.<sup>22</sup>

The list of these practices went on, demonstrating union as well as company discrimination. In the case of a local steel plant, the company displaced eighteen black workers on the nightshift with white workers from another sector of the plant.<sup>23</sup> The eighteen workers protested in this case, but weren’t rehired until an investigation exposed that the white workers had refused to work on the open hearth during the hottest months of the summer, while the black workers displaced had done so. When the Carpenters’ Union organized a lumber mill in the city in the 1930s, it refused to accept a black man who had worked there since 1911 into the union.<sup>24</sup> When he joined the Truck Drivers’ Union instead, the Carpenters’ Union subsequently gave his job to a white man. The Urban League intervened and the worker regained his job, but, the carpenters’ local still refused to admit him. Finally, a black man who had worked for thirty years as a glassworker was cut from his job along with several white workers when the business started

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<sup>21</sup> *Kansas City Sun*, January 22, 1921.

<sup>22</sup> *Kansas City Call*, January 18, 1929

<sup>23</sup> *Negro Worker*, KCULP, 24, MO State Archives, Jefferson City

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

to struggle; the white workers were subsequently rehired, but he was not.<sup>25</sup> As was the case nationally, African Americans in KCMO in the 1920s and 30s were often the last hired and the first fired.

How, then, one might ask, can this abominable record of race discrimination be reconciled with the description of the interracial strikes in 1904, 1917, and 1918 among hack drivers, meat cutters, cannery workers, freight carriers, soap workers, laundresses, and streetcar workers? The answer, again, is that the common denominator of these strikes mostly revolved around the packinghouses and industries strongly related to them. In all but the 1918 laundry-led general strike, this is especially apparent. And as noted already, laundresses happened to be one of the occupations open to black women.

Comparisons to other industrial cities of the era that experienced race riots in the late 1910s such as Chicago and St. Louis are instructive. Unlike the explosive situation in Chicago in 1919 or in East St. Louis in 1917, African Americans in KCK and KCMO did not compete with Eastern European immigrants or Irish for housing space and had not in the late nineteenth century either, when Eastern European immigrants first arrived in the Greater Kansas City area; the different groups lived in distinct parts of the city.<sup>26</sup> In addition, Irish immigrants and black workers had worked side by side in unskilled positions in the plants since the 1870s. This was because both KCK and KCMO's black communities predated Chicago's by several decades, stretching back to the 1850s. Instead of being new arrivals in the Great Migration wave from the rural Deep South to cities with established Irish or Eastern European immigrant communities, black communities in both KCK and KCMO had been present since the earliest Irish

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Coulter, 61; US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census* (Washington D.C.: 1911), *Fourteenth Census* (Washington D.C.: 1921)

communities and had been established before the arrival of Eastern European immigrants. There had already been at least three waves of black migration to the Greater Kansas City metro between 1850 and 1880, with the Exoduster wave of 1879-80 being the largest.

While scholars are unsure as to how much of a difference the Great Migration made in KCMO (Charles Coulter stated that it was inconclusive), it is clear that the post-1915 Great Migration increased the black population of KCMO by a third between 1910 and 1920 and also accounted for a steady increase in black packinghouse workers in the 1910s to the point that they comprised twenty percent of its labor force.<sup>27</sup> Coulter noted that the growth rate of KCMO's black population between 1910 and 1920 "paled in comparison to other cities farther north and east," although that could simply reflect the fact that many of those cities had a negligible African American population before 1910, while again, KCMO already had a significant one.<sup>28</sup> As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, the Great Migration would hit the city with its fullest force several decades later, during World War II. Interestingly enough, Coulter also concluded that both the Great Migration and the phasing out of skilled butchers pushed the Cudahy cannery's strike to its victory by increasing the number of black workers in the packing plants.<sup>29</sup> The reason for the removal of skilled butchers was the modernization of the plants by applying assembly-line techniques using machines; the result was that new opportunities opened for unskilled workers.

But if racial tensions had not been caused by competition between blacks and immigrants over jobs or housing, there were still very real racial tensions in the city. Historian Sherry Lamb

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<sup>27</sup> Coulter, 61.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Schirmer, for her part, has argued that the Great Migration increased population overcrowding on the “black” eastside, especially after 1922.<sup>30</sup> By 1925, Kansas City was noted alongside those very “cities father north and east” such as Detroit and Cleveland as having high racial tensions over housing by the Federal Council of Churches.<sup>31</sup> So, while competition for jobs was not a potent factor for racial violence in KCMO, by the 1920s housing patterns certainly were as much a source of racial violence as anything in Detroit. Given the history of mixed neighborhoods in the city between the 1850s and roughly 1904 mentioned in this chapter and earlier, this was a drastic change of events for KCMO.

Indeed, the color lines drawn by the insurance industry and middle-class whites around housing, property, and neighborhoods and the white middle-class anxiety over race, status, gender, and place identified in chapter two intensified in this time period. As Schirmer put it, the 1920s were a time of “partitioning Kansas City” along racial lines.<sup>32</sup> The growth of the black commercial district at Eighteenth and Vine in the middle and later 1920s made the eastside quite attractive to black homeowners, but construction of new businesses or institutions such as schools or churches removed available space for housing. Overcrowding was already a problem in the black eastside by the middle of the 1920s, as residences averaged an occupancy of four and a half families.<sup>33</sup> This development especially hurt the black working-class and poor, who were forced to endure overcrowding and deteriorating conditions because they had no money to move anywhere else. Here we see an ominous foreshadowing of the urban crisis’ full blown emergence in KCMO by the Second World War.

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<sup>30</sup> Schirmer, 99.

<sup>31</sup> *Kansas City Call*, December 18, 1925.

<sup>32</sup> Schirmer., 96.

<sup>33</sup> *Kansas City Call*, March 2, 1923.



Desperate to find better housing than the increasing ghettoization occurring in the Eighth Ward, middle-class African Americans relied on black real estate agents to find housing elsewhere in the city. One of the city's best known and successful black realtors was Fortune J. Weaver.<sup>34</sup> Nicknamed "The Locator," Weaver was one of the earliest so-called "blockbusters" in Kansas City. Cultivating ties with white-owned realty firms, and white property owners, he knew how to convince them to rent or sell to African American customers. Weaver's formula was this: he would first announce "a willingness to pay cash for lots of twenty-five" and then, other real estate agents would encourage white flight by having a light-skinned black person called "the strawman" pretend to buy a house in an all-white neighborhood.<sup>35</sup> Unlike in subsequent decades, when the drive would be for integrated housing, civil rights activists in 1920s Kansas City did not lament white flight both because it gave blacks additional places to live and because racial hostility, discrimination, and oppression were so intense that attempting to integrate housing was not a priority. In fact, the editor of the *Call*, Chester A. Franklin, noted rather dismissively that "it is time wasted to try to prove to whites that they should not refuse to live neighbors to Negroes."<sup>36</sup> Such "busted" neighborhoods tended to re-segregate rapidly.

However, if only one black family purchased a home in a white neighborhood it was incredibly dangerous. White violence against black homes peaked between 1921 and 1928, with sometimes as many as seven bombings of homes in a single year.<sup>37</sup> 1923 was a particularly bad year for such clashes, as Chester A. Franklin complained of a lack of "unoccupied ground where

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. November 16, 1923, April 3, 1926, March 5, 1922, August 24, 1923.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> *Kansas City Call*, May 28, 1926.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., January 19, 1923, May 13, 1922, September 2, 1922, June 20, 1924, October 14, 1927.

Negroes can go and live without having to fight to do so.”<sup>38</sup> Vigilance committees and the formation of a Negro Protective and Improvement Association failed to stem the attacks, as did NAACP complaints to the police. As shall be seen later, the police force at this time was controlled by a very anti-black political faction of the Republican Party, so claims of “adequate protection” verbally by the department were undermined by practices of leaving the houses unguarded at “the right time” and failure to arrest any whites connected with the attacks.<sup>39</sup> If other blacks lived in the neighborhood of a threatened home, they would often sit with their threatened neighbors to watch over their home. All too rare was the case in 1927 when white residents of a similar neighborhood actually protected two black women from a white mob.<sup>40</sup>

Racial violence by whites over housing in KCMO had a definite class character in that it was usually middle-class. For example, in all of the cases of white violence against black homeowners and renters in the city, Schirmer identified the perpetrators as being solidly blue-collar in only one instance, the North End. Other whites involved in the fighting in the neighborhood came from a mixture of class backgrounds and ethnicities that were predominantly lower-middle-class.<sup>41</sup> This incident occurred in an apartment complex there known as the Garland in 1925.<sup>42</sup> The Garland had been built as part of a series of apartment complexes in the 1880s along Independence Avenue. The new owner in 1925 wanted to increase his occupancy rate by opening the apartments to black renters. The owner renamed the complex Lincoln Apartments and assigned a black owned real estate firm to handle rentals. He was forced to

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., January 19, 1923.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., September 9, 1927.

<sup>41</sup> Schirmer, 102-04.

<sup>42</sup> *Kansas City Journal*, August 11, 1925; *Kansas City Star*, August 11, 1925.

change his plans when an angry mob of white protestors gathered.<sup>43</sup> Along with the wide variation in labor local practices towards blacks, the outburst of violence at Garland demonstrates that there was no true interracial solidarity among KCMO's working-class in the 1920s; that it was atypical also serves to further underline the mostly middle-class nature of the city's white racism.

The other cases occurred on the eastern and western flanks of KCMO's black eastside, as crowding pressured black residents outward into older white suburbs.<sup>44</sup> There were seven different neighborhoods in the city that witnessed the most violence (typically bombings) between 1923 and 1927: 21st and Park, 25th and Montgall, 19th and Montgall, 20th and Park, 24th and Brooklyn, 25th and Tracy, and 20th and Montgall.<sup>45</sup> All of these neighborhoods were a mixture of class and ethnic backgrounds but they were dominated by the lower middle class. Amongst the heterogeneous population were German, Italian, and Jewish families and, often, each end of the class structure, with physicians side by side with blue-collar workers. Unlike other cases, residents here were not defending homes and streets they had known for many years; about sixty percent had arrived only three years before the first anti-black violence started. In other words, these neighborhoods already had high turnover rates even before African Americans tried to purchase homes in significant numbers. Unlike Chicago and Detroit, where housing shortages did much to inflame racial violence over housing, in KCMO the bombings actually followed one of the biggest housing booms in the city's history.<sup>46</sup> The motive for violence in KCMO wasn't competition over houses, but the skin color of residents and anxieties over

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Schirmer, 104.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 104-05.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 106.

property values. Unfortunately, the 1923-27 wave of attacks was neither the first nor the last example of white terror bombing in the city's history for the purposes of keeping certain neighborhoods white.

If white residents turned to terror bombings to keep blacks out of majority white neighborhoods, white city officials and private businessmen in real estate and housing construction firms used more subtle tactics to get the same results. Many other American cities used zoning laws before 1917 as a means to create racially segregated neighborhoods and urban spaces. US cities were forced to end such practices when the Supreme Court ruled racial zoning illegal in the *Buchanan v. Warley* case of 1917, striking down a Louisville zoning ordinance. In Kansas City's case, however, similar moves were made much later. In June 1923, KCMO's city council passed a zoning ordinance and began utilizing it specifically to separate land uses by race.<sup>47</sup> The city enacted this law despite the *Buchanan v. Warley* ruling. KCMO was able to escape accountability for this action largely because neither the ordinance nor its supporters mentioned race; it was justified under the rubric of beautifying the city.<sup>48</sup> Its zoning ordinance was in addition to private sector restrictive covenants, which replaced zoning elsewhere as a tool for urban race segregation. As mentioned earlier, private real estate firms and homeowners also turned to the whites-only restrictive covenants to keep African-Americans out of white neighborhoods. The Supreme Court would not strike these covenants down until after World War II, and by then they had been put in place "in almost every Kansas City suburb and newly developed residential area."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 38.

<sup>48</sup> Schirmer, 99n.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

The 1920s were an important decade in the development of the modern real estate industry. One key figure in the hardening of residential race segregation in KCMO who would be linked to the inscription of housing discrimination into the New Deal's federal housing policies was J.C. Nichols, already famous for the Plaza and the city beautiful movement locally.<sup>50</sup> Nichols was one of the first developers to promote the use of racial covenants and his J.C. Nichols Company was a major land developer and shopping center constructor as well as homebuilder.<sup>51</sup> Nichols' use of covenants not only shaped KCMO's model for residential race segregation, but was used as a model in other cities as well. Fatefully, he helped advise the Federal Housing Administration at its creation during the 1930s, bringing these biases into federal policy.<sup>52</sup> His influence went still deeper: as noted by sociologist Kevin Fox Gotham, "deed restrictions and restrictive covenants not only legitimized the idea of land-use control," but were also "the primary mechanism" in the creation of the modern subdivision.<sup>53</sup> The consequences of these developments would be a decades-long and even now frustratingly unresolved issue for the civil rights movement both in Greater Kansas City and nationally. By the 1920s, all major actors and segments of the US housing industry were convinced that neighborhood decay, poor housing, and lower property values were linked to either black or racially mixed occupancy of a given space.

Beginning in 1908 and continuing throughout this period, Nichols's company built dozens of whites-only upper- and middle-class housing with covenants that officially prohibited housing sales to African Americans. Nichols advertised his subdivisions as the "highest class" in

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 42.

Kansas City, appealing to white middle-class sentiments about place and status.<sup>54</sup> By the late 1930s, the Nichols Company owned more than four thousand tracts of land in the Kansas City area and was expanding its racially exclusive housing properties into Johnson County, Kansas.<sup>55</sup>

Another tactic to exclude blacks that Nichols pioneered was the organization of white homeowners into mandatory homeowners' associations.<sup>56</sup> The purpose in mind here was to create an incentive to enforce the racial covenants of the neighborhood, as neighborhoods in the process of turning over often ignored the covenants.<sup>57</sup> After World War II, home builders routinely made such homeowners association mandatory in their suburban housing planning.<sup>58</sup> Nichols justified housing discrimination from the 1910s onward by claiming that such practices established "harmonious surroundings" and a "feeling of security" by establishing the "character of the neighborhood."<sup>59</sup> Nichols even claimed that such exclusion of blacks and Jews created "a more interested citizenship and a more home-loving family."<sup>60</sup>

Influenced by the former, a second type of homeowner association that was voluntary began to appear in white middle-class neighborhoods to prevent racial turnover. These organizations spread rapidly throughout KCMO in the 1920s and were often led by real estate

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<sup>54</sup> Nichols advertisements in *Kansas City Star* issues: April 30, 1905; May 28, 1905; June 5, 1905; March 4, 1906; July 4, 1907.

<sup>55</sup> Gotham, 42.

<sup>56</sup> J.C. Nichols, "Restrictions and Homes Associations," *Planning For Permanence: The Speeches of J.C. Nichols*, found in the online edition of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection—Kansas City at UMKC. <http://www.umkc.edu/WHMCKC/publications/JCN/JCNspeeches.htm>.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Gotham, 43.

<sup>59</sup> Nichols, "Housing and the Real Estate Problem," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 51 (January 1914): 132-33.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

agents.<sup>61</sup> These associations attempted to buy property from recent black homeowners, bought property from landlords renting to blacks, and bought vacant homes in their neighborhoods. The organizations also lobbied city hall to pass racially discriminatory land-use policies and to close streets where African Americans lived to through traffic. In some cases, they made Jim Crow in public places worse by threatening to boycott white businesses that had any black clients.<sup>62</sup>

Among the most well-known of these homeowners' associations were the Linwood Improvement Association (founded in 1923), the Greenwood Improvement Association (founded in 1923), the Southeast Home and Protective Association (founded in 1923), the Home Owners' Mutual Benefit Association (founded in 1926), the East Side Improvement Association (founded in 1926), and the Southeast Improvement Association (founded in 1926).<sup>63</sup> These organizations would help mount defenses of KCMO's Jim Crow segregation well into the 1940s.<sup>64</sup>

Nor were these organizations above invoking the threat of vigilante white terror as a deterrent to blacks who would move into "their" neighborhoods. Between 1910 and 1932, letters, signs, and posters appeared in several Kansas City neighborhoods that threatened violence or death.<sup>65</sup> In 1927, letters were circulated around neighborhoods and to the *Kansas City Call* that

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<sup>61</sup> Gotham., 43-44.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> "Improvement Association Moves to Restrict Against Colored Owners," *Kansas City Call*, December 24, 1926; "Hit Restrictions With Facts," *Kansas City Star*, June 25, 1926.

<sup>64</sup> "Neighborhood Changes Knock Covenants Out," *Kansas City Call*, November 4, 1927; "Fraud Used to Restrict Property From Negroes," *Kansas City Call*, March 25, 1932; "White Property Owners in Court Over 15-Year Restriction Agreement," *Kansas City Call*, December 2, 1932; "Carl L. Johnson Ordered to Move from 2602 Tracy," *Kansas City Call*, March 11, 1938; "To Appeal Housing Decision: Says Decision will not Go Unchallenged., NAACP Official Sees Decision as 'Ridiculous,'" *Kansas City Call*, December 23, 1949; "Delay in Home Suit: Attorney to Prepare Suit in Negro Property Case," *Kansas City Star*, June 14, 1948; "Sues Over Home Sale," *Kansas City Times*, December 31, 1949.

<sup>65</sup> Martin, 34; "Negroes Must Not Come Up Here Edict," *Kansas City Call*, June 4, 1926; "Threat By Linwood Mob," *Kansas City Call*, June 18, 1926.

stated that “Niggers have no business in this neighborhood.”<sup>66</sup> The following year, posters began appearing on trees in some neighborhoods that said “Danger! Colored people are hereby notified that they will not be allowed to live on this block. This block is white and going to stay white at any cost.”<sup>67</sup> The toll of the solidifying of residential apartheid in the 1920s and 1930s was apparent by 1940, as black neighborhoods rose to racial isolation rates of eighty-eight percent, an almost complete reversal of the degree of residential mixing in the late nineteenth century.<sup>68</sup>

Building on the mighty legacies of Grisham, Coles, Yates, Jones, Becks, Smith, Bradley, Johnson, and Crews were a group of African American middle-class intellectuals and activists who called themselves “race men” and “race women”; they were determined to resist the deepening racial oppression and segregation in the 1920s and push for basic civil rights.<sup>69</sup> A smaller, more politically active portion of the black professional class, educator J. Silas Harris described them as “distinguished leaders of the race.”<sup>70</sup> In contrast to the black working-class, the major occupations of which were meatpacking, janitorial and domestic work, and railcar porters, the dominant occupation for the black professional classes was that of clergyman.<sup>71</sup> The city’s form of Jim Crow, however, would humiliate blacks of all backgrounds and the housing discrimination directly excluded middle-class blacks.

Among the best known “race men” and “race women” were Willa Glenn, Chester A. Franklin, editor of the *Kansas City Call*, and future NAACP leader Roy Wilkins. Nelson Crews,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 1927.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., October 26, 1928.

<sup>68</sup> Gotham, 46.

<sup>69</sup> *Kansas City Call*, November 1, 1919.

<sup>70</sup> *Kansas City Sun*, July 5, 1919.

<sup>71</sup> Coulter, 87.



as noted previously, had edited the *Sun* throughout the 1910s as a robust voice for black Republicanism in the city. By 1921, however, his health began to decline. Willa Glenn was a graduate of Western University and had joined the *Sun* in 1910. She had taken over the *Sun* between 1921 and 1923 and had contributed editorials for Crews in the spirit of “The New Negro” before Crews’ illness.<sup>72</sup> She was a firm believer in uplift and “advancement of the race.” Glenn pulled no punches in her fiery writing; in 1921, she castigated police brutality with the cutting remark that “the order ‘SHOOT TO KILL’ is fine, just right, just the thing, PROVIDED the man you shoot is a Negro.”<sup>73</sup> Another column the previous year, at the very height of white supremacist thinking and Klan revival in the US, asserted that “a nigger-hater is not only an enemy to Democracy but a curse to himself.”<sup>74</sup> Nelson Crews passed away on April 24, 1923.<sup>75</sup> After Crews’ death, Watkins, Fred Dabney, Samuel Hopkins, Reuben Street, L. Amasa Knox, and the Reverends D.A. Holmes and James Wesley Hurse bought the *Sun* and tried to save it, but the paper folded in 1925.

Into the void left by Crews’ death and the collapse of the *Sun* stepped Chester Arthur Franklin, founder of the *Kansas City Call*.<sup>76</sup> As previously noted, Franklin was already a force for civil rights in the city through his work in the NAACP. Franklin was born on June 7, 1880 in Denison, Texas. In 1887, his parents had been part of the waves of southern black migration to Kansas; the Texas couple’s original goal had been Nicodemus in northwestern Kansas. On the way, they changed their mind and young Chester Franklin grew up in Omaha. In 1913, Franklin

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<sup>72</sup> Coulter, 105-06.

<sup>73</sup> *Kansas City Sun*, May 14, 1921, with emphasis in original article.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, July 3, 1920.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, May 5, 1923.

<sup>76</sup> Coulter, 107.

came to Kansas City with the intent of starting a newspaper. Due to the outbreak of World War I, his dream was delayed by a couple of years, but he nonetheless opened a printing press. On May 6, 1919, Franklin published the first issue of the *Kansas City Call*.<sup>77</sup>

Like Crews, Franklin pushed for a proud black Republicanism, but was also adamant about “the growing race consciousness of Negroes” which race men were obligated to encourage in “resistance that is taking them upwards with leaps and bounds.”<sup>78</sup> Franklin’s ideal “race man” and “race woman” were defined by several qualities. These included deeds; knowledge of black history and culture; proud self-identification as “Negroes;” no toleration of racial insult or slight; and an unspoken or spoken vow to “advance the race” by both example and direct activism.<sup>79</sup> Black Kansas Citians who fell short of this set of standards met the contempt of race men and women.

Franklin remained both a Republican and a conservative on economic matters, but often found himself tempted to vote for Roosevelt and Truman near the end of his life due to his frustrations with the Republicans’ record on civil rights.<sup>80</sup> Even during the height of the Depression in 1930, Franklin preached free-market capitalism and self-help, bemoaning working-class and poor blacks who “bemoan their lack of employment but refuse to grasp evident opportunity.”<sup>81</sup> However, Franklin did not adhere to pure rugged individualism, stating in an address to the 1937 Urban League that “the problem of the unemployed mass of Negroes is equally the problem of employed Negroes who produce, and it is for all to carry the struggle

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> *Kansas City Call*, November 1, 1919.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Coulter, 99.

<sup>81</sup> *Kansas City Call*, September 19, 1930.

together.”<sup>82</sup>

The meteoric rise of Roy Wilkins to leading activist in Kansas City had a great assist with Franklin’s decision to hire Wilkins, a recent journalism graduate from the University of Minnesota, as a reporter for the *Call*.<sup>83</sup> Wilkins’ influence was felt in that he steered Franklin towards relenting on some of the sensationalism in the paper that emphasized scandals and murders in favor of more political news.<sup>84</sup> Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Franklin and Wilkins—through the *Call*—advanced the interests and needs of the Kansas City African American community like no others. For example, Franklin and the paper forced the local court system to end the slave state-era practice of refusing to allow blacks to serve on juries.<sup>85</sup> As noted earlier, the paper and Franklin bitterly condemned the housing discrimination of Nichols and the neighborhood associations, insisting on the right of black men and women to live wherever they could afford the housing. In 1930, Wilkins organized a boycott of a local bakery that refused to hire black drivers; since much of its customer base was black, the bakery relented after two weeks.

Boycotts and protests against discrimination spread in the 1920s, inspired by Franklin and others. In 1922, protests forced the city to cancel a watermelon eating contest scheduled for black children as part of the mayor’s picnic.<sup>86</sup> The same year, The City Federation of Clubs, a combination of black women’s clubs, succeeded in boycotting a segregated showing of a movie at a local theater, pressured a furniture store to extend credit to black customers, and convinced a

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<sup>82</sup> “Minutes: Annual Meeting, February 11, 1937,” KCULP, Box M-1, Vol.2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>83</sup> Coulter, 111.

<sup>84</sup> Wilkins, 58.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>86</sup> *Kansas City Call*, July 15, 1922.

local merchant to stop marketing his candy as “nigger toe brittle.”<sup>87</sup> However, other protests at the time failed due to white owners’ claims that the bigotry was on the part of white patrons, or by denying segregation was their intent. Examples included Swope Park’s unofficial “whites only” policy and the VFW’s 1928 decision to ban black women from selling poppies on Armistice Day. In the case of Swope Park, in 1927, park attendants ordered a group of black Camp Fire Girls to leave a shelterhouse where they were having a picnic.<sup>88</sup> When the girls’ leaders refused to budge until the park confirmed the shelter was for whites only, the attendants threatened them. Activists, including one of the fathers of the girls, attempted to take legal action but the park board denied having ever given any orders to remove the girls.<sup>89</sup> As for the VFW case, the veterans’ organization used a similar tactic, making the excuse that white women would object if they had to attend sales meetings with black women.<sup>90</sup>

Crowded into isolated black neighborhoods, shut out by many labor unions, discriminated against by many private business owners, and oppressed by the police, the black working-class had to endure every single racial slight experienced by the black middle-class in addition to lacking the financial resources to move or organize against their oppression. African American middle-class civil rights activists’ “uplift” programs helped somewhat but often were hobbled by middle-class conservatism and distance from the plight of the working-class. Franklin, for his part, was a rare case in that he welcomed the activism of radicals such as Marcus Garvey and A. Philip Randolph and also embraced Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolent civil

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., February 18, 1922.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., July 29, 1927.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., August 12, 1927.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., May 25, 1928.

disobedience by 1931.<sup>91</sup> Given Franklin's previously noted economic conservatism, this may seem odd, but Franklin's admiration for both men as living up to the "race men" ideal probably overrode any distaste for separatism and socialism, respectively.

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If the strikes of the 1900s and 1910s had shown that working-class blacks had agency independent of black middle-class activists and reformers or the very few whites sympathetic to them, African American workers' political agency became almost synonymous with the Pullman railcar porter in the 1920s and 1930s. The railcar porters rose to great prominence in the years between World War I and World War II in both in KCMO and nationwide, led by the pioneering African American labor leader and Socialist, A. Philip Randolph. Their breakthrough was especially critical in a local climate in which most railroad brotherhoods were whites-only.<sup>92</sup> As a vehicle for black working-class agency, they had no equivalent until decades later, when Freedom Incorporated ran black political candidates for office in 1962 and later still with the appearance of the local version of the Panther Party.<sup>93</sup> All of the other dominant civil rights and black organizations were middle- or upper-class in orientation, in contrast to the Brotherhood.

Kansas City was one of the first areas organized after the formation of the Brotherhood of Sleepingcar Porters Union in 1925.<sup>94</sup> Randolph and the Brotherhood of Porters would seek to overturn the discriminatory practices of the AFL and union locals both in KCMO and nationally

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<sup>91</sup> Schirmer, 177; *Kansas City Call*, February 13, 1931, January 22, 1932, March 20, 1931.

<sup>92</sup> *Negro Worker*, p.10, KCULP, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>93</sup> Arthur Bronson, Jr., "An Oral Interview, Arthur Bronson," October 7, 1976, Kansas City Public Library; Black Archives of Mid-America, Inc., SC69-2, Tape 8, CD 8, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL. Bronson stressed how the NAACP and Urban League failed to represent the city's black working-class.

<sup>94</sup> Jervis Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 153, 168-69.

in the decades to come. The AFL granting the union a charter was itself a significant crack in the old Gompers-era racial discrimination. Even before Randolph's formation of an African American labor union organizing the porters, they held a much higher status in the black community than did packinghouse workers in spite of the paradox that the Pullman company made playing to white racial stereotypes of blacks part of the porters' jobs.<sup>95</sup> Their status in fact was so exceptional among black workers that they were said to constitute "an aristocracy of black labor."<sup>96</sup> After 1925 Randolph used the Brotherhood as a springboard for black unionization and civil rights, but in addition, the ranks of the porters nationally would generate much of the future civil rights and black intellectual leadership to come: Claude McKay of the Harlem Renaissance, Roy Wilkins, and Malcolm X were just a few of these figures.<sup>97</sup>

The ascendancy of the Pullman porter between 1880 and 1925 was rooted in changes in transportation in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>98</sup> Early in the railroads' history, from before the Civil War until the 1870s, very few trains had sleeping or eating arrangements. As a result, passengers had to inconveniently race off the car and grab a quick meal at a stop or wait for vendors to board the train to buy food from them. George Pullman's dining and sleeping cars changed all of that by the 1880s; by the turn of the century, the cars, staffed with African American porters and waiters, were a "fixture in the railroad industry."<sup>99</sup> Pullman porters' work could be divided into several categories: the busboy, café food service attendant, sleeping-car porter, and the private-car

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<sup>95</sup> Larry Tye, *Rising From the Rails: Pullman Porters and the Making of the Black Middle Class* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2004), 26, 93-96.

<sup>96</sup> Beth Tompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-45* (Raleigh, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 20, 23-25.

<sup>97</sup> Tye, 186-87, 190-91, 222-24

<sup>98</sup> Coulter, 69-70.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

porter.<sup>100</sup> Kansas City claimed four hundred and sixty-five porters by 1920 , and almost nine out of ten were African American.<sup>101</sup>

Building on the already significant presence of the porters in KCMO, Randolph succeeded in enrolling three hundred and one out of three hundred and eighty-six porters in the Greater Kansas City area by 1927.<sup>102</sup> Throughout the remainder of the twenties and into the thirties, Randolph visited the city to speak and organize, including an appearance at the first Labor Conference in Kansas City in 1928. The Pullman Company aimed to crush the Brotherhood locals in KCMO in their infancy since Kansas City was too important as a rail hub to allow unionism to get a foothold ; the company favored only company unions.<sup>103</sup> After the company withdrew from negotiations at a federal mediation board in 1928, tensions rose to the point where Randolph's assistant general organizer, Ashley L. Totten, hid weapons in his office to repel strikebreakers.<sup>104</sup> The following year, Totten was beaten severely with a club on a street outside of his headquarters in the Lincoln building.<sup>105</sup> Randolph reassigned Totten to New York as national secretary treasurer afterwards, given how terrible his injuries were.<sup>106</sup> A subsequent trial of the assailants failed to prove that the Pullman Company had ordered the attack, but a witness swore they were both promised police protection if they attacked Totten.<sup>107</sup> One of the

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<sup>100</sup> Eric Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle For Equality* (Boston MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 24-26.

<sup>101</sup> US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census*, Table 2.

<sup>102</sup> Anderson, 168-69.

<sup>103</sup> *Kansas City Call*, June 7, 1929.

<sup>104</sup> Anderson, 196-206.

<sup>105</sup> *Kansas City Call*, April 19, 1929

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, July 19, 1929.

attackers was identified as a cook for Ellis Burton, a major KCMO crime boss.<sup>108</sup>

Totten was lucky in that he escaped death, and he was not the only one targeted. Anyone who advocated an independent union was attacked. J.H. Williams, a porter active in union organizing from Kansas City, was either taken or lured away from his coach in April 1930 and murdered.<sup>109</sup> The killer or killers dumped his body several yards away from the tracks in Locust Grove, Oklahoma.<sup>110</sup> Williams' murderer was never found, despite investigations by the company, the railroad, and later the union itself working with local attorney and Socialist labor activist Frank P. Walsh.<sup>111</sup> It was for this very reason that it was dangerous for Randolph to come to KCMO and consequently, he had to be hidden among friends whenever he was in the city. Whatever local politicians' opinion was of Randolph, it was clear that the city did nothing to protect him or his allies from the Pullman Company and its hired muscle. It would take until 1934 before Congress included sleeping-car porters in an amendment to the Railway Labor Act that banned company unions. By 1935, the *Kansas City Call* reported an end to the ten-year battle between the union and the Pullman company, noting that Pullman porters voted overwhelmingly to join the Brotherhood union.<sup>112</sup>

Not all working-class blacks turned to the labor and social-democratic left in KCMO, however. Many turned instead to Black Nationalism. In fact, before Randolph began organizing the porters into the Brotherhood, it was Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., June 7, 1929.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., May 16, 1930.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> *Kansas City Call*, July 5, 1935.



Association that was the largest black working-class political force in the city.<sup>113</sup> Despite its mostly working class membership, the UNIA attracted some prominent supporters from among the professional classes as well.<sup>114</sup> Eschewing both leftism and mainstream black Republican politics, Garvey preached black self-help economically, Black Nationalism, anti-colonialism, and pan-Africanism. By the early 1920s, the KCMO branch of the UNIA had grown to about three hundred members.<sup>115</sup> Although the arrest and conviction of Garvey in 1925 greatly weakened the movement, it survived as a local political force into the 1930s and was larger than the Communist Party ever was in KCMO.<sup>116</sup> Among Black Nationalist groups, an even smaller organization was known as “The Red Fez” or the “red caps,” which consisted of followers of Mohammed Bey in both KCMO and KCK.<sup>117</sup> This group followed a vaguely Islamic and race-conscious religion and was estimated to have fifty followers in 1936.<sup>118</sup> If Franklin had respect for Garvey, he certainly didn’t for Bey, blasting the “red caps” as a “cult” in the pages of the *Call*.<sup>119</sup>

Beyond railcar porters, the railroads were also critical in offering employment to blacks outside of the porter profession; many worked in the rail yards and along rail lines. More than two thousand five hundred men from KCMO were employed by the railroads as laborers; almost a quarter of those laborers were African-American.<sup>120</sup> During the First World War, in fact, the

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<sup>113</sup> Coulter, 160.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> *Kansas City Call*, March 11, 1922, July 15, 1922.

<sup>116</sup> Coulter, 160-61

<sup>117</sup> *Kansas City Call*, October 6, 1936.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Arnesen, 46.

railroads had even offered employment to black women. Many of these women were hired by the Santa Fe as roundhouse laborers and others occupied unskilled laboring jobs in the railyards.<sup>121</sup>

Finally, another significant portion of the African-American working-class made their livings as janitors or domestic workers. In fact, more than half of the black male population of the city was employed as janitors according to the 1920 census.<sup>122</sup> One of the lowest paying jobs, working as a janitor or a domestic could be as dirty as meatpacking or as demeaning as the stereotypical behavior porters were expected to exhibit in order to “entertain” or “comfort” white Pullman passengers.<sup>123</sup> For some African-American men, however, the job provided both wages and a room in the apartment buildings in which they worked and did so in an environment where both were hard to come by for the black working-class.<sup>124</sup> As with the Urban League study, census data at the time often ignored female workers, so while the data doesn’t show it, it is clear that occasionally wives or single women worked as janitors as well.<sup>125</sup> The immediate effect of the Great Depression on the black working-class was to dramatically increase the number of male janitors by as much as fifty percent.<sup>126</sup> Faced with this situation, the Urban League commissioned a janitor training program in 1932 with help for the unemployed in mind.<sup>127</sup>

Beyond some white workers in some of the union locals, the black working-class and activists for African American civil rights more generally had very few white allies in the early

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> US Department of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census of the Population* (Washington DC, 1921)

<sup>123</sup> Coulter, 74.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> “More Skilled Workers,” undated item found in “Scrapbook,” KCULP, Box 3, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

twentieth century, even among the self-styled “enlightened liberals” or further left, in the Socialist Party. This very fact was what made Randolph’s Brotherhood so important and revolutionary: a labor and socialist left gaining strength within the African American community and controlled by its own working-class. Such a black-directed organization was preferable to an outside ally tied to white society. As African Americans had learned from whites in the labor movement, whites allies who were allegedly left of center or reformist were, at best, unpredictable when it came to race in the early twentieth century.

White progressives/liberals and democratic-socialists aligned with the NAACP and the Urban League had the best records; so-called “clean government” reformers were often vicious racists in the Kansas City of the 1910s and 1920s.<sup>128</sup> As for The Socialist Party of America, its leader, Eugene V. Debs, took very courageous and bold stances in refusing to speak in segregated venues and understood better than most whites of his day that racism was both morally wrong and a factor ensuring capitalist victories over unions and socialists.<sup>129</sup> In doing so, he had overcome much of his own earlier racial prejudices, ones that ran deep in his native Indiana.<sup>130</sup> Unfortunately, this was not true of everyone in the Socialist Party and both in Kansas City and nationally, the 1910s era party harbored some very racist members.<sup>131</sup>

Nationally, Victor L. Berger of Milwaukee represented a wing of the Socialist Party that was unapologetically white supremacist and virulently anti-black and anti-Chinese.<sup>132</sup> The writer Jack London was also notorious for spouting race hatred and pseudoscientific racism against

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<sup>128</sup> Schirmer., 131.

<sup>129</sup> Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 227.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

Asians and blacks as often as he advocated socialism. In Kansas City, sadly, one of the city's most celebrated Socialists, "Red Kate" O'Hare, harbored deeply racist views, despite denouncing poll taxes and "oppressive segregated housing ordinances" and lending her support to local black struggles in St. Louis.<sup>133</sup>

Kate O'Hare had been born in Ottawa County Kansas, near Minneapolis, Kansas, in 1876 but had grown up in Kansas City between 1887 and 1901.<sup>134</sup> She did most of her subsequent political and organizational campaigning in Oklahoma, rural Kansas, rural Missouri, and St. Louis. She exposed her own personal bigotry in her campaigns to popularize the party in the border states and the South by repeating the Dunning school myths of Reconstruction as "Negro domination" and by referring to African Americans as "niggers" and "darkies," and O'Hare made it clear that she considered blacks as "lazy, shiftless, and mentally inferior."<sup>135</sup> One of her most infamous racist writings was a 1912 pamphlet called "Nigger Equality" which disavowed Democratic claims that Socialists were for "social equality" between the races and advocated a racially separate Cooperative Commonwealth for blacks that would be established in land that would be severed off from the rest of the United States.<sup>136</sup> W.E.B. DuBois could have just as easily been talking about O'Hare herself when he gave a withering address to the Ninth Annual Convention of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society in 1917 by stating of the white socialists:

Ten indeterminate half-truths will sum up your whole knowledge of the Negro problem and the knowledge which you are unwilling to have disturbed. For instance, (1) the Negro is lazy; (2) the Negro is unhealthy and is dying out; (3) the Negro is inferior in mind and

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<sup>133</sup> Neil K. Basen, "Kate Richards O'Hare: The 'First Lady' of American Socialism, 1901-1917" *Labor History* 21:2 (Spring 1980), 191, as found in Vertical File: Kate Richards O'Hare, KCPL, MO Valley Special Collections.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-72, 188.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

body; (4) the Negro misused the ballot and the ballot was rightfully taken from him; (5) the Negro is lynched for rape; (6) the Negro is abnormally criminal; (7) the Negro's one ambition is to marry your sister; (8) efforts to educate Negroes beyond a certain point are a failure; (9) the South is the best friend of the Negro; [and] (10) the Negro problem is insoluble.<sup>137</sup>

O'Hare also laced her advocacy of women's suffrage with attacks on black male voters as undeserving of voting rights.<sup>138</sup> Incidentally, beyond suffrage, O'Hare's thinking was not especially feminist compared to contemporaries such as Elizabeth C. Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Alice Paul, Emma Goldman, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mary Church Terrell, or Frances Willard.<sup>139</sup> Rather conventionally, she believed that socialism was the path to saving the home and motherhood (and presumably, woman's traditional role) from capitalism.<sup>140</sup> O'Hare's nickname of "Red" was given her by the press after she was arrested for opposing the draft during World War I, just as Debs had been.<sup>141</sup> She was indicted for violating the Sedition Act in Devil's Lake, North Dakota, on July 1917, and was sentenced to five years in prison in August, serving four months in Jefferson City's Missouri State Penitentiary beginning in April 1919.<sup>142</sup> The nickname is incredibly ironic given not only her racist record, but the fact that she sided with more conservative and centrist elements in the Party in most disputes; she opposed, for example, the IWW.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, "The Problem of Problems: Address to the Ninth Annual Intercollegiate Socialist Society," December 27, 1917, in [edited by Foner, Philip S. and DuBois, Shirley Graham] *W.E.B. DuBois Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder, 1970), 239; also cited in Van W. Hutchison, *The Evolution of An African-American Intellectual: Race, Modernity, Liberalism, Republicanism, and 'The Talented Tenth' as Reflected in W.E.B. DuBois's Writings, 1903-21* (M.A. Thesis, Indiana State University, 2001), 47.

<sup>138</sup> Basen, 193. VF: Kate O'Hare, MO Valley Spec. Collections, KCPL.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 193-94.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 177, 182.

Frank P. Walsh, another prominent socialist from Kansas City, had a mixed record on civil rights for African Americans. As has been seen, his partisan ties to the Democratic Party meant that he was not above race-baiting in local political campaigns against Republicans, as in 1906.<sup>144</sup> On the other hand, as noted in the cases of the beating of Totten and the murder of Williams, Walsh was an indispensable ally of Randolph and the Brotherhood in attempting to bring Pullman company thugs to justice for their attacks on porters active in the Brotherhood union. Going by these examples, his record was certainly better than O'Hare's or Berger's, but he was not as strongly anti-racist as Debs himself or socialists in the NAACP such as Mary White Ovington.

The major Socialist paper of KCK from 1904-07, *The Line-Up*, most closely aligned itself with Debs' attitudes towards African Americans out of all of the major local white voices for the Socialist Party. The paper, for example, expressed pleasure when the first black Socialist, M.R. Smith, was elected to office in KCK as Park Commissioner.<sup>145</sup> Smith's story was fascinating. He had been born to escaped slaves from Missouri in 1861 or 62, had been raised in Warsaw, Illinois, and in 1896 became a Socialist in a very unlikely place indeed: Springfield, Missouri.<sup>146</sup> He moved to KCK in 1899 and became an active Party member in KCK by 1902.<sup>147</sup> As friendly as its coverage was, the paper, like Debs himself, fell short of offering any strategy to combat Jim Crow or segregation independent of class struggle.

In contrast to the Socialists of the 1910s, the Communist Party USA in the 1930s would

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<sup>144</sup> *Kansas City Post*, April 2, 1906.

<sup>145</sup> "Nothing But Madagascar Excepted: The Only Negro Socialist Ever Elected," *Line-Up*, May 5, 1905, KS State Archives.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

prove to be a much more consistent and solid ally of black freedom both in Kansas City and nationally.<sup>148</sup> In Kansas City, however, the party was not nearly as successful as elsewhere and as we have already seen, Garveyites outnumbered Communists among the city's black population even in the 1930s. The Communists did not come close in Kansas City or the region around it to the levels of popularity achieved by the Socialists two decades earlier. Nevertheless, unemployed blacks made up the majority of marchers in a Communist demonstration against unemployment in the city in 1931 and the party's failures locally were not from lack of trying.<sup>149</sup> The most prominent black Communist in KCMO was a man named Abner Perry. Perry was arrested and fined in 1933 for "vagrancy," though many suspected the real reason was both his politics and the fact that police caught him talking to a white female Communist.<sup>150</sup> In a weird twist of fate, KCMO would have a strain of Marxist-Leninist thought briefly capture young black activists' allegiance in KCMO in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the form of the Panther Party under Pete O'Neal.<sup>151</sup> Unlike Self's study of Oakland, where the national Panther Party had local Communist antecedents among the Longshoreman's and other unions, KCMO's sixties black radicalism was missing a strong predecessor that combined labor radicalism with anti-racist activism.<sup>152</sup> Anti-racist activism in KCMO would come either filtered through the CIO or from non-Communist radical sources, such as religious dissidents and Randolph's Brotherhood.

The newest labor organization of the 1930s, the Congress of Industrial Organizations,

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<sup>148</sup> Schirmer, 174; for an example of the party's fearless antiracist work in the heart of the Jim Crow South, see Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

<sup>149</sup> *Kansas City Call*, March 6, 1931.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, February 3, 1933.

<sup>151</sup> Arthur Bronson Oral Interview, October 1976, KCPL, Black Archives of Mid-America, Inc.

<sup>152</sup> Self, 63-69, 302

was far more open to black workers than the AFL had ever been, and both Communists and leftists of other stripes influenced the new union's militancy and openness to working-class men of all backgrounds. Nationally, the CIO would open unions up to black workers in unprecedented ways in a manner similar to Randolph—who was aligned with the AFL—and would pressure the Democratic Party to shift to the left in the 1930s. In Kansas City, the CIO had more of an impact than the Communist Party USA did, but the nascent labor organization had limited success in organizing black workers in the city and did better in some areas of the city's industrial workforce than others.

For example, the CIO was very thorough in organizing the packinghouse workers, but in other sectors, such as steel, clothing, and retail, very few black workers were organized.<sup>153</sup> In steel, one hundred and forty black workers at four plants joined the CIO, but the remaining six steel plants had no African American workers at all.<sup>154</sup> The Amalgamated Clothing Workers had about thirty to thirty-five members, while the three locals of the United Retail and Wholesale Employees Union had only six black members, all of whom were employed by Montgomery Ward.<sup>155</sup>

As for the packinghouses, on the other hand, the CIO successes in organizing there were such that more than a quarter of CIO members in the meatpacking industry were African-American. In fact, one of the greatest union victories in 1930s Kansas City was a September 1938 sit-down strike by the United Packing House Workers of America at the local Armour

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<sup>153</sup> *Negro Worker*, 20-21, KCULP, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*



plant.<sup>156</sup> The strike was sparked by the Armour company decision to dock the pay of six workers for the time they spent before the plant's grievance committee. Subsequently, eighteen hundred workers walked off the job in protest, half of whom were African American.<sup>157</sup> Wildcat solidarity strike actions by black workers also were critical in achieving local victories. An example of such an action was the walkout of busboys and dishwashers, which devastated a Fred Harvey restaurant until management rehired a busboy viewed as unjustly fired.<sup>158</sup>

Outside of the Left, white allies were if anything even rarer, especially as KCMO's Republican Party by the 1920s had adopted much of the city's white middle-class racism.<sup>159</sup> The party's betrayal of African-Americans locally was actually worse than the national party's abandonment of civil rights between 1890 and 1925 when one examines the local record. Here, the two cities diverge: KCK's Republican mayors remained responsive and popular with black voters there into the 1940s. In contrast, in KCMO, just as Democratic campaigns in 1906 and 1908 had taken on ugly racial tones, Republican racism in the 1920s was a byproduct of intraparty factional warfare between party regulars and "anti-boss" reformers. Just as in the case of the anti-machine Democrats, the Republican "reformers" were openly hostile to black people.<sup>160</sup> The party regulars, or "boss Republicans," had as recently as 1918 run a black candidate for alderman for the Eighth Ward, William C. Hueston.<sup>161</sup>

But in 1920, the "reform" faction ousted black Republican activist Thomas Marks from

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<sup>156</sup> *Kansas City Call*, September 6, 1938.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* June 18, 1937.

<sup>159</sup> Schirmer, 153-56.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Larry Grothaus, "Kansas City Blacks, Truman, and the Pendergast Machine" *Missouri Historical Review* 69:1 (October 1974), p.68-70, found in Kansas City Public Library, MO Valley Special Collections

party councils and captured control of the party by 1922.<sup>162</sup> A group of African American activists also fed up with the corruption of the regulars simultaneously ran an independent candidate in 1922, only to see him defeated.<sup>163</sup> After the defeat of their independent candidate, this group initially backed the “anti-boss” Republicans, who also pledged to crack down on bootleggers, gamblers, and prostitutes. A drive against urban vice was something on which the black middle-class could concur with the white middle-class. However, this newly dominant Republican faction almost immediately revealed its bigotry and hostility to the city’s black community by injecting race-baiting into its antivice campaign invoking “crap-shooting Negroes who should either get jobs or get out of town.”<sup>164</sup> Worse, the reformers cost blacks representation in the local party, and refused to nominate an African American candidate for alderman to the shock and outrage of black Republicans throughout the city. Former 1918 alderman candidate Hueston angrily blasted the reformers as an elite faction of silk-stocking suburbanites that conspired to “keep blacks off the Republican ticket.”<sup>165</sup> Nelson Crews also condemned Matthew Foster, the nominee, as a racist.<sup>166</sup> As if to confirm these charges, it soon leaked out that a Republican committeeman aligned with the reform forces had as early as 1920 declared that “we want no nigger votes for the anti-boss ticket.”<sup>167</sup>

Racial insensitivity and open contempt for blacks by white upper-class Republicans continued throughout the decade, alienating the city’s African-American community further from

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>163</sup> *Kansas City Call*, June 15, 1922.

<sup>164</sup> Grothaus, 69.

<sup>165</sup> *Kansas City Call*, January 14, 1922.

<sup>166</sup> Grothaus,, 69.

<sup>167</sup> *Missouri Mule*, March 27, 1920.

their historical political ties to the Republican Party. In 1924, Republicans decided to delay the opening of the newly built Jackson House for Negro Boys.<sup>168</sup> Democrats immediately publicized this slight against the community. Republicans looked all the worse by being quoted as reasoning that because “the faucets and tile floors were too plush for black delinquents,” the building should be converted to house extra white elderly from an old folks’ home.<sup>169</sup> The self-inflicted wounds continued: the Kansas City Republican Party segregated its seating by race in 1926 and then barred black delegates from the city’s hotels for the first time in history in 1928.<sup>170</sup> Instead, the party’s leadership arranged to house the party’s African Americans in private homes and in a YMCA in the ghetto.<sup>171</sup> The proverbial final straw politically was a Republican rally in 1930 in which a speaker openly used the word “nigger” in a speech.<sup>172</sup> Besides these gaffes and acts of overt discrimination, the behavior of the Republican governor’s appointed police force as well as the party’s reaction to the KKK, detailed below, had made the 1930 speech the final factor in moving the city’s black population unambiguously towards the Democratic Party. The election totals showed it: in 1922, Republicans had carried the black precincts by margins as high as three to one; by 1930, those same precincts went Democratic by majorities from fifty-two to sixty percent.<sup>173</sup>

This open Republican hostility to African Americans was spurred in part by the rise of the Second Ku Klux Klan in both Missouri and Kansas in the 1920s. Locally, the Second Klan’s

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<sup>168</sup> *Kansas City Call*, March 14, 1924.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Kansas City Call*, April 6, 1928.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, June 13, 1930.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, April 8, 1922; March 28, 1930.

national zenith served to further tie the Republican Party on both sides of the state line to race-baiting, and Jim Crow, fatally damaging the party's ties to African-Americans in KCMO especially.<sup>174</sup> The Klan entered western Missouri and eastern Kansas politics in 1922. Two years later, both states had one hundred thousand Klan members, five thousand of whom were concentrated around KCK and KCMO.<sup>175</sup> In both states, a large percentage of Klansmen were from the white "respectable classes" of professionals and the organization in both states claimed to stand for patriotism, Americanism, and morality. In the region, the Klan directed most of its animosity against Catholics and immigrants; neither state saw much Klan terror against blacks.<sup>176</sup> However, African-American voters were understandably nervous when the Klan entered Missouri politics, knowing all too well the original Klan's legacy of terror and murder on behalf of racist white Democrats in the Deep South as well as its contemporary commitment to disfranchising blacks.<sup>177</sup> The Klan's claims that it had nothing against blacks "who stayed in their place" did nothing to reassure the city's black community, for obvious reasons.

Although the effect of the KKK in rural Missouri divided the Democratic Party, in Kansas City, the Klan eventually aligned itself exclusively with Republicans to target the Irish Catholic bosses Tom Pendergast and Joseph Shannon for defeat after the party had failed to do so through its anti-boss "Rabbit" faction.<sup>178</sup> Whatever leverage the Klan had gotten in rural Democratic circles in Missouri was damaged when it targeted a fellow racist for defeat in a Senate race because he was a "wet" Democrat against Prohibition; by 1924, the Democratic

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<sup>174</sup> Schirmer, 157; Grothaus, 75.

<sup>175</sup> Schirmer, 157.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Grothaus, 71; *Kansas City Call*, April 1, 1922.

<sup>178</sup> Reddig, 95-96.

Party of Missouri denounced the KKK.<sup>179</sup> While their gubernatorial candidate could not convince voters he had never been in the Klan and the Republican candidate for governor in Missouri explicitly rejected Klan support, locally the Democrats condemned the KKK while the Republicans actually elected a Kansas City mayor who was openly supported by the KKK.<sup>180</sup>

If the Klan's entry into Missouri politics damaged the Missouri Republican Party, the links between the KKK and Republicans on the Kansas side of the border reinforced the damage done, and unlike in Missouri, the Klan did not divide the Kansas Democratic Party.<sup>181</sup> The Democratic Governor of Kansas, Henry J. Allen, denounced the Klan as soon as they appeared and ordered his attorney general to begin legal action that would remove the Klan from the state.<sup>182</sup> The Democratic Mayor of KCK, Harry Burton, debated Klan leaders publicly and demanded city employees either resign from the Klan or quit their jobs. The Kansas Republican Party was tied even more strongly to the Klan in 1924, when the Republican gubernatorial candidate, Ben Paulen, welcomed the KKK's endorsement and blocked an attempt to insert an anti-Klan plank into the Republican Party platform.<sup>183</sup> For his part, the Democratic candidate for Kansas Governor denounced the Klan. Paulen won; his victory and the strong Klan association with the campaign caught the attention of *The Kansas City Call* and further tied the Republicans to the Klan in the view of blacks in both KCMO and KCK.<sup>184</sup>

Finally, what made Republican insults, discrimination, and alliances with the Klan sting

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<sup>179</sup> Grothaus, 70.

<sup>180</sup> *Kansas City Call*, October 27, 1922.

<sup>181</sup> Schirmer, 158; Grothaus, 69.

<sup>182</sup> Schirmer, 158.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> *Kansas City Call*, April 4, 1924

even more as betrayal was the abysmal record of the “anti-boss” Republicans’ police force. Although and as noted before, police brutality against the city’s blacks was at least as old as the 1880s, the behavior of the Kansas City police in the 1920s was especially shameful.<sup>185</sup> Police violence and harassment against African Americans in Kansas City drastically increased after 1921, when Governor Hyde appointed Matthew Foster to head the Kansas City Board of Police Commissioners.<sup>186</sup> The worst years were between 1922 and 1932.

Foster was a true believer in the white upper- and middle-class ideology of civic housekeeping that linked social status and urban space in racialized and gendered ways. He was rumored to hate Italians, which made African Americans and many others in the city even more uneasy about him.<sup>187</sup> His refusal to run or appear with the machine-endorsed African American candidate William C. Hueston in 1918 had already made him widely disliked by blacks.<sup>188</sup> On top of these biases, Foster’s previous experience had been as one of the local officials who broke the 1918 general strike and was often referred to contemptuously by the labor press as “a silver spoon” who’d “never worked a day in his life.”<sup>189</sup> Foster carefully tailored his political messages as police commissioner to soothing the anxieties of the city’s white middle-class by declaring a war on crime in order to create a “sense of security.”<sup>190</sup> This discourse of white bourgeois “security” directly echoed Nichols’ justification for whites-only covenants almost a decade earlier.

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<sup>185</sup> Schirmer, 131, 137.

<sup>186</sup> *Kansas City Call*, March 28, 1924.

<sup>187</sup> Grothaus, 69.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> *Missouri Mule*, February 7, 1920.

<sup>190</sup> Matthew A. Foster, “Effective Police Protection for Residential Sections,” *American City* 25 (June 1921): 31-32.

Given that the police commission was appointed by the state of Missouri and therefore answerable to the governor, Foster was able to direct police affairs in Kansas City without interference from local politicians.<sup>191</sup> The state of Missouri's Republican governors packed the police commission with reformist, anti-crime hardliners between 1921 and 1929. Accordingly, while the Pendergast and Shannon machines pledged to eliminate police brutality, in reality they had absolutely no authority to control the police commission appointed by Republican governors; these statements did, however, make for good politics in swaying the African-American vote to each Democratic machine in their respective wards.<sup>192</sup> Foster's legacy would be to make himself, the police, and the Republican Party common enemies of both African Americans and labor in ways that overcame the remaining distrust between the two groups and drove them both into the city's Democratic Party orbit.

One of the most obnoxious and humiliating practices white officers under Foster's tenure employed was the stopping and arresting of African American couples or even in one case, a minister and a female parishioner, if the women involved were light-skinned.<sup>193</sup> All of this was carried out without a single official statute against interracial associations; instead, these policies were based on a very elastic interpretation of morality statutes.<sup>194</sup> In several cases, officers would not let the couples go until they examined the woman's fingernails for "Negroid" features and determined she was indeed black.<sup>195</sup>

An infamous example of this zealous policing of perceived interracial romantic and

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<sup>191</sup> Schirmer, 134.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>193</sup> *Kansas City Call*, September 17, 1926; Wilkins, 66.

<sup>194</sup> *Kansas City Call*, September 17, 1926.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

sexual contacts was the case of the Walton couple, Aubrey and Ruth, in 1927.<sup>196</sup> They were arrested on a morals charge for sitting beside each other on a curbside bench; the arresting officer, H. H. Byers, thought Ruth Walton was white. When she protested that she was black, Byers sneered that she was “the whitest looking nigger I’ve ever seen,” and took the couple to the station house anyway.<sup>197</sup> When the case went to trial, the Waltons proved they were both black and legally married to each other, so the prosecutor tore up the charges. However, a police court judge named Carlin Smith promptly intervened, and wrote out his own charges that the Waltons were “occupying a room for immoral purposes” by sitting together on a park bench.<sup>198</sup> With himself as sole witness, Smith railroaded them into a five hundred dollar fine each and to imprisonment in the county “detention farm.”<sup>199</sup> Smith’s excuse was his concern for “purity” and hatred of interracial marriages.<sup>200</sup> This case ignited mass protest in the African American community, as more than thirteen hundred black residents of KCMO signed a petition demanding Byers’ dismissal from the force.

Despite these protests, Byers was merely transferred and the police crusade against “race mixing” continued. Police raided black homes on numerous occasions in the late 1920s when they thought white women were having relations with African American men; every time, it turned out these women were light-skinned African Americans.<sup>201</sup> Even Roy Wilkins and his wife Minnie were taken in and interrogated by Kansas City police because the glare of the patrol

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<sup>196</sup> *Kansas City Call*, July 1, 1927.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, March 23, 1928.



car's headlights made Minnie look white; the ordeal was so humiliating that Roy and Minnie Wilkins left Kansas City permanently for New York City. Roy Wilkins subsequently remarked to a New Yorker that "any policeman in Kansas City knows that stopping race mixing is a more sacred duty than stopping any bank robber."<sup>202</sup>

The racial double standards behind this policing of real or perceived interracial relationships in the name of "white womanhood" enraged the city's African American community even more, making the wounds deeper. Such double standards were nothing new (see chapter three), but the degree of police action against even mistaken appearances of black male contacts with white women made outrage over lack of police protection of black women all the more acute. Schoolgirls as well as grown women who were black were routinely catcalled and street harassed by men of both races, yet these same policemen did nothing about any of those incidents.<sup>203</sup> The marchers in the Walton case pointed out that the very same Judge Smith who had railroaded the Waltons into a criminal record was notorious for fining white men who associated with black women for as little as ten dollars, nothing else.<sup>204</sup>

Actual police violence only added to black resentment of the police and their Republican political patrons. A 1926 example illustrates the brutality that went with the "anticrime" crusade of the "reform" Republican police commission. Two police officers spotted a young black man named Dorsey Stewart in the act of stealing a ham.<sup>205</sup> Without warning, an officer forty feet away opened fire, wounding Stewart. As he limped home, pursuing officers repeatedly shot him

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<sup>202</sup> Wilkins, 84, 98-99.. Wilkins angrily called KCMO "The Hard Heart of America."

<sup>203</sup> *Kansas City Call*, March 20, 1925.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, July 1, 1927.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, March 26, 1926.

until he died at his doorstep.<sup>206</sup> Witnesses to the shooting claimed they overheard a policeman shout “Take that you black [expletive deleted by *The Call*]” as he shot Stewart point blank.<sup>207</sup> As they left the scene, witnesses overheard one of the police officers saying, “Well, that’s one nigger I got anyway.”<sup>208</sup> Once news of this police killing had spread across the city’s black community, African American activists called for the officers involved to be tried for murder. The police commission investigated, and a coroner’s jury was established; only one witness came forward and because the assistant coroner could not find the pistol slug in the body, the jury ruled that the officers had “fired in the line of duty” and merely admonished them to “take care in the future just to cripple suspects.”<sup>209</sup> According to Schirmer, issues of *The Call* are the only records that survive of the Stewart case, since white newspapers ignored it, no transcripts of the coroner’s proceedings were made, and all autopsy reports from the 1920s were accidentally destroyed in the 1950s.<sup>210</sup>

As the 1920s drew to a close, the situation continued to worsen. Police units, without warrants, often raided Kansas City blacks’ homes looking for stolen property, ransacking apartments and tearing up furniture, walls, and floors in the process.<sup>211</sup> By 1928, there was even a case of a black minister being beaten by a plainclothes officer when the clergyman intervened in a fight between the officer and an African American resident.<sup>212</sup> The worst of the city’s racial profiling and brutality peaked between 1930 and 1932. Darius Hendricks, a janitor at the Waldo

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> *Kansas City Call*, April 9, 1926.

<sup>210</sup> Schirmer, n. 138.

<sup>211</sup> *Kansas City Call*, July 23, 1926, August 6, 1926, February 3, 1928.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., April 20, 1928.

Theater, was arrested in early 1931 on suspicion of robbing the theater's safe. While he was being interrogated at the station, five plainclothes officers beat him with a baseball bat, gardening tools, and wire coat hangers.<sup>213</sup> Refusing to confess to a crime he did not commit, Hendricks was released with permanent, crippling injuries.<sup>214</sup> A week later, the police caught the actual robbers; the police commission then claimed that Hendricks had been injured by the robbers instead of ruthlessly interrogated.<sup>215</sup> The city police then tried to intimidate the Call newspaper into silence on the case and pressured witnesses and Hendricks to change their stories, unsuccessfully in both attempts.<sup>216</sup>

Under the influence of politically ambitious and creative bosses such as the Pendergast brothers and Shannon, the Democratic Party had begun to shed, albeit slowly, their old image as the party of white supremacy and the Confederacy. In doing so, KCMO's Democratic Party was ahead of the national party, which would not attract significant black support until the Great Depression.

By 1925, Tom Pendergast had solidified his control of local Democratic politics by forging alliances with key faction leaders in the party.<sup>217</sup> He outflanked the Republican reformers by using charter reform and a new city management style to take over the city government.<sup>218</sup> By March 1932, the Missouri State Supreme Court dealt a fatal blow to Republican reformers' control of the police by granting Kansas City "home rule" over its own

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., February 13, 1931

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., February 20, 1931, February 27, 1931

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., March 13, 1931, March 20, 1931, September 11, 1931.

<sup>217</sup> Reddig, 118.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

police force and taking the force out of the hands of the Republican Governor in Jefferson City.<sup>219</sup> Pendergast now had almost unlimited control of the police thanks to the Court and a 1925 city charter that authorized the city manager to appoint a director of police. Pendergast made good on his earlier pledges to reign in police brutality against blacks, and purged the force of Republican appointees. After this change in 1932, reports of police brutality in the African-American press declined dramatically, with the *Call* going so far as to assert and celebrate that “the reign of police brutality is over!”<sup>220</sup> Indeed, the new Public Safety Director Eugene Reppert was praised by the *Call*’s editor Chester A. Franklin for promptly firing an officer who shot a black suspect without cause.<sup>221</sup> The city’s black community rewarded the Pendergast Democrats with an overwhelming vote tally in support.

In addition to an end to police brutality, KCMO’s new Democratic machine delivered other promises and benefits to Kansas City’s African American community. The Judge of the County Court (and future US President) Harry S. Truman made sure that blacks won a tubercular cottage and girls’ home as well as a boys’ home.<sup>222</sup> Truman also ousted Dr. D.M. Miller, head of the Jackson County Home for Aged Negroes, when it became clear Miller was abusing patients.<sup>223</sup> Additionally, the machine more than made up for Republican betrayals in the area of patronage.

However, in most other cases, the Democratic machine fell far short of its promises to the city’s African American electorate. For example, the machine made a pledge to improve health

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 152; Walter Matscheck, “Kansas City Wins Police Home Rule,” *National Municipal Review*.21(August 1932):342-43.

<sup>220</sup> *Kansas City Call*, April 22, 1932; Grothaus, 80.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., March 9, 1934.

<sup>222</sup> Grothaus, 77-79.

<sup>223</sup> *Kansas City Call*, November 18, 1927, December 2, 1927.

care for the black community. Pendergast's Democrats started out well by appointing an African American physician named Dr. William J. Thompkins to assistant health commissioner in 1927.<sup>224</sup> Thompkins remained at the post until 1934, when President Roosevelt appointed him Recorder of Deeds for the District of Columbia.<sup>225</sup> Thompkins had been born in Jefferson City, Missouri in 1884 and in many ways fit Franklin's archetypal "race man." He had received a medical degree at Howard University and came to KCMO to practice medicine in 1906.<sup>226</sup> By 1915, he was the first black doctor to serve as superintendent of Old City Hospital, one of the key facilities for black patients. The hospital under his management improved from a class D to a class A rating.<sup>227</sup>

Given such an excellent pick, how could the health care pledge end up a disappointment? The sad answer had nothing to do with Thompkins and everything to do with infighting in the machine. Thompkins had recommended a new public hospital for blacks after surveying housing and tuberculosis rates in the ghetto. Almost immediately after announcing plans to build a new facility on Hospital Hill near the public hospital for whites, City Manager McElroy sidetracked the project by getting into a dispute over its location.<sup>228</sup> After tying the project up for two years in order to placate whites' objections to various sites, McElroy opened General Hospital Number 2 in 1930.<sup>229</sup> At first, it was the most up to date and well-equipped black hospital in the country. A patronage war within the machine caused conditions to rapidly deteriorate, however. In August

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., April 11, 1944.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> *Kansas City Times*, April 11, 1934.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.; *Kansas City Call*, October 22, 1926, January 7, 1927, July 22, 1927, October 7, 1927, July 6, 1928.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., February 28, 1930.

1930, Cas Welch fired Dr. Howard Smith, a Pendergast appointee, and replaced him with his ally Dr. D.M. Miller, whom Truman had fired from the nursing home.<sup>230</sup> Months later, reports and complaints from patients about false diagnoses, faulty treatment, and at least one malpractice case flooded the *Call*.<sup>231</sup> As Welch continued to fire Pendergast appointees and replace them with his cronies, morale at the hospital deteriorated to the point where bedpans went unemptied and patients would go entire shifts without seeing one nurse. Finally, in 1932, Pendergast wrested control back from Welch, but the damage had been done. In just two years, the new hospital had become a disaster.

The machine also failed to do anything about segregation and discrimination in city spaces, such as Swope Park. Police and park workers continued to eject blacks from the park or force them into a shelterhouse “reserved for you people” throughout the 1930s.<sup>232</sup> Protests to the Pendergast-allied Mayor Bryce Smith over Swope Park’s racist practices received no response. Even worse, segregation expanded into city facilities under Pendergast, so that blacks were barred from a café in the Municipal Airport for the first time in 1937.<sup>233</sup>

On top of all of the shortcomings of the machine’s record with African-Americans, there was the decades-old issue of urban vice. While the previous Republican police force claimed it had “declared war” on vice, the practice was often the old 1910s Marks Plan on steroids: by the 1920s, the once proud Lincoln High School was surrounded by dens of prostitution, saloons, and gambling houses. High school boys were often propositioned on their walk to school by prostitutes, while high school girls were often catcalled at by men of both races who frequented

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., August 15, 1930, August 22, 1930.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., February 20, 1931, July 17, 1931, September 9, 1931, September 25, 1931

<sup>232</sup> Schirmer, 165.

<sup>233</sup> *Kansas City Call*, February 12, 1937.

the bars and prostitution houses.<sup>234</sup> When the “morality” oriented Republican police were told of this, the most they would offer be token gestures such as assigning extra officers to the area. When pressed by the Colored YWCA further about the problem, they were told none of the vice industries near the high school could be shut down because they all had police protection.<sup>235</sup> This Republican hypocrisy was one policy with which the Pendergast Democratic machine was aligned, for its own nakedly political goals of profiting from the vice industry while wooing middle-class whites who were afraid of it. If anything, when the Pendergast Democrats took over, the main change was that the pretense of fighting vice was dropped and in its place emerged a Vegas-like institutionalization of vice around what were often Mafia-linked jazz nightclubs.<sup>236</sup> These clubs, with the exception of the Reno that served patrons of both races on opposite sides of a divider, were usually either whites-only or blacks-only.<sup>237</sup> Worst of all, many of the white-only clubs presented blacks as directly connected to gambling, illegal drugs, prostitution, pornography, and deviancy, which in turn fed the housing industry stereotypes.<sup>238</sup> At the same time, some of these major jazz clubs, such as The Castle or The Cherry Blossom (frequently featuring the legendary Count Basie) appealed directly to the black middle-class and stressed sophistication.<sup>239</sup> To say the machine lived and breathed on vice would be an understatement.

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed an acceleration of the previous decade’s move towards

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., March 20, 1925.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., July 3, 1925, September 25, 1925, June 19, 1925.

<sup>236</sup> Schirmer, 167-69.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> *Kansas City Call*, April 3, 1931, July 29, 1932, February 9, 1934.

segregating the city by color despite significant civil rights pushback against discrimination in labor unions and public accommodations. Next, this study shall explore the role changing transportation systems played against an environment of urban race segregation over time.



## **CHAPTER FIVE: TRANSPORTATION, RACE, WORLD WAR II, AND URBAN CRISIS IN THE TWO KANSAS CITIES, 1890-1945**

Three key arguments lie at the core of this chapter. First, the shifting modes of transportation over the half century between the 1890s and the Second World War shaped the urban crisis directly, as the rise of the automobile culture accelerated trends towards suburbanization that were already underway. The development of suburbs had already been given a racial character as far back as the 1910s, but the car culture would accelerate the racially polarized development of all-white middle class suburbs and an increasingly overcrowded and deteriorating majority black inner city in KCMO. Secondly, the New Deal housing programs of the early thirties locked in these trends. J.C. Nichols would be consulted by Roosevelt administration officials in the creation of the FHA, and Johnson County as it is known today would be built with FHA subsidies in the decades between the Depression and the early 1960s. Finally, it would be in roughly 1939-40 that the urban crisis would emerge in KCMO full blown, with the added stressor of a later wave of Great Migration hitting the city during the Second World War.<sup>1</sup>

Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas City, Kansas, were no exceptions to the general postwar shift in US metropolitan areas away from rail and public transit to car-based, urban freeway-centered transportation. Just as the routing of the railroads at the beginning of the construction of the national rail system in the mid-nineteenth century had tremendous

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<sup>1</sup> “Annual Report, 1942,” KCULP, File 6, Box KCULP-2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

consequences in establishing KCMO and the future KCK as the metropolitan center of the region, the shift away from rail and public transit to automobile travel after World War II would have consequences for the future of the metro area. It is almost impossible, historically speaking, to overestimate the sweeping nature of the alteration of daily life brought about by the internal combustion engine, petroleum driven automobile in the first half of the twentieth century. To take but one small example, not just Kansas Citians' but American ways of eating and sleeping while on long distance trips would drastically change as a result of the rise of the automobile and decline of streetcars between the 1930s and the 1950s. Furthermore, the balance of power within the labor movement would shift away from the railroad brotherhoods to the United Auto Workers union and the Teamsters' union by the 1940s.

Decisions regarding Kansas City's transportation system did not, of course, occur in a social vacuum; racial attitudes had, for example, nearly forced the segregation of streetcars in the 1910s.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, just as discriminatory racial stereotypes had long influenced real estate practices, they would also play a large role in decisions regarding which neighborhoods would be targeted for "urban renewal" in the late 1950s and early 1960s so as to clear the way for the building of intracity freeways connecting Kansas City to the interstate highway system.<sup>3</sup> Working-class and labor union interests and ways of life were also affected by changing modes of transportation. Obviously, unions connected to railroads would decline while unions connected to automobiles and roads benefitted from the change. Moreover, the new automobile culture as well as the abandonment of streetcars and the decline of the railroads after the Second World War sharply accelerated both suburban growth and the residential racial segregation that

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<sup>2</sup> "Jim Crow Law is Defeated," *Kansas City Sun*, March 17, 1917.

<sup>3</sup> "Denver Praise For Kansas City 1980," *Kansas City Times*, December 30, 1958.

had accompanied it since shortly after the turn of the century.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the predominant mode of cross-country travel as well as the transport of goods and services was by railroad. Both KCMO and the relatively new city of KCK were no exceptions, and indeed, both were major rail hubs. Cross-town transportation in smaller as well as major cities at the dawn of the twentieth century was mostly handled by systems of streetcars that ran on rails and were electrically powered. The heyday of streetcars both in Greater Kansas City and nationally was “from about 1890 to the early 1920s.”<sup>4</sup> In KCMO, electric streetcars had been established by 1889, having evolved from horse-drawn railcars in 1870 and then, cable-run railcars by 1883.<sup>5</sup> Short-distance travel between cities, too, soon became the territory of the streetcars in the form of the interurban lines that developed between 1889 and 1916.<sup>6</sup> Such construction peaked at over fifteen thousand miles nationwide before World War I.<sup>7</sup> Greater Kansas City was the hub of extensive interurban networks by the 1910s, linking the city to nearby St. Joseph and Excelsior Springs in Missouri and Olathe, Lawrence and Topeka in Kansas.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, the origins of the emergence of Johnson County as a growing, suburban part of the metro can be traced to the 1907 opening of William Stang’s Missouri & Kansas Interurban Railway between KCMO and Olathe.<sup>9</sup> This line happened to pass through his new real estate

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<sup>4</sup> Monroe Dodd, *A Splendid Ride: The Streetcars of Kansas City, 1870-1957* (Kansas City: Kansas City Star Books, 2002), 78.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 22, 47.

<sup>6</sup> James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Dodd, 113.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

developments, one of which was named Overland Park.<sup>10</sup> Along with railroads before them and interstate highways after them, streetcar lines' routing had tremendous consequences for spurring great growth in certain areas, often at the expense of others. The rise of Johnson County as a suburban metropolitan area of both KCK and KCMO thus predated the post-World War II boom by about half a century. Again, this demonstrates that suburbanization should not be confused with the shift away from rail and streetcars to automobiles, even if it was accelerated by such changes.

Automobiles had been made possible by the introduction of a commercially viable internal combustion engine-powered automobile in Germany in 1885 by Karl Benz.<sup>11</sup> Stuart Perry in New York and Etienne Lenoir had both patented primitive versions of it in 1844 and 1860 respectively; Lenoir's was closest to what Benz developed, as it introduced use of a spark plug to ignite the gasoline engine.<sup>12</sup> By 1893, Benz had introduced the electric ignition to his manufactured automobiles.<sup>13</sup> Another essential component of the automobile, the tire, was pioneered by the Michelin brothers in their successful 1895 Paris-Bordeaux –Paris race. Between 1893 and 1904, the industry was dominated by Germany and France.<sup>14</sup>

In its earliest years, the story of the rise of the automobile played out so deeply in the shadows of the railroads and the streetcars that, around the turn of the century, people assumed that the new mode of transportation would complement railroads and streetcars rather than

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Dodd, 129; Flink, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 17.

replace them.<sup>15</sup> After all, both rail and automotive improvements to transportation increased mobility, connected goods and services in urban and rural areas to one another, helped to manage urban space by decentralizing it and improving cleanliness, and helped to forge a truly “national culture, economy, and society.”<sup>16</sup> Wiebian notions of “reordering” society, especially that of urban society, therefore were interwoven into middle and upper-class reactions to the appearance of the automobile. The post-Civil War search for “reunion” and the corporate reordering of capitalism in this same time period were also linked strongly to the appearance of new technologies under the rubric of “progress.”<sup>17</sup> Just as the railroads fulfilled this need in the mid-nineteenth century, automobiles would usurp the function of national development and progress between the 1920s and 1960s.

What American contemporaries failed to foresee was that the potential “unparalleled flexibility” of the automobile set it apart from transit that ran on rails, and that in a country with a national mythology that praised individualism as one of the highest values, car ownership by one person or a family would take on a life of its own.<sup>18</sup> Despite the origins of the technology in Germany and France, it was not long before the United States began to develop an auto industry of its own.<sup>19</sup> By 1893, bicycle mechanics in Springfield, Massachusetts by the name of Charles

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 3. Interestingly, KCMO’s streetcar company began worrying that residents of the city using their own vehicles would be a threat to their existence as early as 1896, but thought that bicycles would be the competition that would undo them., as noted in Dodd, 129. In a twist of irony, it turned out that many of the largest names in the future automobile industry began as bicycle manufacturers. For example, future General Motors President William S. Knudsen had begun his career as a bicycle manufacturer., as Flink noted on p.5-6.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Again, see David Blight, *Race and Reunion* and of course, Robert Wiebe, *Search For Order*.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 11.

and J. Frank Duryeas built the first successful American gasoline car.<sup>20</sup> By 1896, the Duryeas brothers sold the first American gasoline-powered automobile and produced twelve more cars that year.<sup>21</sup> By 1898, Kokomo, Indiana, car manufacturers began building cars there; by 1906, the center of US car production would move to Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio.<sup>22</sup> The 1900 launch of the Oldsmobile by Ransom Olds in Detroit completed the shift to Midwestern states of auto manufacturers.<sup>23</sup> Henry Ford and William C. Durant followed suit in establishing their own auto companies, Ford Motors and General Motors in 1903 and 1908, respectively.<sup>24</sup> By 1908, US auto production was centered exclusively in Detroit and southern Michigan.<sup>25</sup>

This relatively new American transportation industry was given some advantages by several factors favorable to the development of gasoline-based vehicles in the United States. First, a strong institutional network of support for the gasoline-powered automobile already existed by the 1880s. This source was the strong social and political influence of John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Corporation in the United States. Second, the discovery of large deposits of oil in Texas and Oklahoma in 1906 reinforced the favorable conditions for the new form of transportation.<sup>26</sup> Ironically, given that automobiles would eventually become yet another corporate giant of the type populists usually despised, the nascent industry found unlikely and indirect allies in the Farmers' Alliances and the Populist movement of the 1890s which pushed

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>23</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 159.

<sup>24</sup> Flink, 25-26.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>26</sup> Dodd, 129; Jackson, 172.

for improved roads and highways in reaction to railroad monopolies.<sup>27</sup>

Such advantages were undercut by the fact that at the turn of the century, the U.S. lacked paved roads and there was no signage along existing dust trails to inform a potential driver of where to go.<sup>28</sup> This was still the case despite the Populists' call for better roads throughout the previous decade of the 1890s. Additionally, while the abundance of oil was excellent for a gasoline-powered vehicle, gas stations or car repair shops were extremely rare in the 1900s and 1910s.<sup>29</sup> Although the change from a brand new foreign invention to an American industry centered in Detroit was relatively rapid, the speed with which it became accessible as a means of transit to the general public paled in comparison to how rapidly streetcars had risen to prominence earlier. Finally, the automobile's rise was slowed by local, state, and federal governments' lack of interest in, or hostility towards, the new technology. For example, many states still viewed transportation by horse as a very high priority as late as the turn of the century and passed laws limiting automobiles to four miles per hour while also "requiring that each be preceded by a man on foot carrying a red flag" out of concern for scaring horses and large dust clouds.<sup>30</sup> In fact, future U.S. President Woodrow Wilson so distrusted automobiles that he warned in 1906 that they would cause a socialist revolution by promoting envy of the rich.<sup>31</sup> As late as the First World War itself, the War Industries Board concluded that out of all American industries, a hypothetical shutdown of the auto industry would be "a mere inconvenience."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Flink, 4. However, such groups had bicycling largely in mind as an alternative.

<sup>28</sup> Jackson, 158-59.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

Despite the fact that American auto production eclipsed French auto production by 1904-05 and overtook the German and British auto industries by the start of World War I, the industry was far from shaking either the streetcars' or railroads' domination of American transportation in the 1900s and 1910s.<sup>33</sup> No one then would have believed that the auto industry would be the symbol of American capitalism and American global power in less than fifty years.

KCK and KCMO in 1900 were indeed quite removed from the upstart new vehicle. Railroads and streetcars were still the dominant means of transportation for residents of both cities, both long- and short-distance. Despite the concern of the local streetcar company over competition from bicycles, no serious competition emerged in the city until the mid-1910s.<sup>34</sup> In fact, ridership in 1896 totaled more than thirty-four million and would actually increase over the next three decades.<sup>35</sup>

For the metropolitan area's black citizens, the streetcars, as noted earlier, were one of the few public services not segregated by race by the 1910s in Kansas City, although black passengers were still harassed and mistreated by both white drivers and passengers.<sup>36</sup> In practice, this meant that while streetcars were available to the city's black residents without Jim Crow mandates for a separate "colored" section, streetcars were nonetheless far from friendly territory for African Americans in a city divided by race. Busses and automobiles, when they emerged as major competing sources of transportation in later decades, would have their own effects on the ongoing struggle for basic rights for African-Americans especially when it came to employment, restaurant, and lodging discrimination.

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<sup>33</sup> Flink, 25.

<sup>34</sup> Dodd., 130.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>36</sup> Coulter, 52.



Railroads, as noted in the previous chapter, were of even greater significance to the African American community. Not only were they a major source of employment for working-class blacks in Kansas City, but they were also central to the growth and continued existence of the stockyards and packing plants in both KCMO and KCK were another major employer of the African American working class.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the Pullman porters among the railroad workforce were especially critical to the strengthening of black political influence, both in KCMO and nationally, after A. Philip Randolph had organized them into the first African American labor union. Randolph's 1925 formation of the union with the Pullman company simultaneously broke the AFL's color barrier and was one of the developments that linked the civil rights and labor movements in the 1930s. Porters held the highest status of all of the city's rail workers and among the working-classes as a whole even though they had to play to white racial stereotypes as part of their job description. The importance of railroads to organized labor nationally is easily demonstrated by noting that the largest strikes of the late nineteenth century included the 1877 Great Railroad Strike and the 1894 Pullman Strike. Given the lack of paved roads in rural areas before 1920, railroads were in far less immediate danger from the newer forms of transportation than the primarily urban and suburban streetcars.<sup>38</sup>

In retrospect, however, it is clear that the dominance of the streetcars and railroads as the primary transportation systems was being incrementally threatened by the internal combustion engine. Henry Ford opened up a Model T plant in KCMO in 1912, the first of its kind outside of

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<sup>37</sup> Arnesen, 46; This was even more true in KCK, as the NAACP found: Untitled Report [in Q&A format], December 1931, NAACP Papers, Kansas Branch Office Files of NAACP: Kansas City to Ottawa, c. 1920-39, as found in KS State Archives, Topeka.

<sup>38</sup> Jackson, 158.

Michigan, at Winchester Avenue in the eastern part of the city.<sup>39</sup> However, the first major challenger to the dominance of Kansas City's streetcars was from a vehicle called the "jitney."<sup>40</sup> A jitney was what contemporaries called "any independently operated vehicle that carried groups of passengers for a fee."<sup>41</sup> Jitneys varied in size; some were automobiles, while others were closer to the size of busses. In this fashion, they were predecessors both to taxis and busses. Originating in Los Angeles in 1914, the first jitney appeared in KCMO in 1915. Streetcar companies loathed and feared jitneys because they would deliberately follow streetcar lines and lure waiting passengers away with rates that either matched or undercut the streetcar fees. Unlike the taxi or bus services today, however, jitneys were initially unregulated both in KCMO and in other cities. The street railways lobbied local governments fiercely to change this, and area cities began to regulate the vehicles, which caused many jitney drivers to quit.<sup>42</sup> Worse, the jitney drivers mostly lacked liability insurance, leaving no recourse for potential injury victims.<sup>43</sup> In 1920, the company went into receivership and jitneys rapidly disappeared from Kansas City after 1921.

The victory of streetcars over jitneys both locally and nationally proved to be pyrrhic, however. The 1920s would witness the rise of a twin threat to the streetcar lines: the automobile and the bus system.<sup>44</sup> The lack of paved roads or a national highway system which had held back competition from the automobile was redressed by two congressional acts within a decade

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<sup>39</sup> Dodd, 129.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 130-31.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

of each other: the 1916 Road Act and the 1921 Federal Aid Highway Acts created the preconditions for the construction of a national system of two-laned paved highways by 1926.<sup>45</sup> The 1916 act had offered federal money to states to set up highway departments, while the 1921 act set aside two hundred thousand miles of road for federal matching funds.<sup>46</sup> Locally, this meant the streetcars and railroads had competition from newly designated US highways 24, 40, 50, 69, and 71 after 1926. After decades of mostly futile advocacy for better roads, the issue had been at last given a boost by frustrations in moving military equipment during World War I.

Henry Ford's development of the assembly-line method of mass production (following from inspiration he took from Gustavus Swift's meatpacking factory's use of movable parts on conveyor belts) not only meant American global dominance of the industry was insured but that the country's existing oil industry would only be too happy to license filling stations for the growing number of Ford, GM, and (after 1920) Chrysler cars on the new roads. The oil companies' supplying of filling stations had an additional subsidizing effect: following the lead of Oregon in 1919, every state adopted a one cent gasoline tax by 1929 to finance future investment in roads.<sup>47</sup> Prices for Ford's Model Ts also began to rapidly decline, from nine hundred and fifty dollars in 1910 to two hundred and ninety dollars in 1924.<sup>48</sup>

Ford revolutionized both the auto industry and American capitalism by becoming the first car manufacturer to aim his product at the middle-classes and by raising his own workers' minimum wages so that they too were potential buyers of his cars.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, all of the earlier

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<sup>45</sup> Jackson, 167.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Jackson, 161.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

French, German, British, and American automakers had intended the vehicle to be a luxury product for the rich. Moreover, no capitalist before Ford had ever paid workers higher wages in order to cultivate them as customers; this was an entirely new business model. In doing so he undercut the labor left as surely as Wilson-era state repression or factional fights within labor and the Socialist Party ever did. After all, as one elderly labor sympathizer in Muncie Indiana told a reporter, “as long as men have enough money to buy a secondhand Ford and tires and gasoline, they’ll be out on the road and paying no attention to union meetings.”<sup>50</sup>

Still, most “growth in the motor vehicle market” from working class and other “lower income brackets” relied on these classes’ purchase of used cars rather than new cars.<sup>51</sup> The industry’s own trade journals fretted over a “used car problem” by the mid-1920s, as trade ins often had to be disposed of at a loss. Further, “illiterate, immigrant, and Negro families” were dismissed altogether as “obviously outside the market.”<sup>52</sup> Despite all of the industry’s advances, forty-four percent of American families did not own cars in 1927. Ford and the industry’s successes concealed deep divisions in car ownership by class and race as well as rural as opposed to urban location. Farmers proved to be one of the major purchasers of automobiles in the decade, as they had not been adequately served by rail transportation.<sup>53</sup> Conversely, both ownership and use of cars declined sharply with degree of urbanization. African-Americans in both KCMO and KCK, both for this reason and because of high rates of poverty and job discrimination, were very unlikely to own a car in the 1920s nor were they likely to own one until after World War II.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Flink, 131.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 131-32.

As if the availability and affordability of cars to the public wasn't worrying enough to streetcar operators, bus companies came into direct competition with them by 1924.<sup>54</sup> The first city busses were launched in a very similar fashion to the way the streetcars themselves had been established: through a private local company. Local entrepreneur T.A. Kennedy had founded the Kansas Cities Motor Coach Company as an operation of four twenty-passenger busses that ran from the Kansas to the Missouri side of the metro. From what was then the western city limits of KCK at 18th street, the bus line ran down Minnesota Avenue to the Intercity Viaduct, and then drove to Union Station in downtown KCMO.<sup>55</sup> As with the jitneys, Kansas City Railways, the streetcar company, fought the bus company relentlessly through the legal system, eventually defeating it in 1925 by obtaining a court injunction against the bus company's use of the intercity viaduct.<sup>56</sup> Ironically, the streetcar company quickly discovered that busses were cheaper to operate than the streetcars at fifteen to seventeen cents a mile for thirty passengers as opposed to the cost of twenty-two to twenty-seven cents a mile for streetcars. In 1925, the streetcar company opened its own Kansas City Motor Coach Company. Because Jim Crow laws for Missouri's railroad companies had been defeated in the 1900s and 1910s, the company did not impose any on its bus line either, but discriminated against both KCK and KCMO blacks by refusing to hire them as drivers.<sup>57</sup> The struggle against job discrimination by the city transit company in both its bus and streetcar lines would drag on into the 1950s.

The rising auto industry was a national juggernaut not so easily held off by legal tactics and its products could not be duplicated by Kansas City Railways, unlike the Kansas City Motor

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<sup>54</sup> Dodd, 131.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 131-34.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>57</sup> "How About It Kansas City?," *The Call*, December 3, 1954.

Coach Company. Ford's 1912 plant did not take long in producing cars for regional buyers: the number of automobiles in the metro area skyrocketed between 1914 and 1924 from about eight thousand six hundred to over eighty-nine thousand.<sup>58</sup> This constituted a tenfold increase over the course of a decade. As early as the 1917 entry of the US into World War I, more than twenty-three thousand automobiles were registered in the Kansas City area.<sup>59</sup> The first major warning sign that automobiles would come to dominate was that the number of tickets to passenger trains peaked in 1920 and the number of passenger trains handled peaked three years earlier. By 1922, streetcar ridership peaked at one hundred and thirty-six million; when the 1920s ended, that figure had declined to one hundred and thirteen million. But even so, as late as 1929, eighty percent of people entering downtown still used mass transit.<sup>60</sup>

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These massive changes to transportation occurred against the backdrop of the civil rights and labor struggles discussed last chapter and amid the ongoing residential race segregation that had begun in the 1910s. The 1920s had truly been one of the worst decades for racial violence, hatred, discrimination, and tension the area had seen. In addition to police brutality and harassment, constant private sector discrimination, vice being pressed into black neighborhoods, and white terrorism against black homeowners moving into all-white neighborhoods, a lynching occurred in nearby Excelsior Springs, Missouri, in August 1925.<sup>61</sup> There, a thirty-three year old man named Walter Mitchell had been accused of sexually assaulting a white woman, arrested, taken to the county jail in Liberty, and then taken by a white mob, despite resistance by law

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<sup>58</sup> Dodd, 135.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>61</sup> "Innocent Man Lynched By Excelsior Springs Mob," *Kansas City Call*, August 14, 1925.

enforcement officers and local African-Americans, back to Excelsior Springs and hanged from a tree.<sup>62</sup> Black residents of KCMO who had fled the brutal 1921 race riots in Tulsa just four years previously for Kansas City were especially alarmed and the atrocity was widely covered by the African American press. The Call conducted its own investigation, concluding that Mitchell knew the alleged victim through a white partner in a cattle-stealing gang he belonged to; the partner was her boyfriend. The assault resulted from a fight amongst the cattle thieves; Williams was guilty of stealing cattle as part of a group of criminals but did not sexually assault her, the paper determined.<sup>63</sup>

With tensions already high from the Williams lynching, two weeks later, the city of KCMO itself nearly experienced a lynching of its own.<sup>64</sup> On a Friday afternoon in September, the 18th and Vine district was suddenly invaded by whites from the 21st and Montgall neighborhood, some on foot with bloodhounds and others in cars, in pursuit of someone. They stopped in front of a nightclub called the “Yellow Front,” and entered the building with their bloodhounds. The dogs stopped in front of an African American man in the club identified by the Call only as “Charles”, and the whites grabbed him. As he was being dragged to the car by the white mob, another black man named Oliver “Blue” Moore intervened, asking the mob what they were going to do with the suspect. When they replied they were looking for a suspect in a sexual assault on a white woman and Moore overheard one of them murmur about lynching, he grabbed hold of the steering wheel of the car the mob was going to take Charles in, preventing the car from leaving and declaring that if Charles was suspected of something that the police

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., August 21, 1925.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., September 4, 1925.

should be called. The situation escalated further when a member of the crowd pulled a gun on Moore, which led another African American man who had followed the group from the poolroom to pull a gun. An armed standoff resulted, with Charles in the car, Moore gripping the steering wheel, and large groups of white and black men pointing guns at one another. This standoff was only broken when the police showed up, but when they took Charles in for questioning both the white and black crowds followed the police closely. When word spread, Kansas City Missouri's black community rallied, vowing "This is not Excelsior Springs!"<sup>65</sup> The situation diffused when the police brought the victim in to identify her attacker, and she bluntly stated the Charles was not the culprit. Still, groups of African Americans chose to stay at the station and protect Charles until he was released.

Given that September 1925 was such a close call for a potential race riot, the new automobile was very far down the list of priorities for a civil rights movement that was fighting tooth and nail to get existing public transportation to treat black passengers decently and to hire African Americans. A rare exception was Sarah Rector, one of the richest persons in the city who had acquired her wealth from oil discoveries on her family property in Oklahoma: Rector was one of the few African Americans who even owned a car and she owned several ones.<sup>66</sup> Needless to say, Rector was far from typical of KCMO's black population, most of whom couldn't dream of affording even one car. But even had money been no object, car ownership could not have solved all the difficulties African Americans faced when they did travel. Travel, in whatever dominant form, had always been dangerous for blacks even in the North and was in

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Coulter, 253.



any case “exhausting and demoralizing.”<sup>67</sup> When it came to the automobile, independent black publishers in 1937 began to publish a travel guide for African-American car owners called *The Negro Motorist Green-Book*.<sup>68</sup> It identified which lodging, filling stations, and restaurants were hospitable to African American customers and which of these establishments excluded blacks. Before the publication of this guide, African American travelers often had to ask porters on Pullman and other trains what they had heard about local establishments in different towns and cities. Because of hotel and later motel discrimination, many black travelers stayed at Negro YMCAs even if the locations were far from train or bus stops. Black oriented newspapers also helped by running ads for “race” hotels and restaurants, while *Ebony* magazine began publishing a competing summer vacation travel guide in 1947.<sup>69</sup>

The automobile’s significance for most working-class blacks lay in its potential to create new jobs in the city, especially at the Ford plant, the Chevrolet plant that opened after 1928, and the Fisher body plant that opened in 1929.<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, job discrimination was rampant in the auto plants as well, and even the Urban League of Kansas City barely made a dent in it during the 1920s.<sup>71</sup> For example, the 1920 census had listed only seven black workers at the Ford plant in Leeds (eastern KCMO) in semiskilled positions.<sup>72</sup> Ten years later, the number had grown to one hundred and seventy African Americans employed in auto factories, garages, and repair work, but these jobs constituted only eight percent of all Kansas City males employed by

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<sup>67</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle For Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008), 132.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Coulter, 275.

<sup>71</sup> US Department of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census of the Population* (Washington DC, 1921)

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.; US Department of Commerce, *Fifteenth Census of the Population* (Washington DC, 1931)

the automobile companies.<sup>73</sup> In the case of the Chevrolet plant, large numbers of African American men in fact would not be hired to work there until after World War II.

The emerging car culture also exacerbated racial discrimination in less obvious ways. Future decisions about highway building were directly related to the ideology of “colored property” that had fuelled the 1911 and 1923-27 white violence against black home purchasers. This rhetoric was first articulated by J.C. Nichols and Asa Martin in the 1910s.<sup>74</sup> Claims about African American neighborhoods had instilled in public officials a contempt toward black people and their homes, a reality vividly illustrated by the fact that KCMO city officials placed a garbage station in the heart of the black neighborhood at Twentieth and Woodland in 1923.<sup>75</sup> Garbage from all over the city was collected there until transferred to the city dump.<sup>76</sup> The Attucks School and the Western Baptist Bible College were both within walking distance of the garbage station, while a Methodist Episcopal congregation had to deal with the stench at every service they attended.<sup>77</sup> Chester Franklin and Roy Wilkins of the Call railed against this garbage station, demanding its removal.<sup>78</sup> In 1925, it was removed, only to be replaced by another garbage station at a different location in the African-American neighborhoods.<sup>79</sup> This incident was a highly symbolic illustration of the meaning of a color line dividing city property up into “good” and “bad” neighborhoods, with an overlapping dichotomy of suburban/inner city. In

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<sup>73</sup> Coulter, 265.

<sup>74</sup> “Colored property” of course is the title of David Freund’s excellent study of housing discrimination, *Colored Property*; Gotham, 36, 46.

<sup>75</sup> *Kansas City Call*, November 2, 1923.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, November 9, 1923.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* November 16, 1923.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, November 30, 1923, December 21, 1923.

<sup>79</sup> Coulter, 264.

other words, black central city neighborhoods were literally defined by whites as worthy of no higher status than a dumping ground for trash, while white neighborhoods and suburbs were to be the epitome of cleanliness. Racial insult was thus built in to such urban planning and policy.

In addition to local, borderline vigilante-like homeowners associations such as the Linwood Improvement Association, the National Association of Real Estate Boards emerged by the 1920s as a powerful national voice for equating whiteness, homeownership, upward mobility, and material success through “Own Your Own Home Campaigns.”<sup>80</sup> Founded in 1908, the NAREB constituted the first organization composed of builders and real estate agents.<sup>81</sup> NAREB had been a leading force (along with figures such as J.C. Nichols) in promoting the idea that black residents lowered neighborhoods’ property values. By 1927, NAREB had the ear of the US Department of Commerce in defining private land use in urban areas.<sup>82</sup> NAREB by the late 1920s was part of a public-private alliance that included the National Conference on City Planning, the National Municipal League, the American Civic Association, the nation’s city managers, and Herbert Hoover’s Department of Commerce.<sup>83</sup> The consensus this partnership and the courts had come to by the late 1920s was that restrictive zoning was pragmatic and “non-ideological”; the partnership additionally defined segregation of certain land uses as a requirement of a free market in housing.<sup>84</sup> This maneuvering began to harden in place the urban segregation implemented in the previous two decades even before the federal government officially became involved in housing policy and the highway planning that accompanied it.

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<sup>80</sup> Gotham, 47-48.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>82</sup> Gotham, 49.

<sup>83</sup> Freund, 88.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 89.

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The Great Depression hit KCMO's African American population especially hard. First, the blue-collar jobs that had sustained the community through the 1920s and in many cases, decades back into the nineteenth century disappeared within the first year of the Depression.<sup>85</sup> These included the railroads, stockyards, packinghouses, and stone quarries. Worse, there fewer job openings for black men than ten years before. Second, the Depression exacerbated preexisting housing problems. According to an Urban League study of the 1940 census, the 1930s had witnessed a racial pattern in housing in which blacks were confined to the east of Troost Avenue and north of Thirty-First Street, along with clusters on the city's West Side and to the east, in Leeds.<sup>86</sup> This was the case despite the fact that KCMO was saved from the worst of the Depression compared to other cities, as it had received a huge amount of relief money from the federal government.<sup>87</sup> FDR had given Pendergast control over all relief expenditures in Missouri as a reward for Pendergast's early support of Roosevelt's presidential nomination at the 1932 Democratic Convention.<sup>88</sup> The reason for this disparity between generous federal funding to Pendergast and the city and the degree of joblessness among the city's African-American community had everything to do with the Missouri Employment Service being unable or unwilling to help black job applicants and the Pendergast machine's failure to combat racial discrimination in hiring.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> US Department of Commerce, *Fifteenth Census* (Washington DC: 1931);

<sup>86</sup> *A Matter of Fact* 1:2 (August –September 1945), KCULP, Box KCULP-1, File 1, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>87</sup> Reddig, 272.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>89</sup> *Kansas City Call*, September 8, 1933, September 29, 1933, June 8, 1934, September 29, 1931, December 14, 1934, August 4, 1939, August 12, 1938, August 19, 1938.

The New Deal of Franklin D. Roosevelt was critical to developments in transportation, housing, and political alignments that were felt in cities nationwide. First, the New Deal reinforced the trends started with the 1916 and 1921 Road Acts towards federal subsidizing of road building, as Roosevelt and other officials favored projects that could employ as many workers as possible and be planned quickly, of which road building was one.<sup>90</sup> Highway projects easily fit within the rubric of public works, as employment opportunities that not only restored a sense of self-worth to those who had been jobless but which were also understood to be part of national development and improvement.

The streetcars and railroads, for their part, were not a priority for an administration more worried about stabilizing the banking system, employing people, providing relief, saving capitalism from collapse, and creating a housing policy that would renew the housing industry the Depression had destroyed. Yet this alone does not explain why the United States, alone among the prosperous nations in the world, jettisoned its own transportation systems other than the automobile after the war. Part of the answer lies in the fact that state and federal government policy subsidized road building and taxed the railroads after the 1920s.<sup>91</sup> The other reason lay not in the public sector, but in the private sector. As early as 1926, General Motors quietly began buying out nearly bankrupt streetcar systems through a subsidiary corporation.<sup>92</sup> Between then and 1950, General Motors had been involved in the replacement over a hundred streetcar operations in New York City, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Salt Lake City.<sup>93</sup>

In the case of Kansas City, General Motors' subsidiary never bought them out and

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<sup>90</sup> Jackson, 167.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 170-71.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

perhaps as a result, the local streetcar system was still in operation on as late as 1957.<sup>94</sup> The *Call* had been pressing them and the busses they operated to hire African-American drivers just a few years before and noted that the city's blacks made up a significant share of the riders on both the bus and streetcar lines of the Kansas City transit company.<sup>95</sup> Pendergast, for his part, was far more interested in bringing the age of air travel to Kansas City by developing the municipal airport and its terminal at the mouth of the Kaw as part of his Ten Year Plan of city improvement than he was in maintaining his city's streetcar lines or railroads.<sup>96</sup>

By the time the Great Depression ravaged the nation, it was in many ways already too late for the United States to choose the option to develop its transportation in the manner Western Europe did, in which the automobile and airplane did not replace rail and streetcars as transit but instead were part of a range of transportation options. In a weird twist, Americans as early as the 1920s decided that the road was a public good while mass transit was defined as a private business unworthy of taxpayer subsidy.<sup>97</sup> By 1940, liberals as well as conservatives in the US agreed with New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia that the trolley was a relic and an "obstacle to progress."<sup>98</sup> For urban blacks, even before urban freeways began to be planned, they were to be as James Flink put it, "especially disadvantaged by auto-induced urban decentralization."<sup>99</sup> This would be one of many ways that most African Americans would be excluded from postwar

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<sup>94</sup> Dodd, 183, 190.

<sup>95</sup> "How About It Kansas City?," *Call*, December 1954.

<sup>96</sup> Reddig, 351.

<sup>97</sup> Jackson, 170.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Flink, 134-35.

prosperity.<sup>100</sup>

One of the most fateful policy decisions the Roosevelt administration made would help to exacerbate the nascent urban crisis in the coming decades in every American major city including Kansas City, although unintentionally. Seeking to speed the recovery of the housing sector in the economy, and to improve access to credit more generally, the Roosevelt administration created new agencies in its quest to rebuild the depression-devastated housing market.<sup>101</sup> The five years after 1928 had been particularly bad for the industry, as the number of residential permits fell, the number of foreclosed homes rose, and the number of failed building and loan associations rose between that year and 1933. Permits dropped by more than one hundred thousand, while foreclosures increased by seventy-one percent.<sup>102</sup> The administration turned to advice from the same alliance of private and public officials who had advised the Coolidge and Hoover Departments of Commerce.<sup>103</sup> Unfortunately, this meant that every racist notion advocated by Nichols and the NAREB in the 1910s and 1920s that black neighborhoods meant low property values would now be implemented as federal government policy.<sup>104</sup> The third major housing policy Roosevelt would enact would be an attempt to set up a system of public housing for the poor and working-class, but the results would be far from what he intended.<sup>105</sup>

Two new agencies were created to confront the housing crisis in 1933 and 1934: the first,

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>101</sup> Gotham, 52-53.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Freund, 99.

<sup>104</sup> Gotham, 54.

<sup>105</sup> Jackson, 219.

with the intention of protecting the small homeowner from foreclosure, and the second, with a plan that could stimulate building through private enterprise.<sup>106</sup> These were the Homeowners' Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration, respectively. Together, they completed the process of creating the modern mortgage and real estate market as it is known today. The HOLC introduced and institutionalized "the long-term, self-amortizing (paying down) mortgage with uniform payments spread over the whole life of the debt."<sup>107</sup> Before, in the nineteenth century, mortgages had been viewed negatively, and it was expected of established families that they purchase homes with full payment at the time of purchase. The mortgage had arisen after World War I, when rising costs and consumer debt had necessitated its use in financing a home. During the 1920s housing bubble, these mortgages tended to last five to ten years and the loan was not fully paid off when the final settlement was due. This meant the mortgage went into immediate foreclosure unless renewals for five to seven years were obtained.<sup>108</sup> Extensions such as these were nearly impossible to obtain with the onset of the Great Depression. The homeowner was thus at the mercy of the unpredictability of market forces. The HOLC changed that, as the repayment period was extended to twenty years and the principal of the loan was repaid over the life of the loan.<sup>109</sup>

In a move that would have tremendous ramifications as one of the major ways urban African-Americans were shut out of postwar prosperity, the HOLC also introduced redlining.<sup>110</sup> The very name in fact came from HOLC maps of major cities that were color-coded into "A"

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 195, 203.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.



through “D” grades.<sup>111</sup> “Red” neighborhoods were grade “D” neighborhoods as determined by the HOLC, while grade “A” neighborhoods were marked green on maps.<sup>112</sup> In a way that reflected how casual and commonplace anti-Semitism as well as racism was in the United States before World War II, Jewish neighborhoods were graded lower than “American neighborhoods” and “neighborhoods with an infiltration of Jews” as determined by HOLC officials were also given lower grades.<sup>113</sup> Race and ethnicity were used arbitrarily along with age and material conditions to rate city blocks, but the key assumptions were that green grade “A” neighborhoods were homogenous, new, white, and inhabited by businessmen and professionals, while African-American and Jewish neighborhoods could not possibly be considered “best” under any circumstances. Neighborhoods in between were given grade “B,” colored blue, and grade “C”, which were yellow.<sup>114</sup> Grade “B” neighborhoods were often Jewish, Catholic, or white working-class while grade “C” neighborhoods were often racially mixed.<sup>115</sup> Black neighborhoods were automatically rated “D” regardless of income or condition of property.<sup>116</sup>

The Federal Housing Administration was created by the passage of the National Housing Act of 1934.<sup>117</sup> Its purpose was to insure home mortgages, and to this end, the Housing Act included three main provisions. First, the federal government established an emergency temporary national credit plan between 1934 and 1936 that insured lenders up to twenty percent losses on all property loans. The purpose was stimulate home building and renovate existing

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 197-98.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 197-98.

<sup>115</sup> Gotham, 53.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

homes.<sup>118</sup> Secondly, the FHA created “national mortgage associations” to buy and sell FHA mortgages in order to make mortgage insurance available nationwide and maintain a circulation of funds.<sup>119</sup> Finally, the FHA established the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation to insure the accounts of savings and loan associations.

The FHA, too, discriminated against African Americans in Kansas City. It refused to insure mortgages in neighborhoods that were poor or racially mixed, so builders and prospective home buyers could only obtain lower FHA down payments and rates if they relocated to suburban areas.<sup>120</sup> The Agency warned personnel not to insure mortgages on homes unless they had racially restrictive covenants, were in “homogenous” neighborhoods, and were removed from “blight” such as poor schools and older housing.<sup>121</sup>

FHA subsidies helped J.C. Nichols create one of the Kansas City area’s largest suburban subdivisions, Prairie Village in Johnson County, Kansas.<sup>122</sup> Using the racially restrictive covenants even after the Supreme Court ruled them unconstitutional, Prairie Village excluded Blacks and Jews for decades with FHA approval.<sup>123</sup> Flush with money from the FHA, Nichols and other suburban land developers began to ring KCMO and KCK around with white-only subdivisions in Jackson, Platte, Clay, and Johnson counties.<sup>124</sup> Another housing development firm, the Kroh Brothers, built the entire city of Leawood in Johnson county using racial

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 61.

restrictions and FHA funding.<sup>125</sup> The FHA would insure more than seventy-seven thousand homes in the metro area between 1934 and 1962, but only one percent would go to Black families. A former president and chairman of the Board of the City Bond and Mortgage Company between 1934 and 1965 later recalled that the “FHA and VA wouldn’t insure and guarantee loans in Kansas City unless there was a racial restriction involved.”<sup>126</sup>

In a way that was further damaging, the justifications for these policies by agencies originating in the New Deal helped to forge a new language white suburbanites would use in later decades to justify housing segregation by claiming these were natural “free market” forces and that white homeowners had “property rights” to exclude blacks.<sup>127</sup> In a twist of irony, the far right-wing John Birch Society—an organization whose members despised FDR and the New Deal—would make the same arguments in its defense of Kansas City businesses that practiced Jim Crow in the 1960s.<sup>128</sup>

Mindful that the HOLC and FHA were not aimed at the poor, FDR persuaded Congress to pass the Federal Housing Act of 1937.<sup>129</sup> Liberals and the administration hoped the law could wipe out slums and give the poor and lower classes better places to live.<sup>130</sup> Conservatives and the real estate industry hated the idea and staunchly resisted it from the beginning, screaming that it was a form of socialism or communism.<sup>131</sup> The real estate industry also wanted to wipe out slums, by knocking them down to build subdivisions or commercial businesses, but was

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Freund, 132.

<sup>128</sup> Gotham, 126.

<sup>129</sup> Jackson, 219.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.; Gotham, 76.

staunchly opposed to public housing.<sup>132</sup> Kansas City was authorized by the state of Missouri to begin building public housing in accordance with the act in 1941, only to have World War II halt such efforts altogether.<sup>133</sup>

Initially, and from one point of view, the act was a success.<sup>134</sup> After all, within a year, thirty-three states had passed laws enabling public housing and two-hundred and twenty one local authorities had been established. Despite all of their efforts, the real estate industry and conservatives were not able to kill the program or divert all of its funding to eminent domain, and by 1941, the US Housing Authority had built one hundred and thirty-thousand units in three hundred projects nationwide. By 1962, more than two million people lived in the half-million units built under housing programs. While their condition was mocked and decried, the units were certainly better than the dilapidated buildings they often replaced.<sup>135</sup>

Despite early successes and the good intentions of President Roosevelt and Senator Robert Wagner, instead of a public housing system for the poor and working-classes, public housing became one more symbol of urban segregation. The new housing became known generically as “the projects” and they became a potent symbol of the exclusion of inner-city blacks from postwar prosperity. Right wing opposition along with the real estate industry’s attempts to turn the act into a blank check for eminent domain and urban renewal schemes, and ultimately, the act’s reliance on state and local officials to administer the program, led to such a development.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, the intent of the act was geared towards stimulus rather than need, so

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<sup>132</sup> Gotham, 75.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Jackson, 224.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Jackson, 224-25.

that when the war and the postwar boom came, the public sector was relegated to a lower priority.<sup>137</sup> To make matters worse, Republican Congresses (with the help of conservative Democrats) repeatedly cut funding for the program after the war.

Despite the very real limitations of the New Deal's outreach to African Americans, the Presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt marked the beginning of the end of African American political allegiance to the Republican Party as millions of northern Blacks voted for FDR, especially in 1936 and afterward.<sup>138</sup> This development would create a situation after World War II in which northern Black voters' leverage over both political parties increased as a swing voting bloc. Locally, the Pendergast brothers had been decades ahead of the national party in trying to woo the African American vote, and black Kansas Citizens voted Democratic for Pendergast and Roosevelt in large numbers in the 1930s.

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Roosevelt's New Deal had additional implications for Greater Kansas City and the region. The role of the Urban League in the KCMO job market changed after 1934, as the organization served as the main job broker for the city's African American communities.<sup>139</sup> Between 1934 and 1939, the Urban League handled the cases of at least fifty individuals a month.<sup>140</sup> Few of these individuals made just one appearance; after 1935, monthly appearances jumped from two hundred to around five hundred and fifty. Throughout this period, there were always more job applicants than jobs available. Another persistent problem was that of low

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>138</sup> Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), xvi.

<sup>139</sup> "Annual Report for 1934," KCULP, Box KCULP-2, Files 1, Vol.1-41, 1934-89, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>140</sup> Coulter, 282-83.

wages or even, in some cases, the refusal of employers to pay for work done. In one case, when black workers in Kansas City successfully struck for a three cent an hour raise in 1934, they had their hours cut by twenty percent.<sup>141</sup> Many industries in the city were adamant in their refusal to hire African American workers, despite Urban League pressure and negotiation.

Nonetheless, the Urban League won a few small victories in persuading the Jones Store in 1936, the utility companies in 1937, and the Ford plant in October 1939 to hire or, in the case of the Jones Store, rehire black workers.<sup>142</sup> The Jones Store had appointed a new manager, who dismissed eight porters, five of whom were black.<sup>143</sup> The Industrial Relations staff of the Urban League then met with the manager, persuading him to not only rehire the porters but hire ten additional porters. Additionally, the manager agreed to raise wages for African American elevator operators in the store.<sup>144</sup> As for the Ford plant in Leeds, all that is known is that six workers were hired by the plant, but no records survive of what the plant assigned them to do as part of its workforce.<sup>145</sup> Given the pervasive racism and hiring discrimination of the era, the League also had to pressure the Public Works Administration and the city's labor unions to give African American workers a chance.<sup>146</sup> Besides small victories, the Urban League was unable to make a breakthrough in any one job or industry until World War II.<sup>147</sup> Through 1939, the Urban League

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<sup>141</sup> "Monthly Report, September 1934," Urban League Minutes, Board of Directors, Box M1, Vol. 1, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>142</sup> "Monthly Report, March 1937," KCULP, Urban League Minutes, Board of Directors, Box M1, Vol.1, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>143</sup> Coulter, 284.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> "October Report—1939," Urban League Minutes, Board of Directors, Box M1, Vol.3, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>146</sup> "Urban League Activities for the Month of July 1938," Urban League Board of Directors, Box M1, Vol.2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

had an especially difficult time finding work for African American women.<sup>148</sup>

Despite Randolph's successes with the Brotherhood of Sleepingcar Porters and the AFL recognition of his union, union locals associated with the AFL still held on to racially exclusionary practices in the late 1930s. In fact Randolph and other civil rights activists would be fighting racist exclusion policies in AFL locals into the 1960s.<sup>149</sup> As a result, when Kansas City had a wave of strikes and labor unrest in 1936-37, African Americans were put in an odd position. On the one hand, because the garment workers excluded them, black workers at the Gordon Brothers Company did not participate in a strike against that company by garment workers.<sup>150</sup> However, they did participate in strikes at the Ford plant and (as noted in the previous chapter) in the meatpacking plants in 1938, as both were CIO locals open to African American workers.<sup>151</sup> The work stoppage at the Leeds Ford plant was nowhere near as brutal and violent as the River Rouge strike in Michigan earlier in the decade had been. The danger when black workers did participate in strikes was that their jobs could be put in direct peril at a time when jobs were scarce and discrimination was as rampant as ever. These strikes were followed in 1938 by a citywide strike in the produce industry and a Sheffield Steel Plant walkout that included twenty-eight black workers.<sup>152</sup> The produce strike had left many without work, while the steel plant

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<sup>148</sup> "November Report—1939," Urban League Minutes, Board of Directors, Box M1, Vol.3, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>149</sup> Herbert Hill, "Racism Within Organized Labor: A Report of Five Years of the AFL-CIO, 1955-60," *Journal of Negro Education* 30:2 (1961): 109-18.

<sup>150</sup> "Monthly Report, March 1937," Urban League Minutes, Board of Directors, Box M1, Vol.2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>151</sup> "Minutes, Board of Directors, February 18, 1938," Urban League Minutes, Board of Directors, Box M1, Vol.3, MO State Archives, Jefferson City. Urban League Minutes, Board of Directors, Box M1, Vol.2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>152</sup> "Monthly Report, October 1938," Urban League Minutes, Board of Directors, Box M1, Vol.2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City. Urban League Minutes, Board of Directors, Box M1, Vol.3, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

workers only returned to work after the Urban League's intervention.<sup>153</sup>

As for New Deal programs beyond public works and housing, their record towards Kansas City's black population was a mixed one. Some, like the HOLC and NHA, actually harmed the community. Others did very little. The late 1930s revival of relief programs did little to help African American families, as the monthly allotment of eleven dollars was insufficient to meet the needs of unskilled laborers who had not worked in two or three years.<sup>154</sup> In addition, the National Recovery Act discriminated against black workers in order to curry favor with racist locals of the AFL and the southern wing of the Democratic Party.<sup>155</sup>

Still other agencies were very helpful or were turned around after initially behaving in a discriminatory fashion. The Civil Works Administration at first offered very few opportunities to blacks until the federal government threatened to cut off funding for Missouri unless it removed racial barriers to CWA projects in Jackson County.<sup>156</sup> Once the barriers were lifted and African American workers were admitted to the CWA, the Kansas City Urban League assumed some oversight of the program.<sup>157</sup> The National Youth Administration began its first project in Jackson County at the Thomas Swope Settlement House near Campbell Street. Young men and women between ages sixteen and twenty-five who came from families on relief were eligible to participate in the NYA, and the agency hoped to enlist thirty-nine young women and twenty-one young men in helping to expand recreational and vocational programs at local community

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> "Administrative Report, January 1938," Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> "Negro Workers Under the N.R.A." Urban League Pilot, April 1934, KCULP, Folder 11, no volume, No.2, Box KCULP-1, MO State Archives, Jefferson City; "Industrial Relations," p.4, KCULP, Box M-1: Minutes of the Board of Directors, 1932-39, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>156</sup> Coulter, 287.

<sup>157</sup> "A New NYA Allotment," undated, KCULP, Box N1, File 2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.



centers. The NYA awarded the Kansas City Urban League a federal grant to hire students to repair toys used in African American childrens' hospitals and other institutions for black children.<sup>158</sup>

By 1935, the Urban League was supervising seven federal programs which were part of the New Deal, including the NYA and the WPA.<sup>159</sup> Adult education courses for the city's African American population provided by the WPA became very popular.<sup>160</sup> Like the CWA, the CCC at first had problems with racial discrimination. In 1937, four black employees at the CCC camp at Lone Star lake near Lawrence, Kansas complained of racial discrimination by the camp commander.<sup>161</sup> The most serious of these complaints mentioned incidents that resulted in jail sentences for three black youths who had participated in the CCC. An investigation by Thomas Webster of the Urban League resulted in a formal complaint to the CCC office in Omaha.<sup>162</sup>

In the early years of the Depression, African Americans in both KCMO and KCK received some aid from the charities bureau of the Chamber of Commerce. In 1932 for KCMO, the agency set a quota of African Americans on a federal reforestation project on the basis of the percentage of black men seeking assistance through the Provident Association.<sup>163</sup> As a result, more than eighty African American men were hired on the crew of four hundred.<sup>164</sup> For KCK,

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> "Monthly Report, March 1936," KCULP, Urban League Minutes, Board of Directors, Box M1, Vol.2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>160</sup> "Classes For Adults Now," KCULP, Urban League Minutes, Board of Directors, Box M1, Vol.2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>161</sup> "Monthly Report, July 1937," KCULP, Urban League Minutes, Board of Directors, Box M1, Vol.2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> "Negro Quota in Forestry Jobs to 80," undated newspaper clipping ca. 1933, KCULP, Box N1, File 2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

black workers were hired to build a new Missouri river bridge from the Fairfax industrial district to Platte County, Missouri.<sup>165</sup> There, one hundred black men were employed as cement mixers.<sup>166</sup>

As for Pendergast, his record on jobs for African Americans was only slightly better than his record on the city's segregation and discriminatory practices. The number of African Americans on the city's payroll rose from twenty nine under the previous city government in 1924 to four hundred and thirty-eight in 1938.<sup>167</sup> However, most of these were patronage appointments and job barriers elsewhere remained untouched.<sup>168</sup> Like FDR, Pendergast was averse to antagonizing the more racist locals of the AFL. The city's inspection department denied permits that would have allowed African American plumbers, electricians, masons, carpenters, plasterers, and tile settlers to work on buildings that required city inspections.<sup>169</sup>

This was especially glaring given that the Pendergast machine liked to boast that Tom Pendergast's "Ten Year Plan" kept the city working through the Depression. His Ten Year Plan was an ambitious program of civic improvement that had three main goals: to improve infrastructure, put the unemployed back to work and keep them off the relief rolls, and, not incidentally, to enrich Pendergast and his friends. To these ends, the machine accomplished a staggering amount: it built a new city hall and Jackson county courthouse, the Municipal Auditorium and greatly expanded the zoo, the Municipal Airport, and Municipal Hospital.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> "100 Workers on Fairfax Bridge Job," undated ca. 1933, KCULP, Box N1, File 2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> *Kansas City Call*, September 29, 1931, August 4, 1939

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., September 29, 1933, June 8, 1934, December 14, 1934.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Reddig, 127-28, 182.

That the Urban League was having so much trouble getting African-Americans hired and that there were so many black families struggling in extreme poverty in the midst of this frenzy of city-subsidized building exposed how racially biased the city's hiring practices were and how the Pendergast machine's record fell far short of what black voters had hoped for. Beyond this, the Pendergast Ten Year Plan was myopic in that any construction project or sector of the economy that wasn't one of the machine's pet projects languished.<sup>171</sup> The machine did nothing, for example, to help housing, the railroads, or the stockyards.<sup>172</sup> In any event, Pendergast rapidly fell from grace when he and several of his associates were given federal sentences for income tax evasion in 1939.<sup>173</sup> Despite all of his flaws on civil rights and the city's treatment of African Americans, Pendergast and his machine still had a much better record on civil rights than his fellow Democrats in the early 1900s or the Republican state-appointed police department in the 1920s.

Activists such as Chester Franklin seized on the fall of Pendergast to create the Non-Partisan Citizens' Movement in June 1939, as the fall of the machine swept a Citizens' Reform political ticket into power in 1940.<sup>174</sup> The Citizens' Reform ticket was in fact deeply hostile to blacks and definitely worse than the Pendergast machine on matter of race, since it reflected the city's own pattern of racism informed by a gendered white middle-class ideology of civic housekeeping. Franklin and the Non-Partisans did not know this at first, and initially actually believed they would be able to influence the new reform government. The platform of the Non-Partisan Citizens Movement was a preview of black activists' agenda during the 1940s. Its

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<sup>171</sup> Coulter, 272.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Reddig, 322-23; Haskell and Fowler, 132-34; *Kansas City Call*, March 31, 1939.

<sup>174</sup> "Citizens Movement Platform," *Kansas City Call*, June 9, 1939.

platform called for equitable employment based on merit in city and county positions, proposed public housing projects, demanded an end to racial discrimination in tax-supported facilities, and called for the election of African-Americans to the city council.<sup>175</sup>

Franklin and other civil rights activists in Kansas City took up the cause of attacking segregation of Missouri's university system in the 1930s through legal action, galvanized by the case of Lloyd Gaines.<sup>176</sup> This was an important first step in attacking KCMO's segregated schools, by means of undermining Jim Crow at the state level. Given that chronic school segregation by race even after Brown was an interrelated problem in the story of KCMO's urban crisis, this is important to note as the first step in a long legal battle over KCMO's segregated school system that would drag on well past the 1960s, into the 1980s.<sup>177</sup> Gaines was a young black man from St. Louis who had sued the University of Missouri after being denied entry to the University law school on the basis of his race. After a series of court battles, the US Supreme Court ruled in 1938 that the University of Missouri had to admit Gaines to its law school or else provide equal facilities for blacks.<sup>178</sup> The University of Missouri chose the latter option, but thought setting aside a law school for African Americans in an abandoned beauty college with two hundred thousand dollars in funding constituted "equal facilities."<sup>179</sup> Sadly, Gaines never attended that or any other school, since he disappeared shortly after giving a speech in Kansas City in March 1939 thanking his supporters.<sup>180</sup> He was never seen again and a nationwide search

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. January 31, 1936.

<sup>177</sup> For more detail on the story of school segregation in Kansas City, see Pete Moran's dissertation, *Balancing Act: Race and the Kansas City, Missouri Public Schools, 1949-1999* (Manhattan KS: Kansas State University, 2000).

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., December 16, 1938.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., March 10, 1939.

by the NAACP the following October found no trace of Gaines.<sup>181</sup> It was assumed by many contemporaries that he was murdered.

Gaines' fate only emboldened activists in Kansas City, who refused to be intimidated. A month before Gaines made his last speech, Lucile Bluford was barred from enrolling in the University of Missouri's graduate school of journalism on the basis of her color.<sup>182</sup> Bluford, an honors degree graduate of the University of Kansas, had been a reporter for the *Call* since her graduation in 1932. She actually had been accepted on the basis of her transcript, only to have the registrar refuse to enroll her once he discovered she was African-American. The excuse used by the registrar and the University was that the Gaines case had not yet been completely settled. Bluford refused to be intimidated by Gaines disappearance, renewed her application, and was again denied admittance.<sup>183</sup> For more than a decade, Bluford and her allies would battle in the courts to make segregated schooling too expensive for Missouri by demanding truly equal facilities for higher education. Additionally, Bluford would become a major force for civil rights in KCMO, as she would later serve on the advisory board of the Urban League until the early 1960s.<sup>184</sup>

During these battles, Chester Franklin's conservatism was shaken and he openly began to draw parallels between Jim Crow in America and British colonial rule in India in the pages of the *Call*.<sup>185</sup> Franklin closely examined Gandhi's "program of nonviolence and non-cooperation" as a

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, October 27, 1939.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, February 3, 1939.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.* October 13, 1939.

<sup>184</sup> "Annual Report: Report For 1959," Spring 1960, p.3, KCULP, Box KCULP-2, File 18, MO Valley Special Collections, Jefferson City.

<sup>185</sup> *Kansas City Call*, February 13, 1931, March 20, 1931.

tactic for civil rights struggle.<sup>186</sup> Franklin was not alone in admiring Gandhi's teachings and methods among KCMO's black leadership; the Reverend Joseph Gomez of the Allen Chapel A.M.E. also greatly admired Gandhi and spoke to black audiences about him.<sup>187</sup> Gomez believed Western acceptance of Gandhi's philosophy would have the power to eliminate "all class and color prejudice."<sup>188</sup> In Black Kansas City in the late 1930s, the tactical and philosophical shapes that the 1950s and 1960s civil rights and black freedom movement would take were starting to emerge.

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World War II provided African American activists nationwide with a powerful weapon against domestic Jim Crow—a foreign enemy of the United States whose entire ideology, Nazism, was based on racism; the new language of anti-fascism was also a language with which to attack Jim Crow. This would have the long-term effect of inverting the international climate that had reinforced American racism at home; especially after the war, the association of pseudoscientific racism with the Nazi enemy and its atrocities would put racism and anti-Semitism on the defensive. The slogan of activists for black freedom and civil rights during wartime nationwide became the "Double V": victory over the Axis abroad and Jim Crow at home. African American veterans' attitudes were best summed up by William Ashby of the Newark Urban League who said "I'm tired of this goddamn crap. Tired of hearing the white man say, 'I can serve no niggers in my restaurant.' . . . Hitler leveled his bullets at me. Missed. I went to the Pacific. Mr. Hirohito sent his madmen to blow me to hell in their planes. I'm still

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., January 22, 1932.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

here. Why don't I tell the white man, "Take your goddamn boots off of my neck!"<sup>189</sup>

Accordingly, more African Americans were willing to take collective, direct action against racist exclusion.<sup>190</sup> They aimed protests, demonstrations, and court challenges at the heart of the mythology and institutions that protected racism. By late 1940, manufacturers and public officials were getting ready to produce weaponry and munitions, the war production that FDR had promised to help supply the Allied effort in Europe, especially Britain. At first, it appeared blacks would be frozen out of the benefits of war production in Kansas City.<sup>191</sup> The KCMO School District launched a martial arts program to train defense workers, but refused to hire African Americans.<sup>192</sup> *The Call* noted with much irritation that state employments bureaus in both Kansas and Missouri were quietly refusing to send blacks to fill defense contractors' requisitions and it took a mass protest to force the hiring of twenty-five black carpenters from Kansas City for construction work at Fort Riley, Kansas.<sup>193</sup>

It was the aircraft industry, however, that held the most promise for unemployed workers of all races and backgrounds for good-paying jobs. In March 1941, defense contractors began building an enormous bomber plant in Fairfax, Kansas, an industrial district of KCK.<sup>194</sup> Built with federal monies, the plant would be operated by a California-based subsidiary of General Motors named North American Aviation. The company promised it would employ as many as ten thousand at the plant. KCK's Mayor, Don McCombs, in the excitement, assured black voters that

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<sup>189</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 132.

<sup>190</sup> Schirmer, 180-81

<sup>191</sup> *Kansas City Call*, January 1, 1941.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Kansas City Call*, February 28, 1941; March 7, 1941.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, March 21, 1941.

the company would hire them too.

Unfortunately, McCombs spoke too soon, as the company announced its intent was to hire blacks only as janitors.<sup>195</sup> *The Call* immediately went on the offensive, using antifascist language to shame the city and company with the all-upper case lettered headline, “NAZISM IN KANSAS CITY.”<sup>196</sup> North American’s President, James H. Kindelberger, dug his heels in and told the *Kansas City Star* by phone that the firm would refuse to employ African Americans on factory lines regardless of their skills.<sup>197</sup> Hours later, blacks in both Kansas Cities fired off an avalanche of letters and telegrams to Washington D.C.<sup>198</sup> Republican Senator Arthur Capper of Kansas and the NAACP sponsored a resolution calling for an investigation of race discrimination in defense and Walter White of the NAACP demanded that Kindelberger be subpoenaed to appear before the Senate.<sup>199</sup> In the House, another Republican, U.S. Guyer condemned North American Aviation’s “gross discrimination” on the House floor.<sup>200</sup> In Topeka, the Kansas House passed its own resolution condemning North American’s race discrimination.

A. Philip Randolph’s March on Washington Movement provided just the outlet for both Kansas Cities’ blacks to express their outrage at Kindelberger’s policies. In January, Randolph made it known that he was displeased with President Roosevelt’s attempts to sidestep a ban on racial discrimination in the defense industries. He announced a “pilgrimage” to the capital by

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> *Kansas City Star*, March 17, 1941

<sup>198</sup> *Kansas City Call*, March 21, 1941.

<sup>199</sup> *Kansas City Call*, March 28, 1941.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.



African Americans demanding their rights to “work and fight.”<sup>201</sup> Of what he wished this to achieve, Randolph wrote, “Our demand would be simple, single, and central. Namely: jobs in National Defense and placement as soldiers and officers of all ranks we are qualified for in the armed forces.”<sup>202</sup> Unless these key demands were met, tens of thousands of African-American citizens would march on the nation’s capital on July 1, 1941. Even so, President Roosevelt refused to meet with a national conference on “Negro Participation in National Defense” held in March.<sup>203</sup> Instead, he issued a fireside chat in which he warned that if blacks were not given any stake in their country’s defense then “their full loyalty and unstinted support” could not be expected, but he still refused to use executive powers to guarantee African-American workers would be included in the war effort.<sup>204</sup>

*The Call* joined the vast majority of black publications in endorsing the March, Randolph had particularly close ties to both Kansas Cities dating back to the days when the *Call* was one of the only black newspapers to cover his labor organizing fairly and the Reverend D.A. Holmes was the only pastor in the Midwest who permitted him to use the pulpit.<sup>205</sup> A mass local protest paralleling the March Movement was organized to make Kansas City’s black voices heard.<sup>206</sup> It was hosted by both Kansas Cities’ NAACP chapters, and an estimated thirty-five hundred to five thousand black men and women from Greater Kansas City attended the March

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., January 31, 1941.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Schirmer, 43.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., April 4, 1941.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., February 26, 1943, March 28, 1941.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

30, 1941 rally in Memorial Hall in KCK.<sup>207</sup> By a voice vote, the attendees of the rally passed a resolution demanding cancellation of North America's defense contract and called for delegates from both cities to go to Washington to meet with White House and congressional officials. The Mayor attended and was jeered at first, but loudly applauded after he read an angry letter he sent to Kindelberger, attacking him for lying to the mayor and black voters about his hiring intentions.<sup>208</sup>

After the demonstration, KCK's city commission passed a resolution banning discrimination against black workers at the Fairfax plant and the packinghouse local of the CIO sent a delegation to Washington DC to issue its own protest.<sup>209</sup> Both houses of the Kansas state legislature passed a bill that outlawed racial discrimination in the state's labor unions. Meanwhile, the Office of Production Management had been flooded with letters, telegrams, and phone calls from Kansas Citizens demanding action against North American.<sup>210</sup>

Sidney Hillman, the co-director of the Office of Production Management (OPM), sent what became known as "the Hillman letter" to the nation's defense contractors in April.<sup>211</sup> In it, Hillman cited reports that some contractors were not hiring "qualified and available Negro workers."<sup>212</sup> The letter continued, bemoaning how "extremely wasteful of our human resources" discrimination was.<sup>213</sup> It urged contractors "to examine their employment and training policies" in order that it could be decided if "those policies make ample provision for the full utilization of

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., April 4, 1941.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., April 18, 1941.

<sup>211</sup> Schirmer, 185.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

Negro workers.”<sup>214</sup>

By mid-May, the Kansas City delegation of protestors reached Washington to find Capper’s bill bottled up in the Senate committee.<sup>215</sup> When they left, all they had were non-specific assurances from the Senate and OPM that “everything practical” was being done to open up the defense plants to black workers.<sup>216</sup> Worse, the *Call* reported that although Hillman had gotten guarantees from several contractors to hire twelve hundred black workers, he had not received any response from Kindelberger. Randolph, out of patience, declared he was tired of the “runaround” and called for a “thundering march on Washington, ending in a monster and huge demonstration at Lincoln’s monument that will shake up white America.”<sup>217</sup> Randolph hoped to force Roosevelt’s hand to issue an executive order banning racial discrimination in all federal departments, one way or another.

Still, Roosevelt balked, arguing that Randolph’s planned march “would stir up race hatred” and several of his advisors warned of a race riot.<sup>218</sup> In mid-June, thanks largely to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt’s intervention, the president issued his first public statement supporting the Hillman letter.<sup>219</sup> The protest movement was far from satisfied and Randolph refused to call off the July 1st march. Finally, on June 18, FDR met with Randolph, Walter White, and other delegates from the March Movement as well as New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. Roosevelt and his staff probed Randolph and others with questions to see if the march was a bluff; White

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> *Kansas City Call*, May 16, 1941.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., May 9, 1941

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., May 2, 1941.

<sup>219</sup> Schirmer, 186.

rather rashly disposed of that conception by pledging one hundred thousand marchers.<sup>220</sup> Finally convinced, Roosevelt joined Randolph and LaGuardia in constructing a compromise that omitted desegregation of the military itself.<sup>221</sup> On June 25, 1941, FDR issued Executive Order 8802 banning racial discrimination in defense plants, the first action of a presidential administration in support of civil rights since the Grant administration in the 1870s. The African American communities of both KCMO and KCK had helped make it happen by refusing to allow a defense corporation to engage in frustratingly familiar job discrimination, and forced the OPM to break with the administration's indifference to Jim Crow.

After their success in pressuring the White House to end racial discrimination in munitions plants, the city's middle class activists became more cautious, preferring not to disrupt the war effort.<sup>222</sup> Working-class blacks, however, were inspired by Randolph's example to launch protests of their own. Between 1943 and 1945, there were a series of wildcat strikes by black workers. In May 1943, forty black employees of a local garment company stopped work for one day in protest of the firing of black machine operators<sup>223</sup>. A month later, eight black employees of an Army mess hall in Kansas City walked off the job after they saw two black GIs denied service there.<sup>224</sup> In March 1945, African American women who operated elevators in the Jackson County Courthouse struck to protest the beating of a black woman by county deputies.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> *Kansas City Call*, June 20, 1941.

<sup>222</sup> *Kansas City Call*, January 23, 1942.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., May 14, 1943.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., June 4, 1943.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., March 16, 1945.

Perhaps the largest wildcat strike by black workers in Kansas City took place at the Pratt-Whitney aircraft engine plant strike of July 1944. What occurred there was rooted in the tried and true tactic of deflection by employers and unions who claimed that the bigotry of “customers” or “rank and file” were the reason for Jim Crow policies.<sup>226</sup> At Pratt-Whitney, this theory was tested and proven false in the most blatant fashion. Early in the war, the plant had no separate facilities for blacks and whites except for restrooms and black workers found relations with their white counterparts “harmonious.”<sup>227</sup> As a result, they were shocked when they came to work one morning and saw “whites only” and “coloreds only” signs at the factory’s six cafeterias.<sup>228</sup> Within an hour, most African American workers on the first shift walked off their jobs, followed by second and third shifts when they learned of this discriminatory act by management. When confronted, management claimed that the signs had been posted at the request of officials of the International Association of Machinists. The striking black workers were puzzled, since neither they nor the Machinists’ union were aware of any objections to integrated cafeterias from white workers in the plant.<sup>229</sup>

Once the wildcat action was underway however, Pratt-Whitney’s African American workforce registered other complaints against the plant’s management. White workers with less training and seniority were steadily promoted, while many black workers had been denied promotion.<sup>230</sup> Foremen assigned black workers to the lowest level and least desirable jobs, gave them old or faulty machines, and verbally harassed them with racist insults and language. An

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<sup>226</sup> “The Negro Worker of Kansas City,” June 1940, KCULP, Box KCULP-3, File 2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> *Kansas City Call*, June 30, 1944.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., July 7, 1944.

outraged woman worker who was the mother of two sons pointed out, nearly in tears, that there certainly wasn't any "segregation of" German or Japanese "bullets being shelled on our boys overseas."<sup>231</sup> These workers only called off their strike so as not to delay war production, but while the cafeterias remained segregated, most African American workers refused to use them.

During the war, KCMO continued some of the worst Jim Crow practices that had marked both the Republican "reform" and Pendergast years in the 1920s and 1930s. An infamous example that almost caused Franklin and other middle-class blacks to reconsider eschewing protest for the sake of the war effort was a February 1942 performance by Paul Robeson at Kansas City's Municipal Auditorium. Robeson vowed he would never perform in front of a segregated audience and had been promised by Auditorium officials that his audience would be integrated.<sup>232</sup> During the intermission, Lucile Bluford asked Robeson directly why he had broken his pledge by singing in a Jim Crow hall. In shock, Robeson replied that he did not know his audience was a segregated one. He had been tricked by a tactic the Auditorium often used, since the blocs of seats for blacks were scattered throughout the auditorium in a way that gave off the illusion it was integrated. After intermission, Robeson returned to announce that he would only continue the concert under protest. He then proceeded to sing the most rousing freedom and protest songs he knew, eschewing his prepared music.<sup>233</sup> Angry whites began leaving the auditorium.

As a result, the NAACP launched a campaign to target segregation in the auditorium, its

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> *Kansas City Call*, February 20, 1942.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., February 27, 1942.

music hall, and Swope Park.<sup>234</sup> *The Call* recommended a conference with the authorities, since, after all, black Republicans were allies of the Citizens' Association, the nonpartisan group that came to office after Pendergast's fall. However, the nonpartisan city government, including Mayor Gage, ducked responsibility for Auditorium discrimination, claiming that private promoters who rented the auditorium were at fault for segregated seating. Not only did Gage and his "reformers" refuse to eliminate racial segregation in the auditorium, they actually tightened racial boundaries in Swope Park by sending mounted park attendants and police officers in squad cars to herd black picnickers into a designated "colored area" of the Park.<sup>235</sup>

The Kansas City Philharmonic was worse, banning African-Americans from attending altogether.<sup>236</sup> Ruth Seufert, chair of the Philharmonic, denied that she was racist or prejudiced herself, since she had "a colored maid" who "sometimes eats at my own table with my family."<sup>237</sup> She trotted out the familiar deflecting tactic that it was the fault of bigoted patrons. However, neither the musicians nor their conductor approved of these racist policies. When the Board of Trustees finally agreed to sell tickets to African Americans in 1943, they seated them in the upper balcony only.<sup>238</sup>

This wave of activism energized a new type of white racial liberal, by challenging them to live up to their principles. Interracial activist partnerships forged this way created a new conception of race and race relations among a minority of white Kansas Citians.<sup>239</sup> This small

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., July 25, 1941.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., July 16, 1943, July 7, 1944.

<sup>239</sup> Schirmer, 181.

group of white allies was further emboldened by newer works in science and anthropology that worked to discredit pseudoscientific racism. Of particular importance was Gunnar Myrdal's seminal work on American racism, *The American Dilemma* in 1944. The "dilemma" alluded to in the work's title was in fact at the core of Myrdal's chief argument: that the United States was at its core defined by "the ever raging conflict between . . . the American Creed" where Americans thought and spoke the language of "high national and Christian precepts" but "on the other hand, [behaved in accordance with] the valuations on specific planes of individual and group living" that included "group prejudice."<sup>240</sup> Myrdal was the first to identify white racism as at fault for the so-called "Negro problem," and to frame white racism as a moral failing that threatened the country's democracy.

Applying Myrdal's ideas, KCMO's liberal integrationists reversed the idea among white middle-class Kansas Citians that racial separation was a critical ingredient for "a peaceable, secure, and wholesome place."<sup>241</sup> Instead, integrationists said that segregation jeopardized communal peace and safety by corrupting individual character with bigotry and race prejudice. Given how weak the Communists' political presence in KCMO had been, it's not surprising that in the case of Kansas City, more of the impetus for these antiracist ideas came from Christian pacifists and Quakers than the secular radical Left. By 1943, a group of white Kansas Citians emerged who were genuinely upset at the treatment African-Americans were receiving and were alarmed at the possible consequences if these grievances continued to be ignored.<sup>242</sup> They would form a religiously ecumenical civil rights group called the Fellowship House that would

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<sup>240</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper Touchbooks, 1944), as quoted in Hodgson, 159.

<sup>241</sup> Schirmer, 181.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*



become especially active after the war.<sup>243</sup> The next chapter will examine the Fellowship in much greater detail.

As in 1919, the 1943 Detroit race riot convinced a growing number of Kansas Citians of both races that some interracial cooperation was necessary to squelch rumors and prevent something similar from happening in KCMO.<sup>244</sup> Given how close the city came in 1919 and 1925 to racial violence and how close KCK came to racial violence in 1904, their worry was not unrealistic. Among incendiary rumors circulating were false claims that a riot had already started in the city, that a “bump club” of blacks deliberately jostled whites on busses and streetcars, that “Eleanor Clubs” of black domestics were inspired by the First Lady to abandon their employers’ kitchens on Sundays and holidays, and that blacks were planning to leap in mass numbers into the Swope Park swimming pool on the Fourth of July.<sup>245</sup> In August 1943, the Kansas City Council of Social Agencies named a forty-nine member interracial committee to combat the rumors and ease tension over housing.<sup>246</sup> The Citizens’ Interracial Committee was hobbled from the start by the refusal of Mayor Gage to call an interracial conference.<sup>247</sup> Instead, he passed this task onto a nongovernmental organization. His failure to give the committee official standing doomed it to toothlessness and it was clear Gage considered it a means to smooth over problems and denounce radicals rather than a chance to make any real changes.<sup>248</sup>

As the Second World War drew to a close, Kansas City and the nation were in a

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<sup>243</sup> “Membership Drive,” November 1947, Vertical File: Fellowship House, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>244</sup> *Kansas City Call*, August 13, 1943

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>246</sup> “Annual Report: The Urban League of Kansas City in 1944,” p.2, KCULP, Box KCULP-2, File 8, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>247</sup> *Kansas City Call*, August 13, 1943.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*

transitional period in which change sometimes moved in ways that were ultimately untenable or had contradictory effects. The war years would be the last time in US history that the streetcar and passenger train in the United States would be major forms of transportation, as the automobile was becoming dominant over American society in ways that served to highlight American exceptionalism. No other wealthy society with an auto industry chose to eliminate its streetcars or allow its passenger rail system to deteriorate. The directions the New Deal took in national housing policy were completely contradictory, as it attempted to set up a two-tiered private system for the middle class and a public system for the poor and working-classes, but ended up setting up a two-tiered racial housing policy instead based around the dichotomy of white suburban subdivisions and black inner city “projects.” Openly racist social theories were directly inscribed into federal housing plans and agencies at the very moment that the heinous crimes of Nazi Germany discredited such ideas. The United States’ rise to global preeminence meant that first Japan, then the USSR, and then the People’s Republic of China would be able to point to Jim Crow as a way to undermine the US in Asia and Africa during World War II and the Cold War. The Black freedom movement would continue to grow after the war, its ranks swelled by returning veterans. In the next chapter, the postwar civil rights movement in Greater Kansas City, the entrenchment of redlining and urban segregation despite the success of integration elsewhere, and the impact of the new interstates on black neighborhoods will be discussed and analyzed. The paradox looming largest of all was that the urban crisis had arrived full blown in KCMO at the very same time that Jim Crow was finally on the defensive and as the United States emerged from the war as the wealthiest and most powerful nation on the planet.

## CHAPTER SIX: GREATER KANSAS CITY IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA, 1940-68

Both Kansas Cities emerged from the Second World War in the midst of several transformations that would alter the course of the future of the metropolitan area. The city had already crossed the threshold for urban crisis conditions in the overcrowding and increasing residential inequality by race and income, as numerous Urban League studies had warned repeatedly between 1940 and 1945.<sup>1</sup> The Great Migration happened to peak in its effects on KCMO at the same time, hitting with the greatest force during the war, and in the process exacerbating these conditions.<sup>2</sup> The three transformations ongoing at the close of the Second World War would work to exacerbate the urban crisis to the point where conditions would become favorable for the kind of upheaval seen in 1968.

First, both cities entered the postwar era with a ring of FHA subsidized suburbs surrounding them in Johnson, Platte, Clay, and Jackson counties in Kansas and Missouri that had racially restrictive covenants.<sup>3</sup> These suburbs would grow rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s, and despite the Supreme Court's 1948 decision outlawing whites-only covenants, they would prove stubbornly resistant to integration.<sup>4</sup> As shall be seen, attempts by Roosevelt, Truman, and even Eisenhower to provide public housing for a more egalitarian urban housing system were undermined and misdirected by both conservatives in Congress and the real estate industry

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<sup>1</sup> "Annual Report, 1942," KCULP, File 6, Box KCULP-2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City; "Annual Report: The Urban League of Kansas City in 1944," p.2, KCULP, Box KCULP-2, File 8, MO State Archives, Jefferson City; A Matter of Fact 1:2 (August–September 1945), KCULP, Box KCULP-1, File 1, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>2</sup> "Annual Report, 1942," KCULP, File 6, Box KCULP-2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>3</sup> Gotham, 61.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 50.

between 1937 and 1955. Instead, what KCMO—and other cities—ended up with by the 1960s was a public housing that was enfolded into the predominant dichotomy of racial and class urban equality: suburban white middle-class private homeownership as the antithesis of inner city black poor “projects.” The injection of racism into the original housing program that subsidized private homes and the failure of the government to provide adequate public housing would prove costly indeed.

Secondly, struggles against Jim Crow racism in the state of Missouri and both cities were ongoing. The war had created a spirit of determination both in the city and nationwide that the African American community would directly fight for their liberation from oppression and discrimination.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the long term effects of national housing and transportation policies were explosive in that they helped exclude inner city blacks from sharing in postwar prosperity at the very moment that there was a determined resistance to Jim Crow, a resistance that began to extract concessions and promises from U.S. Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy. The signals regarding race that the Executive Branch sent out in the 1940s—through its intervention in housing on the one hand and its intervention to open up munitions factories and later, the military, to African Americans on the other—were more than mixed: they directly contradicted each other. As Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton put it in their study of the creation of the ghetto, *American Apartheid*, “what was new about the postwar era was the extent to which the federal government became involved in perpetuating racial segregation.”<sup>6</sup>

Presidential politics also drove such mixed signals, as both liberal Democrats and moderate Republicans after FDR sought to win both the northern African American vote and the southern

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<sup>5</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 132.

<sup>6</sup> Massey and Denton, 51.

white vote. Meanwhile, the city had barely escaped outbreaks of racial violence in 1919 and 1925 and there had been worries during World War II as well of the potential for race riots.<sup>7</sup> As shall be seen, in the case of Kansas City, the fight against Jim Crow would be a long one, stretching into the early 1960s.

Third, the structure of the city's transportation and economy was in the process of being restructured. The stockyards and packinghouses gave way to bomber and defense plants, and though the city's streetcar system limped into the 1950s, the city's own Ford and Chevrolet plants churned out cars for what would become a "drive-in" decade.<sup>8</sup> The railroad, which originally had launched the two cities to regional metropolitan status, was now dethroned in the very city it helped to make in the nineteenth century. As Monroe Dodd put it in speaking of the fate of the streetcars, "Detroit sold Americans the dream. The government gave them the roads to live that dream."<sup>9</sup> Even before the war, both coasts signaled what was coming: Robert Moses started his parkway building spree in New York in the 1930s, while Los Angeles began building some of the first freeways in the US in 1942.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, Pennsylvania constructed a turnpike that ended up being the oldest of all Interstate Highway sections as early as 1940. When General Eisenhower had waged the final campaigns in the European Theater, the impression the German autobahns made on him sealed this trend; as president, he vigorously backed the plan for a nationwide interstate highway system.

These developments were occurring at the very moment when the international climate

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<sup>7</sup> "Annual Report: The Urban League of Kansas City in 1944," p.2, KCULP, Box KCULP-2, File 8, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>8</sup> "Drive-in" decade a paraphrase of Jackson, 246.

<sup>9</sup> Dodd, 186.

<sup>10</sup> Jackson, 167-68, 251.

alluded to in chapter two had altered drastically. Hitler's Third Reich and its Holocaust of millions of Jews, Slavs, Romas, and others put racism and anti-Semitism on the defensive at the very moment the United States emerged as the dominant world power center. This meant that all domestic activity, including Jim Crow, were on display for coverage by news presses around the world. Secondly, the discrediting of both pseudoscientific racism and colonialism by their association with defeated fascist ideology helped to spark independence movements throughout Africa and Asia that were highly sensitive to American racism's similarity to the racism of former European colonial overlords. Third, World War II and the ensuing Cold War exposed the United States' domestic record of Jim Crow for use by rival powers. Imperial Japan during the war, and the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China following the war, all sought to seek the allegiance of anti-colonial forces in Africa and Asia by exploiting the American record on race.<sup>11</sup> Again, Gunnar Myrdal's *American Dilemma* in 1944 expressed the growing international consensus that racial prejudice was morally wrong as did the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights at the United Nations. And at home, four years of war with fascism had underscored for many Americans, particularly African Americans, the link between fighting the German enemy abroad and fighting racism at home.

A turning point in the momentum for civil rights in KCMO was the emergence of a group of white integrationists in KCMO who were not satisfied with Kansas City Mayor Gage's largely empty gestures at "interracial cooperation."<sup>12</sup> Before their emergence, white allies for the city's African American community were few and limited to a few labor locals, some segments of the Socialist Party (their record would be better in the 1930s than it had been in the 1910s), the CIO,

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<sup>11</sup> See Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000)

<sup>12</sup> Schirmer, 192

and a very small and weak Communist Party. Interracial direct action in KCMO came largely from a small group of pacifists who launched a branch of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (or FOR) in KCMO in the 1930s that would reorient itself towards battling racism and segregation after 1942.<sup>13</sup> Given the notable weakness of the Communists in Kansas City in the 1930s compared to other cities in the decade, it makes sense that the main influence on white anti-racist and pro-civil rights activism would come from a religious dissident source in alliance with the left wing of the CIO and with social-democrats, especially Randolph and those allied with him.

Originally a British Christian pacifist organization, the Fellowship's history in the United States dated back to 1915, with the original goal of achieving a "world order based on peace and love."<sup>14</sup> Members of the Fellowship saw pacifism and social change as reinforcing one another. By 1942, the national organization under the leadership of A.J. Muste began to take a more assertive approach and steered the organization towards both direct action and anti-racist principles. War and racism, Muste said, were twin evils and both were anti-Christian in origin and impulse.<sup>15</sup> Later in the same year, The Fellowship followed up on its new rhetoric by forming a Department of Race Relations, staffed by African-American Christian activists including future CORE director and Freedom Rider James Farmer and future Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. ally Bayard Rustin. Farmer, a Christian Socialist, pushed for a more radical approach than interracial committees had sanctioned in the past; he pushed for "relentless non-cooperation" with Jim Crow, aiming "not to make housing in ghettos more tolerable, but to

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. ; "The History of Fellowship House," p.2, *Fellowship House of Kansas City* (pamphlet, ca. 1960), Vertical File: Fellowship House, MO Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

<sup>14</sup> Schirmer, 192.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

destroy residential segregation.”<sup>16</sup> He would found the Congress of Racial Equality at the University of Chicago late in 1942.

Locally, the Fellowship of Reconciliation went through changes as well, asking the Quakers for assistance. Emma Cadbury, chair of the Wider Quaker Fellowship, was sent to help FOR organize a Kansas City Society of Friends. Out of this contact came the Penn Valley Meeting for the Religious Society of Friends, who held their initial meeting in January 1942.<sup>17</sup> The Penn Valley Friends would provide religious and ethical advice and training for several Kansas City white civil rights activists. Given that the CIO was the only other major white institution in the city to speak out against Jim Crow, FOR needed all the help they could get in taking a stand against racism and segregation in the city.

FOR accordingly shifted their objectives away from pacifism, since after Pearly Harbor, they gave up trying to prevent World War II under orders from the national organization. The national office instead advised that “we should begin to work on this problem of race” because “peace begins at home” and race was one of “the things that caused dissension and difficulties.”<sup>18</sup> In 1942, Kansas City’s FOR invited people of both races whom they thought might be interested in forming a civil rights organization. Although sympathetic to CORE, the group decided against openly naming themselves an auxiliary of the group for fear of generating public and political backlash against themselves. Instead, they christened themselves the Committee on the Practice of Democracy (COPOD), a name less likely to generate controversy and which they picked in order to highlight their belief that integration was the application of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



true democracy.<sup>19</sup> COPOD activists concluded that “something had to be done about the segregation of people in Kansas City.”<sup>20</sup> To that end, one of its founding goals was to “create opportunities for persons of varied backgrounds to get together on an equal basis.”<sup>21</sup>

The first COPOD meeting attracted very few African-Americans from either KCMO or KCK, because as Girard Bryant—one of the few blacks who did attend the first meeting—recalled, most “were afraid to come.”<sup>22</sup> Eventually, the COPOD did attract black membership, most of whom came from the black professional classes. Bryant himself had been a teacher; he came to KCMO in 1926 to teach at Western Baptist Bible College.<sup>23</sup> In 1930, Bryant joined the faculty of the KCMO School District, serving as a high school principal, and later serving as a college president. Bryant would then chair COPOD and its child agency Fellowship House.<sup>24</sup> Another major African American figure in the Fellowship would be the very active Lucille Bluford, who was also deeply involved with the local Urban League.<sup>25</sup> Bluford would become chair of the Publicity Committee after the war.<sup>26</sup> The white membership of the group, too, came mostly from the teaching, social service, and health professions. Ruth Gordon, one of the few Penn Valley Friends actually raised as a Quaker, had been a professor of dietetics and nutrition at the University of Kansas Medical Center in KCK.<sup>27</sup> While there, she initiated desegregation of

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<sup>19</sup> “History of Fellowship House,” p.2, Fellowship House pamphlet, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Schirmer, 193.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> “Steering Committee Plans,” March 1947, Vertical File: Fellowship House, MO Valley Spec. Collections, KCPL.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Schirmer, 193-94.

the teaching hospital at the start of the war by hiring its first black staffer.

Virginia Oldham, who became one of Kansas City's leading antiwar, prison reform, and civil rights activists came to social activism less directly than Gordon or many others. While attending Wellesley College, Oldham was mystified and upset by the isolation her black classmates faced, despite their obvious talents and intellectual brilliance. However, Oldham herself had been raised with a racist family background, as her father and brother were prejudiced, and (perhaps as a result) the first interracial meeting she attended in Chicago in the 1920s made her feel "strange" and "self-conscious."<sup>28</sup> When Oldham returned to Kansas City, she became an English teacher at Central High School, as there were few careers open to women in the 1920s and as she had given up her plans to become a journalist. Oldham stumbled into FOR and Penn Valley Friends quite accidentally, as she accompanied a friend who was a great admirer of A.J. Muste to a pacifist rally in the 1930s. Oldham ended up being so impressed by Muste that she joined the movement, signing a card that stated she had taken a vow to be a pacifist.<sup>29</sup> As a result, Oldham became one of the founders of Kansas City's FOR branch and a force behind the COPOD as well.<sup>30</sup> She would be elected chair of the entire organization after the war.<sup>31</sup>

For its first two years, the COPOD met in an informal fashion in the homes of its activists, but by March of 1946, the Fellowship/COPOD had established an official headquarters.<sup>32</sup> From its inception, the organization began to directly attack segregation. In the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> "Steering Committee Plans," March 1947, VF: Fellowship House, MO Valley Spec. Collections, KCPL.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> "History of Fellowship House," p.2, VF: Fellowship House, MO Valley Spec. Collections, KCPL.

spring of 1944, hundreds of whites and blacks gathered at the Grand Avenue Temple in Kansas City for a Race Relations Institute, a sort of teach-in on racism and how to fight it held by FOR in several northern cities.<sup>33</sup> These institutes followed similar patterns wherever they were: different days would be set aside for particular topics related to race relations; for example, on Institute's Fridays, a scientist would speak of the lack of scientific evidence for racial inferiority and a local clergyman would follow, to speak on racism as a moral issue. Over the course of the three days the institute was held, participants in Kansas City also studied the philosophy and techniques of nonviolent direct action with speakers John Nevin Sayre and CORE leader and FOR race relations secretary James Farmer.

Out of this three-day gathering, a variety of strategies were proposed for activists to employ against the private and official evasions that protected the city's color line. COPOD and CORE activists formed interracial teams to probe downtown theaters, restaurants, hotels, and drugstores for the true boundaries of segregation in KCMO's public accommodations.<sup>34</sup> These activists soon discovered that KCMO's version of Jim Crow was drawn with somewhat irregular boundaries.<sup>35</sup> Movie theaters in the city varied in their discriminatory practices: one theater might throw mixed groups out before they could take their seats; others might not ask the mixed group to leave until after it had already sat through an entire film. Likewise, some Kansas City restaurants and lunch counters seated the mixed groups in out of the way corners and provided poor service, while others barred them completely. Participants noted that they failed to encounter hostility from the general public and found managers courteous but confused by their

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<sup>33</sup> Schirmer, 194.

<sup>34</sup> *Kansas City Call*, April 21, 1944.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

appearance. When pressed by the activists about their practices, the managers would often either admit segregation was morally wrong or, as was more typical, claim “it’s not me personally.”<sup>36</sup> They would fall back on the “bigoted patron” myth, with one theater owner claiming some white theater goers had complained about a sunburned man when the group pressed him on how he could possibly “know” what white customers reactions would be since the theater had never admitted blacks.<sup>37</sup>

*The Kansas City Call* reported that what the interracial activists discovered in 1944 vindicated what itself and the Urban League had long asserted: that it was “the officials, the management of private business” who were responsible for what Chester Franklin called “all the petty limitations put on us.”<sup>38</sup> To further test this hypothesis, COPOD launched a demonstration in more than one sense of the word when they started a protest to illustrate that the white public was “ready” for integration. To this end, a mixed party of seven young women asked for and received service at a KCMO cafeteria in 1945.<sup>39</sup> The only indication of hostility was that the cashier abandoned her post rather than serve them and one white customer abruptly left. Besides these incidents, the only other negative reactions were a few whispers and glances. Other diners shared tables with smaller numbers of activists and actually told them “they were glad to have them.”<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, attempts to integrate housing and the city’s school system would prove far from this encouraging.

In another play on the meaning of “demonstration,” the activists next targeted Municipal

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., August 7, 1942, April 21, 1944.

<sup>39</sup> Schirmer, 196.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Auditorium and the Music Hall in order to expose to the city's whites that discrimination in the city against blacks was real. In these city institutions, camouflage of Jim Crow segregation by scattering "colored sections" was so effective and notorious that it had fooled even Paul Robeson; COPOD was determined to expose this sneaky tactic.<sup>41</sup> The Philharmonic, too, remained segregated and was also targeted for protest action.<sup>42</sup> Interracial teams from the COPOD attended the Philharmonic concerts, demanding to be seated together. The NAACP joined in and began to picket the Music Hall and Municipal Auditorium in November 1945 to force both races to admit auditorium seating was segregated and to see if they could "flush out" white support.<sup>43</sup>

By the winter of 1946, this protest had expanded to include the involvement of several black social clubs and veterans' organizations; these groups began to picket performances such as Carmen Jones and Anna Lucatasa, performances which had black themes and were thus likely to attract large black audiences.<sup>44</sup> *The Call*, for its part, refused to advertise these performances in its pages and in its editorials advocated that readers boycott them.<sup>45</sup> Such tactics built upon 1930s era "More Jobs For Negroes" campaign by the Community League, with the boycott as a weapon in the fight for the principle of "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work."<sup>46</sup> This was a very effective strategy: of the eight hundred to nine hundred African Americans who would have normally attended, only thirteen did so, and even among whites, so many boycotted the

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<sup>41</sup> *Kansas City Call*, October 20, 1944

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, November 16, 1945.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, December 13, 1946, December 27, 1946.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> "Monthly Report, October 1938," Urban League Minutes, Board of Directors, Box M1, Vol.2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

performance that over a third of “white only” seating was empty.<sup>47</sup> Whites who did attempt to attend and encountered pickets were shocked to learn the facilities were racially segregated.<sup>48</sup>

Unfortunately, the biggest target of all, the white politicians and officials of the city, fell back on their old deflecting tactics in the face of the pickets. They claimed no control over the auditorium and halls, claiming that the city only “rented” them to performing companies.<sup>49</sup> These renters, the city officials said, determined segregation in the events they staged and the city had no control over those policies. With municipal elections around the corner in March 1946, the Citizens’ Association, the political party then in power, promised all future events at the auditorium would not be segregated, but that private promoters could set whatever seating arrangement they wanted.<sup>50</sup> *The Call* was delighted, since promoters who had wished to integrate audiences in the past reported that city officials pressured them to segregate the seating.<sup>51</sup>

City officials, however, waffled on the promise by “advising” event sponsors to “follow the custom in seating Negroes.”<sup>52</sup> Tired of this double-talk and deflecting tactics by the city government, an African American group confronted the city council directly in 1947, demanding that the council set seating policy in favor of integration at the Municipal Auditorium.<sup>53</sup> When City Manager L.P. Cookingham repeated the same tired old excuses that the city had no legal authority over promoters, the group pointed out that a recent Golden Gloves event had been

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<sup>47</sup> *Kansas City Call*, December 27, 1946.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, January 3, 1947.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, February 1, 1946.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, March 22, 1946.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, June 14, 1946.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, November 29, 1946.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, February 14, 1947.

segregated against the wishes of its sponsor, *The Kansas City Star*.<sup>54</sup> Cookingham then claimed that the segregation was ordered by the *Star*, which the *Call* scoffed at as an obvious lie.<sup>55</sup> The picketing continued.

In March 1947, two events took place in the Auditorium without segregated seating; city officials accordingly upped security, as they were certain there would be fistfights and brawls by whites.<sup>56</sup> Instead, no such things occurred and, according to the *Call*, whites even applauded when Carl Johnson of the NAACP took the microphone to say “This crowd here tonight demonstrates that Negro and white people can enjoy an event sitting side by side without any trouble.”<sup>57</sup> As a result, the NAACP proposed an ordinance banning racial discrimination in public facilities, but withdrew it because Citizen Association Mayor William Kemp objected out of fear that the proposed law would include Swope Park’s swimming pool.<sup>58</sup> The city council refused to even introduce or debate a second proposed measure that would ban discrimination in the Municipal Auditorium alone.<sup>59</sup> The council quickly backpedaled when the *Call*’s business manager, Dowdal Davis, ran for office as a Citizens’ Association candidate for a council seat with the ordinances as a campaign issue. Although he failed to defeat Pendergast Democrat Thomas Gavin, Davis syphoned off enough of the African American vote to finally force the council’s hand. In May 1951, they finally passed a law banning discrimination in the Municipal

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., February 28, 1947.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., March 7, 1947

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., March 21, 1947.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

Auditorium, the air terminal restaurant, and the new Starlight Theater in Swope Park.<sup>60</sup> The fight over the pool, however, was just beginning, as NAACP chair Carl Johnson pledged it would.<sup>61</sup>

Meanwhile, the housing question would prove to be the most vexing of all challenges facing the black freedom movement. While two main agencies of the New Deal's housing program would bolster the color line in the housing market, a third housing program was being hotly debated and fought over by a coalition of New Dealers, leftists, and unions against conservatives in both parties and real estate companies. As mentioned in the previous chapter, public housing, provided for in the 1937 Housing Act, had been authorized by Missouri in 1941 for Kansas City, but interrupted by the war.<sup>62</sup> That was the second delay in the history of the Housing Act in Kansas City. Authorization had been delayed for four years after the act initially passed due to the obstruction of Pendergast and his crony Henry McElroy, who refused to admit the city had any slums.<sup>63</sup>

With the war over and Pendergast long gone, the housing authority resumed its Kansas City activities in March 1946 amid a storm of protest from Missouri state legislators and real estate company officials.<sup>64</sup> Because of this intense opposition from the Missouri State House in Jefferson City and business interests, the state legislature failed to amend the enabling act for slum clearance in 1949.<sup>65</sup> Members of the Real Estate Board strongly supported the idea of slum clearance with eminent domain, but were adamant that the private sector should carry out

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., "Jim Crow Banned in Auditorium," May 25, 1951, found in VF: Civil Rights-KC-Public Accommodations, in MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Gotham, 75.

<sup>63</sup> Haskell and Fowler, 165.

<sup>64</sup> Gotham, 75

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



redevelopment and construction products.<sup>66</sup> Above all, they loathed and staunchly opposed any efforts to build public housing for low-income people.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, although Kansas City's government took tentative steps in the 1940s towards a permanent housing authority with the legal power to acquire private property, these efforts rendered null by the intense opposition of a Real Estate Board that refused to invest in a public agency geared towards fighting slum conditions and building public housing for the poor and working-classes.<sup>68</sup>

The NAREB and other real estate elites launched a concerted propaganda attack on public housing throughout the 1940s as “creeping socialism” that constituted “the cutting edge of the Communist front” in the United States; the campaign reached a peak between 1946 and 1949.<sup>69</sup> The organization's Vice President, Herbert Nelson, demanded that “no further funds be appropriated for public housing” since “public housing is European socialism in its most insidious form.”<sup>70</sup> It was unacceptable to this business lobby to have the government competing with private home construction and real estate; ironically, the very same government was lavishly subsidizing their private subdivision construction through the FHA, which somehow wasn't “socialism” to them. Nelson was more brutally honest than most in 1950, when he explained that in reality “I do not oppose government intervention in housing. I only believe the powers of government should be used to assist private enterprise.”<sup>71</sup>

Very similar arguments to those used by the New Right and neoconservatives in the

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<sup>66</sup> “Public Housing,” *Kansas City Realtor*, May 25, 1944; “Postwar Housing,” *Kansas City Realtor*, December 7, 1944.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Gotham, 76.

<sup>70</sup> “Nelson Proposes Eight-Point Plan to Beat Shortage,” *Kansas City Realtor*, January 9, 1947.

<sup>71</sup> Gotham, 76.

1970s and 1980s to attack the Great Society programs and “welfare” (Aid to Families With Dependent Children) were used by the real estate industry to attack public housing in the late 1940s as they railed against it for putting “a premium on dependency.”<sup>72</sup> In a climate of Cold War mobilization for potential war with the Soviet Union and a full-blown Second Red Scare led by Senators Richard Nixon and Joseph McCarthy, NAREB and other real estate interests’ red-baiting tactics succeeded. By the 1950s, the industry had redefined the terms of debate towards “slum clearance” and what would become the buzzword for the next two decades, “urban renewal.”<sup>73</sup> Left-liberal and social-democratic voices in favor of public housing were marginalized in the debate by then, and civil rights and labor organizations would have almost no say over housing policy made in the 1950s. In fact, it could be said that this development capped off a series of events that marked the transition from New Deal liberalism to a type of corporate liberalism based upon economic growth and political moderation.<sup>74</sup> With this shift in interpretation of the 1937 Housing Act and the defeat of its original vision of public housing for the working-classes and poor and the Republican Congress’ similar defeat of most of President Truman’s Fair Deal proposals, postwar liberalism would jettison more expansive social-democratic visions in favor of Keynesian growth policies.

The great irony of Kansas City’s experience in the 1940s was that at the very moment a significant group of white civil rights activists were willing to join in interracial protests to achieve integration, housing segregation in the city reached a crisis point.<sup>75</sup> If the Depression

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Self used the term “growth liberalism” while the late Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. coined the term “vital center”; see Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle For Postwar Oakland* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 3; Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Vital Center* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1949)

<sup>75</sup> A Matter of Fact, 1:2 (August-September 1945), KCULP, Box KCULP-1, File 1, MO State Archives, Jefferson

had exacerbated the problem of housing, the outbreak of the war and resulting increase in industrial war jobs had created a situation of serious overcrowding in the city's black district. Seventy-one percent of the city's entire black population lived in the area bound by Troost and Jackson, Independence Avenue to the north, and 31st Street to the south.<sup>76</sup> In three of the 1940 census tracts of the area, blacks made up more than seventy-five percent of residents.<sup>77</sup> In three others, African Americans made up more than half the population.<sup>78</sup> This data was confirmed by African Americans alive at the time interviewed decades later by Kevin Fox Gotham for his study on Kansas City's history of housing segregation, *Race, Real Estate and Urban Development*. One, Albert Elliot, remembered that "once you got past 27th Street . . . it was just all white, I mean the businesses were white, the houses were white, . . . everything was white."<sup>79</sup> This was due to the rampant use of whites-only covenants in those blocks of the city.

By 1943, an Urban League report through their Community War Services division noted that most of this African American population on the East Side lived in "deteriorating neighborhoods" in which only fifty new houses had built for African Americans in the area since the 1920s.<sup>80</sup> Most of these housing units were in a state of disrepair or lacked bathing facilities. Rents in these dwellings ranged from ten dollars to twenty-four dollars a month. The highest rents did not guarantee better facilities or privacy. A fifth of all of these housing units averaged three people for every two rooms in the building. The study deduced that the worst crowding

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Gotham, 65.

<sup>80</sup> "Report on Negro In-Migration in the Greater Kansas City Area," 4-5, *Community War Services*, KCULP, Box H-1, File6, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

was in areas with the lowest number of rental properties.<sup>81</sup> It noted that African Americans were beginning to move into areas south of Twenty-Seventh Street, but that this meant they were “merely taking over [other] older and deteriorating neighborhoods.”<sup>82</sup> The bottom line, the study concluded, was a problem of “increasing population and dearth of new construction.”<sup>83</sup> Paradoxically, this same residential segregation temporarily boosted African American businesses and fuelled further development in the Eighteenth and Vine district.<sup>84</sup>

Still, if Eighteenth and Vine prosperity temporarily masked full-blown urban crisis conditions in KCMO, the Great Migration, white flight, urban renewal, and urban freeway construction would worsen the situation in decades to come. By the end of World War II, over thirty percent of all housing in KCMO was rated as substandard and eighty-five percent of housing occupied by blacks was determined to be in need of repair or replacement.<sup>85</sup> KCMO’s total population had increased by twenty-three percent in the 1920s, while its black population increased by twenty-five percent.<sup>86</sup> Although the city’s African American population increased only seven to eight percent in the 1930s, white population in the city started declining. Once the Depression ended, the KCMO African American population grew by a drastic thirty-four percent in the 1940s and by fifty percent in the 1950s.<sup>87</sup> As dramatic as these increases were, when one

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Coulter, 294.

<sup>85</sup> “Summary and Recommendations,” p.5, Urban League of Greater Kansas City, 1946, KCULP, Box H-1, Historical Records, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>86</sup> “Report on Negro In-Migration to Kansas City Area,” October 15, 1943, p.6, KCULP, Box H-1, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.; “Negro-in-Migration,” *Matter of Fact*, January 1957, p.2, KCULP, Box KCULP-1, File2, Vol. 9-1, MO State Archives, Jefferson City. This document confirmed that 1940s migration continued into the 1950s.

considers that they occurred after the FHA and HOLC had made redlining and white-only covenants federal policy, this meant these ever growing numbers of black urban residents were confined to the same neighborhoods identified as in trouble by the Urban League during World War II.

Just as in 1911 and 1923-27, the population pressures of overcrowding caused black residents to move outward, setting off a new wave of white violence, threats, and bombings that would be intermittently ongoing between 1941 and 1962.<sup>88</sup> As early as 1940, white vandals smashed windows of homes that had recently been inhabited by African Americans who were moving into neighborhoods near Fifteenth Street.<sup>89</sup> In 1941, the Linwood Improvement Association sponsored a rally of one hundred white homeowners opposed to blacks moving across Twenty-Seventh Street and a black family who had just moved south of twenty-seventh received an anonymous letter threatening them with termite infestation if they didn't move.<sup>90</sup>

Perhaps the most vicious reactions came from Johnson County, Kansas, whites reacting to African Americans who wished to move anywhere in the county. In 1949, African-American families moving into Shawnee, Kansas, were met with cross burnings and rocks thrown through windows with notes reading, "All the niggers that want to be alive in Shawnee in 1950 be out of Shawnee in December 1949."<sup>91</sup> Speaking of the Kansas side of the metropolitan area, KCK did not even have large apartment complexes until World War II, nor did it enact public housing until

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<sup>88</sup> Kansas City Call, December 23, 1949; Kansas City Times, "Criminal Terrorism," May 23, 1952, as found in VF: Civil Rights-KC-Bombings, John Ramos Collection, in MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.; Kansas City Call, "Raytown Mayor Deplores Attack on Carter Home," April 20, 1962.

<sup>89</sup> Kansas City Call, April 11, 1941.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., June 27, 1941.

<sup>91</sup> "Shawnee Family Is the Target of 'Junior' KKK; Cross Burned," *Kansas City Call*, October 28, 1949; "Housing Problem," *Matter of Fact*, November 1953, KCULP, Box KCULP-1, File 2, Vol.6-3, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

1957.<sup>92</sup> But most clashes over housing occurred in KCMO, where the overcrowding was the worst. One elderly African American resident recalled seeing a house “on east 47th street where the garage door was painted with swastikas” while another remembered that in the Kansas City of the 1940s, “you had a lot of animosity, you didn’t have a lot of instances of outward violence, but you had it . . . You had rocks thrown through windows.”<sup>93</sup>

In addition to the city’s east side, the North End also experienced tensions over housing during the war. *The Call* investigated in 1945, both out of concern for what had happened in Detroit two years earlier, and out of a genuine puzzlement given that Italians and blacks had lived side by side in the neighborhood for decades without conflict.<sup>94</sup> What had changed was that with the war, Italian-Americans had discovered better paying and more secure jobs. As a result, Italian-American businessmen and community leaders joined forces to build more housing for Italian families in the North End. The projects included buying property the city has seized for unpaid taxes, many of these properties having African American occupants. Another plan of the Italian-American business community was to replace Garrison Center with a housing facility for Italian newlyweds. African-Americans in the North End were convinced their Italian-American neighbors were trying to drive them out, and the *Call* sadly agreed given the evidence.<sup>95</sup> The scarcity of housing available to African-Americans meant the North End’s black population had nowhere else to go.

After 1945, the NAACP took the lead in organizing civil rights protests, so the COPOD reoriented itself and established a Fellowship House headquarters modeled on the national

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<sup>92</sup> McDowell, 47, 61.

<sup>93</sup> Gotham, 66.

<sup>94</sup> *Kansas City Call*, June 22, 1945.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

organization in Philadelphia. There, the organization sponsored a variety of activities, including talks on international affairs and peace, weekend workshops for students to study labor and race relations issues, and training in direct action in civil rights marches.<sup>96</sup> Most importantly, Fellowship House was a safe place where African American, Hispanic, Asian, and white men and women could discuss great books and debate public affairs of the day.<sup>97</sup> Before, according to Feazel, COPOD members had met “practically on street corners” because public meeting places in KCMO banned interracial socializing on their property.<sup>98</sup> Worse, police brutality against blacks and oppressive policing of any perceived interracial contacts returned after the fall of Pendergast, as the state legislature in Jefferson City rammed through a bill once again stripping Kansas City’s police force of home rule in 1939.<sup>99</sup> This development made COPOD’s activities all the riskier.

This time, a Democratic Governor, Lloyd Stark, appointed a fourteen-year veteran of the FBI and a fervent J. Edgar Hoover admirer, Lear B. Reed, to chief of police over a new Board of Police Commissioners.<sup>100</sup> Reed was obsessed with saving Kansas City from criminals and Communists, the latter of which he deemed “more of a threat to America than the British Redcoats ever were.”<sup>101</sup> He launched a cleanup of the police department and the city’s streets that greatly weakened organized crime’s power in Kansas City. In accordance with his anticommunist zealotry, two of Reed’s zanier schemes were to establish a database of every

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<sup>96</sup> “History of Fellowship House,” p.2, VF: Fellowship House, MO Valley Spec. Collections, KCPL; Kansas City Call, August 9, 1946.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Schirmer, 199.

<sup>99</sup> Reddig, 365.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid

Kansas Citian's fingerprints and to establish a paramilitary organization of civilians working side by side with the police.<sup>102</sup>

Predictably, it was in the African-American sections of the city where Reed's methods were most felt by citizens. By 1941, Reed's police became as feared and hated in the black neighborhoods of the city as Matthew Foster's police department had been in the 1920s. When he purged the Pendergast police ranks, Reed removed more than twenty black officers; only three of Reed's replacements were African American<sup>103</sup>.

Perhaps the worst incident was the August 1941 shooting of Harrison Ware by Kansas City police. Ware was in the Autumn Leaf Club when the vice squad raided it. According to those present during the event, Officers Charles LeBaugh and Dewey Ellis then began to beat the unarmed Ware without any provocation. When Ware, in response, began hitting them with a cue ball, they shot him in the back three times, and proceeded to kick Ware as he was dying.<sup>104</sup> Following a funeral march of over one thousand demonstrators, the police commissioners suspended LeBaugh.<sup>105</sup>

For the city's African American population, the Ware killing was the last straw as far as dealing with Lear Reed and his police force. A group of black Kansas Citians travelled to Jefferson City to meet with Republican Governor Forrest C. Donnell to plead for him to improve relations between law enforcement and Kansas City's black community.<sup>106</sup> The visiting Kansas City delegation read off a list of abuses over the time period between Reed's appointment and the

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 366-67.

<sup>103</sup> *Kansas City Call*, January 24, 1941.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., August 1, 1941.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., August 8, 1941.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., August 15, 1941; Reddig, 367



Ware shooting. These included multiple instances of police brutality, harassment of young black men by the police on street corners near dance halls, and the resumption of harassment of light-skinned black women to determine if they were white when they were on dates with black men.<sup>107</sup> The governor responded by demanding an explanation from the KCMO police commission.<sup>108</sup>

The Commission, feeling the wrath of the Governor, then called Reed before an executive session.<sup>109</sup> Declaring to the board of commissioners that “if I can not enforce the law in the colored belt, then I won’t be chief of police,” Reed resigned.<sup>110</sup> William Reddig, a contemporary observer and historian of the Pendergast era, dryly remarked of Reed: “Besides suppressing criminals and scattering Reds, he antagonized workingmen and union officials, Negroes, liberals, and a wide variety of ordinary individuals who began to wonder if democracy could stand the strain of absolute rectitude.”<sup>111</sup> Few missed him, even among the nonpartisan citizen reformers.

Harold Anderson, Reed’s replacement, generated hopes and positive expectations in the African American community, as his father had been widely respected as captain of the Flora Avenue police station.<sup>112</sup> They were especially encouraged by pledges he made to hire more black officers, including detectives.<sup>113</sup> However, just like the 1920s “good government” reformers, their 1940s counterparts were hostile to the city’s African American community. The Board of Police Commissioners examined the list of nineteen incidents of police brutality and

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> *Kansas City Call*, August 22, 1941.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., August 29, 1941.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., September 5, 1941.

<sup>111</sup> Reddig, 365.

<sup>112</sup> *Kansas City Call*, July 24, 1942.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

dismissed every single one as exaggerations by the black community.<sup>114</sup> The board opined that officers had been justified in every case, including even in their harassment of light-skinned black women at a Greek letter convention with their dark-skinned husbands.<sup>115</sup> Outraged, the NAACP promptly demanded that the governor fire the entire board; Donnell then proceeded to reorganize the board with a new president to replace the man who had hired Reed.<sup>116</sup> After a grand jury failed to indict officers LeBaugh and Ellis, a second grand jury brought an indictment.<sup>117</sup> However, despite impressive medical evidence and eyewitness testimony against them, a jury acquitted both officers of the Ware shooting and both were restored to active duty.<sup>118</sup>

Nonetheless, the frequency of police brutality in Kansas City declined sharply after 1941, and this trend continued into the 1950s.<sup>119</sup> The officers continued to police any perceived interracial romantic relationships; accordingly, they stopped whites who tried to enter the Hot Club, a weekly jam session by jazz musicians of both races at the Chez Paree nightclub.<sup>120</sup> When Anderson was criticized, he responded that “violations of the law were certain to occur wherever liquor, hot jazz, and interracial dancing were found.”<sup>121</sup> The Urban League’s Dorothy Davis responded that if the club was criminal in nature, then police should bar blacks too.<sup>122</sup> In 1946-47, these Kansas City police practices attracted national attention when they resulted in

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., February 13, 1942.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., September 12, 1941.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., October 3, October 10, 1941.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., November 14, 1941.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. February 13, 1942.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., September 19, 1947, January 1, 1954.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., December 28, 1941.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.,

altercations with two of the biggest swing band stars of the day, Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington.

Cab Calloway was trying to enter the Pla-Mor Ballroom to hear Lionel Hampton perform, when patrolman William Todd clubbed him over the head with the butt of his revolver for trying to enter a “white club.”<sup>123</sup> Charges of resisting arrest against Calloway were dropped and Todd resigned, but Calloway sued the club.<sup>124</sup> The defense attorneys for the Pla-Mor then proceeded to play to the basest white fears of black men seeking white women. They also exploited anti-Eastern feeling among whites in the city, impugning Calloway’s character by suggesting he tried to inject the “New York angle” into the “Kansas City way of life.”<sup>125</sup> As a result of this demagoguery, an all-white jury found in favor of the Pla-Mor. In the case of Duke Ellington, he was stopped by a Kansas City patrolman for questioning because he was seen by the officer in a cab with three light-skinned women that the officer thought could be potentially be white.<sup>126</sup> In this case, Police Chief Anderson actually apologized to Ellington for the incident.

The Hot Club case greatly alarmed African American activists in the city because it appeared to imperil interracial organizing just as it was becoming a real force for change in the city.<sup>127</sup> After all, if the city police could break up interracial social gatherings in nightclubs or on streets by law-abiding men and women of both races, what could stop them from ordering the arrests of Urban League, NAACP, COPOD, or Fellowship activists?<sup>128</sup> Even worse, assumptions

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., January 4, 1946.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., February 1, 1946.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., May 16, 1947, May 23, 1947.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., February 17, 1950.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., November 22, 1946.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

by the police that interracial mixing led to crime made it harder to convince city officials to desegregate public accommodations.<sup>129</sup>

The other side of the problem the Hot Club incident represented was equally tricky to negotiate. No one wanted to openly address interracial relationships, least of all civil rights activists trying desperately to convince nervous whites that integration did not mean interracial sex. As Roy Wilkins warned his fellow NAACP members after he became the national assistant secretary, mounting a challenge to police action at the Hot Club could be easily misinterpreted “as a fight to associate with white people on the most intimate social terms” that would outrage and drive away respectable blacks and whites.<sup>130</sup> More conservative clerical elements in the African American community insisted that the Hot Club should be shut down completely.<sup>131</sup> Carl Johnson decided one way out of the dilemma created by the Hot Club action was to press Anderson and the police to issue an unambiguous policy prohibiting officers from interfering in the actions of citizens when there was no violation of the law.<sup>132</sup> The only concession the Board would allow for was that police were not permitted to interfere with whites and blacks who visited each others’ homes and churches.

This type of preemptive policing of potential interracial liaisons continued into the 1950s, as the very fear expressed by activists manifested itself in several incidents between 1950 and 1953. In 1950, “a young white woman described as being in the vanguard of the fight for civil rights and racial equality in the Kansas City area” was stopped by officers in the Eighteenth and

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., April 5, 1946.

<sup>130</sup> Schirmer, 229.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> *Kansas City Call*, November 22, 1946.

Vine area.<sup>133</sup> During questioning, one of the officers justified stopping her by saying, “It’s for your own protection. One of these niggers might jump out of a doorway and hit you over the head.”<sup>134</sup> After releasing her, the officers told her to stay out of black neighborhoods, saying, “Lady, you don’t know these niggers like we do.”<sup>135</sup> Shaken, she reported the incident to the Call, asking them to withhold her name, out of fear the policemen would hurt civil rights workers.

Over the next three years, indeed, letters of complaint continued to flow to the city’s Human Relations Commission, set up by the city council in 1951 to handle racial issues.<sup>136</sup> One of those who wrote the commission in 1953 was a young jazz musician and waitress who was picked up in her own car for talking with a young black man, who was also a musician.<sup>137</sup> When she asked what she was being arrested for, the police told her the only reason was that she was a white girl in a black neighborhood. She was searched at the station house and questioned by the Kansas City Police Vice Squad unit for several hours. Then, she was released with a warning that she would be arrested again if officers saw her in the black district. She stated sadly that, when she moved to Kansas City from New York, “I was unprepared for the treatment I have received by the Kansas City police force due to my association with jazz musicians of the Negro race.”<sup>138</sup> She concluded her letter by claiming to have been arrested three times “for riding in a car in mixed company” and that she hoped in the future “to avoid more confrontations with the ugly,

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., February 17, 1950.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Schirmer, 213, 230.

<sup>137</sup> Letter of complaint to Kansas City Human Rights Commission (unsigned), December 6, 1953, Kansas City Commission of Human Relations Collection, Box 14, File 6, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

prejudiced attitudes of the Kansas City police.”<sup>139</sup>

A second woman complained that she had also been arrested three times for socializing in a “colored tavern” with three other white women.<sup>140</sup> She noted that an officer had threatened her with picking her “up on investigation every time he sees me their [sic]” and asked whether that was true because she and her friends really liked the new African American friends they had made.<sup>141</sup> The worst fears of COPOD and Fellowship activists were realized when, incredibly, a white woman was arrested in her own home along with her guests, six social workers she had invited over for coffee.<sup>142</sup> Four of these six guests were black, and two of these four were men.<sup>143</sup> This also occurred in 1953.

The signs of impending crisis were therefore manifest by the 1950s. There was overcrowding in old and deteriorating housing accompanied by white violence when blacks sought housing in “white” neighborhoods. This was as the steady practice of police harassment and brutality. But there was more. The city’s health care system had been subjected to Jim Crow segregation since the early 1900s and the emerging, state-subsidized urban order of residential segregation by racially motivated appraisements of property helped to lock in inequalities in health care by race and residence.

As shown in chapter four, in-fighting for patronage in machine politics was shown to be part of the culprit for General Hospital Number 2 falling into disrepair. According to Urban League records, however, problems were documented that suggested race discrimination much

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Letter from Shirley Morley to the Kansas City Human Relations Commission (undated), Box 14, File 6, Kansas City Commission of Human Relations Collection, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> *Kansas City Call*, August 21, 1953.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

deeper than fights over personnel. These reports are additional evidence of a state of increasing urban crisis in the KCMO of the 1940s. For example, an Urban League report conducted in 1940 concerning the conditions at General Hospital Number 2 found that patients' "housing facilities" there routinely had cracks in the walls.<sup>144</sup> Room Number Ten in the facility's basement was noted as especially bad, with large cracks which "on numerous occasions, snakes have come through . . . and into the room."<sup>145</sup> Amongst other complaints registered by black patients were seven overarching problems. These were: "treatment and care of patients, . . . housing facilities of patients confined in the basement, . . . insufficient supervision over nurses, orderlies, and . . . other staff, . . . lack of sufficient number of attendants and doctors, . . . lack of communication between basement and first floor, . . . brutality exercised by orderlies, [and] . . . lack of occupational therapeutic training."<sup>146</sup> In at least two cases, Urban League investigators found that that a patient had died because the first floor was never told that they needed emergency care.<sup>147</sup> All of this was the case years after Pendergast had removed Dr. Miller for his neglect and abuse.

Moreover, employment continued to be a constant source of frustration for African Americans. Employment discrimination had continued through the war years. The Urban League compiled a three page list of complaints stretching from the start of the war to the first full postwar year of 1946 by black residents against local employers.<sup>148</sup> Rampant workplace discrimination continued despite civil rights victories in the Fairfax and other area munitions

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<sup>144</sup> "Report of Health and Housing Committee of the Urban League," p.2, 1940, KCULP, Box CM-1: Committee Minutes, 1940-56, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p.1

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> "Complaints Filed With the Urban League By Negro Eligibles For City Employment," KCULP, Box H-1: Historical Records, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

plants and despite victories by FOR/COPOD, CORE, the NAACP, and Urban League against the city's Jim Crow in the late 1940s. As shall be seen, it was not until the early 1960s that the city passed any anti-discrimination ordinance and legal battles would tie the law's implementation up another several years into the 1960s. The effect was a cumulative build up of tension around the deepening urban crisis over time; the mixed messages out of white officials, the delays, and the contradiction between the reality of black inner city life and the aspirations of a local and national civil rights movement all worked to create a long fuse. KCMO officials had said the city was "a tinderbox" in 1925 and had again worried during the war. The ominous problem was that the city remained the proverbial "tinderbox" after the war, into the 1950s, whether the city or middle-class civil rights leaders chose to acknowledge it or not.

For example, 1941 witnessed three complaints. Walter Caldwell had applied for a job as a storeroom clerk by taking a merit exam; he was told he could only apply for the General Hospital 2 or in the storeroom of the Recreation Department.<sup>149</sup> He was told this despite scoring in the top ten.<sup>150</sup> Caldwell's employers implied that blacks were not fit to work alongside white employees as storeroom clerks, and put him to work in the storeroom of the Recreation Department. That same year, a qualified accountant by the name of Guy Davis, was never called for an interview even after successfully passing the merit examination for the Finance Department. A woman by the name of Alberta Gilmore was treated similarly, also never receiving a follow up call for an interview after taking the Finance Department's exam. Finally, S.S. Dunson took an exam to work as an inspector in a tax office but received no referral.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p.1

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.



The start of the war did little to change the situation: in 1942, there were at least thirty cases of such discriminatory hiring practices.<sup>152</sup> Even veteran status for some applicants did no good. One such veteran, Dennis Woodard, applied to be a guard at the city's Personnel Department. He was then told by an interviewer in the Personnel Department that he should "apply for a job as a coal shoveler in which he could find better opportunity."<sup>153</sup> When The Call and the Urban League contacted the City Manager about this incident, Woodard was refused employment as either a guard or a coal shoveler. Three days later, when the Urban League requested a conference to discuss the difficulties blacks faced in obtaining municipal jobs with the city's Director of Personnel, they were ignored. It took until 1946 for twenty-three qualified blacks who applied to be firemen to be hired at city stations 11 and 15. Elouise Phillips passed an exam to be a junior typist but was never referred to any city department for employment.<sup>154</sup> The city's race discrimination was not limited to employment: two African-American messengers were passed over for wage increases two years in a row.

The following year, as many as ten applicants were on registers after interviews but never referred to any city departments.<sup>155</sup> In the case of Irma Graves, she passed an exam as a junior typist and received offers from the Water and Traffic Departments. When her racial identity became known, however, she was referred to General Hospital Number 2 at a salary lower than the previous two offers. Peacetime changed little. In 1946, there were at least four complaints registered to the Urban League. One, Edmond Adams, was blatantly told by the secretary that the sign repair job he sought was "a white man's job" after having passed an exam to be a semi-

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

skilled laborer.<sup>156</sup> Basil North passed an examination for Sanitary Inspector; when he inquired about the job, he was told that “the positions would not supplement those already existent,” which was probably an archaic and evasive way of telling him the position has been filled.<sup>157</sup> North, like many others in these complaint cases, was never called for work. In another fire department case, Henry Bausby was sent a letter informing him of certification for Fire Inspector and instructed him to report to Fire Headquarters if interested in the job and ask for Mr. Wornall. After some run around in which Bausby was told Wornall was not in his office, The Kansas City Call finally reached Wornall and told him of the situation. Wornall then told them he did not know why Bausby received the letter, as “there were no such openings for him.”<sup>158</sup> Wornall then took Bausby’s name and number and said he would call him if such a position did open; he never did. All of this occurred after Bausby had passed an exam the year before for Fire Inspector. Finally, Sylvester Hill had taken an exam for Sanitary Inspector, also during the previous year and passed. He received a similar letter as Bausby’s, telling him to report to the Sanitation Department if he wished to take the job a few months later. When Hill arrived, the Director of the Department of Transportation told him that while Hill “was fully qualified for the job,” he “could not be accepted because” Hill would then “have to deal with the white public at their homes which he felt would be resented by them.”<sup>159</sup>

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The tragic irony of the history of African Americans and civil rights in Kansas City in this time period was that just as Jim Crow barriers were beginning to come down and interracial civil

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

rights organizations were making headway, the conditions of urban crisis continued to worsen. Virginia Oldham and COPOD luckily managed to escape police harassment of interracial gatherings. Lucile Bluford, prospective Missouri journalism student, Urban League activist, and COPOD member said of the Fellowship House that it was about “trying to eliminate segregation and discrimination by letting people know each other as individuals and persons.”<sup>160</sup> It was to be “brotherhood through example” and to that end, COPOD activists held interracial luncheons every Wednesday in public places to educate whites and restaurant owners in Kansas City that integration and interracial harmony was possible.<sup>161</sup> All other days of the week, the popular KCMO restaurant Bretton’s refused service to blacks, but on Wednesdays, owner Max Bretton set aside a special table for Fellowship members in the hope that the Restaurant Owners’ Association would decide to drop Jim Crow after seeing their example.<sup>162</sup> Bretton himself was active in Jewish community relations work. As shall be seen, Jewish civil rights activism would be inspired by both the wide-open inclusiveness of the Fellowship and fighting persistent anti-Semitism in Kansas City. It would be one more element in a powerful coalition that would do battle with Kansas City’s Jim Crow in public accommodations between 1945 and 1963.

Jews, like Italians, Mexicans, Native Americans, and African Americans, had been long discriminated against in the Greater Kansas City area. In KCK, remnants of the once predominant Wyandots and other Native Americans were discriminated against in labor locals such as the railroad brotherhoods, which barred them as well as blacks and Mexicans from

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<sup>160</sup> Schirmer, 199.

<sup>161</sup> “The Fellowship Ideal,” p.2, Vertical File: Fellowship House, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>162</sup> Schirmer, 200.

membership as late as 1940.<sup>163</sup> Nichols' suburban tracts in Johnson County had excluded all five groups as late as the early 1960s.<sup>164</sup> The benefits of civil rights activism and the degree to which the urban crisis and related developments such as urban renewal effected each group was far from equal or even remotely similar in the postwar years. When the dust settled from the urban crisis, Jews and Italians would end up on the "white, middle-class, suburban" side of the real estate industry and FHA-manufactured color line, while African Americans and many Mexican-Americans would stay in the "low-income, nonwhite, inner city" side of this urban divide.<sup>165</sup> This occurred despite the participation of the city's Jewish population in the civil rights movement with middle-class blacks who themselves were exceptionally well-off compared to the majority of the metro area's black population. Further complicating the picture with Mexican-Americans is that, in this time period, it widely varied whether they were labeled by data collectors as "white", "colored," or as a separate "race" from either whites or blacks.<sup>166</sup>

Esther Brown was the most important figure in the story of KCMO's Jewish community allying itself with the cause of civil rights for African Americans. Brown had been born Esther Swirk in 1917 to Russian-Jewish parents in a working-class neighborhood in Kansas City, Missouri.<sup>167</sup> She began her political activism as a high school student when she picketed with

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<sup>163</sup> "The Negro Worker in Kansas City," p.10, 1940, KCULP, Box KCULP-1, File 1, Vol.1-1, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>164</sup> "A View of the Supreme Court's Housing Decision," Matter of Fact, 4:1 (Autumn 1948):1, KCULP, Box KCULP-1, File 1, Vol.4-1, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>165</sup> "Appointed Thorn," Kansas City Star, August 19, 1984, Vertical File: Alvin Brooks, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL. Brooks remarked on this development at the beginning of the article.

<sup>166</sup> "Summary and Recommendations: Housing," p.S-5, 1945, KCULP, Box H-1: Historical Records, MO State Archives, Jefferson City. In 1945, the Urban League considered both Mexicans and Italians as distinct "races" from whites or "Negroes" and from each other.

<sup>167</sup> "Esther Brown (1917-70), Civil Rights Activist," found in VF: Brown, Esther, in MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

garment workers and then, she studied at the leftist Commonwealth College in Arkansas.<sup>168</sup> She would launch the opening lawsuit in what would be a long, anguished battle over Kansas City metro school desegregation over the next three decades.

In 1947, in Merriam, Kansas, School District Number 90 in South Park built a ninety-thousand dollar building for two hundred and twenty-two white children.<sup>169</sup> Though the building had been built with taxpayer money from all residents, the district excluded forty-four black children, keeping them in a separate two-room schoolhouse with no indoor restrooms and one outhouse. This was actually in violation of existing Kansas segregation law back to the 1880s, which stated that only cities over fifteen thousand were allowed to maintain segregated school systems, while smaller communities such as South Park were required to operate integrated school systems.<sup>170</sup>

Brown wouldn't have even have known about the plight of African American children in the South Park district had it not been for the fact that the Browns had purchased a two bedroom home in Merriam and hired a black South Park woman, Helen Swan, to help around the house.<sup>171</sup> Swan told Esther and Paul Brown all about the plight of South Park's black children and Esther Brown immediately took action. She spoke across the state of Kansas, raising money and organizing.<sup>172</sup> In February 1948, she helped black parents in South Park set up a branch of the NAACP.<sup>173</sup> In May 1948, the South Park NAACP sued the school district and board. The

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> *Kansas City Star*, "Esther Brown," May 21, 2000, as found in VF: Brown, Esther in MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> "Esther Brown (1917-70), Civil Rights Activist," VF: Brown, Esther, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>173</sup> "Esther Brown Civil Rights Activist" and *KC Star*, "Esther Brown," both found in VF: Brown, Esther, MO

Browns were immediately subjected to harassment and intimidation as a result of Esther's courageous stand against Jim Crow, including threatening nighttime phone calls every night and a burned cross in their front yard.<sup>174</sup>

In June 1949, the Kansas Supreme Court ruled that the South Park school board's actions violated Kansas law by segregating through "subterfuge."<sup>175</sup> Brown continued her activism, taking her fight against segregation to Topeka, where African Americans in 1950 had written Thurgood Marshall of the NAACP to inform him that segregation of Topeka schools had grown unbearable. Esther Brown, for her part, helped to persuade Oliver Brown, a railroad welder and minister, to allow his daughter Linda to be the main plaintiff in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case.<sup>176</sup> Throughout 1951, she helped Topeka and national NAACP lawyers to find Topeka hotels that would provide them lodging and helped them find education officials to testify about the damage segregation did to black children.<sup>177</sup> Though a three-judge panel ruled in favor of Topeka schools, the NAACP's appeal to the Supreme Court would result in the overturning of the 1896 *Plessy* decision by 1954.

Unfortunately for Esther and Paul Brown, her activity had attracted the ire of J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI, who accused her of "agitating the Negro to demand their rights;" he further claimed that the couple were both communists.<sup>178</sup> Paul Brown lost his job and was asked to resign his commission as a captain with the US Air Force reserves when he was brought up on

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Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid; "Esther Brown Civil Rights Activist," VF: Brown, Esther, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL

<sup>177</sup> *KC Star*, "Esther Brown," VF: Brown, Esther, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>178</sup> "Esther Brown, Civil Rights Activist," VF: Brown, Esther, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL; Mike Hendricks, "Commentary: A Reminder of 1950s Paranoia," *KC Star*, April 11, 2001, found in VF: Brown, Esther, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

charges in 1951 for “loyalty reasons.”<sup>179</sup> Unidentified informants had brought the couple to the FBI’s attention, and agents repeatedly badgered Esther about past or present communist affiliation. “She denies that she is a communist or that she has ever been a communist, and said that she was only fighting what she considered to be an injustice,” an FBI agent wrote of Esther Brown in 1951.<sup>180</sup> By 1957, the charges were dropped against Paul, but throughout the six years the FBI was investigating them, Paul Brown remembered that he and Esther “endured sleepless nights and an ever-present gnawing fear.”<sup>181</sup> It is no coincidence that the lone figure among this group of Kansas City white civil rights activists with strong ties to the labor left, Esther Brown, would be targeted by J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI. Thus, anticommunism was yet another force that drove the federal government to send out mixed messages when it came to civil rights and race: on the one hand, one of the key motives for postwar politicians to support civil rights reforms was the bad image Jim Crow was giving the US overseas but on the other, civil rights progress was delayed by a Red Scare climate that viewed civil rights as subversive.

Refusing to be intimidated, Brown continued her activism on behalf of civil rights and integration. She worked to establish an anti-discrimination commission in the state of Kansas in 1953.<sup>182</sup> She organized a Panel of American Women through the B’nai Jehuda Temple Sisterhood in 1957, a national organization dedicated to creating dialogue between women of diverse backgrounds. Throughout the turbulent 1960s, Brown served on the Jackson County,

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<sup>179</sup> “Esther Brown, Civil Rights Activist,” VF: Brown, Esther, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>180</sup> *KC Star*, “50s Paranoia,” April 11, 2001, VF: Brown, Esther, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>181</sup> “Esther Brown, Civil Rights Activist” and *KC Star*, “50s Paranoia,” April 11, 2001, both in VF: Brown, Esther, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>182</sup> “Esther Brown, Civil Rights Activist,” VF: Brown, Esther, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL

Missouri, Civil Rights Commission.<sup>183</sup>

In the case of Kansas City, Jewish alliance with the civil rights movement was not only out of a sense of moral duty, political leaning, or a shared history of discrimination, but was motivated by continuing discrimination against and segregation of Jews.<sup>184</sup> Such segregation dated as far back as at least 1908, and the city's Jewish population in the early twentieth century resided mostly in the North End and another neighborhood called "McClure flats and Wardencourt."<sup>185</sup> Conversely, removal of racial barriers made religious or ethnic ones look all the more ridiculous. Sidney Lawrence of the Fellowship accordingly steered the Jewish Community Relations Bureau (JCRB) towards an official policy that "the civil rights movement was vitally significant to the removal of social barriers affecting Jews."<sup>186</sup> In 1945, when the Bureau learned that a new subdivision in Leawood, Kansas, included covenants against both Jews and African Americans, the Board considered issuing a religious discrimination complaint alone because it was more likely to succeed than a racial discrimination complaint. Consultation with black activists convinced the Board to forge stronger ties to the Fellowship to coordinate the attacks on the restrictive covenants.<sup>187</sup>

The Fellowship examined public accommodations to find out what their racial policies were.<sup>188</sup> At the Forum Cafeteria, Bluford and Oldham would stand in line until Bluford was

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Sidney Lawrence, "United We Stand," *Kansas City Jewish Chronicle* (December 13, 1948) ; "A View of the Supreme Court's Housing Decision," *Matter of Fact*, 4:1 (Autumn 1948):1, KCULP, Box KCULP-1, File 1, Vol.4-1, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>185</sup> Whitney, 465.

<sup>186</sup> Lawrence, "United We Stand."

<sup>187</sup> Schirmer, 210.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.



refused service. Then Oldham would fill a tray with food and sat down with Bluford to share a meal. The purpose was to demonstrate to white observers that “black people and white people could enjoy things together” without any incident or problem.<sup>189</sup> Activists noted that whites always acted as if “the sky would fall” if whites and blacks ever sat, talked, and ate together.<sup>190</sup> Despite this unity of purpose, black and white activists in the group had very different ways of viewing why segregation was wrong and what its consequences among white Kansas Citizens were.

Obviously, for African American activists who fought Jim Crow in the 1950s, the consequences of segregation were deeply personal in nature. Margaret Holliday said she fought segregation because “it limits the individual so very much . . . . Every thing that is wrong is black; right is white. When you do that to a group of people, they begin to think that, and they will be less than what they could or should be.”<sup>191</sup> Dorothy Davis Johnson of the Urban League staff recalled that her feeling was “what segregation did to us, we have not recovered from . . . It is an injustice to people to imply there is something so different about them that they must be separated.”<sup>192</sup> Johnson felt that just as importantly, segregation placed her and other African Americans under constant threat of violence or humiliation if they crossed certain boundaries. “Segregation causes incidents,” she explained. “You see if, you have a whole bunch of blacks . . . and they’re told they can’t go here, they can’t go there, then the tiniest infraction can cause a scene.”<sup>193</sup> Johnson noted that the worst part was variation in what exactly segregationist rules

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 200-01.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

were and the fact that they were not always clearly defined. As she put it, “The variation is what is important. You never know what to expect. That’s the black side of it.”<sup>194</sup> Experiencing this created “a discomfort that I don’t think may white people had to experience.”<sup>195</sup>

Chester Franklin, for his part, simply saw segregation as an affront to democracy. He repeatedly stressed this theme throughout World War II and into the height of the Cold War.<sup>196</sup> Using both liberal and old-fashioned labor republican language, Franklin defined democracy as a man having “a right to make a living and to enjoy the fruits of his labor equally with his neighbors.”<sup>197</sup> Franklin noted that segregation robbed African Americans of that right by forcing them into substandard schools and housing, by denying them gainful employment, and by excluding them from full enjoyment of public facilities. In the spirit of that argument, Franklin stated, “A man should not have to remain hungry . . . when he has money in his pocket simply because of the color of his skin.”<sup>198</sup> Franklin noted that the system of segregation was self-reinforcing since it prevented whites from personal contact with African Americans who would disprove their racial stereotypes, which were the same ones used to justify segregation and racial exclusion. Worst of all, “in order to prove Negroes bad,” segregationists committed a type of slow-motion extermination, as they “railroaded them into prison, lynched them by the score, and denied them work and homes,” practices that were “entirely at variance with Christianity and real Americanism.”<sup>199</sup> Franklin believed segregation must go because of the obvious and direct

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> *Kansas City Call*, February 23, 1940, February 20, 1942, July 30, 1948, August 29, 1952, January 8, 1954.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

harm it did to the African American community.

In contrast, white civil rights activists and members of the Fellowship tended to focus on the harm segregation did to whites, following Myrdal's key thesis. These activists believed that ignorance, not character flaws, caused bigotry. Ignorance was much easier to combat than stupidity or evil, which they quickly ruled out as causes of bigotry and prejudice. Overcoming ignorance through education and through providing whites personal contact with blacks formed a critical part of 1940s and 1950s white integrationists' activism. When COPOD activist Betty Feazel was asked why she protested against segregation in the 1940s and 1950s, she replied that the very people who degraded others through segregation were themselves degraded because of it. As she explained further, "It lowers their[white people's] character; it brings out the worst in people."<sup>200</sup> She warned further that "you can't keep a man down in the gutter without getting down there with him."<sup>201</sup> White Kansas Citians who protested segregation did so because they thought it lowered the character of their fellow citizens and created an uncivil society in which they had no desire to live. Another activist, Rhea Kalhorn, believed that segregation was wrong because it undermined social values that underpinned civility and decency. Like Franklin, Kalhorn saw segregation as a horrendous violation of the spirit of democracy. Segregation "took dignity away from men" by generating inequality, Kalhorn said.<sup>202</sup>

With the force of these beliefs, white civil rights activists in the city sought to attack segregation in order to create "the peaceable kingdom."<sup>203</sup> They believed integration possessed a transformative power that would uplift human character and human society. The activists

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<sup>200</sup> Schirmer, 202.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 205.

experienced different spiritual responses to the fight for justice between 1945 and 1957, as reflected in the wide spectrum of religious belief systems they held. Oldham was the least religious of the activists, despite the fact she converted to the Quaker faith. Her attraction to the Quakers was “that they were people who did something about their religion” since conventional Christianity left her unimpressed. Her admiration for the Quakers was underpinned by her commitment to the teachings of Gandhi. She believed in an “inner light in everybody” and “Truth and Love,” not in “somebody off in heaven who ought to do better for the world than he does.”<sup>204</sup>

In comparison to Oldham, John Swomley was more conventionally Christian, but this observation concealed the depth of his commitment to pacifism and to the Social Gospel.<sup>205</sup> Swomley had come from a Methodist background, met future ally James Farmer in the Methodist youth movement, and by 1939, became by his own account “radicalized” out of his discussions with pacifists. He adopted left of center positions on any number of social issues as a result. Going to work for the Fellowship in 1939, he became its executive secretary and then its director. Swomley then hired his old friend Farmer as the FOR’s race relations secretary; later, he was behind the hiring of Bayard Rustin as well. Together, the three men would develop the Gandhian techniques Farmer and Rustin advanced as the chief philosophical underpinning of the Congress of Racial Equality.<sup>206</sup> After completing his doctorate on hiatus from FOR leadership, Swomley came to Kansas City to join the Methodist college St. Paul’s Theological Seminary. Once he came to KCMO, Swomley was one of the city’s leading activists for peace, civil

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 16, 20, 69.

liberties, and civil rights. One of the key ideas he brought to the budding interracial Kansas City civil rights movement was the notion that Christians were obligated to seek social change especially around race and that the struggle to transform society would bring the Christian closer to the “communion with God” because “in confronting the fact of evil, . . . the Christian is constrained to act as fully as he can in the spirit of love.”<sup>207</sup>

With a coalition of the NAACP, the Urban League, JCRB, COPOD, FOR, and later, CORE, the group was actually diverse community of Quakers, African-American professionals and clergy, Jews, Unitarians, Christian pacifists, and Social Gospel advocates. Their protests against segregated public accommodations would gain momentum in the 1950s. The next major fight would be, as the NAACP pledged at the end of its successful effort to topple segregation in the auditoriums and Philharmonic, the Swope Park swimming pool. It was the only remaining city-owned facility still segregated.<sup>208</sup>

As early as June 1951, Carl Johnson of the NAACP announced that unless the park board changed its policies and allowed African Americans to use the Swope park swimming pool, a lawsuit would be filed to test whether the board could legally do so.<sup>209</sup> NAACP attorneys in New York, Johnson warned, had been studying recent court decisions in Missouri and had decided to fight the park board in the courts.<sup>210</sup> He said this lawsuit would be made on behalf of blacks who were refused the right to purchase tickets to the pool. After Johnson left, the Swope Park officials stated that they would refuse to make any changes and that it was their official

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<sup>207</sup> John Swomley, “Christian Dynamic For Social Change,” reprinted in *War, Peace and Justice: The Prophetic Record* (Kansas City: Smith Grieves Co., 1985), 75-76.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>209</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “May Sue Over Pool Use,” June 8, 1951, as found in VF: Civil Rights-KC-Public Accommodations, as found in MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

position that “the Paseo swimming pool at Seventeenth Street and Paseo already provides equal swimming facilities for Negroes.”<sup>211</sup> This would prove to be the opening salvo in a three-year battle over the Swope pool.

On August 9, 1951, three African Americans named Esther Williams, Lena Smith, and Joseph Moore, filed suit in the US District court, seeking an injunction against the city and fifty-two thousand dollars in damages because they were refused admittance to the Swope park pool.<sup>212</sup> Infamously, the city managers stated that “no rights have been violated” because the “policy of operating separate swimming pools for the two races is reinforced by a recognized natural aversion to physical intimacy inherent in the use of swimming pools by members of races that do not mingle socially.”<sup>213</sup> *The Kansas City Call* pointed out, in another symbolic slap in the face, that the city managers’ statement spelled “Negro” with a small “n.” City managers repeated the excuse that the separate Paseo pool already provided “equal swimming facilities.”<sup>214</sup> They also claimed that pool segregation was part of a custom that benefitted both “races” and that the Fourteenth Amendment did not apply in this case in any event because the practice was a custom rather than a law.

The suit was litigated by NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall on behalf of the three plaintiffs.<sup>215</sup> Federal district court Judge Albert A. Ridge saw through the city’s flimsy attempt at a “custom” loophole, and ruled in April 9, 1952, in a twenty-eight page opinion that Fourteenth

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “No Rights Have Been Violated,” August 31, 1951, as found in VF: Civil Rights-KC-Public Accommodations, in MO Valley Spec. Collections, KCPL.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> *Kansas City Star*, “Lifts A Negro Ban,” April 9, 1952, as found in VF: Civil Rights-KC-Public Accommodations, in MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

Amendment most definitely did apply, that the Paseo “colored” pool was not equal to the Swope facilities, that the city was definitely in violation of equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment, and that the state of Missouri itself had no laws segregating pools on the books.<sup>216</sup> Moreover, Albert said, the city itself had no such provision to separate races in its city charter. David M. Proctor, the city’s counsel, immediately declared the city would fight all the way to the Supreme Court. The decision was praised by NAACP president Johnson, who said of the suit that it was “of tremendous importance to the people of this community” because “it clearly defines the established rights of all citizens without limitations based on race. We believe it is the second major decision in the field of human rights by a judge in this vicinity in the last thirty years, but it is by far the most outstanding. Contrary to some isolated notions, we believe that the decency and self-respect of the citizens of this community white and Negro, will meet the new experiences resulting from this decision with fairness and pride.”<sup>217</sup>

As the city sent its case on a two-year appeal process through the courts, it closed Swope pool rather than comply with Ridge’s ruling.<sup>218</sup> An additional reason KCMO officials closed the pool was out of fear of repetition of the 1949 race riot in St. Louis following desegregation of a public pool, and because of similar violence in Chicago throughout the 1930s along its waterfront.<sup>219</sup> In June 1953, the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth District rejected Proctor’s appeal, and in an editorial, the *Kansas City Call* heaped scorn on the park board’s

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “Judge Says Custom of Segregation By City Violates 14th Amendment,” April 11, 1952, found in VF: Civil Rights-KC-Public Accommodations, in MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>218</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “White Citizens Want Swope Park Swimming Pool Open this Summer, NAACP Says,” May 8, 1953, found in VF: Civil Rights-KC-Public Accommodations, in MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL; Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 161.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 155-56; “St. Louis Tackles Swimming Pool Problem,” Matter of Fact 5:1 (October 1949), p.2, KCULP, Box KCULP-1, File 1, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

“waste [of] the taxpayers’ money by keeping the case in court” since “there is not a chance for the city to win.”<sup>220</sup> Their prediction was proven correct when the Supreme Court permitted the lower court decisions to stand months later. *The Call* declared that Proctor and the city council had been defeated and ridiculed Proctor’s blustering statement that the city’s policy would await the Supreme Court’s decision in the school segregation cases.<sup>221</sup> The paper additionally found talk of city officials trying to sidestep all of the rulings by building another “colored-only” swimming pool for blacks that would be the same size as Swope to be incredibly asinine and mocked Proctor for suggesting it.<sup>222</sup> To signal to the city the NAACP was not in the least interested in another segregated pool, Johnson announced that he would launch more lawsuits to force compliance with the courts. Even Mayor Kemp’s own Kansas City Commission on Human Relations was pressuring the city council to reopen the Swope park pool, and open it to everyone.<sup>223</sup>

Swope Park pool finally reopened in 1954, integrated at last<sup>224</sup>. Unlike in St. Louis, the city launched a public education program about the upcoming changes to the Swope pool over a period of months.<sup>225</sup> The feared violence did not materialize, but white attendance fell by a third of its usual level and only slightly increased in 1955. In May 1955, civil rights activists’ victory for integrated Kansas City pools was complete, as the Board completely reversed course and

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<sup>220</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “Park Board And Council Petitioned,” June 12, 1953, found in VF: Civil Rights-KC-Public Accommodations, in MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>221</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “Swimming Pool Case to Satisfying End,” October 16, 1953, as found in VF: Civil Rights-KC-Public Accommodations, in MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> *Kansas City Call*, June 12, 1953, VF: Civil Rights-KC-Public Accommodations, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*



opened all city pools to everyone.<sup>226</sup> With this victory over the last holdout of city-sponsored segregation, the movement turned its sights towards fighting private sector segregation in the city, which would last another decade.

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Housing discrimination proved to be a more difficult challenge than the city's swimming pools. In the late 1940s, the Santa Fe neighborhood in KCMO south of Twenty-Seventh Street was beginning to experience neighborhood transition, as the first African American families began to move in after World War II.<sup>227</sup> At first, whites attempted to sue in court to enforce racist neighborhood covenants. When the courts threw these suits out and declared the covenants illegal, whites began putting their homes up for sale and moving out, convinced property values would plummet. By 1952, neighborhood turnover in the Santa Fe district was so advanced that black parents petitioned the Kansas City Missouri School District to convert the Benton elementary school from a "white" to a "colored" school (this was before *Brown v. Board of Education*).<sup>228</sup> Later that year, the school district approved the change much to the anger of whites living in the area. Protests from neighborhood whites delayed the conversion of the school, but in September 1953 it opened as an all-black school. Six days after it opened, a fire destroyed the school and students were forced to attend split shifts for the rest of 1953.<sup>229</sup> The destruction of the school coincided with a wave of bombings and arsons of homes purchased by black families in the 1940s and early 1950s.

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<sup>226</sup> *Kansas City Call*, "City Pools Now Open to Everyone," May 20, 1955, as found in VF: Civil Rights-KC-Public Accommodations, in MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>227</sup> Gotham, 66.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

<sup>229</sup> "The Mysterious Benton Fire," *Kansas City Call*, October 2, 1953; "NAACP Hits Theory of Fire Chief," *Kansas City Call*, October 2, 1953.

Indeed, the series of bombings in 1952 were so horrific that even *The Kansas City Times* called them “a reign of terror” and dubbed the perpetrators “terrorists.”<sup>230</sup> On May 21, 1952, Charles C. Chriddenden, a Navy veteran, and his family were nearly killed when a homemade bomb destroyed the house on the Paseo block they had recently purchased.<sup>231</sup> They survived largely because one family member threw the bomb out on the driveway upon discovering it.<sup>232</sup> The Chriddenden family had received anonymous telephone calls warning them not to buy in neighborhoods that had been white and threatening them with non-specific reprisals. The bombing had culminated a series of attacks by whites that included a previous arson attempt on the Chriddenden home and another bombing in the same neighborhood that did minor damage to another house.<sup>233</sup>

Four months later, on September 7, 1952, the home of another African-American family in the Paseo block was bombed.<sup>234</sup> Luckily for Sam Miller and his wife, they had already moved out of the home due to repeated earlier harassment.<sup>235</sup> *The Kansas City Call* claimed that the harassment included the explosions of large firecrackers in their backyards and a telephone caller claiming to be a member of the Ku Klux Klan. The explosion ripped a hole in the foundation of the two-story home, greatly damaged the furnace pipes, shattered several windows, and wrecked cabinets and a sink in the kitchen. Additionally, it blew out twenty-nine window panes and

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<sup>230</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “Criminal Terrorism,” May 23, 1952, as found in VF: Civil Rights-KC-Bombings, John Ramos Collection, in MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “Criminal Terrorism,” May 23, 1952, VF: Civil Rights-KC-Bombings, Ramos Collection, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>234</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “Dynamite Rips Hole in Foundation,” September 12, 1952, VF: Civil Rights-KC-Bombings, Ramos Collection, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

shattered dishes in the home of a white family living across the street. The Chr ittendens had sold the home to the Millers and were in the process of trying to find another buyer after the Millers left. *The Call* noted that this was the third bombing in that block so Far, and Mayor Kemp condemned the bombings in a speech. Kemp called it “a despicable crime” and an act of “terrorism” that threatened the city as a “law abiding community.”<sup>236</sup>

After 1952, the violence became more sporadic as white flight accelerated, and the majority of whites had opted to move to suburbs in places such as Raytown or Johnson County, Kansas.<sup>237</sup> Evidence of the lingering hostility could be found in a 1956 sign posted in the white neighborhood of East 39th Street that read “For Sale By Owner to the Blackest Negro In K.C.”<sup>238</sup> The Kansas City Call drew attention to the whites who put up signs saying “Not For Sale” and “I Believe in my Neighborhood;” unfortunately, they were outnumbered by those who fled to suburbs on either the Kansas or Missouri side of the metro.<sup>239</sup> Nor did the bombings stop entirely after 1952: as late as 1962, African Americans who moved into Raytown had their homes subjected to terror bombings and arson.<sup>240</sup>

What made these outbreaks of racial violence between 1940 and 1962 different from their predecessors in 1911 and 1923-27 was the fact that that fears that African American purchases of homes would destroy the value of neighborhoods were no longer features of local housing markets or private prejudice but were now “a permanent and uncontested belief shared by all

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., “Mayor Kemp Denounces Bombing,” September 12, 1952, VF: Civil Rights-KC-Bombing, Ramos Collection, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>237</sup> Schirmer, 225.

<sup>238</sup> *Kansas City Times*, photograph captioned “Sign of the Times,” September 29, 1956, as found in VF: Civil Rights-Housing, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>239</sup> *Kansas City Call*, photograph captioned “Sign Display Christian Attitude,” April 22, 1955, VF: Civil Rights-Housing, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>240</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “Raytown Mayor Deplores Attack on Carter Home,” April 20, 1962.

segments of the real estate and banking industries and disseminated on a national scale by the federal government through the FHA.”<sup>241</sup> Despite the US Supreme Court *Kraemer* ruling against racially exclusive covenants in 1948, not only did the FHA do nothing to change discriminatory practices by its private clients in the real estate and lending industries, but continued itself to use a racist system for evaluating neighborhoods all the while denying that the practices were racist and insisting that they only reflected “private market conditions.”<sup>242</sup> The result would be what Kevin Fox Gotham termed “the racialization of metropolitan space.”<sup>243</sup>

The real estate industry’s red-baiting regarding public housing concealed the fact that it did not just see public housing as a potential competitor but was also worried about it as a vehicle for attacking housing discrimination, which was the underpinning of the entire federally-subsidized and segregated private real estate market from which NAREB drew its political and economic power.<sup>244</sup> In the case of Kansas City, the industry had allies in the city council, who were adamantly opposed to placing any public housing in white neighborhoods. The Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954 would finalize the transition away from the original public housing intent of the 1937 act towards urban renewal. This development was the fruit of real estate lobbying efforts to block public housing, create local redevelopment agencies with broad powers of eminent domain, and secure generous government subsidies for its private redevelopment ambitions. Alarmed at “blight” and “decentralization” affecting downtown property values, NAREB had been planning since 1935 to undertake a “slum clearance” initiative with

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<sup>241</sup> Gotham, 67.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 67.

government assistance in order to resell the property to private redevelopers.<sup>245</sup> What they neglected to acknowledge was that “blight” and “decentralization” were the consequences of their own disinvestment in the central cities in favor of suburbanization of whites through the FHA in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.

The real estate industry achieved one of these chief goals in the form of the 1949 Housing Act’s Title I, which provided federal subsidies for property acquisition and clearance.<sup>246</sup> Elsewhere in the Act, Title II raised by five hundred million the amount the FHA was allowed to offer as mortgage insurance.<sup>247</sup> The most liberal section of the act, Title III, authorized the federal government to build eight hundred and ten thousand new public housing units over a ten year period and required local housing authorities to demolish or renovate one slum dwelling for every unit they built. Title III survived conservative congressional budget cuts and real estate industry opposition, but was gravely weakened and never came close to meeting the target spelled out in the bill. Instead, by 1960, only one hundred and fifty housing units had been built. Sadly, it was clear much sooner than 1960 that two things had resulted: “(1) there were no houses available for slum-dwellers displaced in the cities; (2) these slum dwellers were largely minorities to whom housing in new areas was banned.”<sup>248</sup>

It was the Housing Act of 1954 that provided a blank check for “urban renewal,” with all

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<sup>245</sup> “Are Residential Property Values Normal Now?,” *Kansas City Realtor*, May 18, 1932; “Campaign Against Decentralization,” *Kansas City Realtor*, February 14, 1940; “Warehouses Feel Effects of Decentralization,” *Kansas City Realtor*, June 6, 1940; “Factors in Decentralization,” *Kansas City Realtor*, October 31, 1940; “War Checks Decentralization,” *Kansas City Realtor*, January 5, 1942.

<sup>246</sup> Gotham, 77.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Charles Abrams, *Forbidden Neighbors: A Study of Prejudice in Housing* (Washington NY: Kennikat Press, 1971), 244.

of the connotations that term implies today.<sup>249</sup> Roosevelt and Truman had been apparently sincere in desiring public housing, but both presidents either delegated too much authority to locals and the private sector or, in the case of Truman, were too weakened by divided government to deliver it. In contrast, Eisenhower showed no enthusiasm whatsoever for expanding existing public housing. Eisenhower and the Republican Congress made one exception to that point of view: the 1954 act established the first specific housing for the elderly through the public housing program.<sup>250</sup> Though Eisenhower, like Truman and Roosevelt before him, also called for relocation of displaced residents of slums that were cleared, urban leaders and the industry ignored this aspect of the 1954 law much like they had similar clauses in the 1949 act. Counties in Missouri would ensure such a decline of KCK.

Moreover, the Cold War itself provided a rationale for both the growth of FHA-subsidized suburbia and the construction of the interstates.<sup>251</sup> In the 1951 issue of *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* was an article entitled “Defense through Decentralization,” which argued that the ideal in case of a nuclear attack by the USSR was a depopulated urban core surrounded by smaller settlements and low-density suburbs.<sup>252</sup> Likewise, the interstates could be used for rapid evacuation of cities in case of nuclear attack, as stated by President Eisenhower himself in signing the 1956 Act.<sup>253</sup>

Two developments in 1956 and 1957 would set the course for future transportation in KCMO, and the former event would combine with urban renewal to create disastrous

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<sup>249</sup> Gotham, 77.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Jackson, 249.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

consequences for African-American neighborhoods in the city. First, President Eisenhower introduced and Congress signed into law the 1956 Interstate Highway Act, solidifying the dominance of the automobile over American transportation. The following year, in 1957, Kansas City's transit company retired its streetcars permanently.<sup>254</sup>

Both developments were culminations of trends in American transportation going back to previous decades. The streetcar, for its part, had been in slow decline since the 1920s. As for the Interstate Highway System, as far back as the 1939 New York World's Fair, General Motors had presented an exhibit called "Futurama, "complete with "elevated freeways, [with] traffic moving at one hundred miles an hour."<sup>255</sup> California built freeways and Pennsylvania built a turnpike back in the early 1940s that would become absorbed into the Interstates after 1956, and the President had been greatly impressed as Allied commander by the German autobahn system in the last campaigns of the European Front in World War II. As early as 1943 in the US, a diverse group of lobbyists came together to form the American Road Builders Association. They included initially the Automobile Manufacturers Association, state highway chairmen, motor-bus companies and operators, the American Trucking Association, and the American Parking Association.<sup>256</sup> By the mid-1950s, this coalition of lobbyists was broad-based enough that it had grown to also include: "the oil, rubber, asphalt, and construction industries; car dealers and rental car agencies; . . . the banks and advertising agencies that depended upon the companies involved" and labor unions such as the UAW and the Teamsters' union.<sup>257</sup>

The latter's inclusion served to highlight two developments in organized labor after

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<sup>254</sup> Dodd, 190.

<sup>255</sup> Jackson, 248.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

World War II: the peak of the power of organized labor as part of the postwar Cold War consensus and the shift in the transportation sector of the labor movement away from the Railroad Brotherhoods to the UAW and the Teamsters. The latter shift had been underway since at least the victory of Walter Reuther's UAW at the 1937 sit-down strike at the General Motors plant. The expulsion of leftist radicals from the CIO in 1949, the postwar accord between business and labor, and the 1955 merger of the AFL and CIO signaled a retreat from more radical visions for organized labor. Such a change made such an alliance for road lobbying with management possible. Given that the UAW helped fund liberal Democrats and the Teamsters supported Republicans like Eisenhower and Nixon, the pressure from transportation unions for road projects was bipartisan. A. Philip Randolph would remain a labor and civil rights giant despite these shifts, but the Pullman company and the Brotherhood's heyday was now behind them, as the country's "once magnificent passenger railroad system" went through bankruptcy and deteriorating service in the 1950s as an "inevitable result of a national transportation policy that subsidized air and automobile travel and taxed the railroads."<sup>258</sup>

In the middle of 1946, advocates of interracial and black unionism in KCK won a significant court case in the fight against racism and segregation in labor unions.<sup>259</sup> One hundred black workers at the Santa Fe railroad repair shops had been fighting the AFL local Brotherhood of Railway Carmen for two years in court in order to obtain membership in the union.<sup>260</sup> The Kansas Supreme Court ruled in June of 1946 that segregated, auxiliary union locals were

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>259</sup> "Court In Momentous Decision" and "Pertinent Paragraph From Kansas Decision," *Kansas City Call*, June 14, 1946.

<sup>260</sup> "Court in Momentous Decision," Ibid.



unconstitutional under the Thirteenth Amendment.<sup>261</sup> Despite such victories, as late as the 1960s, many AFL locals still excluded blacks. The decline of the railroads and the Brotherhood further harmed urban working-class blacks by depriving them of union wage-paying jobs and rendered the benefits from victories in rail unions sadly short term.<sup>262</sup> By 1962, an open fight broke out between Randolph and George Meany in the national AFL-CIO over discrimination in union locals; Meany refused to admit that the problem of racist locals was a major one and also refused to appoint an African-American to head the AFL-CIO's civil rights department.<sup>263</sup> Meany dismissed such a potential measure as "discrimination in reverse."<sup>264</sup> In any event, the boost the interstates would give to the UAW (including black auto workers at the Ford and GM plants) and Teamsters would only be temporary, as became clear once capital broke its postwar accord with labor in the 1970s. In the long term, the capital mobility and low-wage service jobs spurred by the interstates in the form of fast food chains and chain malls would greatly undermine the labor movement in the late twentieth century.

For KCK, an additional blow to the labor movement came much earlier, in the form of the 1958 Kansas right-to-work law.<sup>265</sup> The long-established International Brotherhood of Boilermakers were so enraged at the right-to-work law's passage that they threatened to abandon KCK as their headquarters; they ended up remaining.<sup>266</sup> The Attorney General of Kansas, John

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Hill, "Racism Within Organized Labor," *Journal of Negro Education*, 30:2 (1961): 109-18; *Call*, "Pipefitters Union Denies Training Bias," March 9, 1962; *Call*, "Negro Group in All Out War Against Federal Contract Bias," August 24, 1962.

<sup>263</sup> *Kansas City Call*, "Meany Calls It Bias in Reverse," January 12, 1962.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> *Kansas City Star*, "Right to Work Effective Now," December 1, 1958.

<sup>266</sup> McDowell, 43.

Anderson, Jr., ruled that all union security contracts had been abrogated by the November 4, 1958 adoption of the right-to-work amendment to the Kansas state constitution, with only railroads, airlines, and other firms involved in congressionally-defined “interstate commerce” exempt from the law.<sup>267</sup> The 1958 right-to-work act altered KCK’s working class by removing a culture of industrialized unionism around the stockyards and packing plants that had already lost the packing industry and stockyards to economic depression and flooding between the early 1930s and early 1950s. The long-term effects would be devastating: by the end of the century, Wyandotte County would become “one of the poorest counties in Kansas and the metropolitan area” while Johnson County would be “one of the richest counties in the United States.”<sup>268</sup> The hollowing out of its urban core along with KCMO’s through federally subsidized suburbs in Johnson County and other metro suburbs in Jackson, Platte, and Clay Counties in Missouri would ensure such a decline of KCK.

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In 1953, in accordance with the federal 1949 Housing Act, the state of Missouri formed the Land Clearance For Redevelopment Authority, or LCRA, for carrying out urban renewal projects in Kansas City and St. Louis.<sup>269</sup> KCMO’s city council established the LCRA as a separate legal agency responsible to its own board of private sector figures not directly answerable to city hall or the city manager. Although the bulk of the funding came from the federal government, the decisions were entirely made by LCRA officials working closely with downtown Kansas City business elites, including the Downtown Committee, the Building

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<sup>267</sup> *Kansas City Star*, “Right To Work,” December 1, 1958.

<sup>268</sup> Gotham, 16-17.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

Owners and Managers Association, the Citizens Regional Planning Council, the Hotel Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Merchants Association.<sup>270</sup> Between 1953 and 1969, the federal government supplied two-thirds of the eighty million dollars it cost to finance KCMO's urban redevelopment and renewal programs.

For the next two and a half decades, the undertaking of large scale slum clearance and public housing building in KCMO would further transform the character of an urban core already deeply altered by white flight and the collapse of the streetcar system. Residential neighborhoods began being cleared away for commercial and industrial land use, and both in Kansas City and nationally, urban renewal was celebrated by the press and public officials.<sup>271</sup> Early on, both of the city's major newspapers, the *Kansas City Star* and the *Kansas City Times*, threw their full support behind the effort with glowing coverage.<sup>272</sup> Nationally, *Look* magazine in 1958 awarded Kansas City the Community Home Achievement Award for its urban renewal program.<sup>273</sup>

The LCRA launched eighteen urban renewal projects in the sixteen year period between 1953 and 1969.<sup>274</sup> The Northside area was the first area targeted for slum clearance, with Attucks, South Humbolt, and Eastside urban renewal projects following each other consecutively in the 1950s. The purpose of the urban renewal project on the Northside between 1953 and 1960

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> There are myriad examples of this celebration: "To Redeem the Whole West Side," *Kansas City Times*, July 6, 1953; "Praise Kansas City Renewal Projects," *Kansas City Times*, May 2, 1959; "Dream City Without Slums," *Kansas City Star*, December 19, 1952; "For A City Without Slums," *Kansas City Star*, February 24, 1952; "Slum War Is On," *Kansas City Star*, July 3, 1955; "New Housing Leads Way to a City Without Slums," *Kansas City Star*, April 7, 1957; "Out of the Rubble A New Kansas City Arises," *Kansas City Star*, June 1, 1958; "City Faces Great Era," *Kansas City Star*, October 2, 1958; "Kansas City's Battle on Blight Is A Major Feat," *Kansas City Star*, January 3, 1960.

<sup>272</sup> "Denver Praise For Kansas City 1980," *Kansas City Times*, December 30, 1958; "Out of the Rubble," *Kansas City Star*, June 1, 1958.

<sup>273</sup> "City Honored For Face Lift," *Kansas City Times*, April 9, 1958; "Award for a Program that is Rebuilding A City," *Kansas City Times*, April 10, 1958.

<sup>274</sup> Gotham, 79-80.

was to build parking lots near downtown, and resulted in four-hundred and thirty-two white and eighty-eight black residents being displaced as well as the demolition of seventy-one businesses.<sup>275</sup> The entire purpose of the Attucks project of 1955-65 was to clear out African American neighborhoods adjacent to downtown. As a result, four hundred and seventy-eight African Americans lost their homes and eighty-five businesses were destroyed, many of them Black-owned.<sup>276</sup>

The hunger for interstate projects accelerated the demolition trend. Locally, there had been a hunger for expressway projects in both cities as far back as the 1930s. KCK had acted first, building the 7th Street Trafficway in 1933 as an upgrade of US 69.<sup>277</sup> While a Senator, Harry Truman had been an enthusiastic booster of the Kansas City highway system in the 1930s.<sup>278</sup> By 1947, the largest items in the KCMO bond program were funding for future airports and trafficways.<sup>279</sup> And, as early as 1953, before Eisenhower's first full year as president and well before he proposed the Interstate Highway System, the Urban League was already warning that the construction of the Paseo bridge and the "proposed system of expressways would necessitate the "relocation of 700 Negro families."<sup>280</sup>

After the urban renewal funding from the 1949 and 1954 Housing Acts and the 1956

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid., Table 4.1, 80.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid, Table 4.1 on p.80

<sup>277</sup> McDowell, 25.

<sup>278</sup> Haskell and Fowler, 146.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>280</sup> "Housing," Matter of Fact 6:2 (August 1953), p.1, KCULP, Box KCULP-1, File 2, Vol. 6-2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City. The Paseo Bridge was demolished and replaced a couple of years ago; was I-29/35 from the 1960s-2000s. The "expressways" ultimately included today's I-35/70 downtown loop.

Interstate Highway Act, the city enthusiastically started building the new superhighways, clearing out eighty-nine and a half acres of South Humbolt and Eastside between 1956 and 1965 in order to build the eastern downtown loop portion of I-70.<sup>281</sup> As a result, one hundred and sixteen blacks, seven hundred and eighty-five whites, and one hundred and sixty-one businesses were displaced. All of this was quite on purpose, as the new interstates and freeways were “a handy device for razing” what to city officials were a blighting “jumble of slums and aging buildings” that needed to be eliminated so that the city would be instead “a place to do business and find entertainment.”<sup>282</sup> City officials in KCMO and in other cities saw building urban interstates as part of urban renewal. There was no place for residential neighborhoods deemed eyesores in the bright future imagined by municipal officials of “Kansas City 1980.”<sup>283</sup> Also excluded from this consumerist future was the Hispanic Westside, literally cut in half by the construction of I-35 in KCMO between the downtown loop and the Kansas state line.<sup>284</sup> The start of construction on I-670 in the late 1960s further damaged the neighborhood.<sup>285</sup> Unlike other cities in the Midwest, the Mexican-American population in both Kansas Cities (as well as Topeka and Wichita) was as old as 1882, and like African Americans, had been very connected to the railroad and meatpacking jobs in the area.<sup>286</sup>

Together, the construction of the downtown loop, I-35, and I-70 between 1956 and 1965

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<sup>281</sup> “To Hear East Side Plan,” *Kansas City Times*, June 13, 1956; “East Side Renewal Project Gets OK,” *Kansas City Times*, June 14, 1956; “East Side Project to Aid City Growth,” *Kansas City Times*, February 28, 1958.

<sup>282</sup> “Razing” quote in Sugrue, *Urban Crisis*, 47; “Kansas City 1980,” *Kansas City Times*, December 30, 1958.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>284</sup> Daniel David Arreola, *Hispanic Spaces, Latino Places: Community and Cultural Diversity in Contemporary America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), p.216.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>286</sup> McDowell, 12.

removed more than five thousand four hundred houses, one thousand one hundred and eighty two of which were black.<sup>287</sup> Twenty-eight point six percent of all households displaced for freeway construction were African American even though they made up only seventeen and a half percent of the city's population in 1960. The construction of the US 71 freeway, or South Mid-Town Freeway, on the southern part of the city between 1966 and 1975 displaced an additional three thousand houses, over forty percent of which were black.<sup>288</sup>

Besides the Attucks and Northside urban renewal projects and the interstate highway construction, the LCRA authorized fourteen additional urban redevelopment projects in the 1960s.<sup>289</sup> They were in the following areas: the Woodland, Garfield, Hospital Hill, West Main, Trinity-St. Mary's, Manual, Town Fort Creek, Independence Plaza, Columbus Park, Attucks East, the Central Business District, East 23rd Street, Oak Park, and 12th and Vine.<sup>290</sup> These actions displaced thousands of individuals and businesses, and forty-eight percent of those persons displaced were African American.

The language in both the 1949 and 1954 Housing Acts stated that in order to qualify for urban renewal funding, cities had to provide sufficient housing for those displaced.<sup>291</sup> In KCMO, the city council turned to public housing to absorb those dislocated by the city's urban renewal and freeway construction initiatives. In 1953, the city had built one of its first public housing units for African Americans, the T.B. Watkins homes. As mentioned before, the city refused to build any of these housing units in white neighborhoods, and until 1964, the Housing

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<sup>287</sup> Gotham, 82-83, Table 4.2

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 80-81.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

Authority of Kansas City, Missouri (or HAKC) segregated its public housing residents by race as well.<sup>292</sup> By 1954, HAKC had three major public housing developments that were racially segregated: T.B. Watkins was for African Americans only, while Guinotte Manor and Riverview were whites-only. Other public housing projects being planned or built during the mid-1950s included Wayne Miner Court for Blacks and Choteau Court, West Bluff, and Pennway Plaza for whites. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, HAKC built all of these housing projects within six miles of each other, so that public housing was concentrated in the inner city.<sup>293</sup>

The Greater Kansas City Urban League and the *Call* both protested repeatedly against the segregationist policies of HAKC and insisted that they build these housing units on vacant land outside of the city. *The Call* was especially upset that a racially mixed neighborhood of Blacks, Italians, and other white ethnic groups had been demolished to build the all-white Guinotte public housing project.<sup>294</sup> The paper continued its criticism of the local housing authority, blasting it for its segregationist policies and for expecting the Watkins housing project to take care of all of the city's housing needs.<sup>295</sup>

The damage done to African American neighborhoods was severe: former CORE activist and present-day police commissioner Alvin Brooks remembered that “urban renewal became the synonym for ‘Black removal’” and that it “broke the back of stable Black neighborhoods.”<sup>296</sup> Other residents recalled how many thriving Black businesses and convenience stores were lost when the urban renewal projects and the construction of I-70 cut off

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<sup>292</sup> “Three Public Housing Sites on the Fringe of Downtown Area,” *Kansas City Star*, December 7, 1957.

<sup>293</sup> Gotham, 82.

<sup>294</sup> “Interracial Housing Project in Order,” *Kansas City Call*, February 13, 1953.

<sup>295</sup> “Segregation in Housing Must Go,” *Kansas City Call*, April 2, 1954.

<sup>296</sup> Brooks quoted in Gotham, 83.

the northern section of the Vine district after 1962.<sup>297</sup> In several cases, small businesses and neighborhood stores were destroyed or forced to move in favor of parking lots and corporate chain stores.<sup>298</sup> This two decade process transformed Kansas City's urban core and many of those displaced were minorities banned from purchasing suburban homes by real estate companies.<sup>299</sup> From 1953 through 1969, neither the LCRA nor the Missouri Department of Highways and Transportation provided financial assistance to help these residents find new housing. The LCRA for its part, like the HAKC, perpetuated housing segregation and discrimination by keeping separate lists of available homes "for Blacks" and "for Whites."<sup>300</sup>

Whatever benefits that I-70 between Kansas City and St. Louis offered black middle-class Kansas Citians who owned cars had was greatly undermined by the persistence of Jim Crow at motels, gas stations, and restaurants on the patchwork quilt of Highway 40 and newly completed segments of I-70 that was that route in the early sixties; the situation was much the same in the rest of the state on Highway 50 and Route 66/ newly completed I-44.<sup>301</sup> Gas stations along all three of these routes often wouldn't let black families use their rest rooms, a practice ongoing since the 1930s.<sup>302</sup> As the *Kansas City Times* (finally) acknowledged in 1963, "a Negro family can drive between Kansas City and St. Louis and spend a good part of the time looking

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 83-84; Missouri State Highway Commission, Missouri Official Highway Map 1963, "Kansas City Area(Inset)", found on MODOT website at [http://www.modot.org/historicmaps/documents/1963001\\_reduced.pdf](http://www.modot.org/historicmaps/documents/1963001_reduced.pdf)

<sup>298</sup> "18th St.—Requiem to A Grand Old Lady," *Kansas City Call*, May 5, May 11, 1972; "From Yesterday: the 18th and Vine Area," *Kansas City Call*, April 1, April 7, 1977; "Kansas City's Black Elders Give Accounts of Their Times Changing," June 11, June 17, 1982.

<sup>299</sup> Gotham, 85.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> *Kansas City Call*, "Negroes in Need of Missouri Congressman," December 17, 1954.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.



for a place to eat.”<sup>303</sup> Worse, “a Negro family can be caught in a blizzard and be turned away from one motel or hotel after another.”<sup>304</sup> Appealing to liberal and moderate whites, the paper noted “this is a hazard of travel that other Americans never consider.”<sup>305</sup> While it was a sign of changing times that the Negro Motorists’ *Green Book* steadily lost readers in the 1950s and ceased publishing in 1964, it would ultimately take action by both the state of Missouri and the federal government to bring an end to the discriminatory practices against the black middle-class that had made the green book necessary in the first place.<sup>306</sup>

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The struggle against Jim Crow in hotels, lunch counters, stores, bars, restaurants, and amusement parks by the city’s civil rights movement between 1955 and 1963 would therefore play out against this backdrop of bulldozers and wrecking balls destroying long-established African American neighborhoods. Despite a few victories in the early 1950s against segregated public facilities, it was in the aftermath of the victory over segregation at the Swope pool and especially after 1958, that there would be the greatest push against racial discrimination.

The Call’s November 19, 1954 headline, “Rip Downtown Race Bias,” signaled how fed up the city’s black middle-class and civil rights activists were with private sector discrimination and the slow pace of change after World War II.<sup>307</sup> Prompted by a letter written by an African American woman named Julia Adams who had visited from Los Angeles, the Call’s readership responded by stating their agreement with her feelings that the refusal of service to African

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<sup>303</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “Discrimination Is An Issue in Missouri,” February 9, 1963.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>306</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 160.

<sup>307</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “Rip Downtown Race Bias,” November 19, 1954, VF: Civil Rights-KC-Public Accommodations, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

Americans by downtown businesses was “a terrible situation and is having a damaging effect on the future morale of our young people.”<sup>308</sup> One of those who responded was a civil rights activist herself and a member of the Women’s Civil Rights Club named Floyd Fine. She stated that her organization had been at work for several years to remedy the situation. The Women’s Civil Rights Club had drawn up a proposed ordinance which it submitted to the city council that made it illegal for any public accommodations to discriminate against citizens because of “race, color, or creed.”<sup>309</sup> When a large delegation went to a council meeting, Mrs. Fine recalled that they presented it but that Mayor William E. Kemp said that the matter should be presented to all the members of the council rather than a special council committee. Mayor Kemp further said that a later date would be set for such a meeting, but months passed, and only one councilman responded to the letter. Another letter writer to the *Call* identified as Mrs. Strickland agreed with Julia Adams’ criticism of the city and added that it was “so embarrassing to one when with out of town guests, we have to say to them that we cannot eat at but two places, the dime store and Carver’s Grill.”<sup>310</sup> Strickland angrily noted that some of the same large department stores that refused to serve blacks at their cafeterias greatly profited from African American customers’ purchase of their products; she implicitly suggested a boycott of these stores until they changed their lunch counter policies. Finally, a male letter writer identified as Mr. Thompson criticized activists for being too content with the Swope pool victory to the point that “a first-run movie and a hot dinner at some restaurant or hotel seems forgotten” and reminding readers that even “some of your larger and smaller cities in the South aren’t as bad as good old K.C.” when it came

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

to racial discrimination.<sup>311</sup>

Other complaints voiced by the *Call* and its readers was the frustrating feeling that St. Louis' African American community, at the other end of the state, was making more progress towards civil rights than Kansas City's was.<sup>312</sup> As examples, the *Call* listed St. Louis' public utilities being opened to that city's black population. In 1952, St. Louis' public transit company had begun to hire African American bus drivers, and in 1954, Southwestern Bell began to integrate its black employees into the main office and other branches throughout St. Louis. The *Call* rhetorically asked, "What does St. Louis have that Kansas City doesn't have?"<sup>313</sup> It concluded that "the St. Louis Negro community pushes a little harder for what it wants than do the citizens of Kansas City" and noted that Southwestern Bell had set up first segregated offices and then integrated black telephone workers into the main offices because "they [civil rights activists] continued to agitate for integration of employees" after having made "constant demands for employment."<sup>314</sup> The column concluded by bemoaning the fact that "there is not a single bus or trolley car driver in Kansas City" even though Tulsa, Oklahoma employed African American drivers.<sup>315</sup> In the aftermath of the Supreme Court's Brown decision ending school segregation in nearby Topeka and reversing Plessy, this mood only grew.

By the end of 1955, the city's downtown hotels and theaters had largely abandoned segregation, but segregation at diners and restaurants continued. One of the first local drugstore

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> *Kansas City Call*, "Needed: Constant Pluggers," December 24, 1954.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

giants to abandon segregation was Katz, in 1956.<sup>316</sup> This decision in August ended a month of protests prompted by the refusal in July of service at the restaurant section of Katz to the Reverend Arthur Marshall, Jr. of the Metropolitan AME Zion Church.

Marshall had followed up the incident with a letter to the management informing them if their discriminatory practices weren't changed, he would subject them to a boycott of all Katz stores.<sup>317</sup> Marshall's letter prompted a quick response from the manager, Ross B. Meyers, who informed him that the store would be willing to open service to all if other merchants in the area would follow suit. Meyers, according to Marshall, was afraid of being "the first" to integrate his lunch counters among the other drug stores. After conducting a survey of other drug stores in the city, Marshall was served at the Parkview Rexall Drug store counter; this Rexall also employed black women as waitresses. After getting feedback from Mowrey and Crown drug stores and the Knowles restaurant similar to what Meyers had told him, he brought all of these findings to Meyers. As a result, Katz drug stores began serving all customers at their lunch counters. Crown Drug stores also began hiring African-American girls as waitresses, thanks to Marshall's efforts.<sup>318</sup>

The Mayor's own Human Relations Commission censured segregated restaurants for "disrupting peace and harmony between groups of our community" and concluded that they "invited criticism of Kansas City from foreign dignitaries and conventioners."<sup>319</sup> The city indeed lost conventions from large national and international organizations due to discrimination

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<sup>316</sup> *Kansas City Call*, "Open Policy For Katz at 31st and Prospect," August 24, 1956, VF: Civil Rights-KC, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Schirmer, 218.

in downtown restaurants. Building on the attempts made earlier in 1954 by the Women’s Civil Rights activists, KCMO’s NAACP drew up a public accommodations ordinance in August 1956, which even some KCMO restaurants were in favor of because it would give them cover from the “first to integrate” fear Meyers had and they all shared.<sup>320</sup> However, the city council, as with the 1954 petition, refused to pass the ordinance. As a result, the Greater Kansas City Restaurant Association set up a committee of its own to work with the Human Relations Commission’s public accommodations committee, and by 1958, several KCMO downtown restaurants began serving African American customers.

With drug stores and restaurants now beginning to serve African Americans, the last major hold outs were the department stores.<sup>321</sup> The Human Relations Commission and the Call both requested a meeting with William G. Austin, head of the Merchants’ Association in March 1957. Austin stalled, and unfortunately, Dowdal Davis—the president of the Call—died, which allowed Austin to avoid a meeting entirely. Still, pressure was steadily building in 1957, as the National Conference of Christians and Jews spoke to the Human Relations Council in favor of ending racial discrimination in public restaurants.<sup>322</sup>

1958 would prove to be a momentous year for the civil rights movement in both KCMO and KCK, as activists in both cities mobilized against Jim Crow in what turned into a five year campaign between 1958 and 1963. In KCMO, these mass protests would launch what would turn out to be a six year long battle for equal treatment under the law at both the city and state levels through boycotts, sit-ins, and other actions. Seasoned COPOD, NAACP, and Women’s Civil

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “His Group Passed Resolution,” March 5, 1957, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

Rights Club activists were joined by younger CORE activists such as Alvin Brooks who had served as a police officer in 1954 and had himself experienced Jim Crow discrimination at a drugstore as a child in the 1940s.<sup>323</sup> Inspired by the 1955-56 Montgomery Bus Boycott and enraged at the inaction of William G. Austin's Merchants Association, a black woman's social club known as the Twin Citizens had several of its members join with activists to form the Community Committee For Social Action (CCSA) to carry out mass demonstrations targeting five department stores. These stores were: Macy's, the Jones Store, Kline's, Peck's, and Emery, Bird, Thayer.<sup>324</sup>

The CCSA launched its campaign by mailing five hundred protest letters to all five of the stores' respective managers in October 1958.<sup>325</sup> The letter-writing campaign was requested after the organization was unsuccessful in its efforts to meet with representatives of the stores. If stores refused to change their policies, the group hinted that boycotts were possible. They requested a reply by November 29. Additionally, the group issued stickers for black customers to add to their bill payments that protested discrimination.<sup>326</sup> By December 15, two of the stores' managers requested conferences with representatives of the CCSA.<sup>327</sup>

However, two days later, a special meeting of the Merchants' Association called by Austin resulted in all five store owners turning down CCSA's requests.<sup>328</sup> This refusal was the

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<sup>323</sup> Schirmer, 179-80; "Appointed Thorn," *Kansas City Star*, August 19, 1984, p.10, Vertical File: Alvin Brooks, MO Valley Special Collections, Kansas City, Missouri, Public Library.

<sup>324</sup> Schirmer, 219.

<sup>325</sup> *Kansas City Call*, "500 Letters Protest Downtown Store Bias," October 28, 1958, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>326</sup> Schirmer, 219.

<sup>327</sup> *Call*, "Department Store Execs Meet CCSC Delegates," December 15, 1958, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>328</sup> *Kansas City Call*, "Still Will Not Open Restaurants," December 19, 1958, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley

result of five weeks of negotiation between the five stores and CCSA. The president of CCSA, Mrs. Kenneth Kerford, undeterred, called for a boycott of all five stores since the two had been most amenable would only agree to serve blacks if the other three stores did.<sup>329</sup> She added that other direct action, including picketing, would also ensue until the stores changed their policies. CCSA also added a men's auxiliary unit of activists. In doing so, she ignored the pleading of the Human Relations Commission's chairman, William Gremley, who wanted more time for negotiations. The Reverend Marshall shot back, "This group has attempted to organize in a fair way, and it is now necessary to take overt action."<sup>330</sup> When Mayor H. Roe Bartle offered to mediate a settlement, relayed to CCSA through the Human Relations Commission, CCSA went ahead with the boycott but held back the pickets until Mayor Bartle had an opportunity to try to talk the store managers into negotiations. Unfortunately for the mayor, the parties in question gave him the run around: the managers said that the Merchants' Organization had to decide, while Austin claimed all the power to decide was with the store managers themselves.

On December 19, 1958, CCSA launched mass demonstrations, including pickets, against the five stores despite the freezing weather.<sup>331</sup> The demonstrators carried signs protesting discrimination at the stores' restaurants. Reverends Arthur Marshall and L. Sylvester Odum were among the first picketers on the 19th. At first, store managers dismissed the group's ability to hurt their business, believing that they would give up. One store manager sneered that it was

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Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> *KC Star*, "Protest By Group: Negro Pickets Appear Before Downtown Stores," December 20, 1958, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL; Call, "Picket KC Stores," December 26, 1958.

“typical of you people to raise sand for a while and then it will die out.”<sup>332</sup> Austin, for his part, officially said that because of “the holiday rush,” he had not been able to give the situation the attention it warranted.<sup>333</sup> He then told the *Star* that he intended to meet with CCSA after the Christmas shopping season ended.<sup>334</sup> When sales dropped, managers tried the old deflective tactics to get the pickets to stop, by claiming that they wanted to open their restaurants but that it was the Merchants’ Association who was maintaining the discrimination. This tactic failed to placate the demonstrators, as the boycotts and protests stretched on through the rest of December 1958 into January 1959, and business continued to drop as most African Americans and a significant number of whites stayed away from the stores. The demonstration grew, attracting blue-collar and white-collar black demonstrators and in addition to Marshall and Odum, attracted six other clergymen, including Bethany Baptist Church Reverend F.D. Gregory.<sup>335</sup>

When it became clear the demonstrations were affecting post-Christmas sales, William Gremley of the Human Relations Commission intervened to try to restart negotiations among the stores, the CCSA, and Austin’s Merchants Association.<sup>336</sup> On February 9, 1959, CCSA stopped picketing as part of a precondition for talks with the five stores and with the Merchants’ Association, but made plans to march downtown if the talks failed again.

On February 25, 1959, in a letter to CCSA, the Chamber of Commerce president Carl Rechner announced an offer to negotiate a settlement if CCSA would suspend its protests for

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> *KC Star*, “Protest By Group,” December 20, 1958, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.; *Call*, “Picket KC Stores,” December 26, 1958.

<sup>336</sup> Schirmer, 220.



sixty days.<sup>337</sup> Rechner infuriated the Reverend Odom by leaking the letter to the press before Odom could receive it and by asserting that “your more mature and well-known leaders” thought a solution was impossible with protest ongoing.<sup>338</sup> Deeply resenting being publicly undercut in such a fashion, Odom tersely responded that CCSA was itself in the midst of negotiations through “calm deliberation” and it was in fact the very same “mature and well known leaders” who were insisting on marching if CCSA received no concessions from the stores.<sup>339</sup>

Finally, on February 27, 1959, after meetings Austin, the store managers, and CCSA, it was announced that Macy’s and Peck’s would open their dining areas immediately to all customers.<sup>340</sup> Macy’s, Peck’s, and Kline’s further agreed to open their dining facilities after “an education and orientation program,” which prompted the CCSA to organize workshops on proper dress, etiquette, and table manners for African American customers to comply with this condition.<sup>341</sup> This condition had been prompted by employer anxieties that their white customers would be driven away by their stores being “overrun by Negroes.” CCSA also established a scheduling system to guarantee a significant number of black diners were present each day to monitor the stores’ faithfulness to their end of the bargain. Satisfied with the results, the last two stores, the Jones Store and EBT (Emery, Bird, and Thayer) integrated their dining areas two months later.

By 1960, activists had succeeded in finally passing the antidiscrimination ordinance that had been proposed by the Women’s Civil Rights Club six years before and by the NAACP four

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

years earlier.<sup>342</sup> The city council voted six to two in favor of the ordinance, which outlawed refusal of service by hotels and restaurants on the basis of race or color.<sup>343</sup> However, on January 25th, Jackson County Circuit Court Judge John H. Lucas issued a temporary restraining order prohibiting the city from enforcing the new ordinance.<sup>344</sup> Even the councilmen who passed the ordinance expected the action, however, since they knew the restaurant and hotel interests would fight the law in court.<sup>345</sup> The injunction had been sought in a petition by fifteen restaurant owners, who argued the law was unconstitutional under both the city charter and Missouri law.<sup>346</sup> They claimed that it interfered with “their right to contract as they choose and deprives them of their property without due process of law.”<sup>347</sup> They also complained that the law only targeted hotels, motels, and restaurants and made no mention of “any other merchant, business, or occupation in Kansas City.”<sup>348</sup> Led by a group of tavern owners with strong backing from the John Birch Society, these small businesses tied up the ordinance in the courts for four years.<sup>349</sup>

Undaunted, CORE, the NAACP, and CCSA launched mass demonstrations and sit-ins against Fairyland Park in May 1961 in what would become a three year battle to break the park’s

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<sup>342</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “Lift A Racial Bar in Hotels,” January 16, 1960, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.; Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 153.

<sup>343</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “Lift A Racial Bar In Hotels,” January 16, 1960, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>344</sup> *Kansas City Star*, “Orders Injunction On Race Bias Law,” January 25, 1960, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>345</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “Lifts A Racial Bar In Hotels,” January 16, 1960, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>346</sup> *Kansas City Star*, “Orders Injunction,” January 25, 1960, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 153; *Kansas City Times*, “Tavern Men Wage Their Own Battle,” March 2, 1964, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL; *Kansas City Star*, “Foes of Rights Law Are in Birch Society,” February 26, 1964, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

Jim Crow “whites only” policy.<sup>350</sup> More than thirty demonstrators were arrested at the park by police but would be released when the city failed to press charges. Marion Brancato, Fairyland park owner, sought and obtained an injunction in 1961 against future demonstrations. However, the next year, in June 1962, a similar demonstration lasted for three hours despite the injunction.<sup>351</sup> Thirty members of the NAACP Youth Council, both high school and college students, staged a stand-in at the park entrance after they were denied entrance.<sup>352</sup> They included young people from both KCMO and KCK, and the struggle for racial justice at the park would energize the fight against Jim Crow on both sides of the state line. Indeed, 1962 would prove to be a momentous year as discrimination was confronted on a number of fronts.

While still fighting for the antidiscrimination ordinance in the courts and to integrate Fairyland Amusement Park, activists in both KCK and KCMO took on some additional targets: the KCK school system and KCMO employment discrimination. In February 1962, activists in both Kansas Cities launched major civil rights campaigns.<sup>353</sup> The CSSA in KCMO moved first, passing a resolution to accomplish four major goals at a meeting at the Paseo YWCA: 1) launch a boycott of the Emery, Bird, and Thayer department store over its hiring discrimination; 2) set a thirty-day deadline for the Southeast State bank to show “visible evidence” of integrated employment policy; 3) speed up efforts to win a breakthrough in the baking industry; and 4) adopt a wait and see attitude towards the Avon cosmetics company which denied it had

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<sup>350</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “Police Arrest CORE Pickets,” August 22, 1963, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL. Mentions the 1961 protests.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>352</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “Stand-In at Fairyland,” June 1, 1962.

<sup>353</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “Kansas City In War on Racial Bias,” February 2, 1962; *Call*, “Witnesses End Testimony In Suit Against KCK School Board,” February 9, 1962.

deliberately discriminated in its hiring.<sup>354</sup>

The second goal was accompanied by a vow to “withdraw all accounts from Southeast State Bank” if they did not comply with an integrated employment policy after thirty days.<sup>355</sup> The CSSA made it clear that the Bank could not get away with hiring blacks as janitors, as the thirty-day deadline was explicit in its demand that the bank hire African-American tellers, clerks, secretaries, and machine operators. At the meeting, the crowd listened with exuberance over details of conferences between CCSA and the baking industry, especially the news that two bakeries were close to agreeing to hire truck drivers “very soon.” This joy turned to anger when the crowd learned of Emery, Bird, and Thayer’s failure to make good on a nondiscriminatory promise. Instead of a truly integrated workforce, the store only had “a mere handful of Negroes in clerical or semi-clerical jobs.”<sup>356</sup> Southeast State Bank, on proverbial thin ice as it was, didn’t help its case with the activists with the comments its president made to the Reverend Cecil Williams. Bank President James R. Perdew gave a litany of excuses, such as “we might lose our customers” and “now is not the time.”<sup>357</sup> Worse, Perdew then claimed “Negroes come in, they don’t know how to sign checks, they take up a lot of time,” which Reverend Williams correctly interpreted as an insult implying “that we were simply nuisances.”<sup>358</sup> As if insinuating that blacks were a race of incompetents wasn’t offensive enough, Perdew then gave the excuse that the bank was “located in an area which has a high Negro crime rate” and then mentioned the bank “having difficulties with some of the Negro churches” which Perdew implied were

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<sup>354</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “Kansas City In War On Racial Bias,” February 2, 1962.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*

overdrawn and then named three of them.<sup>359</sup> Disgusted, Williams lambasted Perdue for mentioning other accounts, considering it highly unethical behavior.

A week later, parents of fifteen black children in KCK in the Hawthorne School District of KCK filed a lawsuit in a United States District Court charging that the Board of Education refused them permission to go to the nearest school to their homes, Northwest Junior High, and forced to attend the still existing separate schools farther away, in violation of the 1954 *Brown* decision.<sup>360</sup> The suit had evidently been making its way through the courts for some time, as it originated on September 15, 1960.<sup>361</sup> US District Court Judge Arthur J. Stanley, Jr. heard the case and the testimony of both the plaintiffs and the superintendent of public schools.

Superintendent F.L. Schlagle testified that he was directly responsible for carrying out desegregation policy for KCK schools.<sup>362</sup> When asked if KCK schools were in full compliance with the *Brown* decision, Schlagle answered that he believed that he and the Board were. He then told the court that “Negro teachers” were in “the predominantly Negro schools; there are no colored teachers in the other schools.”<sup>363</sup> When asked what was preventing him from placing African American teachers in schools with white teachers, he replied “Nothing whatsoever.”<sup>364</sup> Schlagle and the Board’s attorney claimed in his opening statement that segregation in KCK schools ended in 1959. When asked how they could maintain that was true given their own admission that no African American teachers taught at schools that weren’t predominantly black,

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “Witnesses End Testimony In Suit Against KCK School Board,” February 9, 1962; Call, “Desegregation in the North,” May 11, 1962.

<sup>361</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “Witnesses,” February 9, 1962.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

Schlagle offered up Quindaro Elementary as an example of a former “white school” that now had “two-thirds Negro enrollment.”<sup>365</sup> Schlagle and the board contended that black children were denied admission to Northwest Junior High and Wyandotte High School was because the school district boundaries had changed rather than any racial bias. When confronted with the fact that the school the Board demanded the fifteen plaintiffs’ children attend used to be an integrated school with white teachers before September 1960, Schlagle claimed that it was done merely to find work for teachers who had been displaced by urban renewal in the Northeast section of the city, causing a shortage of pupils.

This wasn’t the only case of allegations of manipulation of school district lines and Board shenanigans to maintain separation of KCK’s schoolchildren by race in defiance of Brown in the early sixties, either. At the end of 1962, Mr. and Mrs. Shanks of Kansas City, Kansas, chose to risk prison for their children’s truancy rather than accept their children’s attendance at segregated schools in the city.<sup>366</sup> When seven high school-aged neighbors of the family were denied admission to Wyandotte High School in September 1962, the Shanks pulled their children out of the school system and began teaching their own children and the seven high school students refused admittance to Wyandotte at their home. Parents of the high school students sued the Board of Education in fall 1962.<sup>367</sup>

George Mansfield, a truant officer for the KCK Board of Education, came to the Shanks’ home in November to present a complaint that charging that Mrs. Shanks refused to send her

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “Parents Stand Pat Against Segregation,” December 14, 1962.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

children to school only because she didn't want them "to go to half-day sessions."<sup>368</sup> Mrs. Shanks retorted that regardless of what the school officials had told him, this was a lie, as her objection was to sending her children to a segregated school. Mansfield then served her and her husband with warrants for their arrests on November 21, 1962; through their attorney, their hearing was set for December 14th. Shanks noted that no other parents had been served with warrants, even though their children were still being taught at the Shanks home. According to Shanks, Mansfield told her that they would have to send their children to Hawthorne "or some other Negro schools" or they would go to jail.<sup>369</sup> All of this occurred while both of the lawsuits against KCK's Board were still ongoing. As a result of these incidents, NAACP field secretary Leonard H. Carter, who helped litigate the case of fifteen parents in the Northwest District, remarked that "the Negro youngsters in Kansas City, Kansas are receiving an inferior brand of education as a result of bias in the school board—and this is not Deep Dixie."<sup>370</sup> In September 1962, during further court litigation, Willard L. Phillips of the School Board let it slip that it was his opinion that "it is not in the best interest for a Negro child to go to a school heavily populated by whites and vice versa," claiming that this was the consensus of "some of the best educators."<sup>371</sup> In blurting this out, he undercut the Board's own defense in claiming that the boundary line was changed due to overcrowding and urban renewal, not race.

With school segregation in KCK under litigation, activists there struck on another front. In May 1962, KCK's NAACP began picketing four stores on Minnesota Avenue which refused

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

<sup>370</sup> *Kansas City Call*, "'Got A Long Way to Go' Says Carter," February 9, 1962.

<sup>371</sup> *Kansas City Call*, "U.S. Federal Court Hears Arguments in KCK School Board Case," September 28, 1962.

to negotiate with the committee on Labor and Industry.<sup>372</sup> The stores picketed included Shepherd's, Joe Vaughn, Dixie Shop, and Wait's Shoe. Pickets were recalled from Wait's when management declared the intent to negotiate. Additionally, the KCK NAACP held conferences with Zale's, Goldman's, Helzberg's, Robinson's, Kresge's, and Katz. All of those stores denied having discriminatory hiring policies; the Committee informed them that such a position was meaningless unless African American were being hired to positions other than menial work. J.C. Penney, Montgomery Ward's, and The Leader were praised by KCK activists for their hiring of African Americans, and they noted that a part-time clerk position that become full time had been added by Adler's. All stores were put on notice that there would be follow-ups to measure progress in employment fairness and if none were found, picketing and boycotting would resume. By May 26, only two stores, Joe Vaughn Clothing Company and Shepherd's, still refused to negotiate with the Labor Industry committee of the NAACP; picketing against them continued into the fourth week of the protests.<sup>373</sup> At the same time, the organization had been holding talks with the Dixie Shop, Grant's, and Woolworth's. The Dixie Shop supervisor from New York reported that one of three salesclerks was black. The conferences with Grant's and Woolworth's were unsatisfactory, so boycotting of Grant's and Woolworth's continued, pending future conferences. When Grant's management mentioned that they had hired a black stock clerk since the boycott began, the committee informed them that this action was by no means sufficient given that they continued to turn away qualified black applicants for salesclerk positions. To reinforce that point, the group announced that they would hold further conferences with The Leader, Kresge's, and others which had offered only token compliance after the first

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<sup>372</sup> *Kansas City Call*, "NAACP Pickets Stores: Seek Jobs In Kansas Business," May 18, 1962.

<sup>373</sup> *Kansas City Call*, "Picketing In KCK Into Fourth Week," June 1, 1962.



conferences.<sup>374</sup>

Following KCMO's lead from eleven years earlier, KCK set up its own Human Relations Commission on November 14, 1962.<sup>375</sup> Ordained by the KCK city government, Section 1 read in part: "There is hereby created an advisory commission on human relations which shall be composed of fifteen members who shall serve without compensation and who shall be broadly representative of the religious, racial, and ethnic groups in the community to be appointed by the City Commissioners, one of whom shall be designated as chairman."<sup>376</sup> The remaining sections spelled out its purpose and what powers the agency had.

KCK activists, along with African Americans in other parts of the state of Kansas, also spoke up in expressing disappointment with Republican Governor John Anderson, Jr.'s failure to keep several promises he made on the issue of civil rights.<sup>377</sup> Dr. Charles R. Roquemore, president of the Kansas State Conference of NAACP Branches, wrote the governor that "the NAACP is no longer confident" that civil rights matters discussed "have ever been processed beyond your promises to 'do something.'"<sup>378</sup> The blistering letter read off a list private businesses and state agencies that either only hired whites or hired blacks for the lowest paying jobs. Roquemore continued, telling Anderson that "right under your nose lies racial discrimination in its most flagrant forms. We asked you to issue an Executive Order that state agencies comply with the 1961 Kansas Act against Discrimination and cooperate with the

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> *Kansas City Call*, "Commission On Human Relations Created In KCK," December 21, 1962.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> *Kansas City Call*, "Says Kansas Governor Made Several Promises Which He Has Not Kept," March 23, 1962.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

Kansas Bill of Rights.”<sup>379</sup> Exasperated, Roquemore recalled the Governor merely stating “you would ‘look into it.’” The governor had also pledged to appoint two African-Americans when confronted by civil rights activists about appointing only whites since he became Governor; six months passed, and no such appointments had been made. The letter continued, with mounting outrage, noting that “we asked you to call a conference on housing so that you could determine for yourself the great need for a housing law in this state. You promised to ‘look into it.’”<sup>380</sup> Worst of all, Governor Anderson had cut the budget for the Kansas Civil Rights Commission after promising his “support.”

If KCK was experiencing a wave of activism that it hadn’t seen since the wartime marches against Jim Crow in the Fairfax defense plant back in 1941, KCMO’s African-American community won one of the first major court victories in favor of the 1960 anti-discrimination ordinance. In April 1962, the Missouri Supreme Court in a 4-3 decision upheld the anti-discrimination KCMO ordinance as constitutional.<sup>381</sup> The majority opinion held that the ordinance was a valid use of the city’s power to protect public health and welfare. This, the opinion said, was obvious given that “food and shelter or food and lodging are among man’s basic needs.”<sup>382</sup> *The Call* was ecstatic, comparing the ruling to the Brown decision in importance for the basic human rights of black citizens of KCMO.<sup>383</sup> It reiterated how long in the making the ordinance had been, going back to 1956 in its latest form. The editorial continued, calling the Missouri Supreme Court decision a “moral” as well as “primarily a legal”

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “Restaurant Ordinance Ruled Legal: Supreme Court Says It’s Okay,” April 13, 1962.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “A Victory of Real Significance: An Editorial,” April 13, 1962.

victory.<sup>384</sup> Although it noted that most downtown and Plaza restaurants had been open to customers of all races for two years and the major hotels had been for quite a bit longer, the law would have the greatest effect on isolated cases where some restaurant owners had stuck to the old practices, and on the motels, which had been slower than the hotels in changing their policies towards black customers.

A further sign of the changing times was the fact that Democratic Governor of Missouri John M. Dalton called a statewide Missouri Conference on Human Rights to be held in Jefferson City on May 4-5, 1962.<sup>385</sup> Unlike the adversarial relationship KCK activists had with Governor Anderson, Governor Dalton of Missouri for the most part tried to placate civil rights activists, pushing for passage of the 1961 Fair Employment Practices Law. However, when he condemned “radicals” for the tension around desegregation in Southeastern Missouri in the Charleston schools, civil rights activists in both KCMO and St. Louis strongly criticized him. State politics on both sides of the state line could and did affect national policy, as was seen negatively when JFK’s attempt to create a new Department of Urban Affairs headed by Robert Weaver was defeated by the House, including all six Kansas congressmen and seven of Missouri’s eleven congressmen.<sup>386</sup> All but one of the Kansas congressmen were Republican, while of Missouri’s congressmen opposed, all but two were Democrats. All four of the Missouri congressmen in favor of Kennedy’s new post were Democrats. Kennedy himself was not above criticism in the new mood sweeping both African American communities in KCK and KCMO in 1962 that could be best summed up with the SNCC slogan of the era, “Freedom Now.” In this vein, *The Call* said

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “Proposal Killed By House Vote,” March 2, 1962.

that given how tough the President was with the steel industry, it was lamentable that he didn't show such toughness on housing integration.<sup>387</sup>

Meanwhile, in the off year election of 1962, six African Americans were elected to Missouri's state legislature.<sup>388</sup> Until that time, there had never been that many black elected officials in the state assembly. Although five of the state congressmen were from St. Louis and the lone Kansas City state representative was re-elected, the election gave a boost to African American political influence in the state. To stress this development is actually to bury the proverbial lead story, as what was truly earth-shaking about this election for Kansas City was the May 1962 formation of Freedom Inc. by seven black grassroots activists, the first black political organization independent of the white power structure in either party.<sup>389</sup> Activists in KCMO including Bruce Watkins, Leon M. Jordan, Earl D. Thomas, police officer Alvin Brooks, and three others took the critical step of forming Freedom Inc. in 1962, a political group with the goal of electing African Americans to city government.<sup>390</sup> Jordan had decided by 1960 that such a step was in order and the organization was his idea.<sup>391</sup> According to future Panther and local activist Arthur Bronson, Freedom Inc. was the first black political movement in the city that working-class blacks felt represented them adequately.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> *Kansas City Call*, "Says JFK Could Be As Forceful On Housing As He Was On Steel," April 13, 1962.

<sup>388</sup> *Kansas City Call*, "Six Negroes Elected to Missouri Legislature," November 16, 1962.

<sup>389</sup> "Who was Leon Jordan?" *Kansas City Call*, December 12, 1974, Vertical File: African-Americans, Prominent #3, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL; "Civil Rights Activist Anne Thomas Dies," *Kansas City Star*, September 22, 2002, Vertical File: African-Americans, Prominent #4, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>390</sup> "Who was Leon Jordan?" *Kansas City Call*, December 12, 1974, Vertical File: African-Americans, Prominent #3, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL; "Civil Rights Activist Anne Thomas Dies," *Kansas City Star*, September 22, 2002, Vertical File: African-Americans, Prominent #4, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>391</sup> "Who Was Leon Jordan?" *Kansas City Call*, December 12, 1974, VF: African-Americans #3, MO Valley Spec. Collections, KCPL.

<sup>392</sup> "An Interview With Arthur Bronson," oral interview conducted by Horace M. Peterson III, October 7, 1976, Black Archives of Mid-America, SC69-2, Tape 8, CD 8, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

Tired of decades of a paternalistic all-white city council either throwing roadblocks to change or giving piecemeal concessions to black citizens' basic rights, activists decided to form a political organization of their own to counter the old remnants of the machine and reformer politicians in both parties. With white flight decreasing the city's white population in every year since the 1930s, the feeling of being ruled over by a city government that represented suburbs miles away from the city increased and was deeply resented. In addition to trying to fight discrimination in private business with an all-white city council whose support for civil rights was dubious to nonexistent, activists were faced with a situation where the most responsive part of the city government, the Human Relations Commission, was constantly underfunded.<sup>393</sup> Four years before SNCC's Stokely Carmichael was to nationally coin the phrase "Black Power," Freedom Inc. managed to achieve a degree of black political power by breaking the grip of all-white nonpartisan "reformers" over city council by electing African-American politicians Bruce R. Watkins and Earl Thomas to the council in March 1963.<sup>394</sup>

CORE organized yet another protest in August 1963 at Fairyland Amusement Park, when sixteen CORE activists entered the park at ten o'clock at night and lay flat on their backs until police arrived to remove them.<sup>395</sup> CORE activists' leaders paid the ten cent a person admission fee to the park, were denied tickets, and walked through the gates anyway, leaving their money with the cashiers. Singing freedom songs, CORE activists purchased tickets for the rides while singing, and some even rode on the rides before park officials and police intervened. The police, led by Police Chief C.M. Kelley, approached the demonstrators and told them they would have to

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<sup>393</sup> *The Call*, "Human Relations Commission Must Have A Bigger Budget," February 16, 1962.

<sup>394</sup> "Civil Rights Activist Anne Thomas Dies," *Kansas City Star*, September 22, 2002, Vertical File: African-Americans, Prominent #4, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>395</sup> *Kansas City Times*, "Police Arrest CORE Pickets," August 22, 1963, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

leave the park or face arrest. This was when they chose to lay on their backs, and police had to lift them out of the park and into patrol wagons; this was repeated at the police station, where the demonstrators had to be physically moved out of the patrol wagon. Kelley snapped, “for the record, this demonstration tied up twelve patrolmen who could have been preventing crime while on patrol . . . I do not see what C.O.R.E. can accomplish through this.”<sup>396</sup> Given this kind of insensitivity, it was highly unfortunate for KCMO that Chief Kelley would still be police chief when the 1968 riots occurred.

Park manager Harold Duncan defended the park’s policies by saying it was “private property” and that while Fairyland “had reached an agreement with various minority groups that we would admit Negroes if they came in groups and made arrangements in advance,” the park “will not admit them individually.”<sup>397</sup> Like the homeowners’ association and the small business-tavern owners, the park leadership adopted a private property-based defense of race segregation. CORE leader Constance Timberlake said the demonstration was to impress upon both the KCMO city council and Missouri Governor John M. Dalton the critical importance of passing both city and state public accommodations laws protecting African-Americans’ civil rights. Nine days later, the Park sued Timberlake, claiming damages for having to shut the park and refund tickets and touching off a legal battle that wouldn’t be settled until 1964.<sup>398</sup>

With the Missouri Supreme Court’s upholding of KCMO’s antidiscrimination ordinance in 1962, opponents of integration in downtown businesses had one last maneuver they pulled to try to stop the ordinance. The Tavern Owners’ Association successfully circulated petitions to put

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<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “Fairyland Park Sues,” August 31, 1963, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

the ordinance to a vote and deliberately broadened it to include taverns.<sup>399</sup> They gravely miscalculated, as the 1962-63 elections of Watkins and Thomas to the council if anything tilted the council in an even more pro-civil rights direction. In September 1963, the council upheld the expanded ordinance by a vote of eleven to two.<sup>400</sup> The ordinance defined public accommodation as: “taverns, common carriers, stations, terminals, all places dealing with goods, wares and merchandise, and public way and auditoriums, except where restrictive leases have been created for any other reason other than to discriminate. Also defined as public are places of amusement, relaxation, exercise and relaxation, public libraries, museums, hospitals, dispensaries, clinics, and trade and professional schools open to the public and operating at a profit.”<sup>401</sup> However, in order to pass the measure, one of the compromises had included the exemption of barber and beauty shops, apartments and rooms leased on a time-limited basis, and private homes that rented to boarders. The omission touched off a mass sit-in and hunger strike by CORE that lasted for several days, in Mayor Illus W. Davis’ office.<sup>402</sup> As a result, the committee of the city council revised the ordinance to drop the exception to personal services and to revoke licenses of businesses after a third violation. An earnings tax election in December delayed further action on the referendum into 1964.<sup>403</sup>

In contrast, KCK passed a broad public accommodations ordinance late in December

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<sup>399</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “An Anti-Bias Success in Kansas City, Kansas,” January 25, 1963, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>400</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “Rights Bill Is Passed,” September 11, 1963, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Conference, KCPL.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*; *Times*, “Mayor’s Office A Sit-In Scene,” September 12, 1963, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL; *Times*, “Sit-In Group Talks With Mayor Davis,” September 12, 1963, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL; *Times*, “City Hall Sit-Ins to A Climax Today,” September 13, 1963, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>403</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “City Delay Likely On A Rights Law,” December 5, 1963, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

1962 that stated racial or religious discrimination was illegal in businesses licensed by the city.<sup>404</sup> Unlike in KCMO, the new law was accepted as a matter of course, and KCK avoided the long-fought court battles that delayed such civil rights legislation for years in KCMO. Specifically, KCK lacked a mobilized segment of small business owners backed by right-wing political elements determined to fight “the Communist program to destroy the system of free enterprise” that propelled dynamics in KCMO between 1960 and 1964.<sup>405</sup>

Civil Rights activists in both cities, both states, and especially CORE and the NAACP won a huge victory in early 1964, when Fairyland Amusement Park finally opened its admission to all people after three years of mass protests, arrests, and court battles.<sup>406</sup> On February 29, the lawyer for the owners, the Brancato family, wrote Mayor Davis of their decision to not only admit African American customers, but also to drop all six lawsuits the park had filed against demonstrators and invalidate the injunction that had stopped the city from enforcing the public accommodations ordinance against the park. The owners concluded that it was in the Park’s best interests to integrate, given the negative publicity, their fear of “open strife between citizens of our city,” and the fact that there had been no drop in business for amusement parks in other cities that had discrimination ordinances. Lastly, they noted that they had “viewed with concern the attitudes and statements of groups opposing this ordinance”; apparently the virulence of some of those statements had given them pause.<sup>407</sup> Most damaging was the admission of three top officials of the Association for Freedom of Choice that they were also John Birch Society

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<sup>404</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “An Anti-Bias Success in Kansas City, Kansas,” January 25, 1963, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>405</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 153.

<sup>406</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “Fun Park Will Drop Race Bar,” February 29, 1964, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*



members and their subsequent remarks.<sup>408</sup> Two of these individuals, Thurman McCormick and James Kernodle, made remarks that damaged the credibility of anyone opposed to the ordinance.

McCormick first claimed that the city ordinance was “identical” to “the objectives stated in the Communist Manifesto.”<sup>409</sup> When pressed by the Kansas City media about the most outlandish things the group and its founder Joseph Welch said about Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, McCormick would only say “let’s judge his [a President’s] conduct and decide. Whether it be Eisenhower, Kennedy, or Johnson, let’s look at the facts. What position are they taking on matters?”<sup>410</sup> McCormick dug himself deeper into public scorn by seeing “nothing unusual” in a Birch Society article that bizarrely claimed that JFK and the CIA set up a “fake invasion of Cuba designed to strengthen our mortal enemies there” and saying further about the recently assassinated President, for whom millions were still in mourning, that “if he’s a skunk when he’s alive, he’s a skunk when he’s dead.”<sup>411</sup> What Kernodle said wasn’t as controversial, but he did brag about being a John Birch Society member and called anybody opposed to the organization either ignorant of it or “a Communist or Socialist sympathizer.” They both denied any direct connection between the Association for Freedom of Choice and the Birch Society.

The loss of the Fairyland Park as an ally was a huge defeat for the alliance of the Tavern Owners and Association. Charles V. Genova, President of the Kansas City Tavern Owners Association, claimed to have turned down offers from unnamed political bosses in the city to help fight the ordinance so that the referendum could be “the people’s choice.”<sup>412</sup> He

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<sup>408</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “Foes of Rights Law Are in Birch Society,” February 26, 1964,

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

<sup>412</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “Tavern Men Wage Their Own Battle,” March 2, 1964, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley

emphasized that he wouldn't fight the ordinance any more after the 1964 referendum, but smugly asserted "with a white population majority of nine to one we don't need political bosses to help us."<sup>413</sup> As if demonstrating a textbook case of the kind of "new white language around property and race" identified by David M.P. Freund, Genova denied being racist, saying "we are not against Negroes as Negroes."<sup>414</sup> However, Genova let the property rights and libertarian proverbial masks drop when he said that "the association feels that whites, whiskey, and Negroes is a combination that just won't work."<sup>415</sup> Further remarks during the campaigning for the election by Genova exposed racist attitudes behind the opposition to the ordinance, such as Genova's claim that its purpose was "expressly . . . to make it legal for Negro boys to date white girls in public taverns, dance halls, and swimming pools."<sup>416</sup> Continuing this line of demagoguery, he wrote that "we are not ready for this personal intermixing of the races in our places of business, no matter how the rest of the world and the politicians feel."<sup>417</sup> Genova earned the ire of a *Kansas City Star* editorial in April for his race-baiting that the paper called pulling "absurd racial issues out of the air."<sup>418</sup>

With openly racist language like that, it was much easier to tie Genova and other opponents in Kansas City to the atrocities of Bull Connor and Jim Clark in Birmingham and

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Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid; Freund, 6.

<sup>415</sup> *Kansas City Times*, "Tavern Men," March 2, 1964, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>416</sup> *Kansas City Star*, "Tavern Owners: Letter From President," March 30, 1964, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> *Kansas City Star*, "Public Accommodations: The Real Issues," April 2, 1964, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

Selma.<sup>419</sup> In the lead up to the April 7th vote, both sides used the international context of the Cold War, but framed it in very different ways.<sup>420</sup> On one side, in opposition, was the paranoid, rigidly property-rights focused anticommunism articulated by McCormick for the Association, the Tavern Owners, and Birch Society which regarded any attempt to regulate private property (classical liberalism) in consideration of the public good (republicanism) or the rights of other people as “Communist” and against the US Constitution. On the other side, an alliance of clergy from Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant denominations from both the white and African American communities, labor unions, civil rights organizations, and the board of directors for the Chamber of Commerce pointed to the context of American leadership in the world and the damage the defeat of public accommodations bills at both the city and state levels would do to the American image around the world.<sup>421</sup>

The clashing discourses also defined freedom and morality very differently. On the opponents’ side, freedom was defined in almost entirely property-rights classical liberal discourse and any interference for any reason with business was an abridgement of freedom. For the civil rights movement, freedom was a matter of basic human rights not constrained to, or to be constrained by, property rights. On the side supporting the ordinance, the liberalism underpinning it was actually a coalition of the postwar consensus liberalism of interest group juggling to maintain social harmony and a left of center discourse that was informed by the Social Gospel. Both of these defined liberal notions of freedom far more expansively than did the

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<sup>419</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land*, 153.

<sup>420</sup> *Kansas City Star*, “Give Plans For A Referendum,” February 10, 1964, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>421</sup> *Kansas City Star*, “A Significant Line-Up On Human Rights,” March 2, 1964, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL; *Kansas City Times*, “Labor Council To Rights Bill,” March 11, 1964, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL; *Kansas City Star*, “Eyes On Vote On Race Law,” March 15, 1964.

discourse of their opponents and believed that group rights were as important as individual rights. As for morality, the kind of gendered white middle-class racism that Schirmer had identified in the 1910s that obsessed over interracial contact between white women and black men was definitely invoked by Genova in the 1964 fight against the ordinance. On the other side, it was the newer interracial middle-class morality of the Fellowship forged in the 1940s that animated the supporters of the ordinance. These forces would clash again, over housing in 1968.<sup>422</sup>

In this fiercely contested referendum, high African American voter turnout finally ensured the ordinance remained city law, as it was upheld by one thousand six hundred and fourteen out of nearly ninety-thousand votes cast.<sup>423</sup> At the same time the movement won this critical victory regarding public accommodations, one that had been a decade in the making, racial segregation in housing had reached such a point in the previous decade that Troost Avenue became the de facto dividing line between white and black neighborhoods in the city.<sup>424</sup>

In a city in which racial movement had been ongoing for decades back to the 1910s, what was especially significant about the wave between the 1950s and 1970s was “its extent and rapidity.”<sup>425</sup> Instead of gradual turnover and marginal expansion, the entire southeastern section of KCMO, south of 27th Street and east of Troost Avenue, was transformed from mainly white to almost all-black between 1955 and 1970. Ever since then, the inner city African-American population has continued to move southeast but never moves west of what locals call “the Troost

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<sup>422</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “Fair Housing Ordinance Attacked: Ordinance Called Obvious, Designed to Help Communism,” February 14, 1968.

<sup>423</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 153.

<sup>424</sup> *Gotham*, 93.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

Wall.”<sup>426</sup> This development occurred largely because the KCMO School District was as resistant to the Brown decision as the KCK School Board had been, but used a technique to get around Brown that proved far more damaging than the games played with district lines its KCK counterpart was sued for. The KCMSD used Troost Avenue as a racial school attendance boundary between 1955 and 1975, separating white schools to the west and black schools to the east.<sup>427</sup> As a result, real estate agents and “blockbusters” saw an opportunity to use the school district boundary to stimulate white flight east of Troost.

Civil rights activists would find housing and school segregation their toughest battles of all. On June 20, 1963, a group of white and black civil rights activists staged a protest at the KCMSD Board meeting charging the district with reinforcing residential segregation through “the unwritten law of the Troost line.”<sup>428</sup> A month later, CORE launched a series of sit-ins and picketing at the Board protesting the use of Troost as a racial boundary.<sup>429</sup> In July, the Superintendent of KCMSD James Hazlett met with the Board to give the position officially held on school integration: the board “accepts the principle of promoting integration as one of many factors to be considered, but it does not believe that priority should be given to this above all other factors.”<sup>430</sup> Throughout 1964, civil rights protests continued and were each time rebuffed with the district’s variant of the property rights or “market condition” excuse: “neighborhood

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.; For more on the history of school segregation in KCMO and the long, frustrating fight against it, again, see Peter Moran’s 2000 dissertation, *Balancing Act: Kansas City Missouri Public Schools, 1949-1999*

<sup>428</sup> Gotham, 100.

<sup>429</sup> *Kansas City Call*, “Give the Board Time To Act,” August 2, 1963; *Kansas City Call*, “School Board Too Slow, Kansas Citizens Charge,” August 2, 1963.

<sup>430</sup> Gotham, 100-02.

unity.”<sup>431</sup>

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Having examined over a hundred years of the history of the Greater Kansas City metropolitan area and the origins and development of conditions of urban crisis in the city since the 1910s, it is at this point that the 1968 riot in KCMO needs to be contextualized. It is also important to look at the reasons that KCK was spared a similar fate following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. For many white observers, the 1968 riot was the first recognition of an “urban crisis.” But as this work has sought to demonstrate, the crisis itself was a long-term process, fed by racial exclusion and overt discrimination in housing, in employment, in education, and in public accommodations. It was moreover a process exacerbated by white hostility to black aspirations as well as an agonizingly slow and only partial response to black demands. The 1968 riot in Kansas City, Missouri, was not the crisis: it was the flash point of the explosion of a powder keg that had been packed for years.

First, it should be reiterated that KCMO had close calls with large-scale urban riots before, particularly in 1919, 1925, and to a much lesser extent, during World War II. Had situations in especially 1919 or 1925 gotten past a certain point, KCMO could have easily gone through two earlier riots on the order of those suffered in Detroit or Chicago during that earlier period. It is very well known that the 1968 riots were national in scope due to the May 4, 1968, assassination of Dr. King, with KCMO one city among most US major cities seeing violence then. However, as was the case with riots such as the 1992 Los Angeles riots, there is often a local cause interacting with a national cause, with the national cause often acting as a catalyst for local tensions to explode.

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 102; *Kansas City Call*, “Events in K.C. School Controversy,” September 25, 1964.

Despite the victories of the civil rights movement coalition of the NAACP, COPOD, the Fellowship, CORE, and CCSA between 1950 and 1964 and Freedom Inc.'s 1962-63 electoral success in electing Watkins and Thomas, KCMO in 1968 was still marked by "social exclusion and injustice."<sup>432</sup> Despite integrated public accommodations, there were still only two black elected officials on the city council, and whites still excluded blacks from labor unions, real estate boards, corporations, and suburban schools and housing.<sup>433</sup> African Americans were twenty percent of the city's population in 1968, yet they comprised only six percent of the police force, less than two percent of all union members (the end of the stockyards and meatpacking industry probably helped drive the numbers this low), and less than one percent of all members of the Kansas City Real Estate Board.<sup>434</sup> Until 1968, there had been no blacks on the Kansas City school board.<sup>435</sup> WDAF-TV, the city's NBC affiliate had only one African American newscaster, Lena Rivers Smith.<sup>436</sup> She had come to the station from working at the *Kansas City Call*, the only former *Call* journalist hired to work in local television news.<sup>437</sup>

James Farmer had warned activists four years earlier that the public accommodations ordinance, despite making progress, was "too late with too little," as it still did not cover some public places that could continue to practice segregation.<sup>438</sup> Almost immediately after the first

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>436</sup> *Kansas City Star*, "King Tragedy Uncovers Hope," April 5, 1968; "Lena Rivers Smith: Two Decades on the Kansas City News Front," Vertical File: African-Americans, Prominent #4, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

<sup>438</sup> *Kansas City Times*, "Critical of Ordinance," April 13, 1964, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

version passed in 1962, reports of violations began flooding the Human Relations Commission.<sup>439</sup> Six years later, the NAACP reported that complaints of discrimination in Kansas City were still nearly constant in nature.<sup>440</sup> In 1965, the Kansas City transit company curtailed bus service, prompting protests.<sup>441</sup> Missouri would also be among the last holdouts among those states outlawing interracial marriage following the *Loving* decision of 1967.

Both the Kansas City and national white leadership were fully unprepared for what occurred after Dr. King's death in most American major cities, including KCMO. Even the Urban League, long the canary in the coal mine between 1939 and 1961 in terms of warning of housing conditions, was too busy after 1966 gushing over the promise that the Johnson administration's Model Cities program held for KCMO and basking in the progress that had been made for civil rights to pay attention to the warning signs.<sup>442</sup> As late as the day before KCMO's riot began, the *Kansas City Times* had cast doubt on the Kerner Commission's position that white racism was the cause of summer urban riots since 1965 by putting the phrase white racism in quotes and by noting that "respectable national spokesmen" had been critical of the report.<sup>443</sup> Incredibly, one of the sources the paper cited for "national spokesmen" was Senator Strom Thurmond.<sup>444</sup> Liberal Democrats, too, however, were just as quick to shoot the messenger rather than pay attention to the report; Vice-President Hubert Humphrey was quoted as "wondering if

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<sup>439</sup> *Kansas City Call*, "First Complaints Filed Under Restaurant Law," November 1962.

<sup>440</sup> Gotham, 121.

<sup>441</sup> *Kansas City Call*, "Bus Protest Wednesday," October 8, 1965, VF: KC-Civil Rights, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

<sup>442</sup> "Urban League Annual Report, 1967," p.10, KCULP, Box KCULP-2, File 23, MO State Archives, Jefferson City; "Model Cities Organization For Kansas City, Missouri," March 8, 1968, KCULP, Box CM-2: 1960-70, Legal Committee, File 18, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>443</sup> *Kansas City Times*, "Kansas City's Answer to 'White Racism,'" April 8, 1968.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid.



white racism wasn't overemphasized" in the Kerner report.<sup>445</sup> In contrast, Brooks not only had seen it coming, but had warned the Jewish Community Center earlier in the year that "the wrong spark could ignite a situation right here in Kansas City that would cause the same thing that's occurred around the country."<sup>446</sup>

When the terrible news of Dr. King's murder in Memphis was reported nationwide on April 4, 1968, initially neither KCK nor KCMO reacted violently.<sup>447</sup> In KCK, Wyandotte and Sumner high schools held school assemblies on Friday April 5th in which speakers mourned Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., followed by a peaceful march of a thousand black high school students through downtown KCK.<sup>448</sup> The Reverend Maynard Preston of the Eighth Street Baptist Church spoke through a bullhorn at city hall, preaching to the protestors not to forget Dr. King's lessons of nonviolence. About twenty-five officers walked outside Sumner high school for the students' march; half of these policemen were African American. One of the officers said, "I don't want to give off the impression that we are here expecting violence. We are here today out of sympathy."<sup>449</sup> In KCMO, on Sunday April 7, 1968, ten thousand people gathered on Twenty-Seventh Street and Woodlawn and marched from there to Liberty Memorial Mall.<sup>450</sup> The march was orderly and without incident, as more than fifteen thousand people stood or sat on park benches provided by the park department.

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<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> "Appointed Thorn," *Kansas City Star*, p.13, August 19, 1984, VF: Alvin Brooks, MO Valley Spec. Collections, KCPL.

<sup>447</sup> *Kansas City Star*, "City is Quiet After a March," April 6, 1968; *KC Times*, "Ask Action to Fulfill King's Dream," April 8, 1968.

<sup>448</sup> *Kansas City Star*, "Students March in Kansas City, Kansas," April 5, 1968.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> *Kansas City Times*, "Ask Action to Fulfill King's Dream," April 8, 1968.

What changed matters so drastically between Sunday and Tuesday April 9, when KCMO experienced its own outbreak of urban violence? The answer largely had to do with the way in which KCK and KCMO schools responded to the day of Dr. King’s funeral, Monday April 9, 1968. Keeping with its tone of deep respect and official mourning set on Friday April 5, Wyandotte county schools closed in recognition of the funeral of Dr. King on Monday.<sup>451</sup> KCMSD schools, however, refused to close, and like every other school system in the metro except KCK, held classes Monday, April 9.<sup>452</sup>

When schools in the Kansas City MO school district opened at eight am on the 9th, Lincoln High School, Manual school, Central Junior High and Central High Schools experienced walkouts. They began at Lincoln High School, where a group of students began marching at eight o’clock.<sup>453</sup> The march then spread to Manual and from there to Central High School, as Central Junior High students and staff could see a crowd of hundreds of Central High school students marching towards the Junior High.<sup>454</sup> The principal at Central Junior High had planned a memorial for 9:15 am in the auditorium, with two ministers and Curtis McClinton and Otis Taylor of the Kansas City Chiefs to read tributes to King.<sup>455</sup> However, a hundred Central High students rushed into the junior high and shouted, “School’s out!”<sup>456</sup> When the principal called the police and locked the doors, the situation calmed until a second wave of about three hundred college-aged adults descended on the school.

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<sup>451</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “Some Schools to Close For King Rites,” April 9, 1968.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>453</sup> *Kansas City Times*, “Rights Leader Hits Police Tactics,” April 10, 1968.

<sup>454</sup> *Kansas City Star*, “Riot Tempo Mounted Swiftly,” April 14, 1968; *KC Times*, “Rights Leader,” April 10, 1968.

<sup>455</sup> *Kansas City Star*, “Riot Tempo,” April 18, 1968.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*

The second group got in after a junior high girl unlocked the back door, while others smashed windows.<sup>457</sup> The principal claimed that his teachers had been hit in the face with wastebaskets by some of the demonstrators; Arthur Bronson later confirmed that some white teachers had been attacked.<sup>458</sup> The memorial ended up being held anyway, with the school dismissing at ten fifteen am. At eight forty-five Mayor Davis was alerted to the possibility of disturbances downtown; Police Chief Kelley asked the Missouri highway patrol to come to the downtown area at nine fifteen am. The Mayor reached Kelley's office at nine thirty five am. By nine fifty seven am, Missouri Governor Warren E. Hearnes called Kelley to discuss the need for National Guard troops.<sup>459</sup>

Meanwhile, the crowd of hundreds of high school and junior high students, activists, members of the clergy, and some Kansas City Chiefs players marched up Paseo and then marched down I-70 in the direction of City Hall. Before the marchers got to I-70, police officers in a patrol car drove up, and sprayed the crowd with chemical mace. When the NAACP leadership asked them to apologize to the students, the officers would only say they were investigating a glass-breaking incident, concluded the noise from the church was vandals breaking glass, and threw the canisters.<sup>460</sup> Mayor Illus Davis agreed to meet with them and spoke to them for a while that morning.<sup>461</sup> When the demonstrators complained to him about the use of tear gas, he said that he was very sorry to hear that any tear gas was used. Police claimed this march had been peaceful until twelve forty-five, when "an unidentified person" threw the

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<sup>457</sup> Ibid.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid.; Arthur Bronson Interview, Oct. 7, 1976, Black Archives of Mid-America, CD 8, MO Valley Spec. Collections, KCPL.

<sup>459</sup> *Kansas City Star*, "Riot Tempo" April 18, 1968.

<sup>460</sup> *Kansas City Times*, "Rights Leader Hits Police Tactics," April 10, 1968.

<sup>461</sup> *Kansas City Star*, "Mayor, Chief," April 10, 1968.

first canister of tear gas and that police were provoked by “firecrackers” to use tear gas; the NAACP claimed that the police had fired tear gas into the crowd at that point and that it was a “soda pop bottle” that had been thrown at the police.<sup>462</sup> All sources agreed that the crowd left after that in busses.

That afternoon, the marchers met at Holy Name Catholic Church, hosted by Father Timothy Gibbons, the white associate pastor of the church, to dance in the church basement to a program of rock n roll and soul music provided by radio station KPRS, and its disc jockeys Arthur Lee and Larry Anthony.<sup>463</sup> Without warning, KCMO police officers kicked in the basement windows and tossed three canisters of tear gas into the basement. The two disc jockeys witnessed the officers doing this, asked them why, and were told by the officers that police had been called to investigate a glass-breaking incident and decided that the noise coming from the basement was connected to it. Raising tensions further, police were reported to have beaten two white Episcopal priests marching in solidarity with the NAACP and black school students in the area of 12th and Oak Streets near the Jackson County Courthouse.<sup>464</sup> One of them suffered cracked ribs and another was struck on the arm with a club.<sup>465</sup>

A series of violent clashes broke out between that afternoon and evening and led Mayor Davis to issue a curfew from 8 pm, that night to the following morning.<sup>466</sup> Hundreds of African American residents on the eastside neighborhoods ignored the curfew, and the early morning hours of April 10, two hundred stores were damaged or looted, including a Katz, a Kroger’s and

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<sup>462</sup> *Kansas City Star*, “Riot Tempo,” April 14, 1968; *Kansas City Times*, “Rights Leader,” April 10, 1968.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>464</sup> *Kansas City Star*, “Priests Assert Policemen Struck Them,” April 10, 1968.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*, “Davis Imposes Curfew on City,” April 10, 1968.

a Crown drug store.<sup>467</sup> The next day, April 10, police threw tear gas at Lincoln High School students during a repeat of the walkouts the previous day; that only ensured another two nights of rioting and looting, from the 11-12th.<sup>468</sup> When those two days were over, both KCK and KCMO had imposed curfews, the Missouri National Guard had been called in from Columbia, six people were dead, and nearly one hundred buildings had been damaged or destroyed as a result of arson.<sup>469</sup> KCMSD finally decided to dismiss classes for Spring Break on April 11, after two straight days of walkouts and urban violence.<sup>470</sup> Furious activists blamed Chief Kelley and Superintendent James Hazlett for the violence, demanding that both be removed.<sup>471</sup> Kelley's defiant comments defending the use of tear gas at both Lincoln on April 10 and denial of knowledge of the incidents against the Episcopalian priests and teenage dancers in the Catholic Church further enraged them.<sup>472</sup> Meanwhile, those who had actually rioted recalled years later, "We burned some buildings all along 31st Street. We didn't touch Black businesses—only White . . . They were white-owned and that's who we'd been fighting against all our lives and that's who took King's life. We were mad . . . We wouldn't let the firemen get to them. One guy would shoot at them. We'd say, 'let it burn.'"<sup>473</sup> As former police officer and CORE activist Alvin Brooks put it in an interview with Kevin Fox Gotham, "Black residents were fighting for human and civil rights, right of employment, opportunity, right as far as housing opportunities, public

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<sup>467</sup> Ibid., "Disorder in the City," April 10, 1968; Ibid., "Ruin Is Light After March," April 10, 1968.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., "Out At Five Schools," April 10, 1968.

<sup>469</sup> *Kansas City Star*, "Curfews Are Ordered in Both Kansas Citys," April 11, 1968; *KC Times*, "Call 690 More Into Riot Duty," April 12, 1968; Gotham, 121.

<sup>470</sup> *Kansas City Star*, "Schools Out Today," April 11, 1968.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid., "Negro Leaders Demand Hazlett, Kelley Quit," April 12, 1968

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., "Chief Defends Tear Gas At Lincoln," April 11, 1968.

<sup>473</sup> Gotham, 121-22.

accommodations, as well as race relations in general. There was firm resistance on the part of the White community to all of the above and we therefore had serious difficulties.”<sup>474</sup>

The national shift of SNCC to the more militant Black Power phase resonated well in KCMO between 1968 and the early 1970s, as anger over the slow pace of change reached a crescendo. One of those thousands of black individuals who grew up in the poorest and most racially isolated city neighborhoods that were a legacy of redlining and blockbusting since the 1940s, Pete O’Neal, would transform from a petty criminal into a black revolutionary in 1967 after reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and hearing about Bobby Seale, Huey Newton, and Eldridge Cleaver’s Black Panther Party.<sup>475</sup> O’Neal would found Kansas City’s Black Panther Party in 1969; he originally called it the Black Vigilantes.<sup>476</sup> One of the first political acts of O’Neal was to demand a federal investigation of Chief Kelley and the KCMO police department. Pete O’Neal transformed the Vigilantes into the Kansas City chapter of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in 1969 in response to Chief Kelley’s conduct during the riots. O’Neal in fact read his manifesto in the Kansas City police department hallway, announcing “We want the power to determine the destiny of our black community.”<sup>477</sup> One of the Lincoln High students who participated in the demonstration and rebellion of 1968 in KCMO, Arthur Bronson, would join O’Neal in 1970 after serving in the Air Force between 1968 and 1969. Like Seale, Cleaver, and Huey P. Newton in Oakland, O’Neal ran Panther breakfast programs for black

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<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>475</sup> *New York Times*, “A Black Panther’s Mellow Exile: Farming in Africa,” November 23, 1997

<sup>476</sup> *Kansas City Star*, “Pete O’Neal: Are There Any Others Still Left?,” June 6, 1975, Ramos Collection, VF: Biography J-P: Pete O’Neal, MO Valley Spec. Collections, KCPL; Timeline entitled “Felix L. (Pete) O’Neal,” found in Ibid.; Oral History, “An Interview: Arthur Bronson,” October 7, 1976, Black Archives of Mid-America, SC69-2, Tape 8, CD 8, MO Valley Spec. Collections, KCPL.

<sup>477</sup> *NY Times*, “A Black Panther’s Mellow Exile,” Nov. 23, 1997

children in Kansas City.<sup>478</sup> Intrigued by Maoism, he memorized whole sections of Mao Zedong's "Red Book."<sup>479</sup> However, he also tried to provoke the police into a war "to show how brutal they were" and in particular loathed Police Chief Kelley, whom he believed was funneling weapons to white supremacist groups. His tactics were often highly disruptive, as he stormed into an October 12, 1969 US Senate meeting, and started screaming that Kelley was running guns to racists.<sup>480</sup>

On another occasion, he disrupted a white church service to ask for donations to the Black Panthers.<sup>481</sup> Federal agents arrested him on charges of illegally transporting a gun across state lines; he and his wife, Charlotte Hill, also a Panther, were convicted in October 1970, but they jumped bail. They escaped by crawling out the back door of their home at 3 am, jumped into the trunk of a friend's car, rode in the trunk to St. Louis, where they caught a plane to New York, and were given fake passports by the New York Communist Party they then used to board a plane to Sweden. By 1972, O'Neal surfaced in Algeria, where the party had bases and he succeeded Eldridge Cleaver as the party's head of foreign operations, but the Algerian government expelled them over a disagreement.<sup>482</sup> By 1973, the O'Neals ended up in Tanzania.

KCK handled the tense national and local situation in April 1968 much better than KCMO did, in the end. Much as its public accommodations bill had passed without much of a problem and just as its World War II-era Mayor had realized that angry African American constituents over segregated munitions plants were not good for him politically, the school and

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<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

<sup>479</sup> "Pete O'Neal in Algeria," June 6, 1975, Ramos Collection, VF: Biography J-P: Pete O'Neal, MO Valley Spec. Collections, KCPL

<sup>480</sup> *NY Times*, "Mellow Exile," Nov. 23, 1997.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid.

police authorities in KCK were much more careful, responsive, and intelligent in their response than KCMO. Mayor Davis meant well, but was undercut by a Police Chief that as far back as the Fairyland sit-ins in 1962 gave off vibes of hostility to black people and a school board that was an all-white relic of pre-Brown days and clueless about its black students. Moreover, KCK's black population was not subjected to the full brunt of the waves of Great Migration from the Deep South that KCMO was between 1910 and 1960 that created crisis in overcrowding and hypersegregation when combined with NAREB and FHA housing policies.

The callous decision of the school board in KCMO would prove the spark that would ignite decades of pent-up rage, going back to the 1910s over the following: discrimination, overcrowding, poverty, police brutality in the 1920s and 1940s, empty and broken promises by Republicans and Pendergast Democrats, urban renewal and inadequate and segregated public housing replacing old homes, the loss of black businesses, obstruction and delaying tactics by the city council and groups such as the Tavern Owners' Association that caused the struggle for equal treatment in public accommodations to last over a decade, and the murder of Dr. King. Any number of these were explosive enough, but when combined with a national climate of mourning and rage over the assassination of the leader of the Black freedom struggle, the school board's decision to hold classes despite King's funeral was seen as one more example of white disrespect and racial insult of African Americans collectively. When combined with a rate of racial segregation and poverty in the city's black neighborhoods that had reached a crisis point nearly thirty years earlier during the last years of the Depression, the situation was all the more dire.



## **CONCLUSION: GREATER KANSAS CITY AND “THE URBAN CRISIS” IN RETROSPECT**

As the 1960s came to a close, KCMO and KCK had both been greatly transformed. For African Americans in particular, the change fomented by the Civil Rights Movement and the overall condition for housing, education, and employment between 1945 and 1968 had moved in two very different directions. For KCMO especially, the fight had been a very long one indeed. The African American struggle for civil rights in KCMO actually began in Missouri’s Reconstruction period as a response to the denial of voting rights to blacks before 1872 and to the segregation of the schools.<sup>1</sup> Paradoxically, by the time that the long and often excruciatingly slow civil rights struggle had successfully ended the Jim Crow segregation of public accommodations by law and custom, both cities had experienced a worsening of the housing segregation underway since the 1910s. As was true in so some many urban centers across the nation, white flight to the suburbs in the greater Kansas City area created two urban centers with declining taxes bases, and with majority black populations deeply mired in the conditions of poverty, with endemic unemployment and troubled school systems being the most notable.<sup>2</sup>

Such was the common case for both cities between the 1940s and 1960s, but the details varied across the state line. KCK was an industrial working-class town that lacked the high bourgeois obsession with social status and the management of urban space that comprised the

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<sup>1</sup> Schirmer, 29-30.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.; Greenbaum, 64-65; Coulter, 268; Gotham, 62.

basis of a very distinct form of racist ideology in KCMO, again tied to the latter's "city beautiful" movement. In addition to the class composition, the differences in the historical roots of each city mattered. The two cities had been on opposite sides of mid-nineteenth century sectional cultures surrounding slavery and race—"free labor and free soil" as opposed to a "northern city with southern exposure"—and this meant that both the characteristics of racism locally and the timeframe for development of an urban crisis were different in KCK than in KCMO. As a result, for example, Jim Crow in public accommodations hung on longer in KCMO than in KCK. Because it was the bigger city, overcrowding resulting from the Great Migration in the 1940s was much worse in KCMO than in KCK, which had experienced most of its mass migration of southern blacks in the nineteenth century. Despite these considerable differences, the rise of Johnson County suburbs would be heavily implicated in the urban decay of both Kansas Cities after the Second World War.

A "two-tiered welfare state instantiated in the New Deal" and its postwar "growth liberalism" successor had subsidized and engineered the growth of white suburbia through the public-private partnership between the FHA and real estate industry.<sup>3</sup> The national result was to create a federal government-subsidized postwar boom that largely created great prosperity and upward mobility for whites while freezing out African Americans, especially urban residents who had been on the wrong side of redlining and racially restrictive covenants. The result can be charted in the dramatic alteration in racial isolation in KCMO, dating from the 1890s. In KCMO in 1890, the percentage of central city residents who were black was 12.7%. By 1930, it was 30%. But by 1970, 75.6% of KCMO's inner city population was African American.<sup>4</sup> KCMO

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<sup>3</sup> Self, 3, 11; Freund, 100-02.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 48.

lost, and has continued to lose, white population to the suburbs in every census since the 1930s. Much of this dramatic trend can be attributed to redlining, suburbanization, and blockbusting between the 1930s and the 1960s. Unlike the situation in Sugrue's Detroit where fierce competition between whites and blacks for scarce housing was the underlying issue, Kansas City's problem was instead one largely created by real estate industry figures such as J.C. Nichols and, later, by federal housing policy.<sup>5</sup>

Labor unions in both cities had a checkered and contradictory record with African-Americans from the beginning of the twentieth century right up through 1968. Highly variable depending on which labor union local in which industry one looked at, labor unions ran the gamut in their support, or lack thereof, for African American aspirations. Some union locals, notably those in hod carrying, meatpacking, canneries, and laundries, were white allies and partners for interracial strikes; many others excluded blacks from membership entirely and colluded with management in perpetuating job discrimination between 1900 and 1930.<sup>6</sup> In the 1960s, labor unions lobbied hard for the anti-discrimination ordinance and were in the forefront of the fair housing struggle in 1966; yet, as late as 1968, less than two percent of union membership in KCMO was black.<sup>7</sup> The Brotherhood of Pullman Porters led by A. Philip Randolph was a genuine force as an African American labor union, but the decline of the railroads after the 1950s undermined much of the benefits that unionized jobs for African-Americans in this sector had delivered in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the demise of the

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<sup>5</sup> Sugrue, *Urban Crisis*, 51-55.

<sup>6</sup> *Negro Worker*, 1940, KCULP, Box KCULP-3, File 2, MO State Archives, Jefferson City.

<sup>7</sup> Gotham, 121, 124.

<sup>8</sup> *KC Call*, "Negroes On Committees of the A.F. Of L.," October 15, 1937, VF: Labor Unions, Ramos Collection, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL; Thomas Webster, "The Negro and Labor Unions," *KC American*, March 29, 1938, VF: Labor Unions, Ramos Collection, MO Valley Special Collections, KCPL.

stockyards and meatpacking industry between 1929 and 1951 had devastating consequences in eliminating unionized jobs for working-class blacks in both cities.

The shift in transportation between 1930 and 1965 in Greater Kansas City – from railroads and streetcars to automobiles traveling on Interstate freeways – undermined the black community in two ways, both of which reinforced the damage already done by FHA and private real estate practices. First, as noted, the decline of the railroads also diminished the clout of the only major African American union, Randolph’s Brotherhood, which had been a particularly powerful presence in KCMO. Secondly, when combined with urban renewal, urban interstate construction destroyed prosperous black businesses and entire neighborhoods.

In the case of Kansas City, Missouri, the longest and unresolved struggles other than housing have been over school segregation and the problem of police brutality, both of which date back to the late nineteenth century and the earliest activism of James Dallas Bowser and others.<sup>9</sup> Neither KCK nor KCMO proved cooperative with the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, as has been seen, but the KCMSD’s use of Troost Avenue as a de facto barrier between white and black after 1955 proved especially exacerbating to an already racially segregated housing market beset with overcrowding. Indeed, it can be said that KCMO was reaching a tipping point of urban crisis as early as 1939, but it was not until the 1960s that the city’s school district finally pushed the city over the edge into a full scale crisis. Other historians, such as Peter Moran, have already examined in much more detail the full extent of the history of school segregation and desegregation in KCMO; my purpose here has been to examine how the school board’s actions affected the overall trends toward a crisis flashpoint. As for police brutality, in KCMO it seems to have followed a cyclical pattern of peaks where it was

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<sup>9</sup> Schirmer, 20.

particularly brutal, and periods where it decreased in intensity and frequency. The inconsistency may very well have been influenced by the state's control of the city's police, a circumstance that had made the police relatively immune to local pressures. Police behavior during the 1968 riot appears to have been the worst of a cyclical, recurring problem.

Ironically, just before the KCMO riots, both Mayor Davis and President Lyndon Johnson were starting to make major pushes for legislation that would integrate housing.<sup>10</sup> Davis' local bill prohibited racial and ethnic discrimination, real estate blockbusting practices, and discriminatory lending practices by banks connected to the sale of housing.<sup>11</sup> The old foes of the anti-discrimination ordinance, the John Birch Society and the Association for the Freedom of Choice, returned to battle civil rights activists and the Mayor in 1967-68, charging fair housing activists and the city council with accomplishing "a major goal of the Communist Party—confiscation of private property."<sup>12</sup> Davis shot back against this crude red-baiting and appeal to "property rights" by stating that "they're [the Birch Society and The Association] not talking about property rights so much as the right to discriminate against Negroes and Jews, and in some cases, Catholics."<sup>13</sup> The Association reinforced that perception by making repeated references to the "mongrelization of the races" and asserting that "facts prove that the Negro does not qualify as a first class citizen, or as a desirable neighbor" in their newsletters.<sup>14</sup>

As for Johnson's bill, it was passed amidst a crisis atmosphere in Washington D.C. after

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<sup>10</sup> *KC Star*, "Davis Dispels Fair Housing Fear," April 7, 1968; *Ibid.*, "Push By L.B.J.," April 12, 1968

<sup>11</sup> *KC Star*, "Housing Fear," April 7, 1968.

<sup>12</sup> *Gotham*, 126.

<sup>13</sup> *KC Star*, "Housing Fears," April 7, 1968.

<sup>14</sup> *Gotham*, 126.

the capital had its own urban riot; at the time, the military was guarding the Capitol building.<sup>15</sup> The bill the Democratic Congress passed and President Johnson signed, the Civil Rights Act of 1968, had provisions that sought to undermine housing discrimination, sharply penalized vigilante and hate group racial violence against blacks and civil rights activists, and provided stiff penalties for inciting riots.<sup>16</sup> The three stages of the housing section of the bill banned racial discrimination in FHA and VA financed housing and apartments, banned racial bias in apartment complexes, and banned discrimination in sale of individual homes through real estate agents.”<sup>17</sup> The Act authorized the recently created Housing and Urban Development program to enforce the federal government’s antidiscrimination laws and develop housing subsidy programs to increase low-income home ownership.<sup>18</sup> Davis and the KCMO city council had planned a referendum on their local bill for April 30; once Congress passed the 1968 Civil Rights Act, 250-171, the city council voted unanimously to enact the housing provisions of the bill and cancelled the referendum.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately for liberal and civil rights activists’ hopes, the way in which the FHA and real estate companies administered the program between 1968 and 1982 served to reinforce what Johnson and civil rights activists had been trying to fight. Between 1969 and 1974 in KCMO, the funding for Section 235, which had been intended to attract private lenders and developers to participate in providing low-cost housing to poor people, was used to build new housing mostly

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<sup>15</sup> *KC Star*, “Push By LBJ,” April 12, 1968.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Gotham*, 127.

<sup>19</sup> *KC Star*, “LBJ Push,” April 12, 1968.; *Gotham*, 126.

in the suburbs and to allow African Americans to purchase existing homes in the city.<sup>20</sup> Only twenty-seven percent of inner city black neighborhoods had new homes built. The FHA and real estate speculators used Section 235 to relax lending standards and open large amounts of credit to neighborhoods known for panic selling and racial turnover.<sup>21</sup> Often, real estate agents used Section 235 to purchase dilapidated dwellings, make superficial repairs to make the building look inhabitable, obtain an inflated appraisal from an FHA appraiser, and then sell the home to an unsuspecting low-income black family with a risk-free, federally insured loan.<sup>22</sup> Only later would the family discover serious problems with the home, and as repair costs mounted, the homeowner would leave the home. It would then return to FHA property to be resold again.

But more important than obvious corruption such as this, the 1968 Fair Housing Act failed to solve the problem of housing discrimination effectively because, as Gotham has put it, it was reactive in nature, “responding to violations of the law rather than attempting to undo prevailing discriminatory patterns “ and because it did not “challenge the institutional practices, ideology, and everyday activities of real estate agents and firms that create and reinforce racial residential segregation.”<sup>23</sup> For example, as late as 1977, private real estate appraising manuals in both Missouri and Kansas still listed African Americans and Hispanics as the worst among ethnic groups in their negative effects on property values.<sup>24</sup> Even a 1988 amendment strengthening HUD’s enforcement powers didn’t fix these problems.<sup>25</sup> In any event, Reagan

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<sup>20</sup> Gotham, 128-29.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 130-31.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 140.

eliminated funding for new construction of government-subsidized housing in 1982 after spending on the program peaked in 1978.<sup>26</sup> Both attention to, and indifference toward, housing issues was a bipartisan affair: one irony of this era, as G. Calvin MacKenzie and Robert Weisbrot note in *The Liberal Hour*, was that “the greatest fiscal support for 1960s liberalism came not from John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson but from Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford.”<sup>27</sup>

The story of the civil rights movement in Kansas City, then, is one that is bittersweet at best and tragic at worst in that, in spite of decades of activism that included significant victories, African-Americans and their allies were up against a deeply entrenched institutional racism, built around urban space and status, that resisted all attempts by activists, local politicians, and the federal government itself to puncture the residential color line through the city. In the latter’s case, this was all the more striking at a time characterized by the zenith of postwar public faith in the federal government’s powers to resist the Soviet bloc, build Great Societies, and land on the Moon. The truth actually was that when Mayor Davis, LBJ, and the US Congress acted to fix the problem, it was far too late. White religious activists in the Fellowship had also awakened to the problem far too late, as the tipping point for the urban crisis had already been reached. On the other hand, what the movement in KCMO did achieve should not be belittled or dismissed: they defeated the most egregious Jim Crow practices in public accommodations and opened up the city’s political system, media, places of business, and services to a black middle-class that had previously been subjected to humiliating exclusion and discrimination. Anti-Semitic discriminatory barriers were also taken down in the process. Sadly, the same could not be said for the black working-class and poor who, although they too benefitted from the removal of the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>27</sup> G. Calvin Mackenzie and Robert Weisbrot, *The Liberal Hour: Washington and the Politics of Change in the 1960s* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 369.



most insulting and discriminatory practices of Jim Crow, could not escape the loss of whole industries that sustained them nor the pernicious effects of real estate racism that had been locked in decades before they were born.

The Kansas Cities' stories enrich the current urban crisis literature by providing a case study in which key variables common to other case studies, such as migration, housing, and local politics, are manifested entirely differently. For example, black migration to the Kansas Cities occurred much earlier than in other major northern and western cities; paradoxically, the Great Migration itself did not become noticeable in KCMO until World War II and the 1950s, several decades after cities such as Chicago and New York City. Moreover, the political pattern of white racism in KCMO was almost the exact opposite of Detroit. Instead of bottom-up white backlash expressed by white Democrats voting for Republican mayors, a top-down "clean government" group of "nonpartisan" city officials enforced white supremacy as part of an upper-class policing of urban space. Similarly, early twentieth century patterns of mutual hostility between African Americans and white unionists almost everywhere else were many times stood on their heads in both Kansas Cities, despite the fact that unions in both cities varied greatly in their practices of racial inclusion or exclusion.

Even normal regional identifiers in other case studies, such as Kruse's Atlanta clearly being a civil rights and post-civil rights southern city or the strong identification of Sugrue's Detroit with industrial northern cities, is frustrated by both Kansas Cities'—but especially KCMO's—historical roots on one of the mid-nineteenth century fault lines between slave and free states and Union and Confederate loyalties. To reiterate what was stated in the introduction this study, no other case study shares these historical conditions with the Kansas Cities. Yet in spite of all that made each Kansas City unique from both other major cities and from one another

as case studies, they nonetheless arrived at conditions of urban crisis that were similar to those prevailing in both northern and southern cities in the mid-twentieth century. This was because private and public housing policies that drew a color line through city neighborhoods and subsidized suburban growth at the expense of central cities happened everywhere in the United States between 1910 and 1960.

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