BLACK ARCHIPELAGO: POLITICS AND CIVIC LIFE IN THE JIM CROW CITY

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Their inhabitants are subject peoples...

—Kenneth Clark, on the “Dark Ghettos” of American cities

In this paper, I examine the Strange Career of Jim Crow in the context of industrial St. Louis, where a nearly uniform system of segregation emerged over the first half of the twentieth century in a political culture suffused with gentility and civility. I argue that segregation emerged as the central feature of settlement and public life in St. Louis between 1900 and 1950. At the same time, however, the unevenness of its application and the pretensions of civility that characterized the urban political culture of this North-South border city provided important openings for the development of vital black civic institutions, political associations, and organizations that would protest, challenge, and eventually dismantle legal apartheid. Segregation was the tragic precondition for a flowering of black

Figure 1

Mothers and Daughters Banquet, YWCA, Phyllis Wheatley Branch

African-Americans in St. Louis assembled a rich civic culture from a pool of resources constrained by apartheid. The north-south borderland culture of St. Louis provided the ruptures and openings that made this civic life possible. Photograph taken in 1927, courtesy of the Western History Manuscript Collection.
civic life in St. Louis. But the spatial and life distortions wrought by segregation created the conditions of its own demise, as African-Americans in St. Louis drew upon their internal community resources to build the requisite political power and civic culture to defeat American apartheid in its legal form.

**Racing the Industrial City**

In the summer of 1917, Union Station bustled with the noise of a people in motion. It was the noise of Mississippi, of Arkansas, of Louisiana, of southern Missouri, the long draw of vowels that would remake the city's language, cadence, complexion and culture. It was the noise of black southern men and women, pouring at an ever-quickening rate into the city, transforming its neighborhoods, music, politics, and social life. It was the noise of jazz, of craps, of chickens in the yard, of fiery preachers, of rent parties and hard work. It was the noise of joyous reunions of families and friends. It was the noise of a city bursting at the seams.

As war raged in Europe, black migration into St. Louis reached a fevered pitch. That year, Americus Jackson stepped off the train at Union Station and reunited with her husband Henry. With three young sons in tow, Americus was relieved to be away from Columbus, Mississippi, away from sharecropping and white terror. She felt poised at the threshold of a new life in the big northern city. While his mother and father embraced, young Henry junior marveled at the immensity and bustle of the train station, and at the fine clothes and proud carriage of his father and his uncles—so different from the tatters and tired demeanor he remembered in Mississippi. As they stepped out onto Market Street, and into the chaos of the city, Henry junior could scarcely contain his awe. "Tall buildings of stone and brick," he recalls, "wide paved streets and sidewalks; streetcars charging; autos everywhere blowing horns and making screeching sounds when they stopped." Taking note of his son's amazement, Henry senior stooped down to comfort him. "This is St. Louis," his father said, "your new home."²

That same summer, East St. Louis bled. Severe competition over limited industrial jobs, a mounting strike action against feudal employers, and the use of southern black men as scab labor ignited the deadliest riot in America since the Civil War. Whites, many of whom were Eastern European immigrants and were themselves recent settlers of the area, pointed their fingers, frustrations, truncheons and guns at black laborers.³ The resulting violence, in which both blacks and whites perished, was grave enough for the NAACP to dispatch W.E.B. DuBois to East St. Louis to investigate.⁴ However elated African-American people were in their new circumstances, it was clear that the racial order of the South was extant throughout the North as well, and often just as virulent.

Yet competition for work alone could not account for the intensity of the violence against black people in East St. Louis; indeed, the many and varied European ethnic groups constantly fought one another in a labor system divided, segmented, and manipulated by factory owners and managers. Racial hatred and fear, however, ran deep through American society, crossing lines of class, ethnicity, religion, and geography.⁵ As white and black families met, mixed, and struggled over housing and jobs in the city, racial lines became simultaneously
blurred and more powerful; proximity on the streets and shop floors bred both unprecedented levels of interaction as well as deepening levels of racial hostility. Thus, as black families streamed into St. Louis in search of better prospects, they came to a city with an already complex grain of settlement and neighborhood life, entering an already fragile urban industrial world.

For black families, life in the industrial city was a double-edge sword. On the one hand, their unrelenting migration testified to the hopes and aspirations for a better life far away from the Deep South. On the other hand, as their numbers increased rapidly between the wars, the urban land mass they occupied barely grew at all. Between 1910 and 1920, while the white population increased by 12%, the black population increased by nearly 60% to 70,000 (table 1).

Hemmed into the oldest and densest neighborhoods of the city, working-class blacks faced an uphill battle against the psychic violence of segregation and the physical decline of their communities. Though black families left their imprint on the homes, streets, and political life of these neighborhoods, they did so within a landscape largely owned from a remove, and shaped by decisions over which they had little control. The central development in the settlement of the city between 1900 and 1950, then, was the process whereby race came to rival class as a key determiner of residence, work, and social life.

When the Jackson family departed Union Station for their home, they left the great public city behind and entered the “Black Archipelago”—islands of vibrant black social life surrounded by seas of white racism and hostility, cities within cities that stretched in a chain across America, from Harlem to Chicago’s South Side, and from East L.A. to St. Louis’s Mill Creek Valley. The Black Archipelago was shaped by rapid migration, acute poverty, and pervasive segregation on the one hand, and tremendous resilience and creative energy on the other. American apartheid, as it developed from the Civil War into the twentieth century, was a broad, unilateral movement against black assimilation—a rejection by whites of the notion that blacks should integrate into the white body politic. While never as extensive or rigid as its South African counterpart, apartheid nevertheless coded the life choices and daily experiences of every black person in America, securing a pervasive (though ever porous and incomplete) racial hierarchy, and establishing a racist spatial and social order on the land.6

### Table 1

Population change of St. Louis city, 1900–1960

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>% Change</th>
<th>Non-White</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>575,238</td>
<td></td>
<td>35,516</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>687,029</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>43,960</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>772,897</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>69,854</td>
<td>59%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>821,960</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>93,580</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>816,048</td>
<td>– 1%</td>
<td>108,765</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>856,796</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>154,448</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>750,026</td>
<td>–13%</td>
<td>216,022</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, various reports.
If white racial hostility against black people was a constant feature of the social life of Northern and Midwestern cities like St. Louis, the Jim Crow order was not endemic to the urban settlement landscape. Rather, it was carefully constructed by white politicians, real estate groups, neighborhood organizations, and merchant associations over the course of five decades. In the mid-nineteenth century, when the African-American population of St. Louis was small, black families were no more or less segregated than any other ethnic group, as the immigrant city organized into roughly distinct enclaves. By the middle of the twentieth century, however, over 85% of all African-Americans would have had to move from their homes to achieve an even racial balance in the city's census tracts (table 2).

Throughout the first half of the century, African-American people poured into northern and southern cities from the rural south, transforming the society and politics of urban America. St. Louis was a major stop on the Great Migration route out of the Delta, particularly Mississippi, Western Alabama, Louisiana, and Arkansas. As Katherine Corbett and Mary Seematter put it, "within the span of a single generation, the most rural segment of the American population became the most urban." Even in 1900, some 35,000 blacks made their home in St. Louis; only Baltimore had a higher proportion of black citizens. This rapid influx of African-Americans was prompted by the mechanization of Southern agriculture, the decline of the system of tenancy, the yearn for jobs in the industrialized north, and the prospects opened by the prosecution of two world wars. In St. Louis, this already intense migration stream was greatly amplified by the movement of some 4000 African-Americans into the city from Illinois following the deadly riots of 1917.

This rapid increase in the numbers of African-American families moving to St. Louis began at the same time that the legal instruments of Jim Crow coa-

Table 2
Racial Composition and segregation index for St. Louis city, 1900–1960

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>City Total</th>
<th>% White</th>
<th>% Black</th>
<th>Segregation Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>575,238</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>.413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>687,029</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>.539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>772,899</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>.606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>821,960</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>.755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>816,048</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>.739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>856,796</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>.855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>750,026</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>.859</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

W = Dissimilarity calculated by ward
T = Dissimilarity calculated by tract

lesced into juridical apartheid, yielding a system of codes governing behavior in space. In St. Louis, the consonance of this legal legitimization and the increase in black in-migration had two immediate effects. First, it amplified already existing white racist hostility, prompting fears of race mixing and “Negro invasion.” Second, it provided an opportunity for real estate agents to blockbust stable white neighborhoods through panic-selling. The pervasive racial fear amplified by increased numbers, coupled with the profit possibilities inherent in racial steerage and blockbusting, created a framework for rapid and dramatic segregation. When confirmed by the local imprimatur of the City Plan Commission and the national policies of the Federal Housing Administration, segregation became an entrenched feature of the American city.11

Over the first half of the twentieth century, the multiethnic central corridor rapidly transformed into a vast “Negro District,” a swath of land wherein more and more black families concentrated, and from which more and more white families retreated. Between 1900 and 1940, while the overall population of the city increased by one and a half times, the black population nearly tripled. By 1950, nearly one in five residents of the city was African-American (table 2). Yet while the number of black people in St. Louis quadrupled in only forty years, there was no proportionate increase in the size of their settlement. In fact, the boundaries of their residential areas remained remarkably constant, as racial apartheid deepened in America. The space of the industrial city, already racialized, became increasingly embedded within regimes of daily exclusion throughout the first half of the twentieth century. By World War II, African-Americans occupied the majority of the most dilapidated and overcrowded tenements in the neighborhoods to the west and north of downtown St. Louis.12

“That God-Forsaken City”: Constructing the Jim Crow Order

The response to large numbers of African-American migrants into the industrial city was Jim Crow, a carefully constructed white supremacist social and spatial order embedded in the politics, institutions, real estate, and daily life of the city. Lynchings, terror, spatial restriction, political oppression, and economic deprivation framed the common experience of millions of African-Americans in the first decades of the twentieth century. As a result, in cities like St. Louis, a social order emerged among black families and institutions to cope with a settlement experience grounded in segregation and overcrowding.

At the same time, the career of Jim Crow in St. Louis bore aspects peculiar to the city and its culture. As a borderland city, St. Louis was a cultural breakpoint between the North and the South, and its social and civic life blended aspects of both regions. The Creole elite that financed the city’s expansion in the first half of the nineteenth century was at root a rent-seeking ancien régime, producing wealth as slave-owning planters, mercantilists, and landlords; consequently antebellum St. Louis, like its parent city New Orleans, housed an old and settled population of freedmen as well as a large number of slaves.13 Throughout the nineteenth century, however, a substantial influx of European-born industrial workers and intellectuals provided a strong basis for trade unionism, labor insurgency, and progressive social action, especially as German refugees from the uprisings of 1848 streamed into the city.14 A strong republican tradition of

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“free labor” in St. Louis disposed many immigrant workers and their families to despise slavery as a system, and to abhor the southern (Democratic) elite that allowed it to flourish in St. Louis up through the Civil War.15  

Yet attitudes toward people of African descent were far more complicated in the daily life of the city streets. A hatred of slavery by no means translated into a desire among white working class people for an integrated neighborhood or shop floor; rather, the city seethed constantly under a blanket of racial tension, with periodic eruptions of anger, hatred, and racial violence.16 In daily affairs, St. Louis political culture comported itself with a modicum of gentility and civility, particularly within the old Dixie Democratic Party. Seething below the civility, however, was virulent racism, jostled and amplified with the ever-increasing numbers of black families on the streets.

As a result, segregation in this border city was unevenly applied. In those arenas in which segregation was either law or custom, it was applied strictly and rigidly.17 As early as 1896, black professionals registered their disgust with race restrictions in St. Louis hotels. During a Baptist convention held in the city that year, black delegates found themselves closed out of all major accommodations in the central business district. According to Harry Smith, a “colored delegate from Cleveland,” the practice beffit St. Louis’s standing as an essentially “Southern city.” The hotels, he surmised, “do not dare entertain colored men on an equality with white men,” as it would damage their standing and their business relations with their white clientele.18 African-American delegates were forced to take rooms in the dodgiest residential hotels and flophouses in the Red Light district around Union Station. Outraged, one African-American delegate from Springfield, Illinois reported that the convention should have been held in Chicago or “some other city where the Negro is treated as a human being and not a dog. St. Louis has insulted every Negro in the world, and none of our race should honor that God-forsaken city with a convention of any kind.”19

Black and white people could not marry or cohabitate, nor could they attend the same public schools. Sports and recreation facilities, playgrounds, hotels, and restaurants had long been segregated, either through internal divisions of space, or by alternating days of use, or through the provision of separate but supposedly equal facilities. Movie theaters, as Quincy Troupe recalls, humiliated their black patrons by only letting them in at certain times, and then sequestering them into special sections of the balconies.20 Downtown lunch counters were an especially galling instance of segregation; black people could purchase food and drink at the counters, but could not sit at them, no matter how empty the counters or how full the standing area for blacks. Many chose to go hungry rather than suffer the indignity of paying equal money for unequal service.

At the same time, no laws mandated the segregation of streetcars or other forms of public transportation. Roy Wilkins recalls his bewilderment when, on his first day in the city, his family boarded a streetcar to find streetcars of whites and blacks sitting wherever they chose.21 Moreover, no laws demanded separate facilities for the public library system, or separate lines for government offices or banks, or separate houses of worship.22 The Catholic church, in particular, had no official policy of segregation, and ran many services for the indigent poor without regard to race—one factor which accounts for the high proportion of black Catholics in the city. Of course, individual priests still found ways to exclude black families.
from their parishes.23 In St. Louis, as elsewhere, blacks and whites tended overwhelmingly to worship in different buildings on the weekends.24 Still, within the context of residential, religious, and labor segregation, a powerful black middle class emerged in the city, with a wide compliment of professions, including lawyers, politicians, ministers, doctors, dentists, theater and cabaret owners, morticians, entrepreneurs, and of course educators.

Much of the daily work life of the metropolis was segregated through practices that reserved the least desirable and most laborious jobs for black men and women. While no laws demanded or authorized workplace segregation, it remained a pervasive practice for much of the city's history.25 Typically, when black men did find berths in the industrial economy, it was nearly always in marginal positions, as dray wagoners, nightsoil collectors, ditch diggers, blast furnace operators, coal and rag collectors, and riverfront roustabouts. With luck and connections, black men could pass from the subsistent world of brute labor to the world of uniformed service. By the early twentieth century, nearly one of every two waiters and manservants in St. Louis was black, and black men filled many positions as porters and stewards on steamboats and passenger trains.26 Of course, few black women found work in the industrial economy prior to World War II. When they were able to secure employment, it was nearly always in domestic service or in laundering—"taking in washing"—jobs that left little room for organization, collectivity, or grievance.27

The precarious employment situation that working-class black men and women faced on a daily basis in the city made them especially vulnerable to fluctuations in the industrial economy. The Great Depression, for example, hit black families much harder and with more duration that white families. In 1930, fully 43% of blacks in St. Louis were unemployed as compared with 22% of whites; and while 16% of all St. Louisans fell onto the relief rolls in 1935, over half of all black families sought assistance. As the Depression deepened, black workers were the first to be fired from industrial and wholesale jobs, often to make way for unemployed whites needing work. When the federal government initiated minimum wage increases under the National Recovery Act, many employers either fired their black workers or demanded that they lie to federal investigators when asked if they were receiving the mandated wage; still others defrauded their black employees by demanding kickbacks of a portion of the wages in return for continued employment. It was the direct relief through the PWA, WPA, and CCC, rather than the indirect relief that relied on employer scruples, that earned the Democratic Party the loyalty of black voters. From 1932 to 1936, the federal government pumped some $50 million in project funds in the St. Louis economy—much of it going to payroll for black and white workers alike to build projects of lasting social worth (fig. 2).28

Compounding the already troubled labor position was the fact that white managers and industrialists typically recruited blacks from the South for use as strikebreakers against Northern white workers. Perceiving black workers as threats to labor peace and stability, most unions excluded them from the rank and file.29 While this often-violent racial exclusion surely weakened the strength of unions in the long term, it also performed a critical gatekeeping function against the occupational and social mobility of black families. Yet unions, like many institutions in St. Louis, applied segregation policies unevenly over time.
Around the United States, the redistributive programs of the New Deal led black voters to shift loyalty to the Democratic Party. In St. Louis, however, this transition had already been well underway for over a decade. Here, a work crew in St. Louis poses during a break from a levee construction project. Courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society.

The steelworkers and construction trades, for example, were notoriously exclusionary, while the Longshoremen had a tradition of integrated shop floors, as blacks tended to be over-represented among the riverine trades. Teamster leaders, meanwhile, tended toward a social-justice orientation, and fought both the city and their own membership for integration throughout the 1940s and 1950s. They even cooperated with the Congress on Racial Equality in organizing campaigns, sponsoring events, and preparing policy briefs on issues of racial justice.

If unions practiced a convoluted form of racial exclusion, the other chief social gatekeeper—public schools—established a less ambiguous form of apartheid. Schools in St. Louis, and in Missouri generally, sought to apply the principals of *Plessy v. Ferguson* to the letter of the law. Public school administrators in Missouri imagined that the juridical standards provided in law were both reasonable and obtainable. Indeed, between white and black schools of corresponding social class, some Boards of Education actually managed to produce a modicum of equality in facilities, at least in urban areas. However, many rural blacks in Missouri, according to a 1928 report by the Inspector of Negro Schools, were...
“marooned” in counties where there were very poor facilities, or none at all, for the education of black children. High schools for blacks in particular, outside of the cities, were virtually non-existent. Thus, black high schools in St. Louis and Kansas City were crowded with large numbers of students not only from the cities, but from the surrounding small towns and countryside as well. Moreover, as the Inspector of Negro Schools argued, black schools in the State had a much less even quality of faculty and administration than white schools, in terms of number, training, and preparation.32

Segregation was the principal axis of the problem, as funds for teachers, materials, improvements, and the construction of new facilities were tied directly to tax revenues and voting power. Though school officials might have imagined that they applied Plessy v. Ferguson to the letter, in general the result was a weak, second-tier school system for black students in the State. As a 1923 League of Women Voters press release proclaimed, “Missouri does not provide an educational highway leading from the kindergarten through the University for the feet of her Negro youth such as she provides for the feet of her white youth.”33

At the same time, segregation had the perverse effect of transforming the two black high schools of St. Louis into extraordinary institutions of secondary education—far and above most of their white counterparts—as these were the only institutions where highly educated and qualified black teachers and administrators could work. Consequently, each high school enjoyed the pick of top talent in the city in comprising the faculty. In addition, Lincoln Law School, established at Poro Beauty College as a result of a legal challenge by black civic leaders to the University of Missouri's policy of segregation, fielded an extraordinary faculty, and vetted top flight black lawyers over the course of several decades.34

For most blacks in St. Louis, however, a good education was out of reach. Nevertheless, parents, teachers, and civic groups fought a long and vociferous battle for equality in the schools. “There is to be no cessation,” declared William O. McMahon, Chairman of the Citizens Committee on Negro Education, “in the effort of the Negro citizenry to secure reforms in educational policies and practices in Negro Schools.”35 This incessant struggle for educational reforms emerged in the early twentieth century within the pretexts of “separate but equal,” pressing the State to insure that separate facilities—and education systems—were indeed equal. A 1934 statement by Pastor George Stevens of the Committee of Colored Citizens, delivered to the St. Louis Board of Education, demanded a separate but equal vocational-technical school, and separate but equal high school curricula.36 Heated protests erupted in 1937 over a proposal by the Board to build a new Negro elementary school adjacent to Vashon, the Negro high school, as construction would overcrowd the site and eradicate most of the high school's outdoor athletic space. Opponents of the plan did not object outright to the principle of separation (even though privately they despised it), but rather argued that the site choice would render both facilities unequal to comparable white schools in the city.37 As late as 1945, black parents, administrators, and civic leaders were engaged in a bitter legal challenge to open a segregated school for black students, Cote Brilliante, in the city's West End.38

Nowhere was segregation more intense—and hated by African American people in St. Louis—than in housing. While the black population was still proportionally small, residential segregation was present but not pervasive (table 2).
Quantitative research on segregation suggests that in St. Louis in 1860, blacks were distributed in such a way that only one-third would have to move in order to achieve an even racial spread throughout the city. This number was roughly equivalent to that of various white ethnic groups in the city at the same time. Even in 1890, only 10% of blacks lived in neighborhoods where they were more likely to have black neighbors than white. Black families—even homeowners—could be found in nearly every ward of the city in the early twentieth century.\(^39\)

However, as their numbers ballooned, black families faced ever greater hostility and exclusion in rental and ownership markets. By 1920, black isolation had tripled: 30% of all blacks in the city were more likely to have black neighbors than white, even though they only constituted 9% of the population. In 1930, despite the fact that many African-Americans resided in ethnically diverse working-class neighborhoods, they constituted from 50 to 100 per cent of the census tracts with the most densely packed housing.\(^40\) By 1950, St. Louis was one of the most segregated cities in the nation, slightly less than Chicago, and on par with Cleveland, Milwaukee, Atlanta, and Tampa. There was virtually no opportunity for African-Americans to move beyond those city blocks that they already inhabited, as white protectionist associations ringed the “Negro District” with racial covenants.

As African-American families poured into St. Louis, the guise of the civil and genteel city was increasingly punctuated with vicious racist attacks. Soon, white real estate and development interests began clamoring for an official segregation policy. With the passage of the city’s new charter in 1914, which contained a provision for voter initiative and referendum, advocates of residential segregation saw a prime opportunity to accomplish their goal over the objections of Progressive reformers and politicians—using the very tools handed to them by the new Progressive charter. They would let the people decide.\(^41\)

For years, the St. Louis Real Estate Exchange had preached the negative impact of black migration into the city, black residential expansion into white neighborhoods, and the supposedly deleterious effects of mixed-race districts (fig. 3).

Since the turn of the century, the Exchange had advocated—though could not compel—the application of customary segregation in real estate transactions and rental practices. Plans for the development of a Central Parkway through the city in 1915, however, added fuel to the segregationist fire, as whites feared an “invasion” of their neighborhoods by black families displaced from the Parkway corridor. A mailing sent out in February of 1915 by Wayne Wheeling, the Exchange Secretary, took an ominous tone:

> Perhaps you do not think that your neighborhood will be invaded. Neither do you believe you are going to have a fire when you pay fire insurance. While perhaps you have not been affected by this class of people coming into your neighborhood, you surely want protection against this growing danger which is more menacing than fire or the elements.

Announcing the formation of the United Welfare Association (UWA)—essentially a white supremacist advocacy arm of the Real Estate Exchange—Wheeling’s circular went on to declare that “the race question is one of vital interest to property owners.”\(^42\) In a subsequent circular entitled “The Negro
White homeowners and real estate companies foresaw social decay and economic decline with the "invasion" of black families. In 1915, they banded together to form the United Welfare Association and dedicated themselves to the fight for a segregation ordinance. Courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society.

"Question," the UWA explained that, while home buyers typically calculate interests, taxes, insurance and repairs on properties, "there is no present method by which he may determine how much the property will depreciate because of NEGRO invasion." While this posed little problem when the black population in St. Louis was small, the UWA warned that the race factor in property had reached critical importance "because in recent years this city has become the gateway for vast Negro migration from the South."43

The Parkway issue proved to be a decisive factor in mobilizing support for a segregation ordinance among real estate companies, landlords, and white ward bosses. Conceived as a Progressive slum-clearance and City Beautiful redevelopment scheme, the Parkway was the first in a long line of battles between downtown business and political interests, on the one hand, and real estate and ward interests on the other. Caught in the middle, black families and civic groups opposed both displacement by the Parkway and the racist reactions to displacement by the United Welfare Association. One St. Louis Republic article put it bluntly: "If the [Parkway] committee had carefully planned to disturb the Negro business life of the city and to handicap his church life, it could not have arranged a more perfect program to accomplish it."44 Although the Parkway initiative was ultimately defeated at the polls, it nevertheless created enough momentum to carry the movement for a segregation ordinance forward. As defined in the language of the UWA proposition, the ordinance would "prevent ill feel-
ing, conflict, and collisions between the white and Colored races in the city of St. Louis.\textsuperscript{45} The UWA argued that they had no intention of crystallizing “race prejudice into a law, or to oppress or harass the Negro, but only restrain him from injuring white persons by moving into white blocks.”\textsuperscript{46} The ordinance would do this by restricting blacks and whites from moving into a city block where 75% or more of the occupants were of the other race. To be sure, this restriction would cover a great many of the residential blocks of St. Louis.

The local branch of the NAACP fully appreciated the long-term effects of residential segregation—official or otherwise—and mobilized against the ordinance. Should the ordinance pass, one NAACP brochure declared with extraordinary prescience, “the neighborhoods in which Negroes reside in any appreciable numbers would be speedily given over to them.” Insurance rates would rise because of poor police and fire protection, which would in turn cause rents to skyrocket. Landlords would have no incentive to maintain properties, since they would enjoy a captive and dependent market. The Negro district would become congested, mortgage payments would rise, loans would either come with usurious interest rates or not at all, and black people would be “stigmatized, degraded, disgraced, and humiliated.”\textsuperscript{47} The NAACP had described with astonishing precision the political economy of ghetto formation, and played on these real fears to mobilize black civic and church groups against the ordinance. The Negro Federated Ministerial Alliance joined in condemning the measure, arguing that it was “Un-American, unconstitutional, un-Christian—an evil precedent, one of ingratitude, one that closes open doors of hope, and increases racial antipathy.”\textsuperscript{48} UWA President Felix Lawrence noted with acrimony that black organizations had managed to raise “$20,000 to fight segregation,” thus far outspending the Real Estate Exchange and its allies.\textsuperscript{49}

In the long run, the social forces mobilized for and against the segregation ordinance were of greater durability and importance than legislation itself. Indeed, while the initiative passed overwhelmingly in February 1916, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a similar ordinance in Louisville in 1917.\textsuperscript{50} The St. Louis measure, codified into law, was stillborn—rendered unenforceable (though not unconstitutional) in the courts. Despite this defeat, the forces of segregation had closed ranks around a series of organizations, bolstered by shared racial fears and commitments to property values. The vote on the ordinance reveals the deep social and political cleavages in the city, and indicates a constellation of political alignments that would erupt time and again over the next 50 years to shape urban policy and practice in St. Louis. On the one hand, black civic organizations joined Progressive politicians and reformers, most newspapers, downtown business interests, and many labor unions in opposing the segregation ordinance. They squared off at the polls against the Real Estate Exchange, white neighborhood associations, working-class and middle-class white residents of the city, the more hostile labor unions, and many of the ward organizations that represented white neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{51}

The ultimate legal defeat of the ordinance in no way translated into a defeat of segregation in St. Louis; in fact, the separation of white and black residential areas not only persisted, but intensified over the next three decades. That segregation intensified without a specific municipal writ underscores the considerable power of private groups and associations in the formation of urban policy and
in the shaping of a racialized landscape.\(^\text{52}\) This was accomplished in the main through the use of customary agreements among Real Estate Exchange agents (steerage), the rapid expansion in the use of racially restrictive covenants, and the ongoing work of hostile white neighborhood associations. The Albert Wen- zlich Real Estate company even produced a plan for a model segregated facility, complete with a 2000 seat theater, bowling alley, pool hall, shops, and efficiency apartments, all for use by black citizens on a strictly segregated basis.\(^\text{53}\)

Perhaps emboldened by the martial atmosphere of world war, white residents “mobilized” into neighborhood organizations throughout the 1920s in order to “defend” their districts against black “invasion.” In 1920, for example, the West End Protective Association circulated a flyer calling for a mass meeting at the First Presbyterian Church at Sarah Street and Washington Avenue. Citing the imminent “Colored invasion,” the circular challenged residents in ominous tones: “if you are interested in maintaining the value and desirability of your property for white residential occupation, make it your business to attend.”\(^\text{54}\)

By 1940, nearly every white neighborhood, from Carondolet to Shaw, and from Lindenwood Park to Baden, kept a vigilant stance of defense against black renters and homeowners—and against those real estate companies and landlords that saw it in their interests to rent to black families.\(^\text{55}\)

The \textit{Argus}, the major black newspaper in the city, saw the numerous neighbor-hood improvement associations for what they were—capillaries of the Real Estate Exchange, playing on the racist fears of ordinary white citizens.\(^\text{56}\) Segregation supporters went so far as to hold viewings of D.W. Griffith’s white supremacist film “Birth of Nation,” over protest by black leaders, and despite a temporary injunction brought against the film by the city’s recreation supervisor Charlotte Rumbold.\(^\text{57}\) But the Exchange and the associations did not operate alone; local government officials aided and abetted their cause not only by their silence, but also by actively supporting segregationist practices in home buying and finance.\(^\text{58}\) Along with FHA mortgage lending practices that favored single-family detached suburban homes occupied by white families, St. Louis government officials supplied real estate companies with data on racial turnover in neighborhoods and maps of racial and social indicators. These statistics, along with city housing inventories, formed the basis of the Real Estate Exchange’s Residential Security Maps, which coded social indices into a spatial outlay of loan desirability and investment streams.\(^\text{59}\)

Moreover, through the 1930s the Exchange used blue-line city planning maps, paid for through WPA funds and provided by the municipal government, to target neighborhoods for racial steerage and deed restrictions. One map in particular, drawn in 1935, shows the “Negro District” outlined in red, a large swath of land literally “redlined” and extending from the downtown slums through Mill Creek Valley and the near North side.\(^\text{60}\) With the wagons sufficiently circled by both public and private power, segregation in St. Louis deepened through the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.

**Segregation and black civic culture**

Over the course of a half-century, the black community in St. Louis was forced, by necessity, to develop an array of institutions, capacities, and networks
of interdependence in order to compensate for the vast spatial, physical, and emotional distortions of segregation. These institutions focused the struggle by black families for dignity, identity, and political power—even as racial segregation distorted the lived experience of the city. They played a critical role in black civic life in St. Louis, and ensured that, no matter how deeply racist the white community became, African-American people would continue to nurture communities of intellect and belief, and patterns of democracy and resistance. Segregation in St. Louis, then, was always the simultaneous story of oppression and resistance, accommodation and struggle. And while the ugliness and brutality of twentieth century American apartheid cannot be overemphasized, an equally remarkable story is the long-term "struggle for the city" that involved every black man, woman, and child at every moment of every day of their lives. This struggle was an attempt, ongoing and unfinished, to carve out spaces within the hostile city to preserve and promote decency, dignity, human rights, and a modicum of control over community life.61

The political mechanics of segregation, and the thousands of daily encounters and practices that enforced an apartheid city, were as invisible to white St. Louisans as they were palpable to blacks. As black families squeezed into subdivided tenements owned by absentee landlords, they placed unrelenting pressures on the physical stock of neighborhoods they neither owned nor controlled. With high rents per square foot, with higher rates of unemployment and underemployment, and with little in the way of external public or private investments in the

Figure 4
Urban League of St. Louis Staff, 1942

John Clark, pictured in the center, transformed the Urban League into the leading social institution serving working-class black families in St. Louis. Here the staff assembles for the March on Washington convention. The mural in the background is by Jessie Housley Holliman. Courtesy of the Western History Manuscript Collection.
built environment, the “Negro District” of Mill Creek Valley and DeSoto-Carr spiraled into physical decline. For most onlookers, the physical deterioration of black neighborhoods mirrored a supposed moral deterioration, a decrepitude of character—as if blacks were responsible for the slums that engulfed them. Most whites took the visual cast of the Negro District to be direct evidence of black inferiority, not of patterned spatial inequality, and saw in the slums the confirmation that black people could not cope with urban life. As Thomas Sug-rue notes for Detroit, “the completeness of racial segregation made ghettoization seem an inevitable, natural consequence of profound racial differences.”

African-Americans in St. Louis, then, faced a complicated world of close-ness and separation, a continuous encounter with white supremacy, an ongoing struggle over the terms of life in the city. Segregation imposed a powerful spatial restraint, and a bitter emotional sting. Roy Wilkins watched his father’s health and strength decline as a result of the backbreaking labor he performed in the East St. Louis brickyards. Whatever skills and intellect his father might have imported to St. Louis from Columbia, Mississippi, he arrived within a labor market already structured around a racial division of labor—a division that took a long-term toll on African-American families and bodies. At the same time, however, St. Louis was not Mississippi. “In St. Louis,” Roy Wilkins relates, “my father no longer had to bow, scrape, and say ‘how high?’ to every cracker who ordered him to jump.” Quincy Trouppe captures the ambivalence with which black families regarded their new urban environment: “I liked the old river city from the first moment I saw it. But the old torment of potential and actual conflict between us and whites had not changed much.” For Trouppe and tens of thousands of others, St. Louis was a city of contradiction, at once a place of opportunity and stagnation, pride and humiliation, pleasure and pain.

To navigate this complicated urban terrain, and to mitigate the stifling effects of segregation, black people in St. Louis carved out dense networks of civil and religious institutions, political alignments, and cultural practices. These networks served to capture black effort, ingenuity, and capital, to establish a sense of permanence on the land, and to bolster black power in urban affairs. In the process, these groups forged what Preston Smith has called a “black civic ideology” organized around “the quest for racial democracy.” This quest, and the moral principles that animated it, grew out of the evangelical tradition of exo-dus, witness, and redemption so central to black church ideology. Churches such as Pleasant Green and Third Baptist fostered the moral backbone and ministered to the spiritual needs of congregants in a hostile urban world. The churches gave birth to, and never abandoned, a commitment to racial justice and equality. At the same time, however, a number of important secular groups and institutions arose in St. Louis during the 1920s and 1930s that articulated black civic ideology to a wider public sphere.

In St. Louis, the major African-American civic organizations that emerged during the first half of the twentieth century were local branches of the Urban League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (ACWC). Though each group pursued separate agendas, the three organizations did hold the common goal of racial justice, and continuously shared membership and personnel.

Nationally and locally, the Urban League focused on issues of labor, employ-
ment, and industrial training and adjustment for black workers. The St. Louis chapter formed in 1918 in the wake of riots and massive wartime migration. By 1926, the third executive director, John T. Clark, consolidated the funding, organizational structure, and political mandate of the chapter (fig. 4). Clark had served previously as the housing secretary for the New York chapter, the field secretary for the national organization, and the executive director of the Pittsburgh Urban League. In St. Louis, Clark steered the Urban League increasingly away from employment referral to industrial action, and he emerged in the 1930s as a national leader in the black trade union movement. He positioned the Urban League as a distributor of New Deal employment, literacy, public health, and cultural programs in the black community. Under Clark’s guidance, the Urban League became the most prominent voice for working-class African-Americans in St. Louis, and one of the most active chapters in the country. The first post-World War II national Urban League conference was held in St. Louis.

The Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, meanwhile, drew together the threads of an active African-American female sphere (fig. 1). Incorporated in 1904 to protest racist rules and regulations at the St. Louis World’s Fair, the Association initially included the Harpers Married Ladies, Thimble, Wardrobe Charity, and Informal Dames clubs. Over the next four decades, the Association expanded to include fifty clubs, from small specialized groups like the Fern Leaf Needle club and Acme Art and Culture, to major organizations such as the YWCA, the Wellston Progressive Charity, and the Prudence Crandall Club. In general, the Association mobilized largely Progressive-era concerns with moral and social reform, in parallel with the whites-only League of Women Voters. The Phyllis Wheatley Branch of the YWCA, run by African-American club women in close conjunction with the Urban League, provided a range of services, including an industrial department to coordinate employment training, vocational courses, and job assistance (fig. 5).

Jim Crow unionism in the city conditioned industrial organization and action among African-American workers and professionals throughout the first half of the twentieth century. David Grant of the Colored Clerks Circle organized the first picket line for racial justice in the workplace in 1931 against Woolworth’s. Grant was born and raised in the infamous Mill Creek Valley, and had worked as a laborer, waiter, and porter before attending college at the University of Michigan. After receiving his law degree from Howard University in Washington, D.C., Grant returned to St. Louis to practice. He found the industrial condition of black workers to be so abysmal that he launched the Colored Clerks Circle in order to focus labor protest. The Circle picketed and protested many businesses over the next two decades, though much of its success came not in integrating shop floors but rather in forcing large companies such as Southwestern Bell to open branches in black neighborhoods with black employees. Grant was also a major figure in the effort to address the problem of overcrowding in St. Louis’s black public schools, initially by demanding more schools for African-American children, and eventually by calling for complete integration.

Black newspapers, meanwhile, articulated a broad civic vision to knit together the patchwork of religious affiliations, schools, clubs, businesses, labor organizations, and neighborhood groups. Early in his tenure as executive secretary of the Urban League, John T. Clark had discussed with Fisk University professor John
Maggie Cannon, Industrial Secretary of the YWCA, registers women for employment referral. Though most of the jobs were in domestic service, the Wheatley branch provided a range of educational, training, and self-help opportunities for African-American women. Courtesy of the Western History Manuscript Collection.

Davis the possibilities of a new newspaper, The St. Louis American. Davis, who began his career in the early 1920s as an Advertising Manager for the Washington Sentinel, used his position at Fisk University in Nashville to foster the development of black publications, particularly those willing to develop fixed capital investments in printing plants. He saw St. Louis, with its long experience as a center of the printing trades in the United States, as a potential hub for a new black printing and publishing network.

In early 1928, Davis asked Clark to furnish a proposal for the staffing, circulation, marketing, and funding of a newspaper. Clark regarded the reigning black newspaper of the city, The Argus, to be parochial and conservative, and he imagined that the St. Louis American would not merely report news, but would create it through investigation of topics such as "segregation, the school system, or political graft." The paper would cover a broad regional territory, selling in cities such as Paducah, Kentucky, Terre Haute and Evansville, Indiana, and Sedalia, Missouri, as well as competing with the Chicago Defender for subscriptions throughout the Southern States. The paper, of course, would not at all be separate from the churches, as congregants promised the largest base for
sales and subscription. Clark imagined that churches would compete in contests to enroll the most subscribers to his paper, winning prizes and recognition in the process. Moreover, "news of the churches," he quipped, "should be carried religiously." 76

Both newspapers and churches were crucial for nurturing the growing potency of the African-American public sphere, and its electoral manifestation in a rapidly emerging voting bloc. This voting block coalesced as an unintended consequence of an apartheid practice that concentrated black families in just a few wards. As blacks increased in number in St. Louis, they formed an ever-stronger political base, resulting in the development of a black political machine—initially within the Republican party—organized around the delivery of votes. With this machine came a newfound public voice, and a consequent shift in the political importance of black voters. Indeed, when Clark pitched his idea of a black regional newspaper, he saw political advertising as the economic mainstay of the operation, selling ads to organizations "wishing to solicit the Negro vote." 77

Just which political party would capture the African-American vote became a matter of concern very early in St. Louis. While blacks abandoned the Republican Party nationally through the 1930s, their disillusion with the GOP came sooner in St. Louis. The party of Lincoln had long served as the political base of working class immigrant groups, and it was reasonable that as blacks settled into working class districts they would be courted by Republican ward operatives and bosses. The Democrats, long the party of the creole elite, were ever associated in the minds of African Americans from the South with racial hostility, lynching, and slavery. By 1915, blacks were numerous enough to constitute a significant voting block within the Republican Party, and in 1918 the first African-American, Charles Turpin, owner of the Booker T. Washington Theater and People's Finance Company, advanced on the GOP ticket to elected office. Turpin, now a constable, joined with other prominent "race men" such as lawyers Homer G. Phillips and George Vaughan and Argus editor Joseph Mitchell to form the Citizens Liberty League, a vote-getting, race reform arm of the Republican Party. 78

The Liberty League, however, was short-lived. Beginning with the fight over the segregation ordinance in 1916, black voters became increasingly disgusted with the GOP. Perhaps incorrectly, black civic leaders had regarded the movement for residential segregation as a Democratic Party platform. The Democrats, meanwhile, were internally conflicted on segregation and other matters, as the party found its ranks split between the old Southern genteel wing and the new crop of good-government Progressive reformers that saw the GOP as the party of machine corruption. 79 For their part, Republican ward bosses, ever suspicious of Progressive reformers, rightly assumed that their white working-class constituencies favored the segregation ordinance. In order to ameliorate the powerful black voting blocs, the GOP leadership professed a weak pledge to oppose the measure. But the pledge came too little and too late, and it did not compel Republican ward heelers to oppose the measure with any degree of conviction or urgency, as it would have meant opposing the interests of their white pluralities.

While GOP leaders declared themselves "at a loss" to explain the passage of the segregation ordinance, black voters were infuriated, declaring that they had been "betrayed and double-crossed by the Republican bosses." At a Board
of Election Commission hearing, Homer Phillips and George Vaughan assailed the GOP leadership, particularly Mayor Kiel, who as a former First Ward boss could not even deliver his own district against the ordinance. Neither could "Tub" Becker of the Eighth and "Cap" Troll of the Ninth, two areas with substantial black populations. Tellingly, the only ward boss to make good on his promise to defeat the measure was Mike Kinney, a Democratic State Senator who controlled the Fifth Ward and its largely Irish and black neighborhoods.80

One of the most important turning points in St. Louis's political history came in 1923, not long after the segregation ordinance debacle. Progressives within the Democratic Party succeeded in pushing forward a massive program of public works, to be paid for by the largest Bond Issue in the city's history.81 The Bond Issue was subject to voter referendum, however, so the struggle to pass it was of direct and immediate political importance for the wards of the city. Viewing the public works as a scheme for downtown business interests, many of the Republican ward bosses promised to work for the defeat of the Bond Issue. Sensing a growing disenchantment among African-Americans with the GOP, Progressives in the Democratic Party began actively to court their vote with the promise of a great payoff—the insertion of a line item in the Bond Issue for the construction of a major black teaching hospital on the city's North side.82 This coalition of working class and middle class black voters on the one hand, and downtown elites and Progressive activists in the Democratic Party on the other, produced a powerful alliance, and prefigured broader national political shifts to come in a decade. The 1923 Bond Issue passed with overwhelming support in the city's black wards.83

By the 1932 elections, amid the stress and trauma of the Depression, the shift of black political support from the GOP to the Democrats was nearly complete in St. Louis. Black families had grown tired of the foot-dragging by the local Republican Party, and were angry at the failure of ward bosses and aldermen to scrap for a fair share of patronage jobs and relief support for black districts. In addition, while the Democrats had promised the as yet undelivered black hospital, it was clear to African American voters that its realization was frustrated by obstructionist politics within the GOP ward machine. Democrats campaigned for local offices on a promise to complete the facility—now dubbed the "Homer G. Phillips Hospital" in the wake of the tragic assassination of its namesake. Prominent black leaders such as David Grant of the Colored Clerks Circle rapidly defected from the Republican ranks, not because of any instinctive love for the Democratic party, but out of disgust with the corruption and racism of the local GOP.84

Moreover, the Democratic Party itself had changed, largely as a result of skilled African-American ward heelers that set out to transform the party from the ground up. Jordan "Pops" Chambers, more than any other leader, labored long and hard to convert the Democratic Party from a remnant of slavery into a ward-based, vote-getting urban machine to rival the old GOP. Indeed, by 1932, the Democratic Party more resembled the Republican organization than at any other time, organized as it was around jobs, patronage, and party discipline. In the 1932 election, for example, Jordan's patient work across racial lines with Democratic committeemen and committeewomen, traditionally more aloof
than their GOP counterparts, provided the critical backbone of party strength, as they disciplined the loyalists and mobilized voters to the polls.\(^8^5\)

In 1933, a coalition of Progressive whites, African-Americans, and several labor unions ended the twenty-four year reign of the Republican Party over city politics, electing Fourteenth Ward alderman and Democratic Party boss Bernard Dickmann to the mayor's office. By February of 1937, city politicians joined State and federal officials to dedicate Homer G. Phillips hospital (fig. 6).

New Deal architect and Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes joined Mayor Dickmann, Missouri Governor Lloyd Stark, and Congressman Thomas Hennings, Jr. on the dedication platform, leaving a lasting perception among black voters that the Democrats had delivered on their promise—even amid the fiscal constraints of the Great Depression. Meanwhile, with the national election of FDR, and the local election of a Democrat to run the city of St. Louis, blacks also saw increased relief support and employment through New Deal programs such as the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps.\(^8^6\) Indeed, civic groups such as the Urban League proved instrumental in shepherding New Deal resources into the black community. Under

**Figure 6**

*DEDICATION OF HOMER G. PHILLIPS HOSPITAL*

Nurses sing as part of the dedication festivities of Homer G. Phillips hospital. Though a segregated facility, black St. Louisans were nevertheless intensely proud of the hospital, and its doctors and nurses became leaders in the community. Courtesy of the Western History Manuscript Collection.
John T. Clark, the League participated in the development of programs ranging from National Youth Administration recreation efforts to Civilian Conservation Corps New Camp construction, WPA Federal Theater productions, and Federal Writer workshops. By 1936–1937, 60% of African-Americans in St. Louis voted Democrat, returning Franklin Roosevelt to office in the national elections. This electoral bloc was confirmed in 1940 when the black vote in Missouri cities proved key to the reelection of Harry S. Truman to the U.S. Senate.

The experience of black men and women in World War II was another critical turning point in black political life, and changed the tenor of action around issues of racial justice and equality. By 1945, even as the Urban League and the NAACP were arguing in the circuit court that the city had an obligation to open another segregated school, the separate but equal strategy had worn thin. During the war, black St. Louisians rallied around A. Phillip Randolph’s “March on Washington” movement, and participated fully and openly in the “Double V Campaign.” Drawing on the experience of a war against fascism and race hatred abroad, returning black GIs and their families posed one of the most critical questions in American history: why fight tyranny abroad, only to return to tyranny at home? In May of 1944, workers at a downtown lunch counter refused service to a black sailor in dress uniform, sparking a protracted struggle around integrated service in private restaurants in the city. NAACP activists such as Ruth Mattie Wheeler, Thelma McNeal, Pearl Maddox, Myrtle Walker, and Birdie Beal Anderson began a summer-long sit-in campaign at the lunch counter of the city’s largest department store: Styx, Baer, and Fuller. In short order, the movement spread to other stores, such as Famous Barr, Woolworth’s, and Scruggs-Vandervoort-Barney. Campaign handbills and petitions appealed to people’s wartime sense of patriotism, democracy, and fairness.

Black civic organizations such as the Association of Colored Women’s Clubs and the Phyllis Wheatley branch of the YWCA pressed for the formation of a municipal Interracial Committee during the war. Anxious to avoid “harrowing events such as have occurred in other cities,” like the deadly Detroit riots of 1943, the city readily agreed to the creation of the committee. Typically, however, the city envisioned a different purpose for the Interracial Committee than the various African American organizations that had pressed for it. As then-mayor Kaufmann put it, the purpose of the body would be “to establish good will between the various races in our city” through improved housing, education, and facilities. Black civic groups and labor activists, on the other hand, clearly had in mind a political agency with teeth to impose changes in public policy. For black citizens, the issue was less and less one of “improved facilities,” and instead one of equal access and protection under law.

Black activists increasingly linked “winning democracy for the Negro” at home with “winning the war for democracy” globally. In August of 1943, the March on Washington Committee organized a protest rally at the Municipal Auditorium, with the call to “Wake Up Negroes! Fight for the right to live, work, and be free!” The rally, a seminal event in the history of African-American St. Louis, featured speakers calling for an end to lynchings of blacks in and out of uniform, segregation in the U.S. military, Jim Crow practices in labor unions and war plants, and the apartheid of human blood by the American Red Cross.
disjuncture in perspectives on race relations between city elected officials, on the one hand, and black organizations and civil rights activists on the other, was evident, profound, and enduring. St. Louis city government was accomplished in the art of forming committees and producing studies, but black citizens wanted action and they wanted change.

Victory abroad, however, did not translate into victory at home. Signs of re-trenchment were in the muggy St. Louis air as soon as black GIs returned to their city. In 1946, the Ku Klux Klan surfaced in Buder Park, where one late summer night members erected a ten-foot tall burning cross, and left behind a white hood with the letters “KKK” emblazoned across the brow. City officials had recently changed Buder Park from a white playground to a black playground, to “accommodate” the influx of African-American families into the neighborhood.95 The Klan’s warning, then, was not directed at the city officials that made decisions about what children of what color played in what areas; rather, the warning was clearly directed to the large number of black families pouring into the city’s north side tenements. Of course, it was hard to establish which was more ominous for black families: the presence of the Klan (after all, there was safety in numbers), or the fact that, rather than integrate the playground to reflect the new mix of people, the city maintained segregation in the park system. The racial logic was clear: the city was willing to turn over a public facility to the exclusive use of black children, rather than integrate the facility for a multiracial neighborhood.

By 1950, then, it was evident that city officials had no intention of speeding along integration in public facilities. African Americans in St. Louis could no longer tolerate the foot-dragging approach of municipal government, businesses, and schools to the question of racial justice. Only two years earlier, the black community in St. Louis won a major victory against segregation with the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in the case of Shelly v. Kramer, which rendered racially restrictive deeds and covenants unenforceable. If the immediate decision was clear, however, the longer term impact of the Shelly v. Kramer case remained obscure to black civic leaders and activists. While real estate companies, agents, and developers could no longer apply race to property deed restrictions in home sales, gentlemen’s agreements remained strong, and in fact constituted the primary basis of customary metropolitan segregation. The case only opened the door for change, but did not by itself compel change; this would have to come from a full-fledged fair housing movement in the 1960s.96

Frustrated by the pace of desegregation in the city, the NAACP stepped up legal challenges, while the Association of Colored Women’s Clubs put pressure on white reform organizations like the League of Women Voters to solidify their support for immediate dismantling of Jim Crow.97 An incident at Fairgrounds Park in 1949, and its subsequent debates through 1950, best illustrates the exhaustion of old avenues of political redress and the consolidation of a new language of desegregation in the black community.

On the morning of July 19, 1949, escorted by NAACP officer John Wheeler and Rev. Patrick Malloy of the Catholic Interracial Conference, three black teens braved a crowd of 150 jeering white youth to join a handful of whites in a swim at Fairgrounds Pool. In the melee, police arrested four whites and called in some 100 reserve officers to maintain order in the neighborhood. Meanwhile, wilding white youths combed the area terrorizing any black people they encoun-
tered with racial slurs and threats.\textsuperscript{98} Though no physical injuries were reported by the press in the Fairgrounds event, a subsequent investigation turned up numerous incidents of violence, including attacks on black youth by whites armed with knives, baseball bats, and lead pipes.\textsuperscript{99}

In typical St. Louis fashion, the first reaction of the city government after restoring order was to form another committee. Acknowledging the impotence of the now seven year old Committee on Interracial Affairs, recently elected Mayor Joseph Darst established a Council on Human relations to study not only the Fairgrounds Park riots, but to formulate policy recommendations for race relations in the city.\textsuperscript{100} But as black newspapers were quick to point out, the Council included only four black members out of fifteen. In addition, the city culled the organized labor representative from the notoriously racist building trades, rather than from the racially Progressive Teamsters. The \textit{St. Louis American} noted that Charles “Art” Schmidt, business representative for the Bricklayers—Stone and Marble Masons Union, Local #1, AFL, had a reputation for blocking all efforts by blacks to obtain work in construction. The Bricklayer’s Union, as the \textit{St. Louis American} put it, was a “Jim Crow organization.”\textsuperscript{101}

In the end, a city that maintained such an ambivalent record on race relations and segregation historically could not help but create an equally ambivalent Council to formulate policy on the matter. In a move that galled black desegregation activists, the Council recommended in an 8–6 vote to continue the city’s Jim Crow policies in most of the city’s recreational facilities, pending proper education and outreach activity to prepare the city for race-mixing.\textsuperscript{102} Not surprisingly, every black member of the Council voted against the policy statement.\textsuperscript{103} Following Council recommendations, Mayor Darst ordered two city pools to open doors to African-Americans on a gradual, experimental basis. But a vocal minority on the city’s Council on Human Relations, along with the NAACP, objected to the gradual approach, and sought a court order for immediate integration of public pools in St. Louis.\textsuperscript{104} Though the city fought the subsequent court ruling, arguing that immediate mixing of the races would result in disaster, U.S. District Judge Rubey Hulen nevertheless ordered city-operated swimming pools to be desegregated immediately. To ameliorate profound white fears of sexual mixing of the races, Mayor Joseph Darst declared that, while the pools would be open to blacks and whites, men and women would henceforth swim on alternating days.\textsuperscript{105} The City Council of nearby Webster Groves, by contrast, ordered its public pools closed altogether rather than admitting African-Americans.\textsuperscript{106}

The riotous reaction at Fairgrounds Park, and the evident potential for violence in the white community, ruffled the exterior of civility in the old river city. Indeed, St. Louis political leaders, as in other border cities, prided themselves on the supposed harmony and order of their city. That seething race hatred lay close to the surface, evidenced at Fairgrounds Park, was not necessarily unknown to race-Liberal reformers, but they had long postured an immunity from such eruptions by dint of the city’s supposedly calm and deliberative race politics. The tenuous Liberal coalition that had developed within the Democratic Party in the 1930s around issues of jobs and public works, a coalition that brought together Progressive planners and politicians, reform advocates, certain labor unions, and black political bosses and civic organizations, would accomplish enormous tasks in the postwar era—but at a price. The coalition held together only insofar as
the issue of race lay dormant, and as black voters accepted the well-intentioned payoffs from politicians in return for their support and quiescence. In the end, of course, the discourse of civility, engaged by white and black reformers alike, played a key role in obscuring white race hatred and black working class anger. This mixture of coalition-building and payoff on the one hand, and racialized hostility and animosity on the other, would give way in the following decades to a full-fledged Civil Rights movement dedicated to the eradication of white supremacy and segregation.

Conclusion

By 1950, when the population of St. Louis reached its greatest peak, residential segregation had established deep roots in the city's neighborhoods. Moreover, while the city of 1950 was under the control of a race-Liberal administration, the daily experience of the streets, parks, pools, and schools was still governed by profound white fears of race-mixing. Yet as segregation intensified, so did black political power, formed in the very institutions that exemplified the racist ideology built in to twentieth century urbanism. Segregated hospitals, schools, churches, and civic organizations nurtured a talented generation of youth dedicated to the principles of equality, and equipped with the tools to dismantle Jim Crow. The practice of racial segregation in housing created a territory of apartheid that, however egregious, constituted an important political base for black politicians. As African-Americans poured into St. Louis, the central city and north side wards they inhabited routinely returned black aldermen to the city legislature. And in 1947, for the first time in history, three State congressional districts in St. Louis sent black representatives to Jefferson City.

As members of the white power structure of the city sought their way through an ambivalent history of race relations and Jim Crow public policies, grappling with their own sense of moral confusion, African Americans struggled to sharpen the language of citizenship, resistance, and change. This language yielded a clear intellectual and political shift in the black community away from demands made within the framework of Plessy v. Ferguson, to an all-out attack on the very notion of segregation. This shift manifested itself in struggles to eradicate Jim Crow from all public facilities, from housing and real estate, and from institutions such as trade unions, schools, churches, clubs, fraternal orders, and civic groups. Insurgent within the American form of apartheid, then, were the very tools needed to dismantle racial injustice.

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ENDNOTES
Support for this paper was provided by a Residency Fellowship from the Missouri Historical Society, the John H. Edwards fellowship from Indiana University, and a Research
Grant from the Graduate School at Saint Louis University. Katherine Corbett, former Director of Interpretation for the MHS, provided invaluable insight and advice, as did Jacqueline Dace, Leslie Brown, John Farley, and George Lipsitz. Graduate students Rob Wilson, Aaron Wilcher, and Jody Sowell provided assistance with the production of tables and images. Finally, the anonymous reviewers helped to strengthen the central argument and to probe for greater clarity.


7. For data on segregation before 1900, see Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the American Underclass (Cambridge, MA, 1993), Table 2.1, p. 21, Table 2.3, p. 47.

8. The best work on the Great Migration, its causes, and its social and cultural impact includes Daniel Johnson and Rex Campbell, Black Migration in America: A Social Demographic History (Durham, NC, 1981); Carole Marks, Farewell We’re Good and Gone: The Great Black Migration (Bloomington, IN, 1989); Nicholas Lehman, The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America (New York, 1991); Joe William Trotter, The Great Black Migration in Historical Perspective (Bloomington, IN, 1991).


15. Lou Gerteis, Civil War St. Louis (Lawrence, 2001) 73–74.


17. David Carpenter and Stuart Queen, St. Louis: The Social Life of a Modern Metropolis (St. Louis, 1954) 44–45.


23. See, for example, “Priest denounces Negroes moving into his parish,” 28 April 1918, Post-Dispatch.

24. Carpenter and Queen, 45.


27. See William August Crossland, Industrial conditions among Negroes in St. Louis (St. Louis, 1914); Corbett and Seematter.

view of the impact of the Great Depression on African-Americans in cities comes from
Christopher Wye's revisionist study, "The New Deal and the Negro Community: Toward

29. Edna Taborn, "Social Stratification among Negroes in St. Louis" (MSW Thesis,
Washington University, 1937), 14.

30. Lon W. Smith, "An Experiment in Trade Union Democracy: Harold Gibbons and
the Formation of Teamsters Local 688, 1937–1957" (M.A. Thesis, Illinois State Uni-
erity, 1993).

31. See, for example, *Planning for an Integrated School System: A Community Action Bul-
letin*, prepared and presented by the Committee on Democratic Rights of Members,
Warehouse and Distribution Workers Union Local 688, International Brotherhood of
Teamsters, St. Louis, Missouri, 15 December 1951, file 736, League of Women Voter
Records, Western History Manuscript Collection 530 (hereafter referred to as LWV
Records, WHMC 530). Area teamsters interpreted their mission to safeguard the "demo-
ocratic rights of members" to include blacks and whites alike. The above community ac-
tion bulletin was prepared in conjunction with the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE).

32. N.B. Young, "Report on the Negro Schools of Missouri," 15 June 1928, file 727,
LWV Records, WHMC 530.

33. "What is Missouri doing in an educational way for her Negro children?" press release,

34. JoAnn Adams Smith, "Selected Neighborhoods of North Saint Louis and Selected
Related Events," pamphlet, Friends of Vaughan Cultural Center, 1988, MHS Collections
(St. Louis, 1994), 60, 81.

35. Letter from William O. McMahon to Mrs. Fannie S. Cook, 29 August 1928, file
727, LWV Records, WHMC 530.

36. Statement to the St. Louis Board of Education by the Committee of Colored Cit-
izens, 10 April 1934, file 727, LWV Records, WHMC 530.

37. Mark D. Eagleton, "The Case Against the Negro School Site," *Post-Dispatch*, 10
May 1937; "Protests on Vashon School Site Renewed at Committee Hearing," 10 May
1937, *Post-Dispatch*.

38. Carpenter and Queen, 155; "Cote Brillante School to Open," 10 September 1945,
*Globe-Democrat*.

39. Indexes of isolation and dissimilarity come from Massey and Denton, 19–59. The
index of isolation uses ward data from the U.S. census to calculate the number of blacks
that were more likely to have a black neighbor than a white neighbor. The index of
dissimilarity measures the number of blacks that would have to move to distribute their
population evenly through the city. A score of 30 or below is considered low, 30 to 60
moderate, and above 60 high.

40. Compare tract-level tabulations of 21C, 25B, and 26A with city levels overall in
Table 2 of St. Louis Community Council, 1930 *Federal Census*. For block group data on
settlement densities, see the map for Civil Works Administration project number 22, February 1934, reproduced as exhibit 7 in the city's slum clearance application.


42. United Welfare Association, mailing circular, 5 February 1915, Race Collection, MHS.


44. Quoted in Schmidt, 126–127.

45. Initiative petition for control of mixed blocks occupied by both white and Colored persons, original blank signature form, n.d. (c. 1915), Race Collection, MHS.


47. NAACP, “Segregation and its evils must be defeated,” pamphlet, n.d. (c. 1915), Segregation Scrapbook, MHS.

48. “Declaration and an appeal of the Negro Federated Ministerial Alliance of St. Louis upon the subject of segregation,” pamphlet, February 1916, Segregation Scrapbook, MHS.

49. Letter from Felix Lawrence to Charles Pettus, 10 February 1916, Race Collection, MHS.

50. “Louisville Negro segregation law declared invalid,” 5 November 1917, Post-Dispatch; “Decision kills St. Louis Negro segregation,” 6 November 1917, Post-Dispatch. As soon as the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its verdict in the Louisville case, St. Louis federal judge David Dyer ruled the St. Louis case unenforceable—not unconstitutional.

51. Schmidt, 122–126.


54. West End Protective Association, meeting circular, 19 February 1920, Segregation Scrapbook, MHS.

55. See “Lots white men buy doubled in price to Negroes,” 24 January 1917, Post-Dispatch. Racial tensions in the city inevitably fueled property speculation, and provided a mechanism for the rapid transition of blocks from white homeownership to black rentals—a process known as “blockbusting.”


60. The redlined WPA map of St. Louis is currently hanging in the permanent Twentieth Century exhibit at the Missouri Historical Society museum in Forest Park.


64. Roy Wilkins in Early, 66–67.

65. Quincy Trouppe in Early, 109.

66. Preston Smith, “The Quest for Racial Democracy: Black Civic Ideology and Housing Interests in Postwar Chicago,” *Journal of Urban History* 26, 2 (January 2000): 131–157. Smith argues that during the 1930s, black labor leaders and rank-and-file unionists forged a civic discourse around ideas of socio-economic equality. However, he contends that during the postwar era, black intellectuals shifted civic discourse to powerful ideas of racial equality that, in many ways, eclipsed the more dangerous political implications of economic egalitarianism, and paved the way for broader acceptance of racial justice claims within the republican polity.


68. I am aware, of course, that the civil-religious divide is neither uniform nor complete, particularly in evangelical faith communities, and that the traffic between pulpit and club office is substantial. In the African-American community in St. Louis and elsewhere, the civil and religious spheres were mutually constitutive and reinforcing, and cannot be fully understood apart.


70. See correspondence related to black participation in the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration, Series 1, Box 6, ULSL, WUSC. Also see Annual Meeting Reports, 1938–1942, 1944–1945, 1948, 1957, 1960, file 1, Urban League Papers, WHMC 93.

71. For details on the national meeting of the Urban League in St. Louis, see relevant folders in Series 1, Box 4 of the ULSC, WUSC.


73. Folder 64, Field contacts, Colored Clerks' Circle, 1937–1938, Series Four, Box 6, ULSL, WUSC.

74. Letter from John Davis to John T. Clark, 13 February 1928, Proposed Negro Newspaper File, Series One, Box 18, ULSL, WUSC.

75. Letter from John Davis to John T. Clark, 20 February 1928, Proposed Negro Newspaper File, Series One, Box 18, ULSL, WUSC.

76. John T. Clark, "Proposal for a Colored Weekly Newspaper in St. Louis," n.d. (c. 1928), Proposed Negro Newspaper File, Series One, Box 18, ULSL, WUSC.

77. Clark, "Proposal," Proposed Negro Newspaper File, Series One, Box 18, ULSL, WUSC.


79. On the dramatic rise of Progressive activists within the Democratic Party, see Schmidt, chapter two.


84. See Grant's personal papers and correspondence, folders 1 and 4, David Grant Papers, WHMC 552.


87. See correspondence and records in the files on Civilian Conservation Corps, National Youth Administration, and Works Progress Administration, among others, in Series One, Box 6, USL, WUSC.

88. Corbett, 85; Smith; Schmidt, chapter five.


92. Letter from Mrs. Ralph Thayer to Mayor A.P. Kaufmann, 4 August 1943, file 704, LWV Records, WHMC 530.
93. Letter from Mayor Kaufmann to Mrs. George Gelhorn, 30 August 1943, file 704, LWV Records, WHMC 530.

94. See rally poster reproduced in Burnett, 41.


97. See letters in file 736, LWV Records, WHMC 530 and in Housing—Racial Integration in Public Housing File, Series One, Box 24, Raymond Tucker Papers, WUSC.


101. “New member of mayor's council has vile record of job bias,” 2 February 1950, St. Louis American.


103. Idid, for vote tally; compare with the mayor's list of Council members, with “colored” members clearly indicated, in a letter from Mayor Darst to Mrs. Claude Carr, 31 January 1950, file 704, LWV Records, WHMC 530.


106. “Webster to keep pool closed rather than admit negroes,” 8 February 1951, St. Louis Start-Times.
