

RACE AND REAL ESTATE:
INTERRACIAL CONFLICT AND COEXISTENCE IN HARLEM, 1890-1920

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

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By

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From 1890 to 1920, the northern Manhattan community of Harlem changed from a village dominated by white middle class merchants and professionals, with a small settlement of black residents, to a densely built urban community that was called the Black Capital of America. Although the dramatic change in Harlem is often described as one of “invasion” by black newcomers and “resistance” by white Harlem residents, details of the real estate transactions of the period indicate a more complex reality which challenges some elements of the “ghetto formation” model used by many historians to describe similar changes taking place in many northern cities in the first decades of the 1900s. Blacks were intent on forming a permanent, thriving black community in Harlem and therefore they sought to own residential, religious, and commercial property in Harlem. Many whites did resist blacks’ movement into Harlem, but others facilitated this movement by assisting them to finance purchases of properties. White residents and investors in Harlem were a diverse group whose actions regarding race were influenced by length of residency, social class, ethnicity, and personal world views. Most other northern cities experienced variations of the changes experienced in New York City. On both sides of the color line class, ethnicity, politics, and economics dictated a range of strategies to either facilitate or forestall racial change in Harlem. The ownership and occupancy of real estate, long the symbol of citizenship in the United States, was a critical element in implementing and understanding these strategies.

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Introduction

The growth of Harlem within the past four or five years has been as if by magic. Blocks and blocks, flats and flats have been built, and the cry continues, "Give us some more."¹

Harlem Local Reporter, March 1, 1890

In the spring of 1891 Henry C.F. Koch closed his dry goods store, H.C.F. Koch & Company on Sixth Avenue and Twentieth Street in Manhattan's Fashion Row, and opened a new, "Magnificent Fire-Proof Building" on 125th Street between Lenox and Seventh Avenues in the Upper Manhattan community of Harlem. With the move, Koch cast his lot on the future of Harlem as the next up-and-coming area in New York City. He had established his business in 1859 on Carmine and Bleeker Streets in the Greenwich Village area of Lower Manhattan, and became adept at anticipating the trends in Manhattan development. In 1875 he moved the store to its Sixth Avenue location following the northward movement of trade in the city. With each move H.C.F. Koch & Co. had settled into a bigger building. The Harlem location contained over two acres of floor space on four floors. Koch was confident that he could entice into his store the upper middle class white residents of the newly constructed brownstones lining many Harlem blocks. There they would find "the finest and most varied stock ever exhibited in New York above 23rd Street." His vision was accurate. Two years after the move to Harlem, in the middle of the 1893 national depression, H.C. F. Koch & Co. announced that due to overwhelming demand it would add a two story extension to its Harlem store.² Henry Koch noted that the extension

... was part of the original plan of the building, but we did not anticipate such an early necessity of carrying out the plan. It is, of course very gratifying to us that

¹ "Harlem Real Estate," *Harlem Local Reporter*, March 1, 1890, 2

² Elliot Willensky and Norval White, *AIA Guide to New York City* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, Third Edition, 1988), 187; "Erduin Koch, 56, Merchant and Horseman, Dies," *New York Herald Tribune*, December 4, 1928, 25; "Koch & Co." Display Advertisement, *Harlem Local Reporter*, March 7, 1891; "Ready for the Opening," *Harlem Local Reporter*, March 21, 1891, 1; "H.C.F. Koch & Co.," Display Ad, *Harlem Local Reporter*, March 28, 1891, 5;

our business is increasing in all directions and justifies our policy of offering the best line of goods at down town prices.”³

The surge of investment activity in Harlem in the last decade of the nineteenth century transformed the Upper Manhattan community. With the construction of apartment buildings and townhouses, as well as the establishment of businesses such as Koch’s, Harlem changed from “Goatville,” the sleepy village that did not become part of New York City until 1873, into an urban community that attracted middle- and upper-middle class white New Yorkers as residents. Harlem’s businesses were beginning to compete with downtown enterprises.

Although turn of the twentieth century newspapers often characterized Harlem residents as well-to-do, the laboring class and the poor-- black and white-- also lived in Harlem in the 1890s. The area east of Fifth Avenue and south of 125th Street was developed in the mid-nineteenth century by Jews from Manhattan’s Lower East Side and by Italian immigrants. By the 1890s, in addition to the gracious apartment buildings and townhouses, west of Fifth Avenue rows of tenement apartment buildings had also been built on some Harlem blocks.⁴

While Harlem was developing, further south in midtown Manhattan, the growing African American population ran up against the physical limits of its enclaves in the city. After the Civil War, increasing numbers of blacks living in the South and the Caribbean fled oppressive social conditions and sought opportunities in northern cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit. New York, one of the key ports along the East Coast, became a destination for many. After 1900, as the existing black enclaves in Manhattan’s midtown area became increasingly overcrowded, the northern Manhattan community of Harlem became an attractive and accessible destination for some black New Yorkers. Harlem’s previously small black community grew. Many African

³ “Business is Good,” *Harlem Local Reporter*, June 21, 1893, 1; census of 1900, New York City, Enumeration District 863, Sheet 19

⁴ Jeffrey Gurock, *When Harlem Was Jewish* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); “Harlem Real Estate,” *Harlem Local Reporter*, March 1, 1890, 2; “Harlem Gossip,” *Harlem Local Reporter*, March 1, 1890, 4;

Americans would find homes in Harlem, but the process was contentious. The movement of larger numbers of blacks to Harlem threatened white control of the community that many Harlem residents assumed would continue into the future. The contentious process of the community's transformation revealed the state of race relations in New York City at the turn of the century.⁵

This study examines real estate transactions to analyze the range of responses by white Harlem residents to the increased black population in Harlem between 1890 and 1920. It also uses this lens to examine the tactics used by blacks, to counter attempts to oust them from rental properties that they already occupied in Harlem, and later to attract other blacks to live in the community. The strategies used by blacks and whites to retain or acquire real estate in Harlem during this period reveal a range of perspectives on interracial relations. While many whites were hostile to blacks moving to Harlem, not all were. While some blacks promoted what would later be called residential integration, others took actions that helped to establish a racially uniform community in Harlem. These diverse responses were not unique to Harlem, but were also common in other northern cities at the time.

Only a few people on either side of the color line believed that these groups might live as neighbors. For many blacks and whites, the neighborhoods of Harlem would be either all black or all white. With this zero sum vision, the only response that most whites considered to the possibility of a black "invasion" was resistance. Whites in some cities, such as Chicago and Detroit successfully defended their communities against black entrants and therefore did not experience the dramatic racial change that was experienced in Harlem before 1920. When resistance failed in Harlem, whites' own fears of the black presence created the self-fulfilling prophecy of dramatic declines in property values and substantial white exit from the community.

⁵ Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 22-23; *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910, Bulletin, Population: New York*, 3, 43-45

Black visions of a racially uniform community helped this process along. As blacks gained control of white-occupied apartments, they evicted the white tenants and “opened” the buildings to anxious black tenants.

During the 1960s and 1970s many studies on black urban life focused on the period from the late nineteenth century through the Great Depression. Written at a time when the nation’s cities were reeling from black discontent, the studies attempted to explain the historical roots of the frustration and violence that appeared on the nightly news. The 1960s studies focused on “ghetto formation,” the ways that interracial conflict, and racial restrictions in housing, employment, and education, led to spatial confinement of African Americans, and the economic restrictions that sowed the seeds for the problems being experienced in these communities in the 1960s. Books such as *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920*, and *Harlem the Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York 1890-1930*, written in the 1960s followed this pattern.⁶

Gilbert Osofsky’s *Harlem the Making of a Ghetto* (1966) is the most extensive study of racial transition in Harlem. The book provided details on the transition period of Harlem from a predominantly white community to one with a large black presence, with particular emphasis on interracial conflicts and the community problems of the period after 1920, in order to explain how the community became what the author described as an “enduring ghetto” with a high concentration of blacks, and a wide range of social problems. Osofsky described the resistance efforts of white Harlem homeowners as well as the activities of black real estate companies and churches in establishing a black residential and institutional presence in the area.⁷ Another work from the same period, *Negro Mecca: A History of the Negro in New York City, 1865-1920* by

⁶ Seth Scheiner, *Negro Mecca: A History of the Negro in New York City, 1865-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 1965); Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, Negro New York, 1890-1930*, Second Edition (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996, 1966); Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967)

⁷ Osofsky, 92-104

Seth M. Scheiner (1965), focused on the history of blacks in many neighborhoods of New York City-- a “city of refuge” for blacks from the South-- specifically the adjustments made by African Americans in labor, politics and other areas as the city’s black population increased.⁸

The literature of the 1970s took a different turn. Kenneth Kusmer’s *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* published in 1976, did not ignore the “ghetto formation” construct, but highlighted elements of black community formation-- institutional life, economic relations, and class status-- as well as interracial ties during a period when barriers defined by color became institutionalized in Cleveland.⁹

More recent books have looked at the growth of black communities from a variety of perspectives, for the most part discarding the ghetto construct as a focal point of analysis. Joe Trotter’s *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45* (1985) focused on the proletarianization of African American workers who moved from farms to the city. Trotter examined the lives of the mass of migrants who were workers.¹⁰ Other works have stressed the diversity of the black population. A recent study, *Before Harlem: The Black Experience in New York City Before World War I*, (2006) by Marcy Sacks, as its title notes, considered the composition of New York’s black communities and the challenges faced by black New Yorkers in scattered Manhattan settlements before Harlem became the center of black life in Manhattan. Sacks explored the many barriers faced by native born, southern migrant, and Caribbean immigrant black New Yorkers, ranging from obtaining employment sufficient to sustain them, searching for adequate housing, demanding appropriate police protection, as well as finding

⁸ Scheiner, 12

⁹ Kusmer; David M. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973);

¹⁰ Joe William Trotter, Jr. *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985)

sufficient time to properly raise their children.¹¹ Another New York study, Irma Watkins Owens' *Blood Relations: The Caribbean Presence in Harlem, 1900-1930* (1996) focused primarily on the period after 1920 when blacks were already a strong presence in Harlem, particularly focusing on "black ethnic heterogeneity" and the influence of Afro-Caribbeans in Harlem. In *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (2002) Wendell Pritchett considered the complexities of interracial and inter-religious relations on individuals and institutions in this Brooklyn neighborhood that was predominantly white in 1940 and in the succeeding years became a community of black, Latino and white residents.¹² Whether using the lenses of class, labor, ethnicity, religion, or community institutions, these studies provided a range of ways of looking at racial and ethnic transitions in early twentieth century urban communities.

Other histories of black New York City used other perspectives to analyze urban life. Published in 1981 and 1982 respectively, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* by David Levering Lewis, and *This Was Harlem: A Cultural Portrait* by Jervis Anderson focused on the 1920s and the Harlem Renaissance. The central story of both of these studies was the cultural development of the 1920s. *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City* (2001) by Craig Wilder used the perspective of black men's participation in voluntary associations to explore the workings of the black community in New York from 1644 to 1960. He argued that the communitarian responses by these organizations to oppression in the United States was a legacy of West African traditions.¹³

¹¹ Marcy S. Sacks, *Before Harlem: The Black Experience in New York City Before World War I* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006)

¹² Irma Watkins Owens, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 1, 39-53; Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002)

¹³ David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Random House, 1981); Jervis Anderson, *This Was Harlem: A Cultural Portrait 1900-1950* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982);

This study uses the lens of real estate to examine the internal workings of the black and white populations in Harlem from 1890 to 1920. It addresses some of the complexities of interracial relations that few studies of urban life at the turn of the twentieth century have highlighted. Many of the urban histories describing the period of increased black residency in northern cities focused primarily on interracial tensions and the white defenders of racially segregated areas. It is important to understand that in Harlem neither blacks nor whites were monolithic groups and that their varied responses to the racial transitions they experienced in Harlem reflected the diversities associated with class and ethnicity within and between these groups. Documents associated with real estate transactions reveal the actions white defenders took to maintain a racially segregated community in Harlem. But other real estate documents reveal whites who attempted to co-exist with African Americans. The white community in Harlem in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was more diverse than historians have made it out to be. A shortcoming of the 1960s studies seeking the historical roots of the black ghetto is the assumption that the white community was uniformly hostile to blacks in Harlem and in other cities. The language of white supremacy often recounted in studies of the period implied a uniform white perspective independent of class, ethnicity and religion. This uniformity did not exist in Harlem.

While the white community was dominated by its middle and upper middle class residents who lived in the brownstones that lined Harlem's streets, there were white working class residents who lived in tenement apartment buildings on other Harlem streets and avenues. Across these classes there was substantial ethnic diversity. Native born residents shared the community with first and second generation whites from Germany, Sweden, England and other

Craig Wilder, *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 2001)

European countries. Religious affiliations of these white residents ranged from Protestants such as Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists and Baptists, to Catholics and Jews. Each of these groups established places of worship that also served to solidify the presence of their respective communities in Harlem. This diversity of Harlem whites contributed to their differing perspectives on interracial relations. While some cities, such as Chicago, had clearly dominant white voices, such uniformity did not exist in other cities experiencing racial transitions. If they looked for other voices, historians might discover more varied interpretations of white responses to the black presence in other cities as well.¹⁴

The focus on interracial conflicts in areas to which blacks were moving, while significant in some cities, also obscured the diversity of the black population and the organized efforts by blacks to establish thriving communities in their new places of residence. The blacks moving to Harlem after 1900 were a diverse group. Those who led the influx of entrants to Harlem after 1900 were middle class blacks who paid a premium to live there. The blacks who were principals in the transition in Harlem were a new generation of the black middle class. Philip Payton, the founder of the Afro American Realty Company, one of the leaders in the movement, was twenty-seven years old when he created the company in 1903. A native of Massachusetts, his father was a barber, and his mother operated a millinery business. John Nail began his real estate career working for Payton, but eventually created his own company with partner Henry Parker. Nail was also the son of an entrepreneur. His father had operated a hotel and liquor distributorship in the Tenderloin section of Manhattan, in addition to becoming active in Democratic politics. The younger Nail became the real estate broker for St. Philip's Episcopal Church, a black middle class congregation whose 1911 move from midtown to Harlem led to the building of a new

¹⁴ Sugrue, 22; Twelfth Census of the U.S., Schedule No. 1 Population, Manhattan, Enumeration Districts, 614, 616, 878, 875, 876; Thirteenth Census of the U.S.: 1910- Population, Enumeration Districts 532, 533 (Washington, D.C.: Department of Commerce and Labor Bureau of the Census, 1900, 1910);

church and the purchase of a row of apartment buildings that further anchored blacks in Harlem. Undertaker James C. Thomas was the elder of the group. A native of Texas he had moved to New York in the 1880s and in 1897 established a funeral home in the Tenderloin that had become very successful by the time he began investing in Harlem property in 1903. This group and other lesser known people led the black “invasion” of Harlem with some assistance from accommodating whites. The middle class blacks joined a small community of working class blacks who by the late nineteenth century had established a small Harlem settlement. As blacks established a more visible presence in Harlem, other lower income blacks followed, often needing to double up in apartments to meet the premium rents.¹⁵

In addition to class, the new black residents of Harlem were ethnically and culturally diverse. They were a mix of native-born New Yorkers, moving from other parts of the city, as well as blacks moving from the South and various parts of the Caribbean. Black New Yorkers moved to Harlem from other parts of Manhattan and brought their religious institutions with them, ranging from Episcopalians to Methodists and African Methodists to Baptists. Blacks who came from outside of New York infused some of these established congregations with new energy, but they also founded new churches as well. Blacks who moved to Harlem shared a common desire for adequate housing in an environment free from threats of violence and intimidation, factors that had motivated southerners to move, but had also influenced some New Yorkers as well in the aftermath of a 1900 race riot in midtown Manhattan.¹⁶

¹⁵ Booker T. Washington, *The Negro in Business* (Wichita, KS: DeVore and Sons, Inc., 1907), 152-154; “New York Loses Pioneer Undertaker, James Thomas, *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)*, June 3, 1922, 8; “John E. Nail,” *Dictionary of Negro Biography*, Rayford W. Logan, Michael R. Winston, editors, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), 469-470

¹⁶ David Dunlap, *From Abyssinian to Zion: A Guide to Manhattan’s Houses of Worship*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Twelfth Census of the U.S., Schedule No. 1 Population, Manhattan, Enumeration Districts, 614, 616, 878, 875, 876; Thirteenth Census of the U.S.: 1910- Population, Enumeration Districts 532, 533

In moving to Harlem black residents began to establish a community in which they owned property and also could elect some of their own to public office. With population concentrations that for the first time made them more than an afterthought in political calculations, black residents of Harlem believed that black elected officials would be better able to convey their views on the management of the community and ensure that they benefited from patronage. This study includes an analysis of these efforts in Harlem.

The arrival of large numbers of blacks to Harlem after 1900, raised the expectations of the new black residents, but also generated a range of responses from long-time white residents. For the first time, white Harlemites articulated residential segregation as a desired goal. Before coming to Harlem in relatively large numbers, New York City's black population had been so small and dispersed that it had not warranted concern from white residents either in Harlem or in other parts of New York City where black enclaves existed. But with increasing numbers of black migrants to New York City, by the 1910s white neighborhood improvement associations began to promote a new goal of residential segregation. Some promoted the use of restrictive covenants in deeds to enforce prohibitions against selling properties to blacks. The covenants were ambitious, collective undertakings. Although the restrictions were placed in the deeds of individual properties, the agreements typically required the consent of the majority of property owners on a block. This required a substantial organizing effort that was primarily undertaken by the Harlem Property Owners Association under the leadership of a retired police officer, John G. Taylor. While developing the agreements required a collective effort, adhering to the commitment not to sell or rent to blacks required an even greater effort of community pressure. Each signer made a commitment not to sell or rent their property to blacks for a given period of time (after which it was assumed that the instability in the real estate market caused by the entry

of blacks in Harlem neighborhoods would have subsided). An owner who broke the agreement could be sued. With the hardening of segregation traditions in New York City after 1900, the increasing numbers of blacks coming to New York had few other residential areas that were available to them and therefore they continued to seek housing in Harlem. As white tenants began to leave Harlem in advance of the black tide, many covenant signers were left with the choice of adhering to the covenant and having empty buildings, or breaking their commitments and renting to blacks at premium rents. Many whites chose economics over racial solidarity and the movement of blacks into Harlem continued.¹⁷

Discussions of the history of deed restrictions usually focus on the city of Chicago where in the 1920s covenants were widely used to stop the flood of blacks into previously all-white neighborhoods. The scale of the use of covenants in Chicago and the violence against blacks attempting to move into white neighborhoods in Chicago, justify the attention. But the restrictive covenant was used almost two decades earlier in Harlem for similar reasons: to stop the increased flow of blacks into the neighborhood.¹⁸ The national press and professional legal journals provided a means for other communities to learn from Harlem's experiences with restrictive covenants by communicating victories and losses in the residential race wars that became national by the 1910s. White communities in other cities expanded on Harlem's use of neighborhood improvement associations, in some cases, with more success than in Harlem. In cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, for a time whites successfully defended their communities and prevented black entry. In many cities, neighborhood associations also

¹⁷ "Negro Invasion Threat Angers Flat Dwellers," *The New York Times*, July 27, 1906, 2; "Free Renting: Organizations Formed to Kill This Practice," *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide*, August 25, 1900, 235; "\$20,000 to Keep Negroes Out," *New York Times*, December 8, 1910, 2;

¹⁸ William Tuttle, Jr. *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana & Chicago, 1996), 173

became the venues through which violence against blacks was conceived, organized, and implemented. In a number of communities these tactics were more popular than the use of the restrictive covenant. Harlem's neighborhood associations did not promote violence.¹⁹

In the same way that whites became aware, through national press accounts, of tactics that could be used to defend their neighborhoods, the strategies used by Harlem's blacks to purchase property in Harlem were chronicled in the national black press. Because several of Harlem's early African American real estate brokers and investors had ties to Booker T. Washington, the era's most important race leader, their successes were trumpeted across the country by him and others in his national network of black entrepreneurs. The purchases of real estate by blacks in Harlem were pointed to as examples of people moving closer to Washington's goal of black economic self-sufficiency.²⁰

After 1900 African American settlement in Harlem developed in ways that differed from earlier black settlements that had long existed in New York City. The scale of the black population that settled in Harlem by 1920 was dramatically larger than other previous black settlements in New York. Harlem's black population growth was spurred by both black migration into the city and segregation practices within the city that restricted blacks' housing choices. In addition to larger overall numbers, the period from 1910 to 1920 also witnessed a growth in the black middle class nationally as a small but significant number of blacks gained access to teaching, medicine, and other professions as well as developed businesses to serve the growing black populations in cities. In New York, it was this growing black middle class that played an important role in distinguishing Harlem from previous black settlements in New

¹⁹ William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 157-183

²⁰ "Status of Harlem Negroes," *New York Times*, March 26, 1913, 19

York.²¹ Black real estate ownership in previous New York settlements had been minimal. The properties previously occupied by blacks in other parts of the city were primarily in declining neighborhoods, and usually owned by absentee white owners who viewed the properties as good investments. Because of limited housing options, blacks usually paid premium rents for substandard properties that were often poorly maintained by their owners. While black renters were the most visible part of the group of blacks moving to Harlem, the move to Harlem included a significant number of blacks who became property owners, some of whom purchased the buildings that the black renters occupied. The housing stock in Harlem was often quite new and of much better quality than the housing in previous declining areas. But Harlem also had substandard housing as well. By 1913 black real estate broker John Nail appealed to white Harlem businessmen to encourage white landlords to keep their properties occupied by black renters in good repair.²²

Black ownership of real estate in Harlem, reflected the aspirations and achievements of these residents, but was also a strategic response to white hostility. Whites followed an unsuccessful 1904 attempt to evict black tenants from Harlem with a decade-long restrictive covenant movement which required a mobilization of a large segment of Harlem's white residents. At a 1913 meeting of Harlem property owners, building owner Henry Holding observed:

Nothing we can say can convince me that the situation is bearable... The negroes are negroes and that's all there is to it. They are objectionable. Their mode of living is not the same as ours, and the two races cannot live together in peace. Drive them out, and send

²¹ Patricia Gunn, Shirley Hatchett, James Sidney Jackson, *Hope and Independence: Blacks's Response to Electoral and Party Politics* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1989), 212-213; Bruce Sinclair, *Technology and the African-American: Needs and Opportunities for Study*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), 133; Evelyn Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement and the Black Baptist Church, 1880* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 41

²² "Status of Harlem Negroes," *New York Times*, March 26, 1913, p. 19

them to the slums where they belong and don't let them turn our beautiful Harlem into a cheap settlement district.²³

Racially hostile rhetoric such as this was an important tool in the covenant mobilization efforts. Such comments had the potential to rally white residents to defend their neighborhoods against black invasion and also to discourage blacks considering moving to Harlem. But rather than dissuade blacks from pursuing residences in Harlem, the white hostility motivated blacks to expand their presence in Harlem from renters to owners in order to provide an anchor in the community. This ownership movement came at a time when a larger number of blacks had the means to realize the goal of ownership. Black property ownership was a critical element in the transition of Harlem from a black settlement to a black community. The African American owners/residents had a long-term interest in their new community, and the ownership movement in Harlem created leaders who articulated the desires of black residents to have a voice, through elective office, in the administration of the areas where they lived and owned property. This level of black real estate ownership in Harlem was more significant than has been recognized in other studies. Gilbert Osofsky's detailed review of the activities of Philip Payton's Afro-American Realty Company in *Harlem, the Making of a Ghetto*, leaves the impression that once Payton's company folded in 1908, black property ownership in Harlem ended as well. In reality, many other blacks, most without Payton's flair for publicity, continued to purchase property in Harlem. Even Philip Payton created a new company that engaged in real estate ownership and management in Harlem.²⁴ The ghetto framework may have prevented some researchers from

²³ "Harlem Property Owners Discuss Negro Problem," *Harlem Home News*, July 24, 1913, 1

²⁴ "Manhattan Tenement Apartments and Estimated Population by District, December 31, 1916," *Eighth Report of the Tenement House Department of the City of New York, 15, 1916*, 66, 90; "More Harlem Homes for Colored People," *New York Times*, March 26, 1911, xxi; Tenement House Department, 1916, 90; "Real Estate Field," *New York Times*, August 21, 1918, 14; "Real Estate Field," *New York Times*, March 14, 1918, 20; "Real Estate Field," September 28, 1917, 16; "Negro Apartments," *New York Times*, "Real Estate Field," July 28, 1917, 14; Fourteenth Census of the United States, Population; Thirteenth Census of the United States, Population; "Bronx Cars to Come

even looking for a black ownership class which was small but a significant influence on perceptions of Harlem as a black-controlled community.

A review of the changes in Harlem property ownership and the details of real estate transactions involving African Americans from 1890 to 1920, reveals that the responses of participants on both sides of the color line during this time of change in Harlem were more complex than typically described under the construct of black “invaders” met by white “resistors”. The invader moniker was used by white residents of Harlem and other communities to describe blacks who in Harlem were taking advantage of an opportunity to obtain quality housing for the first time in New York City. Many white residents did resist the expansion of Harlem’s black population for a range of reasons. For some white Harlem residents, antipathy to blacks was a major reason for resistance to their presence in Harlem. For many white Harlem residents this antipathy was driven by a subset of other reasons: a concern regarding a reduction in property values which it was long-assumed was the result of the black presence in a neighborhood; an assumption that all blacks were of the lower-economic class and would bring vice and violence with them to middle class Harlem; and a broader concern that the culture of the community was about to change from what white residents had known. In many cases these motivations were intertwined and expressed simply as hostility to blacks.²⁵

Although hostility to blacks moving to Harlem increased during the first two decades of the twentieth century, and eventually dominated local newspaper accounts, the actual responses of Harlem’s white residents varied considerably. The community’s white population was very

to Harlem, Colored Question Taken Up by Board.” *Harlem Magazine*, April, 1913, 21-22; Osofsky, 92-104; “Payton Closes Harlem Realty Deal Involving Million and a Half Dollars,” *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, 1, 7; “World’s Finest Housing Proposition,” *New York Age*, August 16, 1917, 7

²⁵ “More Property Owners Agree to Exclude Negroes,” *Harlem Home News*, July 10, 1913, 1; “Harlem’s Black Belt is a Growing Menace,” *Harlem Home News*, July 24, 1913, 1; “Harlem Property Owners Discuss Negro Problem,” *Harlem Home News*, July 31, 1913, 1; “Negro Invasion Has Cut Property Values in Half,” *Harlem Home News*, August, 7, 1913, 7;

diverse. After centuries of existence as a farming community, and then as a small village, by 1890, urban Harlem was a new development that was still under construction. Its middle class white population was ethnically and religiously diverse, and many were recent arrivals. Because of this, the white residents of Harlem had a range of reactions to the increased black presence in Harlem.²⁶

In 1913 Erduin v.d. H. Koch who had inherited H.C.F. Koch & Co. dry goods store on 125th Street from his father, responded to attempts by his fellow members of the Harlem Board of Commerce to restrict black movement into Harlem by stating that he believed blacks should be able to live wherever they could afford. The views of Koch were held by at least a few other white Harlem residents, and by the time he spoke, some of them had already literally put their money behind their beliefs to assist blacks to purchase property at the very time that other whites were organizing to keep blacks out. The sellers were small business owners of German ancestry. Their businesses were smaller than H.C.F. Koch & Co., but their social activities were occasionally mentioned in the society pages of the *New York Times*. In providing relatively long term financing to black purchasers, these sellers demonstrated that their motives were not to make a quick dollar. This group of whites should be distinguished from other white agents who during the first half of the twentieth century in Harlem and across the country facilitated the entry of blacks into white neighborhoods as catalysts (later called “blockbusters”) to drive down real estate prices and benefit from the panic as white residents scrambled to leave in advance of the predicted flood of black residents.²⁷ The diversity of white Harlem has not been recognized. While newspapers chronicled the rallying cries of white Harlem residents working to prevent

²⁶ G.W. Bromley Map of Manhattan, 1897 (New York: G.W. Bromley & Company, 1897)

²⁷ “Society,” *New York Times*, January 16, 1910, X2 ; “A Feast of German Song,” *New York Times*, April 21, 1895, 16; “Status of Harlem Negroes,” *New York Times*, March 26, 1913, 19; “Blockbusters”- *Encyclopedia of American Urban History*, David R. Goldfield, editor, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 81

more blacks from moving to Harlem, the German American group was overlooked by reporters of the time and later by historians because it was a handful of men who did not seek out publicity and may even have worked independent of each other.

In cautioning against fanning racial animosities in Harlem in 1913, community-minded white residents such as Erduin Koch (who was not among the group who assisted black purchasers) sought to avoid the violent episodes of the era that were the end result of racially hostile rhetoric in cities in the North and the South. They believed that the violent actions targeting blacks in these cities destroyed valuable property and resulted in many deaths, outcomes that were as harmful to community stability and property values as the critics of black entry to Harlem claimed the black presence would be. Without some white assistance and these moderating voices, the transition from tenants to owners would not have occurred for blacks in Harlem in the first decade of the 1900s.²⁸

The white Harlem residents who assisted African Americans in purchasing properties in Harlem were able to work against the tide of broader racial hostility because although the anti-black rhetoric was loud, the lack of white uniformity in Harlem meant that the potential for violence or other negative results against whites who accommodated blacks was relatively low. The diversity of Harlem's white population and the relatively recent arrival of many whites to residency there prevented a unified defense of the community from being organized. For the German Americans in Harlem, assisting black purchasers was unlikely to result in harsh community pressure that could affect them socially or economically. The potential that they could be the targets of violence for their actions was even more remote, because even the black "invaders" in Harlem were not targeted in this way. The cost for whites who might have considered assisting blacks in other cities such as Chicago, where bombs were regularly used to

²⁸ "Status of Harlem Negroes," *New York Times*, March 26, 1913, 19

dissuade new black homeowners, or Detroit, where mob attacks on black homes in white neighborhoods occurred, would have been much higher both in terms of community pressure through economics and actual physical danger. In these cities, the neighborhoods being defended were racially and culturally homogenous, with long-time property owners firmly committed to remaining in the communities.²⁹

In contrast to cities such as Detroit or Chicago, the diversity of Harlem's white residents and their relatively short residency in the community help to explain the range of their responses to black entrants to the community, and the absence of major violence in Harlem related to the racial changes that occurred in the community between 1890 and 1920. Rather than violence, Harlem's opponents to the black presence used newspaper stories, neighborhood improvement associations, and ultimately the law in the form of restrictive covenants in deeds, to attempt to stem the black tide. When the white resisters' efforts in Harlem were unsuccessful in keeping blacks out, many whites, lacking decades-long attachments to the area, chose to flee rather than fight their new black neighbors.

Most of the principals on both sides of the color line in Harlem during the period 1890 to 1920 were known locally, but beyond mentions in newspaper articles, they left no papers or other documents that conveyed their beliefs and the motivations for their actions during the period of racial change in Harlem. For this reason, real estate records are particularly important. Documents that indicate who purchased a particular property from whom, and on what terms provide surprising insights regarding the goals of both the buyers, the sellers, and in the case of restrictive covenants, the broader community. This study confirms the well known hostile

²⁹ William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 157-183; Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, (New Brunswick: Princeton University Press, 2005) 235; Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age*, (New York: Macmillan, 2005), 156

responses of some whites to the increased black presence in Harlem, but also illustrates less well known nuances even in these responses. Rather than violence, the use of neighborhood organizations and restrictive covenants were more genteel expressions of hostility to blacks (when compared to the bombs used against some blacks in Chicago). In addition, this study reveals a previously unexamined small group of white business owners of German descent who believed that blacks should be able to live wherever they could afford, and who facilitated black purchases of property as a means of putting their principals in action. The various ways that class and ethnicity influenced interactions between blacks and whites in Harlem, particularly as they related to the settlement of blacks in the community, challenge the invasion/resistance description of black-white relations accompanying the influx of blacks into northern cities. It is quite possible that a review of real estate documents in other cities during the period from 1890 to 1920 could reveal interracial interactions in these cities that may have been more complex than has been previously understood.

Organization

Chapter One of this study analyzes African Americans in New York before 1890. Nineteenth century African American settlements in Manhattan were scattered, and included Harlem long before it became the primary destination for blacks in New York. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Manhattan's midtown settlement had become the largest in terms of population and geographic scope, but it was still small compared to what Harlem would become. After 1900, in addition to a greater number of black residents, Harlem would differ from previous black settlements because of the scale of community-building activities undertaken by black residents there. One of the most important of these activities was the ownership of real estate.

Chapter Two explores the first large scale public concern regarding the African American presence in Harlem through a 1904 attempt by white property owners to evict black tenants of its largest settlement. This effort marked a significant shift in race relations in Harlem and the beginning of public pronouncements advocating the ouster or containment of black residents. But the eviction attempt led to an organized movement by African Americans to purchase Harlem properties with the assistance of some white sellers. Other whites countered this movement with an initiative of their own to contain Harlem's black settlement within its existing boundaries through the use of restrictive covenants attached to property deeds which is recounted in Chapter Three. The moves and countermoves on both sides of the color line reflected conflict prompted by growing hostility of whites toward blacks as the black population in New York increased, but also efforts of some middle class blacks and middle class whites to find ways co-exist in Harlem.

As the black population in Harlem increased in the 1910s, and some white residents began to leave the community, their churches began to decline. Chapter Four explores the issues of community control that led white congregations to refuse to sell their church edifices to black congregations. White residents left Harlem reluctantly, but most quickly sold their residential properties, often to black newcomers. The decisions to sell the church buildings of white congregations in Harlem were made with much deliberation. Before 1920 these sales were not made directly to black congregations, illustrating the significance of these buildings as symbols of white settlement, as well as the continued reluctance to concede that the black presence in Harlem was more than a brief phenomenon.

Since real estate purchases and rentals were the vehicles through which the black community gained an anchor in Harlem, black real estate professionals who facilitated most of

these transactions, became prominent in the community and acquired a level of financial independence that led some to pursue elective office. Chapter Five considers the efforts of black real estate broker John Royall to run for alderman in Harlem in 1913, as well as the candidacy of real estate investor James C. Thomas, Jr. for state assemblyman in 1915. Neither candidate was successful, but their candidacies illustrate the high community status that some real estate professionals had attained, as well as the new expectation among some black Harlem residents that they should have one of their own representing their interests.

By the latter part of the 1910s the African American presence in a portion of Harlem was solidified through continued property acquisitions. The purchase of apartment houses and townhouses by blacks was chronicled and celebrated in the *New York Age*, and gave readers the perception that Harlem was a community controlled by blacks. While white residents continued to be present in parts of Harlem for decades, by the 1910s blacks owned more property in Harlem than is usually understood. Chapter Six recounts the broader move toward property ownership by blacks in Harlem, the methods used by black leaders to promote this goal, and the transfer by Equitable Life Assurance Society of two blocks of townhouses to black owners. These buildings and their owners became symbols of the black middle class presence in Harlem. By 1918 blacks owned over thirty-five apartment buildings in Harlem containing over one thousand apartment units. On a macro level this was a modest amount, approximately two percent of the 46,000 apartments in buildings between West 130th and West 155th Streets (New York City's black population was between two and three percent during this period). But on a neighborhood level, where black ownership influenced perceptions of both blacks and whites, because most of the buildings owned by African Americans were concentrated within a five block area, black ownership gave people on both sides of the color line a very visible sense that

the momentum of black ownership was growing, which it was. When the ninety-four townhouses of the King Model Houses were sold to black purchasers between 1919 and 1920 they comprised eight percent of black homeowners in the entire city.³⁰

Assisted by an even more dramatic influx of black residents in need of housing during and after World War I, through the ownership movement, black leaders used the black press to shape perceptions of Harlem as a community controlled by blacks and to attract black investors whose purchases could make this perception a reality.

The early twentieth century growth of Harlem as a large black community between the years 1890 and 1920 exemplifies a trend that occurred in many northern cities as blacks left the South in increasing numbers. The timing of the development of these communities varied within this three decade period as did the level of conflict that accompanied the movement of blacks into predominantly white communities. The ethnic diversity of Harlem's white residents, the upper middle class status of the dominant leaders, and the brief residency of many white residents, resulted in a transition in which the hostility toward blacks was verbalized at public meetings, in the press, and through deed restrictions rather than acted out through violence. The white racial and class uniformity that inspired strong violent white responses to black entrants in some cities did not exist in Harlem. The middle class status of the blacks who led the influx of black residents into Harlem after 1900 provided them with access to whites of similar class status who did not share the hostile feelings of their neighbors toward blacks, and assisted middle class

³⁰ Abstract Index, Mortgages, New York County, Blocks 2023, 2024, 2025, New York City Register; T. J. Woolfer, *Negro Problems in Cities*, (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1928), 136-151; "More Harlem Homes for Colored People," *New York Times*, March 26, 1911, xxi; "Real Estate Field," *New York Times*, July 28, 1917, 14; "Real Estate Field," *New York Times*, September 28, 1917, 16; "Negro Apartments," *New York Times*, November 18, 1917, RE10; "Real Estate Field," *New York Times*, March 14, 1918, 20; "Real Estate Field," *New York Times*, August 21, 1918, 14

blacks in purchasing properties that provided an anchor for the black residential area in Harlem to develop beyond a black settlement into a black community.

Research Methodology/Sources

The principal source for information on real estate transactions in New York City is public records maintained by the New York City Register. Each city block in New York is assigned a number for the borough (before 1898 New York City consisted only of the island of Manhattan; after 1898 Manhattan was consolidated with the city of Brooklyn, the boroughs of Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island; these five boroughs comprise New York City today). In each block every property within a block is assigned a unique number. If one knows the street address of a property, the Register's Office provides a database that will indicate the corresponding block and lot number for the property. Essential real estate information on the conveyance of real estate is provided in conveyance record books in the Register's Office. The books are organized by block, and indicate in chronological order, every transfer of property or other transaction involving the lots on a particular block extending back to the late 1700s or early 1800s. Each conveyance, or transfer of property to a new owner, is referenced by a liber ("book") number and a page number indicating the book that the document detailing the terms of the conveyance was originally entered into. This information is on Conveyance microfilms which provide a transcription of the conveyance document that details the specific transaction. The level of detail of transaction documents varies. It always includes the date of the conveyance, the names of the parties involved, a description of the property, and the date the transaction was recorded. Many times a payment will be noted, which may be a down payment. Sometimes payment terms are listed but many times they are not listed. Deed restrictions, such as the restrictive covenants studied, appear in the Conveyance records because they were

restrictions on the conveyance of properties. They can usually be identified because they are noted as an “Agreement” and usually list many more parties to the transaction than a typical conveyance of property would. Rent agreements occasionally appear in Conveyance records also.

Much of the racial tension related to Harlem real estate was centered in a small geographic area (approximately fifteen blocks) just to the north and south of West 135th Street between Fifth and Lenox Avenues. While conveyances over a larger area were reviewed for this study, the bulk of the relevant information was obtained from the smaller area during the period 1890 to 1920.

Mortgage records are also organized by blocks, but separately from conveyance records. Mortgage books also indicate transactions chronologically by block and lot number with mortgages referenced by liber and page numbers on Mortgage microfilms. The information on the microfilmed records provides the terms of the loans made to acquire properties and typically include names of principals, the cost of the property, the amount initially paid, the outstanding principal, the terms of payment of the principal including interest rate and installment payments of principal. If a lending institution was involved, the name of this lender is provided.

None of these real estate records make reference to the race of the parties involved in the transaction. There were a handful of high profile African American purchasers of Harlem property from approximately 1904 to 1920. The research began by searching for transactions involving people such as Philip Payton or the Afro-American Realty Company which mostly chronicles of Harlem during the period of transition site as a major force. Payton’s partner James C. Thomas was another significant purchaser. Because *The New York Age* regularly chronicled the purchases made by African Americans in Harlem, other lesser known black investors were

able to be identified. *The New York Times*' weekly listing of all real estate transactions was also a source of information as was the monthly *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*. In cases where the race of the purchaser was not clear, census records were used to attempt to confirm this. The New York City Directory which sometimes listed the race of people was a secondary source of information on race. Where corporations were involved in real estate transactions, information on the principals (names, addresses) was obtained from incorporation records at the New York County Archives. The incorporation papers also provided information on the capital on hand at the time of incorporation and the maximum amount that could be raised as well as the initial price of the stock.

Chapter 1

African Americans in New York City Before 1900

On a Saturday afternoon in July, 1893, Marie F. Posey, an African American, sat at her kitchen window looking at workmen drilling on a rock outcropping behind her apartment building on East 122nd Street in Harlem. Her eight-year old daughter Marie Adel was at her side. In the adjacent dining room Mrs. Posey's mother-in-law Mary watched the other three Posey children: Irma, Austin and Reginald. In the apartment one floor below, Mary McAdam, a white woman spoke with her neighbor, Albert Graham. The Saturday routines of these neighbors were suddenly interrupted by a deafening blast that sent a boulder directly into the apartment wall where Mrs. Posey and her daughter were sitting. They were killed instantly. In the dining room, the blast threw the senior Mrs. Posey to the other side of the room and scattered the children across the floor. Downstairs, Mrs. McAdam who had also been sitting near the window was knocked unconscious. Her visitor Mr. Graham was thrown across the room. The workers responsible for the blast, part of a crew working to level out one of Manhattan's many rock outcroppings to prepare the land for development, fled as soon as they saw the results of their negligent use of dynamite. They were later arrested.¹

Marie Posey's husband Francis, a letter carrier, was inconsolable when he arrived home from work later that afternoon to find his apartment destroyed, his wife and daughter dead, and the rest of his family injured. The Posey apartment building, at 61 East 122nd Street between Fifth and Madison Avenues was in an area of Harlem that had been developed with tenement buildings in the 1870s and 1880s. The first residents had been Jewish families from the Lower East Side soon followed by Italian immigrants. By the 1890s African Americans had begun to move into the area. Few in number, they were scattered throughout the area, and as the Posey

¹ "A Volley of Rocks," *Harlem Local Report*, July 26, 1893, 1

building illustrated, they sometimes lived in the same buildings with white tenants. While race had not been a barrier to the Poseys living in the same building with Mary McAdams, when black people were subjects of news reports they were usually identified by race. The newspaper articles describing the tragedy noted that the Poseys were “colored,” and that McAdams was white. Albert Graham’s race was not noted; the detonators of the dynamite were identified as Italian.²

East 122nd Street was a new block for black New Yorkers in 1893, but the area to the south and east of the Posey apartment building had been a settlement for black New Yorkers for quite some time. In 1902 social worker Mary Rankin Cranston explained that

New York’s oldest Negro colony, which has been in existence for twenty-five years is situated in Harlem and is bound by 97th and 103rd streets and 2nd and 3rd avenues.³

In addition to Harlem, Cranston’s description included several more recent areas of black settlement in Manhattan: the area between 6th and 7th Avenues from 26th Street to 33rd Street; the area between 36th and 44th Streets from 7th Avenue west to the Hudson River; and 47th Street between Broadway and 8th Avenue. Black New Yorkers were dispersed in many parts of the city before 1900, and contrary to Cranston’s observation, there were black settlements even older than Harlem, such as Greenwich Village, which was losing black population. The dispersed nature of African American settlement in Manhattan before 1900 was a testament to the diverse and somewhat fluid racial attitudes of white New Yorkers, and the small number of blacks living in New York City before the twentieth century.⁴

² *Harlem Local Reporter*, July 26, 1893, 1; “Harlem Shaken By Dynamite,” *New York Times*, July 23, 1893, 1; “Trying to Fix the Blame,” July 24, 1893, 9; Nancy Foner, *From Ellis Island to JFK: New York’s Two Great Waves of Immigration*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 224-227

³ “The Housing of the Negro in New York City,” Mary Rankin Cranston, *The Southern Workman*, June, 1902, 329; the journal was published by the Hampton Institute, a school for black students in Hampton, Virginia.

⁴ “The Housing of the Negro in New York City,” Mary Rankin Cranston, *The Southern Workman*, June, 1902, 329

At the end of the nineteenth century, New York City's black population increased, and the city's African American communities became less dispersed. A few black settlements in midtown began to grow larger. Black newcomers were naturally attracted to these settlements. A race riot in 1900 precipitated a shift by some blacks from midtown and also exposed racial animosities held by both white neighbors as well as public officials to whom black New Yorkers looked for protection. Midtown became less attractive and the Harlem settlement became the area of attraction for more black New Yorkers.

From the Colonial Era to the Civil War

People of African descent lived in Manhattan/New Amsterdam as early as 1626 when eleven African slaves arrived under the ownership of the Dutch West India Company. The heart of the City of New Amsterdam was in Lower Manhattan with farms to the north of this area. In 1644 the first eleven company slaves petitioned the colony for their freedom. They and their wives were granted "half-freedom" under which they were released from slavery, and allowed to farm their own land, provided they returned a portion of the harvest as well as furs to the company annually. They were required to work for the Dutch West India Company in times of need. Their children remained slaves. In 1663 just before the English assumed control of the colony, the Dutch granted unconditional emancipation to seventy-five half-free Africans. When the English assumed control of New Amsterdam and renamed the city New York in 1664 they solidified the institution of slavery, ending the practice of granting half-freedom as well as the option of manumission for good behavior. Slaves were slaves for life. There were 375 Africans

living in New Amsterdam at the time, including the seventy-five who had received their freedom the previous year.⁵

After the Revolutionary War, as the boundaries of New York City moved north, settlements of free people of African descent moved as well. Some had been granted their freedom by former owners; others may have arrived free from other states, while some undoubtedly had ventured to New York fleeing southern slavery. While some northern states abolished slavery soon after the Revolution. New York passed the “Act for the gradual abolition of Slavery,” in 1799, but full freedom was not available to all slaves in New York until 1827.⁶

The world that newly freed slaves entered into in 1827 New York included supportive institutions, but many limitations. Between the 1790s and 1810, the population of free blacks grew from 1,011 to 8,137 through private manumissions. This community established churches including Mother African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Abyssinian Baptist, and St. Philips Episcopal. All were located in Lower Manhattan within a few blocks of Anthony (now Worth) Street in close proximity to the area where many free African Americans then lived. The existence of these institutions was as much a testament to limitations facing African American New Yorkers as it was to their resourcefulness. Each church was established because of restrictions on participation (seating, church governance, etc.) experienced by African Americans attending predominantly white churches.⁷

⁵Leslie Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003) 23-27, 36; Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: A comprehensive history of African Americans in New York City and East Jersey from 1613-1863*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 31

⁶Lucille Genevieve Lomax, “Social History of the Negro Population Living in the Section of New York City known as Greenwich Village,” M.A. Thesis, Columbia University, 1929, 4-30; D.N. Gellman, D. Quigley, eds, *Jim Crow New York: A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship 1777-1877* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 13-22, 52-55

⁷Rhoda Golden Freeman, *The Free Negro in New York City in the Era Before the Civil War* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994) 6; Jonathan Greenleaf, *History of the Churches of All Denominations in the City of New York From Settlement to the Year 1846* (New York: E. French, 1846), 79-80, 240, 325,

In the early 1800s Manhattan's community of free African Americans had established fraternal organizations for fellowship, burial benefits, and other methods of financial and social support. In 1808 the New York African Society for Mutual Relief was founded by a group of African American men. It eventually owned property and became a training ground for African American leaders. In 1827 *Freedom's Journal* based in New York became the first newspaper in the nation published by African Americans. Although it was only published for approximately two years, its editors Samuel Cornish and John Russworm continued to play leadership roles in the community after the demise of the newspaper.⁸

The subordinate status of blacks in New York was reaffirmed in 1821 when New York State held a constitutional convention to revise its constitution. The new Constitution, a revision of the 1777 document, extended the vote to all white citizens regardless of their economic status. In spite of vigorous advocacy by African Americans and their allies, the Constitution restricted African American voting to men who owned at least two hundred and fifty dollars of debt-free real property, disqualifying the majority of black male New Yorkers.⁹

The freedom gained by formerly enslaved black New Yorkers in 1827 under the Gradual Manumission Act of 1799 did not end the subordinate status the group had in New York. In the first half of the nineteenth century, African Americans were restricted from entering skilled trades, and were most widely represented in service work and unskilled labor. But in spite of these limitations, in the nineteenth century, black New Yorkers continued to establish organizations, including the Boyer Masonic Lodge (1812), and the Garrison Literary and Benevolent Society (1834). Shiloh Presbyterian and Bethesda Congregational were two churches

⁸ Gellman and Quigley, 77; Craig Wilder, *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 74; J.H. Pease, W.H. Pease, "Samuel Eli Cornish," in *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, eds. R.W. Logan, M.R. Winston (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), 134-135

⁹ Gellman and Quigley, 90-200

that joined the ranks of black religious institutions.¹⁰ While public schools were available for African American children, the New York City school system was segregated, maintaining a separate group of Colored Schools with black teachers reporting to white administrators.¹¹

During the nineteenth century black settlements moved northward in Manhattan. At any given time, there was more than one area in Manhattan in which blacks lived. During the early nineteenth century African Americans were a substantial presence in the Five Points community of Lower Manhattan (Orange, Cross and Anthony Streets). By the 1830s, Seneca Village (in what is now the west side of Central Park between 83rd and 88th Streets) was a bi-racial settlement containing three churches, Colored School No. 3, as well as over two hundred and fifty residents. Some of the black residents owned their property and therefore may have been able to vote. Irish Americans made up about thirty percent of the settlement. The black and white settlers were evicted in the 1850s to make way for the development of Central Park.¹² During the same time, an African American settlement developed in Greenwich Village. In 1850 over 5,000 of New York's 13,815 African Americans lived in the four Greenwich Village wards. In these various settlements African Americans were a substantial portion of the population on some blocks, but white residents and others often lived on the same streets and occasionally in the same buildings as African Americans. Residential segregation was not strictly practiced. With a small population of blacks, many of whom were confined to the lower economic ranks, poor neighborhoods often had a mix of races. The small black middle class population typically was forced to live in the same neighborhoods as poor blacks. The restrictions they faced in

¹⁰ Wilder, 74; Charlotte Augusta Burroughs Ray, *Sketch of the Life of Rev. Charles B. Ray*, (New York: J.J. Little, 1887), 7-18;

¹¹ Freeman, 213, 235-265

¹² R. Rosenzweig, E. Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 65-73; Wilder, 101-102, the Churches were Mother AME Zion, African Union Church and All Angels Church

seeking housing were often based on the personal preferences of landlords rather than a community-wide policy of racial segregation which would account for the scattering of black settlements in Manhattan in the nineteenth century.¹³

Transportation was a major factor in the nineteenth century development of Manhattan. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the city's business activities were concentrated in Lower Manhattan below Chambers Street. Many businesses were housed in the same buildings in which the business owners lived. As the century proceeded, a separation of business and residential activity began, but because of poor transportation, the businesses continued to be located within walking distance of the owners' residences. In the 1820s the extension of horse drawn omnibuses as far north as Harlem, resulted in the establishment of separate residential communities at greater distances from the business districts.¹⁴

The nineteenth century moves being made by African Americans in Manhattan were typically into communities that were declining, often after having been invaded by commercial establishments. Transportation improvements made it possible for white residents to move to newer, more fashionable neighborhoods. During the mid-nineteenth century, horse drawn "rail cars" and elevated railroads-- made it feasible for prosperous whites to seek fashionable locations, usually to the north of existing Manhattan settlements. African Americans and other poor residents took over lodgings in the once fashionable neighborhoods.¹⁵

Racial tensions between black and white New Yorkers flared periodically in the nineteenth century often around issues of employment. Attempts by blacks to establish

¹³ Lomax, Table No.3 "Negro and White Population New York City by Wards"; Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The 19th-Century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 97-105

¹⁴ Elizabeth Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent, 1785-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 101-135; Clifton Hood, *722 Miles: The Building of the Subways and How They Transformed New York* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 38

¹⁵ Lomax, 92; Blackmar, 93-103; Seth M. Scheiner, *Negro Mecca: A History of the Negro in New York City, 1865-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 1965), 15-19

themselves in fields were viewed by some whites as unwelcome competition. In the first half of the nineteenth century black New Yorkers were pushed out of trades that they had once dominated. From carting, to catering, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed an absence of blacks in most areas that had once provided them with a strong economic and social foundation. In carting the increased competition from growing numbers of European immigrants, and the hardening of racial lines inspired the changes. Accordingly in the 1830s applications for carting licenses were denied on the grounds of race and justified as a decision that would prevent conflict with white carters. In catering a change in tastes toward European cuisine, and the entry of elegant hotel dining rooms and ballrooms led to a decline for blacks in the area.¹⁶

In 1834 anti-abolitionist rhetoric fueled a riot that led whites to attack several African American churches, homes and businesses as well as the home of abolitionist businessman Lewis Tappan. Reports considering the status of black New Yorkers during the period 1834-1846 concluded that economic opportunities were declining and in many cases African Americans were being displaced from skilled positions by European immigrants. In the 1840s and 1850s the jobs of porters, dockhands, waiters, barbers, and cooks in which blacks had once had a strong presence were dominated by Irish and German immigrants.¹⁷

Racial tension sometimes led to the courthouse. In 1855 when Elizabeth Jennings, a black Sunday school teacher, was thrown off of a horse car because of her race, she sued the privately owned railroad company. While New York City did not have Jim Crow laws, private businesses often established their own Jim Crow policies. New York's Street car lines in the 1850s organized its cars along segregated lines with some cars restricted to whites, carrying "whites-

¹⁶ Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, (Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press, 1999) , 232-236

¹⁷ Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The 19th Century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum*, (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 7-13; Hodges, 112-113

only signs” and others available to everyone. Elizabeth Jennings had attempted to ride a “whites-only” car. Defended by future president Chester A. Arthur, the jury awarded Jennings \$225 in damages determining that the street car lines policy violated the law.¹⁸

African Americans’ departures from lower Manhattan communities were often precipitated by pressure from the arrival of European immigrant groups also seeking the low cost housing available. In 1850 over twenty percent of New York State residents were foreign born. Most of these immigrants were from Europe and remained after arriving at the port of New York City. The arrival of these new residents, whose numbers continued to grow in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, caused a competition for housing with black residents.¹⁹

The beginning of the Civil War exacerbated racial tensions in New York City. As the nation’s financial center, as well as a shipping center, New York’s merchants were closely tied to the plantation economy. New York City was a political stronghold of the Democratic Party whose southern wing was staunchly in favor of protecting the institution of slavery. When southern states began leaving the Union in late 1860 following the presidential election of Abraham Lincoln, New York Mayor Fernando Wood, cognizant of the concerns of New York merchants associated with the plantation economy of the seceding states, threatened that New York City would also secede from the Union and become a “free trade republic” in order to maintain slave state business. This threat was not executed, but when New York men began to be drafted in the summer of 1863 to fight for the Union, New York experienced a virulent backlash directed at African Americans.²⁰

¹⁸ Anbinder, pp. 7-13; Freeman, 72-73; Herman D. Bloch, *The Circle of Discrimination: An Economic and Social Study of the Black Man in New York*, (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 19-46; John H. Hewitt, *Protest and Progress: New York’s First Black Episcopal Church Fight Racism*, (London: Taylor & Francis, 2000), 98-103

¹⁹ Seventh Census of the United States, Population, Statistics of the United States, “Nativities of the White Population,” Table XL, 61

²⁰ Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); 143

Class and race were the prevailing factors behind the racial violence experienced in several cities in connection with the 1863 draft. Those drafted were given an option to pay \$300 to hire a substitute to fight in their stead, confirming the popular charge that the war was “a rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight.” Although the reason for fighting the war had initially been emphasized as the preservation of the Union, the January 1863 enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation which freed slaves in the states in rebellion, broadened the framing of the war to a war to end slavery. In this context poor whites being drafted resented being called to fight to free slaves whom Democratic Party functionaries said would soon be moving to the North to take their jobs.²¹

This rhetoric resulted in an explosive reaction in New York City in July of 1863 with four days of rioting during which hundreds of white men and women destroyed the draft office, broke into armories and stole weapons, and marauded through the streets. The homes of blacks and abolitionists were attacked. Many blacks were injured or killed, and the bodies of some were burned or mutilated. Union troops had to be called from the South to re-establish order in the city. After the Draft Riots, New York was in such turmoil that a firm account of those killed was never determined. Many blacks left the city, some for the separate city of Brooklyn and others left the area completely.²² In 1865 New York City’s African American population was approximately 10,000 or 1.4% of the city’s population. This decline from the 1860 population of 12,574 has been attributed to out-migration following the 1863 Draft Riots.²³

²¹ Ibid, 17-42

²² Ibid, 17-42

²³ Tenth Census of U.S. Population, “Population by Race, Sex, and Nativity,” p. 402; Ira Rosenwaike, *Population History of New York City*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1972), 77

African Americans in New York After the Civil War

After the Civil War, the status of African Americans continued to be challenged in New York where the Democratic Party continued its dominance. Challenges to Reconstruction policies and proposals to expand the rights of blacks were not only centered in southern states. New York's political leaders weighed in on both sides of the debate regarding the impact of new federal laws and the impact of the Fourteenth Amendment on life in New York. In 1866 New York State Republicans were able to gain enough support for a constitutional convention with one of its stated goals being to expand voting rights for blacks, which since 1821 had been restricted to those who owned property valued at two hundred and fifty dollars or more, a very small number statewide. Democratic opponents adopted the language of their southern colleagues stating that black enfranchisement would lead to black dominance. Shifts in the statewide political fortunes over the thirty months that the convention convened led to the issue of enfranchisement being separated from the constitutional revision process and put to a referendum. In 1869 a statewide referendum to end the two hundred and fifty dollar property requirement for black male voters was defeated. The Manhattan vote was 65,189 to 27,390.²⁴

In 1870 when the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, the barrier preventing most African American men in New York from voting was finally removed. The impetus for the first federal Enforcement Act passed later in 1870 to protect "the Right of Citizens of the United States to Vote in the several States of this Union, and for other purposes" was southern opposition to black voting but, Republican New Yorkers, concerned about voting fraud associated with the selling of naturalization papers by New York City Democratic Party

²⁴ David Quigley, *Second Founding: New York City, Reconstruction, and the Making of American Democracy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 39-69

supporters, were among the strongest advocates of the first federal Enforcement Act. The law made such fraud, if committed in a congressional election, a federal crime.²⁵

The end of the Civil War witnessed a moderate movement of blacks from the South to the North. From 1870 until 1890 approximately 41,000 black people per decade migrated to the North. The destination of black migrants traveling to the North after the Civil War was tied to efficient, affordable transportation. Influenced by the presence of relatives or acquaintances from communities of origin, New York City became one of several popular northern destinations, along with Philadelphia, for African Americans from eastern states particularly, as well as for people of African descent from the Caribbean.²⁶

In the five years between 1865 and 1870 New York's African American population increased by thirty percent to 13,072, making up for the population decline that had followed the Draft Riots. The city's overall population also grew by thirty percent to 942,292 as another major wave of European immigration began. In 1870 Philadelphia had the nation's largest black population with over 22,000 out of a total population of 674,022. By contrast, Midwestern black communities such as Chicago and Detroit had small black populations of 3,600 and 2,200 respectively in 1870. In the succeeding decades New York's African American population continued to grow dramatically. Between 1870 and 1880 the population increased by almost 6,600 or 50% to a population of 19,663, reflecting the movement of blacks from the South as well as from the Caribbean. New York City's overall population was also increasing. Therefore even though the black population increased, it never exceeded two percent of New York City's total population.²⁷ Brooklyn, a separate city until the 1898 consolidation of Greater New York,

²⁵ Quigley, 74-76; Freeman, 107;

²⁶ Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, Negro New York 1890-1930* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996, 1966), 18

²⁷ Ninth Census of the United States, Population; Tenth Census of the United States, Population;

also had a thriving African American population which grew after the 1863 Draft Riots as more of New York's City's black population moved there. By the late nineteenth century Brooklyn was the center of the black elite in the region.²⁸

The northern movement of blacks continued within Manhattan in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. By 1880 African Americans were concentrated in settlements from the old area of Greenwich Village to a new district from 23rd Street to 69th Street on the West Side of Manhattan. The southern part of this midtown area was known as The Tenderloin, and in addition to providing residency, was also a cultural hub of the African American community. While these areas had significant numbers of residents and several community institutions, blacks still lived throughout Manhattan. In 1880 blacks lived in each of the city's twenty-two wards.²⁹

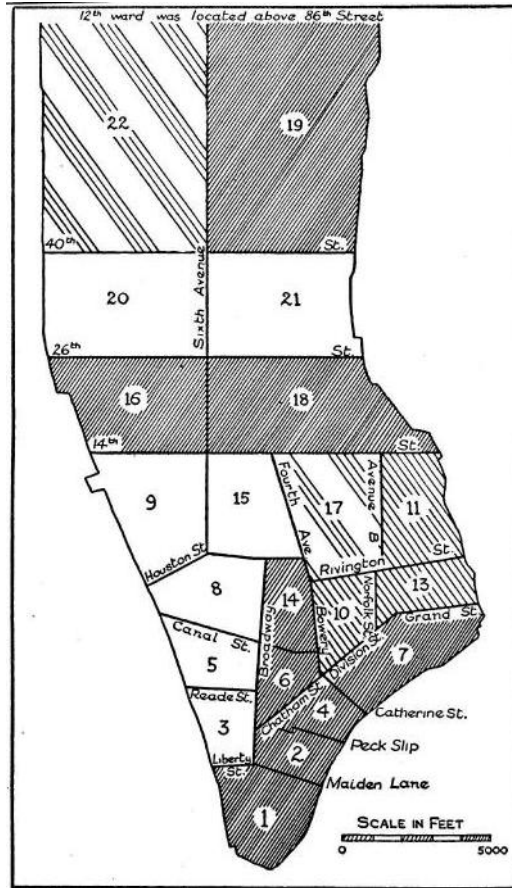
In 1880 the total colored population (which included 747 Asians and Native Americans) was 20,433 or 1.69% of New York's 1,206,577 residents (see Table 1). In Manhattan's wards, the African American presence ranged numerically from 49 residents in Ward 3 in Lower Manhattan to 4,152 in Ward 20, (the West Side of Manhattan between 26th and 40th Streets), the African American presence as a percentage of ward population ranged from .10% in Ward 11 on the East side south of 14th Street to 8.99% in Ward 15 the Greenwich Village Ward. In Ward 20, with the largest population of African Americans (4,152), they remained less than five percent of the ward's total population.³⁰

²⁸ Elizabeth Blackmar, Roy Rosenweig, *The Park and the People* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 379-381; James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York: DaCapo Press, 1930, 1991) 58-145

²⁹ Scheiner, 18-19

³⁰ Tenth Census of U.S. Population, Census Bulletin No. 13 (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, Census Office, 1880)

Map 1, Manhattan Ward Map, 1880³¹



Some of these residents, particularly in wards with low African American populations, were servants living in the homes of their employers, but in the wards with higher populations, either numerically or as a percentage of the ward's population, it is more likely that blacks were independent residents of the area. If the location of black churches is used as an indicator of 1880s community formation, the range of black settlement can be seen. Abyssinian Baptist Church was located on Waverly Place in Greenwich Village. Zion Methodist Church was located on Bleeker and Tenth Streets also in Greenwich Village. Illustrating the northern movement, St. Philip's Episcopal Church was located on West Twenty-Fifth Street, and Shiloh Presbyterian Church was located on West Twenty-Sixth Street. Little Zion Methodist Church was much

³¹ "New York (Manhattan) Wards: Population & Density 1800-1910, n.d., <http://www.demographica.com/db-nyc-ward1800.htm>

further north on East 117th Street. The widely dispersed black population illustrates that while restrictions based on race and economics existed, the small numbers of black residents did not threaten white home owners or renters to the point of consigning blacks to one neighborhood. The number of black residents was not large enough to change the demography of a neighborhood, but black New Yorkers were concentrated in several settlements throughout the city.³²

White owners of rental properties rightfully believed that they could control the movement of New York's black residents who were primarily renters. While overt residential segregation practices or laws did not exist in New York City, in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, black New Yorkers seeking housing experienced limitations. In April of 1889, a few weeks before the annual May 1st Moving Day, when New York renters' leases traditionally expired, *The New York Times* presented two long articles with titles that described the state of black New Yorkers' housing choices: "Prejudices of Landlords" explained that the "privilege of selecting their quarters wherever they please consistent with their ability to pay the rents ordinarily demanded is denied" black New Yorkers. The article noted that blacks were charged premium prices for the worst quarters, made available to them typically when whites were no longer interested. "The Northern Color Line" which appeared two weeks later, included the observation from Hutchens Bishop, the pastor of the black congregation at St. Philips Episcopal Church, that "since the Civil Rights bill was declared unconstitutional [1883] by the United States Supreme Court, it appears to me that the spirit of intolerance of the colored people has been on the increase in the North." The federal Civil Rights Act of 1875 had been passed to enforce the provisions of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution. The

³² David W. Dunlap- *From Abyssinian to Zion: A Guide to Manhattan's Houses of Worship*, David W. Dunlap (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 6, 91,148,243,262; Trow's Directory of New York City, 1880

Act outlawed discrimination in public accommodations and called for fines for violators.

Agitation against the act began immediately after its passage and focused on what critics claimed was its attempt to “legislate against prejudice” which was part of human nature.” The 1883 Supreme Court decision focused on the limits of the government to interfere with private decisions.³³

The federal census records in the late nineteenth century suggest that the movement of African Americans in Manhattan might more accurately be described as expansions due to population increases rather than wholesale migrations. While new settlements of African Americans developed, older black areas continued to retain residents. For example, as the neighborhood between Twenty-sixth and Fortieth Streets was becoming a new area of relatively high African American concentration in the 1880s, the older community of Greenwich Village continued to be a black enclave as well. In the next ten years this expansion of black areas of settlement grew to include Harlem.

³³ “Prejudices of Landlords,” *The New York Times*, April 14, 1889, p. 10; “The Northern Color Line,” *The New York Times*, April 28, 1889, 9; Daniel E. Bigham, *On Jordan’s Banks: Emancipation and its Aftermath in the Ohio River Valley*, (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2005), 156

Table 1. 1880 Manhattan Ward Population³⁴

Ward Number and Location	Total Population	Total Colored Population	Colored as a % of Total (or ward) population	Ward colored population as a % of they city's total colored population
	1,206,577	20,433	1.69%	100%
1: below Maiden Lane	17,939	207	1.15%	1.01%
2: btwn Peck Slip & Maiden Lane East	1,608	70	4.35%	0.34%
3: btwn Reade St. & Liberty West	3,582	49	1.37%	0.24%
4: btwn Catherine & Peck Slip West	21,015	55	0.26%	0.27%
5: btwn Canal & Reade West	16,134	220	1.36%	1.08%
6: btwn Canal, Broadway & Chatham Central	20,193	344	1.70%	1.68%
7: btwn Grand , Division & Catherine East	50,066	63	0.13%	0.31%
8: btwn Houston and Canal West of Broadway	35,880	1,798	5.01%	8.80%
9: btwn 14 th & Houston West of 6 th Ave	54,593	1,077	1.97%	5.27%
10: btwn Rivington, Division, Bowery & Norfolk Central	47,553	192	0.40%	0.94%
11: btwn 14 th & Rivington East of Ave. B	68,779	70	0.10%	0.34%
12: Manhattan above 86 th Street	81,802	1,071	1.31%	5.24%
13: btwn Rivington and Grand, East of Norfolk	37,797	163	0.43%	0.80%
14: btwn Houston, Canal, Broadway and Bowery	30,172	451	1.49%	2.21%
15: btwn 14 th and Houston, 6 th Ave. & 4 th Ave.	31,873	2,866	8.99%	14.03%
16: btwn 26 th and 14 th West of 6 th Ave.	52,186	2,172	4.16%	10.63%
17: btwn 14 th and Rivington, 4 th Ave & Ave. B	104,895	292	0.28%	1.43%
18: btwn 26 th and 14 th East of 6 th Ave.	66,610	658	0.99%	3.22%
19: btwn 86 th and 40 th East of 6 th Ave.	158,108	1,188	0.75%	5.81%
20: btwn 40 th and 26 th West of 6 th Ave.	86,023	4,152	4.83%	20.32%
21: btwn 40 th and 26 th East of 6 th Ave.	66,538	929	1.40%	4.55%
22: btwn 86 th and 40 th West of 6 th Ave.	111,605	1,634	1.46%	8.00%

³⁴ Tenth Census of U.S. Population, Census Bulletin No. 13

The Development of Harlem as an Urban Residential Community

By 1880 Harlem had been settled for over two hundred years. Dutch farmers were the initial inhabitants of the area in the 1630s. The Village of New Harlem was founded in 1658 with an ordinance stating that its purposes were “the further promotion of agriculture, for the security of this Island and the cattle pasturing thereon, as well as the further relief and expansion of this City Amsterdam.” After the English gained control of the city in 1664 a charter was granted to the settlers establishing the boundaries of Harlem as upper Manhattan from “Kingsbridge (the northern end of Manhattan) south, as far as Manhattanville on the west side and Seventy-fourth Street on the east.” In the following decades, the name Harlem was used more broadly, often to refer to all of upper Manhattan.³⁵

The African American presence in upper Manhattan dates to this colonial period as well. In *History of Harlem*, James Riker suggests that African Americans came to Harlem possibly as early as 1664 when “Some of the inhabitants, in want of servants and laborers, seized the opportunity to buy a number of negro slaves sold at auction in Fort Amsterdam... These were probably the first slaves owned at New Harlem...”³⁶ Harlem continued to grow as a farming community and also became the site of estates of wealthy New Yorkers in the late eighteenth century. In 1765 British colonel Roger Morris built a summer house near 160th Street. In 1802 The Grange, the residence of Alexander Hamilton’s 13-acre estate at what is now 143rd Street and Convent Avenue was completed.³⁷

In 1811 a survey of the island of Manhattan up to 155th Street was completed and a grid pattern was established to designate plots of land. Since the city was concentrated in Lower

³⁵ James Riker, *Revised History of Harlem (City of New York) Its Origin and Early Annals*, (New York: New Harlem Publishing Company, 1904), 119

³⁶ Riker, 210

³⁷ E. Willensky, N. White, *AIA Guide to New York City* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1988), 433, 461

Manhattan at the time, most of this grid applied to large portions of undeveloped land. The establishment of the grid was an important step in preparing land in Manhattan for sale and development. At the time of the survey, the geography of Manhattan was extremely irregular, marked by streams, ponds, and rock outcroppings. Recognizing the obstacle these irregularities would pose to potential developers, steps were taken in the years following the survey to fill in the streams and ponds with landfill and to explode some of the rock outcroppings (work that was continuing in 1893 when the Posey family's home was destroyed). The result was the creation of a uniform commodity of land that could be considered for purchase when the appropriate conditions arose.³⁸

Although the grid and the clearing of rock outcroppings created better conditions for development of upper Manhattan, during much of the nineteenth century Harlem was a semi-rural community of farms, country estates, and squatters' cabins. Blacks continued to be a presence in the area with sufficient numbers to merit creation of a Harlem mission of the Mother African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. In 1843 the Harlem congregation, Little Zion Methodist Church, consisted of sixty-six members at an East 117th Street location.³⁹

Transportation advances that enabled Manhattan residents to move northward eventually brought more residents to Harlem. In 1853 the Third Avenue horse-car line was extended to Harlem. The horse-car, with horses pulling coaches on tracks was considerably faster and more comfortable than the omnibus (an elongated stage coach). The horse car reduced travel time from City Hall to Harlem to ninety minutes. Steamboat service from 125th Street to Peck Slip

³⁸ The Real Estate Record Association, *A History of Real Estate, Building and Architecture in New York City During the Last Quarter of a Century* (New York: Record and Guide 1898), Arno Press, 1967, 33; Blackmar, 98

³⁹ Osofsky, 83-84; Greenleaf, 321-322;

downtown soon followed. Neither of these advances made daily commuting practical for any but the well-to-do, but some New Yorkers did begin building homes in Harlem.⁴⁰

After the Civil War, the Third Avenue area of Harlem became the site of settlement by German-Jewish merchants from the Lower East Side. In this area they established businesses and homes, soon followed by a synagogue, a Hebrew school, as well as social organizations.⁴¹ In 1873, the Village of Harlem was annexed into the City of New York. Soon afterward, a larger movement of residents from Manhattan's Lower East Side to East Harlem (East of Fifth Avenue) began. Primarily Jewish, they settled into tenement buildings near Third Avenue and established businesses or found work nearby. By 1880 the extension of the Second and Third Avenue elevated railroads to the Harlem River reduced the travel time between Harlem and City Hall almost in half. With commuting from downtown made feasible, a boom in residential construction in Harlem began. By the middle of the decade nearly half of the land in East Harlem below 125th Street was developed with tenements and brownstone buildings. Some criticized the dense concentration of tenement housing designed to attract workers, but for the former residents of the overcrowded Lower East Side neighborhoods, the housing was a vast improvement.⁴²

In the late 1880s Italian immigrants also began to move into the tenement district to the east of Third Avenue in Harlem. While these developments shifted the character of Harlem from a rural community, large expanses of undeveloped land remained to the west and north of the developed area. These areas retained the rural quality of "a village of huts and very humble houses."⁴³

⁴⁰ Jeffrey S. Gurock, *When Harlem Was Jewish, 1870-1930*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979),.7

⁴¹ Gurock, 5-24

⁴² Osofsky, p. 75, Hood, 51

⁴³ Gurock, 49-50, "Old Timers' Tales of Harlem's Growth," *Harlem Magazine*, December, 1914, 16

The black population in New York City was also increasing during the 1880s. Although the 1890 African American population of 25,674 was still less than two percent of the total population (1,515,301), the black population had increased by over 5,000 during the decade and changed the geographic presence of African Americans in New York City. Ward 12, all of Manhattan above 86th Street, which included Harlem, had the third highest black population (4,226) of the city's 22 wards. Ward 20 on the west side between 26th and 40th streets with 4,868 was followed by Ward 22 also on the west side between 40th and 86th streets with 4,405 African American residents. The new black migrants to New York could not all go to the already overcrowded black settlements in midtown. While there was still a black presence in some of the Greenwich Village wards, that population was declining as a black community as Italians and other European immigrant groups moved to the area. In 1890, the European immigrant population was significant. In that year each of Manhattan's wards had foreign-born white populations of 30% or more. As the character of the Lower Manhattan neighborhoods with black settlements began to reflect the cultures of the European immigrants, black residents moved to other wards to the north in Manhattan.⁴⁴

While Lower Manhattan neighborhoods were becoming less appealing to black residents, in the 1880s there were clear efforts to attract them to the developing East Harlem community. In the 1880s and 1890s advertisements in the *New York Age* the newspaper of New York's black community explicitly noted that some property owners were seeking black tenants, with language such as "a quiet home for respectable colored families," "For Colored Families."

⁴⁴ John S. Billings, M.D., "Population of New York, June 1, 1890, By Wards and Sanitary Districts," in *Vital Statistics of New York City and Brooklyn Covering Six Years Ending May 31, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, Census Office) 232-233; Rosenwaike, 77; Gurock, 49-50; regarding the boundaries for Harlem in *When Harlem was Jewish*, Gurock notes "there exists no legally defined modern community of Harlem. The colonial Harlem village ran approximately from 74th to 129th streets from the East to Hudson rivers." The term "Harlem" was also used extensively during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to designate all of upper Manhattan Island. , 6

Advertisements for apartments west of Fifth Avenue also appeared in the *New York Age* during this period, although most did not mention the race of the tenants sought. The owners of the advertised properties were white and had no reservations regarding renting to certain African Americans. The premiums that blacks were charged for rent undoubtedly contributed to the interest in black tenants.⁴⁵ The language of the advertisements made clear that stable working class black families such as the Poseys, who became the victims of the dynamite explosion on East 122nd Street, were welcome. Francis Posey's position as a letter carrier was a stable, relatively well paying job compared to the other options then available to black men. Harlem property owners were not seeking the unattached black laborers or domestic workers often mentioned in newspaper accounts of crime in the midtown Tenderloin and other black areas. The appeal by Harlem property owners to black middle class tenants was likely an investment strategy. Although segregation was not a citywide policy, the limited housing options available to blacks resulted in a policy in New York and most northern cities in which blacks were charged a premium for housing when compared to what white residents were charged. A real estate investor who targeted stable, black tenants could be assured of a higher return than he would receive with white tenants. This policy and the growth in New York's African American population resulted in significant changes in the presence of African Americans in Harlem by 1890.

⁴⁵ Daniel McL. Quackenbush (owner of 119, 131, 123 East 97th Street)- Census of 1880, New York City, Enumeration District 598, 19; Conveyances, 1880, Block 1625, 8 (Lots, 9,10,11, 12); Henry Morgenthau et al- 235-237 West 124th St., Conveyances, 1890

Table 2, Manhattan Population 1890⁴⁶

	Total Population	Colored	% of total colored in city	Colored as a % of Total Population	Total White Native Born	Total White Foreign Born	Foreign Born Whites as a % of Total	Colrd Numerical Change From 1880	Colrd% change From 1880
TOTAL:	1,515,301	25,674	100%	1.69%	852,641	636,986	42.04%		
Ward Number, Location									
1: below Maiden Lane	11,122	151	0.59%	1.36%	5,888	5,083	45.70%	-56	-27.05%
2: btwn Peck Slip & Maiden Lane East	929	23	0.09%	2.48%	467	439	47.26%	-47	-67.14%
3: btwn Reade St. & Liberty West	3,765	30	0.12%	0.80%	2,085	1,647	43.75%	-19	-38.78%
4: btwn Catherine & Peck Slip West	17,809	97	0.38%	0.54%	9,401	8,242	46.28%	42	76.36%
5: btwn Canal & Reade West	12,385	81	0.32%	0.65%	6,855	5,449	44.00%	-139	-63.18%
6: btwn Canal, Broadway & Chatham Central	23,119	456	1.78%	1.97%	9,633	13,030	56.36%	112	32.56%
7: btwn Grand , Division & Catherine East	57,366	76	0.30%	0.13%	31,222	26,068	45.44%	13	20.63%
8: btwn Houston and Canal West of Broadway	31,220	737	2.87%	2.36%	16,945	13,538	43.36%	-1,061	-59.01%
9: btwn 14 th & Houston West of 6 th Ave	54,425	1,188	4.63%	2.18%	36,725	16,442	30.21%	111	10.31%
10: btwn Rivington, Division, Bowery & Norfolk Central	57,596	174	0.68%	0.30%	20,040	37,382	64.90%	-18	-9.38%
11: btwn 14 th & Rivington East of Ave. B	75,426	62	0.24%	0.08%	37,527	37,837	50.16%	-8	-11.43%
12: Manhattan above 86 th Street	245,046	4,226	16.46%	1.72%	155,468	85,352	34.83%	3,155	294.58%
13: btwn Rivington and Grand, East of Norfolk	45,884	62	0.24%	0.14%	20,591	25,231	54.99%	-101	-61.96%
14: btwn Houston, Canal, Broadway and Bowery	28,094	169	0.66%	0.60%	11,691	16,234	57.78%	-282	-62.53%
15: btwn 14th and Houston, 6th Ave. & 4th Ave.	25,399	2,265	8.82%	8.92%	12,569	10,565	41.60%	-601	-20.97%
16: btwn 26 th and 14 th West of 6 th Ave.	49,134	2,278	8.87%	4.64%	29,797	17,059	34.72%	106	4.88%
17: btwn 14 th and Rivington, 4 th Ave & Ave. B	103,158	224	0.87%	0.22%	50,647	52,287	50.69%	-68	-23.29%
18: btwn 26 th and 14 th East of 6 th Ave.	63,270	496	1.93%	0.78%	36,889	25,885	40.91%	-162	-24.62%
19: btwn 86 th and 40 th East of 6 th Ave.	234,846	2,135	8.32%	0.91%	130,482	102,229	43.53%	947	79.71%
20: btwn 40 th and 26 th West of 6 th Ave.	84,327	4,868	18.96%	5.77%	47,821	31,638	37.52%	716	17.24%
21: btwn 40 th and 26 th East of 6 th Ave.	63,019	637	2.48%	1.01%	36,256	26,126	41.46%	-292	-31.43%
22: btwn 86 th and 40 th West of 6 th Ave.	153,877	4,405	17.16%	2.86%	94,675	54,797	35.61%	2,771	169.58%

⁴⁶ Based on data from "Vital Statistics" ,232-233

New York City's 1890 black population of 25,674 was the result of an increase of more than 6,000, a thirty percent increase over the 1880 population. Southern black migrants continued to find the city an attractive alternative to the South where racial violence was increasing and opportunities were declining for blacks following the end of Reconstruction. Of northern cities, Philadelphia continued to lead the way with a black population of over 40,000 in 1890. By this time, Chicago's black population was approaching 15,000 and Detroit's was almost 3,500.⁴⁷

Table 3
Late Nineteenth Century
Black Populations of New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia and Detroit⁴⁸

	1870	1880	1890	1900
New York/Manhattan* black population	13,072	20,433	25,674	36,246
Total Manhattan population	942,292	1,206,577	1,515,301	1,855,034
Black population as % of total	1.39%	1.69%	1.69%	1.95%
Chicago black population	3,691	6,480	14,852	30,150
Total City population	298,977	503,185	1,099,850	1,698,575
Black population as % of total	1.23%	1.29%	1.35%	1.78%
Detroit black population	2,235	2,821	3,454	4,111
Total City population	79,577	116,340	205,870	285,704
Black population as % of total	2.89%	2.42%	1.68%	1.44%
Philadelphia black population	22,147	31,699	40,374	62,613
Total City population	674,022	847,170	1,040,964	1,298,697
Black population % of total	3.29%	3.74%	3.88%	4.82%
*Statistics are for the borough of Manhattan				

By 1890 blacks were a substantial numerical presence in Upper Manhattan. Ward 12, northern Manhattan above 86th Street, had the third highest African American population, 4,226, in 1890 (see Table 2). Because the ward was the largest geographically and in terms of total

⁴⁷ Rosenwaive, 77; Twelfth Census of the United States, Population

⁴⁸ Ninth Census of the U.S., Population; Tenth Census of the U.S., Population; Eleventh Census of the U.S., Population; Twelfth Census of the U.S., Population

population (245,046) African Americans represented only 1.7% of the total population in Ward 12, but 16.5% of the city's African American population of 25,674 lived in this ward.⁴⁹

Examining the distribution of the African American population within Ward 12 provides insight into the development of black communities in Harlem in the late 19th century (See Table 4 and Map 2). In 1890 Ward 12 was divided into 18 Sanitary Districts. As with the twenty-two wards of Manhattan, African Americans resided in every Sanitary District in Ward 12. Similarly, foreign born whites were at least 28% of the population of all of the districts. The African American population in the Ward 12 Sanitary Districts ranged from .17% in District D (East Side between 86th and 94th Streets) to the significantly more substantial 7.3 % in District G. This District, bound by Third Avenue on the west, 110th Street on the north, and 94th Street on the south and the East River on the east was within the district in which upper Manhattan development began to be concentrated in the 1880s when the Second and Third Avenue elevated railroads were extended. It was also the district of several of the properties advertised in *The New York Age* in the 1880s and 1890s.⁵⁰

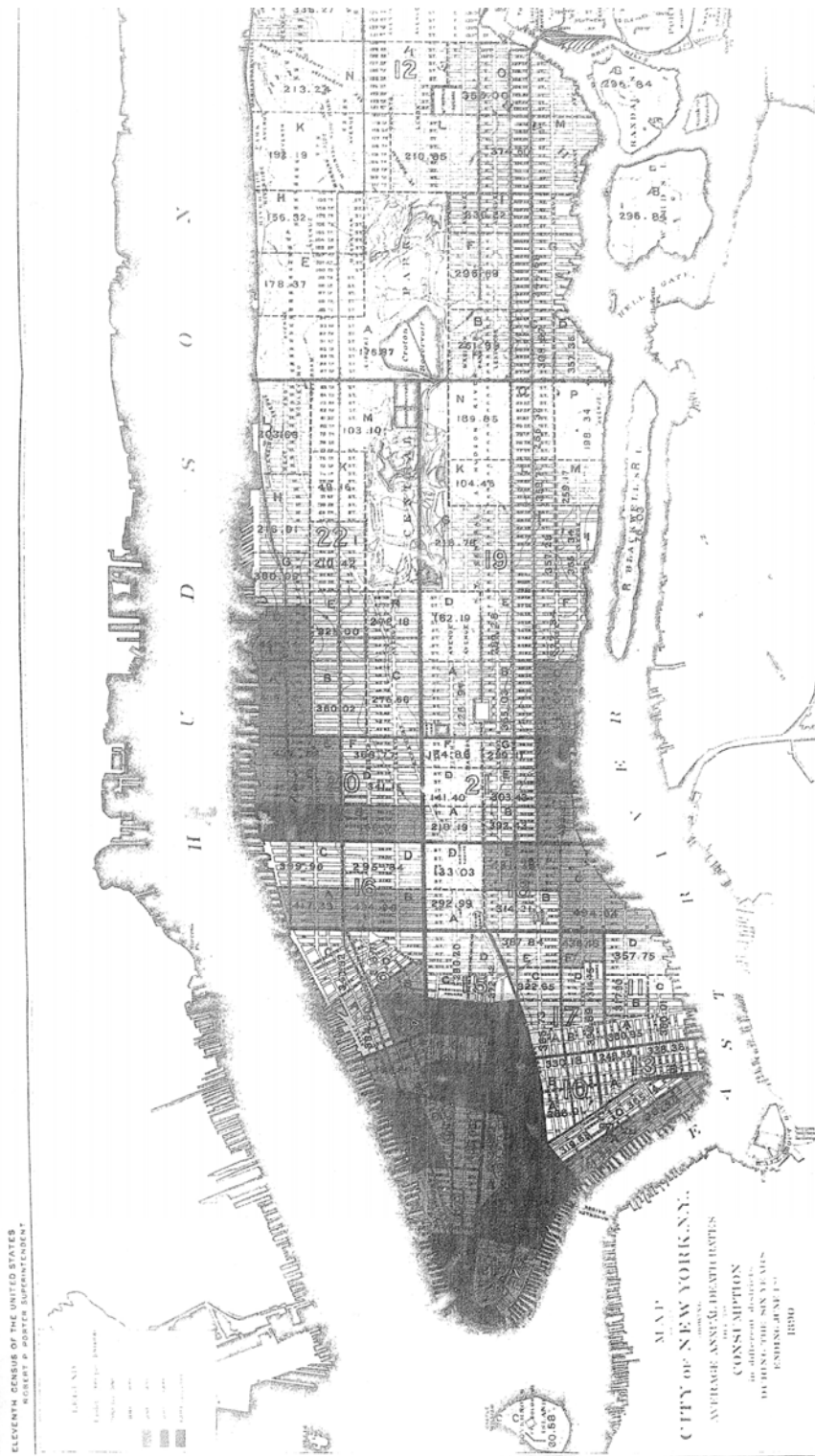
The surviving members of the Posey family, victims of the 1893 explosion on East 122nd Street were part of the group of black New Yorkers on the move during the 1890s. They had moved into their apartment on East 122nd Street earlier in 1893 leaving housing at 214 West Twenty-Eighth Street on the southern edge of the midtown black settlement. Three years before that, they had been living in Washington, D.C. with Mr. Posey's parents⁵¹

⁴⁹ Rosenwaik, 77

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Trow's New York City Directory, 1893-1894, The Trow City Directory Company, Vol. CVII; Boyd's Directory of the District of Columbia, (Washington, D.C.: W. H. Boyd, 1888), p. 1578; Census of 1880 Washington, D.C., Enumeration District 23, 17;

Map 2, Manhattan Sanitary Districts, 1890⁵²



⁵² John S. Billings, M.D., *Vital Statistics of New York City and Brooklyn*, (Washington: Department of the Interior, 1894)

Table 4, Population of Ward 12 Manhattan Sanitary Districts, 1890⁵³

	Total Population	Clrd All ages	Ward Colored as % of total city colored (25,674)	Clrd % of Total Pop	Total White Native Born	Total White Foreign Born	% White Foreign born
Ward 12 Totals:	245,046	4,226	16.46%	1.72%	155,468	85,352	34.83%
Sanitary District: Location							
A: 86 th to 110 th , 5 th to Central Park W; 86 th to 94 th CPW to Hudson River	5,107	60	0.23%	1.17%	3,503	1,544	30.23%
B: 86 th to 94 th , 5 th Ave. to 3 rd Ave.	13,345	67	0.26%	0.50%	8,404	4,874	36.52%
C: 86 th to 94 th , 3 rd Ave to 1 st Ave	11,936	290	1.13%	2.43%	6,471	5,175	43.36%
D: 86 th to 94 th 1 st Ave. to E. River	7,001	12	0.05%	0.17%	4,538	2,451	35.01%
E: 94 th to 102 th , CPW to Hudson River	10,648	48	0.19%	0.45%	7,234	3,366	31.61%
F: 94 th to 110 th , 5 th Ave. to 3 rd Ave	8,432	180	0.70%	2.13%	5,240	3,012	35.72%
G: 94th to 105th, 3rd Ave. to East River	17,876	1,305	5.08%	7.30%	8,766	7,805	43.66%
H: 102 nd to 105 th , CPW to Hudson River	6,669	81	0.32%	1.21%	4,555	2,033	30.48%
I: 105 th to 110 th , 5 th Ave. to 3 rd Ave.	23,358	43	0.17%	0.18%	13,828	9,487	40.62%
K: 110 th to 120 th , 8 th Ave. to Hudson River	4,700	13	0.05%	0.28%	3,203	1,484	31.57%
L: 110 th to 120 th , 8 th Ave. to 4 th Ave.	7,471	52	0.20%	0.70%	5,219	2,200	29.45%
M: 110 th to 120 th , 4 th Ave. to East River	39,520	232	0.90%	0.59%	24,103	15,185	38.42%
N: 120 th to 130 th , 8 th Ave. to Hudson River	25,744	523	2.04%	2.03%	17,976	7,245	28.14%
O: 120 th to 130 th , Park Ave. to East River	27,857	526	2.05%	1.89%	18,784	8,547	30.68%
P:	4,891	16	0.06%	0.33%	3,069	1,806	36.92%
R	11,328	142	0.55%	1.25%	8,282	2,904	25.64%
S	16,510	542	2.11%	3.28%	10,615	5,353	32.42%
AB: Ward's Island, Randall's Island	2,653	94	0.37%	3.54%	1,678	881	33.21%

⁵³ Ibid, 230

While the Poseys were settled in East Harlem, the westward development of Harlem was moving forward in the 1890s. Plans to develop a subway line from City Hall in Lower Manhattan to West 145th Street in Harlem led to the westward shift in Harlem's development. Each of the previous transportation improvements, from omnibus, to horse-car to elevated railroad, had been advocated as necessary to promote the business development of New York City. The discussions of a subway line were framed in the same context, and a transportation link more efficient than the existing elevated train lines had been discussed for decades. The 1888 proposal by Mayor Abram Hewitt began to move the idea toward reality. At the time that Hewitt proposed a line from City Hall in Lower Manhattan to Harlem, much of Manhattan's Upper West Side, the area above Fifty-Ninth Street was sparsely developed. Residents and business owners complained of the poor transportation, and business leaders noted that without better transportation the area would never be fully developed. While there was support for improved transportation, implementation of the plan was hindered by debates over cost. Some advocated another elevated train line that would be less costly but also would not provide the level of quick service of a subway line. By 1898 the subway plan was in place. Construction began in 1900.⁵⁴

While the debate over the subway line was taking place, developers had purchased vacant land along the route of the line, confident that some form of improved transportation would make the property desirable. When construction was finally begun, a building boom was sparked in the area of Lenox Avenue from 110th to 145th Street along the route of the subway

⁵⁴ Real Estate Record Association, p. 59; Elizabeth Hawes, *New York, New York: How the Apartment House Transformed the Life of the City (1869-1930)*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), 154; Hood, 13-26, 105-108; Charles Lockwood, *Bricks & Brownstones: The New York Row House, 1783-1929 an Architectural & Social History* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company) 1972, 242; Gurock, pp.27-30; Osofsky, 34, 80-87;

line. The initiation of construction of the subway line sparked a flurry of activity in sales of long-held property as well as development of the property.⁵⁵

Conclusion

The black population of Manhattan almost tripled in the last three decades of the nineteenth century growing from 13,072 in 1870 to 36,246 in 1900. This number was too large to be absorbed by the scattered black settlements in midtown and lower Manhattan. But with the population increases, these decades also witnessed shifts in the racial mores of New York City. As black and European immigrant numbers both increased dramatically in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, opportunities for blacks became more limited. The hardening of racial lines meant that African Americans were no longer welcome in some occupations and as customers in some places of business. Traditions of segregation on public transportation were more uniformly enforced. But the period also witnessed advances. Charitable organizations were founded to attend to the needs of black residents. A state civil rights law was passed in 1873, and in 1884 the segregated school system ended.⁵⁶

By 1900 the Posey family, victims of the 1893 explosion had moved from 121st Street, but not to another part of Harlem. In 1900 they were living on Gates Avenue in Brooklyn. There Frank Posey, who had lost his wife and his mother in the explosion, reconstructed his household. He married Elizabeth, a New Yorker whose parents were from Virginia. His children Irma and Austin were not listed in the household, suggesting that they may have died from their injuries in the explosion. Reginald, the elder son, was joined by five other siblings who may have been Elizabeth's children. Although the Poseys did not remain in Harlem, that Manhattan community

⁵⁵ Hood, pp. 56-90; Rosenwaik, p. 77; Gurock, pp. 30-33

⁵⁶ Marcy S. Sacks, *Before Harlem: The Black Experience in New York City Before World War I*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006) p. 3, p. 66

became an increasingly attractive refuge for many other blacks seeking to escape the potential violence of midtown. As the new century began, about twenty-five percent of the city's black population already lived in the Twelfth Ward of Upper Manhattan which included Harlem. These numbers would soon grow as more black residents moved to Harlem. ⁵⁷

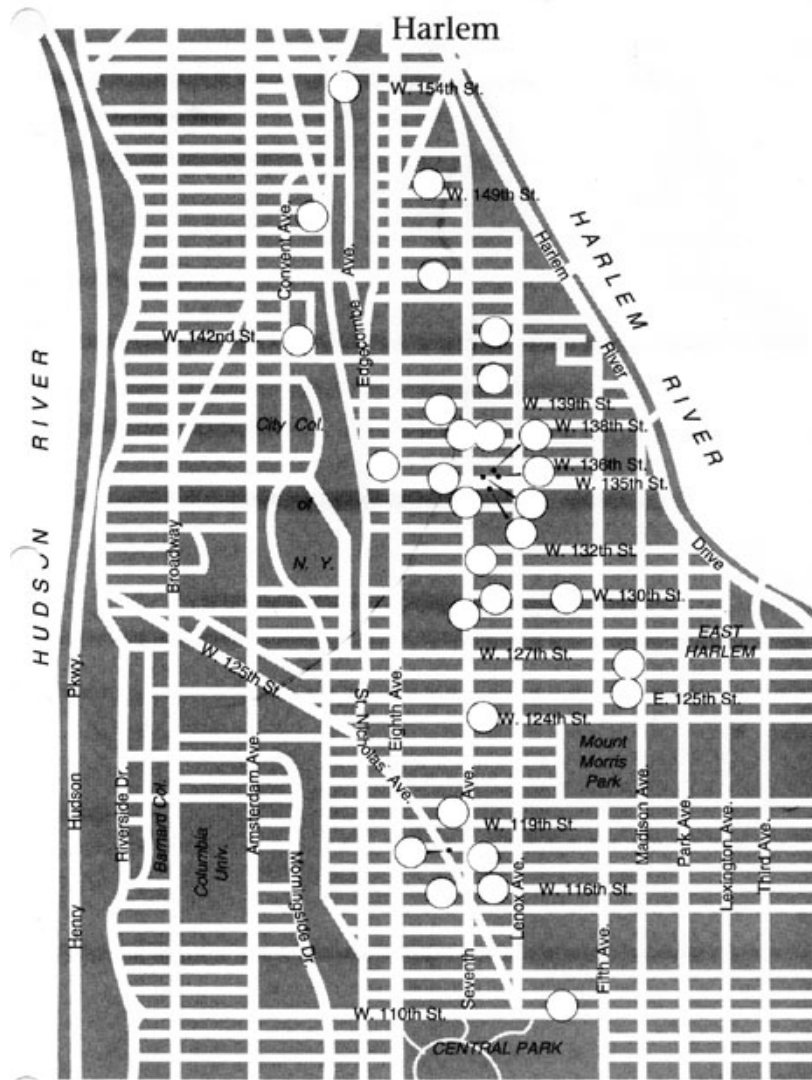
⁵⁷ Twelfth Census of the United States, Population, City of New York, Borough of Brooklyn, Enumeration District 398, 18, 1900;

Chapter 2

The End of the African American Welcome in Harlem, 1904

In the 1890s Harlem had vague northern and southern boundaries. The area north of Ninety-Sixth Street, was often referred to as Harlem in reference to the village of New Harlem that had once had boundaries extending even farther south to 72nd Street before it was annexed into New York City in 1873. The northern boundary of Harlem was also vague and in references ranged

Map 3, Map of Harlem¹



¹ <http://mapsites.net/gotham01/requirements.htm>

from 155th to streets in the 170s.² Decade by decade, since the city's establishment at the tip of Lower Manhattan in the 1600s, development in Manhattan had moved northward and consumed the land that had been either vacant or previously used for farming. An 1897 map of New York City, then consisting only of Manhattan, a year before it was joined with Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island into Greater New York, illustrates that the vacant land in the Upper Manhattan community of Harlem was disappearing as development moved northward.³ But there were still substantial areas of vacant land. Between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, 110th Street, and 111th Streets were almost totally vacant. Continuing to travel northward, partial rows of brownstones began to fill blocks such as 112th and 113th Streets. Most of Seventh Avenue between 110th and 116th Streets was vacant. Many of the streets east of Seventh Avenue were vacant or sparsely developed with apartment houses. Above 116th Street traveling northward to 135th Street, the blocks were more densely developed, but areas of vacant land remained in the middle of some blocks or along some avenues. Above 135th Street, many of the blocks were totally vacant.⁴

For many New Yorkers the development of Upper Manhattan could not happen soon enough. An 1890s article expressed embarrassment at the grass that was growing in 125th Street, Harlem's main commercial thoroughfare, implying that its presence suggested a country village rather than a neighborhood in a large city. Harlem real estate investors and residents had long agitated for the construction of better transportation routes, arguing that without such links their investments would not grow and neither would Harlem.⁵

² Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem, The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890-1930* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 75; *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, Harlem Local Reporter, New York Times*, 1890s

³ Sections 6, 7 and 8, Map of New York City, G.W. Bromley & Co. 1897, New York Public Library

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Clifton Hood, *722 Miles: The Building of the Subways and How They Transformed New York* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 24-28, 60

The growth in developed areas of Harlem coincided with an increase in the black presence in Upper Manhattan. From 1890 to 1900 the African American population in Manhattan grew by forty-one percent from 25,674 to 36,246. Behind these numbers was the growing exodus of blacks from southern states. Seeking to escape racial violence, declining economic opportunities, and legalized segregation, African Americans moved to northern cities like New York in increasing numbers.⁶

The real estate transactions of African Americans in Harlem during the first decade of the twentieth century, as well as the reactions of white Harlem residents and property owners to the black presence in the community, provide a unique view of the hardening of the color line in a northern city. In cities such as Cleveland, Chicago, and Philadelphia, as well as in New York, when the black populations increased, racial lines that had previously been somewhat flexible hardened, sometimes resulting in interracial conflict. In this atmosphere, examining African Americans' access to Harlem real estate, as renters and as owners, reveals examples of increased racial hostility, but also instances of interracial cooperation.⁷

Although African Americans lived throughout Manhattan, in the 1890s the dramatic increase in population during the decade resulted in greater visibility in some districts. Their largest concentration was in the midtown area. By 1900 the midtown Assembly District Nineteen (the west side from 59th to 72nd Streets) contained the largest population of African Americans-- 4,982, or 14% of the borough's total black population (See Table 5). Four other midtown districts each contained over 2,500 African American residents. In Upper Manhattan, the

⁶John S. Billings, M.D., "Population of New York, June 1, 1890, By Wards and Sanitary Districts," in *Vital Statistics of New York City and Brooklyn Covering Six Years Ending May 31, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, Census Office) pp.230-233; "Population by Sex, General Nativity, and Color By Groups of States and Territories: 1900, Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900- Population, Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, No. 88, 9 ; W.E. B. Dubois; *The Black North*, (New York: Arno Press, 1901, 1969), 1-18
⁷ Spear, 11-27; Kusmer, 53-65; Roger Lane, *Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia, 1860-1900*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 6-44

Twenty-third District, east of Fifth Avenue between 86th and 96th Streets housed over 3,000 African Americans. During the 1890s African Americans in Upper Manhattan, previously concentrated in the area East of Third Avenue began to move west, settling in relatively substantial numbers on blocks south of 135th Street and east of Lenox Avenue. In 1900 the Thirty-first District in East and Central Harlem between 110th and 135th Streets was home to approximately 1,600 African Americans. With these increased numbers, in some districts in Manhattan the African American population approached eight percent of the total population of the district. Borough-wide, the black population remained less than two percent of Manhattan's total population of 1.85 million in 1900.⁸

⁸ Vital Statistics, Twelfth Census of the United States, Census Bulletin No. 88, "Population by Sex, General Nativity, and Color, by Groups of States and Territories, 1900, Washington: U.S. Census Bureau, 1901, 9; Marcy Sacks, *Before Harlem: The Black Experience in New York City Before World War I*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 22-23

Table 5

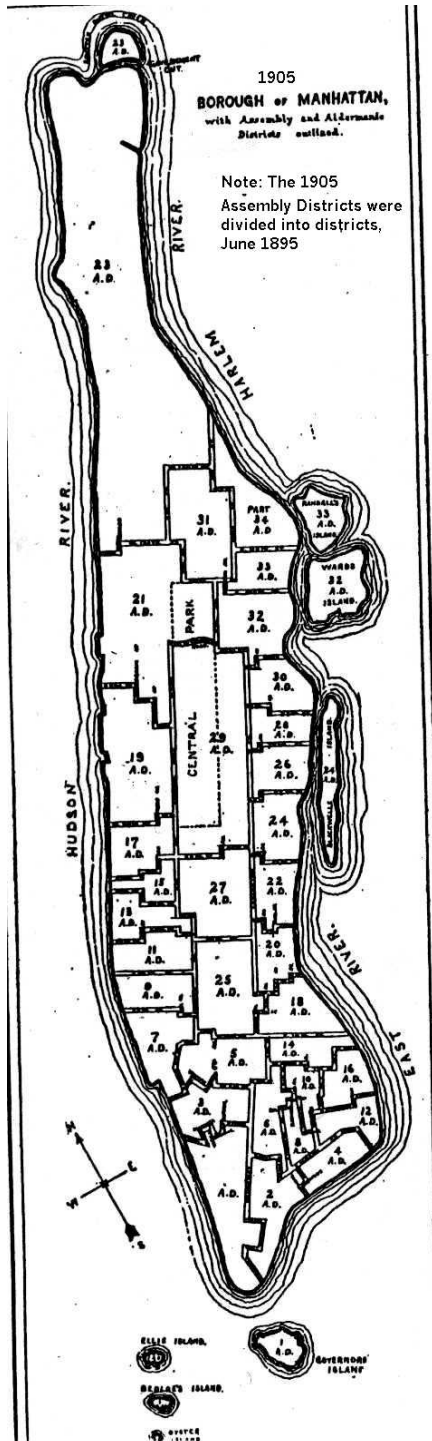
Distribution of African American Population in Manhattan in 1900⁹

Assembly District	Total	Negro	% of ttl Dist. Pop	% of ttl Negro pop
Assembly District 1	25,959	132	0.51%	0.36%
Assembly District 2	52,768	261	0.49%	0.72%
Assembly District 3	47,295	965	2.04%	2.66%
Assembly District 4	76,852	22	0.03%	0.06%
Assembly District 5	37,951	1,378	3.63%	3.80%
Assembly District 6	64,286	68	0.11%	0.19%
Assembly District 7	41,979	793	1.89%	2.19%
Assembly District 8	72,125	9	0.01%	0.02%
Assembly District 9	42,346	1,673	3.95%	4.62%
Assembly District 10	70,785	18	0.03%	0.05%
<i>Wsid- 14th-34th</i> 11	41,247	3,756	9.11%	10.36%
12	72,897	4	0.01%	0.01%
<i>Wsid- 34th-40th</i> 13	37,572	2,584	6.88%	7.13%
14	54,847	25	0.05%	0.07%
15	38,911	842	2.16%	2.32%
16	73,834	2	0.00%	0.01%
17	40,975	1,214	2.96%	3.35%
18	45,197	86	0.19%	0.24%
<i>Wsid 59-72</i> 19	65,025	4,982	7.66%	13.74%
20	42,596	113	0.27%	0.31%
86-125th West Side 21	89,055	1,135	1.27%	3.13%
22	48,796	244	0.50%	0.67%
above 86th 23	78,536	3,169	4.04%	8.74%
24	51,209	379	0.74%	1.05%
<i>34th-14th mid</i> 25	36,800	2,950	8.02%	8.14%
26	56,882	458	0.81%	1.26%
<i>42nd-34th mid</i> 27	36,984	3,318	8.97%	9.15%
28	46,123	192	0.42%	0.53%
29	51,674	957	1.85%	2.64%
E. Hrlm 68-86 th 30	58,728	345	0.59%	0.95%
E./Central Hrlm 110th-135th 31	78,013	1,483	1.90%	4.09%
E. Hrlm 86-110th 32	80,379	1,680	2.09%	4.63%
33	58,112	147	0.25%	0.41%
34	38,296	862	2.25%	2.38%
Manhattan	1,855,034	36,246	1.95%	100.00%

Italic text= Midtown districts; Black bold text= Harlem districts

⁹ Compiled from Twelfth Census of the United States, Census Bulletin, No. 88, "Population by Sex, General Nativity, and Color, By Groups of States and Territories, p. 9

Map 4, Manhattan Assembly Districts (1905)¹⁰



¹⁰ <http://www.bklyn-genealogy-info.com/Ward/1905.NY.AD.html>

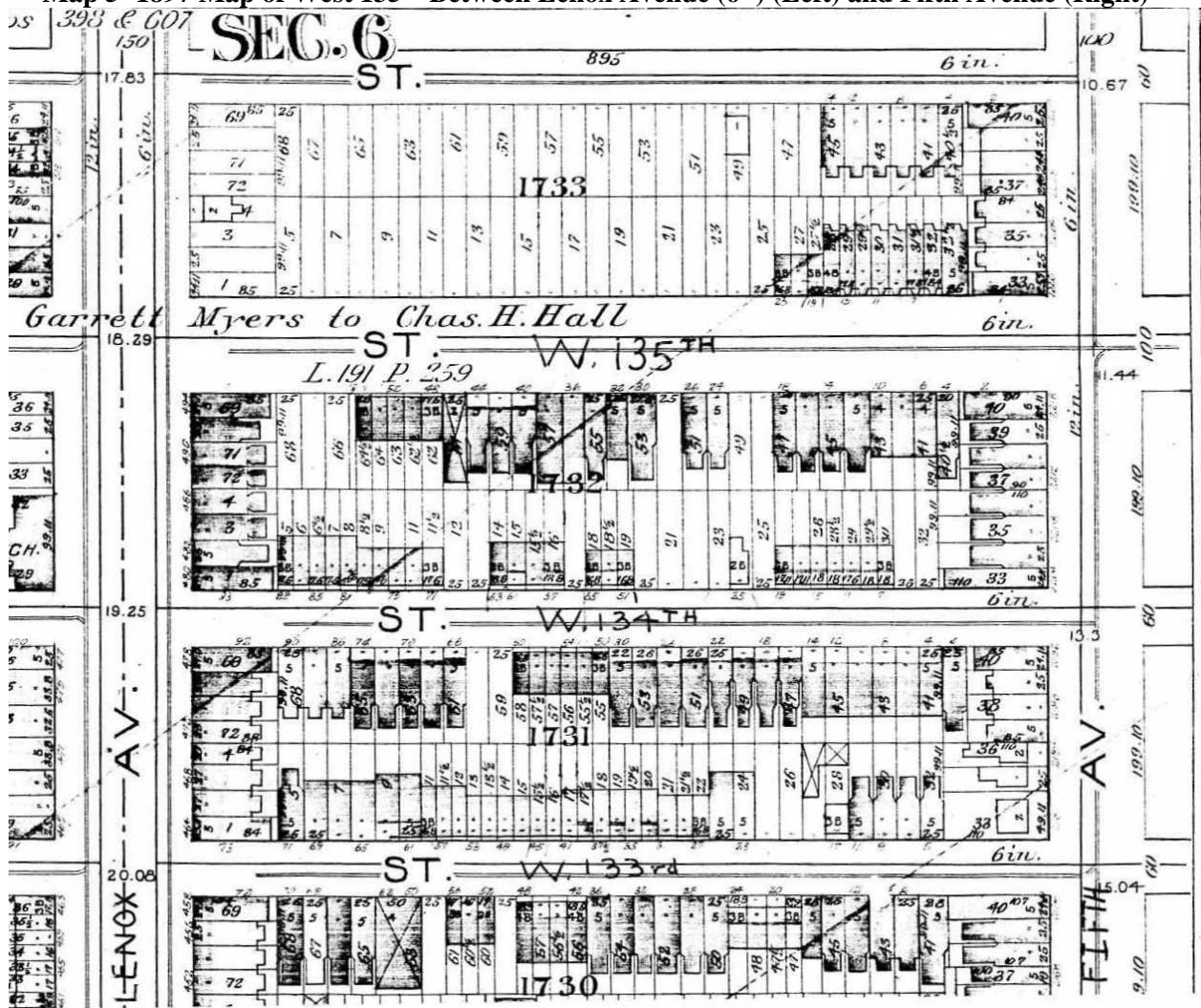
Although midtown Manhattan continued to house substantial numbers of blacks, by the end of the 1890s an African American enclave was concentrated at 135th Street and Lenox Avenue in Harlem. The black residents of this area rented apartments owned by white investors who viewed their presence in the “Negro Colony” as a source of revenue, not unlike their presence in other black enclaves in Manhattan such as Greenwich Village or the midtown Tenderloin and San Juan Hill districts. A distinction from these earlier settlements, to which blacks gained entry as they declined, was that the Harlem district was a relatively new district. The buildings occupied by the black tenants were recently built.¹¹

By 1897 the south side of West 135th Street, between Lenox and Fifth Avenues, was almost fully developed with small apartment buildings (see Map 5). Only six vacant parcels of land were scattered throughout this side of the block. The north side of this block of 135th Street was quite different. Except for fifteen buildings on the eastern edge of this side of the block, the north side of West 135th Street was totally vacant. In 1900 the buildings on the south side of 135th Street were occupied by both white and black residents, usually in separate buildings, but not always. Reviewing the racial characteristics of the occupants of the twenty-two buildings on the block, (see Table 6), nine buildings were occupied exclusively by African Americans, and ten properties were occupied exclusively by white residents. The remaining three properties were occupied by tenants from both groups.¹²

¹¹ Vital Statistics, Twelfth Census of the United States, Census Bulletin No. 88, “Population by Sex, General Nativity, and Color, by Groups of States and Territories, 1900, Washington: U.S. Census Bureau, 1901, 9

¹² Twelfth Census of the United States, Schedule No. 1- Population, New York City Enumeration District 614, 7A-13B, Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office) 1900

Map 5- 1897 Map of West 135th Between Lenox Avenue (6th) (Left) and Fifth Avenue (Right)¹³



Darkened areas= buildings N ↑ E →

Looking more closely at some of the households in some of the buildings on West 135th Street provides a perspective on the social fabric of the block. In 1895 Joseph Holden, a forty-five year old African American moved to 16 West 135th Street, between Fifth Avenue and Lenox Avenue. Holden found work as a cook and a porter to support his family that included his wife Margaret, forty-one, and two daughters, Marcellina, sixteen, and Maude, twelve. While Holden was born in New York, his wife and their oldest daughter, Marcellina, were born in Washington,

¹³ Ibid

D.C. The Holden's younger daughter was born in New York. The Holdens had previously lived on Grove Street in the middle of the Greenwich Village neighborhood that in the early 1800s had been known as "Little Africa" because of its concentration of black residents. By the time the Holdens left Grove Street in 1895, the center of the black community had shifted to midtown Manhattan. But in moving to Harlem, the Holdens moved to another area that was becoming an African American settlement. Far from the increasingly crowded black district in midtown, in the 1890s Harlem was viewed by black and white New Yorkers as the suburb that it had been until 1873. The area was still sparsely developed, and while brownstones and apartment buildings lined some streets, the width of the north-south avenues, and the modest heights of the buildings, gave residents access to the light and air that progressive reformers were beginning to emphasize as essential for healthy communities. Many blocks were undeveloped and still contained open fields. In moving to Harlem, the Holdens may have been seeking a more respectable neighborhood in which to raise their children. While Harlem's white property owners sought the "respectable" class of black tenants, black renters seeking an escape from the Tenderloin neighborhood sought this class for neighbors.¹⁴

For many New York City renters of the nineteenth century, April 30th was traditionally the day that annual leases expired both for residential and for commercial spaces. Therefore, the following day, May 1st of each year was known as Moving Day. On this day the streets of the city were filled with vehicles loaded down with furniture and other belongings, in some cases followed by residents carrying things that would not fit on the vehicles, or that the renters preferred to carry for safekeeping. For low income New Yorkers, moving was an annual ritual,

¹⁴ Twelfth Census of the United States, Schedule No. 1-Population, Enumeration District 617, Sheets 7A-13A; Trow's Directory of New York City, 1895, 1896, 1897, 1898, 1899, 1900; Osofsky, p. 11; Lucille Genevieve Lomax, "A Social History of the Negro Population Living in the Section of New York City known as Greenwich Village" (M.A. thesis, Columbia University, 1930), Table 3b

sometimes instigated by landlords, often by tenants seeking the greener pastures of slightly lower rents or better living environments.¹⁵

The Holdens' housing tenure reflected this tradition. After moving to 16 West 135th Street in 1895, they moved each year for the next five years. In 1896 they moved next door to 18 West 135th Street. The following year they returned to Grove Street. In 1898 they moved to 26 West 135th Street, and 1899 found them back on Grove Street. By 1900 they were back at 26 West 135th Street. Holden then worked as a cook. His wife Margaret kept house, while their daughter, Marcellina, worked as a maid. Their other daughter Maude also worked outside the home. A fifty-five year old lodger, John Hill, a "jobber" born in Washington D. C., had joined the household.¹⁶

By 1900 building number 26, to which the Holdens had moved was occupied by ten black households. Peter Willis, a fifty-two year old laborer lived in an apartment with his wife Rachel, fifty years old, and a large extended family: Willis' twenty-nine year old son, Rufus, also a laborer, his twenty-eight year old daughter Rosa, with her husband Thomas Williams (who was unemployed) and their children Madge (two), and Charles (one). Other occupants included another son, David who was a twenty-two year old laborer, a daughter Lula Bell, who at eighteen was a teacher, a fifteen year old son John who worked as an elevator boy, and a daughter Ida who at thirteen was attending school. All members of the Willis extended family were born in North Carolina. Six boarders also lived with this large family. Puck and Anna Letty, a couple in their late twenties were also from North Carolina. The husband worked as a laborer, and his wife did not work outside the home. Junius and Mary Fields, nineteen and twenty-one years old were

¹⁵ Elizabeth Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent, 1785-1850*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989)

¹⁶ Twelfth Census, New York, Ward 12, E.D. 617, Sheet No. 10B; the occupation noted for Marcellina is illegible; the occupation of "jobber" could have referred to a person who sold wholesale merchandise or a meat packer.; Trow's Directory of New York City, 1900

from Virginia. Junius Fields worked as a butler, and his wife did not work outside the home. Samuel Jarvis a twenty-four year old laborer, and John McAlister, a twenty-eight year old teacher were both from North Carolina. While the bonds of family or friendship might have made living in close quarters more manageable, the fact that seventeen people, most of whom were adults or young adults, were living in one apartment illustrates the reality of limited housing choices for black New Yorkers. The residents the other six apartments at 26 West 135th Street, all African Americans, were a mix of residents born in the South, in New York or other northern states.¹⁷

A building comparable to number 26, but separated from it by a vacant lot was 30 West 135th Street. It was occupied by ten white families who reflected the wider occupational choices available to white New Yorkers. The family of Joseph (forty-nine) and Mary Wilbur (forty) included six children. Five other children born to the couple were no longer living in 1900. Joseph worked as a mechanic, and their twenty-five year old daughter Carry worked as a box maker. Daughters, Maggie (twenty-four) and Mamie (fifteen) were seamstresses, while twenty-three year old Christina did not work outside the home. The Wilbur's son Joseph, who was twenty-one, was an electrician, and youngest daughter Rose was in school. All of the Wilburs were born in New York, although the parents of Joseph and Mary Wilbur were born in Germany.¹⁸

A building near the eastern end of the block, 4 West 135th Street was occupied by nine black families. Howard Gilmore, a barber and his wife Jennie lived in one apartment with their daughters Grace and Olive, ages nine and ten. Forty-two years old, Gilmore was born in New York. His wife, who was five years younger than him, was born in Massachusetts. Howard

¹⁷ Twelfth Census, Enumeration District 617, Sheet 10A, 10B

¹⁸ Twelfth Census, Enumeration District 617, Sheet 10B, 11A

Gilmore's parents were born in Pennsylvania and his wife's parents were born in Massachusetts. The Gilmore's younger neighbors Jessie Boyd, a post office clerk, and his wife Clara were twenty-eight and twenty-four respectively. Both were born in New York, but Jessie Boyd's parents were born in Virginia. His wife's father was born in New York, and her mother was born in Scotland. Another neighbor, James Edwards, a thirty-five year old jobber was born in the West Indies. His wife Nora, a laundress, (thirty-four) was born in Virginia. Their neighbors, Fred and Fannie Stewart, twenty-eight and twenty-four years old, were born in New York as were their parents and their three children, sons Francis (four), Elliot (three) and Elliel (two). Fred Stewart was a shipping clerk. Fannie Stewart's mother, Fannie Brown also lived with them. Fifty-six years old, she was also born in New York.¹⁹

White families lived next door to 4 West 135th Street at 6 West 135th Street. John Crawford, a fifty-seven year old plasterer from Scotland lived in one apartment with his wife Sarah who was from Ireland. At fifty-five she was raising her grandsons James (eleven), and Thomas (nine), both of whom were born in New York. John Crawford's fifty-nine year old brother William also a plasterer, lived with them. In another apartment in the building was Charles Fisher (thirty-eight), an engineer from Pennsylvania, and his wife Myra (thirty-four) who did not work outside the home. Living with them was Myra's brother John Lathrop, a forty-year old elevator operator, Myra's sister Annie, a thirty-five year old tailor, a nephew William, a twenty year old civil engineer, and Myra's mother Emmaline Lathrop, (seventy-six and born in England). Myra Fisher, her siblings and nephew were all born in New York. Apart from the Willis household's seventeen residents, black and white households on 135th Street were comparable in size, most ranging from five to eight people. Extended family or unrelated lodgers

¹⁹ Twelfth Census, N.Y.C. Enumeration District, 617 Sheet, 7A, 7B

were not unusual, but more white residents had higher skilled jobs such as electricians and seamstresses, while black residents worked in laborer or service positions.²⁰

Like previous black settlements in Manhattan, the 135th Street settlement, while containing a substantial number of black residents, was not exclusively African American. Some buildings on the block did have tenants of both races, and in one building tenants of different races shared an apartment. At 16 West 135th Street Sallie Tagwell, a forty year old African American lived with two boarders, Jamie Lee, a thirty-year old white woman born in “Carolina” whose parents were born in Ireland, and her husband Henry Lee, a white, twenty-nine year old builder, also born in Carolina. The 135th Street settlement also differed from previous black settlements. The black and white residents of previous settlements were predominantly poor and therefore the interracial residential arrangements were overlooked. Most of the white heads of household on West 135th Street held skilled jobs which allowed them to rise above the level of poor whites in Manhattan’s midtown district. Harlem’s black residents of the 1890s were also striving for middle class status within the occupational constraints of the period. Porters, cooks and other service workers, whose incomes were supplemented by the work of their wives, were the core of New York’s black middle class of the nineteenth century. On 135th Street, by living in large groups of families and unrelated individuals, residents such as the Willis household, who were mainly laborers, could combine their incomes in crowded conditions to meet the cost of better housing in Harlem.²¹

²⁰ Twelfth Census, N.Y.C. Enumeration District, 617 Sheet 7B

²¹ Twelfth Census, N.Y.C. Enumeration District, 617 Sheet, 9A, 9B

Table 6

Racial Characteristics of Residents of the south side of One Hundred and Thirty-Fifth Street (between Fifth and Lenox Avenues) in 1900²²

	Building Address West 135th Street	Race of residents	Number of Households in the Building²³	During 1903-04 Purchased by
1.	2 West 135 th Street	White	10	
2.	4	Black	9	
3.	6	White	5	
4.	8	White	4	
5.	10	White	5	
6.	12	Black	11	
7.	14	Black	8	
8.	16	African American and white (2 white boarders within a household headed by an African American)	6 (1 white household)	
9.	18	African American and white	6 (1 white household)	
10.	24	African American and white	8 (1 white household)	
11.	26	Black	10	
12.	30	White	10	James & Ella Thomas; Philip Payton; Afro-Am Realty
13.	32	White	5	“ “
14.	34	Black	9	
15.	40	Black	10	Hudson Realty
16.	42	Black	15	Hudson Realty
17.	44	Black	13	Hudson Realty
Not on census	46			Mercy Seat Baptist
18.	48	Black	1	
19.	50	White	1	
20.	52	White	1	
21.	54	White	4	
22.	56	White	1	

²² Twelfth Census of the United States, Schedule No. 1- Population, New York City, Ward 12, Enumeration District No. 617, Sheets 7A-13B, U.S. Department of Commerce, 1900

²³ Households represented by the number of people recorded as the “Head” of a household on the census schedule at a particular address

The biracial housing patterns on West 135th Street would soon be challenged by larger forces and increasing hostility toward blacks. As African Americans became a greater presence in northern and southern cities in the decades following the end of the Civil War, policies were developed to limit their movement and access to public and private accommodations. In the south, voting restrictions and segregation laws eventually resulted. Blacks were characterized as prone to criminality and disorder, factors used to justify segregation practices, harsh treatment by the criminal justice system, anti-black violence, and restrictions on educational and employment opportunities. In the north, social and economic discrimination increased. Access to skilled occupations became even more limited. Some restaurants and other public accommodations refused service to African Americans. Because of discrimination, blacks in the West Fifty-third Street enclave leased a building and applied to the Young Men's Christian Association for affiliation. It became one of the first of many all-black YMCAs in northern cities. In employment, blacks seldom had access to the jobs that were continuing to draw unskilled European immigrants to New York City. In social interactions, they experienced restrictions as well. The state civil rights law of 1873 made it possible for blacks to sue if denied accommodations and did result in suits related to service in bars and restaurants, but the onus was on blacks to challenge discriminatory behavior. Many preferred to frequent places that sought their patronage rather than challenge the hardening color line.²⁴

Blacks battled against the prevailing stereotype of criminality. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century progressive reformers began to look for solutions to urban problems such as vice and crime. Consistent with the developing image of black community pathology and disarray, many reformers at the time considered African Americans more prone to vice and

²⁴ Ida Wells-Barnet, Alfreda Duster ed, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970), 18-20 ; Osofsky, 15, 36

crime. Black urban neighborhoods were then coming into existence or increasing in scale as African Americans migrated from southern farms to northern cities. The fact that these communities were often the location of crime and illegal activities was considered by many to be an unavoidable natural outgrowth of racial characteristics of blacks rather than the result of restricted opportunities, racial segregation, poverty, graft, and lax law enforcement.²⁵

The image of black criminality was confirmed for many New Yorkers on an August evening in 1900, when Arthur Harris, a black man, interrupted a walk with his common-law wife, May Enoch, also African American, to purchase a cigar at a corner store. Harris' wife remained on the street as he entered the store to make his purchase. Upon exiting the store Harris observed that a white man was in an altercation with May Enoch. Harris struggled with the man and in the course of their fight Harris stabbed the man. The man was Robert Thorpe, an undercover policeman who had been attempting to arrest Harris's wife. Seeing her standing at the corner in the Tenderloin district at night, he assumed that she was a prostitute. The undercover officer was about to become the son-in-law of a senior official at the neighborhood precinct. When Thorpe died from his wounds the next day, the midtown neighborhood was swept with a fury that was directed by white residents at African Americans (Harris had escaped to Washington, D.C.). In the days following the officer's death blacks were pulled off of streetcars and beaten, their homes were damaged, and many were chased through the streets. Retaliating for the death of a colleague, police officers looked the other way to these violent acts and in some cases were reported to have assisted in attacks.²⁶

²⁵ "The Housing of the Negro in New York City," Mary Rankin Cranston, *The Southern Workman*, June 1902, pp. 327-332; Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, (New York: C. Scribner's Sons), 98-101

²⁶ Osofsky, 46-52; James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1930), 58-73; 126-130; Citizens Protective League, *Story of the Riot*, (New York: Arno Press, 1969)

In the aftermath of the attacks, the worst since the city's 1863 Draft Riots, area ministers organized the Citizens Protective League, held meetings and brought the grievances of the victims, several of whom claimed to have been attacked by policemen, to city leaders. The investigation, led by Bernard York, president of the Board of Police Commissioners (mayoral appointees), concluded that there was no evidence of wrongdoing, and that:

It may be that some innocent people, both black and white were injured during the time of the trouble, but it should be borne in mind that a portion of the district in which the trouble occurred is thickly populated with a mixed class; that it calls for, at all times, extra vigilance on the part of the police.²⁷

For many blacks, midtown was no longer a safe area. This incident contributed to the continued movement of African Americans to Harlem.

Although the racial ideology of black criminality influenced the perceptions of whites toward blacks, the profit motive was also an equally powerful factor in determining how blacks would be treated by whites. A few years after the 1900 riot, as Harlem land values increased with the first subway line nearing completion in 1904, the black residents once sought as renters in Harlem became the targets of an organized removal effort by some white Harlem property owners. The black residents of West 135th Street were discussed on the day after "Moving Day" in the May 2nd edition of the *New York Herald*:

There is nothing but trouble in a section of Harlem where a community of negroes that has grown rapidly in a few years, is being made to disintegrate and "move on," through the concerted action of landlords. One hundred families will be on the move to-day, and six hundred other families are perilously near eviction.²⁸

²⁷ "Looking Into Race Riots," *New York Times*, September 8, 1900, p. 7 ; "Police are Exonerated," *New York Times*, December 9, 1900, 14;

²⁸ "Negro Families Must 'Move On' *New York Herald*, May 2, 1904, 6; the article incorrectly names the pastor as "N.S. Betts" rather than N.S. Epps.

Some owners of properties on West 135th Street and nearby streets to the south had decided to exercise their Moving Day prerogative of not renewing leases. *The Herald* article suggested that the first black inhabitants of the area had arrived some twelve years prior, and were quiet, “wealthy parlor car attendants.” The article noted that the motive behind the evictions was a reduction in rents in the area that attracted a more “objectionable” element of the race as evidenced by “the frequent presence of the police and the patrol wagon.” The article also suggested that a rent increase “which the parlor car porters could pay, but their colored inferiors could not,” had previously been used as a strategy to remove the undesirable tenants. The owners’ target was the “colored inferiors,” but the “wealthy railroad porters” were also caught in the net of the eviction effort.²⁹

The black residents of West 135th Street decided to challenge this effort to oust them. An article in the May 2nd edition of the *New York Times* described an “indignation meeting” of the previous evening held at the Mercy Seat Baptist Church at 46 West 135th Street by “colored residents of 134th and 135th Streets, between Lenox and Madison Avenues.” The article reported on the attendees’ complaints of a “systematic campaign” to force them from the neighborhood, noting that landlords had indicated that the black residents were “noisy and disorderly, an accusation which was denounced at last night’s meeting as without foundation.” Homing in on the reason for the dispossession strategy, the article noted that Mercy Seat Baptist’s pastor, Reverend Norman Epps observed that “The prospective opening of the subway has enhanced the desirability of the locality, and so... the very landlords who had once invited the negro tenants are now trying to drive them out.” The language of reform was being used to veil the owners’ interest in gaining unrestrained access to property that they anticipated would

²⁹ Ibid

dramatically increase in value. No mention was made of eviction efforts targeting white tenants in the same area.³⁰

Rev. Epps' analysis was accurate. The development of a subway system had been a matter of discussion in New York for many years. When construction started in 1900, Harlem property owners began to look forward to the benefits the community would experience after the announced 1904 subway opening. With a subway stop at the corner of 135th Street and Lenox Avenue, the western end of the 135th Street block, the adjacent properties then occupied by small walkup tenements and rowhouses were ideally located for more intensive use. The owners of the buildings were interested in obtaining higher rents from the existing buildings or constructing larger buildings to respond to the demand of residential and commercial tenants to be near the new subway stop.³¹

On May 2nd African American resistance moved beyond words. Mercy Seat Baptist Church, which had hosted the indignation meeting on the previous evening, signed a five year lease for 46 West 135th Street, the site of the meeting. The monthly rent was \$100.00, and the lease gave the church the option to purchase the building at a price of \$16,000 "at any time during the term of this lease, with the appurtenances."³² The lessor was Louis Partzschefeld a metal worker who lived at 4 West 136th Street. The lease was for a five year term.³³

Three days later, on May 5th, James and Ella Thomas, an African American undertaker and his wife, purchased 30 and 32 West 135th Street from Charles and Katie Kroehle providing them with a payment of \$100 and assuming mortgages of \$30,000 (in 1900 these two buildings

³⁰“Harlem Negro Colony to Fight Evictions,” *New York Times*, May 2, 1904, 5

³¹ 722 Miles, 91-112

³² \$100 in 1904 was the equivalent of \$2,402.57 in 2007 dollars using the Consumer Price Index, <http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/uscompare/result.php/>

³³ Manhattan Conveyances, Section 6, Liber 88, 183, *New York City Register*; Trow's General Directory of the Boroughs of Manhattan and Bronx, City of New York, 1097; Thirteen Census of the U.S.- Population, New York City Enumeration District, 536, Sheet 4A

had been occupied exclusively by white tenants). A week later, on May 12th, Mercy Seat Baptist Church purchased lots at 45 and 47 West 134th Street for \$16,000 from August and Mena Ruff. August Ruff was a builder who lived at 54 West 120th Street. The source of Mercy Seat's funds for the purchase cannot be determined. The sales agreement for the Ruffs' lots included a covenant or promise that the first building constructed on the property would be a church for Mercy Street Baptist. On the same day, the Reverend Charles Satchell Morris, pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church, an African American congregation then located on West 40th Street, transferred to Abyssinian, a building located at 61 West 134th Street that he had purchased eight months earlier in September of 1903. The church agreed to assume the payments on mortgages totaling \$25,000 on the properties. On June 29th the Thomases sold a half-interest in their properties at 30 and 32 West 135th Street to Philip A. Payton, Jr. an African American real estate broker. A month later the Thomases sold the other half-interest to Payton. The cost to Payton for the two buildings was \$200 and the assumption of a first mortgage of \$30,000 and a second mortgage of \$3,500.³⁴

While the May 1904 newspaper articles suggested that white Harlem property owners were united in their efforts to oust blacks from 135th Street, the sales transactions noted above tell a much more complex story. The flurry of leases and purchases by African Americans that took place before and after the May eviction notices could not have taken place without the cooperation of the white owners of the properties as well as others involved in real estate investing. Financing the purchase of tenement buildings in the 1890s and first decade of the 1900s was not done by most mainstream banks. The buildings that routinely cost between \$20,000 and \$40,000 were viewed as high risk gambles, both because of the variations in

³⁴ Twelfth Census, E.D. 851, Sheet 15B; Conveyances, Section 6, Liber 86, 346-347, Liber 86, 382-383, Liber 84, 379-380, Liber 87, 432-343, Liber 90, 388-389, New York City Register; Twelfth Census of the United States, Schedule No. 1- Population, New York City, Enumeration District 851, Sheet 15, 1900

construction quality, and the transient nature of the lower income tenants who typically occupied the buildings. Banks rarely provided financing for these buildings, particularly to borrowers with modest incomes and limited social contacts. The estates of the wealthy or unlicensed individuals would have been the potential lenders for the African American purchasers of the buildings in the 135th Street area.³⁵

When James and Ella Thomas purchased 30 and 32 West 135th Street from Charles and Katie Kroehle on May 5, 1904, they paid one hundred dollars and agreed to assume the payments on mortgages totaling \$30,000 that were already on the property. The Kroehle's had purchased the buildings only three weeks earlier on April 20th. The transaction might be mistaken for that of speculators seeking to make a quick dollar. Unfortunately there are several gaps in the record that cloud the terms of the Kroehle's transactions. The purchase of the property by Charles Kroehle on April 20th indicates that Kroehle paid "one dollar and other valuable consideration." Valuable consideration could have been money or some other thing of value to the seller, but it obscures the actual purchase price for the property.³⁶ The terms of the Thomas mortgage called for interest only payments for a period of five years, after which time the principal balance was due. This principal payment was usually made either through the sale of the property, or by obtaining a loan from another source to repay the first loan. For the lenders, such loans were seen as another investment vehicle equivalent to a bond (which are loans that typically pay lenders interest on their funds, and return the borrowed principal at a given date). Real estate loans added a level of protection for the lender with the borrower offering property as collateral to ensure the loan payments. To enter into this agreement the Kroehles had to believe that James and Ella

³⁵ Jared N. Day, *Urban Castles: Tenement Housing and Landlord Activism in New York City, 1890-1943*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 32-50

³⁶ Conveyances, Section 6, Liber 87, p. 95, New York City Register; James Matlock Ogden, *The Law of Negotiable Instruments*, Edition 2, (Chicago: Callaghan & Company, 1922), 72-73

Thomas were capable of making the interest payments on the loan from the difference between the rents they collected from tenants and the buildings' operating costs, or from their personal financial resources. Since the collateral for the mortgage was the property itself, there was always the possibility that if the payments were not made the Kroehles could reclaim the property through foreclosure proceedings, but this was a lengthy, undesirable process. Because James Thomas was a businessman with a well-established undertaking business, the Kroehles most likely were confident that the Thomases would be successful in managing the buildings. Charles Kroehle owned a stable on East Fifty-Fifth Street, and lived on East Seventy-First Street. The transaction between the Kroehles and the Thomases illustrates the complex nature of race relations of the time. While some white New Yorkers were characterizing blacks as the source of problems in order to justify evicting them from Harlem, others were doing business with African Americans for substantial sums of money over long periods of time, enabling these African Americans to gain a more permanent presence in Harlem. But even this element of the Kroehle transaction has a cloud. Records show no mortgage of \$30,000 associated with the property, either while it was briefly owned by Kroehle, or when it was purchased by the Thomases. It is possible that the loan was a personal loan, but it would not have been logical to make an unsecured, personal loan when the property being purchased was the logical collateral.³⁷

A young African American broker, Julia Liggan also began buying property in the 135th Street area during this time. A native of Virginia, Liggan was a resident of 14 West 134th Street, where she and her widowed mother rented an apartment. Exactly one year before the 1904 eviction effort Liggan had already begun acquiring nearby properties. On May 12, 1903, she

³⁷ *Urban Castles: Tenement Housing and Landlord Activism in New York City, 1890-1943*, Jared N. Day, (New York: Columbia University Press) 1999, 32-56; Conveyances, Section 6, Liber 86, 346-347; Liber, 87, 95; Mortgages, Section 6, Liber 137, 499-500; Liber 139, Liber 207, 305-306, Liber 225, 116-118; *Trow's General Directory of the Borough of Manhattan and Bronx City of New York, 1904-05*, (New York: Trow Directory, Printing and Bookbinding Company, 1904) ;

purchased a property on West 134th Street. The next week, on May 20th she purchased 100 and 102 West 136th Street and agreed to make payments on a mortgage of \$9,500 provided by George Chapman. On the same day Chapman also loaned Philip Payton \$31,500 and \$3,000. Chapman was an attorney in the office of the Astor estate. The estate at one time had extensive properties in Harlem, which may have been his link with Liggan and Payton. On June 16, 1903 Liggan sold a three story building at 60 West 134th Street to Rev. Norman Epps, the pastor of Mercy Seat Baptist Church.³⁸

With the exception of George Chapman, the white people involved in these transactions had German ancestry in common. Cornice maker Louis Partzchefeld, who leased his property to Mercy Seat Baptist Church, and his wife were born in Germany. They had both arrived in the U.S. in the early 1880s. Their son, Louis, Jr. attended German-American Felix Adler's Ethical Culture School, which in 1904 moved into a new building at Central Park West near 59th Street, and was noted for its innovative curriculum of hands-on education.³⁹ August and Mena Ruff, who sold property to Mercy Seat Baptist were also both born in Germany. Ruff, who had arrived in the United States in 1867, was an officer in a New York City German American singing society, Schwaebischer Saengerbund. Active in Democratic politics, the wedding of his daughter was later described in *The New York Times* suggesting that he was successful in his business as a builder.⁴⁰ Charles Kroehle and his wife, who purchased property that they soon re-sold to James

³⁸ *New York Times*, 1904; New York City Register, Conveyances, Liber 119, 414; *Who's Who in New York City and State*, John W. Leonard, editor (New York: L.R. Hamersly & Company, 1907), 270; "Real Estate Transfers: Recorded Mortgages", *New York Times*, June 16, 1903, 12; "Astor Wants Reduction," *The Real Estate Record and Guide*, January 14, 1911

³⁹ *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910- Population*, New York City, Enumeration District 536, Sheet 4A, (Washington, D.C.: Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census), information on the year that the Kroehle's arrived in the U.S. was not included in the Census report; "Ethical Culture Fieldston School," <http://www.ecfs.org> 5/12/08; *Ethical Culture School Record*, (New York: The Society for Ethical Culture, 1918), 78

⁴⁰ *Twelfth Census of the United States, Schedule No. 1- Population*, New York City, Enumeration District, 851, Sheet 15, (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Census, 1900); "Society," *New York Times*, January 16, 1910, X2; "Tammany Hall Delegates," *New York Times*, September 27, 1897, 2

and Ella Thomas, were born in New York, but their parents were born in Germany. Like August Ruff, Kroehle was an officer of a German American singing society, New-York Maennerchor. The debut tea for his daughter was also noted in the *New York Times*.⁴¹

These middle class German American households headed by craftsmen were of the group that in the nineteenth century had supported “equal rights for all, regardless of color, religion, nationality or sex.” Responding to the oppressive conditions in their country preceding Germany’s failed 1848 revolution, and influenced by revolutionary democratic ideology in Europe, after arriving in America some Germans became vocal anti-slavery advocates. But all Germans were not of this mind. Nineteenth century New York also had a large German American population that identified with the pro-slavery wing of the Democratic Party. The *Staats-Zeitung*, the German newspaper controlled by New York’s mercantile elite, and read by German mechanics and laborers, referred to its press competitors that advocated abolition as *Niggerblätter* (nigger sheets).⁴²

A generation later, the actions of Partzchefeld, the Kroehles and the Ruffs, in assisting blacks to buy properties in Harlem, illustrated that a different, possibly anti-racist ideology was still alive. Various German ideologies had ample potential to grow in New York City. In 1900 thirty-seven percent of New York’s population of 3.4 million people were foreign born. German-born New Yorkers were the most populous of this group at 322,343, (9.38% of the total population). Russian-born residents were a distant second at 155,102, (4.52%) followed by Italian born at 145,433 (4.23%). Many German Americans lived in the lower Manhattan

⁴¹ *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910- Population*, (Washington, D.C.: Department of Commerce, Labor Bureau of the Census, 1910), New York City Enumeration District, 1146, Sheet, 4B; “A Feast of German Song,” *New York Times*, April 21, 1895, 16

⁴² Leroy Hopkins, “Black Prussians:’ Germany and African American Education from James W.C. Pennington to Angela Davis,” in *Crosscurrents: African Americans, Africa, and Germany in the Modern World*, ed. D. McBride, L. Hopkins, C. Berkshire-Belay (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell & Brewer, 1998), 68-70; Bruce Levine, “Against All Slavery Whether White or Black,” in *Crosscurrents*, 56-60

neighborhood of Kleindeutchland (Little Germany) but as they prospered they moved to various neighborhoods of the city including Harlem. This substantial population of people of German descent had developed German language newspapers, and social groups that provided the German sellers of Harlem property with a social group that extended beyond Harlem. They were therefore less susceptible to pressure from other Harlem property owners who may not have approved of their transactions with blacks.⁴³

The New York newspaper accounts of the 1904 eviction efforts in Harlem illustrated that under some circumstances class distinctions among black New Yorkers were acknowledged by whites. The reference to the welcome received by “wealthy” African American railway porters in Harlem in the 1880s and 1890s versus the twentieth century African American “undesirables,” who attracted attention from the police because of their riotous behavior, indicate that in describing the eviction the writer acknowledged class differences among African Americans. While the leaders of the eviction movement sought to portray all blacks as undesirable, the other property owners who chose to lease, sell or lend to African Americans in 1904 were also making distinctions among African Americans. It is highly unlikely that they would have entered into the fairly liberal sales arrangements for properties they owned if they had not believed that the African Americans with whom they were doing business were both trustworthy as well as financially capable of honoring their agreements. Black purchasers such James and Ella Thomas, owners of a midtown undertaking establishment were of a similar economic class as the stable owners Charles and Katie Kroehle from whom they purchased property.

⁴³ “The Ethical Culture Fieldston School,” <http://www.ecfs.org>, 5/12/08; *Twelfth Census of the United States*, New York, Statistics of Population, Table 35, “Foreign Born Population, Distributed According to Country of Birth,” (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Census, 1900), 800-803; Stanley Nadel, *Little Germany: Ethnicity, Religion, and Class in New York City, 1845-80*, (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 9-35

By the time the Thomases had transferred 30 and 32 West 135th Street to Philip Payton in June and July of 1904, Payton had already assembled a group of African American businessmen to undertake other Harlem real estate ventures. In 1902 Payton and his wife Maggie had purchased a brick townhouse at 13 West 131st Street. That same year they had also purchased an apartment building at 67 West 134th Street from the trustee of an estate. For the apartment building, the Paytons assumed the payments on an existing mortgage of \$23,000 and also agreed to make payments on an additional \$23,000 loan the estate had provided to them toward the purchase of the property.⁴⁴

Originally from Westfield, Massachusetts, Philip Payton, Jr. had moved to New York City in 1899 at the age of twenty-five. After working as a porter in the office of a real estate broker, in 1900, he and a partner formed their own real estate company located on West 32nd Street at Eighth Avenue in the heart of the African American midtown district. After six months of hardship, Payton's partner left the business and Payton moved the office to Lower Manhattan in a building at Nassau and Beekman Streets.⁴⁵ Payton credited the change in his business from struggle to prosperity to an argument between adjacent property owners. He noted that one of the owners decided to "get back" at his neighbor by turning the management and renting of his apartment building over to Payton to rent the building to blacks who were considered undesirable by his neighbor. Payton successfully rented the building which led to other opportunities to manage buildings, and also to purchase property. Paytons' building at 67 West 134th Street, housed the offices of the new company that Payton established in 1903, the Afro-American Realty Company. The company was a partnership with several African American investors,

⁴⁴ Conveyances, Section 6, Liber 68, 181-182; Liber 86, 414-415; Liber 87, 342-343

⁴⁵ Booker T. Washington, *The Negro in Business*, Wichita, KS: DeVore and Sons, Inc., 1907, 152-154

including James C. Thomas the undertaker who in June and July of 1904 had sold Payton 30 and 32 West 135th Street.⁴⁶

The May, 1904 attempt to evict African Americans from the 135th Street area was of both personal and professional interest to Payton, and led him to expand his company in July 1904 by incorporating it in order to raise more capital. The pamphlet used to solicit investors noted:

When the movement was started to put the colored people out of West 135th street, this co-partnership being unable to lease any houses on this street, voted to buy and did buy two 5-story flats valued at \$50,000 and thereby stemmed the tide, which had it been successful in West 135th street, would surely have extended to West 134th street, which is almost entirely given over to our people.⁴⁷

The 1904 eviction effort had led the Afro-American Realty Company to shift its focus from that of leasing and managing buildings to ownership. For these activities additional capital was needed and the company which had been a partnership was incorporated in 1904 with the ability to raise up to \$500,000 through stock sales at \$10 per share. The company's prospectus of business activity suggested broader aims than merely stopping the eviction movement. "The idea that Negroes must be confined to certain localities can be done away with. The idea that it is not practical to put colored and white tenants together in the same house can be done away with."⁴⁸

The office of the most powerful African American in the country, Booker T. Washington, gave encouraging words as early as May 3, 1904 with a letter to Payton from New York:

I have read in yesterday's *World* how you turned the tables on those who desired to injure the race, and wish to congratulate you on this instance of business enterprise and race loyalty combined.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ New York City Register, Conveyances, Section 6, Liber 68, Liber 86, 414-414, Liber 87, 241-242, 342; *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto* Osofsky, 94; "The Father of Harlem Called it Home", *New York Times*, June 16, 1991, p.6

⁴⁷ Afro-American Realty Company pamphlet, 2

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Unsigned Letter to Philip Payton, May 3, 1904, Booker T. Washington Collection, reel 248, Box 245; the letter could have been written by Booker T. Washington or his assistant Emmett J. Scott; Scott often wrote letters on

Payton had most likely met Washington through his membership in Washington's National Negro Business League, an organization created in 1900 that had local chapters of African American business leaders, and held annual meetings which drew on Washington's philosophy of promoting black economic development.⁵⁰

On July 29, 1904 Payton transferred 30 and 32 West 135th Street to the Afro-American Realty Company along with the building housing his company's Harlem office at 67 West 134th Street. Individual blacks had been moving to Harlem in increasing numbers during the previous decade, but Payton's activities represented an organized and very visible effort. They did not go unnoticed by others outside of Harlem. The Afro-American Realty Company was the subject of a *New York Times* article and an editorial in July of 1904. Under the headline "To Make Color Line Costly in New York" the article paraphrased the company's prospectus, noting that \$100,000 in capital had been paid in by investors and that most of the directors were "negro property owners and business men." In an editorial the next day the *Times* suggested that the Afro-American Realty company, formed "to depress real estate values in order to bring desirable apartment houses into the market as homes for negroes promises to be a business mistake." The editorial predicted that white residents would leave and "that the number of unobjectionable negro tenants standing ready to take their places is not great enough to prevent neighborhood deterioration."⁵¹

The suspicion that the Afro-American Realty Company sought to depress real estate values was linked to a belief that conflated the racial beliefs of the era with the poor

Washington's behalf, but was also a friend of Payton's; in correspondence to Payton he addressed him as "Mr. Payton"

⁵⁰ "Booker T. Washington and the Afro-American Realty Company," Maceo Daley, *The Review of Black Political Economy*, Vol. 8, No. 2- Winter 1978, 184-188;

⁵¹ "To Make Color Line Costly in New York", *New York Times*, July 26, 1904, 7; "Afro-American Realty," *New York Times*, July 27, 1904, 6

neighborhoods to which most African Americans were consigned in cities. Many if not most in the real estate field believed that the presence of blacks caused the deteriorating conditions in which they lived. Implicit in this belief was the notion that African Americans lived lives of disarray marked by crime and sexual abandon. It was the common belief that property values in neighborhoods occupied by African Americans would be depressed due to their presence. This theory failed to recognize that while crime, gambling and prostitution existed in some African American neighborhoods, it flourished under the tacit approval of corrupt police, and others who benefited from the revenue generated by such activities. Although the criminals were visible in the black neighborhoods, such as midtown Manhattan, the majority of the residents who worked as domestics, deliverymen, elevator operators or in other menial positions were unseen by critics of African Americans. The *Times* article assumed that people such as James Thomas and Philip Payton who could enter into agreements to repay substantial loans, were intent on bringing the disarray of San Juan Hill or the Tenderloin districts to Harlem. In reality Thomas and Payton were jumping at an opportunity that a generation earlier had been unavailable to African Americans. The post-Civil War increase in Manhattan's black population, from less than 10,000 in 1865 to over 36,000 by 1900, not only brought potential tenants to New York, but increased the pool of potential black investors, business partners, and customers of black businesses as well. James C. Thomas had moved to New York from Texas in 1880s, and established his business in 1897. New York's black business class grew as the black population grew since it was better able to sustain more viable businesses. Philip Payton was able to draw from this business class to attract the eight initial investors in the Afro-American Realty Company. A generation of growth in African American economic activity following the Civil War, had resulted in a coterie of individuals who could be deemed creditworthy by white owners of

properties in an area of Manhattan that was in great demand. This position would have been unimaginable decades earlier.⁵²

The African Americans' efforts to remain in Harlem in 1904 represented a unique phenomenon for several reasons. While African Americans had been living in Harlem since its settlement in the 1600s and moving there in increasing numbers after 1880, the efforts in 1904 represented an organized effort to remain in, and continue moving to, a community that was not marginal but was being developed. The closest earlier examples in New York would be the movement to Seneca Village or to Weeksville in Brooklyn. Both were nineteenth century villages rather than urban areas, but both also had high levels of black property ownership. Prior to Harlem, the African American urban presence in New York City had been consigned primarily to areas on the way down. From Five Points, to Greenwich Village, to midtown, blacks had entered each neighborhood in the nineteenth century when that neighborhood was declining, seemingly confirming the theory that the black presence led to depressed real estate values. While some African American churches and a handful of individuals owned properties in each of these areas they did not have to overcome resistance to their entrance to these neighborhoods. By the time these areas were made available to them, prior owners were glad to find renters or buyers for their declining properties. Ironically African Americans, desperate for housing, were charged a premium for these properties in comparison to rental rates charged to recent white occupants.⁵³

⁵² James McCague, *The Second Rebellion: The Story of the New York City Draft Riots of 1863* (New York: Dial Press, 1968), 107, 178-179; Ernest A. McKay, 308; "New York Loses Pioneer Undertaker, James Thomas, *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)*, June 3, 1922, 8

⁵³ In 1855 less than 100 men met voting requirement for African American men that they own real estate valued at \$250. Ernest McKay, *The Civil War and New York City* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 11; Junius Henri Browne, *The Great Metropolis: A Mirror of New York* (New York: Arno Press, 1869, 1975), 25; Southern Workman, June 1902

The entry of African Americans into East Harlem in the 1880s could be seen as the beginning of the exception in black settlement in Manhattan, since East Harlem was then being developed. The black population there in the 1880s was small and therefore unnoticed. The movement of blacks into the Central Harlem area of West 135th Street in the 1890s was a movement of renters not owners. Without the coming of the subway, the African American presence in the area may not have been an issue even in 1904. The white property owners would have been satisfied to continue collecting what were then premium rents from black tenants. The subway created the potential for the investors to extract dramatically more income from the properties, and transformed the desirable black renters into undesirable troublemakers who needed to be evicted. The fact that when their presence became an issue, blacks organized to acquire property for substantial sums was unique.

The removal effort on West 135th Street highlighted the differences between large and small white property owners. If Rev. Norman Epps' assessment was accurate, that the primary impetus for African American eviction was the increased value of the property, such value would be much more difficult for small property owners to exploit without selling outright to those with more capital who could redevelop the properties. After the opening of the subway stop at Lenox Avenue and 135th Street, small property owners in the area could have increased their rental revenue by increasing rents on the properties, but there was a limit as to what tenants, black or white, would pay for a tenement apartment, as the frequent annual moves of renters demonstrated. The greatest future value of the 135th Street properties would have been realized through the acquisition of the land on which the many small tenement apartment buildings and rowhouses stood, demolition of these buildings, and construction of buildings that could command higher rents because of their larger sizes, better designs, and more dense development.

Such ambitious plans would have required access to substantial amounts of capital, unavailable to a stable owner such as Charles Kroehle who in the face of the eviction movement sold the Thomases 30 and 32 West 135th Street, or metalworker Louis Partzchfeld who leased 46 West 135th Street to Mercy Seat Baptist, or August and Mena Ruff who sold land at 45-47 West 134th as a future site of Mercy Seat's church. The *Times* articles criticizing the Afro-American Realty Company's aims reflected national racial mores, but the black purchase of Harlem properties indicated that there were other whites who viewed black businessmen as permanent fixtures in Harlem.⁵⁴

In *Black Manhattan* James Weldon Johnson, whose brother-in-law John E. Nail worked for Philip Payton's Afro-American Realty Company, suggested that the Hudson Realty Company sought expel African Americans from Harlem by buying the properties in which they lived. Hudson Realty was formed in 1893. Its directors included members of New York's elite such as Maximilian Morgenthau, brother of banker and diplomat Henry Morgenthau (who was an initial director), and Joseph Bloomingdale of the department store family. In comparison to small property owners, white or black, this company had access to the capital that could remake the 135th Street corridor after the removal of the black tenants. An indication of this access is the fact that in 1902 the directors of the Hudson Realty Company agreed to increase the company's capital stock from \$100,000 (in \$100 shares) to \$1,000,000. At the same meeting at which this decision was made the directors also voted to expand the company's purpose beyond the sale and

⁵⁴ "To Make Color Line Costly in New York", *New York Times*, July 26, 1904, 7; "Afro-American Realty," *New York Times*, July 27, 1904, 6

leasing of property to include the sale of stocks, bonds and securities, the making of mortgages, and the issuing of bonds.⁵⁵

On April 5, 1904 approximately one month before the eviction effort, the Hudson Realty Company purchased seventeen vacant lots on the north side of 135th Street for \$100 and assumed the payment on mortgages totaling \$296,500 on the properties. Four of these lots had frontage on Lenox Avenue, and the remainder were on the north side of 135th Street. Hudson Realty also purchased six lots on the south side of 136th Street as part of this transaction. On April 23rd Hudson Realty purchased three buildings at 40, 42, and 44 West 135th Street, just to the east of 46 West 135th Street that was eventually leased by Mercy Seat Baptist Church in May of 1904.⁵⁶

In 1900 40, 42 and 44 West 135th Street were occupied by African American tenants.⁵⁷ It is likely that Hudson Realty's purchase of these 135th Street buildings was followed by eviction notices for residents just in time for the May 1st Moving Day. (James and Ella Thomas' purchase of 30 and 32 West 135th Street may have been accompanied by similar eviction notices for white tenants). It is also possible that Hudson was the firm that offered to purchase Philip Payton's newly acquired buildings at 30 and 32 West 135th Street. The Afro- American Realty Company's investment pamphlet noted:

When those who had it in their minds to change the tenancy of this street found themselves circumvented by this co-partnership, known as the Afro-American Realty Company, they lost no time in putting themselves in communication with this company and made them an offer of a tempting profit, which was declined.⁵⁸

Perhaps small property owners such as Louis Partzchefeld, August and Mena Ruff, or Charles and Katie E. Kroehle did not see a benefit (or were not provided with the opportunity) to

⁵⁵ *Black Manhattan*, James Weldon Johnson (New York: Knopf, 1930) 148-149; Hudson Realty Company Certificate of Incorporation, February 9, 1893, Hudson Realty Company Annual Meeting Minutes, January 13, 1902

⁵⁶ New York City Register, Conveyances, Section 6, Liber 85, 198, Liber 84, p.307

⁵⁷ Twelfth Census of the U.S., E.D. 617, Sheets, 12A, 12B, 13A

⁵⁸ Afro American Realty Company Pamphlet, 3

joining forces with the Hudson Realty Company. These property owners might not have believed that the Hudson Realty Company would reward them any better than anxious African Americans would in a sale of their properties. Harlem's large and small property owners had very different interests which can be seen in these different responses to the presence of blacks in the 135th Street settlement following the construction of the subway.

Conclusion

As the congratulatory note from the office of Booker T. Washington to Philip Payton suggested, the efforts of Philip Payton, James and Ella Thomas and other African Americans to gain control of 135th Street properties were viewed by Washington's followers as litmus tests of the ability of black business leaders to use economic power to secure their rights, not just in New York but across the nation. The Hudson Realty Company conceded defeat in stages: in November 1904 the company sold twelve lots fronting 136th Street; in February of 1905 Hudson Realty sold 40, 42, and 44 West 135th Street; a month later, in March the company sold two lots at the northeast corner of Lenox and West 136th Street and at Lenox Avenue between 136th and 135th Streets; finally on November 1, 1906 the company sold the remaining seventeen parcels it owned on 135th Street. Each transaction was with a different group of white purchasers, making it less likely that Hudson's attempt to assemble the large tract of properties on West 135th Street could be revisited by these new owners. With several unrelated new owners of the properties, a future developer would have to be very determined and patient to try to reassemble the large tract of property that Hudson Realty had relinquished.⁵⁹

The success of black property owners in acquiring control of properties in the 135th Street settlement could not have occurred without the cooperation of white property owners and

⁵⁹ Conveyances, Liber 96, 4-5; Liber 96, 9-10,

lenders. The white property owners had alternatives. They could have sold to white investors such as the Hudson Realty Company. The fact that all of the transactions to African Americans were not quick, with some involving initial modest cash payments and then multi-year, payments suggests complex relationships of race, class and possibly ethnicity. By 1904 southern segregation laws and racial violence were popularizing notions of black pathology and inferiority, and some of these notions and segregation customs were being adopted in northern cities in response to the increasing populations of African Americans. Hostile statements and actions against African Americans became increasingly visible. What was less visible, and perhaps often unspoken, was the fact that some white residents did not view the black community as monolithic, and it was not. In the area of business, while some white businessmen were limiting African American access to Harlem properties, others chose to enter into real estate transactions with African Americans at a time when they could have easily dealt with white investors instead. Perhaps the white small business owners identified with the African Americans such as undertaker James C. Thomas, and real estate broker Philip Payton whose economic status was comparable to the white property owners. It is also possible that ethnicity played a role in the transactions. Three of the property owners who were associated with pivotal real estate transactions in 1904, Charles Kroehle, Louis Partzchefeld, and August Ruff, and their spouses were of German descent, either first or second generation immigrants. Ethnicity may have been an additional element causing these owners to be more receptive to striving African American buyers than to possible offers from the principals of the Hudson Realty Company who were established members of New York's business elite. Ethnicity may have been intertwined with social class. Maximilian Morgenthau, and Samuel Bloomingdale two of the principals of

Hudson Realty were of German descent, but their families were much more established than the Kroehles, Partzchefelds or Ruffs.⁶⁰

The debates in Harlem regarding blacks and real estate also suggest that for some white New Yorkers racial rhetoric became a convenient tool to use against African Americans to justify their evictions from increasingly valuable property. But some blacks also adopted a brand of racial rhetoric as well which they used strategically to create an organized movement to increase African American access to Harlem real estate. The prospectus of the Afro-American Realty Company made clear that its goal was to provide opportunities for blacks to live wherever they could afford. The prospectus even suggested that racial integration in housing would also be a goal. While the Afro-American Realty Company did not state that Harlem would be its focus, the community was the location of its first purchases of property. The efforts of African Americans in Harlem to secure a place in the community through property ownership in the first decade of the 1900s, was highlighted by the rhetoric accompanying the formation of the Afro-American Realty Company. With its formation, the black movement to acquire Harlem property shifted from being a reaction to eviction attempts to an ongoing organized effort. The shift from a community of transient renters to one of owners with a long-term stake in the community represented a shift in social class as well. While the “wealthy” porters may have been in the vanguard of black residency in the 135th Street area in the 1890s, the group of black business owners and professionals that sought to ensure a black presence in Harlem was near the top of the black economic ladder as it was available to black New Yorkers in 1904. Some white

⁶⁰ Thirteenth Census of the U.S.- Population, New York City, Department of Commerce, Enumeration District 1146, Sheet 4B, Enumeration District 536, Sheet 4A, Enumeration District 493, Sheet 7B; “A Feast of German Song,” *New York Times*, April 21, 1895, 16; “Society,” *The New York Times*, December 26, 1909, p.X2; “The Swabian Saengerbund,” *The New York Times*, June 17, 1894, 20; Hudson Realty Company Certificate of Incorporation, February 9, 1893

property owners would respond to their effort with another strategy to keep African Americans out of Harlem, or at least to contain them to the area of their 1904 victory over eviction.

Chapter 3

From Eviction to Containment: The Restrictive Covenant Movement

Through the early 1910s, real estate transactions in Harlem continued to reflect a range of interracial relations. As the first decade of the 1900s proceeded, some Harlem property owners decided that the black “invasion” of Harlem had to be confronted directly. They developed a legal strategy using racial restrictive covenants placed in the deeds of their properties to try to keep African Americans from moving into some areas of Harlem. Harlem’s white business class—business owners, lawyers, and other professionals—concluded that the problem was not with the blacks, but with whites in Harlem who had not effectively marketed the many desirable aspects of the community to potential white buyers. They developed a program to market Harlem to whites. And a few white residents did not take the time to analyze the problem. They used violence to attempt to oust African Americans from the community. A unified response to the black invasion continued to elude white Harlem residents because the community was ethnically and religiously diverse. Even the principal resistance leader was a recent arrival to the community as were many other white residents.

By 1904, the year of the eviction struggle on West 135th Street, the development of the area west of Lenox Avenue as an exclusive urban residential area was proceeding quickly. Newly developed properties west of Fifth Avenue, were built to attract middle and upper middle class New Yorkers. A few townhouses and large, elevator apartment buildings were built in the 1880s, but during the 1890s townhouses were being constructed on many of the East-West numbered streets from the low 120s north to the 160s.

¹ Larger apartment buildings, for upper income residents, distinguished from tenements

by their more gracious accoutrements such as elevators, large rooms, and architectural details, were also being built, many as a result of the 1901 Tenement House Law which created the guidelines followed by builders of new apartments in New York City. The law allowed apartment buildings to be built at heights twice as tall as the width of the streets on which they were located, and also required designs that would provide for sufficient light and air to all rooms in multi-family buildings.² The completion of the Lenox Avenue subway line in 1904 solidified Harlem's position as a residential community. The subway made it possible for people who worked downtown to commute daily to homes in Harlem with a travel time of approximately thirty minutes from Harlem to City Hall.³

After its 1904 success in acquiring properties in the 135th Street area, the Afro-American Realty Company continued leasing and purchasing property. A construction boom in modest tenement buildings for lower income people in Manhattan was brought on by surges in European immigration and the completion of the Interborough Rapid Transit (IRT), the first line of the New York City subway system. In Harlem this line traveled along Lenox Avenue with stops approximately every ten blocks. The result was a "sustained and healthy demand for real estate, both for use and for investment."⁴ Real estate investment was seen as a prudent not speculative endeavor. A review of the 1905 real estate market concluded that

Anybody who considers calmly the existing situation must reach the conclusion that there is no surer way of making money in the world than to purchase improved real estate which carries itself in some central but less expensive district of Manhattan.⁵

¹Charles Lockwood, *Bricks & Brownstones: The New York Row House, 1783-1929 an Architectural & Social History* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company) 1972, 242

² Elizabeth Hawes. *New York, New York: How the Apartment House Transformed the Life of the City (1869-1930)*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 153-154

³ Clifton Hood, *722 Miles: The Building of the Subways and How They Transformed New York* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993) 13-26

⁴ RRBG January 7, 1906, 1

⁵ *Ibid*; it is not clear as to whether Harlem was considered a less expensive district of Manhattan; it was when compared to areas such as Fifth Avenue, a portion of which still was lined with mansions of millionaires, or the Upper West Side in which buildings for wealthier people were being built;

In the summer of 1906 the Afro-American Realty Company came to city-wide attention again. In July, 1906 the company entered into a five year lease for a fifteen-unit apartment building at 525 West 151st Street between Amsterdam and Broadway. The white tenants of the building were told they would need to vacate the building by August 1st and would be replaced by “colored” tenants. Under the headline “Negro Invasion Threat Angers Flat Dwellers” *The New York Times* reported in great detail, the shocked reaction of the janitress, a Mrs. P. M. Roth who reportedly had refused to install a sign reading “Choice Four and Five Room Apartments for Colored Tenants” on the building. The indignation of other tenants who would be required to move quickly was also reported as were the comments of adjacent property owners one of whom suggested that “It’s a trick to make us buy them out.” The article ended with a quote from Afro-American Realty manager Philip Payton:

What we wish to do is to stop forced colonization. We are in earnest in this proposition. We intend to have negro families in that apartment house. Of course there is a prejudice against them, but there was once similar prejudice against the Jews and the Italians. They overcame it and we should be able to do so.⁶

Payton referred to New York’s residential racial segregation tradition as “colonization,” because the areas where African Americans were concentrated were often called “Negro colonies.” While Payton’s proposed strategy challenged residential segregation by attempting to move blacks into a building on an exclusively white street, there were limits to his mission to “stop forced colonization.” He did not attempt to attract African American *and* white residents to the same building. In evicting the white residents of the building he leased, and identifying the building as one reserved for “colored” residents, he was conceding, that an apartment building with residents

⁶ Conveyances Section 7, Liber 125, New York City Register, 4-9. “Negro Invasion Threat Angers Flat Dwellers,” *The New York Times*, July 27, 1906, 2

of both races was not his goal. Although as noted in Chapter 2, West 135th Street had a few buildings with residents of both races, this pattern was not common in New York City. Mixed race buildings were often seen as symbols of poverty, where the limited choices of the residents, both black and white, led them to overlook the social customs of racial segregation on a building level that the broader community maintained. The fact that Payton's purchase was the subject of a newspaper article suggests that the white residents of West 151st Street had no intention of leaving without a fight. In presenting the plight of the white tenants facing eviction, whether at the instigation of the residents or *The Times*, support for the white tenants could be rallied.⁷

Philip Payton did not have an opportunity to challenge the racial divide on 151st Street. In September, 1906, the lease that he had entered into two months earlier for 525 West 151st was cancelled (the lease had contained a clause allowing for such an outcome if a sale occurred). Before any black tenants recruited by Payton had moved in, the building was purchased by Loton Horton, the owner of Sheffield Farms Dairy. In addition to making a payment of one hundred dollars, Horton assumed the payments on three mortgages on the property totaling \$50,000. Although the transaction did not allow Payton to provide housing for African Americans on West 151st Street, he did benefit from the sale. Based on the lease terms he received a one thousand dollar payment due to the cancellation of the lease.⁸

It is quite possible that Horton's purchase was in response to the publicity that Payton's actions prompted, and that Horton served both literally and figuratively as a "white knight" to retrieve the building from Payton's "clutches." This scenario would seem to corroborate the

⁷ Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The 19th Century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum*, (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 95-102

⁸ Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 125, 7, New York City Register:- if the building was sold after August of 1907, the lease would have been cancelled and Payton would have received a payment of \$750; Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 118, 81-82, New York City Register

suspicion of the adjacent property owner quoted in the *Times* article. Considering the substantial fee received by Payton, the equivalent of \$23,800 in 2007 dollars, Payton's role in the transaction was more complex than that of race champion. The owner of the property with which Payton negotiated the initial lease was Louis Meyer Realty Co. This company had purchased the property in May of 1906, only two months before Payton leased the property. It is possible that Louis Meyer Realty Co. did want to facilitate the sale of 525 West 151st Street and saw the agreement with Payton as a likely means to bring about this result as neighbors scrambled to keep blacks off the block. Unlike the 135th Street area building owners in 1904 who provided financing for blacks to purchase their buildings, Louis Meyer Realty did not provide Payton with financing to purchase the building. Payton's options for obtaining institutional financing would have been limited. Bank or insurance company financing of tenement buildings was not common since the buildings were viewed as risky. In addition, there would have been great reluctance to facilitate black ownership, since even without Payton's prior publicity, it would have been assumed that his tenants would be black. Instead Louis Meyer Realty Co. offered Payton a lease. For Payton, the lease was a "win-win" agreement. If the building had not been sold during the five year lease term, but rented by him to African Americans, it would have been another victory for the Afro-American Realty Company. Although this goal was not accomplished, the one thousand dollar fee he received was a significant amount of capital. But Payton's gain did have a cost in increased hostility toward blacks. The evictions of the white tenants from the building and Payton's pronouncements regarding his interest in bringing in black tenants raised sufficient concern that a *Times* reporter was assigned to the story, which could be viewed as a warning to readers. In this context the cost of Payton's gain was an increased concern regarding a black

“invasion” in Harlem. Since black entrance meant white exit, Payton’s actions may have encouraged a more vigilant defense by whites in Harlem.⁹

The renting of properties to African Americans continued to be a concern in Harlem. Four months after Payton’s 151st Street agreement ended, the January 26, 1907 issue of the weekly *Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* a local industry magazine, included an example of increased concern of the black presence. The advice column of the magazine included a letter asking whether a lender making a loan for a property that eventually was leased to someone who planned to rent to “colored tenants” could do anything to “make his mortgage more secure” since the property was vacant (as the lessee continued to seek these tenants), but the borrower was paying the taxes and interest on the loan when due. Implicit in the letter writer’s question was a desire to prevent blacks from renting the properties which the lender viewed as a threat to the property’s value. The magazine columnist explained that “the renting of the mortgaged premises to colored tenants is no ground for interference by a mortgage holder.” While the question was couched in financial terms, the concern was both financial and racial. Since black tenants typically paid higher rents than whites, the plan to lease to blacks would have increased the possibility that the lender would be able to be paid from the higher rent revenue that the building would produce. The lender’s financial concerns stemmed from a belief that black tenants lowered property values because they brought with them social problems. In spite of the higher rents black tenants paid, real estate appraisers would consider the income of a building as well as values of properties in close proximity. If enough people believed a property was worth less, it would be worth less regardless of whether it generated higher rent revenue than it could with white tenants. An appraiser would consider these factors and possibly lower the valuation of the

⁹ Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 125, 7, New York City Register; Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 118, 81-82, New York City Register; <http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/compare/>- calculation based on the Consumer Price Index calculation method;

building. Therefore the lender's concern that the value of the property might decrease with black tenants did have merit.¹⁰

Ironically in the same issue, the person who had become a symbol of the tactic mentioned by the letter writer, Philip Payton, had a half-page advertisement with his photograph under the heading "Colored Tenements Wanted." In the advertisement he claimed that "I can manage a 'Colored Tenement' better than any White agent in New York City." Payton had abandoned his call for integrated housing announced in his 1904 Afro-American Realty prospectus. His 1907 advertisement acknowledged that there were white real estate agents who specialized in managing black buildings, but that he could do it better. His photograph alluded to the competitive advantage that he implied as a black person enabled him to outmanage the competition. He was clearly African American just like the tenants whom he sought to rent to, but his conservative suit and tie, and his wire-rimmed glasses conveyed an air of austerity and professionalism that was a fairly rare media image in 1907.¹¹

Soon afterward, the concern expressed by the *Record and Guide* letter writer evolved into an organized movement to use the law to resist the "Negro invasion" in Harlem. The movement began in the 100 block of West 137th between Lenox and Seventh Avenues, two blocks north and one block east of the West 135th Street block which had been the site of the 1904 effort to evict African Americans. The 100 block of West 137th Street, shared a characteristic with West 135th Street. In 1907 it was only partially developed.

¹⁰ Willford Isbell King, *The Valuation of Urban Realty for Purposes of Taxation: With Certain Sections Especially Applicable to Wisconsin* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin, 1914), 54-59

¹¹ "Correspondence: Colored Tenants" *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, January 26, 1907, 198, 230

Map 6- West 137th Street between Seventh Ave (left) and Lenox Ave. (right)¹²



Darkened areas represent buildings; blank areas are vacant lots or streets

On the north side of the block, sixteen of the twenty three lots facing the street were vacant, and on the south side fifteen of the twenty-one lots facing the street were vacant. While sparsely developed, the buildings on the south side of the street were large apartment buildings and those on the north side were smaller apartment buildings. Most of the residents of the block were born in New York, but a significant number were born in Ireland and Germany. A smaller number was born in Sweden, Scotland, or other regions of the United States. Many of those born in New York had parents born in Germany, Ireland, and Scotland. A few of the households included servants.¹³

The occupations of the household heads on West 137th Street were much more diverse than those of the black or white residents of West 135th Street. Several residents of West 137th Street were stenographers. One resident was a civil engineer; one was a tailor; another was a merchant, but there were others who were janitors and servants. As suggested by their occupations, the residents of this block were of a higher social class than their neighbors on 135th Street. The racial composition was different as well. Where the 135th Street block had African

¹² Sections 6 & 7, New York , G.W. Bromley & Co., 1897; map for 1902 shows slight changes, digital copy not yet available;

¹³ Twelfth Census of the United States- Population, Schedule No. 1 Population, Enumeration District 619, Sheets 17A-19B; Thirteenth Census of the United States- Population, Enumeration District 528, Sheets, 1A-6B

American and white residents, there were only two African American residents residing on the 100 block of West 137th, and they were servants in two households.¹⁴

On February 13, 1907 twenty-three owners of property on the 100 block of West 137th Street, entered into an agreement that they hoped would protect their block from the presence of African Americans for the foreseeable future. The agreement stated that up to and including January 1, 1917 they would not

... permit... the said premises to be used or occupied in whole or in part by any negro, mulatto, quadroon or octoroon of either sex whatsoever... this covenant or restriction may be proceeded on for an injunction and for damages against the party... It is expressly understood and agreed that this covenant or restriction shall attach to and run with the land belonging to the respective parties herewith...¹⁵

At the beginning of the document, following the list of the owners' names and addresses was a justification for the document:

... the white tenants in the property known and described as 106 and 108 West one hundred and thirty-seventh Street... were dispossessed and the said premises leased and rented to tenants of the negro race... for the purpose of compelling adjoining and neighboring owners to purchase the same property to protect their holdings...¹⁶

The inspiration for the covenant was the successful renting of two buildings on the block to black tenants following the eviction of the white tenants. The writers of the covenant assumed that the move-in of blacks was a ploy to push the remaining white residents on the block to purchase the black-occupied buildings in order to oust the black tenants and maintain the values of their properties (as the 151st Street residents had suspected of Philip Payton's actions). There is no record of the leases for 106 and 108 West 137th Street, but in the two years before the covenant was executed, the properties changed hands four times. They were sold by Daniel

¹⁴ Twelfth Census of the United States, Schedule No. 1 Population, New York, Manhattan Borough Enumeration District 619, Sheets 17A- 19B

¹⁵ Conveyances, Section 7 Liber 128, 147, New York City Register; "mulatto"- one white parent, one African American parent; "quadroon"- one-quarter African American; "octoroon"- one-eighth African American; these terms were commonly used in the South particularly during the period when slavery was legal; use of the terms in the North was much less common

¹⁶ Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 128, New York City Register, 146

Mahoney to Wolf Bomzon in May of 1905 for \$100 and an assumption of mortgages totaling \$40,000. Fifteen months later the properties changed hands twice in the same day in transactions that belied the claim that property values were endangered by the possibility of a black presence in Harlem. First on October 17, 1906 Bomzon sold the properties to Montgomery Rosenberg for \$100 and the assumption of mortgages of \$53,500 and increase of \$13,500 in less than two years. Later on the same day, Rosenberg sold both properties to Hannah Theobald for \$100 and the assumption of mortgages of \$60,000. While it was not a cash transaction, Rosenberg was able to identify a borrower willing to pay \$6,500 more for property than what he had paid hours earlier. It is likely that Theobald, who appears to have been a real estate investor, precipitated the February 1907 covenant by evicting the white tenants of 106 and 108 West 137th to bring in black tenants, in order to charge higher rents to better meet her loan payments. But similar to Philip Payton on West 151st Street, Theobald did not have an opportunity to fully realize her plan. On January 31, 1907 she sold the properties, three months after purchasing them. Jacob Blauner purchased 106 and assumed mortgages of \$30,000. Rosa Newman purchased 108 and also assumed mortgages of \$30,000. Two weeks later, on February 13th the West 137th covenant was filed, signed by both Blauner and Newman, suggesting that by that time their properties no longer had black tenants. Residents of West 137th Street wanted to ensure that there would be no repeat of Theobald's actions.¹⁷

The scenario surrounding these properties as described in the restrictive covenant and reflected in the series of transactions is quite similar to the circumstances that residents of West 151st Street faced after the Afro-American Realty Company leased the apartment building at 525 West 151st: White tenants had been evicted by a person intent on renting to blacks. On West

¹⁷ Manhattan Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 108, 204-205, Liber 120, 425, Liber 120, 427, Liber 121, 473, Liber 121, 474, Liber 128, 145-150, New York City Register;

137th Street the abrupt eviction of white tenants by Hannah Theobald who replaced them with black tenants was viewed by the remaining white residents on the block, and particularly the owners of properties on the block, with fear. The community pressure was sufficient that Theobald decided to sell the buildings at cost three months after purchasing them. The covenant signed by the property owners on West 137th Street indicated that the entry of African Americans onto the block

caused or induced many of the white tenants to move and required a substantial reduction in rents to those who remained and prevented the reletting of vacant and unoccupied flats... except at rentals much lower than those formerly prevailing...¹⁸

The text of the covenant may be an exaggeration, but in the environment of fear whipped up by those predicting calamity upon the arrival of black residents to a block, it is possible that the activity described in the covenant took place within a three month period. The property-owning residents of 137th Street were not afraid of being evicted but they were concerned about the decline in the value of their properties. Adopting the same perspective as the property owners on West 151st Street had in 1906, black tenants on West 137th Street were seen by the white property owners as being part of a larger conspiracy to induce whites to purchase the newly occupied buildings (implying that the black tenants would be removed if the buildings were purchased) to protect the values of their own properties. Although the restrictive covenant suggested that white tenants had moved from the block as a result of the African American presence, the document does not suggest that the conspiracy sought to induce the remaining property owners to sell their own properties, or that the intent of the “conspirators” was for blacks to control the block. White Harlem residents on 137th Street viewed the entry of blacks onto the block as a ploy to push whites into buying the black-occupied properties. There was no reference point in their experiences that would have led them to view the tenanting of two

¹⁸ Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 128, New York City Register, 146

buildings by blacks as the vanguard of a broader settlement movement. The West 137th restrictive covenant was meant to maintain the stability of real estate values which they believed required racial segregation.

The white property owners seemed to have been certain that the goal of the parties behind the black tenants was to force a purchase of the buildings with black tenants. Although the *New York Times* had suggested in 1904 that black movement into white neighborhoods was motivated by a desire to drive down prices to facilitate more black purchases, the residents of 137th Street did not envision such a goal that would result in them selling their homes that were less than twenty years old. For them the logical purpose of the black presence on their block could only have been to push whites to *buy* the properties occupied by blacks in order to evict them. White residents of 137th Street were seeking a more permanent solution to the Negro problem through the restrictive covenant.¹⁹

The restrictive covenant signed by the residents of West 137th Street had its roots in British law. By the eighteenth century the covenants were used in England to set aside private parks for exclusive use. In the early nineteenth century the covenants also began to be used to prevent landowners from undertaking uses that could hurt their neighbors. Covenants typically restricted the development of slaughterhouses, tanneries, and soap factories, industries notorious for their noxious fumes and waste. Restrictive covenants began to be used with some frequency in the United States in the nineteenth century also in connection with park development and the building of residential subdivisions. Covenants eventually dealt not only with land use, lot size, property setbacks and building construction types, but also with race and ethnicity. The deeds of the Brookline, Massachusetts, Linden Place subdivision from 1843 stated that the residences could not be sold to “any Negro or native of Ireland.” In the late nineteenth century and early

¹⁹ Ibid; “Afro-American Realty,” *New York Times*, July 27, 1904, 6

twentieth century the covenants were widely used in developments for the wealthy. The enforcement of long-term covenants became the province of homeowners' associations.²⁰

The 137th Street covenant, with a ten-year term, was not perpetual. Its signers viewed it as a measure that would remain in place until the crisis—the entry of blacks onto West 137th Street and the anticipated decline in property values--- subsided. Perhaps anticipating legal challenges to the covenant, the agreement noted:

... there is no desire to preclude or prevent negroes or citizens of African descent, solely because of their race and color from occupying any of the properties owned by the parties hereto... the sole desire purpose and object of the parties hereto being to secure a resumption and continuance of the rentals obtained prior to the introduction of negro tenants into 106 and 108 West One Hundred and thirty-seventh street...²¹

The contradictory statement in the covenant suggesting that there was no desire to exclude “citizens of African descent” was included with an eye on potential legal challenges. There was also an assumption that a black owner would eventually seek black tenants, so the covenants also precluded purchase of buildings by blacks. Concern regarding the growing African American presence in this section of Harlem continued and on May 28, 1907 seventeen residents of the 200 block of West 140th Street, between Seventh and Eighth Avenues executed a restrictive covenant for their block. The instrument differed from the 137th Street covenant. Instead of a lengthy preamble outlining the parties' names and their reasons for coming together to execute the covenant, the document quickly noted that the properties owned by the signers would “...not be used as a colored or negro tenement leased to colored or a negro tenant or tenants sold to colored or negro tenant or tenants.” There was also no end date for the agreement, suggesting that

²⁰ Evan McKenzie, *Privatopia: Homeowner Association and the Rise of Residential Private Government*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, 31-36

²¹ City Register, Section 7, Liber 128, 145-150; in 1895 New York State passed a Civil Rights bill that prohibited race discrimination in places of public accommodations; private homeowners usually were typically considered exempt since their homes by declaring that their homes were not places of public accommodation but available to people whom the homeowner desired to accommodate either as guests, renters, or purchasers;

the agreement would be in place in perpetuity. The agreement prohibited the occupancy, lease or sale of properties to blacks. More densely developed than West 137th Street, West 140th Street was a block of large apartment buildings.²²

The collective nature of the covenants, involving substantial numbers of property-owning neighbors, suggests a motivated individual or organization, capable of alerting residents of the common threat, and convincing them to take legal action. As other covenants were executed in the neighborhood, John G. Taylor, a police officer who had moved to Harlem in 1903, played a pivotal role in organizing the resistance to the black presence in Harlem. Taylor, a fifty-four year old New York City police officer of Irish descent, and his wife Agnes purchased a house at 213 West 136th Street, between Seventh and Eighth Avenues in Harlem. They assumed the payments on an existing \$10,000 mortgage on the property from the Equitable Life Assurance Society. For the Taylors, the move from Waverly Place in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of Manhattan to Harlem represented a significant step up, both in terms of the quality of their new home and the social class of their neighbors. Clerks, business owners and professionals, many the children of immigrants from Ireland and Germany, lived on their new block. Although the street was two blocks away from the contested 135th Street Negro colony, it was a world away not only in terms of the quality of the housing stock and of social class, but in terms of racial exclusiveness. The only black person on the West 136th Street block was a servant. The other servants on the block were Irish.²³ Taylor had retired from the police force in November of 1906, after thirty years of service, having risen to the rank of paymaster. As a leader of the Property Owners

²² New York City Register, Section 7, Liber 127, 365-367

²³ John G. Taylor Identification Card, The New York City Police Museum; Twelfth Census of the United States, Schedule No. 1 Population, Enumeration District 100, Sheet, 1; Manhattan Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 88, 60-61, New York City Register; Twelfth Census of the United States, Schedule No. 1; Population, Enumeration District 620, Sheets 9-10

Protective Association of Harlem for the next several years he would be a key leader in trying to limit the movement of blacks into Harlem.²⁴

The Property Owners Protective Association had begun in 1900 with an initial goal to “do away with some of the evils which have made Harlem real estate less remunerative than it ought to be.” Its initial focus had not been on the racial mix of Harlem’s residents. At the time of the Association’s formation, owners of new Harlem apartment buildings, competing for tenants had developed a practice of offering several months of free rent as an enticement to prospective tenants. The Protective Association argued that the practice had led to an expectation of free rent periods from tenants and had reduced the revenue that all property owners were receiving. Its initial activities focused on persuading property owners to forgo free rent arrangements and set rents at competitive levels. By 1910 the focus of the organization had shifted to Harlem’s Negro problem. In December, 1910 John G. Taylor, then Vice President of the Protective Association announced that he had raised \$20,000 (most likely in pledges) by canvassing property owners on two blocks of West 136th Street between Eighth and Lenox Avenues. He indicated that the funds would be used for a campaign “to keep the negroes of ‘Little Africa’ just east of Lenox Avenue from further encroaching upon the street.” Specifically the funds would be used to buy mortgages of properties occupied by blacks and to obtain evidence against owners who the Association believed were using the tenancy of blacks to induce owners of adjacent properties to buy the buildings occupied by blacks at an “enhanced price.”²⁵

Taylor had previously claimed to the local police that a house at 121 West 136th Street owned by Edna C.F. Minott, “a negress,” was occupied by “disorderly persons.” When the police informed him that no action could be taken, the fundraising campaign was mounted. But

²⁴John G. Taylor Identification Card, The New York City Police Museum ;

²⁵ “Free Renting: Organizations Formed to Kill This Practice,” *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide*, August 25, 1900, 235; “\$20,000 to Keep Negroes Out,” *New York Times*, December 8, 1910, 2

Taylor did not give up on his previous strategy either, advising those with complaints concerning disorder in the neighborhood to take their complaints directly to police “headquarters instead of the West 125th Street station.” As a retired policeman, Taylor perhaps had more influence at headquarters than at the local precinct since he was relatively new to the neighborhood. It is also possible that the local precinct would be more likely than headquarters to be aware that the disorderly claims could not be sustained since they disguised the real complaint regarding the black presence on some blocks in Harlem.²⁶

As suggested by the Protective Association’s shift in purpose and growing concern, the black presence in Harlem had increased dramatically by 1910. In 1900 twenty percent of Manhattan’s African American population lived in the area above 86th Street on the east and west sides of Manhattan covered then by four assembly districts. By 1910 almost fifty percent of Manhattan’s African American community resided in eight assembly districts covering a comparable area. The shift away from the midtown settlements also reflected this change. In 1900 over forty-eight percent of Manhattan’s African American population lived in five midtown assembly districts. By 1910 thirty-two percent lived in five midtown districts covering a comparable area.²⁷ Behind these numbers was the dramatic growth through migration in the absolute number of blacks in Manhattan from 36,000 in 1900 to 60,000 in 1910. While some of the Harlem numbers represented movement from midtown, a substantial portion were immigrants coming directly from the south or the Caribbean. The restrictive covenant movement was a response to these demographic changes. The covenant movement continued to grow as the African American presence in Harlem increased.

²⁶ “\$20,000 to Keep Negroes Out,” *New York Times*, December 8, 1910, 2

²⁷ The Assembly District boundaries were redrawn after every decennial federal census; Twelfth Census of the United States, Census Bulletin, No. 88, “Population by Sex, General Nativity, and Color, By Groups of States and Territories, 9; Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Bulletin, Population: “Composition and Characteristics of the Population”, New York, 43-45

On June 10, 1910 three years after the West 140th Street agreement was executed, another covenant was executed by ninety-one owners of property on the adjacent 100 and 200 blocks of West 136th Street. This agreement included John G. Taylor's home at 213 West 136th Street. West 136th Street, between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, differed from 135th, 137th and 140th Streets, the areas of the earlier covenants, both in housing stock and in the characteristics of its residents. The blocks were almost entirely lined with brownstones, a housing form more likely to be owner occupied in 1910. Seventy percent of the signers of the 136th Street covenant were owners who lived on the block. On 135th Street owner occupancy participation in the covenant was twenty-seven percent. Because the 137th and 140th Street covenant did not include the home addresses of the signers, a similar comparison cannot be made definitively, although on both streets apartment buildings were more prevalent in which the owners were less likely to live.²⁸

²⁸ Thirteenth Census of the U.S., Enumeration District 533, Sheets 8A-10B, Enumeration District 504, Sheets 1A-8B; Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 128, 145-150

Table 7- Distribution of African American Population in Manhattan, 1910²⁹

Assembly Districts	Total Assembly District population	Negro population In the Assembly District	Negro population as a % of total Assembly District population	Assembly District Negro Population as a % of total citywide Negro pop	Colored, Non-Negro population
1:clarkson, west 3rd, Broadway	75,878	529	0.70%	0.87%	59
2: Williams, Park row, Henry St.	91,509	65	0.07%	0.11%	107
3: Worth, Bway, 14th, 2nd Ave.	88,002	85	0.10%	0.14%	2,353
4: Stanton, Clinton, E. River	99,721	31	0.03%	0.05%	13
5: 8th ave, Clarkson, 18th, Hudson River	57,341	1,066	1.86%	1.76%	46
6: Ave. B, Stanton, 10th, E. River	99,223	28	0.03%	0.05%	18
7: 7th ave., 18th, 30th, Hudson River	52,483	1,850	3.52%	3.06%	63
8: Stanton, Christie, Clinton, Henry	109,107	28	0.03%	0.05%	22
9: 7th Ave, 31st, 43rd, Hudson river	54,496	5,361	9.84%	8.86%	62
10: 2nd Ave, 14th, Ave. B, Stanton	100,929	27	0.03%	0.04%	35
11: 8th Ave, 43rd, 52nd, Hudson river	52,833	1,269	2.40%	2.10%	32
12: 14th St, 3 rd Ave., 23rd St.	78,010	91	0.12%	0.15%	51
13: Hudson Rvr, 52nd, 67th, Columbus Ave	52,290	9,273	17.73%	15.32%	65
14: 23rd, Lexington Ave., 42nd, E. River	63,879	86	0.13%	0.14%	100
15: Hudson Rvr, 67th, 91st, CP West	72,031	1,865	2.59%	3.08%	152
16: 42nd, Lex, 56 th , E. River	61,415	693	1.13%	1.14%	62
17: Hudson Rvr, 91st, 106th, CP West	63,348	3,074	4.85%	5.08%	81
18: 56th, 3 rd Ave., 73 rd , E. River	74,594	38	0.05%	0.06%	51
19: 101st, 7th Ave, 133rd, Hudson River	82,407	1,690	2.05%	2.79%	149
20: 74th, 3 rd Ave, 82 nd , E. River	65,821	723	1.10%	1.19%	31
21: Hudson Rvr, 127th, 141st, 5th Ave.	73,446	10,912	14.86%	18.03%	82
22: 82nd, Lex, 93 rd , E. River	54,135	181	0.33%	0.30%	24
23: 141st, Lenox, Harlem River	119,799	2,092	1.75%	3.46%	130
24: 92nd, 3rd Ave, 106th, E. River	85,109	2,051	2.41%	3.39%	33
25: West 3 rd , 7th, 30th, 3rd Ave.	54,282	1,407	2.59%	2.32%	137
26: 96th, 5th, 120th, Park Ave.	82,542	893	1.08%	1.48%	33
27: 30th, 8th, 57th, Lex	55,203	3,548	6.43%	5.86%	154
28: 106th, Park Ave., 116th, E. River & Randalls Island	89,802	283	0.32%	0.47%	46
29: 57th, CP West, 110th, Lex Ave	65,300	1,951	2.99%	3.22%	122
30: 117th, Madison, E. River	92,275	7,556	8.19%	12.48%	13
31: 110th, St. Nicholas, 127th, Fifth Ave	64,327	1,779	2.77%	2.94%	39
Totals	2,331,537	60,525			4,365

Italic bold text= midtown districts; Regular bold text=districts above 86th

²⁹ Compiled from the Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Bulletin, Population: "Composition and Characteristics of the Population", New York, pp. 43-45; Manhattan Assembly District Map, 1914

Map 8- 200 Block of West 136th Street³⁰



The language of the June 10, 1910 covenant for West 136th Street was similar to the language of the initial West 137th Street covenant. The document noted that “various parties have been purchasing different parcels of property in and about 137th Street, West” with the purpose of renting the properties to African Americans in order to compel the adjacent white property owners to purchase the properties. The same explanation and profession of no desire to restrict African Americans’ housing choices was provided. The agreement was for a ten year term. John G. Taylor’s name was noted as the witness to the signatures of all of the property owners, which included his wife Agnes at 213 West 136th Street.³¹

Other covenants were made in the following months and years: in December, 1910, thirteen property owners in the 200 block of West 135th signed a covenant; February, 1911, forty-two owners on the 200 block of West 132nd Street signed a covenant; December, 1911, sixty-six owners of properties in the 100 blocks of West 129th, West 130th and West 131st Streets

³⁰ G.W. Bromley, Map of Manhattan , 1897

³¹ New York City Register, Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 151, 134-146;

signed covenants. These three covenants all included the same language and John G. Taylor served as witness of the signatures on two of the three documents.³²

The year 1913 proved to be a pivotal year in the effort to restrict black movement into Harlem. In March the Harlem Board of Commerce held a “conciliation meeting” and invited African American broker John Nail to speak to a group of two hundred members regarding relations between white Harlem property owners and black property owners. Formed in 1896 The Board of Commerce represented the owners of large and medium sized businesses as well as lawyers and other professionals. The meeting was led by the Board’s Chairman Erduin v.d. H. Koch, owner of Koch’s department store (having inherited it from his father) on 125th Street who stated:

The negroes have a right to live and the privilege of going on Fifth Avenue or Riverside Drive if they can pay for it. Many obnoxious things have arisen from antagonisms stirred up between the two races.³³

This statement is remarkable since in 1913 in Harlem and other parts of the country, even many of those who favored fair treatment of blacks set clear limits, usually suggesting that African Americans should be satisfied with obtaining good housing in black neighborhoods. In going well beyond this position, perhaps Koch was concerned that racial antagonisms could lead to individual acts of violence or race riots such as had occurred in New York in 1900, Atlanta in 1906, or Springfield, Illinois in 1908. In these confrontations lives were lost, property was damaged, and the business climate of these communities suffered. As the leader of the organization formally representing Harlem’s business class, Koch may have reached his perspective by considering the manner in

³² New York City Register, Conveyances, Liber 152, Section 7, 297- 300; Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 156, 365-372; Section 7, Liber 159, 7-15

³³ “Status of Harlem Negroes,” *New York Times*, March 26, 1913, p. 19

which racial tensions affected the economic life of a community. It also is possible that Koch held a more radical vision for race relations. Like Charles Kroehle, Louis Partzchefeld, and August Ruff who assisted black buyers of Harlem properties in 1904, Koch was of German descent. His father, Henry C.F. Koch, founder of the family dry goods store was born in Germany. While Erduin Koch did not assist blacks to purchase property, his statement to the Board of Commerce is the most direct expression of the beliefs regarding interracial relations of this group of people of German descent. His statement suggests that he was one of the few to agree with Afro-American Realty leader Philip Payton that blacks should be able to live anywhere they could afford.³⁴

³⁴ Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space and Riots in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 134-135; Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class and Violence in a New South City*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004); Lois A. Carter, *Illinois: Crossroads of a Continent*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 184-185; *Twelfth Census of the United States*, Schedule No. 1- Population, Enumeration District 864, Sheet No. 19A

Map 9- Harlem Blocks with Racial Restrictive Covenants 1907-1911³⁵

			140 th Street
5/28/1907 Covenant (17 signers)			
			139 th
			138 th
	2/13/1907 Covenant (23 Signers)		137 th
6/7/ 1910 Covenant	6/7/1910 Covenant (91 signers)		136 th
12/22/ 1910 Covenant (11 signers)			135 th
		67 West 134th Payton Office	134 th
8th Avenue	7th Avenue	Lenox Ave	133 rd
2/2/1911 Covenant (42 signers)			132 nd
	12/9/1911Covenant	13 West 131st Payton Home	131 st
	12/9/1911Covenant		130 th
	12/9/1911 Covenant (66 signers)		129 th Street

At the 1913 Board of Commerce meeting black real estate broker John Nail provided a snapshot of the state of blacks in Harlem as well as the challenges they were already facing in seeking housing that was of better quality than in previous enclaves. A year before the Great Migration of blacks moving from the South to North would begin,

³⁵ Liber 127, 365-368; Liber 128, 145-150; Liber 151, 134-146; Liber 152, 297-301; Liber 156, 356-272; Liber 159, 7-15, Conveyances, New York City Register

unable to foresee this massive movement, Nail indicated that blacks had sufficient property to sustain growth in the community over the coming five years. He noted that they had vacancy rates of approximately thirty percent in their buildings. Nail added that blacks owned approximately five percent of the properties in the area where they resided, and asked that white absentee owners in this area maintain their properties in good condition. An African American minister present complained about the bars that white people were establishing in the area. Nail and the minister were both concerned that the black settlement in Harlem, that had seemed so attractive because of the better quality of housing, not be a repeat of previous deteriorated black settlements in Manhattan. It is likely that the minister was Rev. Hutchens C. Bishop, pastor of St. Philips Episcopal Church. Two years earlier Nail and his business partner Henry C. Parker had facilitated the purchase of a row of ten apartment buildings on West 135th Street between Lenox and Seventh Avenues by St. Philips Church. The purchase, linked with the sale of St. Philip's downtown rental properties was touted in the African American press as the largest real estate transaction by African Americans. As Harlem's black settlement had grown, white residents had established Lenox Avenue as the "deadline" west of which no blacks would be allowed to settle. Located West of Lenox Avenue, the St. Philips purchase broke through the traditional western boundary of Lenox Avenue for African Americans in a dramatic manner because of its scale. The white residents of the apartment buildings were evicted and the properties were rented to African Americans.³⁶

John G. Taylor, who as the principal organizer of many of the restrictive covenants in Harlem was a purveyor of some of the "antagonisms" towards blacks

³⁶ "Bronx Cars to Come to Harlem, Colored Question Taken Up by Board." *Harlem Magazine*, April, 1913, 21-22; Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*, 117-118

criticized by Erduin v.d. H. Koch, attempted to join the Board of Commerce meeting but was barred. He does not appear to have been a member of the Board of Commerce, but his message seems to have been one that Board of Commerce members had determined would not contribute to a productive meeting. When later asked about the meeting by a newspaper reporter Taylor suggested that Nail's statement regarding the unlikely possibility of black territorial expansion was not sincere and that it was made to provide those present with a false sense of security. Not being able to predict the Great Migration that, with World War I, would soon bring even more blacks to New York, Nail's projections to the Board of Commerce were realistic considering the information that was available to him. Even so, his presentation to the Board of Commerce of the movement of blacks as a benign activity, did not convey his interest in expanding black ownership in Harlem. He had facilitated the St. Philip's apartment purchases which were followed by the eviction of the white tenants. Nail's ability to move into Harlem so aggressively, perhaps not known by the Board of Commerce members, would have rankled those attending the conciliation meeting. Taylor also criticized the Board of Commerce claiming that the Board's conciliatory measures were motivated by a desire to "control the negro vote," a point denied by Board of Commerce leaders. The numbers of blacks moving to Harlem, as potential voters, were large enough for them to become a part of the political calculations of local elected officials, but there is no evidence that this influenced the Board of Commerce members.³⁷

³⁷ "Status of Harlem Negroes," *New York Times*, March 26, 1913, 19; The majority of African Americans of this time were aligned with the Republican Party, then just over fifty years old. They considered the Party more receptive to the needs of African Americans, as they had since its founding. Harlem did have an African American Republican Club, but a political connection to the Board of Commerce or its members is not clear

While Harlem's white businessmen were attempting conciliation, Harlem's youth had a more direct approach. In a front page article under the headline "Gangs of White and Negro Boys Hold Stone Battles Almost Daily" the *Harlem Home News* noted that the Madison Avenue bridge at 135th Street had become such a daily battleground that police would soon have to be posted at all of the bridges leading from Harlem to the Bronx. The article claimed that the battles were started by African American youth from the "Black Belt" of Harlem defending territory against white youth from the Bronx. In addition to the youth, the report suggested that on Sundays the Madison Avenue bridge was dominated by African American loiterers who made it very uncomfortable for others to pass. This report fit the notion that black residents would bring disarray to the community, and echoed complaints at public meetings about the Negro problem. The probability that the estimates of the numbers of black youth were exaggerated is quite high because of the perception among some whites that Harlem was being invaded by blacks.³⁸

Adults were also involved in violent acts. In July of 1913 the *New York Age* described a "race riot" that it indicated had occurred in the area of Lenox Avenue and 142nd Street, a block on which racial tensions between white and African American residents had reportedly been festering. No explanation was provided for source of the tension, implying that the mere presence of the two races in constant, close proximity was enough to lead to tensions. The details of the riot were also not reported, but one arrest was made. Walter Brown, an African American was charged with assault for firing two pistols during the altercation. The focus of the *Age* article was a request by the judge that the jurors consider the facts of the case fairly, suggesting that the charged state of race

³⁸ "Many Injured When Young Rioters Battle on Bridge," *Harlem Home News*, March 20, 1913, 1

relations in New York City required this admonition beyond what would have been the jurors' standard duty.³⁹

By 1913 the hardening of racial lines in New York City affected the ways that blacks did business even in other parts of the city. In the first decade of the 1900s, Emmet Scott and Booker T. Washington traveled frequently to New York from Tuskegee Institute in Alabama to cultivate relationships with northern philanthropists and to attend to other aspects of the institution's political ties. On these trips they stayed at downtown hotels such as the Hotel Manhattan on 42nd Street or the Fifth Avenue Hotel on Madison Square. By 1913 hotel policies had changed. In late 1913 in correspondence with Bertha Ruffner, owner of the Hotel McAlpin on Broadway and 34th Street regarding lodging, Emmett Scott sought to negotiate a compromise regarding the hotel's segregation policies and inquired about the hotel manager's "attitude... with reference to respectable colored people who have regard for the 'natural fitness of things'".⁴⁰

It would not be my purpose to ostentatiously parade myself—nor would it be the attitude of any thoughtful black man—about the corridors of a hotel. In fact, as a rule I have my meals always outside of rather than in hotels where I have stopped.⁴¹

A few days later Miss Ruffner replied:

We regret that we have been unable to secure the name of any hotel in this city, to which we can refer you. We have written and telephoned several, but their restrictions are such that they are unable to accommodate you. It is impossible for us to be of service to you in this connection.⁴²

³⁹ "Court Pleads to Jurors to be Fair to Negro," *The New York Age*, October 9, 1913, 5; New York County District Attorney, Record of Cases, 1913

⁴⁰ Celia Thaxter, Sarah Orne Jewett, Emily Dickinson, *The Atlantic Monthly*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Co., 1916); Letter from Charles W. Anderson to Booker T. Washington, January 26, 1904, Booker T. Washington Papers, General Correspondence, Reel 248; Letter from Booker T. Washington to Hubert Astley Paris, May 7, 1904, BTW Papers, General Correspondence, Reel 248

⁴¹ Letter from Emmett J. Scott to Bertha Ruffner, November 29, 1913, Booker T. Washington Papers, General Correspondence, Reel 358;

⁴² Letter from Bertha Ruffner to Emmett J. Scott, Booker T. Washington Papers, General Correspondence, Reel 358;

A decade earlier, because of their social class, Scott and Washington had no problems finding lodging in white-owned hotels, but by 1913 there was no hotel in New York City for Scott even if he agreed to remain out of sight. Race had become much more important than social class. In other northern cities a similar hardening of racial lines was experienced. Previously dispersed residential patterns of blacks shifted to concentrations of increasing black populations in a few neighborhoods. This is the context in which the movement of blacks to Harlem was defined by whites as an invasion.⁴³

The heat of the summer of 1913 brought a steady drumbeat of stories regarding racial tensions in Harlem and the responses to it. By July, John G. Taylor's Property Owners' Protective Association claimed a membership of two thousand people who had signed restrictive covenants. As the summer proceeded, complaints regarding the Harlem Black Belt increased.

The immoral practices of negro men and women have made the section of Harlem one of the most notorious resorts of the demi-monde...⁴⁴

Newspaper reports noted incidents of "respectable women" being insulted and indicated that white women walking on streets frequented by blacks were in danger. A report in the *Harlem Home News* concluded

The fact that real estate values are going down rapidly in this section of Harlem is fully explained by the conditions described.⁴⁵

⁴³ James W. Loewen *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*, (New York: The New Press, 2005), 80

⁴⁴ "Ask Sage Company to Buy Church to Keep Away Negroes," *Harlem Home News*, June 19, 1913, p.11; "More Property Owners Agree to Exclude Negroes," *Harlem Home News*, July 10, 1913; "Harlem's Black Belt is a Growing Menace," *Harlem Home News*, July 24, 1913, 1; "Harlem Property Owners Discuss Negro Problem," July 31, 1913

⁴⁵ "Harlem's Black Belt is a Growing Menace," *Harlem Home News*, July 24, 1913, 1; the panicked environment undoubtedly hurt real estate prices, but this instability also occurred amidst a general downturn in the real estate market; in looking at the year 1913, *The Real Estate Record and Guide* described it as "a year of uninterrupted and almost unprecedented stagnation," January 3, 1914

During July and August a series of public meetings were held by white residents in Harlem to discuss the Negro problem. Perhaps reflecting a growing concern among Board of Commerce members, at a July meeting of the Board called by its Property Owners Committee, John G. Taylor was allowed not only to attend, but to make a presentation. In a stirring speech he recounted the work of his organization through the use of restrictive covenants, and suggested the formation of a company to purchase properties occupied or about to be occupied by blacks. The acquired properties would be renovated and rented to white tenants, an action that he claimed would automatically result in an increase in value. Taylor's solution met opposition. A lawyer, Bernard Naumberg stated

There is a well-defined colored district and we do not wish to get them out of it. I am assured by men who know that there is plenty of room for everybody. At the same time, white people can not live on the same block with negroes. To my mind, the best way to solve the problem is not by restricting the negroes but by bringing white people to live in the section. To this end we must advertise Harlem.⁴⁶

While in March of 1913 Erduin v.d. H. Koch had said that blacks should be able to live anywhere they could afford, Naumberg dismissed the then radical notion that blacks and whites could live as neighbors. Even so, he did not advocate expulsion of the black residents either or tremendous restrictions. His solution for maintaining white control of Harlem was straightforward: get more white people to move to the area. That night speakers outlined a plan for a pro-active approach to the black invasion in Harlem by focusing on increasing the demand for Harlem property among whites. Consistent with Koch's admonition against "antagonisms" as well as Naumberg's perspective, the speakers suggested that it was the failure of white residents of Harlem to properly inform other whites of the benefits of Harlem that had led white property owners to resort to renting or selling to African Americans. By the end of the meeting a

⁴⁶ "Harlem Property Owners Discuss Negro Problem" *Harlem Home News*, July 31, 1913, 1

committee was formed to carry out the advertising plan. With Erduin Koch serving as the committee's chairman, they collected over \$300 that evening to support the plan, and projected that a total of \$1,500 to \$2,000 would be needed for the first advertising initiative.⁴⁷

The black newspaper *The New York Age* responded to the charges made by Taylor, noting that "one J.G. Taylor, earstwhile real estate agent and always a Negro hater, is president" of the Protective Association. *The Age* stated that Taylor's charges of the peril that whites faced by residing in close proximity to blacks were claims that "are absolutely untrue and which could have their conception only in a depraved and distorted consciousness." The article went on to note that "the Negro as a rule has in his home such furnishings and fittings as are out of proportion to his income, and very much superior to the furnishings to be found in the homes of average white family." A list of "A Few Whose Homes Should be Visited" included over a dozen black lawyers, real estate agents, ministers and other Harlem leaders. *The Age* made clear that middle class status was not only a matter of income but an appreciation for and possession of some of the finer things of life. The article concluded by suggesting that "if there is the immorality and depravity among Negroes of Harlem as is charged, then the white man who owns the saloon and dives in that neighborhood is responsible."⁴⁸

At the July Board of Commerce meeting, John G. Taylor had also assured the audience of the viability of the restrictive covenant as a tool to defend their neighborhoods, noting that the strength of the covenant would soon be tested in the court. He added that he expected the decision to affirm the viability of the covenant. In mid-August of 1913 a lawsuit was initiated against Caroline Morlath, the white owner of 125 West 137th Street, by her next door neighbor, Rafael Greenbaum. This was the block where the initial February, 1907 restrictive covenant was

⁴⁷ "To Create a Demand for Harlem Property," *Harlem Magazine*, August, 1913, 17

⁴⁸ "Give Lie to White Realty Men's Charges," *The New York Age*, August 7, 1913, 1, 7

executed by twenty-three property owners. Greenbaum, the owner of 127 West 137th Street, worked at a butcher shop located on Eighth Avenue a few blocks from his home.⁴⁹ In court papers, Greenbaum noted that Morlath's actions had endangered the value of his property, which he indicated he had purchased because of the value that the restrictive covenant had provided. He complained that Morlath had rented apartments in her ten-unit building to black tenants, violating the restrictive covenant that was part of the deed for her property. He asked for

... an order... restraining the defendant from permitting negroes, mulattoes, quadroons or octoroons to occupy a whole or a part of the said premises 125 West 137th Street.

He also asked for \$10,000 in damages from Morlath.⁵⁰

Soon after the suit was initiated, a meeting was hosted by the Property Owners Protective Association to discuss the lawsuit. John G. Taylor appealed for funds to cover Greenbaum's lawyer's fees and more than \$175 was collected. In rallying the troops, Taylor noted:

We are now approaching a crisis. It is the question of whether the white man will rule Harlem or the negro. It is up to you to say who it shall be the black or the white. The Equal Rights law has been pronounced unconstitutional, and the courts have upheld the restrictive agreement of a group of white people in Baltimore. I have no doubt that our agreement will be upheld too.⁵¹

In his remarks, Taylor also criticized the Harlem Board of Commerce's advertising campaign, noting that it would not solve the race problem since no "respectable family" would be interested in living "in this section of Harlem, next door to negroes." Taylor ended with an appeal for contributions and signatures on a document that would extend the restrictive covenant to a larger area.⁵²

⁴⁹ Trow's City Directory, 1913

⁵⁰ Raphael Greenbaum vs. Caroline Morlath, Supreme Court, New York County, 2; "Property Owners Contribute Funds to Fight Invasion," *Harlem Home News*, August 28, 1913, 2

⁵¹ "Property Owners Contribute Funds to Fight Invasion," *Harlem Home News*, August 28, 1913.

⁵² *Ibid*

In 1895 New York State had enacted a Civil Rights Law that prohibited discrimination in public accommodations based on race and religion. The law had made violations a misdemeanor with victims required to file a civil action to obtain damages (privately owned housing was not considered a “public accommodation”). Despite Taylor’s statement, in New York State an equal rights statute had been making its way through the legislature in 1913. In March a bill sponsored by Assemblyman Aaron Levy passed, followed by a similar bill in the Senate sponsored by Robert Wagner. At the beginning of September 1913 the law went into effect. The new statute also prohibited discrimination in public accommodations but specified that violators would be subject to penalties of “not less than \$100 nor more than \$500 or shall be imprisoned not less than thirty days nor more than ninety days or both.” The new law also prohibited owners from advertising that “persons belonging to a particular race, creed or color are not wanted or will not be accommodated.”⁵³ Taylor’s mention of the Baltimore restrictive covenant case referred to a 1911 Baltimore ordinance to maintain racial segregation by prohibiting either whites or blacks from moving onto blocks occupied “in whole or in part” by residents of the opposite race. In 1913 the Maryland Court of Appeals ruled that the law was unconstitutional, but a week later the Baltimore City Council passed a new ordinance to meet the complaints of the Court. The “Baltimore idea” of residential segregation was soon adopted in other southern and border states. It was one of a variety of restrictive agreements used throughout the nation to restrict the movement of blacks as well as in some cases Jews.⁵⁴

⁵³ “ ‘Equal Rights’ Law in Effect Monday,” *New York Times* , August 30, 1913, 7; the fines of \$100 and \$500 are comparable to \$2,500 and \$10,000 in 2006 dollars (money calculator);

⁵⁴ Garrett Power, “Apartheid Baltimore Style: The Residential Segregation Orders of 1910-1913,” *Maryland Law Review*, Vol. 42, 1983, 304-313; the Court ruled the ordinance unconstitutional because it could have prevented an owner of property from occupying it if the surrounding neighborhood was occupied by people of the opposite race; the revised law applied to owners who purchased property after the date of the law’s enactment; in 1917 the in *Buchanan v Warley*, case from Louisville, Kentucky, the Supreme Court found that such residential segregation laws were unconstitutional and that “ ‘the difficult problem arising from a feeling of race hostility’ an insufficient basis for depriving citizens of their constitutional rights to acquire and to use property without state legislation

John G. Taylor's advocates were not the only ones watching the Harlem restrictive covenant case. The *New York Age* also reported on the case presenting Caroline Morlath as a champion of African Americans. The *Age* indicated that

The John M. Royall firm of real estate agents has charge of the renting of this property and it is due largely to their influence that this and other properties in what is called the "restricted section" has been opened to Negro tenants. Mr. Royall has received assurances from Mrs. Morlath that she will fight this case to the court of last resort if necessary and that she will not be dictated to by any body as to whom she shall rent her houses. She has a number of other properties rented to Negroes, and their tenancy is perfectly satisfactory to her.⁵⁵

John Royall was an African American real estate broker. *The Age* article also indicated that Caroline Morlath had retained, African American attorney Wilfred Smith (who had been an investor in the by then defunct Afro-American Realty Company) to represent her.

In September of 1913, as the case proceeded through the civil court, various real estate brokers submitted depositions for the plaintiff and the defendant describing the neighborhood. Although the suit had not been filed until August 14th, three depositions had been given on July 31st, August 1st and August 6th, suggesting that while the Harlem Board of Commerce was looking for an amicable solution to Harlem's Negro problem, the groundwork for the Morlath case was being laid.⁵⁶

Morlath purchased her building in 1908. Its previous owner, Isaac Birkner had signed the June, 1907 covenant that was attached to the property.⁵⁷ In her September 4, 1913 deposition Caroline Morlath admitted renting apartments to blacks, but she indicated that the only reason she did so was because she was unable to rent to whites. She noted that she was a widow and that the apartment house, where she also lived, was her only source of income (if she owned other

discriminating against them on the sole basis of color'; the Harlem restrictive covenants were considered private agreements and therefore were not affected by this decision;

⁵⁵ "White Property Owners Quarrel," *The New York Age*, August 14, 1913, 1, 7

⁵⁶ Raphael Greenbaum against Caroline Morlath, Supreme Court of the State of New York, County of New York, 1913

⁵⁷ Section 7, Liber 135, 136; Liber 128, 145-150

properties as *The Age* article suggested, she did not mention these). She added that if she had waited for white tenants to rent, she would have been unable to pay her mortgage and would have lost her building. She indicated that the black presence in the neighborhood had become so large that white residents would no longer rent apartments on West 137th Street. Supporting her statement were affidavits submitted by various real estate brokers (including John Royall) identifying black residents of nearby buildings, some of which were under covenant, as well as black patrons of businesses on Lenox and Seventh Avenues the avenues at each end of her block. Morlath also noted a falsehood in Greenbaum's initial deposition. He had stated that the existence of the restrictive covenant on the block had influenced his purchase, but Morlath pointed out that Greenbaum had signed the 1907 covenant, and was the owner of his property before the covenant was executed. Morlath concluded by noting that her attorney had informed her that the restrictive covenant agreement that Greenbaum sought to have affirmed

is void because it is against public policy to create or maintain discrimination by the public against colored people, which is evidenced by the Civil Rights Law of this State and also by the recent amendment to the Civil Rights Law passed in the year 1913 which went into effect September 1, 1913.⁵⁸

This latter statement was consistent with *The New York Age*'s portrayal of Morlath as a champion for the rights of African Americans. She may have been, but if she was, her deposition suggests that she also saw the need to rationalize her decision to rent to blacks as an action that was reluctantly reached because she had no other choice. Although *The Age* had indicated that Morlath had retained African American attorney Wilfred Smith to represent her in the case (keeping with its framing of Morlath's actions as those of a race champion), her attorney of record was Henry Greenberg.

⁵⁸ Raphael Greenbaum vs Caroline Morlath, September 4, 1913 deposition by Caroline Morlath, Supreme Court of the State of New York

Raphael Greenbaum also submitted a series of depositions from real estate brokers. John G. Taylor, leader of the restrictive covenant movement submitted two depositions. In his first deposition made on August 1st, he explained

I am devoting my whole time and attention to the protection of real estate interests in the section of New York known as Harlem, which has been suffering a serious depreciation by reason of what is known as the negro invasion, that is to say the occupation of various apartments and tenements by negro tenants. This I am doing without compensation and solely for the protection of the said district in New York, and for its maintenance as a locality for the residence and occupancy of white people.⁵⁹

In his August 1st deposition Taylor highlighted the ways that the black presence in the neighborhood had harmed property values and he offered examples of homes that in 1913 sold for substantially lower prices than their purchase prices when the street had been exclusively white. His argument might have supported Raphael Greenbaum's claim of the harm to his property value by Morlath's rentals to blacks, but he perhaps later realized that the facts of this deposition could also be used to support Morlath's arguments that many African Americans were in the neighborhood before she began renting to them. On September 10, 1913 Taylor was deposed again. In this deposition he attempted to offer a more nuanced representation of the black presence in the neighborhood. Admitting that African Americans lived at 107 West 137th Street and 113 West 137th Street, he stated that they moved to these premises after July 25, 1913. He added that although 178 West 137th Street and Morlath's building at 125 West 137th Street had African American tenants, "All other houses in this block to my intimate knowledge were occupied exclusively by white tenants." Taylor seemed to be attempting to support the justification for Raphael Greenbaum's lawsuit, even though as Caroline Morlath claimed, racial conditions in the neighborhood had changed substantially.⁶⁰

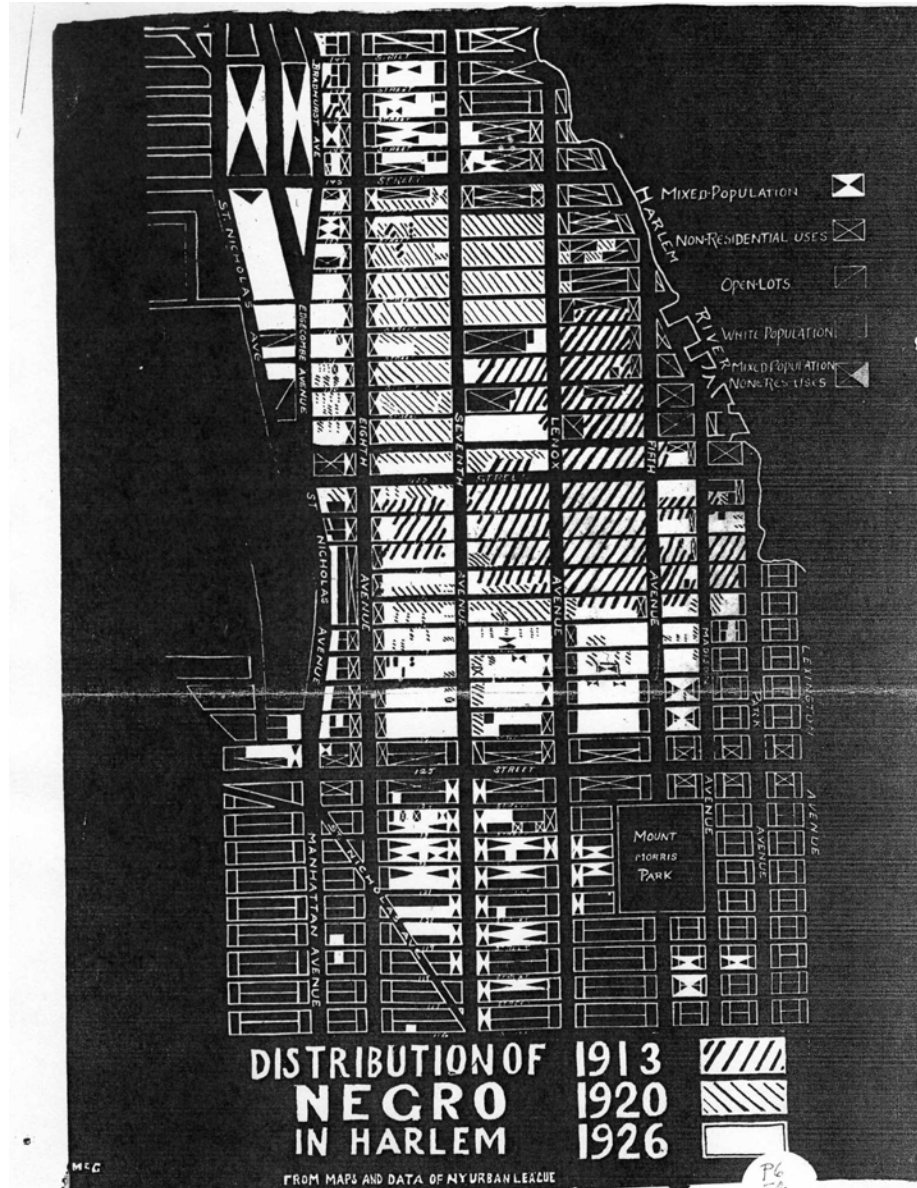
⁵⁹ Raphael Greenbaum vs. Caroline Morlath, John G. Taylor Deposition, August 1, 1913, 1

⁶⁰ Taylor August 1, 1913 Deposition, 1-2; Taylor September 10, 1913 Deposition, 1-5

In a deposition made the next day, September 11, 1913, Caroline Morlath refuted Taylor's claims, noting that 178 West 137th had more than a "few" black tenants, but was fully occupied by African Americans at least six months before Greenbaum's legal action. She recounted that the houses that Taylor claimed had exclusively white tenants had few tenants at all, and that their owners had indicated they would begin renting apartments to blacks. Morlath challenged Taylor's depiction of the racial composition on other nearby blocks as well. She also highlighted the contradictions between the two affidavits, concluding that "Mr. Taylor seems to be rather inconsistent." Taylor had begun by noting the number of blacks in the neighborhood in his first deposition. In his second account, he attempted to support Raphael Greenbaum's justification for undertaking the lawsuit against Caroline Morlath (when Greenbaum had not challenged others renting to African Americans) by attempting to characterize Morlath's rentals as among the first to blacks on the block. The map below depicting the presence of African Americans in Harlem in 1913 also illustrates the extent of Taylor's inconsistencies.⁶¹

⁶¹ Caroline Morlath September 11, 1913 Deposition, 1-5;

Map 10- Distribution of Black Population in Harlem, 1913, 1920, 1926⁶²



On October 1, 1913 Caroline Morlath submitted a final document to the court which included a photograph of Rafael Greenbaum’s building at 127 West 137th Street. The document included Xs that drew attention to Greenbaum’s building and a new sign on it that read: “5 Room Apartments, All Improvements to Respectable Colored Tenants.” Morlath’s document requested that Greenbaum’s case be dismissed “since the plaintiff is now committing a breach of the

⁶² N.Y. Urban League Map, New York City Municipal Library

contract he seeks to enforce.” It appears that Rafael Greenbaum had succumbed to the same economic pressures that Caroline Morlath had described. On October 15th, 1913 Greenbaum’s motion for an injunction against Morlath renting to African Americans was denied. The case that John G. Taylor had expected to affirm the covenant had instead further acknowledged the presence of African Americans in Central Harlem.⁶³



Raphael Greenbaum’s Building at 127 West 137th Street (1913)⁶⁴

Apart from the ironic outcome, the Greenbaum vs. Morlath case leaves several questions unanswered. If the neighborhood had such a large black presence, as indicated by the Morlath

⁶³ Greenbaum vs. Morlath, October 1, 1913; J. Delany Memorandum, October 14, 1913, Supreme Court, New York City

⁶⁴ Greenbaum vs. Morlath Case File

affidavits, the Urban League map, and Greenbaum's eventual actions, why did Greenbaum bring the suit? Was it because with Morlath's actions the black presence was right next door to him? Was there a broader dispute between the two owners with the suit being used as a tool of retribution? Since John G. Taylor was a dominant presence in the case, submitting two affidavits, was he the primary motivation behind Greenbaum's decision to bring the case forward?

Conclusion

While Raphael Greenbaum's request for an injunction to prevent Caroline Morlath from renting apartments to blacks was denied and the use of racial restrictive covenants in Harlem was not affirmed because of the shifting facts of the case, there was also no decision made on a broader question of the legality of the racial restrictive covenant instrument. Although the effectiveness of the covenant as a tool of resistance declined in Harlem, it continued to be used effectively over the next three decades in other parts of the country from Chicago to Washington D.C. In 1948 the Supreme Court ruled the instruments unconstitutional.⁶⁵

Many other northern cities were experiencing similarly dramatic increases in black residents during the first decade and a half of the twentieth century. While some of the rhetoric of white Harlem residents regarding the Negro invasion was insulting to blacks, when compared to responses in other cities it was relatively genteel. Class, relatively brief housing tenure, and white ethnic diversity influenced the responses in Harlem. There were at least three responses to the increase in black residents in Harlem: welcome based on class distinction: "they should be

⁶⁵ African Americans and others periodically mounted challenges, and in 1948 in the *Restrictive Covenant Cases* the Supreme Court ruled that racial restrictive covenants were unconstitutional and violated the equal protection rights insured by the 14th amendment. Clement Vose, *Caucasians Only: The Supreme Court, the NAACP, and the Restrictive Covenant Cases* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1967, c1959)

able to live where ever they can afford;” hostility manifested by the use of restrictive covenants; and hostility as seen through spontaneous violence. Wealthy people such as Harlem Board of Commerce Chairman Erduin v.d. H. Koch may have been more liberal because of their confidence that ultimately they could control their communities. Although Koch lived at Lenox Avenue near 120th Street, some similarly minded members of the Board of Commerce may not have lived in Harlem and therefore did not feel personally threatened by the black presence in the community.⁶⁶

John G. Taylor’s response, while more vocal could be called an intermediate or moderate response. He was more confrontational than the business leaders, and undoubtedly was able to recruit some from the business class who believed that the Koch approach was not strong enough. In addition Taylor relied on owner-occupants, and small investors, both of whom were more susceptible to concern regarding the decline in their property values, and less able to weather such a loss. While Taylor was able to organize large groups to sign restrictive covenants, there were obstacles to getting signers to adhere to their agreements. The short lengths of residency in the newly developed area, and the diversity of ethnic backgrounds among white residents limited the commitment that residents had to the neighborhood. As noted in Chapter 2, the West 135th Street area was a newly developed area in 1900. Many buildings were only built in the 1890s and by the first decade of the 1900s many streets were still partially undeveloped. Beyond aesthetics, this fact could have affected the allegiance of residents to considering a street as “theirs.” In many cases, white residents, including covenant leader Taylor, were almost as new as the blacks seeking to move onto their blocks. In addition to limited time of residency, white Harlem was ethnically diverse with native born whites living on the same blocks as first generation immigrants from Germany, Ireland and other countries. This diversity

⁶⁶ Trow’s City Directory, 1913

extended to religion as well with prosperous German Jews building synagogues on Fifth Avenue and other avenues to the west as well as purchasing brownstones on streets in the 130s, while Christians built churches in the same area. This diversity was an obstacle to a more vigorous defense of their neighborhoods. As the previous chapter illustrated some white residents had provided financing to black purchasers of their buildings, indicating that they did not fear community sanction.

It is also possible that while some white Harlem residents were concerned enough about their property values to enter into restrictive covenants, the more salient concern of some may have been economics rather than race. Their antipathy to blacks may not have been as deep as John G. Taylor's. Before his move to Harlem, Taylor lived on Waverly Place in Greenwich Village. During the time he was there, Greenwich Village still contained vestiges of African American enclaves that earlier in the nineteenth century had earned it the name "Little Africa." The growing black congregation of the Abyssinian Baptist Church was located at 164 Waverly Place just a few doors from Taylor's home at 152 Waverly Place. To John G. Taylor his move to Harlem may have been as much an escape from the company of neighbors whom he considered undesirable as a sign of his growing prosperity. He undoubtedly knew of the 135th Street enclave when he purchased his home on 136th Street in 1903, but he also had every reason to believe that the enclave would remain within its boundaries east of Lenox Avenue. This history linked with his economic concerns may have motivated him to lead the restrictive covenant movement. While his neighbors joined the movement by signing agreements, their commitment to maintaining Harlem as a white community was different from his. The third response to the increased number of blacks in Harlem, violence, occurred in only a few instances. The limited reports of violence reflect the lukewarm commitment of white resident to defending their

community. Other than school boy fights and a few isolated incidents involving adults, many white residents responded to the black invasion of Harlem by moving out of the community. But even as they exited they were reluctant to relinquish their church edifices to black newcomers.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Trow's General Directory of the Boroughs of Manhattan and Bronx, City of New York, 1901, Twelfth Census of the United States, Schedule no. 1- Population, Enumeration District no 100, Sheet 2A; "The Migration of Abyssinian Baptist Church," Diagram by Christopher Moore in "A Brief History of the Abyssinian Baptist Church" pamphlet, 1

Chapter 4

The Battle for Church Properties

In the first decades of the twentieth century there were examples of both conflict and cooperation between blacks moving to Harlem and white owners of residential properties in Harlem. When African Americans attempted to purchase religious properties in Harlem during the first two decades of the 1900s, white church officials in Harlem were very reluctant to directly sell properties being vacated by predominantly white congregations to African American congregations. This reluctance may have been grounded in attempts by remaining white property owners to retain control of the real estate in their communities even as many of the members of the white congregations moved elsewhere. Examining the ways that white congregations struggled to maintain control of these properties provides insight into their larger fears regarding the prospect of being “pushed” out of their community by the arrival of African Americans. From the perspectives of many white Harlem residents, possibly even some who conceded to the presence of a Negro colony in Harlem, the idea that these black newcomers would also establish churches in the community, and seek to acquire buildings constructed by white congregations was going too far. Attempts by blacks to acquire Harlem churches formerly occupied by white congregations were viewed by whites as concessions of defeat as well as symbols of both black permanency and black civic participation that highlighted for whites the decline of white dominance in the community.

Church real estate represented a symbol of permanency and community for white residents in Harlem, as well as a sign of responsible citizenship. For this reason church properties were very significant for white Harlem residents. They were signs of community control. The properties were significant for black Harlem residents for the same reasons. While African

Americans were not necessarily seeking exclusive control of the community, as their numbers in Harlem increased during the first decade of the 1900s, blacks sought sufficient control over the areas where they resided to ensure that they could remain there without harassment. In a period when subway transportation was in its infancy, having a church within walking distance of one's home was an important asset in the formation of a community. The church properties were also significant to African Americans as symbols of good citizenship and well-regulated behavior, at variance with the common stereotypes that characterized blacks as gamblers, drunks, and prostitutes who threatened the future peace of white Harlem.

In 1890, thirty-six percent of the New York State residents belonged to a church, synagogue or other religious organization (the national rate was thirty-two percent). The church and the synagogue remained important centers of religious faith as well as indicators of community membership and class status. As the development of Harlem as a residential community proceeded in the second half of the nineteenth century, some downtown congregations followed their members to Harlem, while new congregations were also established in the area. The completion of a church building was celebrated in the newspapers. Drawings of new church buildings highlighted the architectural designs and significant investments being made by the congregations and reinforced the church edifice as a symbol of middle class stability. The opening of a new church was viewed as a sign of progress, strengthening the community.¹

¹ *Report on Statistics of Churches in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890*, Henry K. Carroll, Washington, D.C., Department of the Interior, Census Office, 1894, 38, 91, Origin, 1970 to 1990, For The United States, Regions, Divisions, and States by Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, Population Division U. S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, September 2002 Working Paper Series No. 56, Table 1, United States - Race and Hispanic Origin: 1790 to 1990; the total U.S. population in 1890 was 62,622,250; total 1890 population in New York State was 556,954; Kenneth A. Scherzer, *The Unbounded Community*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 185-189 "Dedicating the New Church," *New York Times*, December 1, 1890, 6

For African Americans, church membership had additional appeal. While church membership was a sign of respectability, the church was even more important as a community institution. Black mutual benefit societies and literary organizations existed in some cities and towns, but with few independent institutions controlled by blacks, churches were important institutions for African Americans in developing social networks, assessing community mores, and seeking redress against maltreatment. The black pastor, whether full-time or part-time, receiving an income drawn from the offerings of church members, exercised a measure of independence unavailable to other African Americans most of whom worked in menial jobs.²

In New York City, the first predominantly African American congregation was formed in 1796 when the Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church was established by former members of John Street Methodist Church in Lower Manhattan who were dissatisfied with restricted seating and other signs of their subordinate status within the church. Similar circumstances led to the 1808 founding of the Abyssinian Baptist Church by people of African descent attending First Baptist Church (on Gold Street in Lower Manhattan), and in 1809 to the founding St. Philip's Episcopal Church by a group of blacks attending Trinity Church also in Lower Manhattan. In the following decades of the nineteenth century, these churches were joined by a handful of other black congregations typically located in the areas of black settlement in Lower Manhattan and later the midtown area. The churches provided places of worship as well as served as social centers for concerts, lectures, and rallies. They were also the targets of anti-abolition and anti-black mobs in the 1830s and during the 1863 Draft Riots. White elites often considered black pastors to be the leaders of the African American community, and black congregants often

²*The Black Church in the African American Experience*, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, (Durham, Duke University Press) 1990, 56; *Upon This Rock*, Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. (New York: Abyssinian Baptist Church, 1943); *Protest and Progress: New York's First Black Episcopal Church Fights Racism*, John H. Hewitt, Jr., New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000, 13-21

expected their pastors to voice their grievances to the broader community. During the four-day Draft Riots whites protested the drafting of soldiers to serve in the Civil War by killing many blacks and burning or otherwise destroying property owned by African Americans and their allies. In the aftermath of the violence, Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, pastor of the black congregation of Shiloh Presbyterian Church and the Rev. Charles Bennett Ray, pastor of Bethesda Congregational Church, also a black congregation, were selected by a group of white merchants to disburse aid to African American victims. They attempted to use their positions to help those in need, but also tactfully presented to the merchants the grievances of the black community regarding past discriminatory treatment.³

While most African American churches were located near black enclaves in Lower Manhattan and Midtown in the mid-nineteenth century, black congregations in Lower Manhattan recognized the need to serve African American settlements in Harlem. In 1843 Zion African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, then located at Church and Leonard Streets in Lower Manhattan, established a Harlem mission to serve the black population in that area. Located at 236 East 117th Street between Second and Third Avenues, “Little Zion” as the church was called continued to grow as the African American population in the area grew in the late 1800s. In 1882 Carmel Baptist Church, a congregation pastored by Rev. J.E. Raymond, was established on East 121st Street with a congregation of thirty people. In 1891 the growing congregation built a new church on East 123rd Street between Second and Third Avenues. As the African American settlement in Harlem shifted westward after 1900, their churches followed.⁴

³ Ray, 50, 51; Colyer, *Report of the Committee of Merchants*, 11

⁴ Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem the Making of a Ghetto, Negro New York, 1890-1930*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 83; David W. Dunlap, *From Abyssinian to Zion: A Guide to Manhattan's Houses of Worship*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 91

Jewish congregations were also moving to northern Manhattan in the late nineteenth century. In 1873, Congregation Hand-in Hand, became the first synagogue established in Harlem. Until the early 1880s it held services in rented halls. Improved transportation to the area as a result of the extension of elevated railroad lines along Second and Third Avenues in 1879 and 1880 and the growth in apartment construction along the route, led to the growth of Congregation Hand-in Hand. In 1888 it reorganized as Temple Israel and moved into a new building at 125th Street and Fifth Avenue, “the crossroads of Harlem’s wealthiest district.” In 1907 as more prosperous Harlem residents moved to the west, Temple Israel built a Neo Roman synagogue on Lenox Avenue at 120th Street. It was then considered “one of the most prestigious synagogues in the city.”⁵

St. Luke’s and St. Philip’s: Growing Congregations and Harlem Real Estate

In 1892 St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, a predominantly white congregation, celebrated the opening of its new church at Convent Avenue and 141st Street. Founded in 1820 on Hudson Street in Greenwich Village, the church had witnessed growth and decline in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The move to northern Manhattan had not been totally voluntary. In 1887 Trinity Episcopal Church, the oldest and largest Episcopal congregation in New York City, and long-time patron to St. Luke’s and other Episcopal congregations had informed St. Luke’s that it was planning to open a chapel and school on land it owned nearby in Greenwich Village. It offered to incorporate St. Luke’s congregation into the new chapel. Members of St. Luke’s recognized this offer as the death of St. Luke’s as an independent congregation. They decided to move to an area where they believed they would not have to compete with other churches for members and which they also believed had a potential for growth. St. Luke’s requested Trinity’s assistance in financing the building of a church in Washington Heights, as the area of Convent

⁵ Jeffery Gurock, *When Harlem Was Jewish*, 7-21; Oscar Israelowitz, *Synagogues of New York City*, 12

Avenue and 141st Street was then known. (Washington Heights, took its name from the fact that George Washington had led Revolutionary War battles in the area and had his headquarters at the Morris Jumel Mansion one mile to the north). The “Heights” referred to the steep hill that separated the area from Harlem to the east of St. Nicholas Avenue. ⁶

In 1892 the area, on the northern edge of Harlem, was sparsely populated:

...south of Saint Luke’s Church there are no dwelling houses except two or three wooden cabins or shanties until the Convent of the Sacred Heart is reached situated at West 130th St.—...west of Saint Luke’s Church there are some few buildings, the majority of which are unoccupied and That in all probability there will not at a near date be a large population in that section—That east of the church on St. Nicholas Avenue between 135th Street and 145th Street there is not one dwelling house and that from a population further east but few persons can be expected to attend Saint Luke’s owing to the proximity of other parishes and to the steep grade of ...141st [Street]...⁷

Although the area seemed remote, it was actually in the path of development. St. Luke’s was built on a parcel that had been part of the Hamilton Grange, the estate of Alexander Hamilton. In 1887, the year that St. Luke’s was informed of changes at its Lower Manhattan location, the estate had been divided into lots that were sold at auction. Townhouses, much larger than the standard Manhattan brownstone, were built on these lots over the next two decades. In the 1890s as real estate developers began to position Harlem as an in-city bedroom suburb of lower Manhattan, townhouses were built on Convent Avenue north of St. Luke’s and to the east on the L-shaped street, Hamilton Terrace. In 1907 the campus of the College of the City of New York opened on land to the south of Saint Luke’s, a portion of which had been the Convent of the Sacred Heart.

⁶ Penelope Tuttle, *History of St. Luke’s Church*, (New York: Appeal Printing Company, 1926), 208-255

⁷ Tuttle, *History of St. Luke’s Church*, p. 282; St. Luke’s Hudson Street building was operated as a chapel by Trinity until 1976 when it again became an independent congregation called St. Luke in the Fields, the original name of St. Luke’s when it was founded www.stlukeinthefields.org;

All of these developments contributed to the growth of St. Luke's congregation after 1900.⁸

By 1913, as the area of African American settlement in Harlem continued to move west of Lenox Avenue, and the restrictive covenant movement progressed through the courts with the Morlath case, the thriving congregation of St. Luke's experienced a Negro problem. African American children had begun to attend its Sunday School to the dismay of some mothers of white children. The rector, Rev. George Oldham, responded to the mothers' complaints by offering to create a separate class for black children, but he suggested that the best solution would be for these children to attend a church with their own kind, and directed them to St. Philips Episcopal Church a black Episcopal congregation that had recently relocated to Harlem. No mention was made of the children's parents, suggesting that their parents did not accompany them to Sunday school.⁹

Racial tension erupted in at least one other Episcopal congregation in 1913. St. Mary's Church on 126th Street near Amsterdam Avenue had requested that an African American Sunday School teacher cease teaching. Her father, Wilfred Smith, a lawyer and partner of Philip Payton in the Afro-American Realty Company threatened to take the matter to the Episcopal Bishop. There is no evidence that Smith followed up on his threat, but the fact that he believed that the Bishop would hear this grievance also suggests that Smith believed that the Bishop did not agree with the local priest's idea of the subordinate status of blacks.¹⁰

⁸ "Real Estate at Auction," *New York Times*, 1887, ; "Some Sales Reported by Brokers," *New York Times*, February 22, 1895, 15; Elliot Willensky and Norval White, *AIA Guide to New York City*, Third Edition, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1988), 431-433

⁹ "Race Row Started in St. Luke's Church," *Harlem Home News*, April 17, 1913, 1

¹⁰ *Ibid*

St. Philip's Episcopal Church, the church that St. Luke's pastor had suggested the black children attend, was ten years older than St. Luke's, formed in 1809 by African Americans who had been dissatisfied with the discrimination of Trinity Church in Manhattan. Initially worshipping in a school, and then a loft over a carpenter's shop, St. Philip's first permanent building was located on Collect (Centre) Street between Leonard and Anthony (Worth). As the African American community moved northward, St. Philip's followed, moving to Mulberry Street in Greenwich Village in 1857 and in 1886 purchasing a church building on 161 West 25th Street in the heart of the Tenderloin district which by then had a large black concentration.¹¹

By 1910 the area around West 25th Street was becoming problematic for St. Philip's. The 1900 race riot in Midtown, although concentrated several blocks to the north, left a pall over the community. After the riot black pastors organized a committee and filed grievances against the police department for brutality. The tepid official response to complaints left an air of frustration over the community. The lack of security in the black settlements in midtown, and the acquisition of large swaths of property from 30th Street to 34th Street by the Pennsylvania Railroad in preparation for the construction of Pennsylvania Station and its Hudson River tunnels made this area unsuitable for the community.¹²

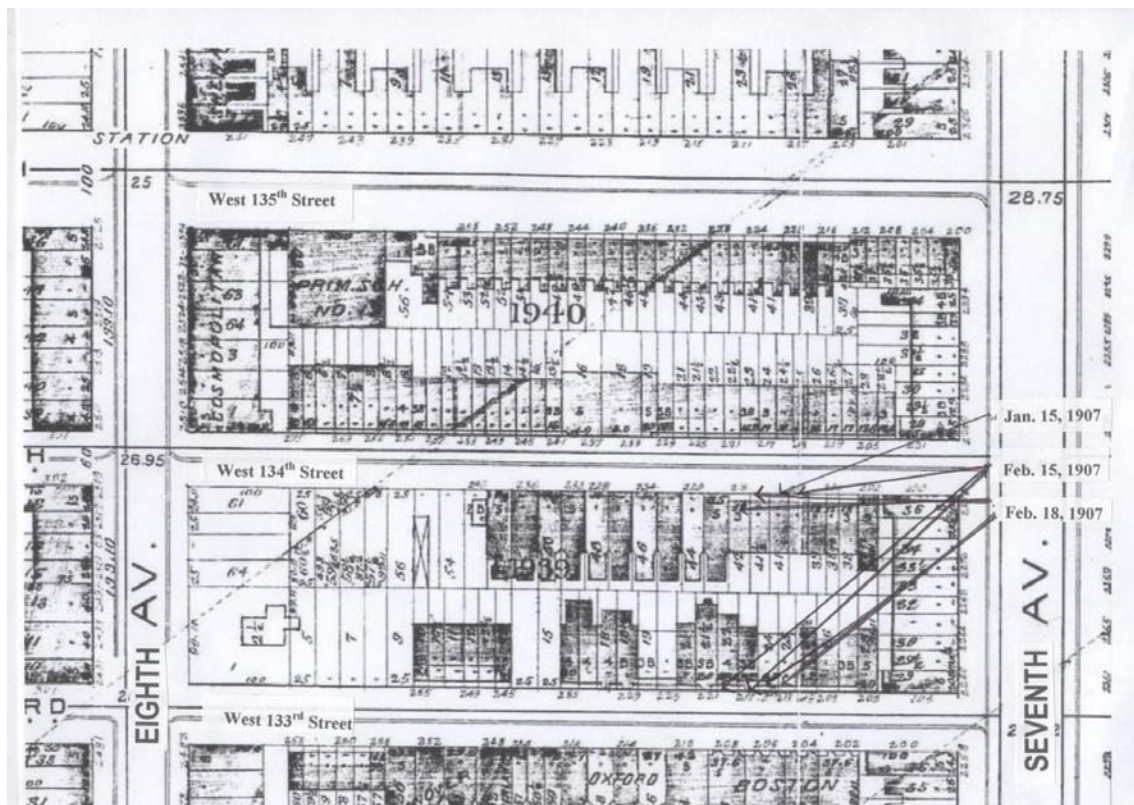
During this period St. Philip's began a series of real estate transactions that resulted in the construction of the first new black church in Harlem. The church's move began in small steps. In January 1907 its rector (pastor) Rev. Hutchens Bishop purchased a building at 212 West 134th Street between 7th and 8th Avenues for \$100 in cash and the assumption of a mortgage of \$5,000. On February 15th, Bishop paid \$13,500 for two more properties on 133rd and 134th Street between 7th and 8th Avenues (217, 219 W. 133rd, 210W 134th). This transaction took place two

¹¹ Hewitt, *Protest and Progress*, 125, 135-138

¹² Jill Jonnes, *Conquering Gotham: A Gilded Age Epic: The Construction of Penn Station and its Tunnels*, (New York: Viking), 67, 84-86, 127-129, 154-155

days after twenty-three white owners of property on West 137th Street between Lenox and Seventh Avenues had signed a restrictive covenant agreeing not to sell or rent to blacks for a ten-year period. On February 18th Bishop purchased two more properties in the same block at 214 and 216 W. 134th making a payment of \$20,000. The transactions were noted a month later in the *The New York Times*, along with other real estate transactions throughout the city in its standard weekly listing of real estate matters. Because Hutchens C. Bishop was fair-skinned, the sellers of the properties and the observers of the transactions may not have realized that an African American had purchased properties west of Lenox Avenue, the previously implicit western boundary for the Negro Colony in Harlem.¹³

Map 11- Rev. Hutchens Bishop/St. Philips Harlem Property Purchases, 1907¹⁴



¹³ Conveyances, New York City Register, Section 7, Liber 124, 449; Liber 127, 15, Liber 125, 470, Liber 127, 44, Liber 124, 500; "In the Real Estate Field," *The New York Times*, March 15, 1907, 14; Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 128, 146

¹⁴ *Ibid*, G.W. Bromley & Sons, Map of Manhattan, 1897

The real estate purchases of Rev. Bishop did not draw the attention of white property owners, even though they had been made at the same time the restrictive covenant movement had begun on the adjacent blocks. But a letter regarding the possible plans of St. Philip's to move to Harlem generated considerable discussion. In February 1907 Rev. Bishop sent a letter to Rev. Dr. George R. Van de Water, rector of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church at Fifth Avenue and 127th Street, a predominantly white congregation, informing Van de Water that St. Philips was considering a move to Harlem. Although their congregations served different populations, Episcopal protocol required that congregations in proximity be informed in advance of a contemplated move to an area by another congregation. The existing congregations then would have an opportunity to voice their opinions of the move to the Standing Committee, the regional governing body of the Episcopal Church.

Rev. Van de Water commented on Bishop's request in St. Andrew's newsletter noting that he fully supported St. Philip's plans and "that it is not for the best interests of either the whites or the blacks that they should attend the same Sunday schools, or the same churches."

Rev. Van de Water in an interview in the *New York Times* elaborated on his view on interracial relations adding:

I repeat, that the sooner the colored people get out of St. Andrew's the better it will be for both whites and blacks. If President Roosevelt wants to eat with a colored man he can do so. I won't, and I am just as much entitled to my opinion as he is. I do not want the colored people in my church, neither do my parishioners for they have been a source of much trouble. In the first place, we have gentlemen ushers, Wardens, and Vestrymen and they in a manner, object to escorting colored people up and down the aisle.¹⁵

Although his views reflected the views of many New Yorkers, Van De Water was denounced by some black and white New Yorkers for un-Christian racial hostility. Two days

¹⁵ "Wants No Negroes in St. Andrews," *The New York Times*, March 3, 1907, 3; President Roosevelt had been criticized for inviting Washington to dinner at the White House in 1901.

after the initial *Times* article, in a letter to its editor Rev. Van De Water repeated his position but added that any “colored person coming to my Sunday school or church will be received graciously, courteously ... All the same I hold that it is much better for all concerned that the races should worship by themselves.”¹⁶

Hutchens Bishop continued to lay the groundwork for the move that would establish St. Philip’s in Harlem. On January 31, 1910 he transferred the Harlem properties he had purchased in his name in 1907 to St. Philip’s. In February of 1910 St. Philips requested permission from the Episcopal Diocese to sell its 25th Street church for \$140,000 and its 30th Street property for \$450,000 (an advantage of the commercialization of the area was an increase in real estate values), and also requested permission to build a church on West 134th Street in Harlem. The Standing Committee of the Episcopal Diocese sent a copy of the request to “the three parishes and mission districts nearest the site”: St. Luke’s on Convent Avenue and 141st Street, St. Mary’s on 126th near Amsterdam Ave., and Church of the Redeemer on West 136th between Lenox and Seventh Avenues. A hearing by the Standing Committee on March 3, 1910 was held to hear from any opponents of the move. No one appeared in opposition to the move, and the request was approved.¹⁷

With the Harlem properties now in the name of St. Philip’s and the approval of the Diocese secured, plans for the construction of the new church began. The architectural firm of Tandy and Foster was selected to prepare the design for the new building. This firm was one of the few black firms in the country. One of the partners, Vertner Tandy, a member of St. Philips,

¹⁶ “Criticise Dr. Van De Water,” *New York Times*, March 4, 1907, 18; “Says Stand is Un-Christian,” *New York Times*, March 4, 1907, 18; “Supports by Dr. Van De Water,” March 5, 1907, 8; “Whites and Blacks in Church,” *The New York Times*, March 5, 1907, 8

¹⁷ *New York City Register*, Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 143, 410-411; Notes of the Standing Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of New York 1907, 71-77; “Church Sale is Confirmed,” *The New York Age*, November 9, 1909,

was the first African American in New York State to be licensed as an architect. For St. Philips, he and his partner George Washington Foster designed a parish house on West 133rd Street, and a “spare, northern Gothic church in salmon-colored Roman brick” on West 134th Street. Construction was completed in 1911, the same year that St. Philips’ most significant real estate purchase occurred.¹⁸

In March of 1911 St. Philip’s purchased a row of ten occupied, six-story walkup apartments on the north side of West 135th Street just west of Lenox Avenue for \$393,000 using the proceeds from its downtown property sales.¹⁹ The seller was the Chase Realty Group which took back mortgages on the properties. The transaction was reported in an article in the *New York Times*, and was highlighted with banner headlines in the African American *New York Age*. The *Times* noted that the “white tenants were notified of the change yesterday, and many families are already preparing to move out.” As Philip Payton had proposed to do with the leased property on West 151st Street in 1906, St. Philips evicted the white occupants of the West 135th Street properties, and replaced them with black tenants. In one very visible move the Lenox Avenue racial “dead line” had been crossed with the construction of a significant church edifice and the acquisition of a large swath of residential properties. While St. Philip’s new church building on West 134th Street was a symbol of the African American presence in Harlem as a community, the congregation’s control of substantial residential property nearby enabled it as an institution to play a significant role in the literal formation of the black community in proximity to its church. There is no record of a protest from the evicted white families, suggesting that

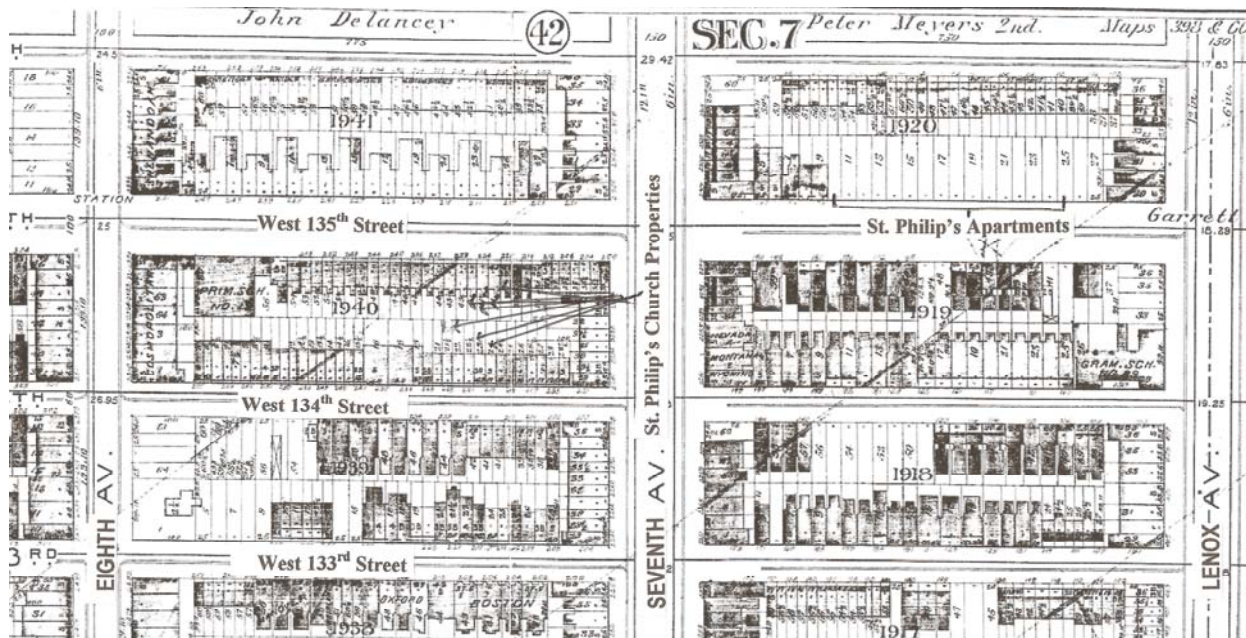
¹⁸ “A Memorable Easter at St. Philip’s,” *The New York Age*, April 7, 1910, 2; Hewitt, *Protest and Progress*, pp. 138-143; Elliot Willensky and Norval White, *AIA Guide to New York City*, Third Edition, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1988), 448

¹⁹ John H. Hewitt, Jr. , *Protest and Progress: New York’s First Black Episcopalian Church Fights Racism* (Garland Publishing, Inc., New York) 2000, 138-139; New York City Register, Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 150, 281-282; newspaper accounts note different sales figures

either St. Philip’s had caught them off guard or that they had resigned themselves to the hard realities of New York’s real estate policies in which a new owner, even a black one, could evict tenants who were white.²⁰

By 1913 when Rev. Oldham, the rector of St. Luke’s repeated the 1907 suggestion made by the rector of St. Andrew’s that it would be better for everyone if blacks at St. Lukes would consider attending their “own” church, St. Philip’s was a congregation of over one thousand people with financial assets that surpassed St. Luke’s and several other white congregations in Harlem, some of which were struggling as white residents moved away in response to the “Negro invasion.”²¹

Map 12-St. Philip’s Episcopal Church Harlem Properties, Acquired 1907-1911²²



²⁰ “More Harlem Homes for Colored People,” *New York Times*, March 26, 1911, p.XXI; Hewitt, 138-139;

²¹ Hewitt, 144

²² “More Harlem Homes for Colored People,” *New York Times*, March 26, 1911, p.XXI; Hewitt, 138-139; G.W. Bromley & Sons Map of Manhattan, 1897

Church of the Redeemer: The Struggle to Retain Control of Church Property

The struggles of the Episcopal congregation of Church of the Redeemer illustrate the ways that maintaining control of church real estate was linked to control of the community for most predominantly white congregations in Harlem during the first two decades of the 1900s. As the African American population increased and black congregations such as St. Philip's began moving to Harlem, there was a concerted effort by white congregations to prevent African American congregations from purchasing the buildings of white congregations. Founded in 1853 as part of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, before moving to Harlem the Church of the Redeemer was located at Park Avenue between 81st and 82nd Street. Not successful there, Redeemer's building was sold in 1897 to avoid a foreclosure sale. In 1898 the Church of the Redeemer merged with the Church of the Nativity, an Episcopal Congregation that had previously merged with the Church of the Holy Innocents. Church of the Innocents had a graystone church in Harlem at 153 West 136th Street with a yard that extended north through to West 137th Street. The consolidated congregations, under the name of Church of the Redeemer, moved to the Harlem building in 1898. These mergers reflected the challenges of maintaining small congregations not just in Harlem, but across the country even in areas where racial change was not an issue, which it was not in 1900 in Harlem. The loss of a few key families or individuals in a congregation through death or relocation, or disenchantment with a pastor could lead to the irreparable decline of a congregation.²³

After experiencing several decades of turmoil in the nineteenth century, Church of the Redeemer had less than a decade of tranquility at its Harlem location. The small congregation continued to struggle to meet its expenses, and a variety of efforts were undertaken to deal with

²³ Letter from Lawson Purdy (Warden of Church of the Redeemer) to Rev. E.C. Chorley, October 27, 1914; "Church of the Redeemer," *The New York Times*, October, 11, 1897, 7; "A Rectorship in Dispute," *The New York Times*, November 30, 1897, 3

the financial problems. In the spring of 1910 the church received permission from the Episcopal Diocese to sell its rectory at 142 West 137th for \$11,500.²⁴ Soon afterward the congregation began to consider moving from Harlem altogether. Church of the Redeemer soon received an offer of \$50,000 for its church building from St. James Presbyterian Church, an African American congregation founded in 1893 by former members of Shiloh (First Colored) Presbyterian Church. Shiloh had been a prominent African American congregation in the mid-nineteenth century. From 1857 to 1864 it was pastored by abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet, who had coordinated aid to black residents after the Draft Riots of 1863. The church had disbanded in 1891, but former members went on to establish St. James. The new church had a growing congregation that had occupied a building on Thirty-second Street, but was displaced with the building of Penn Station. In 1903 St. James took over the West Fifty-first Street Presbyterian Church at 359 West 51st Street.²⁵

In responding to St. James' purchase offer, the Church of the Redeemer Vestry (the governing body for business matters) seemed concerned that the prospective purchaser of their building was not an Episcopal church. Even though racial tension was growing in Harlem, membership in the denomination still inspired an affinity that could cross racial lines. At a special meeting on May 23, 1910 the Vestry passed a resolution to offer the church to St. Philip's Episcopal Church, the black congregation led by Hutchens Bishop, for \$50,000. The resolution also provided an explanation for the sale to a black congregation:

WHEREAS for a number of years past the population of Harlem adjacent to the Church has been changing in character, and colored people have become residents of blocks and streets immediately adjacent to the block on which the Church is situated, and

²⁴ Notes- Standing Committee of the Diocese of New York, March 3, 1910 (p. 75), April 7, 1910, 87, Episcopal Diocese of New York Archives

²⁵ Theodore Fiske Savage, *The Presbyterian Church in New York City*, (New York: The Presbytery of New York) 1949, 154-155, 194-195; David W. Dunlap, *From Abyssinian to Zion: A Guide to Manhattan's Houses of Worship*, (New York: Columbia University Press), 2004, 212

the colored population has been growing in numbers and steadily approaching nearer to the Church and the Vestry is now reliably informed that a large number of houses on 136th Street near the Church are for sale, and the Presbyterian Church above referred to has an option on three houses nearly opposite the Church, and

WHEREAS, it appears that the street on which the Church is situated between Seventh and Lenox Avenues is certain in the near future to be entirely populated by colored persons, and

WHEREAS, the Vestry recognizing their duty to conserve the property of the Church and believing that if the present offer of St. James Presbyterian Church be not accepted it will be impossible to sell the Church Building for any price whatever, and that even the land will seriously deteriorate in value..²⁶

The Vestry unanimously voted for a sale to St. James to proceed if St. Philip's declined.

The detailed explanation in the church's official record seemed to be in anticipation of criticism the church officers expected to receive for selling this community institution to blacks. Their concerns were well-founded.

While the Redeemer Vestry was struggling over selling its property to a black congregation, John G. Taylor, leader of the restrictive covenant movement was organizing a major effort to block such transactions. Taylor lived at 213 W. 136th Street, one block west of Redeemer's church building at 153 West 136th. On June 7, 1910 the massive restrictive covenant discussed in Chapter 3 was recorded with the New York City Register covering ninety-one owners of properties on the 100 and 200 blocks of West 136th Street (between Lenox and Eighth Avenues). The agreement did not simply prohibit black residency, but broadly prohibited "use or occupancy" of the properties by people of African descent. Church of the Redeemer was not a party to this agreement, but owners to the east and west of Redeemer as well as across the street were parties to the agreement. The effort to get these ninety-one signatures must have been proceeding for

²⁶ In the Matter of the Application of the Church of the Redeemer in the City of New York for leave to sell its Real Estate, June 13, 1910, Supreme Court, New York County

days or weeks before the June 7th recording date. Perhaps the covenant effort was sparked by Redeemer's sales plans.²⁷

In spite of the covenant, to which the church was not a party, on June 13th Redeemer petitioned the Episcopal Diocese for permission to sell its buildings, outlining its options in the same manner as its May 23rd resolution had. The Standing Committee of the Episcopal Diocese noted that as required, Bishop David H. Greer had already approved the request and the Committee then also approved the request. Because religious institutions also needed permission from the New York County Supreme Court to mortgage or sell properties, on June 13th an application was entered to the Supreme Court requesting permission to sell the property.²⁸ Redeemer's financial challenges were covered in the press with one article indicating that representatives of the church had explained that the proposed sale was due to the fact that "changes in the population in Harlem have depleted the congregation of the church to such an extent that it is no longer possible to keep it open." It was announced that the Church of the Redeemer planned to build a new church either in the predominantly white communities of Washington Heights in Upper Manhattan or University Heights in the Bronx, two areas to which congregants leaving Harlem were likely to move.²⁹

St. Philips declined to purchase Redeemer's building. By June of 1910 the cornerstone for St. Philips' new building, four blocks away on 134th Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, had already been laid.³⁰ But the Redeemer Vestry's

²⁷ New York City Register, Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 151, 134-146, June 7, 1910

²⁸ In the Matter of the Application of the Church of the Redeemer in the City of New York for leave to sell its Real Estate, June 13, 1910, Supreme Court, New York County; Notes- Standing Committee of the Diocese of New York, June 13, 1910, 99

²⁹ "Redeemer Church to Move", *New York Times*, June 26, 1910, 6

³⁰ "Cornerstone Laid Despite the Rain," *The New York Age*, June 23, 1910, 1

contingency plan of proceeding with the sale to St. James did not occur either. Perhaps the restrictive covenant covering many properties on the block made the Vestry wary of community disenchantment with such a sale. This concern may have gone as far as the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese. Lawson Purdy, who was chief warden of Church of the Redeemer later suggested that the sale to St. James did not occur because of a change in Bishop Greer's position, noting that it was Bishop Greer

who was responsible for our not having sold out when we could have obtained \$60,000 for the property. He wanted us to hold the Fort; it was against my judgment. This is not said in criticism of the Bishop who was loyal and an earnest good friend, always.³¹

By "holding the fort," or not selling to the black congregations of St. James or to St. Philip's, the Bishop would have been echoing rhetoric of the restrictive covenant movement which framed the role of white residents as defending their community against the Negro invasion. In October of 1910 the struggling Redeemer congregation received another destabilizing blow. Rector William Davis submitted a one sentence note, announcing his resignation, effective November 12th. It is quite likely that Redeemer's precarious financial state was a factor in the resignation. A fundraising campaign had to be undertaken to secure a portion of the next rector's salary before a replacement was sought.³²

In December of 1910 John G. Taylor sent a letter to Redeemer in which he expressed concern about the possible sale of the church to African Americans. Chief Warden Lawson Purdy indicated that he had replied "unofficially that it was improbable that the church would be sold to colored people." At the same December 14th meeting at

³¹ Letter from Lawson Purdy to Rev. E.C. Chorley, October 27, 1914, Church of the Redeemer Collection, Episcopal Diocese of New York Archives

³² Vestry Minutes, Church of the Redeemer, October 13, 1910, Episcopal Diocese of New York Archives

which Taylor's letter was discussed the Vestry passed a motion that "the clerk be instructed to write to Mr. J.R. Glide that the church of the Redeemer does not propose to sell the property at present." In all likelihood Glide represented African Americans, for this motion was followed by a motion to instruct the clerk to determine if a \$39,000 purchase offer from a Mr. Knox would include a statement that "he would restrict the property for five years so it would not be used by colored people." There is no record of a response from Mr. Knox. Either he was no longer interested or perhaps was not willing to adhere to the restriction considering the racial changes occurring in the neighborhood.³³

By the end of 1910 another plan was being considered by Redeemer. With an air of desperation, church leaders approached St. Luke's Church on Convent Avenue and 141st Street and proposed to

...transfer a deed of the property [its church at 153 W. 136th Street] to Saint Luke's Church on the condition that Saint Luke's should continue services in said Church of the Redeemer for a reasonable length of time, after which if the expenses exceeded the receipts there would be no objection to Saint Luke's disposing of the property in any way or manner which they saw fit.³⁴

A few months after a potential \$50,000 sale of its property to St. James Presbyterian did not materialize, Church of the Redeemer was proposing to give its building to St. Luke's to operate as a mission church to St. Luke's. The Vestry of St. Luke's seriously considered how it might absorb Church of the Redeemer's congregation, discussing the appointment of the senior Vestryman Lawson Purdy of Church of Redeemer to the Vestry of Saint Luke's, and also considered "providing a special clergyman to attend to the needs of the Parish of the Church of the Redeemer." With a large building that was not fully utilized, debts from the 1892 construction of its building still being paid, operating expenses that were a challenge for the

³³ Vestry Minutes, Church of the Redeemer, December 14, 1910

³⁴ History of St. Luke's Church, 357

modest-sized congregation of approximately 400 to meet, the possibility of bringing additional members into St. Luke's must have been attractive. But these additional members would have come with the challenge of operating buildings at two locations, one in an area of increasing racial change. In late 1910 Saint Luke's informed the Church of the Redeemer that it would decline its offer.³⁵

At its December meeting the Redeemer Vestry had called for a committee to secure pledges of \$1,000 for two years after which a Rector would be called. In April of 1911 a substantial portion of the pledges were secured and Rev. Henry Cornelius Dyer was asked to become rector at an annual salary of \$1,200. During 1911, fundraising efforts for church operations continued through a plan to develop a "mission from Paradise Endowment." By the end of the year discussions were underway to consolidate with the Church of the Holy Road, a congregation at Broadway and 181st Street. This plan also did not proceed and for the next year other plans were considered. In March of 1913 the Vestry suggested that the Catholic Apostolic Church be asked to make a purchase offer. When that church declined, in June the Vestry suggested that efforts begin to get the appropriate approvals (from the Episcopal Bishop, Standing Committee of the Diocese, and New York Supreme Court) to convey the Church of the Redeemer to the Church of the Transfiguration which would assume Redeemer's debts. This did not occur either.³⁶

In June of 1913 John G. Taylor interceded on Redeemer's behalf. Taylor proposed approaching the widow of financier Russell Sage for assistance. Taylor asked Mrs. Sage to consider purchasing the Church of the Redeemer building to establish a new congregation, "Church of the Stranger" in Redeemer's building. In 1898 a Church of the Stranger congregation

³⁵ History of Saint Luke's Church, 357;

³⁶ Church of the Redeemer Vestry Minutes, March 27, 1913, April 14, 1913, June 5, 1913,

had moved into a new building on Fifty-seventh Street near Eighth Avenue. The church drew on the Christian ethos that all were welcome, particularly young people. Ironically John G. Taylor hoped to use this concept to prevent African Americans from controlling the Church of the Redeemer property.³⁷

It appears that Mrs. Russell Sage declined to support John G. Taylor's plans. In December of 1913 the Redeemer Vestry agreed to accept a \$19,000 offer from real estate agent Paul Friedland for the church. At a meeting on January 12, 1914 the Standing Committee of the Episcopal Diocese heard Lawson Purdy explain the sale "owing largely to the occupation of the neighborhood about the church by colored people, as well as other antecedent causes... it had become wholly impossible to maintain the church in the locality." An opponent of the sale, Mr. Ransome E. Wilcox "representing property owners in Harlem" stated that the sale "would be injurious to the neighborhood if the property came into possession of colored people." The Committee approved Redeemer's request. On January 19th the sale of Church of the Redeemer to Paul Friedland's client Mildred Helm, a white Yonkers resident was completed. Rather than move to a new location, the Church of the Redeemer congregation disbanded. The rector, Rev. Henry C. Dyer accepted an appointment with Metropolitan Life Insurance Company as chaplain of the company's sanatorium in Mount McGregor, New York.³⁸ Area property owners speculated on the building's future:

According to one rumor, it will be turned into a moving picture theatre, though another report has it that the negroes of the neighborhood are anxious to secure it for one of their churches.³⁹

³⁷ "Ask Sage Company to Buy Church to Keep Away Negroes," *Harlem Home News*, June 19, 1913, 11; "Church of the Stranger," *New York Times*, November 21, 1898, 7

³⁸ Vestry Minutes, December 17, 1913; Notes of the Standing Committee, January 12, 1914, 262; "High Church Sells Out," *New York Times*, January 21, 1914, 1

³⁹ "Fate of Redeemer Church Arouses Property Owners" *Harlem Home News*, January 25, 1914, 1, "High Church Sells Out," *New York Times*, January 21, 1914, 1

Dr. Robert Bruce Clark, pastor of the Church of the Puritans on West 130th Street

expressed his concern regarding the “danger of being engulfed by the negro invasion:”

The churches more than any other organizations, are suffering from the existing conditions north of 130th St. For years we have struggled to keep our congregations and it has been an uphill fight not to allow them to scatter. ... Under the circumstances, I wonder that [Church of the Redeemer] held out so long as they did. The site of the church is in the heart of the colored section, and it is not in the least surprising that its members did not care to live in Harlem.⁴⁰

On January 22 1914, three days after the initial sale of Church of Redeemer, Mother AME Zion Church purchased the church building from Mildred Helm, agreeing to assume a \$17,000 mortgage on the property. Perhaps aware of the reluctance of Redeemer to sell to a black congregation given the experience of St. James, Mother AME Zion was able to have Helm stand in to assuage Redeemer’s concerns of an outright sale to blacks. Although as the quote above suggests, it was generally believed that Redeemer’s building was likely to come under the control of an African American congregation, by selling to Mildred Helm, a white woman, Redeemer’s loyal Vestry could not later be criticized for contributing to the Negro invasion. That responsibility would fall to Mildred Helm, a woman from outside of the community for whom such a criticism would carry less weight.⁴¹ Other predominantly white congregations in Harlem went through similar transactions, rarely selling to an African American congregation but instead to an individual who then sold to a black congregation.⁴²

The movement of African Americans into Harlem was concentrated in an area between West 130th and West 140th Streets, and therefore did not affect Harlem synagogues to the same extent as predominantly white churches were affected. In the first decade of the 1900s as some

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ New York City Register, Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 169, 149-150, January 22, 1914; *Richmond’s Fifteenth Annual Directory of Yonkers, Westchester County, N.Y.* (Yonkers: W.L. Richmond, 1914), 396

⁴² New York City Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 144, 425; Section 6, Liber 160, 303, 317; Section 6, Liber 172, 37; Section 6, Liber 125, 236; Liber 3028, 391; Section 7, Liber 169, 149; Section 7, Liber 180, 431; Section 6, Liber 180, 492; Section 7, Liber 181, 175; Liber 3036, 94; as the founding church of the national African Methodist Episcopal Zion denomination, Zion Church was known as Mother AME Zion Church;

synagogues moved from East Harlem to the area west of Lenox Avenue, they concentrated in an area between West 116th Street and West 125th Street. In 1900 a faction of Congregation Shaare Zedek, then located on Henry Street, built a synagogue at 23-25 West 118th Street between Fifth and Lenox Avenues. In 1914 the uptown faction reunited with the downtown faction at this location, but in 1922 they sold their building to another synagogue, Chevra Talmud Torah d Agustow. In 1908 the First Hungarian Congregation Ohab Zedek then located on the Lower East Side (172 Norfolk Street) followed many of its members and purchased a building at 18 West 116th Street (between Lenox and Fifth Avenues). In 1926 they moved to West 95th Street. Also in 1908, Congregation Ansche Chesed moved into a new building at 1881 Seventh Avenue at 112th Street. The congregation also moved in the 1920s. Following their congregation, in 1927 they sold their building and moved to a new synagogue at One-hundredth Street and West End Avenue in Manhattan.⁴³ African Americans did live in the area between 110th and 125th, but their numbers were small and therefore did not generate the alarm before the 1920s that their greater numbers did in the area north of West 130th Street. Most of these synagogues moved out of Harlem in the 1920s when more blacks began living in the area.⁴⁴

Other African American Congregations Acquire Harlem Real Estate

While St. Philip's Episcopal Church pioneered in building in Harlem, during the first decade of the 1900s other smaller black congregations were also gaining control of real estate in Harlem. Before moving to 135th Street, Mercy Seat Baptist Church, the site of the 1904 meeting to protest evictions of African American renters in area apartments, was already in Harlem. In

⁴³ Oscar Israelowitz, *Synagogues of New York City: A Pictorial Survey in 123 Photographs*, (Mineola, N.Y. : Dover Publications, 2007), 3; Dunlap, 26, 162, 260; New York City Register Conveyances, Section 6, Liber 3283, 205, Liber 3912, 375; Kerry M. Olitzky, *The American Synagogue*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996), 235-236; "Temple Stone Laid by Ansche Chesed," *New York Times*, September 19, 1927, 17;

⁴⁴ Gurock, *When Harlem Was Jewish*, 137-156; Census of 1910, 1920

1901 the church was located at 424 West 127th Street.⁴⁵ The terms of the purchase of its property at 45-47 West 134th Street, in the days following the 1904 meeting, specified that the first building to be built on the site by Mercy Seat should be a church, indicating the interest of the seller, August Ruff, in the establishment of a church. In 1912 Mercy Seat merged with Zion Baptist Church then located at Fifth Avenue between 131st and 132nd Street to form Metropolitan Baptist Church. In 1916 the consolidated congregation purchased land at 120 West 138th Street for \$30,000 from the executor of the estate of Mary S. Dinkney and built a large church that became known as Metropolitan Tabernacle. They only occupied the building for two years. In 1918 they purchased the large corner church building of the New York Presbyterian Church at Seventh Avenue and 128th (again, by way of an intermediary, Emanuel David). Street. Metropolitan Tabernacle was acquired by Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association and renamed Liberty Hall. In 1920 it was the site of that organization's first convention.⁴⁶

By 1911 "Little Zion" the mission church of Mother AME Zion, the purchaser of the Church of the Redeemer property, had become an independent congregation. In 1911 the congregation built a new church at 60 West 138th Street between Lenox and Fifth Avenues, purchasing land from John Gleed, an African American (possibly the J.R. Glide whose offer to purchase Church of the Redeemer was declined). In the purchase, Little Zion paid \$100 and assumed a mortgage of \$15,000 on the property. The new building was designed by Tandy and Foster, the architect of St. Philip's church. With the move, Little Zion changed its name to Rush

⁴⁵ "Accused of Clubbing the Rev. N.S. Epps," *New York Times*, September 10, 1901, 8

⁴⁶ Section 7, Liber 181, 175; Liber 3044, 77, Liber 3068, 367; "Real Estate Field," *New York Times*, December 3, 1918, 20; Liber 3115, 119, Conveyances; Elliot Willensky and Norval White, *AIA Guide to New York City*, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1988), 447;

Memorial AME Zion, named after Christopher Rush, the second bishop of the AME Zion denomination.⁴⁷

Other African American congregations relocating or gaining control of Harlem real estate in the first two decades of the 1900s included:

- In 1908 Salem United Methodist Church, pastored by Rev. Frederick Cullen (the adoptive father of Harlem Renaissance poet Countee Cullen), purchased property at 102 West 133rd Street for its growing congregation that had previously worshiped at a building on West 124th Street. The New York City Church Extension and Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church paid \$93,000 to Frederic Stimson and the trustees of the will of John Henry Bradford;
- In 1912 Bethel A.M.E. under the pastorate of social gospel minister Rev. Reverdy Ransom built a new church at 52 West 132nd Street on land purchased from Soloman Brooks and Joseph Bichler. The church paid \$100 and assumed two mortgages totaling \$35,000;
- Metropolitan A.M.E. Church established a congregation in a rented rowhouse at 62 West 135th Street. In 1917 the congregation purchased a building at 132 West 134th Street from a realty company for \$200 and a mortgage of \$8,000;
- St. John A.M.E. moved to 132 W. 134th Street taking over the church formerly occupied by Metropolitan A.M.E. Church;
- Shiloh Baptist Church purchased 2226 Seventh Avenue in 1918 from Marion A. Daniels assuming mortgages totaling \$18,800.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Dunlap, *From Abyssinian to Zion*, 91; Liber 160, 317, Conveyances, New York City Register;

⁴⁸ Liber 144, 425, Conveyances, New York City Register; Liber 172, 37, Conveyance, New York City Register; L3028, 391, Conveyances, New York City Register; Liber 3036, 94, Conveyances, New York City Register;

None of the real estate acquisitions involved transactions between the white congregations and the African American congregations. If the properties were formerly owned by predominantly white congregations, they were purchased by individuals or corporate entities who then sold to the black congregations, repeating the exit strategy used by the Church of Redeemer. Rather than sell directly to a black congregation, and possibly incur the disapproval of white residents who remained in Harlem, the exiting congregations sold their properties to acceptable white individuals or companies who then sold the properties to black congregations.

Map 13-African American Churches Established in Harlem, 1908-1917⁴⁹

138 th St.		Metropolitan Baptist (1916) 120 W. 138th	Little Zion (1911) 60 W. 138th	
137 th St.			St. James Presbyterian (1915) 59 W. 137th	
136 th St.		Mother AME Zion (1914) 143 W. 136th St.		
135 th St.				
St. Nicholas Ave.	8th Ave.	7th Ave.	Lenox Ave	5th Ave
	St. Philips (1911) 204 W. 134th	Metropolitan AME (1917) 132 W. 134th St.		
133 rd St.		Salem United Methodist (1908) 102 W. 133rd		
132 nd St.			Bethel AME (1912) 52 W. 132nd St.	

⁴⁹ Section 7, Liber 181, 175; Liber 3044, 77, Liber 3068, 367; “Real Estate Field,” *New York Times*, December 3, 1918, 20; Liber 3115, 119, Conveyances; Willensky and White, 447; Dunlap, 91, 213; Liber 160, 317, Conveyances, New York City Register; Liber 144, 425, Conveyances, New York City Register; Liber 172, 37, Conveyance, New York City Register; L3028, 391, Conveyances, New York City Register; Liber 3036, 94, Conveyances, New York City Register;

Conclusion

In contrast to individual white residents, some of whom facilitated the entry of black property owners into Harlem, the community's white congregations were uniformly reluctant to facilitate a similar movement of black churches into Harlem. Individual residential real estate transactions of white Harlem residents illustrated the range of responses that white residents had to the increasing residential presence of African Americans in Harlem. The restrictive covenant movement was rooted in the notion that blacks were a subordinate class whose presence would endanger both the security and health of white Harlem residents, and therefore result in a reduction in real estate values. Many white Harlem residents believed that African Americans would not be able to afford to maintain the properties they were attempting to buy and that their limited capital would contribute to a decline in values as properties deteriorated.

But other white Harlem residents did sell or lease residential properties to African Americans. The fact that in many cases they helped to finance these sales suggests that they did not subscribe to the belief that the African American presence would result in a precipitous decline in property values. The security for the loans that they made to African Americans was the property that was being purchased. A reduction in the value of the property would have endangered the security on the loan. Others such as E.v. d. H. Koch suggested that African Americans should be able to live where ever they could afford.

In contrast to this range of responses regarding black access to residential properties in Harlem, the white response to attempts by African Americans to acquire church properties was uniformly one of great reluctance. Some predominantly white congregations had tolerated African American members for decades by restricting their seating and taking other measures to limit their participation in worship services, illustrating the continuing belief among many whites

in the subordinate status of African Americans. As the number of blacks within these congregations grew with the black population in New York after 1900, white congregations became increasingly uncomfortable with their presence. At the same time some predominantly African American congregations, located in midtown or further south in Manhattan, began to consider moving to Harlem, either following or leading their congregants. Although by this time some white congregations were moving out of Harlem or considering moving because of a decline in their congregations and the increase in the black population in Harlem, no examples can be found of white congregations facilitating the moves of African American congregations through the sale or lease of their buildings to African American congregations. Even when white congregations vacated their buildings they did not sell to African American congregations. They sold to white individuals or companies, who later sold the buildings to African American congregations. While white Harlem residents could break rank with their neighbors to engage in individual real estate transactions with blacks where residential properties were concerned (either homes or apartment buildings). Harlem churches with predominantly white congregations, as corporate bodies did not engage in such transactions, perhaps because they believed they would betray a function of the church to maintain the standards of the community, a standard that they believed was being lowered by the “invasion” of African Americans.

The movement of established congregations in Manhattan was not new. It was a function of the northern movement of the primary residential areas of the city in the nineteenth century as residential areas either fell out of favor or transitioned to commercial areas. With limited transportation options, churches for the most part relied on the residents who lived within walking distance for their congregants. Even when improved transportation would make it possible to travel longer distances to church, many denominations and their congregants were

accustomed to the church being linked with the residents nearby. The Catholic parishes with formal geographic boundaries recognized this link, but other denominations more informally acknowledged it as well. Given these expectations regarding the role of the church, as the concentration of the residents in Manhattan shifted after several decades, some churches, although remaining in the same locations, reconstituted their congregations with new residents. Others based in areas that were becoming increasingly commercial moved to new areas, and some moved because they preferred to remain near the moving members rather than the newcomers. While these moves undoubtedly engendered regret and anxiety, the changes in Harlem were the first such moves precipitated almost entirely by racial changes occurring when many of the white church edifices were still relatively new. Before 1900 the African American population in New York City was below 2%, so the areas in which African Americans were concentrated did not result in sufficient numbers of black churchgoers attending white churches to threaten existing white congregations. The African Americans arrived to these earlier areas, such as Greenwich Village or Midtown, when the areas were declining as residential communities. Departing white congregations most likely did not feel pushed out, but felt that they were following the natural evolution of the neighborhood, leaving it for more fashionable areas such as Harlem. Having to consider leaving an area that, but for the growing racial animus would still have been considered fashionable, is what made the white congregations so reluctant to leave, and when they did, so reluctant to enter into transactions directly with black congregations. While in leaving they were conceding defeat, selling directly to African Americans seemed to have been viewed as consorting with the enemy, and hastening the loss of white control of the community that was feared.

Conversely, black congregations moving into Harlem had both pragmatic and symbolic considerations. In some cases, such as St. Philip's Episcopal, the downtown location of their church was becoming less desirable. St. James Presbyterian was in the heart of the black midtown area when it made its offer to purchase the Church of the Redeemer in 1913, recognizing that Harlem, a more attractive community, was becoming the home to an increasing number of black residents. In establishing churches in Harlem, these congregations were also sending a message to their members, the broader black community, and the white community, that Harlem was becoming a community with a sufficient number of black people to require black institutions serving black people such as the church. In building a church, St. Philips particularly conveyed the message of both community formation, but also permanence, and community control. It had purchased land with its own resources, and constructed a church of its own design, sending a signal that black people did not have to rely only on what white Harlem residents decided to let them have, but that blacks had the ability to shape this new community to which they were moving. The congregation's purchase of a block of apartment buildings at the same time that its church was built dramatically reinforced this point. As other black congregations negotiated with middle men and women to purchase churches abandoned by white congregations, they added to the momentum of black community formation. Whether they were following or leading their congregations, the presence of the churches, attracted additional black residents to Harlem, and these residents arrived with the expectation that they would have a voice in their new community.

Chapter 5

Real Estate and Politics

As black voters' numbers increased in Harlem in the 1910s, they became a more important factor in the political calculations of both the Democrats and the Republicans. Initially, African Americans in Harlem traded votes for patronage. But in 1913, black real estate agent John Royall, mounted a campaign for alderman representing Harlem in the 21st district. That a real estate agent would be the first black candidate for elective office in Harlem illustrates the important role that the profession played in both the physical and political formation of the black community in Harlem. The association between real estate and politics had a long history for African Americans in the state of New York. The state's first constitution of 1777 linked all men's voting rights to real estate ownership, as did the constitutions of most other states at that time: "a freehold [ownership of land or a lease for life on land] [shall] be the basic standard for determining the right to vote." Color was not a criterion for voting in New York. Anyone who owned land valued at twenty pounds (\$50) or leased property at an annual rate of at least forty shillings (\$5) was eligible to vote. Few black residents of New York State met this requirement, but those who did could vote in the same manner as white citizens. This standard changed with the writing of a new constitution in 1821. While the new constitution dispensed with land ownership requirements for white men, it retained a property qualification for men "of colour" and increased the property requirement value to \$250. As a result, all but a small number of black New Yorkers were disenfranchised. Because of the new requirement, ownership of real estate became a significant goal for black New Yorkers in the following decades since it was their only way to participate fully in the electoral process.¹

¹ David N. Gellman and David Quigley, Editors, *Jim Crow New York: A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship, 1777-1877*, (New York: New York University Press, 2003); *Jim Crow New York*, 25

In 1846, upstate landowner and abolitionist Gerrit Smith attempted to provide black New Yorkers with both the opportunity to become yeomen farmers and to gain access to the vote when he offered to give away thousands of acres of upstate property in forty-and sixty-acre parcels to blacks willing to establish farms. The venture was not successful because of the inexperience of the new farmers, the challenges of cultivating the hilly terrain, and because of the remote location of the land.² In New York City the Seneca Village settlement, located in the western portion of what is now Manhattan's Central Park, became a refuge for blacks starting in 1825 when they began purchasing land from its white owners John and Elizabeth Whitehead. By middle of the nineteenth century it was also attractive to African Americans as a means of gaining the franchise:

In 1855 half of all the black families in Seneca Village owned land, a rate 500 percent that for the city. Seneca's men met New York State's property qualification on Negro voters more often than black men in other sections of Manhattan.³

Black New Yorkers and their allies unsuccessfully challenged the state's voting restrictions several times in the nineteenth century. Statewide votes proposing to end the restrictions were held in 1846, 1860 and 1869. Each time the electorate voted against the measure. Thus the Fifteenth Amendment, ratified in 1870, giving black men the vote was not only significant for southern states. It also gave African American men in New York State unrestricted voting rights for the first time. In New York City this access to the vote came just as the black population was

² Zita Dyson, "Gerrit Smith's Effort in Behalf of the Negroes in New York," *Journal of Negro History*, October, 1918, 354-359

³ Craig Steven Wilder, *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City*, (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 102

beginning a period of dramatic growth. In the three final decades of the nineteenth century, the black population in New York City grew from 13,000 to 36,000.⁴

While the Reconstruction period in the South from 1865 to 1877 led to substantial black voting for the first time, as well as scores of black officeholders and the unheard of participation of black men in the writing of state constitutions, the impact of the Fifteenth Amendment in the North was less dramatic. Black men could vote, but their numbers were not large enough to elect their own candidates. Still, successful black candidates sometimes were elected with white support. In Chicago school teacher John W.E. Thomas was able to gain the support of white voters. In 1876 he was elected to the Illinois State Senate at a time when African Americans comprised only one percent of Chicago's population.⁵

In New York City it would be several decades before a black person gained elective office, but by the 1880s blacks were included in the network of political organizations that were the foundation of local patronage jobs and the focal point for organizing working class voters. New York City had long been a Democratic stronghold symbolized by Tammany Hall, once the Canal Street headquarters of the party in New York. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, African Americans voted mostly Republican, recognizing the "party of Lincoln" that had facilitated emancipation, but locally and nationally there were suggestions among some blacks that they should divide their vote between the parties and not become beholden to either. Disenchantment with the Republican Party's failure to continue to support Reconstruction efforts in the 1870s helped fuel this line of thinking.⁶

⁴ Jim Crow New York, 201; Census of Population, 1870, 1880, 1900

⁵ Harold F. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1935), 65

⁶ Ernest McKay, *The Civil War and New York City* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 33; Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the*

With the entry of African American men into the voting population of New York City following the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, the Democratic Party and the Republican Party began to include black voters in their political calculations. Unlike Chicago, where black support of the dominant Republican Party resulted in a black elected official in the 1870s, black New Yorkers' allegiance primarily to the Republican Party, the minority party, could not have such an effect. Conversely, in New York City, black involvement with the dominant Democratic Party was so minimal that there was no reason for that party to consider providing them with the gift of a black candidate. Eventually, New York City's political leaders in both parties devised strategies to use the new group of black voters to their advantage. As in many other northern cities, New York's local political clubs did not welcome African American participants, but encouraged them to establish "colored" clubs. In 1870, black New Yorkers interested in "furthering the interests of the Republican Party in the coming campaign" formed a political club to carry out these activities. Black New Yorkers' participation in the Democratic Party lagged, but by the mid-1880s at least three black Democratic clubs had been formed in New York. In the 1890s *The Harlem Local Reporter* a newspaper with white and black readership regularly advertised the meetings of the Colored Democratic Club and the Colored Republican Club. The black clubs gave white political leaders a means of communicating with black potential voters while maintaining racially separate meetings and organizational structures. The black political clubs created an efficient mechanism through which white political leaders often selected

Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 112; August Meier, "The Negro and the Democratic Party, 1875-1915," *Phylon*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2nd Quarter, 1956), 173-176

African American leaders to dispense patronage, and to organize black voters and deliver them to white candidates. But the vote of blacks was not needed for success by either party.⁷

An early black political leader who was a product of this process was John B. Nail. The owner of a saloon and hotel on Seventh Avenue in the midtown Tenderloin district, Nail was approached in 1886 by a Democratic Party leader who asked him to organize African Americans. Nail was told that he was not to deal with white voters. The fact that Democrats asked him was significant, given the Republican nature of the black population. He was not particularly interested in politics, but he recognized the potential for his business to be affected negatively if he declined the request. As he later recalled

Now what was I to do? I had been Republican. But there were too many ways these Fellows could make it hard for you, like licenses, taxes, assessments, etc.⁸

But the Democratic association also had the potential to affect his business positively by the increased visibility he would have among potential customers. Nail's career as a political leader was launched and his business continued to flourish as well.⁹

The principal political reward for black political leaders in New York and elsewhere in the late nineteenth century was patronage jobs. Most were unskilled service jobs, but blacks got their first opportunities to move into white collar work. At a time when most African Americans were relegated to menial service positions, an opportunity to become a clerk in a government office was significant for a black man. One who obtained a clerical position and used it and later

⁷ "The Colored Republican Club" *Harlem Local Reporter*, September 24, 1892; "Colored Democratic Rally" *Harlem Local Reporter*, October 31, 1891; "Professor Greener and Charles Mellen ... Harlem colored Republican Club" *Harlem Local Reporter*, October 5, 1892; Michael Louis Goldstein, "Race Politics in New York City, 1890-1930: Independent Political Strategies," Dissertation, Political Science, Columbia University, 1973, 75-84; "The Political Behavior of Negroes in New York City," Dissertation, Political Science, Columbia University, 1950, 5-9; Edwin R. Lewinson, *Black Politics in New York City*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974), 33-35, 42; "Colored Woodford and Kaufman Club," *New York Times*, September 14, 1870, 5; Christopher Robert Reed, *Black Chicago's First Century*, Volume 1, 1833-1900, (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 420-424

⁸ Ralph Bunche, "The Political Status of the Negro," (New York: International Microfilm Press, 1945), 1335-1336

⁹ Ira Katznelson, *Black Men, White Cities: Race, Politics and Migration in the United States, 1900-30 and Britain, 1948-68* New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 67

positions to build a career in club politics was Charles W. Anderson. Born in Ohio in 1866, Anderson arrived in New York in late 1886 and immediately became active in Republican politics. In 1890 he was elected president of the Young Men's Colored Republican Club of New York County and awarded a position as a duty inspector with the federal Internal Revenue Service. Anderson's education at a business college in Cleveland and at the Berlitz School of Languages in Worcester, Mass. gave him the foundation to be an able administrator. In the 1890s as Booker T. Washington rose to national power, Anderson aligned himself with Washington and became the Tuskegee leader's eyes and ears in New York City, a city of significance for Washington because of its philanthropic base, but also it was the home to many of Washington's opponents.¹⁰

As Washington's ally, Anderson perfected a skill of behind-the-scenes political maneuvering that supported Washington's own political goals. Anderson was able to craft a career out of a succession of state and federal appointments that continued long after Washington's death in 1915. Few other black New Yorkers received similar white collar patronage jobs. The Republican Party was a minority party in New York City and its access to patronage was limited. Most blacks who did receive work obtained jobs as unskilled laborers, but these jobs provided them with the same important foothold into the New York City economy that the Irish and Italians were receiving. Saloon owner John Nail was so successful at dispensing this type of patronage for the Democrats that "Negro preachers became alarmed because they had been distributing Republican patronage in this form." White Democrats also complained "on more than one occasion... that he was giving Negroes too much."¹¹

¹⁰ Ralph Crowder, *John Edward Bruce: Politician, Journalist and Self-Trained Historian of the African Diaspora*, (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 72; Harlan, 97

¹¹ Bunche, 1335

Black political influence in New York City did not grow in the late nineteenth century because even though the African American population of the city increased, the growth of the city's general population diluted the voting power of blacks. By 1880 the black population was 20,433 and by 1890 it had increased by twenty-six percent to 25,674. Because the overall population of New York increased at the same rate, spurred by European immigration, the African American population still remained less than two percent of the total New York population. In addition to total numbers, residential dispersion of this population prevented African Americans from leveraging the vote once they did get it. In 1890 there was only one ward (the Fifteenth between Houston and Fourteenth Streets) where African Americans constituted more than five percent of the population. In this ward they were almost nine percent.¹²

In Philadelphia, another Republican stronghold, blacks had earlier success in politics, electing their first candidate, Jacob Purnell, to the Common Council (the lower of two city legislative bodies) in 1884, a time when Philadelphia's black population of over 31,000 people exceeded New York's by over 10,000 people, and represented almost four percent of Philadelphia's population. In Chicago, which like New York had a black population below two percent in the 1890s, blacks also had more success in electoral politics. In 1894 African American Edward H. Wright was elected as a Republican commissioner for Cook County, and in 1895 he was elected as town clerk for South Chicago. Although smaller in number, when compared to New York, Chicago's African American population (14,852 in 1890 vs. 25,674 in New York) was concentrated in a Black Belt whose votes were sought after by white politicians and was instrumental in the rise of black politicians in Chicago in the late nineteenth century.

¹² Vital Statistics of New York City and Brooklyn, 230-233

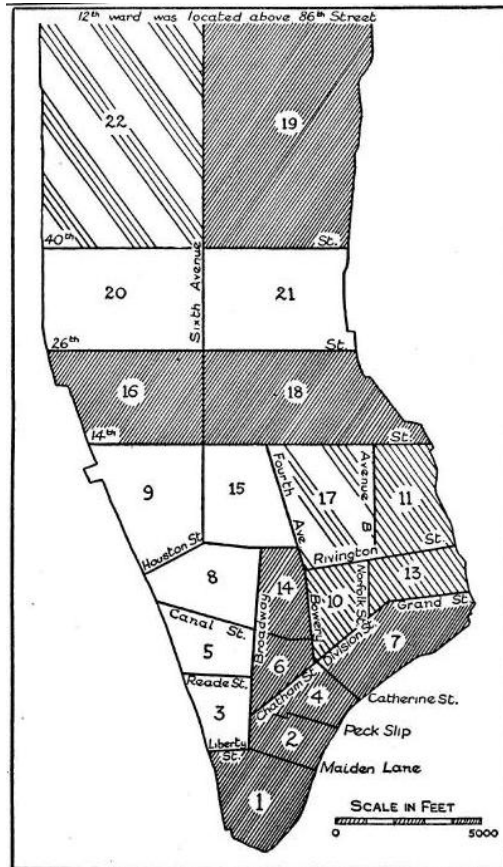
The Republican Party's strength in Chicago made the black vote there more vital to Republican success. In New York the Republican party was already weak and therefore the relatively small number of black Republicans added little of value to the voting power of the party that was already in the minority.¹³ Similarly, by the 1890s blacks in Philadelphia, allied with the Republican Party had also experienced electoral success. In *The Philadelphia Negro* W.E.B. DuBois noted:

In spite of the fact that unworthy officials could easily get into office by the political methods pursued by the Negroes [allying with "the better elements" of the electorate], the average of those who have obtained office has been good. Of the three colored councilmen one has received the endorsement of the Municipal League, while others seem to be up to the average of the councilmen.¹⁴

¹³ Christopher Robert Reed, *Black Chicago's First Century*, Volume I, (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press), 421; Roger Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia and Ours*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 210-213; Census of 1880; Census of 1890; Harry C. Silcox, *Philadelphia Politics From the Bottom Up: The Life of Irishman William McMullen, 1824-1901* (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1989), 111

¹⁴ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, 1899), 382-383; the Citizens' Municipal League was a citywide white led reform organization that endorsed "able" candidates for office; Roger Lane, *Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia, 1860-1900* , (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 75

Map 14- Manhattan Ward ca 1900¹⁵



By 1900 African Americans in Manhattan constituted approximately eight percent or more of the population in four assembly districts (the political divisions then used by the Census Bureau):

¹⁵ “New York (Manhattan) Wards: Population & Density 1800-1910, n.d., <http://www.demographica.com/db-nyc-ward1800.htm>

Table 8- 1900 Manhattan Wards with Approximately 8% or more African American Population¹⁶

Assembly District	Location	Total District Population	Negro District Population	Negro Population as a % of total district pop
11	Westside-14th-34 th Streets	41,247	3,756	9.11%
19	Westside 59th-72 nd Streets	65,025	4,982	7.66%
25	Midtown 34 th -14 th Streets	36,800	2,950	8.02%
27	Westside 42nd-34 th Streets	36,984	3,318	8.97%

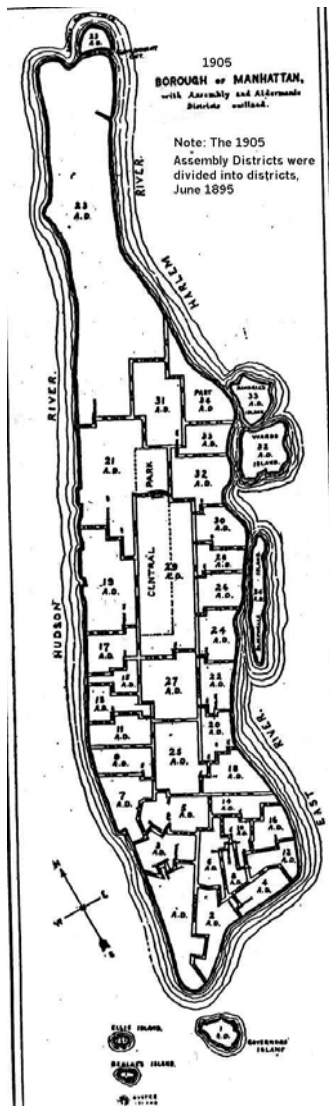
While eight percent of the population might have been enough to use for political leverage in seeking patronage from politicians, the numbers were not sufficient for African Americans to seek to elect their own candidates.

Given their political weakness, blacks formed voluntary organizations to address their grievances. In 1911 some of New York City’s African American residents joined forces to form the Equity Congress designed to push for African American access to then-closed opportunities on the police force, in the Fire Department, and in the National Guard. James C. Thomas, Sr. the first president of Philip Payton’s Afro-American Realty Company (one of the early purchasers of Harlem property), was one of the founders of the Equity Congress, along with entertainer Bert Williams, and lawyer J. Frank Wheaton. In 1898, before moving to New York, Wheaton had been Minnesota’s first black state legislator. He

¹⁶ “Population of Incorporated Places,” Table XXVI, Census of Population, New York City, 1900, lxxvii

was a prominent criminal defense attorney, but was also involved in civil rights litigation. The Equity Congress met on Sundays at Thomas's midtown

Map 15- Manhattan Assembly Districts-1905¹⁷



¹⁷ <http://www.bklyn-genealogy-info.com/Ward/1905.NYC.AD.html>

undertaking establishment to discuss community issues. The Congress also raised funds to challenge Harlem's restrictive covenants. In 1911 they formed a "provisional" black regiment as a means of pressuring state legislators to establish an official black National Guard unit. Equity members (including real estate broker Philip Payton) signed up for the regiment, but legislation making the unit official was stalled by Gov. John Dix. In 1913 legislation was finally passed to establish the unit. Also in 1911, Samuel Battle became New York's first black policeman, although not specifically through the efforts of the Equity Congress, but through a high Civil Service exam score and the intervention of Booker T. Washington's New York assistant Charles W. Anderson and of Fred Moore, publisher of the black newspaper *The New York Age*.¹⁸

By 1910 the black population in Manhattan had increased to 60,525 (67% increase from 1900) and far outstripped the growth in Manhattan's overall population (26%). For the first time the concentration of the black population in some Manhattan political districts exceeded ten percent. In the 13th Assembly District between 52nd and 67th Streets on the west side, the black population approached eighteen percent, and in the 21st Assembly District in Harlem between 127th and 141st Streets, the black population was almost fifteen percent.

¹⁸ "Gen. Miles to Negroes," *The New York Times*, August 3, 1914; Louis R. Harlan, editor, *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, Vol. 10, (The University of Illinois Press) 1981, 2000, 316; Jennifer A. Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 62; Stephen Harris, *Harlem's Hellfighters: The African-American 369th Infantry in World War I*, (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2003), 16- when World War I started the regiment became the 15th Regiment and was sent to Europe attached to a French battalion when Americans refused to be associated with the black unit. The unit had great successes in battle and was awarded the Croix de Guerre by the French; the unit was eventually renamed the 369th regiment; Marcy Sacks, *Before Harlem: The Black Experience in New York City Before World War I* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press) 2006, 100; Roger Abel, *The Black Shields*, (AuthorHouse, 2006), 16

Table 9- 1910 Assembly Districts with Substantial Black Populations¹⁹

Assembly District	Location	Total	Negro	Negro % of total assembly district population	% of City Negro pop
13	Hudson rvr, 52nd, 67th, columbus ave	52,290	9,273	17.73%	15.32%
21	Hudson rvr, 127th, 141st, 5th ave.	73,446	10,912	14.86%	18.03%

The growth in Harlem’s black population did not go unnoticed by Republicans. In the gubernatorial election of 1910, on the night before the election former President Theodore Roosevelt made a number of campaign appearances before Hungarians, Italians, and other groups throughout New York City on behalf of the Republican candidate Henry L. Stimson. In Harlem, Roosevelt spoke at Mercy Seat Baptist Church, still located on 134th Street where it had been the site of successful African American organizing against the 1904 attempt to evict them from the area. President Roosevelt ended his remarks before the audience of over five hundred black residents with an appeal reminding the audience of the links between the Democratic Party and the institution of slavery:

I only have this moment to say how well I wish you, and to ask you in your interest, for the sake of your good name, and the sake of the State of New York, to stand against your ancient oppressors, the men who wronged you and sought to degrade your race— Tammany Hall—and to vote solidly for the ticket headed by Henry Stimson.²⁰

¹⁹ Thirteenth Census of the United States, Bulletin, “Population: New York”, “Composition and Characteristics of the Population for Wards (Or Assembly Districts) of Cities of 50,000 or More (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, 1910), 43-46

²⁰ “Roosevelt in Night Tour With Stinson,” *New York Times*, November 8, 1910, 3

In spite of Roosevelt's energetic campaigning, John A. Dix was elected the first Democratic governor in New York State in sixteen years. Democrats also gained control of both legislative houses as well.²¹

In the 1913 election for alderman in Harlem, African American real estate broker John Royall ran as an independent for the office in Harlem's Twenty-First district (during this period this district served also as the Twenty-First Assembly District), the Manhattan district with the second highest concentration of black residents.²² A native of Virginia, in 1907 Royall started a real estate brokerage business, and by 1913 his real estate office was at 21 West 134th Street. He was also the president of the New York City chapter of the National Negro Business League (NNBL), Booker T. Washington's network of black entrepreneurs. The annual meetings of the NNBL provided opportunities for members to cultivate business relationships, and promote African American achievement. For Washington, who established the organization in 1900 the NNBL served as an important mechanism to consolidate his power through his relationships with prominent and obscure entrepreneurs who were anxious to be near the most powerful black man in the country and to remain in his good graces. Royall's leadership in the local chapter of the NNBL placed him within the orbit of Booker T. Washington's national powerbase.²³

John Royall was not simply a realtor but a very active participant in the racial transition of Harlem. He provided a deposition on behalf of Caroline Morlath, the defendant in the Greenbaum vs. Morlath restrictive covenant case. The *New York Age* suggested that Royall was

²¹ "Dix is Elected Governor; Sweeps State by 64,074," *New York Times*, November 9, 1910, 1; "Dix Inaugurated, Promises Economy," *New York Times*, January 3, 1911, 1; "Next Legislature Safely Democratic," *New York Times*, November 9, 1910, 3; "City Sends Albany Few Republicans," November 10, 1910, 3

²² New York City Board of Elections, 1912 District Maps; Mithel Attacks Murphy and McCall, *New York Times*, October 1, 1913, 3

²³ *New York Age*, "Apartments to Let" classified advertisement, October 2, 1913, 8; The Booker T. Washington Papers, Vol. 12, 315, Footnote 3, The University of Illinois Press, <http://www.pres.uillinois.edu>; Raymond W. Smock, editor, *Booker T. Washington in Perspective: Essays of Louis R. Harlan*, (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1988), 98-99; Joseph J. Boris, Editor, *Who's Who in Colored America* (New York: Who's Who in Colored America Corporation, 1929), 316-317

the broker who had facilitated the rental of Caroline Morlath's West 137th Street apartments to African Americans, the act that precipitated the legal challenge.²⁴ Royall had most recently worked on behalf of Theodore Roosevelt's 1912 presidential campaign under the Progressive Party. Royall had sought the Republican nomination for alderman in 1913. When the party nominated attorney Oscar Igstaedter, the incumbent, Royall decided to defy the party and mount an independent campaign.²⁵ His candidacy for alderman emerged from the formation of the Negro Civic League in September of 1913. The League was formed in Harlem by some of the same leaders of the Equity Congress, with the stated belief that

our political and civic welfare can best be advanced by the organization of a league along non-partisan lines with a membership made up solely from a racial standpoint without regard to party affiliation....one of our main objectives will be the placing of strong, representative Negro men in nomination for various elective offices in our municipal and state campaigns without regard to party lines.²⁶

Royall was elected president of the League at its first meeting. At the same meeting the nomination of a candidate for alderman in the 21st district in Harlem was discussed. A nominating committee was assembled that evening and after caucusing they reconvened and presented the names of John Royall and Louis Leavelle, an attorney, as candidates on which the League members were to vote.²⁷ Before the vote could be taken Leavelle "attacked the integrity of the meeting, asserting that he would not be bound by it" and would run for the office regardless of the outcome. Leavelle had strong ties to the Democratic Party and at the meeting was supported by Charles Stinson, the Democratic leader for the 21st district. When Leavelle was unable to substantiate his claim that he had already received four hundred signatures on

²⁴ Classified Advertisement, *The New York Age*, February 13, 1913, 7

²⁵ "New York City Assembly Districts" "Oscar Igstaedter, Customs Lawyer," *The New York Times*, September 28, 1937; Jervis Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 64-65

²⁶ "Royall Indorsed for Alderman," *The New York Age*, September 25, 1913, 1-2; *Lewinson*, 55

²⁷ "Crime in New York, 1850-1950", Defense Attorneys

http://www.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/crimeinny/trials/browse_defense_attorney.php?letter=L

previously circulated nominating petitions, the League members unanimously voted for John Royall for candidate for alderman in the 21st district. Leavelle was undoubtedly in a position similar to Royall. Having been denied a nomination by the Democratic Party he understood that the League represented an opportunity to get on the ballot, a choice that no black candidate in New York City had yet experienced. In spite of his threat, he did not run against Royall.²⁸

Harlem’s Twenty-First District, which Royall sought to lead, ran from the Hudson River on the west to Lenox Avenue on the east and from 127th Street on the south to 141st Street on the north.²⁹ The potential voters in the 21st District were:

Table 10- 21st Assembly/Aldermanic District, 1910³⁰

Males of Voting Age	23,312	% of total Males of Voting Age
Native white- Native parentage	5,718	24.5
Native white- Foreign or mixed parentage	6,205	26.6
Foreign born white	7,522	32.3
Naturalized	4,149	27.8
Negro	3,867	16.6

Within this district it was estimated that there were 3,000 registered African American voters (or 77% of the blacks eligible to vote). African American men, women, and children, were fifteen percent of the total population in the district. Supporters of Royall organized a voter registration campaign with the goal of adding another 3,000 voters to the rolls by the October 18th registration deadline. With only 867 unregistered African American men in the district, the registration campaign would have had to focus on white as well as black unregistered men.³¹

As the Negro Civic League hoped, John Royall’s candidacy received bipartisan support among African Americans who responded to the call to lay down their political differences for

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ “New York City Boundaries and Districts,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 1910

³⁰ Nineteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Bulletin, Population: New York Composition and Characteristics of the Population, Table V, New York City, p. 45 (the census table indicates the sum of Males of voting age as 23,376, but the sum of the numbers presented, counting only the naturalized foreign born white males results in a sum of 23,312);

³¹ “Negroes Rally Around Royall,” *New York Age*, October 2, 1913, 1

the cause of racial unity. While some black ministers were reluctant to provide outright endorsements, many strongly supported the concept of an African American seeking elective office. Dr. W.R. Lawton, pastor of St. James Presbyterian Church then on West 51st Street noted:

The candidacy of a colored man for alderman in New York City at this time when the race is celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of its emancipation is a most fitting aspiration, and his success would be a most unique exhibit in its achievement of a half century of freedom.³²

When Royall spoke at a meeting of black ministers of the Inter-denominational conference he noted that African American voters had been “tied to the tail end of the Democratic party, the Republican party and the Progressive party,” and suggested that they vote according to their racial interests rather than party affiliation.³³

Fundraising for Royall extended beyond New York City. Booker T. Washington in Tuskegee, Alabama was contacted for a contribution. Royall’s Finance Committee included *New York Age* publisher (and Washington ally) Fred Moore, journalist Lester Walton, nightclub owner Barron Wilkins, and physician H. Malachi Griffin.³⁴ Royall also spent a large amount of his own money in the campaign. To raise visibility, mass rallies were held at the Palace Casino on 116th and Madison on Sunday afternoons.³⁵ In addition to business leaders Royall’s candidacy also attracted more radical black leaders. A. Philip Randolph, then taking classes at City College of New York, while also sharing his socialist philosophies with classmates and co-workers, was excited by Royall’s candidacy, a first for a black New Yorker. Randolph

³² “Negroes Rally Around Royall,” *The New York Age*, October 2, 1913, 1

³³ “John M. Royal[l] at Minister’s Meeting,” *New York Age*, October, 9, 1913, 1

³⁴ Form Letter from John Royall Campaign, October 25, 1913, Booker T. Washington Papers, General Correspondence, Reel 358;

³⁵ Lewinson, 55

distributed literature for Royall and also encouraged his colleagues in the Independent Political Council, a current affairs discussion group that he founded, to work on the campaign.³⁶

In the fall of 1913 another African American, James Anderson, the editor of the black newspaper *The Amsterdam News* announced his candidacy for alderman in the 31st district of Harlem. The district was bound by Lexington Avenue on the East, Lenox Avenue on the west and the Harlem River on the north. The district's southern boundary moved diagonally north and west from East 119th at Lexington to West 135th Street and Lenox Avenue. Whereas John Royall's 21st Aldermanic District had the same boundaries as the 21st Assembly District, Anderson's 31st Aldermanic District was slightly more than one half of the 30th Assembly District, with the 32nd Aldermanic District occupying the other half of the 30th Assembly District.

Table 11- Estimated Population, 31st Aldermanic District, 1910³⁷

Males of Voting Age	15,849	%
Native white- Native parentage	1,697	10.7
Native white- Foreign or mixed parentage	3,363	21.2
Foreign born white	9,246	58.3
Naturalized	3,280	21.2
Negro	1,508	9.5

An estimate of the district's composition from the demographics of portions of the two contributing assembly districts suggests that it had fewer African American residents than John Royall's 21st district, both numerically and as a percentage of the district. The foreign born population in the 31st district was almost twice that of the 21st district, reflecting the continued settlement of immigrants from Italy and Eastern Europe.

³⁶ Jervis Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 64-66

³⁷ Nineteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Bulletin, Population: New York Composition and Characteristics of the Population, Table V, New York City, p. 45 (assuming that the 31st aldermanic district was approximately 55% of the 30th assembly district, the numbers presented represent information for the 30th assembly district multiplied by 55%)

The *Harlem Home News*, a newspaper with a predominantly white readership ridiculed Anderson's candidacy:

It is whispered in the negro belt that Anderson has been endorsed by a negro Republican, a negro Fusionist, a negro Progressive, and a negro whatnot. They are all for Anderson the whole four of them.³⁸

The newspaper article then alluded to the key to the past abilities of white candidates to attract the black vote:

In the 31st Aldermanic district there are about 5,000 enrolled voters. Of this number 4,000 it is estimated are negroes and most of them usually cast their ballot for the Republican Party . They always have relied upon white men for patronage and never have complained...It is predicted that the usual negro vote will be cast for a white man for it is said they have confidence in his ability to deliver the goods to them. Anderson's case is a comical one.³⁹

The statistics presented in the *Harlem Home News* article are so far from census record statistics that it appears that the paper was stretching the facts to make its point that even when they comprised a substantial majority of the vote, blacks would continue to see the benefit of voting for white a candidate.

But some basic assumptions regarding the black population in Harlem suggest that the *Harlem Home News* estimates were unrealistic. The *Harlem Home News* indicated that the total number of voters in the district was 5,000, and then estimated black registered voters in the district to be 4,000. At a time when political districts in Manhattan had less than twenty percent African American population, to suggest that African American's represented eighty percent of the registered voters in any district was an extreme exaggeration. The large differences in the estimates of the white and African American voters in the 31st District to actual voters could be due to a typographical error, but it could also be the result of a larger point that the article sought

³⁸ "Editor Anderson is Certain of One Vote for Alderman," *Harlem Home News*, September 28, 1913, 1

³⁹ Ibid

to make. To suggest that eighty percent (4,000 African Americans of a total voting population of 5,000) of the voters in the district were African American could reflect the perceptions of white Harlem residents to the “invasion” of their community by African Americans. The numbers of blacks moving to Harlem had increased dramatically, but in comparison to the white population, it was still a small percentage of the population. But many white residents may have viewed the black presence in Harlem as becoming dominant even though in reality it was still quite small. In response to this perception, which the *Harlem Home News* writer seems to have shared, the article predicting the voting behavior of African Americans could have had the goal of encouraging white residents that African American voters would not become politically independent or dominant even as their numbers increased. The writer’s analysis revealed a paradoxical perspective. He acknowledged the presence of blacks in Harlem, and even exaggerated their numbers, but then he suggested that whites need not worry about these numbers in regards to the political arena since black voters would continue to rely on the white community to serve their interests even if the black community was in an extreme majority.

Another explanation for the discrepancy between the writer’s perception of the black voting population and the data for the neighborhood could be that the population may have actually been largely Caribbean immigrants or newcomers from the south who were not yet able to vote. United States naturalization laws required a residency of five years before immigrants could become naturalized citizens. New York State required voters to have become citizens at least ninety days before the election, and to have lived in New York State for one year before they could become qualified to vote. With the continued arrival of black newcomers to Harlem in

1913 these requirements could have disqualified a substantial portion of black residents from voting.⁴⁰

The *Harlem News* writer's perspective suggested that even when they comprised a substantial majority of the vote, African Americans would continue to see the benefit of voting for white candidates, was a perspective shared by many white New Yorkers who were unaccustomed to African Americans seeking elective office. They assumed that the goal of the participation of blacks, an economically marginalized group in New York City, in electoral politics was to elect officials who would provide them with jobs and other forms of patronage. White New Yorkers knew that white elected officials were more likely to be positioned to provide this patronage since their contacts politically and economically were more extensive than almost all African Americans. Black New Yorkers did want jobs and other economic opportunities from their politicians, but New York City, had experienced a large race riot in 1900 in midtown, and a smaller riot in 1905 in the same area, after which the African American victims came away disappointed when their grievances and requests for damages were politely heard and then ignored. John Royall's campaign slogan of "the black man first, the black man last, the black man all the time," left no doubt as to his priority. A more detailed record of Royall's campaign platform has not survived. While his campaign slogan was undoubtedly a rallying cry before black audiences, in a district with a potential black voting base of slightly more than sixteen percent, a race-neutral or multi-racial appeal would have been more pragmatic.⁴¹

When votes were tallied in the 1913 campaign for alderman in the 21st District, the incumbent Oscar Igstaedter was reelected with 5,780 votes. Another attorney, Edward S. Brogan

⁴⁰ Sharon DeBartolo Carmack, *Family Tree Guide to Finding Your Ellis Island Ancestors* (Iola, WI: Writer's Digest Books, 2005), 9; *the World Almanac & Book of Facts*, (New York: Newspaper Enterprise Association, 1914), 716

⁴¹"Police Are Exonerated, *New York Times*, December 9, 1900, 14 ; Jervis Anderson, 65

received 3,651 votes, and John Royall received 1,242 votes. A Socialist Party candidate, Estelle Feigenbaum, received 303 votes and Peter M. Johnson received 26 votes as a Progressive Party candidate. The balance of the 405 votes were either blank or void. Of the 23,312 men eligible to vote in the district, 11,407 (49%) voted in this election. To win, John Royall would have needed the votes of all of the 3,867 African American men eligible to vote as well as the votes of some of the white men in the district. Assuming that the majority of the votes he received were from African Americans, they represented thirty-two percent of African Americans eligible to vote. With the racial breakdown of voting data for prior elections unavailable, an assessment of whether this level of support was typical can not be made. In the 31st District, newspaper editor James H. Anderson also came in third receiving 467 votes to the victor Hyman Pouker's 1,681 votes. In the mayoral election, Fusion candidate John Purroy Mitchel was elected. The 1913 election was neither the end of the Negro Civic League nor of John Royall's political career. In the aftermath of the election the League held a banquet under its new name the United Civic League with Royall retaining his position as president. While the banquet was not the victory celebration that Royall and the League would have preferred, it was still an opportunity to acknowledge a first step by blacks into electoral politics in Harlem, and to debrief in preparation for future battles.⁴²

Royall's 1913 candidacy indicates that in Harlem in the 1910s, some real estate brokers had attained a profile in the community previously reserved for the black minister. As agents facilitating the movement of African Americans into Harlem and thereby the formation of the black community there, in the 1910s, the brokers, in the candidacy of Royall, sought to lead it politically. Some black residents recognized this significant role, and acknowledged it by

⁴² *Annual Report of the Board of Elections of the City of New York for the Year Ending December 31st, 1913*, 57-59; *New York Age*; "Vote for Board of Aldermen, 1913," *Tribune Almanac and Political Register*, (New York: Tribune Association, 1914), 743

viewing real estate brokers as community-minded businessmen capable of providing broader leadership as elected officials. But this view was not universal. The fact that Royall did not even receive a majority of black votes in the district suggests that some blacks did not believe that Royall should be their leader, or conversely that incumbent Oscar Igstaedter and the Republican Party could do more for blacks than a novice like Royall. In addition to providing a voice to black residents, Royall was most likely also seeking ways to create conditions that would benefit his and other black businesses in Harlem. Royall's candidacy for elective office indicates that in this regard, he may have surpassed the African American minister, whose political activities at the time in New York City were restricted to acting as conduits of patronage in the form of food and wood to congregants, encouraging congregations to vote, and supporting candidates, but not actually running for office.⁴³

Subsequent events furthered Royall's political aspirations. World War I had a lasting impact on the formation of Harlem's African American community. As fighting proceeded in Europe in 1914, U.S. industries, primarily based in the North, expanded to meet the needs of the combatants. With European immigration to the U.S. greatly restricted because of the war, a labor shortage resulted creating opportunities for African American workers who in the past had not been considered for such jobs. New York became one of several northern cities that attracted blacks from the South who moved north seeking opportunity. Harlem's black population grew dramatically. By the 1910s Harlem had been identified nationally as an up and coming community for African Americans. Their arrival in Harlem in the period after 1914 strengthened the potential voting base for African Americans seeking elective office.⁴⁴

⁴³ Bunche, pp. 1335-1336; This would change in 1915 when Rev. Richard Bolden, pastor of First Emanuel Baptist Church ran unsuccessfully for alderman, and in 1917 when Rev. Reverdy Ransom, pastor of Bethel A.M.E. ran unsuccessfully for Congress;

⁴⁴ Osofsky, 20-24

John Royall returned to the political arena in 1915, running again for alderman (they served for two year terms) but this time in the 31st District in which James Anderson had run in 1913. Royall's 1915 campaign did not receive the prominence in the *New York Age* as his first campaign nor did it generate the unanimity within the black community as in 1913. Royall, once the New York president of Booker T. Washington's National Negro Business League, had broken with Washington by 1915, and according to one critic "he criticized and abused the Doctor [Washington] almost nightly in his public speeches." By 1915, the last year of his life, Washington, had positioned himself as the conduit for most white philanthropists interested in contributing to black causes. Royall noted that his shift regarding Washington was inspired by his concern regarding "the financial forces backing Washington's program." Royall's reservations about Washington could have contributed to the limited coverage he received in the *New York Age*, a newspaper that had long had close ties to Washington. After meeting with Royall in 1915, Afro-Caribbean radical Hubert Harrison noted that "Royall has a firmer and finer grip on the financial, economic, and political factors of the Negro situation and of their inter-relations than any other Negro American with whom I have spoken." In the 1915 election Royall received 880 votes which outpaced the 760 votes of the incumbent Hyman Pouker, but the victor was John McKee who received 1,520 votes (he was the first Democrat ever elected to the seat).⁴⁵

While John Royall was not successful in his 1915 campaign, in Chicago another African American real estate man was. Oscar DePriest, became the first black elected to City Council

⁴⁵ Royall's residence is listed in the New York City Directory as 21 West 134th Street, just south of the 31st District boundary; it is not clear why he did not run in the 21st District again or how if the address is accurate he was able to run in the 31st even though he did not live in the district; *The Annual Report of the Board of Elections of the City of New York for the Year Ending December 31, 1915*, p. 38; "Alderman McKee Dead," *The New York Times*, August 3, 1917, 9; Charles W. Anderson to Emmett Jay Scott, December 4, 1915, *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, Vol. 13, 475, The University of Illinois Press, <http://www.press. Ullinois.edu>; Jeffrey Babcock Perry, *Hubert Harrison, the Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 247

representing the Republican party in the city's Second Ward. He had moved from Alabama to Chicago in 1889 and had begun work as a house painter before becoming a successful real estate investor.⁴⁶

In 1915, while John Royall was again running for office, another Harlem resident with real estate ties was entering the political field. James C. Thomas, Jr. the son of the black undertaker was elected as a delegate for the state constitutional convention. James C. Thomas, Sr. had been one of the initial investors in Philip Payton's Afro-American Realty Company in 1903. Thomas, Sr.'s purchases of property in the area helped to provide an anchor for the African American community. In 1910 Thomas moved his undertaking business and residence from the midtown Tenderloin district to West 134th Street in Harlem, acknowledging that the center of the black community in Manhattan had shifted northward. His son, the child of a prosperous businessman, graduated from City College of New York at a time when few African Americans attended the college. Thomas, Jr. then went on to Cornell University where he received a law degree and was admitted to the New York bar in 1912. He lived at 2229 Fifth Avenue near 135th Street and was elected as a delegate at large to the Constitutional Convention receiving over 67,000 votes statewide.⁴⁷

Two years later, in 1917 Thomas, Jr. built on this foray into elective politics when he ran for alderman in Harlem's Twenty-Sixth district. The 26th district was bound by the Harlem River on the north and east, Edgecombe Avenue on the west and 135th and 141st on the south.⁴⁸ His campaign was linked to that of another African American from Harlem, attorney Edward A. Johnson who ran for state assemblyman in the Nineteenth Assembly District. A native of North

⁴⁶ Mark H. Haller, "Policy Gambling, Entertainment, and the Emergence of Black Politics in Chicago, 1900 to 1940," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 24, No. 4, (Summer, 1991), 724-725

⁴⁷ "Thomas and Johnson Win in New York Primaries," *The Chicago Defender*, September 29, 1917, 1; "Low, Dix and Straus Led Delegate Vote," *New York Times*, December 8, 1914, 17

⁴⁸ Marsha Hurst Hiller, *Race Politics in New York City, 1890-1930*, (Columbia University, Ph.D., 1972) p. 242

Carolina, where he had been an alderman in Raleigh, Johnson had also been an Assistant U.S. District Attorney for the eastern district of North Carolina. He moved to New York in 1907 where he established a law practice. The 19th Assembly District ran from 118th Street on the south to 136th Street on the north with a western boundary ranging from Manhattan to Eighth to Seventh Avenues, and an eastern boundary ranging from Park to Madison to Fifth Avenues.⁴⁹

Both Thomas and Johnson were Republican Party candidates in 1917, and also received support from the United Civic League, still led by John Royall. When they both won the primaries over white candidates, the black newspaper *The Chicago Defender* observed that the “entire Race in Harlem has been rejoicing since the recent primary victories of Thomas and Johnson.” Both campaigns capitalized on the continuing increase in Harlem’s black population due to the war. For Thomas and Johnson some of these migrants helped create a voting base that made the possibility of elective office a reasonable goal. The Republican Party also recognized the strength of the candidacies of Thomas and Johnson who became the first black candidates endorsed by the Republican Party.⁵⁰

For African Americans who were Democrats, the candidacies of the Republicans Thomas and Johnson presented a dilemma of choosing racial allegiance over party loyalty. They reached a compromise. *The New York Age* reported that “Colored Tammany workers were active in asking Negroes to remain neutral in the aldermanic fight and not vote for anyone.” The article suggested that white residents were given a different appeal that was also motivated by racial allegiance in circulars distributed by Tammany that read:

⁴⁹ Marsha Hurst Hiller, “Race Politics in New York City, 1890-1930, Columbia University, Columbia University, Ph.D, 1972, 240; *Who’s Who in Colored America*, 1929, 208

⁵⁰ “Race Candidates are Nominated in Harlem,” *The New York Age*, September 27, 1917, 1; “Thomas and Johnson Win in New York Primaries,” *The Chicago Defender*, September 29, 1917, 1; Hiller, 239-242

Do you want your alderman to be a Negro? James C. Thomas, Jr., is a colored man. Vote for Frank Mullen, who has been your alderman for four years.⁵¹

Following the November election the front page of the *New York Age* announced “Thomas and Johnson Elected in Harlem” and concluded “The election of Thomas and Johnson gives to the Negro race its first representatives in the Aldermanic Board of New York City and the Assembly of New York.” The report noted that Johnson had been elected by one hundred votes over his Democratic opponent, while Thomas led his Democrat opponent Frank Mullen by 1,962 votes to 1,754 votes.⁵²

In the days following the election the Johnson election results held, but the results of the Thomas election shifted as absentee ballots from soldiers were counted. The most dramatic change in the number of votes from the Thursday, November 8th result reported in *The Age* occurred when it was discovered that the ballots for six election districts of the area were missing. When these ballots were found and counted the result shifted to 2,394 votes for Thomas and 2,782 votes for the Democratic opponent Frank Mullen. On November 20th Thomas petitioned the court for a recount of the ballots, and accused his opponent of securing a plurality by fraud, noting that witnesses had seen individuals, who were not voters and were believed to be associated with Mullen, placing ballots in the ballot boxes. Thomas also alleged that his voting results were purposely underreported at the Police Station where the ballots were impounded.⁵³

⁵¹ “Court Orders Recount of Ballots for Alderman,” *The New York Age*, November 15, 1917, .1; “In the Matter of The Application of James C. Thomas, Jr. for an examination of the ballots cast in the County of New York for the office of Alderman of the 26th Aldermanic District of the City of New York,” Supreme Court, Appellate Division, First Department, “Petition Upon Which Order Appealed From was Granted” p. 2; “Negro Asks to See Ballots,” *New York Times*, November 23, 1917, 4

⁵² “Thomas and Johnson are Elected in Harlem,” *The New York Age*, November 8, 1917, 1

⁵³ In the Matter of The Application of James C. Thomas, Jr. for an examination of the ballots cast in the County of New York for the Office of Alderman of the 26th Aldermanic District of the City of New York, Supreme Court, Appellate Division—First Department; “Negro Asks to See Ballots,” *New York Times*, Nov. 23, 1917, 4

As a result of Thomas's petition the court mandated a recount of the votes, but Thomas's opponent Frank Mullen appealed this decision. In early December the recount was stopped while the appeal was considered. Mullen's appeal argued that Thomas's allegations of fraud were based on hearsay and conjecture and should not be considered by the court for grounds for an appeal. The court considered Mullen's argument and ruled that the recount should be halted permanently and Mullen was certified the winner.⁵⁴

James C. Thomas, Jr. ran for alderman again in 1919 in the 26th district, but was removed from the ballot on a technicality. He failed to file a certificate of character for two men who were circulating petitions for him. The challenge was prompted by John Royall's United Civic League. By this time the League was headquartered in its own three-storey building at 184 West 134th Street and with national aspirations was known as the National United Civic League. James Thomas claimed that the challenge to his campaign was prompted by his refusal to pay the League to be nominated. In spite of this intra-racial squabbling, the election of 1919 did result in two more black Republican elected officials to complement Edward Johnson state assembly position. In that year the first African American aldermen in New York City, Dr. Charles Roberts, a dentist, and George W. Harris editor of the black newspaper *The New York News* were both elected. A native of North Carolina, in office Roberts advocated for the establishment of milk stations for low-income Harlem children and for a bathhouse for residents of the Twenty-seventh aldermanic district. Roberts provided a more concrete platform to black residents than John Royall's "black man first" pledges, and he also benefited from the growth in Harlem's black population that continued even after the war was over. Roberts' brother Eugene, a physician, was the first black man appointed to serve in 1917 on the consolidated New York City

⁵⁴ "Court Orders Recount of Ballots for Alderman," *New York Age*, Nov. 15, 1917, p.1; "In the Matter of the Application of James C. Thomas, Jr. . ."; "Recount for Alderman is Halted by Court," *New York Age*, December 8, 1917, 1

Board of Education. Similarly, in the Twenty-sixth district in Harris's first year in office he was able to bring a food and produce market and a bathhouse to his constituents.⁵⁵

Conclusion

For black New Yorkers living on the economic margins, patronage jobs whether menial or clerical and access to resources such as food and wood were the principal attractions to supporting both Republican and Democratic candidates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The 1910s critics of white accommodation to blacks in Harlem had anticipated that the black residential presence in Harlem could eventually translate into political power, but even they had not expected that these residents would want more than jobs and would seek to elect their own candidates. But by the 1910s the increase in the residential presence of blacks in Harlem and the advancement of some black professionals, created the conditions that led to the shift in their roles from beneficiaries to actors in the electoral process. Real Estate broker John Royall the first black candidate for elective office in Harlem was the product of this advancement. The black real estate broker played a critical role in the formation of the black community in Harlem through facilitating access to housing. John Royall's real estate business provided him with both the economic independence and the community stature to seriously consider running for elective office. As he prospered, his successes provided him with a measure of economic independence that enabled him to consider challenging the existing political power

⁵⁵ "Civic League Forces Thomas' Name Off of the Ballot," *The Chicago Defender*, August 30, 1919, 4; Thomas was appointed Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Southern District, and over 30 years after the campaigns noted above, Thomas did win elective office: in 1952 he was elected to the New York State Assembly representing the 11th District in Harlem; "Harlem Is Loyal to Stevenson; Seats Its First State Senator," *The Chicago Defender* (National edition), November 15, 1952, 12; "A Week's Picture Headlines in Busy New York City," *The Chicago Defender*, (National edition), 12 ; "National United Civic League Takes Building," *The Chicago Defender*; Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, Negro New York, 1890-1930* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 171; Hiller, 231; "Negro Doctor, 81 'Oldest' Yet Active," *New York Times*, April 7, 1949, 32; "Charles H. Roberts An Ex-Alderman, 94," *New York Times*, January 3, 1967, 32; "Harris Wins in New York Primary Fight," *The Chicago Defender* (Big Weekend Edition), September 6, 1919, 5; "Alderman Harris Wins Market and Bathhouse," *The Chicago Defender*, (Big Weekend Edition), July 24, 1920, 2; Jeffrey B. Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 256; Arthur Ellis, *The Black Power Brokers*, (Saratoga, CA: Century Twenty One Publishers, 1980), 191

structure without being daunted by the possibility of retribution from opponents. That elective office would bring increased visibility, access to information, and the potential to cultivate relationships with powerbrokers would certainly benefit Royall's business as well. Although the profession of James C. Thomas, another African American candidate, was the law, real estate investments by his namesake father had provided Thomas, Jr. similarly with both a public profile and a measure of financial independence that enabled him to step out and take the risk of running even if it meant creating political enemies.

The background of early black candidates from Harlem was not markedly different from the characteristics of white candidates for office: attorneys and entrepreneurs dominated the political field. The distinct characteristic for Harlem was that real estate professionals were among the first candidates for office. Real estate was an important field of entrepreneurial activity in the white and black communities, but also in Harlem new black residents were aware of the 1904 pronouncements of broker Philip Payton that Harlem housing should be made available to blacks, and many also knew of the work of other brokers such as John Royall and John E. Nail, that had been important to the formation of the African American community in Harlem.

At the end of August, 1917, a few weeks before the September primary the news reached Harlem that Philip Payton, Jr., founder of the Afro-American Realty Company had died of liver cancer at his summer home in Allenhurst, New Jersey. In the following days the encomiums conveyed the importance of his individual role, and that of real estate professionals in the eyes of African American residents of Harlem. Several years before, Payton had begun to be called the "Father of Negro Harlem" an acknowledgment that even though his initial company had not thrived, the notion that he had conveyed, that blacks had a right to live in the quality housing of Harlem, had been essential to the realization of Harlem as an African American community, an

area that at the time of his death was continuing to grow.⁵⁶ Those real estate brokers who followed Payton were acknowledged by Harlem residents and national observers of black life for their roles in solidifying the African American presence in Harlem. John Royall's candidacy, although unsuccessful, demonstrated the ambition of these new entrepreneurs.⁵⁷

During the 1910s for the first time the black population in some Manhattan political districts rose above ten percent due to both the movement of African Americans within New York, but much more because of the arrival of migrants from the South drawn by the potential to obtain factory jobs in the wartime economy. Still the black population was too slight to elect black candidates until 1917 when Edward A. Johnson was elected to the state assembly and 1919 when Charles Roberts and George W. Harris became the first blacks elected the New York City's Board of Aldermen. In the closing years of the decade the presence of blacks in Harlem would be further solidified by movements promoting black ownership of apartment buildings and of houses.

⁵⁶ "'Father of Harlem' Called it Home, *New York Times*, June 16, 1991, p. 6; "Payton Buried at Westfield," *New York Age*, September 6, 1917, 1-2

⁵⁷ Ibid

Chapter 6

The Growth in Property Ownership by African Americans in Harlem

From 1910 to 1920 the African American residential presence in Harlem continued to grow, pushed both by the movement of black New Yorkers from the midtown Manhattan settlements and by the dramatic increase in blacks moving to New York after 1914. Racial restrictions on housing choices for blacks in Manhattan meant that many of these new residents came to Harlem where they exacerbated a housing shortage that was being felt citywide.¹

Although Harlem in the 1910s is often characterized as a community of African American renters and white landlords, in the latter years of the decade there was a significant increase in black property ownership in Harlem. African American investors continued to purchase apartment buildings, and middle class black residents obtained the anchor of homeownership in the community with the purchase of townhouses. The close proximity of the apartment buildings purchased by blacks in Harlem, the acquisition of two full blocks of townhouses by blacks in the late 1910s, and the publicity about these purchases in *The New York Age* solidified the perception among African Americans that Harlem was a community in which the African American residents owned a significant amount of property. This perception complemented black population increases in Harlem. By the end of the decade, almost two thirds of blacks in Manhattan lived within the four assembly districts that spanned Harlem. Within these districts, African Americans comprised approximately twenty-two percent of the population.²

¹ Seth M. Scheiner, *Negro Mecca: A History of the Negro in New York City, 1865-1920*, (New York: New York University Press, 1965), 11-12;

² Fourteenth Census of the United States, Population, 1920, Composition and Characteristics of the Population by States, Table 13. Composition and Characteristics of the Population for Wards (or Assembly Districts) of Cities of 50,000 or more, (Washington: Bureau of the Census), 714-715,

Black purchases of real estate in the latter years of the 1910s resulted in black ownership of buildings containing approximately two percent of the apartment units in Harlem and approximately one percent of the owner-occupied homes in Manhattan. These numbers are modest, but Harlem blacks owned substantially more property in that community than other previous black settlements in Manhattan (other than the short-lived Seneca Village settlement of the 1820s-1850s). The significant black population increases combined with the modest, but visible increase in black property ownership contributed to the perceptions, expressed by the *New York Age* and by some black public figures that blacks in Harlem were residing in their own community rather than in a settlement or quarter owned and controlled by others as previous residential areas in Manhattan had been.³

In the 1910s, the movement toward elective office by black candidates such as John Royall, James C. Thomas, Jr. and Edward Johnson was one example that black Harlem residents viewed the community as theirs and expected to have a voice in it. The movement and construction of churches, a significant long-term investment, that had not occurred with the move to midtown a generation earlier, was another indicator of the expectation that Harlem would be the center of New York's black community for a long time. While housing in previous locations in Lower Manhattan had been occupied by blacks when those areas were long established and in decline, Harlem offered a significantly higher quality of housing that was either new or relatively new. Most of the apartments into which black residents were moving were built after the 1901 Tenement Housing Law went into effect, and therefore reflected the

³ "Bronx Cars to Come to Harlem, Colored Question Taken Up by Board." *Harlem Magazine*, April, 1913, 21-22; T.J. Woofter, Jr., *Negro Problems in Cities*, (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1928, p. 141; Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, Negro New York, 1890-1930*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1966), 119; records do not exist for the two other papers serving New York's black community during this period: *The Amsterdam News*, and *The New York News*; Census of 1920, Population, Volume II, Chapter 15, Table 6, "Number of Homes, Distributed According to Proprietorship and Encumbrance, for Cities Having, in 1920, 100,000 Inhabitants or More", 1286- 1287

much higher standard of providing light and air to apartment units. With all of these advantages available for the first time, in the 1910s black residents of Harlem prepared to make the community a permanent center of African Americans in New York.⁴

World War I had a dramatic impact on the African American population of Harlem. The war triggered The Great Migration, the largest movement to that time of African Americans from the south to northern states. They were drawn by expectations of jobs in factories as European immigrants returned to their home countries and industry expanded production even before the U.S. entered the war in 1917. Blacks in the south were targeted by employment agents who traveled south on behalf of northern industries, encouraging blacks to leave the south and financing their travel north. The black press, particularly newspapers such as *The Chicago Defender* urged African Americans northward as well, encouraging them to take advantage of the employment opportunities becoming available in cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and New York. Upon arrival in New York most of these low-income migrants were renters, often lodgers in the apartments of others, and Harlem was their primary destination. Very soon the community experienced a housing shortage.⁵

The late 1910s housing crisis experienced in Harlem was part of a city-wide crisis related to World War I. The ramping up of wartime production had attracted large numbers of job seekers to New York and other northern cities where much of the production was based. At the same time, restrictions on the production of nonessential goods, had resulted in a virtual halt in housing construction. As a result, many cities across the country experienced housing shortages during the war years.⁶

⁴ “Commissioner of Tenements Chosen,” *New York Times*, December 7, 1901, 1

⁵ Scheiner, 11-12; Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 57-86

⁶ “The Problem of Housing,” *Insurance*, January 2, 1920, 195

Black real estate investors took advantage of Harlem's housing crisis. Local and southern black investors met the continuing African American demand for housing in the area by purchasing buildings occupied by white tenants, evicting them and "opening" the buildings to African Americans. Some white owners of rental properties adopted a similar policy, using African American managing agents to facilitate the opening of formerly all-white buildings to African Americans. While some black property owners characterized their actions as for the good of the race, there was a strong economic motive. Because blacks had limited housing choices in New York they could be charged higher rents. This policy had been the case even in the absence of a housing crisis, but with the wartime scarcity of housing choices for all New Yorkers, and the price increases of certain commodities such as fuel and maintenance supplies that resulted from World War I, the higher rents were easier for landlords to justify.⁷

In the fall of 1916 African American tenants in Harlem organized to protest rent increases of "from \$4 to \$14 per month for apartments recently opened to colored tenants" on West 143rd Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues. The tenants targeted African American real estate agents Charles A. Knowles, A.G. Thompson, and John Royall, as well as a white agency, the Growham Brothers, all managers of the buildings on West 143rd Street. The protesting tenants complained that the agents were summarily evicting white tenants in order to charge African American tenants more. The former white tenants cooperated with the new black tenants by providing their rent receipts to the new tenants. These records demonstrated that the whites had paid substantially lower rents than the new African Americans tenants were charged. White tenants who still remained on the block protested what they believed were their imminent

⁷ Mary Rankin Cranston, "The Housing of the Negro in New York City," *Southern Workman*, June 1902, 327-331; "Agents Raise Rent on Race," *New York Age*, September 28, 1916, 1

evictions, indicating that they preferred to remain in their buildings as African Americans became tenants in neighboring buildings.⁸

With assistance from a staff member of the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes (the National Urban League), three residents of the block circulated a petition that was signed by 109 African American residents on West 143rd Street criticizing other African American residents who

rush into these apartments, accept and even offer unreasonable terms to obtain accommodations.... We shall take this opportunity to warn owners of this property [that] the vast majority of Negro families are unable to pay such rents without 'commercializing' their apartments. This means in most cases, many lodgers, 'socials,' loud and offensive language, and too often, prostitution.⁹

The claims of the petitioners were not exaggerated. While wartime labor shortages had created job opportunities, most of these jobs were low-wage positions. The rents demanded for Harlem apartments did strain the budgets of tenants, resulting in many tenants using a range of options to supplement their incomes and pay their rents.

The fight against the rent increases in Harlem continued with a mass meeting under the auspices of the Negro Civic Improvement League, an organization established a few years earlier as an umbrella of New York City neighborhood associations "to educate Negroes in their civic responsibilities."¹⁰ At the mass meeting, with 1,500 in attendance, anger was directed at the real estate agents who were present. One of them, John Royall attempted to align himself with the tenants, expressing his concern regarding the high rents. But he did not offer to lower the rents in the buildings he managed. In the following weeks *The New York Age* continued its support of the

⁸ "Agents Raise Rent on Race," *New York Age*, September 28, 1916, 1

⁹ Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*, Second Edition (New York: Harper, 1971), 66; "Agents Raise Rent on Race," *The New York Age*, September 28, 1916; "Fight Against Raised Rents," *The New York Age*, October 5, 1916, 1

¹⁰ "Negroes' Civic League," *Survey*, Vol. 33 (October, 1914-March, 1915), 58; "Fight Against Raised Rents," *The New York Age*, October 5, 1916, 1

protest movement by criticizing a December purchase of a row of buildings at 7th Avenue between 136th and 137th Streets by African American attorney J. Frank Wheaton (one of the founders in 1911 of the Equity Congress that had advocated for black policemen and a national guard unit). When Wheaton increased the rents on the properties, *The Age* reported that the purchase was a lost opportunity for lower rents. *The Age* also criticized Wheaton for using a white agency, Aldous & Co. in the transaction. The reporter stated that Aldous & Co. had been a supporter of the restrictive covenant movement to contain black residency in Harlem. In highlighting Wheaton's purchase, *The Age* implied that Wheaton was betraying African Americans and complained that the substantially higher rents would be used as a precedent by "the white landlord and agent... in making increases in rents where property is made available to colored tenants."¹¹

At another tenant meeting held in late December of 1916 to protest the higher rents in Harlem, broker John Royall was unapologetic regarding the state of rents in Harlem. With a hard-nosed businessman's perspective he declared:

that he had no solution for the matter under consideration and that he did not believe that there was any. For twenty years, he said he had never heard of such a thing as bettering the condition of the renting class by providing lower rents for them. Characterizing the whole thing as a foolish idea, he demanded to know why a movement was not started to lower the high cost of living instead of rents, saying that when the cost of living is reduced the rent problem would be solved.¹²

While African American managers and owners may have been instrumental in "opening" certain buildings to African American tenants, as the protests indicated, they were also seeking to generate the substantial revenue from increased rents that African American tenants were typically charged. Philip Payton's earlier company, the Afro-American Realty Company had

¹¹ Louis R. Harlan, editor, *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, Vol. 10, (The University of Illinois Press) 1981, 2000, p. 316; *New York Age*, December 28, 1916, 2

¹² "High Rentals Meeting Warm," *New York Age*, December 28, 1916, 1

been criticized for this tactic ten years earlier.¹³ Black tenants in New York City had limited choices, and the real estate brokers, black and white, were able to exploit their situation (and perpetuate it) by charging as much as people would pay. In some cases landlords even divided individual apartments to obtain greater rents. As the 143rd Street rent protesters predicted, many of the new tenants had to take in lodgers to meet the rents. In many cases new tenants were targeted with the higher rent scale while longer term tenants remained at old rent levels, resulting in a rent structure that did not reflect the size or condition of the apartments. While the blacks replaced some of the white Harlem apartment owners, the structure of the real estate market remained the same, with black owners benefiting from the limited choices available to black renters in the same manner that their white predecessors had benefited..

In December 1916 *The Age* offered Harlem real estate brokers an opportunity to explain the rent increases in letters to the paper. Broker John Nail “said he could not adequately or justly explain the various [reasons] for increased rents in a letter...” Philip Payton’s letter to *The New York Age* regarding the rent situation in Harlem noted that “ ‘if misery likes company’ the colored people get plenty of it” because the rent increases were part of a city-wide phenomena spurred by increased taxes, cost of materials, and cost of coal.¹⁴

A review of the rent increases from 1910 to 1920 in eleven tenement houses on 133rd and 134th Streets between Lenox and Fifth Avenues (the focus of the 1904 eviction attempts) indicated the following building-by-building rents:

¹³ Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, Negro New York, 1890-1930*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1966), 102-103

¹⁴ *New York Age*, December 28, 1916, 2

Table 12- Rents in tenement buildings on 133rd and 134th Streets¹⁵

Building	Type of Building 5 story old-law	1910 rent range	1920 rent range	what the range should have been to keep pace with 7.29% avg annual inflation over the decade¹⁶
1.	5 apartments	\$30-33	\$80-100	65-72
2.	11 apartments (divided into 21)	23-26	15-28	50-56
3.	10 apartments	17-20	18-25	37- 43
4.	10 apartments (divided into 20)	18-20	15-24	39- 43
5.	11 apartments	23-26	25-40	50- 56
6.	11 apartments	21-23	20-27	46-50
7.	9 apartments	16-18	12-19	35- 39
8.	10 apartments	17-20	10-35	37- 43
9.	11 apartments	20-22	10-40	43 – 48
	6 story buildings (new law)	1910 rent range	1920 rent range	
10.	28 apartments	19-22	16-32	41-48
11.	33 apartments	14-21	15-50	30-46

The apartments at the upper rent ranges showed the most dramatic increases in the eleven buildings over the decade. This review of rents in 1910 and 1920 did not take into account the annual inflation rate, which rose from 1.35 % in 1914 to 17.26 by 1918. When the rate of inflation is considered, the rent increases being charged did not keep pace with inflation except in Building One where the increases exceeded the rate of inflation. While the Harlem building

¹⁵ Woofter, 129; “old law” and “new law” refers to the New York City laws governing tenement house construction; in 1901 the law was changed to require that all living spaces have windows and other elements to provide sufficient light and air to residents; apartment built that were governed by this change are referred to as “new law” buildings while building constructed before this law are referred to as “old law” buildings;

¹⁶ The decade average inflation rate was computed from monthly and annual average inflation rates available from 1914 to 1920 from http://inflationdata.com/inflation/Inflation_Rate/HistoricalInflation.aspx?dsInflation_currentPage=7 ; inflation information before 1914 was not available so an assumption was made that the annual rate during the years 1910-1913 was 1%; this rate was then added to the annual inflation rates for the period 1914-1920 (1914: 1.35%, 1915: .92%, 1916: 7.64%, 1917: 17.80%, 1918: 17.26%, 1919:15.31%, 1920: 15.9%) resulting in an average annual inflation rate of 7.29% i.e. to keep pace with inflation, from 1910 to 1920 rents would have had to increase by 7.29% each year;

owners and managers may have used the limited choices available to black tenants to obtain rent increases from these new tenants, the new seemingly high rents still did not allow the owners to keep pace with inflation. While some owners and managers struggled to satisfactorily explain the increases to the public, their assessment that the increases were needed because of higher costs for a range of products was accurate. Because the apartment data did not include the number of rooms in each apartment, comparisons with rents of apartments in other parts of Manhattan cannot be made.¹⁷

The city-wide housing crisis received attention from lawmakers after the end of the war in 1918. Although demobilization led to a return of industrial production to civilian uses, the pent up demand for housing could not be met. Across the country governmental agencies began investigating the causes of the continued housing shortage and exploring ways to solve it. There were suspicions that building contractors, real estate brokers and others benefiting from the crisis were colluding to keep prices high even after the war time conditions that had precipitated the crisis had past. In New York City, housing officials estimated that an additional 30,000 units of housing were needed in 1919 to meet the demand for housing. Apartments were almost impossible to find. When apartments could be found, landlords, not just in Harlem but throughout the city, recognizing an opportunity for increased profits, charged substantially more than pre-war rent rates. Officials warned that if drastic action was not taken the result could be families living in the street. As it was, families doubled up with other families, while some

¹⁷ “Historical US Inflation Rate 1914-Present”
http://inflationdata.com/inflation/Inflation_Rate/HistoricalInflation.aspx?dsInflation_currentPage=7; viewed March 20, 2008;

separated and rented rooms at different locations. In the postwar years the provision of sufficient housing became a high priority for New York lawmakers.¹⁸

The public outcry regarding the housing shortage eventually led the New York State Assembly in 1919 to form the Joint Legislative Committee on Housing “to investigate all possible causes of the post-World War I housing shortage.” Chaired by Charles Lockwood, an assemblyman from Brooklyn, the Lockwood Commission as it became known had a broad investigative purview. The committee sought evidence of collusion to artificially raise prices on housing-related products among general contractors, plumbers, concrete suppliers, real estate brokers, real estate investors, and lenders. To investigate what had become the common practice of landlords demanding substantial rent increases from existing tenants on short notice, New York City Mayor John Hylan created the Mayor’s Office on Rent Profiteering to determine whether building owners were engaged in unfair business practices. During much of 1919 the Lockwood Committee and the Mayor’s Committee on Rent Profiteering listened to testimony from witnesses across the spectrum of the real estate industry. Before the Commission disbanded in 1922, 416 individuals and 250 corporations and trade organizations were indicted for price-fixing activities, but the many convictions that were secured resulted primarily in small fines or jail terms of less than 90 days.¹⁹

¹⁸“Historical Note” *Joint Legislative committee on Housing sub-agency history record New York (State) Legislature*, New York State Archives,

<http://nysl.nysed.gov/uhtbin/cgisirsi/xUwdkrCsTX/ARCHIVES/230190139/9>; “Fear City Will See House Famine Grow,” *The New York Times*, June 18, 1919, 9

¹⁹ “Joint Legislative Committee on Housing sub-agency history record, New York (State), New York State Archives, <http://nysl.nysed.gov/uhtbin/cgisirsi/xUwdkrCsTX/ARCHIVES/230190139/9>; In April 1920 the committee issued recommendations that resulted in the passage of twelve laws under the rubric of the Anti-Rent Profiteering Bill (Chapters 942 through 953 of the Laws of 1920). The laws gave the courts new powers in landlord tenant relationships. The laws required 30 day notice to tenants before they could be evicted, and only under certain stringent conditions could a landlord evict a tenant. The Committee continued its work until 1923 eventually expanding its purview beyond landlords to include labor unions, and building material suppliers, all of whom were implicated in a web of conspiracy which successfully inflated the price housing.

In the war years, *The Messenger*, a monthly magazine edited by black Socialists Chandler Owen and A. Philip Randolph added its voice to the criticism of Harlem landlords. In 1918 *The Messenger* encouraged the formation of a tenants' and consumers' co-operative league noting that for blacks, "their only salvation lies in organizing themselves against their exploiters. The following year the magazine began advocating a policy first made popular by Henry George in the 1880s, taxation on vacant land at high rates to prevent speculation and to encourage the development of housing.²⁰

The Ownership Movement Among Real Estate Investors

The aggressive legislative response to the citywide housing crisis provides perspective on the earlier tenant protests of "rent profiteering" in Harlem. What was already an extreme housing shortage in New York was exacerbated by the fact that blacks did not have access to all neighborhoods even if they could pay the rent. While Harlem tenants demanded lower rents, black ownership of apartment buildings continued to be advocated by the *New York Age* as a part of the solution to high rents in spite of the evidence that black- owned and -managed buildings were not likely to provide rent breaks to blacks. By the latter years of the 1910s the front page of *The New York Age* regularly highlighted purchases of multi-family buildings by African Americans

The paper's publisher, Fred R. Moore had been a colleague of Booker T. Washington and was a key member of Washington's National Negro Business League, a national network of businessmen. The messages from Moore's newspaper announced real estate purchases by African Americans but also served to celebrate African American progress in Harlem and to reaffirm the messages initiated over ten years earlier by Philip Payton's Afro-American Realty

²⁰ "Negroes to Organize Tenants and Consumers' Co-operative League," *The Messenger*, January, 1918, 10; "Rent Profiteering," *The Messenger*, July, 1919, 6 ; Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*, (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2006)

Company that Harlem was a community where blacks could expect to live and succeed. Having taken this stance, Moore felt a responsibility to pressure the brokers whose work he was championing to moderate the rents they charged African Americans. The National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes assisted with the organizing of the Harlem rent protests. Moore was an active member of the League and perhaps this affiliation led him to advocate for a moderation in rents while continuing to promote black capitalism.²¹

During the same period, Robert Abbot, editor of *The Chicago Defender* played a similar role. After encouraging blacks to move to the north, he then encouraged them to buy property and regularly reported on high profile purchases and leases made by African Americans. In 1914 *The Defender* noted:

It probably will startle the world when it realizes that the race has acquired over one billion dollars in real estate in the United States. The colored people of Chicago now own \$5,000,000 worth of property.²²

Some black real estate brokers and investors in Harlem framed their work in the context of the race leadership promoted by Moore, even if it did not result in lower rents. In July and August of 1917 Philip Payton ran a half-page advertisement for six apartment houses on 141st and 142nd Streets in Harlem in *The Age*. The properties were well north of the previous 136th Street northern boundary for black residency in Harlem. The advertisement noted that the buildings were for “Refined Colored Tenants.” To make very clear that African Americans were targeted as potential tenants, each of the six “Deluxe Elevator Apartment Houses” was named after a black icon: Wheatley Court for the Revolutionary era poet, Phillis Wheatly; Toussaint

²¹ Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston editors, “Fred Moore,” *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 446-448; Moore would serve on the Urban League Board for three decades; “Agents Raise Rent on Race,” *The New York Age*, September 28, 1916, 1

²² “J.L. Slaughter, The Real Estate Man,” *The Chicago Defender*, December 2, 1916, 3; “Anderson and Terrell Lease \$60,000 Flat Building,” *The Chicago Defender*, September 20, 1913, 8; “They Can’t Keep the Negro Down,” *The Chicago Defender*, February 7, 1914, 2; “Olivet Baptist Church in Big Real Estate Deal,” *The Chicago Defender*, January 26, 1918, 7

Court for Haitian liberator Toussaint L'Ouverture; Washington Court for Booker T. Washington; Dunbar Court for writer Paul Laurence Dunbar; Douglass Court for abolitionist Frederick Douglass. A portrait of each person was to be placed in the foyer of the respective buildings. In addition to the cultural appeal, Payton used the notion of exclusivity to attract the class of African Americans that he was seeking:

Only People Able to Furnish Satisfactory Reference as to Character and Standing are Invited to Inspect these Houses as it is Intended that a Tenancy in these Houses shall be Almost Equivalent to a Certificate of Character and a Recommendation as to Responsibility.²³

Payton's appeal to middle class blacks as potential renters was a strategy that could prevent complaints regarding rents to be charged. The aura of exclusivity created by the advertising copy could be used to justify the rents. If black tenants viewed their residency in the buildings as a status symbol they would be unlikely to challenge the rents and bring attention to the fact that their economic condition was more tenuous than that of their middle class black neighbors.

After Payton's death in late August 1917, Watt Terry, an African American businessman from Brockton, Massachusetts took over the properties and continued to market them to African Americans. With headlines of "Only a Few More Left!" and "Rents Reduced" his advertisements appealed to potential tenants' concerns regarding rents while continuing to suggest that an apartment in the "Finest and Most Modern Apartment" buildings was a scarce commodity.²⁴ Early in 1918 Terry, who continued to live in Brockton, announced the formation of the "largest business enterprise to be organized and promoted solely by Negroes," the Terry Holding Company. The company's directors included leading Harlem residents such as businesswoman Madam C.J. Walker, Adam C. Powell, Sr., pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church, and W. H.

²³ "Payton Closes Harlem Realty Deal Involving Million and a Half Dollars," *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, 1, 7; Advertisement, *New York Age*, August 16, 1917, 2

²⁴ "Rents Reduced" *New York Age*, September 27, 1917, 1, 7;

Brooks, pastor of Harlem Congregational Church. Advertisements with Madam Walker's photograph appeared in issues of *The New York Age*. The Terry Holding Company had the ability to raise up to \$750,000 in capital in \$10 shares and the article announcing the company's formation noted that the interest of prospective tenants in the buildings on 141st and 142nd Street had been the impetus for the formation of Terry Holding Co. The article implied that other investments would follow:

Mr. Terry says the Harlem section offers more magnificent opportunities for successful investments than is true of any other section in Manhattan, where reasonable profits may be made as well as comfortable housing conditions obtained at reasonable rental.²⁵

Although both the advertisements by Payton and Terry suggested that they had purchased the buildings, during the time from 1917 into 1918, when their advertisements were promoting the buildings for African Americans, the buildings were actually owned by 135 Broadway Holding Corporation a company formed in 1915. The principals of 135 Broadway Holding Corporation were five white men, Cyril H. Burdett, Frank L. Cooke, Gerhard Kuehne, Floyd W. Davis, and Leo Schloss who lived in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and New Jersey. The company had been capitalized with \$1,000. Three of the men were senior officials with New York Title and Mortgage Company. Burdette was the general manager, Cooke the secretary, and Kuehne the treasurer. Burdett owned 40 shares of the company while the other principals each owned 15 shares.²⁶

²⁵ "Incorporate \$750,000 Real Estate Firm," *The New York Age*, January, 26, 1918, 1-2; Brockton Directory, 1917 (Boston: W.A. Grenough & Co., 1917), 639; Trow's Directory of New York City (New York: Trow Publishing Co., 1917, 1918-1919); Reid Badger, *A Life in Ragtime: A Biography of James Reese Europe*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 219

²⁶ 135 Broadway Holding Corporation Certificate of Incorporation, New York County Archives; Census of 1920, Greenburg, N.Y. Enumeration District 50 Sheet 1a, New York City, ED 662, Sheet 3B, ED 1485, Sheet 229B, ED 1511, Sheet 11A; Leonia, N.J., ED 56, Sheet 1A; "Cyril H. Burdett, Attorney, Was 74," *The New York Times*, July 1, 1939, 17; in 1934 Burdett had been appointed by Pres. Roosevelt to the Federal Housing Administration, a New Deal agency through which the federal government supported the financing of new and existing housing; "Good Financial Year—New York Title Shows Increased Profits—Officers Elected," *New York Times*, January 19, 1913, 21

Neither Payton nor Terry had an ownership interest in 135 Broadway Holding company or in the properties on West 141st and West 142nd Streets that they were promoting. Payton and Terry had sought renters for the buildings as managers rather than owners. Payton's name was well-known among African Americans in Harlem, and in spite of the failure of the Afro-American Realty Company in 1908, his name was still well-regarded by black New Yorkers for his brokerage and management activities undertaken through his next business venture the Philip A. Payton, Jr. Company. This "brand" recognition would have been important to 135 Broadway Holding Company in leasing the six buildings to blacks, at relatively high rents (Payton's advertisements listed apartments of 3 rooms to 6 rooms with monthly rents from \$26 to \$52). While 135 Broadway Holding Company would likely have been seen by many potential African American tenants as white exploiters, Payton's advertisements emphasized the opening of deluxe housing for the first time to blacks who had been deprived of these accommodations.²⁷

Watt Terry who assumed the promotion efforts for the 141st and 142nd Street properties after Payton's death was developing a reputation similar to Payton's. He was known for his humble beginnings as a custodian at the YMCA in his hometown of Brockton, Massachusetts. Through diligent savings he was able to accumulate sufficient funds to begin buying property and in the 1910s had expanded his real estate investment activities to Harlem. Terry altered Payton's marketing message slightly by reducing rents, but maintained the characterization of his work as providing a desired good to potential tenants.²⁸

²⁷ "Payton Closes Harlem Deal Involving Million and a Half Dollars," *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, 1; "Terry Takes Over Property," *New York Age*, September 27, 1917, 1; 135 Broadway Holding Corporation, Certificate of Incorporation, New York County Archives; "World's Finest Housing Proposition," *The New York Age*, August, 1917

²⁸ Osofsky, 119; "Incorporate \$750,000 Real Estate Firm," *The New York Age*, January 26, 1918, 1; Brockton City Directory, (Boston: W.A. Greenough & Co., 1917), 639

By March, 1918 a new company, Payton Apartments Corporation, had been formed to “take title to the valuable properties” on 141st and 142nd Streets. The principals of Payton Apartments Corporation were two African Americans, Edward C. Brown and Andrew F. Stevens. Brown had been mentioned as a partner to Watt Terry after Terry took over the properties following Payton’s death. Based in Philadelphia, both Brown and Stevens were natives of Virginia. In Norfolk they had formed a bank, Brown and Stevens, and had expanded their investments to include New York real estate. Brown and Stevens each owned 12,350 shares of the stock of the Payton Apartments Corporation. Three others had small ownership interests of 100 shares: Edward P. Butler secretary of the Universal Carpet and Rug Co.; John A. Burns, a white private detective; and Daniel Getz, Secretary of the Foreign Language Newspaper Delivery & Circulation company. Assuming that Butler and Getz were also white, the roles these associates played in the company are unclear. The Payton Apartments Company was characterized as a “race enterprise.” The company’s shares were initially valued at \$10. The company began with capital of \$250,000 on hand.²⁹

Regarding the company’s formation, E.C. Brown noted that “the possession of these apartments marks the largest real estate proposition in the world undertaken by Negroes.” He noted that the apartments “constructed at a cost of \$1,500,000 are being offered at moderate rentals to respectable colored people.” The article also noted that the company’s secretary would be Emmett Scott who, having been passed over to succeed Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee, had served as Assistant to the Secretary of War during the First World War. Another director

²⁹ “New Syndicate takes Over Harlem Property,” *The New York Age*, March 9, 1918, 1; Payton Apartments Corporation Certificate of Incorporation, New York County Archives; Census of 1920, Philadelphia, PA, Enumeration District 982, Sheet 2A, New York City, ED 1523, Sheet 18B; Juliet E.K. Walker, *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship*, (New York: MacMillan Library Reference USA, 1998), 189; R.L. Polk & Company’s 1918 Trow’s New York City Directory for Manhattan and the Bronx,, Vol. 131 (Trow’s Directory Publishing Company, 1918), 429, 434, 819;

was Heman Perry, an African American who had founded the Atlanta-based Standard Life Insurance Company and other business enterprises.³⁰

When *The Age* publicized the formation of the Payton Apartments Company, no mention was made of Terry Holding Co. The title transfer to Payton Apartments Company was announced in the March 1918 but did not actually happen until October 1918 when the purchase was finalized. The Payton name was then formally attached to the 141st and 142nd Street properties and the Payton Apartments Corporation assumed the payments on mortgages on the properties totaling \$964,000. It is probable that in the preceding months E.C. Brown's company had taken over the management of the buildings from Terry Holding Co. until the actual purchase was made.³¹

E.C. Brown's assessment of the importance of the transaction for the Payton Apartments was accurate. It was a large undertaking with symbolic significance in the promotion of Harlem as a community controlled by African Americans as illustrated by the front page coverage in *The Age*. In 1910 the black congregation of St. Philip's Episcopal Church had purchased 10 apartment buildings on 135th Street for over \$600,000. Quite possibly St. Philip's successful management of these apartments had benefited the Payton Apartments Corporation. Allowing this black-led company to assume the payments on over \$900,000 of loans originally made to the white businessmen who had previously owned the 141st and 142ⁿ Street properties was not typical. St. Philip's prudent management of its properties could have influenced the lenders favorably. While the actual ownership of the Payton Apartments was somewhat murky, the

³⁰ "New Syndicate takes Over Harlem Property," *The New York Age*, March 9, 1918, 1; "Emmett J. Scott," *Dictionary of Negro Biography*, Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston, Editors. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 549-551; Juliet E.K. Walker, *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship*, (New York: MacMillan Library Reference USA, 1998), 189

³¹ "New Syndicate takes Over Harlem Property," *The New York Age*, March 9, 1918, 1; Conveyances, Liber 3061, 455-456, New York City Register

photographs of the buildings on 141st and 142nd Streets accompanying stories about them, and the laudatory tone in which the African Americans associated with the buildings were referred, reinforced the significance of the development as a symbol of African American ownership of property in Harlem.³²

Philip Payton and Watt Terry used the influence of their names among African Americans to facilitate the leasing to black renters of properties initially owned by white investors. This strategy suggests an awareness that black ownership of real estate was an important element in the minds of black residents as the community expanded, and could have also made the charging of relatively high rents more acceptable. The appeal of the perception of black ownership of properties was also being used by a group of white investors in marketing buildings to black Harlem residents. In the late 1910s brief notices in the *New York Age* periodically announced real estate purchases and sales made by the Moton Realty Co. In a front page article *The Age* reported that Moton purchased six houses in the 300 block of west 139th street that would “soon be occupied by colored families” The newspaper stated that the corporation was controlled by J. Douglass Wetmore, and “the company is organized of course as a commercial proposition to secure a profit on its investments, but its officials also are anxious to aid members of the race by relieving to some extent the congested housing situation”³³

The Moton name was well known among Harlem’s middle class. When Booker T. Washington died in 1915, Robert Russa Moton was appointed to succeed him as head of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. In this role he continued the Washington tradition of traveling across the country frequently to generate funds, but also to speak on issues of importance to African Americans. He also continued Washington’s mission of black business promotion.

³² John H. Hewitt, Jr., *Protest and Progress: New York’s First Black Episcopal Church Fights Racism*, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), 137-144

³³ *The New York Age* June 5, 1920, 1

While this promotion did not involve visible direct ownership and operation of businesses by him, the name Moton Realty Co. Inc., formed in October of 1918 in New York City suggested homage to the new Tuskegee leader. J. Douglas Wetmore whom *The Age* indicated “controlled” the company was the attorney for Moton Realty. A native of Jacksonville, Florida, and a friend of NAACP official James Weldon Johnson, Wetmore was a fair-complexioned African American. He was later suggested to have been the model for Johnson’s fictional work *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. Wetmore had an almost exclusively white clientele in his law practice with offices on Park Row in Lower Manhattan.³⁴ The five principals of Moton Realty were from two white families. Ida and Augustus Schmidt lived at 510 West 140th Street near Broadway, far west of the area of Central Harlem to which African Americans were moving. The other principals were Elizabeth Webster and her daughters Madge Webster and Mabel Bundiak who lived on Quincy Street in Brooklyn. The company had convinced *The New York Age* that it was sympathetic to the needs of African American tenants, and maybe it was.³⁵

By the end of 1919 *The Age* provided a progress report regarding African American real estate activity in Harlem:

within the last year Negroes have acquired a dozen elevator apartment buildings in Harlem, many of them tenanted by white people, the most recent being a seven-story building at the northwest corner of Seventh avenue and 137th. As a result of the shortage of living accommodations the southerly limit of the so-called “black belt” has gradually been extended. Several months ago a number of Negro home seekers crossed the “line” at 130th Street and purchased private dwellings occupied by whites in the streets to the south.³⁶

³⁴ “Moton Co. Acquires 139th Street Houses,” *New York Age*, June 5, 1920, 1; Moton Realty Company Certificate of Incorporation, New York County Archives; Anne Herrman, *Queering the Moderns: Poses/Portraits/Performances*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 130

³⁵ Census of 1920, Brooklyn, N.Y., Enumeration District 1019, Sheet 5A, New York, N.Y., ED 1425, Sheet 15B; Moton Realty Company Certificate of Incorporation, New York County Archives.

³⁶ *The New York Age*, Negroes Buy More Harlem Property, , December 6, 1919, 1

In 1919 white New Yorkers also recognized the extent to which Harlem was a black community. Lawson Purdy, an official with New York City's Tenement House Department, (and also the former senior vestryman of the Church of the Redeemer Episcopal Church that had unsuccessfully resisted the sale of its church to African Americans in 1914) observed that

the colored people residing in the Harlem district are good tenants, they preserve property as well as white tenants of similar standing, they are prompt in their payments and the houses tenanted by them are as good investments as similar houses tenanted by white people.³⁷

Purdy's statement could have been meant to reassure white investors who were familiar with the notorious reputation of the midtown black settlements, or possibly to encourage the black investors that Fred Moore sought to attract to Harlem. The front page placement of Purdy's statement in *The Age* would have facilitated this latter goal. Five years after the Harlem Board of Commerce had sought input from black real estate broker John Nail regarding the future of blacks in Harlem, Lawson Purdy's statement suggests that the presence of blacks in Harlem had not destabilized the community. His acknowledgment that black tenants were comparable to white tenants, suggested that while they might not live in the same buildings, black and white residents could co-exist in different parts of Harlem. Although their tenants might resent them, according to Lawson Purdy, white or black real estate investors could prosper regardless of the race of their tenants.³⁸

African American investments in Harlem in 1919 also moved beyond residential properties. In June of that year, *The Age* reported that the "first definite move on the part of Negroes to conduct big business in Harlem" had been made by a group of African Americans with their purchase of the Lafayette Theater on 7th Avenue between 131st and 132nd Streets.

³⁷ Mrs. H. Croswell Tuttle, *History of Saint Luke's Church in the City of New York, 1820-1920* (New York: Appeal Printing Company, 1926) , 357; "Colored Tenants in Harlem are Praised by City Officials," *New York Age*, April 19, 1919, 1

³⁸ *New York Age*, December 6, 1919, 1

Built in 1910, the Lafayette Theater had been one of the first New York City theaters to desegregate in 1912, and while it was white-owned it had its own company of black actors and welcomed black audiences. The head of the group of investors that purchased the Lafayette Theater was E.C. Brown, also the principal of the Payton Apartments Corporation.³⁹ In March of 1920 the purchase of a large corner lot at 135th Street and 7th Avenue by Wage Earners' Savings Bank of Savannah, Georgia was also announced in *The Age*. "The transaction represents an investment close to \$200,000, and so takes ranks among the largest single real estate transactions of recent days." L.E. Williams, president of Wage Earners was also an owner of the Lafayette Theatre organization.⁴⁰

In 1920 regular reports of African American apartment building purchases continued with *The Age* noting that an African American woman from North Carolina had invested \$50,000 and that a group of black men from Jacksonville, Florida had created an investment fund of \$110,000 for Harlem properties. These purchases were framed in the context of uplift:

The real estate men are being commended for encouraging good, sound property investments as a means not only to financial independence but also to racial self-respect and progress. They unite in declaring that they will frown upon out-and-out property speculation.⁴¹

During this period two large black churches also decided to move from midtown to Harlem. Rather than take over the buildings of white congregations, they made plans to build new buildings. In April, 1920 the Abyssinian Baptist Church, then located on West 40th Street announced that it would move to Harlem and build a "modern church plant" for \$200,000 on West 138th Street between Lenox and Seventh Avenues. At the end of the year St. Mark's

³⁹ Elliot Willensky and Norval White, *AIA Guide to New York City*, Third Edition, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1988), 447-448; Bruce Kellner, *Harlem Renaissance: A Dictionary of the Era*, (New York: Methuen, 1987), 214

⁴⁰ "Wage Earners' Bank of Savannah, Ga. Buys Valuable 7th Avenue Corner," *The New York Age*, March 3, 1920, 1

⁴¹ "Facts About Development of Harlem Realty Business: Millions of Dollars in Harlem Realty," *The New York Age*, July 21, 1920, 1

Methodist Episcopal Church then located on West 53rd Street announced that it had purchased property at West 137th Street and St. Nicholas Avenue and would build a new building there.⁴²

The African American investors who purchased the apartment buildings, theaters, and land in Harlem were a new generation of black business people. They used the opportunities provided by the increased concentration of the black population in many U.S. cities to build businesses targeting this market. Their business successes provided them with the capital to invest in Harlem real estate and take advantage of the opportunities afforded by the explosive growth in New York's black population. The steady reports of these purchases and plans in *The New York Age* reinforced the perception that in Harlem, African Americans would have an unprecedented level of ownership of the properties in their community.⁴³

By 1920 large areas of Harlem had significant black populations. Almost two thirds of Manhattan's black population of 109,133 lived in the four assembly districts that included Harlem.

⁴² "Another Downtown Church Plans to Move to Harlem; Abyssinian Church to Erect \$200,000 Building," *The New York Age*, April 10, 1920, 1; "St. Marks M.E. Church Has Purchased Harlem Property; Will Erect Commodious and Modern House of Worship," December 4, 1920, 1

⁴³ Juliet E.K. Walker, *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship*, (New York: Macmillan Library Reference USA, 1998), 182-183; Kathleen Wolgemuth, "Woodrow Wilson and Federal Segregation," *Journal of Negro History*, April, 1959, 158-173

Table 13- 1920 Populations in Harlem Assembly Districts⁴⁴

Street Locations	Assembly District	Total Assembly District Population	Total Whites In Assembly District	Total Blacks In Assembly District	Other	Black Assembly District population as a % of total district Population	Black Assembly District population as a % of Manhattan Black Population (109,133)
118th-136th/5th to 7th Ave	19	78,052	50,805	27,136	109	34.77	24.87
E. 115th – E. 133rd/ E. River to Park Ave.	20	83,156	80,101	3,012	43	3.62	2.76
136th St.-155th St/Convent Ave to Hudson River	21	78,982	39,402	37,436	144	47.40	34.30
144th-161st Street/Lenox Ave to Broadway	22	74,895	72,253	2,531	111	3.38	2.32
Total		315,085	242,561	70,117	407		64.25

In the 1910s black investors purchased over thirty apartment buildings containing over eight hundred apartment units. While these units were approximately two percent of the 46,000 apartment units in the area from 130th Street to 155th Street, the close proximity of these buildings, in the heart of Harlem’s black community, made these acquisitions significant for

⁴⁴ Fourteenth Census of the U.S., Volume III, Population 1920, Composition and Characteristics of the Population by States, Table 13. Composition and Characteristics of the Population for Wards (or Assembly Districts) of Cities of 50,000 or more) (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1920), 714-715

black residents. The New York Age framed these purchases as the signs of increasing black control of the community and this message was shared by blacks across the country.

Map 16- Harlem Apartment Building Purchases by Black Investors, 1911-1918⁴⁵

	130-148 W. 142 nd St. Payton Holding 1918 152 units 3 buildings		142 nd Street
	117-143 W. 141 st St. Payton Holding 1918 154 units 3 buildings		141 st Street
202-230 West 140 th Terry Holding 1918 280 units 15 buildings			140 th Street
			139 th Street
Eighth Ave	Seventh Ave	Lenox Ave	138 th Street
			137 th Street
			136 th Street
	106-120 W. 135 th St St. Philips Episcopal Church 1911 240 units 10 buildings		135 th Street

A Changing of the Guard at King Model Houses

In the final years of the 1910s black real estate ownership in Harlem would extend beyond apartment buildings to individual homeownership through the activities of Equitable Life Assurance Company at King Model Houses, a townhouse development on West 138th and 139th Streets. These actions would dramatically increase the African American homeownership base in

⁴⁵ “More Harlem Homes for Colored People,” *New York Times*, March 26, 1911, xxi; “Real Estate Field,” *New York Times*, July 28, 1917, 14; “Real Estate Field,” *New York Times*, September 28, 1917, 16; “Negro Apartments,” *New York Times*, November 18, 1917, RE10; “Real Estate Field,” *New York Times*, March 14, 1918, 20; “Real Estate Field,” *New York Times*, August 21, 1918, 14

Harlem, solidifying the element of community control for individual homeowners in the same way that apartment building ownership had done for black investor groups.

Insurance companies played a significant role in real estate investing through their investments of millions of dollars of premium payments. Some of these funds were invested in stocks and bonds, but some were used to provide loans for large and small borrowers to purchase real estate. Because of the significant role that insurance companies played in the real estate industry, during its investigations, the Lockwood Commission questioned insurance executives about their failure to maintain high levels of investment in New York real estate. Equitable Life Assurance Society headquartered in New York was one of the companies called before the Commission in June of 1919. Founded in 1859 Equitable was one of the largest insurance companies in the country. In his testimony, the company's president, William Day told the Commission that the company reduced its real estate lending because the purchase of wartime bonds had reduced its available funds. After Commission Chairman Lockwood pressed Day to make a definite lending commitment Day indicated that "he would recommend to his finance committee that the Equitable set aside \$500,000" for additional real estate loans. An amount close to this figure would soon be used for loans in Harlem.⁴⁶

In addition to real estate lending, Equitable also owned and managed real estate, some of it acquired through foreclosure proceedings against borrowers and some purchased as investment property. Most of this property was held and managed by Equitable for short periods, usually less than a five year period, after which the state insurance board required a company to request permission to continue holding a property. The 1919 Lockwood Commission criticism of insurance companies' real estate activities did not extend to property ownership, but in approximately twelve months, from the fall of 1919 through the fall of 1920, Equitable sold to

⁴⁶ "Says Glass Plans to Float New Loan," *New York Times*, June 7, 1919, 9

African Americans over eighty properties in Harlem that it had owned since 1893.⁴⁷ Some insight into Equitable's rationale for selling the King Model Houses buildings in 1919 and 1920 can be gleaned from a statement in a February, 1921 report by Equitable President William Day to the company's Board of Directors:

Real estate is not regarded as a suitable investment except to such extent as may be necessary to provide working quarters for the Society's home office staff. It is the policy of the Finance Committee, therefore, to dispose of all other real estate owned whenever adequate prices can be obtained, but not to force properties on the market.⁴⁸

Equitable may have believed that if it had attempted to sell King Model Houses townhouses during the early years of white flight from Harlem it would not have been able to obtain adequate prices. Ironically as blacks became the principal market for the homes, the real estate market stabilized and because of their limited choices, the strength of blacks' demand for housing enabled Equitable to obtain a better price in 1919 and 1920 than it might have received earlier.⁴⁹

The properties sold were townhouses on West 138th and West 139th between 7th and 8th Avenues that comprised a unique residential development of 138 homes known as the King Model Houses. Named after the developer David H. King, Jr. and completed in 1891 they represented innovative residential design and gracious living.⁵⁰ By the time builder David H. King, Jr. began work on the Harlem townhouse development on 138th and 139th Streets, he was well known as a builder of significant sites in New York City. In 1886 he completed the

⁴⁷ Deloitte, Plender, Griffiths & Co., "Report on Administration, Part II, Investment-Real Estate," The Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York, 1906, 36, Equitable/AXA Archives;

⁴⁸ "President's Report To the Board of Directors of the Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States, February 17, 1921, Equitable/AXA Archives, 3

⁴⁹ Abstract Index, Mortgages, Blocks 2023, 2024, 2025; Mortgages, Liber 3157, 470; Liber 3122, 108, New York City Register;

⁵⁰ *Home Office and Agency Management- 1885-1899*, (New York: Equitable Life Assurance Society), 377; Elliot Willensky, Norval White, *AIA Guide to New York City*, Third Edition, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1988), 450

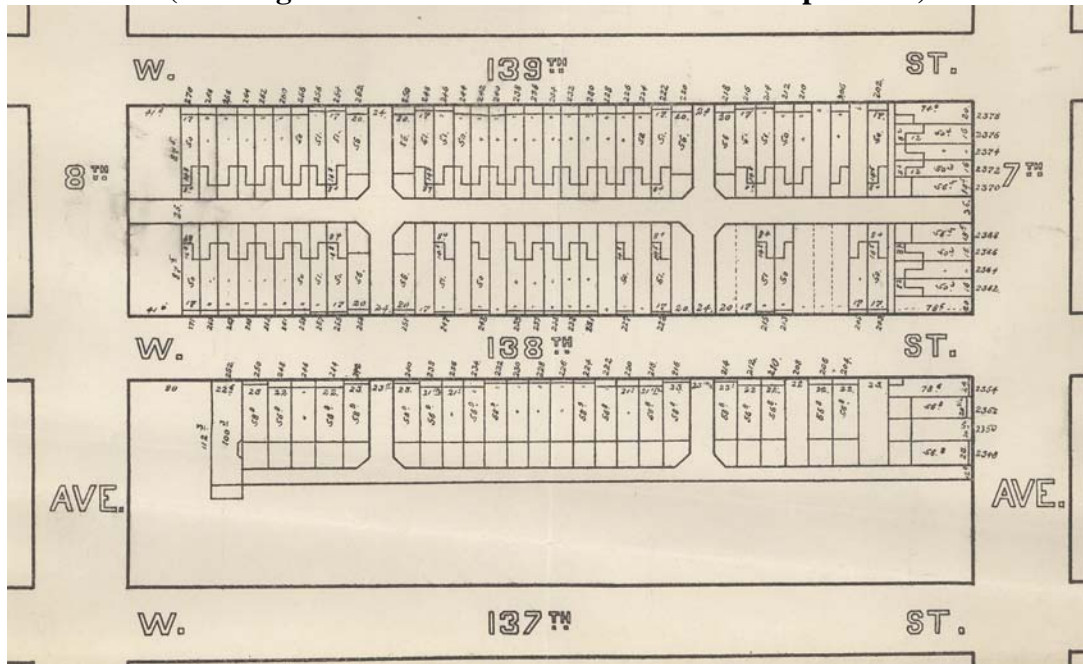
construction of the pedestal and the installation of the Statue of Liberty. Other projects included the Washington Arch in New York's Washington Square Park, and the New York Times building on Park Row. King had acquired the land on West 138th and 139th Streets from several owners within a two year period from 1890 to 1891. To design the buildings, he selected three prominent architectural firms, Bruce Price and Clarence S. Luce; James Brown Lord; and McKim, Mead and White. Stanford White, of McKim, Mead & White had designed many of the buildings previously constructed by King, including Madison Square Garden (the second Garden at Madison Avenue and 26th Street), and the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty.⁵¹

Each architectural firm focused on designing a blockfront within the development. James Brown Lord designed the south side of West 138th Street with buildings “from the Georgian tradition ... constructed of red brick with brownstone trim, in exceedingly good taste.” Price and Luce designed the north side of West 138th Street and the south side of West 139th Street “in the Georgian style of the Eclectic Period... of buff-colored brick with Indiana limestone detail...” The north side of West 139th by McKim, Mead & White was designed in “the Italian Renaissance style.. of handsome dark brown mottled brick.”⁵²

⁵¹ Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 4, 405, Liber 10, 63, Liber 2362, 237, Liber 10, 63, New York City Register; New York City Land Marks Preservation Commission, St. Nicholas Historic District, Manhattan, Designation Report, March 16, 1967, Number 2, LP-0322, 3-5; Kenneth T. Jackson, Ed. *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press), 712

⁵² New York City Land Marks Preservation Commission, St. Nicholas Historic District, Manhattan, Designation Report, March 16, 1967, Number 2, LP-0322, 3-5;

**Map 17- King Model Houses⁵³
(buildings on the north side of 139th Street not pictured)**



A unique aspect of the development was the alleys running behind the homes through the middle of the blocks so that service activities such as trash removal would be unseen from the streets. The entrances to the alleys were placed on the Seventh and Eighth Avenues. In addition to the alleys behind the homes, the blockfronts were periodically interrupted by gated gardens that allowed access to the alley from within the blocks. The buildings were completed in 1891 and advertisements for houses in the development highlighted their unique character:

⁵³ King Model Houses, Equitable Life Assurance Society/AXA Archives

King Model Houses Advertisement

<p style="text-align: center;">Creating A Neighborhood</p> <p>By controlling a large area of land and carefully restricting it against nuisance, every purchaser of one of the King Model houses will be secured against injury both now and in the future. For terms apply on premises.⁵⁴</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The King Model Houses</p> <p>...If we had a Society for Improving the Condition for the Rich it would educate people to Live in ideal homes such as the King Model Buildings, 138th to 139th Sts., 7th to 8th Avs. Two entire blocks.⁵⁵</p>
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In spite of the advertising campaign most of the units were not sold because of the economic downturn following the Panic of 1893. The blocks to the immediate south, east and west of the development were vacant, and perhaps the King Model Houses seemed too remote for potential buyers. In 1895, only four years after completion, David King transferred the complex to Equitable Insurance Company. The transaction seems to have been a gentlemen's agreement. Equitable had provided financing for the development and King, who had built Equitable's New York headquarters building, was a close friend of its president, Henry Hyde. They were both members of the Jekyll Island Club, a cottage resort off the coast of Georgia. This personal relationship and the attractiveness of the developments seemed to have enabled King to convey the properties to Equitable in lieu of payment of the debt he had incurred to build the development. Another sign of the close relationship between King and Equitable was the construction of a uniquely designed local office building for Equitable at the western end of the

⁵⁴ *New York Times*, April 9, 1892, 8

⁵⁵ *New York Times*, May 16, 1892, 8

138th Street block of King Model Houses “to sell life insurance to residents of this newly opened ‘suburb’ of Harlem.”⁵⁶

After acquiring King Model Houses, Equitable sold a few of the homes in the 1890s and thirty-one homes from 1904 to 1905. The buyers were middle class white residents. Equitable also rented the unsold townhouses to white residents. During the period from 1904-1914 when white Harlem residents were concerned about the westward expansion of the African American settlement near West 135th Street and Lenox Avenue, King Model Houses, although in close proximity, was unaffected by the racial tension: the 1910 federal census indicated that only white residents lived on the West 138th Street and West 139th Street blocks.⁵⁷ Equitable retained control of the unsold King Model Houses properties for over twenty years, possibly attempting to ensure that these symbols of gracious living would remain under the control of white owners. By 1913 many of the 138th Street King Model Houses were “leased to natives of South and Central American countries having business interests in the United States.” At the end of the decade Equitable adopted a different strategy.⁵⁸

While individual sales of King Model properties to African Americans were noted in *The New York Age*, and the broader press, the scale of the transfers being made by Equitable was not recognized. Between September 1919 and November 1920, Equitable sold over ninety single family townhouse properties within the King Model Houses development. The majority of the buyers were African Americans who purchased the homes for their primary residences. A few

⁵⁶Paula Deitz, “In Harlem’s Elegant Strivers’ Row, *The New York Times*, April 16, 1982, C1; *Home Office and Agency Management- 1885-1899*, 377; George W. Bromley map of Manhattan, 1897; June Hall McCash, *The Jekyll Island Cottage Colony*, (Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 158; New York City Register, Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 34, p. 9, Liber 31, 492, Liber 31, 498; *From Abyssinian to Zion*, p.287; Elliot Willensky and Norval White, *AIA Guide to New York City*, Third Edition (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1988), 450

⁵⁷ “Testimony of Gerald R. Brown,” The Armstrong Committee, p. 3604; Thirteenth Census of the U.S., Population, Enumeration District 525, 4B-11B

⁵⁸ “Latin-Americans in Harlem Block,” *New York Times*, August 24, 1913, X9

buyers were real estate companies that then resold the homes to blacks. The fact that insurance companies were required to file requests for extensions to continue holding property for more than five years, and that Equitable had retained the King Model Houses properties for over twenty, suggests that the buildings were important to the company and that Equitable had concluded that the proper conditions, either racial or economic had not previously existed for selling the properties. For Equitable, the transfer to African Americans of properties that had been rented to whites for decades was an acknowledgment that the African American presence in Central Harlem could not be reversed as some had hoped for earlier in the decade.⁵⁹

As with the apartment building purchases by African Americans, *The Age* framed the purchases in the context of community control. A February 1920 article noted the buyers of several properties sold by Equitable on West 138th Street. Although *The Age* article did not emphasize that these were significant sales, the placement of this information on the front page of the newspaper suggests that these sales were seen as important information.⁶⁰

New York City's African American homeownership rate was so low that the purchases of the ninety-four King Model Houses made a significant impact on the level of black homeownership not just in Harlem but in New York City. In 1920 12.7 percent of New York City households owned their own homes well below the rate in other major American cities, many of which had rates two to three times higher. The low overall homeownership rate was a reflection of the predominance of multi-family housing (the cooperative form of individual apartment ownership had not yet become popular in New York), the relatively high cost of the

⁵⁹ Abstract Index, Mortgages, New York County, Blocks 2023, 2024, 2025, New York City Register; Fourteenth Census of the U.S., Population, Enumeration District 1415, 7B-10A

⁶⁰ Ibid; "Recent Sales," *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, December 20, 1919, 636; "Recent Sales," *Record and Guide*, June 26, 1920, 843; "Recent Sales," *Record and Guide*, January 3, 1920, 13; *Record and Guide*, "Recent Sales," *Record and Guide*, February 14, 1920, 173; "Many Dwellings Sold for Occupancy," *New York Times*, April 16, 1920, 25

single family houses that did exist, and the limited ability to finance purchases. Financing for home purchasing was extremely conservative in the early 1900s. A study of national homeownership rates from 1911-1914 found “that the average down payment for single-family houses in 22 cities was almost 68 percent of the purchase price, and that 46 percent of homes were acquired debt free.” Few black New Yorkers were in a position to meet such terms. In 1920 only 3.2 percent of African American households in New York City owned their own homes.⁶¹

What made the King Model Houses purchases possible, and is an indication of Equitable’s interest in facilitating the purchases rather than making a quick profit (after fifteen years of holding the properties), was the fact that Equitable provided the black buyers with financing. The provision of financing was essential to the transfer of so many properties to African Americans. For black New Yorkers the obstacles to homeownership facing all New Yorkers were compounded by the limited economic opportunities, limits on access to housing in most areas of the city, and obstacles to obtaining home loans.⁶²

⁶¹ “Race and Home Ownership, 1900-1990,” William J. Collins, Robert A. Margo, January, 2000, http://eh.net/Clio/Conferences/ASSA/Jan_00/margo.shtml; T. J. Woofter, *Negro Problems in Cities*, (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Compan, 1928), pp. 136-151; *The Fourteenth [1920] Census of the United States, State Compendium, New York Statistics of Population, Occupations, Agriculture, Manufactures and Mines*, “Ownership of Homes for Counties Having 10,000 Inhabitants or More,” (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1924), 86

⁶² Woofter, 136-151; Abstract Index, Mortgages, Blocks 2023, 2024, 2025, New York City Register

Table 14- Negro Home Ownership in Five Boroughs, New York City, 1920⁶³

Borough	Total [Negro] Homes	Negro Owned Homes	Per Cent Owned	Black Population
Brooklyn	7,791	477	6.1	31,912
Bronx	975	76	7.8	4,803
Manhattan	26,156	184	.7	109,133
Queens	1,173	370	31.5	5,120
Richmond (Staten Island)	317	56	17.9	905
Total City	36,412	1,163	3.2	151,873

The 3.2 percent of African American homeowners in 1920 New York City owned 1,163 homes. The King Model Houses sold in 1919 and 1920 by Equitable represented approximately eight percent of all of the black homeowners in New York City in 1920. The purchases were even more significant when placed in the context of homeownership rates in each of New York City's five boroughs. In Manhattan African Americans owned only 184 homes. More than half of these dwellings were represented by the Kings Model home purchases. Even with these homeowners, the Manhattan homeownership rate for African Americans was below one percent. The black homeownership rate was much higher in other cities, ranging from seven percent in Chicago to thirty-two percent in Lynchburg, Virginia. These higher homeownership rates were attributed to lower home costs in these areas.⁶⁴

Equitable worked with several real estate brokers to undertake the sales of the Kings Model Houses properties, but the most prominent African American realtor used by Equitable was Nail and Parker. Founded in 1907 By John E. Nail and Henry Parker, the company drew on a wide range of familial and social relationships among New York's black elite to build a

⁶³ Woofter, p. 141; Fourteenth Census of the U.S., Population, "Composition and Characteristics of the Population, 712-716;

⁶⁴ Woofter, 136-141;

thriving business. John E. Nail was a second generation entrepreneur. His father was John B. Nail the saloon owner who in the 1880s had been, tapped for leadership by the Democratic Party representing the United Colored Democracy. Part of the early wave of African Americans moving to Harlem after 1900, the senior Nail sold his midtown building and relocated to Harlem where he lived the life of a retired gentleman, occasionally attending the theater and supervising his Harlem real estate investments.⁶⁵

John E. Nail the son, entered the real estate business as an employee of Philip Payton's Afro-American Realty Company. When that company began to flounder in 1907, Nail joined forces with a co-worker, North Carolinian Henry Parker, to form Nail and Parker. As the African American congregation of St. Philip's Episcopal Church began to consider relocating from its West 25th Street location to Harlem, John E. Nail, a member, provided St. Philips' rector Hutchens Bishop with guidance. The resulting 1911 blockbuster sale of St. Philip's midtown properties and the purchases of Harlem land and buildings placed Nail and Parker on the front page of *The New York Age*. In 1913 Nail (accompanied by a minister, most likely St. Philips' rector Hutchens Bishop) had advised the Harlem Board of Commerce that African Americans in Harlem had more property than they needed and therefore were unlikely to expand to new territory. Nail most likely believed this in 1913 since the population shifts brought on by World War I could not have been anticipated. In 1919 Nail and Parker played an important role in the expansion of African American homeownership in Harlem by brokering many of the purchases of townhouses within the King Model Houses development.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ "Recent Sales," *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, December 20, 1919, 636; "Recent Sales," *Record and Guide*, June 26, 1920, 843; "Recent Sales," *Record and Guide*, January 3, 1920, 13; *Record and Guide*, "Recent Sales," *Record and Guide*, February 14, 1920, 173; "Many Dwellings Sold for Occupancy," *New York Times*, April 16, 1920, 25; Kellner, 343; Osofsky, 118; Correspondence, John E. Nail Collection, Beinecke Library

⁶⁶ "Real Estate firm a Factor in Development of Harlem," *The New York Age*, December 20, 1919; Kellner, 259; Logan and Winston, 469-470; "Status of Harlem Negroes," *New York Times*, March 26, 1913, 19

Many of the buyers of Kings Model Houses in 1919 and 1920 were key figures in the African American community. *The Age* had noted the purchase of 260 West 138th by NAACP deputy field secretary William Pickens:

Among the latest investors in Harlem realty is William Pickens, the recently appointed associate field secretary of the N.A.A.C.P. Through Nail & Parker, Mr. Pickens has purchased from the Equitable Life Assurance Co., the three-story and basement brick dwelling with garage, at 260 West 139th street, and there he and Mrs. Pickens will make their New York residence.⁶⁷

A 1902 graduate of Yale, Pickens before joining the staff of the NAACP, had been a Vice President at Morgan State College, a black institution in Baltimore. Across the street from Pickens new home, Harry Pace had purchased 257 West 138th Street in December of 1919 for \$18,756.25. Pace was a partner in the music publishing firm Pace and Handy. His partner William C. Handy, a native of Memphis as was Pace, had transcribed blues songs, as well as created new compositions. One of his most famous, “St. Louis Blues,” was published in 1914. W.C. Handy purchased 232 West 139th Street on the same day as Pace’s purchase. Physician Wiley Wilson purchased 2354 7th Avenue in August of 1920. Wilson, had been a doctor at Freedman’s Hospital in Washington, D.C. but with partners had recently purchased the Edgecombe Sanatorium, on 7th Avenue one block from his new home. He had also recently married black hair care products heiress A’lelia Walker, daughter of Madam C.J. Walker.⁶⁸

Equitable facilitated the successful sale of the properties to black buyers by financing all of the purchases in 1919 and 1920. Buyers were able to purchase their properties with loans from Equitable in amounts ranging from \$4,500 on the West 138th Street block to \$14,000 for homes on the West 139th Street block. The terms of the loans varied. William Pickens, the NAACP official received a loan of \$4,500 from Equitable to purchase his home. Since other buyers on the

⁶⁷ “\$65,000 Apartment to be Opened; Pickens Buys Home in Harlem,” *The New York Age*, February 28, 1920, 1

⁶⁸ “Annual Statement of the Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States, Schedule A- Part 3, 1919; Equitable AXA Archives; “Weds Three Days After Burial of Her Mother,” *The New York Age*, June 14, 1919

same block received loans of up to \$8,700 for similar homes, Pickens may have made a substantial down payment as part of his purchase. The terms of the Pickens loan called for interest only payments at the rate of five percent to be made biannually with principal due on May 20, 1925. The terms of the loan made to musician W.C. Handy for his home at 232 West 139th Street were different. His loan of \$8,700 from Equitable called for monthly payments of one hundred dollars with a portion of this payment applied to reduce the principal, pay taxes and insurance on the property and cover interest (at six percent). The principal balance would be due after five years, but the terms included an option for Equitable to extend the payment of principal for another five years if the payment terms for the initial five years were followed. These terms were much more conservative than home purchase loans that Equitable was making across the country. Such loans were made at the comparable interest rate of six percent, but for terms of ten years. The King Model Houses loans, with shorter terms but options to extend, reflected Equitable's interest in mitigating its risk to black borrowers, who although they were middle class were more susceptible to economic reversals. The shorter terms for the black borrowers of King Model Houses allowed Equitable to evaluate the payment history of the borrowers and if it was not satisfactory terminate the loan at the end of the five year term.⁶⁹

The King Model Houses purchases were important symbols for African Americans in Harlem. By the census of 1920 ninety percent of the residents on the King Model Houses blocks West 138th and West 139th Street were African American. The acquisition of these homes by black businessmen, doctors, and lawyers and entertainers was celebrated by *The New York Age*, but some in the African American community, not so interested in promoting the goals of the

⁶⁹ Abstract Index, Mortgages, Blocks 2023, 2024, 2025; Mortgages, Liber 3157, 470; Liber 3122, 108, New York City Register; Minutes of the Finance Committee, Equitable Life assurance Society of the United States, Vol. XIII (October 1, 1918-August 26, 1919), Vol. XIV (September 2, 1919- April 27, 1920), Vol. XV (May 4, 1920-November 20, 1920)

black middle class, ridiculed the purchases as empty attempts to impress by striving for things beyond their means. In the 1920s some began to refer to the two blocks pejoratively as “Strivers’ Row.”⁷⁰

Conclusion

As early as 1907 white Harlem residents, such as restrictive covenant leader John G. Taylor, had attempted to contain the African American settlement in Harlem to an area south of West 135th Street and east of Lenox Avenue. Even with the collective organizing that the covenants represented, movement of blacks into previously all-white areas of Harlem continued to occur. Restrictive covenants with fifteen year terms were not effective and by the 1910s white residents had conceded to the northern expansion of the African American settlement. The King Model Houses blocks were not part of this collective movement. No restrictive covenants were filed by residents on the two blocks. With Equitable as the owner of most of the property within the development, a covenant between neighbors was not needed. Equitable’s corporate policy was sufficient to determine who would be able to rent or purchase Equitable’s homes. During the period from 1895 until 1918 Equitable implemented a policy that did not include selling or renting to African Americans. In 1919 when Equitable began selling to African Americans, the properties that it did not own on West 138th and West 139th Street blocks of King Model Houses, were occupied by white renters or owners who had not been long term residents of the block. Even more than in the neighborhoods in which the covenants failed, the white residents of the King Model Houses were of diverse backgrounds and therefore, while they may not have been

⁷⁰ Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920-Population, New York City, Enumeration District 1435; Pickens Buys Home in Harlem,” *The New York Age*, February 28, 1920, 1; Bruce Kellner, *The Harlem Renaissance: A Historical Dictionary for the Era*, (New York: Methuen, 1984), 343; In the 1920s the area was sometimes pejoratively referred to as “Striver’s Row” the home of black snobs. With the passage of time the pejorative nature of the name faded and the term Striver’s Row became a term of pride for the blocks’ residents and for many other Harlem residents;

happy with Equitable's actions from 1919 to 1920 in selling to African Americans, they were not unified long-time residents and therefore were not so passionate about remaining that they would have selected the Chicago strategy of attacking African American homes to retain control of their neighborhood. After 1919 King Model Houses would serve as symbols to some black Harlem residents of community control, stability, and middle class prosperity, while others viewed the development as symbols of materialistic excess.⁷¹

Harlem of the 1910s and 1920s is often depicted as a community of renters exploited by white outsiders. The reality is more complex. As the rent protests of 1916 indicated there were some black tenants who believed they were being exploited, but an additional source of their frustration was the fact that they believed black property owners and managers were their exploiters. While the rent increases they experienced were relatively large, they still were not sufficient to keep pace with the inflationary climate of the war years. African American property ownership in Harlem did grow dramatically in the second half of the 1910s. This black ownership, of apartment buildings, theaters, and of the King Model Houses, was publicized by *The New York Age* and viewed by its publisher, Harlem residents and blacks in other parts of the country as a sign that in Harlem African Americans had attained an unprecedented level of control of their own community.

This perspective was shared by one of Harlem's most talented leaders. At the beginning of 1920, James Weldon Johnson, then field secretary with the NAACP wrote an editorial entitled "The Future Harlem" for the *New York Age*. Johnson was well-suited to provide a broad perspective on both the past and future of African Americans in New York. He had first begun to

⁷¹ William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Summer of 1919*, (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 157-183; "St. Nicholas Historic District Designation Report," New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission.

visit New York at the turn of the century with his musician brother Rosamond when they frequented the midtown artists' hotel on 53rd Street while writing for the musical theater. A lawyer, writer, and lyricist, he was appointed consul to Venezuela and Nicaragua during the administration of Theodore Roosevelt. In 1916 He became field secretary to the NAACP. He was married to the sister of real estate broker John E. Nail which gave him particular insight and most likely a financial interest in Harlem real estate.⁷² In his editorial Johnson noted the importance of property ownership by African Americans and concluded that Harlem was different from the other areas of New York in which African Americans had lived previously:

In the older sections they owned only their churches. In Harlem they own not only their churches, but are fast buying homes; and not only homes, but large apartment houses.⁷³

With this broader ownership, and no undeveloped area of Manhattan to which to be pushed, Johnson concluded:

... I feel confident that the Negro is in Harlem to stay. And what a fine part of New York City he has come into possession of! High and dry, wide and beautiful streets, no alleys, no dilapidated buildings, a section of handsome private houses and of modern apartment and flat houses, a section right in the heart of the empire city of the world.⁷⁴

Johnson, a lawyer and former educator, presented his prediction from a firm, middle class perspective. Socialist A. Philip Randolph may have shared some elements of Johnson's prediction regarding the black presence in Harlem, but in criticizing "rent profiteering," and advocating the formation of tenants' leagues, Randolph acknowledged that lower income black Harlem residents faced challenges:

⁷² "N.A.A.C.P. Elects Johnson to New Place," *The New York Age*, December 21, 1916, 1; Kellner, 257

⁷³ James Weldon Johnson, "The Future Harlem," *New York Age*, January 10, 1920, 2

⁷⁴ *New York Age*, January 10, 1920, 2; in Johnson's 1930 book *Black Manhattan* he moderated his prediction of permanent African American residency in Harlem, suggesting that a move would occur at some point in the future but that African American property ownership would allow them to reap benefits through property sales that would enable them to move with resources

The remedy is not prayer; for as the prayers have ascended the rents have ascended also. It is not denunciations of landlords in mass meetings; we have too often met, resolved and adjourned. It is not race loyalty- a black landlord or agent will dispossess a Negro as quickly as a white landlord or agent.

Randolph suggested that the remedy was the taxation of land to spur owners to develop their vacant land in order to generate revenue from it to pay the tax. In the course of seeking ways to pay the taxes the land owners would build apartments that would address the housing shortage.⁷⁵

The acquisition of an increasing number of apartment buildings and homes in Harlem by African Americans in the 1910s gave African Americans a significant ownership interest in the community. The publicity of these acquisitions provided black New Yorkers with the impression that Harlem was not only the future primary area of settlement for black New Yorkers, but in contrast to other previous areas of settlement in New York, it was a community that they would control. Which blacks would control it, however, was not yet clear.

⁷⁵ "Rent Profiteering," *The Messenger*, July 1919, 6

Conclusion

From 1890 to 1920, the northern Manhattan community of Harlem changed from a village dominated by white middle class merchants and professionals, with a small settlement of black residents, to a densely built urban community that was called the Black Capital of America. Although the dramatic change in Harlem is often described as one of “invasion” by black newcomers and “resistance” by white Harlem residents, details of the real estate transactions of the period indicate a more complex reality which challenges some elements of the “ghetto formation” model used by many historians to describe similar changes taking place in many northern cities in the first decades of the 1900s.

A small number of blacks had resided in Harlem for decades before 1890 when most blacks in New York lived in areas of lower and midtown Manhattan. In the decades after the Civil War, as the midtown areas became overcrowded with the continued arrival of black migrants from the South and the Caribbean, the need to find other areas of settlement became increasingly important. Eventually Harlem became one of the areas of larger black settlement.¹ Whatever the ideology of white Harlem property owners regarding race, before 1900, when the numbers of blacks in Harlem were modest, some white property owners saw black renters as revenue generators. White real estate investors willingly rented apartments to blacks in certain locations in Harlem. An incentive for these investors was the fact that blacks’ limited housing choices meant that they could be charged premium rents for average housing, providing the owners with an attractive return on their investments. After 1900, hostility to blacks in Harlem

¹ “The Housing of the Negro in New York City,” Mary Rankin Cranston, *The Southern Workman*, June, 1902, 329; Ninth Census of the U.S., Population; Tenth Census of the U.S., Population; Eleventh Census of the U.S., Population; Twelfth Census of the U.S., Population

began to grow for two reasons. The value of the land on which the small apartment buildings of the 135th Street black settlement stood increased dramatically with the completion of New York's first subway system that included a stop at Lenox Avenue and 135th Street in the center of the then-small black enclave. Also, the numbers of blacks moving to Harlem quickly increased as the midtown enclave became more overcrowded due to continually increasing numbers of black migrants. Some of the owners of properties near the 135th Street subway stop, along with some of Manhattan's largest real estate investors, attempted to evict the same black residents who had been welcomed a decade earlier to the area. The growth in hostility toward blacks in Harlem that followed in the next years emanated from an even larger number of white property owners, many of whom lived in Harlem. Their defensive efforts were motivated by the increasing numbers of blacks attempting to move beyond Harlem's black enclave into areas previously off-limits to them.²

The presence of black residents in Harlem only became known as an invasion when their numbers increased dramatically after 1900, but the real estate transactions of Harlemites in the period after 1900 reveal that interracial relations between white Harlem residents and black newcomers were more diverse than the uniform white resistance to blacks in Harlem recounted in studies of Harlem such as Gilbert Osofsky's *Harlem: the Making of a Ghetto* or in Irma Watkins-Owens' *Blood Relations*. White residents and investors in Harlem were a diverse group whose actions regarding race were influenced by length of residency, social class, ethnicity, and personal world views. The inferior status of blacks in Harlem had been assumed by many

² *New York Age*, April 7, 1888, 3 regarding 2350 Second Avenue, 120th Street Station; *New York Age*, February 16, 1889, regarding 211 East 97th Street; *New York Age*, March 30, 1889, 3, regarding 366th 126th Street near Eighth Avenue; "Negro Invasion Threat Angers Flat Dwellers," *The New York Times*, July 27, 1906, 2; Conveyances, Section 7 Liber 128, 147, New York City Register; "Afro-American Realty," *New York Times*, July 27, 1904, 6

whites. African Americans in Harlem had previously been consigned to a black settlement because it was not thinkable that they would be integrated into the white community, even if they could afford to live there. When it became desirable to evict them in 1904, the black renters were characterized with a broad brush as troublemakers. The eviction attempts in Harlem were thwarted in large measure by the assistance of another group of white residents, German Americans who sold property to black investors, and provided financing for these purchases. This group of white residents, and the assistance they provided, has not been previously recognized. They were not opportunists seeking to buy properties at a discount from panicked fleeing whites, or to sell at a premium to blacks anxious to obtain decent housing. The financing the white sellers provided to the black buyers was of moderate length, and exposed the sellers to some financial risk. These were not the actions of people interested in making a quick dollar. The whites, such as August Ruff and Louis Partzchefeld, who assisted black purchasers were middle class, self-employed German Americans. The large German-American community that existed in New York in 1904 gave the white sellers the confidence to maintain perspectives on interracial relations that differed from some of their white neighbors, and to take actions that contradicted the desires of some of these neighbors. Active participants in the rich social life available to German American New Yorkers, they were not dependent on Harlem's non-German white residents for social acceptance.³

The German Americans were the most dramatic example of efforts made by white Harlem residents to accommodate blacks in Harlem. These unseen, white, small business owners who provided this financing prioritized class above race in entering into these transactions with

³ Osofsky, 105-123; Owens, 41; "Harlem Negro Colony to Fight Evictions," *New York Times*, May 2, 1904, 5; Manhattan Conveyances, Section 6, Liber 88, 183, Liber 86, 382; Stanley Nadel, *Little Germany: Ethnicity, Religion, and Class in New York City, 1845-80*, (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 9-35

blacks who were also entrepreneurs. The actions of the white business owners enabled blacks to acquire property in Harlem at a time when local newspapers were declaring that blacks in Harlem would be ousted even from Harlem's existing modest black enclave. Without these sales to black buyers, the black "invasion" could have been turned back, if not permanently, at least until some later date. These actions indicate that all white Harlem residents did not subscribe to the notion of black inferiority that would have justified either blacks' removal or restriction from residency in Harlem. The group of whites who facilitated this black real estate ownership in Harlem has been unrecognized in the historiography of Harlem, and similar groups have not been noted in accounts of neighborhood change of the period in other northern cities. It is possible that in other cities whites played similar roles, but historians' focus on the dominant anti-black racial ideologies of the era possibly prevented them from looking for, or seeing the differing white racial ideologies of those attempting to assist new black residents of northern cities. The presence of the group of white "facilitators" in Harlem indicates that access to Harlem real estate by blacks, particularly in the earlier cases, happened as a result of white and black agency rather than solely because of white panic. The efforts by some whites to co-exist with blacks in Harlem has been obscured by the much more visible actions of the whites who resisted black access to Harlem and then exited Harlem in panic when their efforts failed. Understanding the actions of both of these groups of whites in Harlem, and possibly in other cities, provides a more accurate picture of interracial relations and community formation of the period.⁴

The existence of business relationships between whites and blacks in Harlem, while modest in number, is significant, both symbolically and practically. The properties purchased by blacks provided them with anchors in the community. For hostile whites, the purchases

⁴ Osofsky, 105-110; Trow's General Directory of the Boroughs of Manhattan and Bronx, City of New York, 1097; Twelfth Census of the United States, Schedule No. 1- Population, New York City, Enumeration District 851, Sheet 15, 1900

represented flaws in their armor of resistance against black expansion in Harlem. The broader significance of the transactions is that they challenge several elements of the “ghetto formation” model used by authors ranging from Gilbert Osofsky in *Harlem the Making of a Ghetto*, to Alan Spear in *Black Chicago the Making of a Negro Ghetto*, to Kenneth Kusmer in *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* to describe the entry of increasing numbers of blacks to these communities. These works focused on the resistance to black entry into predominantly white neighborhoods, and the panicked selling that occurred once a few blacks gained entry. They also described the social problems that quickly overwhelmed these communities as they became overcrowded when racial discrimination caused more and more blacks migrating to these cities to be steered to these neighborhoods. Understanding that in Harlem there were cooperative business transactions between whites and blacks with long term financial relations that facilitated expanded black entry into these neighborhoods, leads one to consider in more detail the characteristics of the black buyers and the white sellers in Harlem as well as the nature of the communities that were being created by the new black residents in Harlem and in other cities.⁵

Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto is a landmark study of the community, but while Gilbert Osofsky provided a full picture of black real estate investor Philip Payton as a Harlem pioneer business operator, Osofsky quickly passed over the actual business deals of Payton, and more broadly the transitional period of the 1910s, to focus on a description of Harlem as a slum in the 1920s and 1930s. The transactions of Philip Payton and one of his partners, James C. Thomas, in which both purchased properties from white sellers who provided the men with mortgages of five to six years, challenge the notions that the black purchases were the result of panic selling or

⁵ Osofsky, 127-149; Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), vii-27; Kenneth Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930*, (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1976), pp. xi-xiii, 35-65

that the transactions were sales by white real estate investors intent on making a quick dollar on the way to precipitating a panic of selling among the remaining white residents.⁶

While panics did occur in Harlem and other cities, that result was not the intent of either the buyers or sellers in these transactions. Initially both groups envisioned a bi-racial residential community. In 1913, nine years after the purchases of the first key properties by blacks in Harlem, as the debate regarding the black presence increased among white residents, Erduin v.d.h. Koch, inheritor of Koch's Department Store on 125th Street and president of the Harlem Chamber of Commerce Harlem (and of German ancestry) stated at a public meeting that blacks should be able to live wherever they could afford. Most white residents did not agree with him, and as the black presence in Harlem grew in the 1910s, the well-publicized notion that such an outcome would be calamitous for white Harlem generated fear and panic. Block by block real estate values dropped dramatically as blacks began to move to previously all-white blocks. Because of the ethnic, religious, and class diversity of Harlem's white community, and the fairly recent residency of some white residents, a unified resistance to black entry to the community could not be sustained even by racial restrictive covenants or legal challenges to those who violated the covenants. A self-fulfilling prophecy was created as many white residents rushed to leave before the values of their properties declined further. Blacks (and some whites) purchased properties at bargain prices. The scenario repeated itself on a series of Harlem blocks in the first decades of the twentieth century. As blacks first entered areas, prices dropped, only to rise again as blacks' demand for housing pushed prices often above what they had been before. In many cases these new owners, blacks and whites, when renting properties to African Americans were

⁶ Osofsky, 92-104; "Bronx Cars to Come to Harlem, Colored Question Taken Up by Board." *Harlem Magazine*, April, 1913, 21-22; Conveyances, Section 6, Liber 86, 346-347; Liber 86, 382-383, Liber 84, 379-380, Liber 87, 432-343, Liber 90, 388-389, New York City Register; Conveyances, Section 6, Liber 87, 95, New York City Register

able to charge premium rents because of the demand by blacks to live in Harlem and the limited choices available to them to live elsewhere in New York. As whites left Harlem in the 1910s, blacks' vision of the community shifted. They began to promote Harlem as a black community.⁷

The *New York Age* newspaper was a leading advocate of Harlem's new black property owners' vision of Harlem as a black community that would be different from the "black settlements" previously occupied by African Americans in New York. The *Age* suggested that in Harlem blacks would be able to purchase quality properties and to participate in the management of the community. Understanding the social class of the black purchasers of the townhouses and apartment buildings in Harlem in the 1910s, leads one to consider the nature of the newly forming northern black neighborhoods as black *communities* before they were categorized as ghettos. The black people making the substantial investments in real estate in Harlem expected to obtain homes for themselves or a reasonable return on their investments. Many of the black investors also sought to protect these investments by strengthening the community around them. The establishment of black churches, the quest for elective office by black community leaders, and the promotion of more black property ownership were parts of this process of community formation that is underemphasized by some historians when the analysis of the racial transition in northern cities has focused on the problems that eventually emanated from these communities. Considering the transitional period of Harlem in the 1910s in detail through the lens of real estate

⁷ "Status of Harlem Negroes," *New York Times*, March 26, 1913, 19; "Negro Invasion Has Cut Property Values in Half," *Harlem Home News*, August, 7, 1913, 7; "Fight Against Raised Rents," *The New York Age*, October 5, 1916, 1; Seth M. Scheiner, *Negro Mecca: A History of the Negro in New York City, 1865-1920*, (New York: New York University Press, 1965), 11-12;

transactions provides a better understanding of the basic elements of the community before it was overwhelmed by continuing population increases.⁸

In addition to residential properties, during the 1910s black churches became important vehicles in establishing a black presence in Harlem. The resistance of departing white congregations to selling their buildings to black congregations, even though many white congregations were unable to sustain themselves as their congregants moved away, illustrates the depth of their reluctance to relinquish control of properties that were viewed by both blacks and whites as symbols of their claims to the community. The black purchase of churches was another element of the ownership movement that served to anchor blacks in Harlem.⁹

In the 1910s, the substantial black population in several Harlem districts became the political base for New York City's first black candidates. This population, through its patronage of black businesses, provided the business owners who became candidates, with a measure of economic independence that allowed them to even consider running for office. The first black candidates for the board of aldermen from Harlem in 1913 were John Royall, a real estate broker, and James E. Anderson, publisher of the *Amsterdam News* a black newspaper. Although neither was successful, they viewed the political offices as opportunities to improve the economic interests of their constituents and themselves. In 1919 two other African American businessmen,

⁸ "Payton Closes Harlem Realty Deal Involving Million and a Half Dollars," *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, 1, 7; "Incorporate \$750,000 Real Estate Firm," *The New York Age*, January, 26, 1918, 1-2; "The Future of Harlem," James Weldon Johnson, *New York Age*, January 10, 1920, 2; Osofsky, 127-149, 189-201

⁹ Penelope Tuttle, *History of St. Luke's Church*, (New York: Appeal Printing Company, 1926), 208-255; Notes-Standing Committee of the Diocese of New York, March 3, 1910, 75, April 7, 1910, 87, Episcopal Diocese of New York Archives; In the Matter of the Application of the Church of the Redeemer in the City of New York for leave to sell its Real Estate, June 13, 1910, Supreme Court, New York County

Charles Roberts, a dentist, and *New York News* editor George W. Harris, editor of the *New York News*, were elected to the Board of Alderman as Republican candidates.¹⁰

The role of black property ownership as an indicator of community formation has not been explored in detail. Descriptions of many neighborhood transitions in northern cities suggest that the new black residents were primarily renters. This was true of Harlem, but what has not been recognized in earlier accounts is the significant number of black investors who owned the multi-family buildings in Harlem that were then rented to black tenants. To solidify the community, by the mid 1910s a real estate ownership campaign was under way in which a number of large properties were purchased by blacks and well-publicized in *The New York Age*. By the end of the decade black investors owned over thirty apartment buildings containing more than one thousand apartment units. While these units were approximately two percent of the 46,000 apartment units in the area from 130th Street to 155th Street, the close proximity of these buildings, in the heart of Harlem's black community, made these acquisitions significant for black residents. The buildings reinforced the vision of Harlem as a black-controlled community. As blacks became more of a presence in Harlem during the 1910s, details of their real estate transactions illustrate the various ways that some black investors appealed to race to their benefit. In some cases while managing or leasing properties owned by whites, they gave the

¹⁰ Nineteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Bulletin, Population: New York Composition and Characteristics of the Population, Table V, New York City, 45; "Negroes Rally Around Royall," *The New York Age*, October 2, 1913, 1; "Editor Anderson is Certain of One Vote for Alderman," *Harlem Home News*, September 28, 1913, 1; "Race Candidates are Nominated in Harlem," *The New York Age*, September 27, 1917, 1; "Thomas and Johnson are Elected in Harlem," *The New York Age*, November 8, 1917, 1; "Harris Wins in New York Primary Fight," *The Chicago Defender* (Big Weekend Edition), September 6, 1919, 5; "Alderman Harris Wins Market and Bathhouse," *The Chicago Defender*, (Big Weekend Edition), July 24, 1920, 2

impression that they owned the properties and that their business activities, such as charging premium rents, were furthering racial progress.¹¹

In the closing years of the decade, the ownership movement was expanded beyond apartment buildings to individual townhouses when Equitable Life Assurance Society sold over ninety King Model Houses townhouses to black middle class buyers. The sales, and Equitable's provision of financing for these purchases had a dramatic impact on Harlem's miniscule homeownership ranks. The entertainers and professionals who purchased the homes helped to inspire the nickname of "Striver's Row" for the enclave, a term that was used to express derision, envy, and admiration.¹²

At the root of the changes that occurred in Harlem from 1890 to 1920 were population shifts, most notably an increase in the number of African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans moving to New York. Although high rents caused overcrowding in some parts of Harlem by the 1910s, before 1920 Harlem was viewed by many as a place of possibilities. James Weldon Johnson optimistically suggested in his "The Future Harlem" editorial in 1920, that those moving to Harlem did so with an air of anticipation. Johnson's vision was from the firmly middle-class perspective of an official of the NAACP whose brother-in-law John Nail was one of the leading real estate brokers in Harlem. But there were alternative black visions for Harlem. Black tenants who organized against rent increases did not admire the black investors who owned their

¹¹ Woofter, 136-141; "Payton Closes Harlem Realty Deal Involving Million and a Half Dollars," *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, 1, 7; Advertisement, *New York Age*, August 16, 1917, 2; "Incorporate \$750,000 Real Estate Firm," *The New York Age*, January, 26, 1918; "More Harlem Homes for Colored People," *New York Times*, March 26, 1911, xxi; "Real Estate Field," *New York Times*, July 28, 1917, 14; "Real Estate Field," *New York Times*, September 28, 1917, 16; "Negro Apartments," *New York Times*, November 18, 1917, RE10; "Real Estate Field," *New York Times*, March 14, 1918, 20; "Real Estate Field," *New York Times*, August 21, 1918, 14

¹² Abstract Index, Mortgages, Blocks 2023, 2024, 2025; Mortgages, Liber 3157, 470; Liber 3122, 108, New York City Register; Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 4, 405, Liber 10, .63, Liber 2362, 237, Liber 10, 63, New York City Register; New York City Land Marks Preservation Commission, St. Nicholas Historic District, Manhattan, Designation Report, March 16, 1967, Number 2, LP-0322, 3-5;

buildings and who they believed were exploiting them. A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen used *The Messenger* to criticize the actions of black real estate investors for rent profiteering. Their vision for Harlem was imbued with the concepts of cooperative housing and other interventions that would allow poor black people in Harlem to live lives of dignity, something denied to them in their previous New York settlements.¹³

By 1920 in Harlem, for the first time black New Yorkers occupied quality housing. They expected Harlem to become a well-functioning city within a city. Although black Harlem existed because of segregation customs, within the community this second class citizenship could often be forgotten. Considering Harlem before the 1920s and 1930s, when it became increasingly overcrowded, is important because in doing so the basic elements of the formation of Harlem as a black community with churches, newspapers, political aspirants, and property owners can clearly be seen. These elements which continued to exist even among the problems that developed later, are often obscured because of the focus on the problems in Harlem and other communities in 1920s and succeeding decades.¹⁴

The year 1920 was the beginning of another phase in Harlem's formation as a black community. Although the area from 135th to 145th Streets, Lenox to 8th Avenues) had a predominantly black population by 1920, and some blacks also owned businesses there, many of the businesses continued to be white-owned. The Don't Buy Where You Can't Work Campaign on 125th Street in the 1930s, in which blacks picketed and boycotted stores that would not hire blacks, would attest to the stubbornness of the racial hierarchy in employment in area businesses.

¹³ James Weldon Johnson, "The Future Harlem," *New York Age*, January 10, 1920, 2; "Rent Profiteering" *The Messenger*, July, 1919, 6; "Why Negroes Should Be Socialists," *The Messenger*, October 1919, 15; "How to Reduce High Rents," *The Messenger*, November, 1919, 10; "Rent Boosting," *The Messenger*, April-May, 1920, 2-3; ¹⁴ "The Future Harlem," *The New York Age*, January 10, 1920, 2 ; Rufus Schatzberg, Robert Kelly, *African American Organized Crime: A Social History*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 93-94; Sacks, 97-100;

Other residential areas of Harlem also remained predominantly white. The Hamilton Heights area of the 140s west of St. Nicholas Avenue and the Mt. Morris Park area of the 120s near Lenox Avenue maintained a predominant white presence into the 1930s.¹⁵

Many of the principals in the racial battle for Harlem did not live to see the positive and negative changes. Philip Payton founder of the Afro-American Realty Company died in 1917 before his biggest real estate deal, the purchase of buildings on 141st and 142nd Streets, could be completed. John G. Taylor died in 1914 in the middle of the challenges to the restrictive covenant, but his widow, Agnes remained true to the cause. Although she remarried, she adhered to the restrictive covenant that she had signed in 1910. By the 1920s, the 136th Street block of the home John G. Taylor had purchased in 1903 was almost one hundred percent black, but Taylor's widow did not sell 213 West 136th Street, until 1925 when the term of the covenant expired.¹⁶

Erduin Koch, whose father had moved Koch's Dry Goods store to 125th Street in 1891, died in 1928. At the time of his death he was no longer living in Harlem, but on East Ninety-second Street near Fifth Avenue. In the 1913 he had disagreed with his business colleagues and suggested that blacks should be able to live anywhere in Harlem that they could afford. By the 1920s his store had adopted a policy that was much more restrictive toward blacks than this philosophy would suggest. Koch's obituary in *The New York Herald Tribune* mentioned his

¹⁵“Distribution of Negro in Harlem, 1913, 1920, 1926,” Maps of the NY Urban League; Philip A. Klinkner, Roger M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 144-145; Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York After 1950*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 99-100

¹⁶“Payton Closes Harlem Realty Deal Involving Million and a Half Dollars,” *New York Age*, July 12, 1917, 1, 7; Advertisement, *New York Age*, August 16, 1917, 2; “Payton Buried at Westfield,” *New York Age*, September 6, 1917; “John G. Taylor, Foe of Harlem Negro Has Passed Away,” *Harlem Home News*, February 8, 1914, 1; Conveyances, Section 7, Liber 159, 36-38, Liber 3196, 151-152;

business as well as his hobby of horse racing. *The New York Amsterdam News* was more direct.

A few years later in describing the store, it noted that as a business

Koch's paid scant attention to the Negro trade. Due to a feeling that they were not wanted as patrons, many persons living in Harlem patronized smaller stores and downtown companies...At no time did the Koch store advertise with Negro newspapers.¹⁷

The store was sold in 1930 to clothing wholesaler A. Schaap & Sons and reopened in 1934 as a desegregated store.¹⁸

Some Harlem investors experienced business challenges. In the mid 1920s E. C. Brown who had purchased the Payton Apartments on 141st and 142nd Streets experienced a number of reversals. In 1921 he had to sell the Dunbar Theater that he had built in Philadelphia, and then a 1925 run on his Brown and Stevens bank pushed him close to financial ruin. He retreated to Harlem where his Philadelphia creditors complained about the lavishness of his new office. He died in 1928 still trying to reorganize his financial affairs for a business comeback.¹⁹

For those who did survive to see Harlem become the Black Capitol, the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression of the 1930s were tremendous obstacles to the formation of Harlem as the thriving black community that people such as James Weldon Johnson hoped it would be. The vision of A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen of a Harlem that served poor people became much more relevant during the Depression. Many of the black ownership gains that were made in Harlem in the 1910s and 1920s were lost as the entire nation suffered from record unemployment and a disastrous economy. The black elite real estate firm of Nail and

¹⁷ "Erduin Koch,, 56, Merchant and Horseman, Dies," *New York Herald Tribune* , December 4, 1928, 25; "Koch Store Sold," *The New York Amsterdam News*, August 27, 1930, 3

¹⁸ Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 118; "Harlem's Pioneer Department Store Sold," *New York Times*, August 22, 1930, 9; "Koch Store Sold," *New York Amsterdam News*, August 27, 1930, 3

¹⁹ Bernard L. Peterson, *The African American Theater Directory, 1816-1960*, (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997), 61-62;"The Dunbar Theater," <http://www.explorepahistory.com/hmarker.php?markerId=538> "Private Bank Loss Runs in High Figures," 2/29/2008; *The Chicago Defender*, February 28, 1925, 5; "Hold Funeral Services for Noted Banker," *Chicago Defender*, January 28, 1928, 4

Parker, one of the largest firms in Harlem went bankrupt. Although John Nail started another firm, the old prominence was never regained. African Americans continued to move to Harlem which became increasingly overcrowded, and with limited job prospects, increasingly poor.²⁰

The 1935 riot on 125th Street in which blacks went on a rampage, sparked by the unfounded rumor that a young boy had been killed by a department store security guard, created a marker for the era of Harlem as a problem-ridden community. Dr. Charles Roberts, the Harlem dentist who, along with newspaper editor George W. Harris, in 1919 became New York City's first black alderman, was asked by Mayor Fiorella LaGuardia to chair the Mayor's Commission on Conditions in Harlem exploring the causes of the riot. The report, never officially released, found that discrimination, racism and poverty were the underlying causes of the disturbance.²¹

Long before anyone could have imagined a black riot on West 125th Street, in 1891 Henry C.F. Koch moved his dry goods store to Harlem from Sixth Avenue. The store flourished there as the community continued to grow as a predominantly white, middle class enclave. Over the next three decades Harlem was transformed into the largest black community in the world. Most other northern cities experienced variations of the changes experienced in New York City. While these transformations have typically been described as "invasions" by blacks and "resistance" by whites, the changes in Harlem, and most likely in the other cities as well, were more complex. On both sides of the color line class, ethnicity, politics, and economics dictated a range of strategies to either facilitate or forestall racial change in Harlem. The ownership and occupancy of real estate, long the symbol of citizenship in the United States, was the critical element in implementing and understanding these strategies.

²⁰ Rayford Logan and Michael R. Winston, *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 469-470

²¹ Klinkner and Smith, 145; Former Harlem alderman Dr. Charles Roberts chaired the mayoral commission investigating the 1935 riots- "Harlem Riot Laid to Economic Ills," *The New York Times*, March 26, 1935, 5; Nina Mjagkij, *Organizing Black America* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2001), 521

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