THE ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN MUNCIE, INDIANA FROM 1870-1920

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This study focuses on the economic and community development of African Americans in Muncie, Indiana following emancipation, specifically 1870-1920. The following thesis uses primary and secondary sources to explore the advancement of African Americans within the city of Muncie; a city located in Delaware County, Indiana. It explores the economic choices that African Americans were pursuing shortly after slavery and demonstrates the overall community growth of African Americans in Muncie during the rising industrial era that transformed this area.

The economic change from agrarian to industrial in Muncie helped to create pockets of opportunity for many migrants. This thesis explores the influence of African American migration into Muncie, while also pointing out the type of economic and social choices that African Americans were selecting due to their newly found freedoms; a progression from mainly manual labor to specialized types of employment and business ownership. It discusses some of the factors found within Muncie that allowed for African Americans to establish their livelihood, and be a part of the growth of the Muncie community overall.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The journey to know our heritage represents a profound desire to see ourselves in the continuum of history on a family, community, national, or global level. It is a quest to know more about ourselves and to share that knowledge with others through a variety of means.

-Antoinette Jackson

This thesis presents a glimpse of African-American heritage during a period of time that was not always discussed as significantly as that of slavery and the Civil Rights Movement but nevertheless was, and is, significant to our understanding of the American past (Brown 1994; Gilmore 2010; Jackson 2012; Levine 1978; Rowe 2009). As such, it considers post-Civil War African American life leading into the Great Migration; a time where African Americans moved in very large proportions northward in order to find fresh opportunities (Wilkerson 2010). Furthermore, the following pages will point out that Muncie Indiana’s early African American community, specifically 1870 through 1920, produced rapid expansion in both economic and social development; a place that, during a time of immense bigotry, seemed to provide a less harmful environment for African Americans and helped to encourage the growth and development of the overall community. It will do so by presenting a case study of African American life during the postbellum era in the Midwest.

The initial idea behind this thesis came about during an ethnohistory class, where a professor, Dr. Cailín Murray, had mentioned research that was taking place at the local library. A retired professor, Dr. Elizabeth Glenn, notified Dr. Murray of a data set that she then offered as a possible thesis topic. While researching information at the local library, Dr. Glenn came across a lawsuit that involved the two sons of a former slave-turned landowner. The data set brought forth
was a court case, McWilliams vs. McWilliams, involving a land dispute between the two sons of Asbury McWilliams, Sr.: James McWilliams and Sonnie Daniels. The example of a former slave who was able to acquire land so quickly after the end of slavery became the motivating factor behind researching other types of economic and social strides African Americans were making in Muncie; and what, if anything, about the town of Muncie may have helped African Americans like McWilliams acquire property so quickly during the postbellum period. It is within this time period, the “golden age” of African American business development (Walker 1998:224), that this thesis begins exploring the economic, community, and social development of African Americans in Muncie, Indiana.

Even before the Civil Rights Movement, many African Americans began to incorporate into communities and became successful citizens as they transitioned into freedom (Gilmore 2010). During the onset of emancipation, many factors were in place to halt African Americans from establishing any type economic and social development, but interestingly enough many scholars have been studying early African American participation within the working and middle-class for some time (Leone 2005; Mullins 1999; Paynter et al.). This thesis helps illuminate a significant time in Muncie’s African American expansion, to show how former slaves like McWilliams helped to form a stable and economically sound community for future African Americans and the population, overall.

**Why Muncie?**

Muncie was primarily an agricultural town that was established as a city in 1865 (Historic Muncie 2012). As the United States began to move towards industrialism, Muncie followed suit after the discovery of the Trenton Gas Field in mid-1880s. Following this discovery, Muncie’s overall growth began to spike as large-scale businesses such as metal factories and eventually the
Ball Brothers Glass Manufacturing Company settled here (Blocker 2008:209). The types of businesses moving into the area brought in economic opportunities for any migrants willing to follow. By the end of the study period for this thesis, Muncie was a town of prosperity, “Fueled by the expansion of the auto and glass industries” (Geelhoed 2000:7). Eventually Muncie became a hub for industry, which would ultimately be a determining factor in the Lynd’s famous study of Middletown, resulting in Muncie becoming the “[S]ocial laboratory of the United States” (Geelhoed:10).

During the 1920s, Robert and Helen Lynd embarked on a social research project to explore the life of urban America. The town they selected as representative of “mainstream” America was Muncie, Indiana, which was later tagged, “Middletown” (Figure 1.1). While writing their iconic monograph, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* (1929), the Lynd’s sought out six features of the common American town: Getting a Living, Making a Home, Training the Young, Using Leisure, Engaging in Community Activities, and Engaging in Religious Practices. While these categories considered many important aspects of life in America, the Lynd’s neglected a fundamental category – ethnic and racial diversity.

In 2004, this oversight was partly corrected when a group of faculty and students from Ball State University joined political leaders and community members to develop a collaborative ethnographic and oral history project, to study the life of the African American population in Muncie. This project resulted in, *The Other Side of Middletown: Exploring Muncie’s African American Community* (Lassiter et al. 2004). Although this work addressed the Lynd’s’ omission of racial and ethnic diversity, Lassiter et al. (2004) did not include the historical background of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that influenced the arrival of African Americans to the Midwest. This would include a critical time period directly following the Civil War and
Figure 1.1. Map of Muncie, Indiana (Present Day). Courtesy Mike Stults (created via MapPoint).
the abolishment of slavery; also a part of “the Great Migration” from the southern states to the north (Blocker 1996; Wilkerson 2010).

This study addresses these exclusions by reconstructing African American experiences in Muncie during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It does so by building on Lassiter et al.’s (2004) study and considering an earlier period in Indiana’s African American history. This ethnohistoric study will examine the growth of the African American community in Muncie by focusing on the economic, community, and social development amongst African Americans from 1870 through 1920. It will consider African American assemblage in Muncie and how they confronted new economic and societal challenges in a social climate where they were recognized as free citizens and, at the same time, subjected to overt and covert forms of intolerance, racism, and violence.

After the Emancipation Proclamation was signed in 1863, fewer than 8 percent of African Americans could be found living in the Midwest and Northeast (Library of Congress 2010). During the decades following the Civil War, these numbers would increase drastically. Although census data will be analyzed in later chapters, it is important to briefly discuss Muncie’s African American population and how it contributed to Muncie’s overall growth and demographic shift.

The following population counts were obtained by an analysis of United States Census data from 1870 through 1920. During this period, the population of African Americans in Muncie resulted in an overall increase of 3,850 percent (Figure 1.2). Although heavily outnumbered by Whites during this time, one can see a steady growth of African Americans in Muncie. One can also see that when compared to a similar-sized town nearby (i.e. Anderson, Indiana), Muncie’s African American growth was much larger shortly following the 1870 census (Figure 1.3); the end result being Muncie outweighing Anderson’s African American population
Figure 1.2. African American vs. White Population Growth in Muncie, Indiana 1870-1920

(United Status Bureau of the Census)
Figure 1.3. Muncie’s African American Population vs. Anderson’s African American Population Growth, 1870-1920 (United Status Bureau of the Census)
growth by 183 percent by the close of the 1920s. So what was it about Muncie that drew large numbers of African Americans to this town specifically?

At least some African Americans were making strides in Muncie regardless of the difficult circumstances that surrounded them; despite racism that would still be a part of their lives, they were able to succeed in this area. By examining the experiences of some African Americans in central Indiana’s late Victorian period, this thesis will further contextualize African American economic and social experiences in state and urban history. In doing so, it is hopeful that others will gain a stronger understanding of how African Americans entered an independent working class in central Indiana and contributed to the overall growth of the state. By revealing pieces of the African American experience in Muncie, anthropology will have gained a better understanding regarding what helped to shape African American identity in central Indiana.

The end of Asbury McWilliams’ life is the foundation of the theme established in this thesis, and will later portray an example of an ex-slave acquiring enough funds following slavery to own land and pursue a lifestyle that is worth mentioning. This story, along with additional oral histories, illustrates some challenges and achievements that African Americans experienced in Indiana following emancipation. It draws upon primary sources consisting of census data, archival records, oral history, historical maps, and photographic analysis in order to better understand life that African Americans may have been experiencing in the Midwest during this time. By paring primary and secondary sources, the emergence of Muncie’s African American community will be highlighted.

This thesis will include the following:

1. A “reconstruction” of the economic, community, and social development of an identifiable population: African Americans. It will seek to find what type
of occupations African Americans in Muncie were obtaining during the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries. More specifically, this thesis will be analyzing census data to show the types of employment taking place among African Americans in Muncie, and the changes of employment opportunities from 1870 through 1920. Utilizing the census data will help to focus on the development from the general workforce to entrepreneurship and specialized forms of employment in Muncie’s African American community.

2. The types of community and social developments taking place in Muncie during the period under study, and what types of factors allowed for Muncie to develop a strong African American community during a period in American history of abundant discrimination and racism.

In chapter two the theory, methods, and literature used in this thesis are discussed in order to lay the foundation of research and showcase what methods were utilized to help shape this study. In chapter three the analysis of census data is brought forth in order to understand the development of African American population and economic growth in Muncie. Chapter four presents the case study of Asbury McWilliams Sr., as well as the inclusion of supplementary African American oral histories. It does so to better develop a representation of African American economic power, social choice, and community in Muncie from 1870 through 1920. Chapter four further explains Muncie’s attractiveness, and how this city was considered to be “less toxic” in terms of violent acts of racism. It explains why African Americans came to this city in substantial numbers, enough so that they could create a critical mass to support businesses, churches and institutions, which in turn lead to further progress. It exhibits African American progress, including collective
progress, during a time where direct political action was mostly limited, if not entirely nonexistent.

The results of this thesis illustrates how Muncie’s African Americans made an effort to obtain all that was afforded, and were able to do so by developing power of economic and community/social choices. As a result, their community was able to develop at a rate greater than other larger cities during this same time period (Blocker 1996:304). It supports other literature showing how African Americans made noteworthy progress both economically and socially; building institutions, businesses, and gaining an economic foothold to help create the stage for more direct political action. The thesis being presented is to create a greater understanding of the African American development in Muncie after emancipation, to show how this time period helped lead the way to larger events (e.g. the Civil Rights Movement). It is designed to help highlight Muncie’s African American heritage, and what it meant for this group to move towards greater economic, community, and social development one day at a time.
CHAPTER 2

AMBITIOUS BEGINNINGS: THEORY, METHODS, & LITERATURE REVIEW

The general laws of migration hold that the greater the obstacles and the farther the distance traveled, the more ambitious the migrants.

-Isabel Wilkerson

African Americans participating in the Great Migration would be argued as, “[T]he most resilient of those who left, and among the most resourceful of blacks in the North” (Wilkerson 2010:264). Numerous African Americans migrated to smaller towns, like Muncie, rather than larger cities, as these types of rural settings felt more like home and was a place where they were able to obtain employment in familiar areas (Blocker 1996:297-298; also see Blocker 2008). Furthermore, many of these northern cities offered better recreation, entertainment, and an overall better quality of life (Grim 2001; Tolnay 2003). These factors played vital roles in encouraging African American migration to new communities.

This chapter will consider ethnohistory as an interdisciplinary endeavor in the context of African American emancipation, the Great Migration, and economic, community, and social development (i.e. literature). The final portion of this chapter will focus on how the time period following the abolition of slavery (chiefly postbellum America into the 1920s) changed the fabric of American life.

Understanding Ethnohistory: Methods and Social Theory

Much damage has been caused due to early theories and methods that influenced the way in which culture is viewed and written about (Simmons 1988:2). However, as a means to
revealing everyday life in the past, not all scholars and studies have relied on written history alone. Often early written historical documents have taken on some type of partiality, as focusing beyond what has been written can be extremely complex (Trouillot 1997). But by identifying meaningful “silences” within the historical record, it enables us to better understand the points of view of those cultures under study and gain a stronger understanding about culture as a whole (Trouillot 1997). In application of this, it has helped to frame what the African American community was like during the late 19th and early 20th century in Muncie.

Harrison and Harrison (1999) point out that, “Unveiling and recovery of subjugated knowledge [is] a critical aspect of any transformative anthropological project, especially with respect to African Americans” (in Jackson 2011:449). The world is filled with unique stories of and each person should have the right to tell his or her story regardless of the period of time in which the account took place, or the ethnicity of the storyteller. By dismissing these stories, a narrow vision of the past is often established (Jackson 2012), and many important pieces of the past become lost or overshadowed.

Ethnohistory uses an interdisciplinary approach that borrows from archaeology, ethnography, and history, primarily in order to produce a stronger portrait of the past (Simmons 1988:10). For this reason ethnohistory is significant, as it principally involves applying techniques and methods for studying cultures that are less represented within written sources: American Indians, ethnic minorities, the poor and women, for example. It incorporates the use of primary sources and is interdisciplinary as it pulls concepts and approaches from other fields of study (Axtell 1979; Barber and Berdan 1998; Carmack 1972; Euler 1972; Hickerson 1988; Whiteley 2004). It is thus argued that the understanding of culture is greater when both anthropology and history are combined (Whiteley 2004:508). By incorporating many different
avenues of study, ethnohistory is one tool for recovering historical experiences of ordinary and marginal groups of people, which in turn enrich anthropology as a whole.

In ethnohistory, one must look to both events and non-events, as both are needed to help fully understand the past (Fogelson 1989). Though events take place every day, not all events are recorded or documented. That said does the lack of documentation create a non-event, in which case it should be disregarded; or is it that non-events, when under study, create a better understanding of the past? By using “non-events”, where the interest has shifted away from political history to classes or categories of people (Fogelson 1989:138), we can begin to see layers of cultural development, thus viewing the past as multi-layered “non-events” rather than one singular event.

While the understanding of the past is greater when combining many avenues of research, and recognizing the significance of both events and non-events (Fogelson 1989), Antoinette Jackson digs deeper by stating that, “Each generation asks how these stories are reflected in the public record and by whose authority” (2012:21). Many times those involved in documenting the past were scholars, researchers, and those of power – not necessarily the individuals for whom the history was being written. This is what Michael-Rolph Trouillot (1997) means when he explains that history is what has happened, but history also is what is said to have happened. Therefore, the documentation of the past is an interpretive record of experiences and perceptions, or many types of narratives that all serve, to some degree, as truth (Trouillot 1997).

Perception can be described as a way in which the past is perceived and knowledge of the past is understood (Krech 1991:363). The perceived knowledge of the past is where ethnohistorians need to look further by utilizing many avenues of research and design (Sturtevant 1966; Barber and Berdan 1998). In other words, it is beneficial that ethnohistorians study both
documents and living people in order to effectively understand the development of culture through time, and the type of forces that shape the culture under study (Carmack 1972:227). For this thesis, archival records (e.g. previous interviews, newspapers, maps, etc.) and census data will provide insight on the lives of African Americans in Muncie. By adding greater historical depth to the Middletown Studies projects, this study will strengthen the understanding of African American experiences in the postbellum Midwest and by revealing the past histories of a race that has often been underrepresented in studies of the past (Brown 1994; Jackson 2012; Levine 1978; Rowe 2009).

The type of research for this thesis uses both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Both numerical data from the 19th century U.S. Census figures and primary source documents have been considered. Furthermore, the methods used in this study are diachronic, in that it shows African American change over time (Carmack 1972; Krech 1991) in Muncie. Robert Bee points out that, “Time is thus a relative consideration – relative to the task the analyst wishes to accomplish…it is a necessary consideration in any study of change” (1974:17). Thus, this diachronic approach fits nicely within the characteristics of ethnohistory, as it provides an emphasis of change over time; a period of time representing old and new, showing culture change at a gradual, but continuous, level (Dark 1957:237).

While census data provides a detailed description of U.S. populations during a study period, it also poses problems of inconsistency and miscounts (Jackson and Burns 2004:23). This is because many people did not participate in census taking. To help strengthen these inconsistencies, oral histories and other primary sources found through archival research will be utilized for this thesis. These types of histories are essential for research, as it includes recollections and experiences of living people (Mintz and Price in Jackson 2011:450). Jackson
further goes on to explain that, “Knowledge created through stories, observations, lived experiences, and critiques offered by the people impacted by our work is an active act of participation in shaping public memory…” (Jackson 2011:450).

Ethnohistory has created a new way of thinking and by doing so has helped to salvage the accounts of many groups of people. Despite the fact that these “silenced” groups (Trouillot 1997) have played a large part in the past, they have been condemned to look on as spectators while more widely held accounts overshadow their own. Ethnohistory attempts to avoid such obstacles by incorporating the voices of those who have lived the past, rather than by those who have only analyzed it.

**Emancipation, the Great Migration, and Economic and Community/Social Development: Literature Review**

The emancipation of African Americans, and their movement from the Southern states to the North during the Great Migration, “[W]ould transform urban America and recast the social and political order of every city it touched” (Wilkerson 2010: 9; also see Tolnay 2003). Although African Americans could be found existing in northern cities before this time, during the Great Migration roughly half of the African American population began moving away from the sharecropping south and towards the industrial north (Baker 1998:128). During reconstruction and America’s Great Migration, African Americans created a mass exodus from the only homes they had known in order to change their future. In many cases, African Americans would seek out destinations where there was money to be made (Wilkerson 2010:57), and with the hopes that the overall landscape would be less hazardous than what they had previously experienced.

Following slavery, the economic, social, and legal adjustments that both African Americans and non-African Americans made changed American society as a whole (O’Malley
African Americans knew that in order to advance into this “new” America, they would need to practice “‘[S]elf-improvement of the individual” (Cooper 1999:107; also see Butler 1991), which is to say that they now needed to seize control of their future. Over the course of six decades, six million Black Southerners voluntarily migrated to other portions of the United States (Wilkerson 2010: 9). Of this number, and specifically during the years of the Great Migration, over 50,000 migrants came to Indiana (Blocker 1996:299), and by the 1920s Muncie’s black community was proportionately larger overall than other black communities found in separate northern cities (Blocker 1996:304). Needless to say, African American migration was persistent.

Fogelson (1989) examines the idea of persistence within Native American communities. His findings can be related to the early development of African Americans. After slavery, African Americans began reshaping their way of life to help with their progression and survival. In the case of Native Americans, Fogelson explains, “History, so viewed, is not something that happens to Indians; it might better be conceived as a potent force that they actively utilize, refashion, and manipulate as a survival mechanism” (1989:139-140). Even after slavery, and through years of ongoing racism that still exist today, African Americans held onto a continuing sense of identity: “African Americans, according to Mintz and Price, ‘remodeled’ their own and other peoples cultures while building new life ways to meet their daily needs” (Stoffle and Shimkin 1980:3). Furthermore, Baker points out that even early on (shortly after World War I, but research supports that efforts were ongoing for centuries), “African Americans began to forcefully contest how race was constructed and to assert their economic, political, and cultural power” (1998:128). Through persistence and identity retention, African Americans would establish themselves within communities throughout the United States.
The events of slavery produced some of the skills that African Americans utilized in the work force (Walker 1998:150-151). Interestingly enough, further research shows that African American migrants had a greater experience with “[n]on-agricultural employment than was typically assumed” (Tolnay 2003:212). That is to say, the culture change for African Americans was adaptive; they used what they had learned to survive and manipulated their abilities to what they were experiencing. David Bernstein (2007) looks into these adaptive qualities, but in the case of Native Americans; however, the foundation of the argument holds true for both Native and African Americans alike. Bernstein shows that the onset of economic assimilation for Natives was strategic and adaptive (2007). These strategies would allow them to survive in an environment while retaining some control over their families and communities. A similar argument can be said for African Americans; by being adaptive and utilizing economic maneuvers (e.g. shared living arrangements, shared incomes with families/friends) it would enable African Americans to be successful in a changing and highly competitive environment.

Though these factors are significant, the opportunity for better employment was most likely one of the largest pull-factors for African Americans (Blocker 1996; Tolnay 2003). Due to the Midwest experiencing simultaneous growth in both industry and agriculture, it became a very tempting place to migrate to for employment opportunities (Blocker 2008). African Americans generally lived and established their communities based on the availability of work (Jackson and Burns 2004:35). While it is important to take note of these pull-factors, one must equally note that without negative incentives to uproot them (or push-factors), the Great Migration may well never have occurred, or at least may not have been so revolutionary.

Occupational segregation, along with ongoing racism and prejudice, created push-factors, causing African Americans to search for betterment throughout all parts of the country (Tolnay
African Americans were inclined to leave behind places of violence, but these places were often times slow to economic growth (Blocker 2008). During the onset of the Great Migration, which is described by Wilkerson (2010) to have begun during World War I, Northern manufacturers would send labor agents to the South to encourage African Americans to migrate for employment opportunities (Baker 1998; Cooper 1999; Grim 2001; Wilkerson 2010). Frank Baker was living in Muncie during this time and explains, “That they [the Ball Brothers] had gone south to bring in busloads and trainloads of Negroes in order to keep unions and wages low in Muncie” (Hurley Goodall, December 7, 1972). Bringing in African Americans employees was a tactic to deter unity amongst workers. This is because racism amongst fellow employees would help to undermine the establishment of union progression (Bernstein 2001:47).

Although African Americans had experienced considerable amounts of racism before and after emancipation, they were still able to incorporate into communities throughout the United States. Research has further shown examples where other ethnicities, that also experience racism, hatred, and prejudice, incorporated themselves into communities and began to thrive as well (see Wells 1975). Comparable to African Americans in Muncie, Wells found that even with social stigma, it does not necessarily prevent the underprivileged group from being incorporated, influencing, and benefitting in the development of the community as a whole (1975).

Another factor that supported African American migration to the north was the historic significance of strong community support systems like church and family. These time-honored systems enabled newly migrated African Americans to adjust to new surroundings (Price-S pratlin in Tolnay 2003). African Americans relied on extended families living in one household; it was important within the economic, political, and emotional setup of African American life (Cody 1994:26). Additionally, since many were forced to pay higher rates, it was
not uncommon for families to take in additional family members, boarders, or to work more than one job to pay rent (Boyd 2000; Wilkerson 2010).

By way of the church and family, strong African American communities throughout the Indiana landscape began to develop. One such example can be found in Arnold Cooper’s *Plenty Good Room: Bethel A.M.E. Church of Greencastle, Indiana, 1872-1890* (1999). Cooper’s research is important to this thesis, as it is an example of one African American community that emerged directly following the abolition of slavery while also supporting the importance of the church in African American community/social life; regardless of the struggles in place, African Americans created towns that were self-sustaining and functional (Rowe 2009:925).

According to Cooper (1999), the minister of Bethel A.M.E. Church in Greencastle, John Henry Clay, became a spokesperson for the African American community; urging African Americans from the South and neighboring states to migrate to Indiana. Even within the church, the African American community understood the importance of self-help (Butler 1991:80) and economic development: Clay “[E]nvisioned the black exodus to his community as an opportunity for black people to develop their economic and social position” (Cooper 1999:105). The immigration to these types of towns offered the opportunity for African American patrons to support African American business (Tolnay 2003). Wilkerson (2010) further supports this claim, as she has found that migration brought in new patrons to help fund African American institutions. Through word-of-mouth and families who had reached out to their relatives (Blocker 1996; Cody 1994), this “chain migration” brought African Americans from their “[C]ommon points of origin to common points of destination” (Tolnay 2003:217), thus creating new and/or stronger communities in places like Greencastle and Muncie.
One type of change that helped fuel the incorporation of African Americans into the overall landscape of economic opportunity and community/social development was that of industrialism. Antoinette Jackson explains that the onset of industry caused the, “[R]estructuring of the entire social order on which the community was built and the economy was based” (2004:33). The change in economy from agrarian to industrial, “[O]verrode case-class social limitations that typically characterized/plagued agricultural based economies” (Jackson 2004:34). In fact, until the discovery of a nearby natural gas field – Trenton Gas Field, in the mid-1880s, located in Eaton, Indiana, roughly 12 miles from Muncie (Figure 2.1) – Muncie was an agrarian community (Lassiter et al. 2004). Due to the discovery of this natural gas field, Muncie participated in an economic boom that lasted throughout the 1920s and propelled the town into industrialism, opening up even greater economic opportunities for African Americans in Muncie.

Pulling from James W. Loewen (2005), Blocker explains that, “African American migration narratives are marked by a ‘pivotal moment’ in which ‘an event…propels the action northward’” (2008:20). As census data will later show, the discovery of the Trenton Gas Field, and the economic boom that followed, brought in a very large percentage of migrants to Muncie. Economic opportunities such as these allowed for even larger numbers of African Americans to migrate into new areas for employment opportunities. Additionally, because of the growth in industry, it allowed African Americans to be more mobile in their choices for employment. Although the occupations available to African Americans in Muncie were limited if compared to their White counterparts, census data will later reveal how African Americans were moving away from servitude and into more specialized fields.
Figure 2.1. "The Flame Burns Brightly, Natural Gas Makes Muncie a City" document, 1979. Richard A. Greene Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Ball State University Libraries
While many individuals may have found jobs by directly working within the popular commodity of this town, others would find the ability to gain even more control of their lives through entrepreneurship. When looking into the business sector of African American history, “[T]he period of 1900-1930 marked the first of three waves in the rise of black corporate America” (Walker 1998:182). While the demand of labor in communities was important for African Americans (Curry 1981:15), some who sought to better their situation would at times branch out into business ownership. For many, the importance of owning a business was not about the “prestige” of the business itself, but for the economic stability (Butler 1991). In order to succeed, however, African American businesses depended on African American clientele, promoting racial solidarity (Butler 1991; Curry 1981; Walker 1998). Many African Americans were of the working class, but still some had managed to enter a middle class (Wilkerson 2010), and business ownership would help with their economic progress.

The business market was very restrictive when it came to African Americans; many times, they were only allowed to sell to their own race (Butler 1991; Tolnay 2003). In order to succeed, African Americans would have to create an economic niche (Butler 1991). Some of these “niches” would involve insurance agencies, undertakers, and the hair-care industry (Boyd 1996; Butler 1991; Harmon 1929). Many of these businesses did not take much start-up capital (Boyd 2012), and were open to African American domination since, “No one seriously objected to the Negroes doing what most white men did not care to do” (Harman 1929:118).

Many African Americans were developing “[E]nterprises in virtually every area important to the pre-Civil War business community, including merchandising, manufacturing, real estate speculation and development, the construction trades, transportation, and the extractive industries” (Walker 1986:345). During the end of the Civil War, there were 20,000
skilled White operatives, and 100,000 skilled Blacks, “[M]ost of whom were former slaves” (Walker 1998:150-151). And by 1910, “[A] people, virtually landless before the Civil War, owned 20,000,000 acres” (Walker 1998:181).

While many African Americans were overlooked when it came to postbellum employment, racial biases and segregation did not deter their vision of equality, nor did it influence their decision to leave all that they had previously known and start over in towns like Muncie. By shifting focus from something that was purely political (i.e. protests, etc.) to incorporating economic processes (i.e. business ownership), African Americans began to increase the number of businesses created and owned by one another.

As mentioned in Lassiter et al., African Americans in Muncie “[O]wned barber shops, shoe shops, ice cream parlors, restaurants, saloons, grocery stores, tailor shops, a pool hall, concession stand, a hotel, and a skating rink” (2005:57). By doing so, the African American community began to develop a better quality of life for themselves. Nevertheless, this life did not come without sacrifice. In pursuit of a better life, it was possible that African Americans moving into Muncie may never see family or friends again, yet they left “[L]ooking for something they couldn’t name” (Wilkerson 2010:237).

At the close of the Civil War, new and unfamiliar freedoms began to develop, and with it a market for African American patrons increased (Kenzer 1989). Following emancipation, and throughout the time period under study, African Americans “[S]ought to forge new identities far removed from their lives as slaves” (O’Malley 2002:216). That is to say, these communities and economic selections are ones which African Americans made as free individuals, giving them the ability to create innovative opportunities and allowing them to integrate into an American society that had, at one time, seemed so far from reach.
CHAPTER 3
AFRICAN AMERICAN OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY IN
MUNCIE, INDIANA FROM 1870-1920

Their slogan is ‘Cooperation’ and seemingly untiring energies apply themselves industriously to building up their industries and boosting Muncie.
- Miss Ella L.V. Keith (Muncie, Indiana 1924)

Between 1870 and 1920, Muncie, Indiana’s African American population increased from 52 to 2,054 (Figure 3.1). Along with a dramatic increase in population came increasing opportunity for economic mobility. The kinds of occupations African Americans selected reflected their own choices within a sociopolitical context in which post-war racism raged. At the same time, such choices clearly enabled them to establish an economic foothold; an important step in redefining themselves as free American citizens.

During the early stages of African American freedom, former slaves had a hard time entering jobs that were of upper class appeal. Many members of the family unit worked together in order to ensure a better future for their families and themselves. Within years to come, the principles of hard work and determination would became extremely valuable, and help pave the way for greater economic and employment opportunities in Muncie and across the nation. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Victorian period ushered in the rise of urban industry across America. This new industry created a gap in the amount of labor needed to respond adequately to the growing consumer demand; a gap that African Americans were prepared to fill.
Figure 3.1. African American Population Growth in Muncie, Indiana 1870-1920 (Numbers obtained via U.S. Census Data)
Muncie’s African American Community (1870-1900)

At the close of the American Civil War in 1865, African Americans were still adjusting to the idea of freedom. While the southern half of the United States was recovering from the loss of free labor, African Americans began moving northward. They entered the American workforce in order to situate themselves in a world that now recognized them as free citizens. Thus, African Americans were entering the workforce at a very high rate (Mullins 1999) and began taking advantage of a variety of job opportunities.

African American migrants cautiously sought new opportunities, and singled out the type of work they were accustomed to doing (Blocker 2008:35). Between 1870 and 1900, African Americans slowly but steadily moved to Muncie. During this time, Muncie was home to a total of 278 African Americans; 153 males and 125 females (Figure 3.2). Due to the poor quality of the 1900 census scans, only a small quantity of African Americans could be included in the breakdown below, however there were a total of 739 African Americans listed in Muncie at the time of the 1900 U.S. Census (numbers in the figures below only reflect what could be counted from digital census scans). Of the 278 African Americans in Muncie who could be accounted for from scanned census data, a total of 58 percent were employed, while 15 percent attended school, and 27 percent were listed as unemployed (Figure 3.3). Found in the United States Census during this time, the majority of African Americans that were listed as unemployed were either too young to have attended school or work, or those who were considered elderly.

Just fifteen years following emancipation, Indiana was showing signs of becoming a sought-after state in regards to African American in-migration, and Muncie’s growth reflected some of this demographic shift (for a complete breakdown by decade, please reference Appendices A-C). Of all the Midwest states, Indiana was amongst the top three in both
Figure 3.2. African American Population in Muncie, Indiana 1870-1900
Figure 3.3. African American Workers vs. Unemployed (Not Attending School) vs. Attending School in Muncie, Indiana 1870-1900
agricultural and industrial growth (Blocker 2008:25). The simultaneous economic growth of agriculture and industry could be one of the strong pulling forces causing large amounts of African Americans to migrate to Indiana at such a sudden rate.

From 1870-1900, there was a larger ratio of African American males than females residing in Muncie. This could be due to the movement of African American men northward to secure employment before sending for family. Although many men did work, females were seen working outside of the home. Many of the African American women of Muncie were holding down jobs, such as housekeeping, though some worked outside of household servitude, and others were found attending school.

One important aspect of family life is the role of females within the family unit. While it was more common for men to work outside of the home, examples can be found where this type of family structure was not always the case. While middle and upper-middle class White women were subject to the Victorian cult of womanhood, occupying the private domestic sphere, underprivileged women of all ethnic backgrounds did not share in this luxury, and sought employment in the public domain as skilled and unskilled laborers. Jack Blocker explains how one woman by the name of Edna Boysaw brought her children to Indiana once her husband had become injured in a mining accident (2008:97). Blocker goes on to explain how Mrs. Boysaw washed clothes for others as a means to support her family until the recovery of her husband (2008). Therefore, it was not uncommon for women to take on the head-of-household role. This is also the case in a second study by Nancy O’Malley (2002), where she found female-headed households in Kinkeadtown; a post-Civil War African-American neighborhood in Lexington, Kentucky.
Taking this into consideration, there were some examples of African American women in Muncie who had adapted to the role of “bread-winner.” A woman by the name of Martha Gilmore is listed as being twenty years old and caring for her child Mary, age four. Ms. Gilmore is not listed as having a husband, but her occupation is that of a washer woman. Another example is Mary Artis, age 55. Mary was listed as widowed, but also as the primary caretaker of her adopted 13 year old daughter, Dora Artis, whose main duty was to attend school. Mrs. Artis was able to economically support herself and her family while working as a washer woman. These two examples support that some women, no matter how large or small the family unit, had no choice but to work, and at times single-handedly provide for their family.

Employment among African American women in Muncie during 1900 took a drastic turn. While women likely suffered the most from the loss of employment opportunities due to the depression, one female is listed as having an interesting standing in regards to employment. Ms. Gilmore, age 22, is listed as living with her parents. Both Ms. Gilmore and her father are listed as laborers. Ms. Gilmore becomes an important figure because it is the first time the census data reveals that an African American woman had acquired a job that was typically obtained by men in Muncie.

African American women had to overcome many factors within, and outside, of their own racial sphere. While jobs were scarce amongst African American women during the 1900 census, many began to use their specialized skills to bring funds into the household (e.g. dressmakers); as well as step outside the domain of what was typical for a racially marginalized group of females. However, it was still apparent that domestic work was the likeliest of options for women (Wilkerson 2010:332). This is supported throughout the Thomas Neely diaries, where many African American women were hired throughout the 1870s and into the late 1890s.
In the Neely diaries, there are at least 16 women mentioned by name, and listed as “colored girls”, who were assisting Mrs. Neely and their daughter Jennie with house chores, such as cooking and cleaning.

As found throughout the Thomas Neely Diaries, dating from April 1867 to August 20, 1901, there are numerous examples of domestic servitude. One interesting example is when Mr. and Mrs. Neely sent for a woman that lived out of state, in order to assist with housework, “A few weeks ago we sent to Kentucky for a colored girl to do house work. She came this afternoon her name is Lizzie Wickloff. She is a widow and has her little daughter with her who is property 5 years of age” (http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/NlyThmsDiari/id/2051).

While the norm was for men to travel to places first in order obtain employment and then send for family, some factors like single motherhood and widowhood would not allow all African American women to participate in this typical migration pattern. This example shows that some women had to move with their children to new places in order to find employment and better opportunities.

Even more interesting is that with the occupation of domestic servitude came turnover rate. One such example is a domestic servant by the name of Sarah Smitson leaving because Mr. Neely’s wife had laughed at her for smoking a pipe, “It has been clear most of this day....Sarah Smitson our hired girl left today because my wife laughed at her for smoking a pipe” (http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/NlyThmsDiari/id/925). What this reveals is that African American women were in no way bound to a job if they felt less-valued; they had options, enough so that they could quit for multiple reasons and most likely find employment elsewhere. Although the primary concerns of many African American women during this time revolved around household duties, several others held onto separate types of employment in
order to alleviate the pressures of family expenditure and perhaps aid in upholding a certain lifestyle.

African American families not only relied on women to take care of the primary concerns of the household, such as upkeep and childcare, but many families counted on African American women to work outside of the home. As a result both recently freed African American men and women who were employed brought additional income into the household. By doing so, it enabled Muncie’s African Americans to support the household’s overall economic needs.

Following the Civil War into the 20th Century, both men and women were involved in jobs outside of the home. Although much of the census data listed women as unemployed and taking care of their own homes, further examination shows that women were also obtaining jobs outside of their own domestic spheres. African American women found work as such as hairdressers, dress makers, laborers, seamstresses, washers, and weavers.

African American men in Muncie obtained a greater variety of jobs than did women. Many men were a part of the labor force, whether it was in a factory or on a farm. However, some of the men in Muncie were securing more specialized positions, like blacksmiths or barbers. The 1870 census shows that there was one man by the name of Robert Gordon who worked as a carpenter. Mr. Gordon, age 60 at the time of the census, was born in Ohio, is listed as being able to write, and is marked as “M”, meaning “Mulatto.”

Mr. Gordon’s real estate was worth $1000 and his personal estate is listed at $200. This small case study becomes important, because most African Americans living in Muncie during this time were listed as having very little, or no, type of estate. Furthermore, many white residents of Muncie did not have the amount in real estate that Mr. Gordon had obtained. Mr. Gordon’s occupation is equally important, for it shows that in his 60 years of living, he had some
type of carpentry training, perhaps acquired during slavery, which could help him to obtain his financial situation. Many occupations were acquired during slavery, and “This knowledge in turn has been transmitted and shared with pride as an important family and community resource and is often reflected on the stories people choose to tell and the traditions they choose to continue” (Jackson 2011:454). This shows that although just five years after slavery was abolished, African Americans were very much tied to the “[V]alues…rooted in the culture that slaves developed in bondage” (Foner 2006:16). By utilizing the skillsets that they had acquired during slavery, many African Americans were able to incorporate these skills into their current position.

It was not uncommon for family members, other than just the parental units, to bring in some type of income; a common practice held that children who were old enough to work would do so, and contribute funds to the family unit (O’Malley 2002:205). At age sixteen, Walter Wilson was listed as a barber during the 1900 U.S. Census. Walter Wilson was not only working as a barber, but was also listed as attending school. Mr. Wilson was able to alleviate some of the economic stress of his parents by working outside of the home and contributing funds to the cost of living. However, it is observed that while he did obtain employment, school was still important to him, as he was able to juggle the stress of family finances with his own education. This type of mentality shows that African Americans were willing to work hard, beginning at a young age, in order to create a position in life worth recognizing.

While seeking out occupations in Muncie’s 1880 census, there was one African American man who was listed as owning a restaurant – James Ferguson. Mr. Ferguson was not registered as having a wife; however he was listed as the primary caretaker of three daughters, all of whom attended school. Mr. Ferguson was able to support himself and his family by owning a restaurant. At the same time, he valued education for his daughters, which suggests a desire to
improve his own and his children’s station in life. Seeing this type of business ownership at such an early stage is important because it shows that while African Americans were gaining employment in Muncie, some were able to acquire business property and conduct commerce outside of White-owned establishments. Simultaneously, their children benefited from their hard work and opportunities by instilling a strong work ethic that would be passed on for generations to come.

The first 30 years of emancipation marked the beginning of a new era for many African Americans. While blatant acts of hatred and racism pushed African Americans to abandon their former lives in the south, Muncie offered the growth of industry, allowing African Americans to be employed as laborers. However as time passed, Muncie’s African American population became even more specialized in the types of employment that were sought out.

The rise of industry brought forth an opportunity for African Americans to incorporate themselves into the American workforce. Although not always assigned fairly, job openings were numerous during the rise of industry in Muncie and it allowed those African Americans who were of age, and willing, to take advantage of the increase in consumer demand. The upsurge in industry during this span allowed many more African Americans to enter into Muncie, where they were able to find a wide variety of employment opportunities. When looking at the breakdowns during this time, one can see the beginnings of diversification in the types of jobs that were being sought after, and the establishment of African Americans entering into Muncie with a more specialized workforce in mind (Figure 3.4).

Muncie’s African American Community in 1890

In 1921, records for the 1890 census were either destroyed or badly damaged in a fire at the Commerce Department. For the purpose of this thesis, a specific breakdown of census data
Figure 3.4 African American Occupations in Muncie, Indiana 1870-1900
for 1890 is impossible to obtain. However, what was able to be found through further sources was that there were a total 418 African Americans in Muncie (Blocker 1996; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1895:457), and of the 418 person, 216 were males and 205 were females (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1895:530).

The following chart was created using the information that was found from The Black Muncie History Project (BSU Archives and Special Collections Box 2; Folder 11). This information was developed using the Emerson Muncie Directory, but helps to break down some of the missing numbers in order to gain a greater picture of African American population in Muncie throughout the 1890s:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>African American Population</th>
<th>Total African American Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>302</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891-1892</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>310</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>310</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897-1898</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>392</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As one can see from the chart above, the amount of in-migration among African Americans changed slightly from 1889-1893. This small change is most likely due to the depression during the early 1890s. At this time, the United States experienced an economic depression (Blocker 2008:151) that some came to call the Panic of 1893; when the economy itself began to fail. Although the nation was experiencing a catastrophic depression during this time, there was still a steady pattern of migration into Muncie; mostly likely due to the discovery of the Trenton Gas Field and the availability of jobs that this created. Following the decade of 1900, African Americans began entering Muncie at an even faster pace than before. With this increase in
population becomes an even greater desire to pursue the rights and freedoms that had been the
goals of African Americans since before the end of slavery.

**Muncie’s African American Community in 1910**

By the year of the 1910 U.S. Census, Muncie had grown so large that it was necessary to format the census by districts within wards. In 1910, Muncie had a total of 6 wards and 17 districts. African American residency was no exception to the increase in population, resulting in 1005 African Americans; 511 males and 494 females (Figure 3.5). During this time period, Indianapolis’s economic growth was also expanding (Blocker 2008:173), which may have had an effect on Muncie’s development. Located only 50 miles from Indianapolis, Muncie was situated in a geographical position that allowed African Americans the appeal of larger city living without being directly in a metropolis. The Thomas Neely diaries also show how some African Americans enjoyed living near a larger city, “Our hired girl did not come back today she is a colored girl and has been with us about six months. One of her sisters was permitted to go to Indianapolis on a visit and she got mad because she could not go so she went home to be ready the next time” (http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/NlyThmsDiar/id/925).

The 1910 U.S. Census begins to show just how quickly African Americans were moving into the area of Muncie. There were a total of 1005 African Americans residing within Muncie, and of the 1005 African Americans, over half were employed (55 percent), while 13 percent attended school, and 32 percent were unemployed and not attending school (Figure 3.6). As seen throughout most of the census data, there was still a larger ratio of African American men to African American women; however the numbers were beginning to even out. As was the case during the early northward movement of African Americans, many men would leave first, and then send for family at a later date. However, the sudden increase in population during this time
Figure 3.5. African American Population in Muncie, Indiana 1910
Figure 3.6. African American Workers vs. Unemployed (Not Attending School) vs. Attending School in Muncie, Indiana 1910
suggests two things: either families were entering into the area together, or men were able to obtain jobs fairly quickly, which would allow the family to move into the area shortly after.

The 1910 U.S. Census shows that over half of the African American women in Muncie were unemployed. However, the 1910 census does show a change in the types of jobs that women were seeking (Figure 3.7). While many of the employed African American women of 1910 still found themselves working as domestic servants or washer women, one woman by the name of Julia Colman stands out. Julie Colman, age 46, was the wife to the minister Martin Colman and mother to Ruth Colman, age 16, and Raymond Colman, age 23. While Mrs. Colman took on the duties of wife and mother, she was listed as having an interesting occupation; an artist. While her exact artistry type is unknown, Mrs. Colman felt sure enough in herself to declare her type of occupation as an artist. Additionally, and according to photographic evidence, it would also seem that women were becoming more involved with working in the industrial field, rather than the home (Figure 3.8). The shift from domestic work to factory work is interesting. It shows how Muncie was growing so rapidly, it allowed for the inclusion of women laborers into a field that was dominated by men. Furthermore, factory work amongst women stands out in that it reveals how African Americans were moving to greater occupational roles, rather than going along with mainstream employment opportunities (i.e. domestic servitude) during this time.

Men living in Muncie during the 1910 census were entering the workforce at an extremely high rate. Of 511 men living in Muncie, approximately 79 percent were employed, 11 percent were attending school, and 10 percent were unemployed and not attending school (Figure 3.9). Also during this time period, census data reveals an increase of African American-owned businesses within Muncie. One such business owner is Mr. George Burton, age 55. Mr. Burton is
Figure 3.7. African American Female Occupations in Muncie, Indiana 1910
Figure 3.8. Glass Workers. Photograph from Other Side of Middletown Photographs Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Ball State University Libraries
Figure 3.9. African American Male Occupations in Muncie, Indiana 1910
registered as being single and his occupation is a blacksmith. Not only is Mr. Burton listed as being a blacksmith, he is also listed as the owner of the shop. Furthermore, Mr. Burton was financially able to accommodate a woman by the name of Melissa Banks, age 34, as a “roomer”, or what is more commonly understood to be a “boarder.” Taking in extra persons at home was just another way in which many African Americans were able to cut the cost of living in order to focus on their own personal estate and wellbeing. This example shows that Mr. Burton not only owned a business, but increased his income by taking on the role of landlord.

The U.S. Census of 1910 shows that following the economic downturn in the 1890s, Muncie’s population was able to rebound with help from African Americans moving into the area. Employment rates were beginning to increase, thus creating an even higher development of African American culture within the region. Even more interesting, the progress from unskilled to skilled employment began to spread (Figure 3.10), and will become clearer during the next ten years.

**Muncie’s African American Community in 1920**

The African American population during 1920 jumped dramatically to 2,054; 1,075 males and 979 females (Figure 3.11). The types of employment amongst African Americans in Muncie during this time begin to show an increase in the specialized labor force. Over half of the African Americans residing in Muncie were employed (53 percent), 4 percent were attending school, and the remaining 43 percent were unemployed and not attending school (Figure 3.12). While manual labor and housework still were the majority of jobs listed, a few interesting developments began to take place throughout the African American population in Muncie.
Figure 3.10. African American Occupations in Muncie, Indiana 1910
AFRICAN AMERICAN POPULATION IN MUNCIE, IN 1920

MALE

FEMALE

979

1075

Figure 3.11. African American Population in Muncie, Indiana 1920
Figure 3.12. African American Workers vs. Unemployed (Not Attending School) vs. Attending School in Muncie, Indiana 1920
During this time, the large majority of African American women in Muncie were listed as unemployed, yet there was an increase of women entering factory work and others acquiring businesses (Figure 3.13). Mrs. Fossett, age 44, was listed as a manicurist and owner. Her husband Mr. Chas Fossett, age 54, is also listed as a business owner. Census data reveals another woman by the name of Mrs. Shirley Moody, age 38, was married to a Mr. John Moody, age 52, and is listed as being a music teacher. These two examples alone begin to show how African American women were furthering their independence by practicing management skills and by becoming the owners of small businesses.

During the 1920s, another important phenomenon began to emerge within Muncie. As mentioned earlier, labor-type occupations were in the forefront of many African American jobs in Muncie (Figure 3.14). Like many African American women of this time, African American men also started to focus on specialized employment. Two African American physicians are listed as living in Muncie during the 1920 U.S. Census: Charles Martin and John McMorine. Mr. Martin was 49 years old at the time of the census, was married to his wife Ida, age 43, and listed as a medical physician. Mr. McMorine, age 33, is listed as being married to Grace, age 24, and was a physician of general practice. Muncie’s African American community now had the option of seeing a physician of their own race. Although finding African American physicians listed was significant, there are also other careers that are worth mentioning.

Other types of skilled career choices began to show up throughout the 1920 census. Mr. Ell Scott, age 65, is shown to be a policeman, while Mr. Anthony Brooks, age 29, married to Sarah Brooks, age 28, was listed as a dentist and owned an office. Furthermore, Mr. Ross Brown, age 37, married to wife Ella, age 37, was a Socialist speaker. All of these examples show the range in career paths that were being taken by African American men during the 1920 census in
Figure 3.13. African American Female Occupations in Muncie, Indiana 1920
Figure 3.14. African American Male Occupations in Muncie, Indiana 1920
Muncie and how many of these men were making a move towards more specialized occupational roles.

The 1920s ushered in changes in the type of career paths African Americans were pursing (Figure 3.15). Within the city of Muncie, African Americans were finding a place where they could practice their learned skills. While many were of the labor/working class, some may have reached middle class status. However, Muncie’s African Americans needed all parts in order to be the sustainable minority community it was becoming.
Figure 3.15. African American Occupations in Muncie, Indiana 1920
CHAPTER 4

AFRICAN AMERICAN ECONOMIC POWER, SOCIAL CHOICE, AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN MUNCIE, INDIANA

FROM 1870-1920

You know Hurley, the thing about it is about these youngsters. They don’t really realize what we have gone through to get this far. Because we’ve had all sorts of organizations and things.

- Mrs. Findley (Muncie, Indiana 1972)

The following chapter offers a glimpse into the life of a single individual, Asbury McWilliams Sr., in the context of greater economic and social development among African Americans residing in Muncie. The first section will look at economic power and property ownership among Muncie’s African American population. The second section will look at education, both scholarly and culturally. The third will take a look at Muncie’s social life choices, and showcase Muncie’s main African American leadership roles. Lastly, the fourth section will describe how the early African American residents of Muncie found the overall community to be more or less safe in regards to segregation, racism. Asbury McWilliams’ experiences and choices reflect the social and economic resilience of African American individuals and families as they transitioned from slavery to freedom.

Economic Power and Property Ownership

Through transcribed interviews of Muncie’s early African American residents, many themes begin to develop in regards to early African American life in Muncie. One such theme is that of economic power and property ownership. The case James Asbury McWilliams vs. Sonnie
Daniels (a.k.a. Asbury McWilliams) (Delaware County Court Documents, Delaware County Civil Cause #9252 1894) illustrates a developing economic structure for African Americans. It does so by highlighting Asbury McWilliams’ experience, during Muncie’s early African American community development, and his ability to acquire enough land for his descendants to move into Muncie in order to obtain his wealth and property. Asbury McWilliams Sr. was one of the African American men who migrated from the south to Muncie in search of greater opportunities. His experiences were, in many respects, emblematic of the kinds of economic and social growth African Americans may have experienced during the late Victorian era.

During the early 1850s, Asbury McWilliams was the slave of Mr. Andrew McWilliams in Limestone County, Alabama. Asbury McWilliams had been trained as a blacksmith and later married another slave, Jane Steele. Together Asbury and Jane gave birth to two sons: Asbury McWilliams and John McWilliams. Jane’s owner renamed their first child “James” and from then on their first born was known as James Asbury McWilliams. After the unfortunate death of Jane Steele in 1853, John and James were placed in the care of a woman named Eliza Murtaugh.

Asbury McWilliams Sr. later remarried Winnie, the slave of Mr. Martin Corpier. Asbury and Winnie also started a family together, resulting in one boy and two girls: Asbury, Josephine, and Charlotte McWilliams. In 1863, Asbury Sr. left his family to join the Union Army. Following the war, Asbury Sr. was again a widower. After Winnie’s passing, Mary Corpier Daniels, a white woman who had owned Winnie, cared for their children. By that time, Asbury McWilliams Sr.’s third son took on the name Sonnie Daniels. In 1871 Asbury, Sr. traveled to the Indianapolis and Muncie area where he married a woman by the name of Louisa. Asbury Sr. divorced Louisa and then remarried a woman named Margaret, who gave birth to a daughter named Nancy. Eventually, Asbury, Sr. and Margaret divorced (Figure 4.1).
During his time in Indiana, Asbury Sr. acquired land in Muncie: ½ of lot 2 (south portion), lot 7, and lot 8 (Figure 4.2). At the onset of his death, Asbury wrote to his first son, James Asbury McWilliams and asked him to come to Muncie so that the land could be passed to him. During this time, the only land that Asbury still obtained was lot 8, as previous deeds indicate that the land owned in lots 2 and 7 had been sold by Asbury during 1875 and 1876 (Muncie/Delaware County Digital Resource Library). Land-lot 8 would also coincide with the Charles Emerson’s Muncie Directory, showing that Asbury McWilliams Sr. resided at 321 Beacon St, Muncie, Indiana (1876:53). Since Asbury had not heard back from James, he then wrote to his son Sonnie Daniels, who was still residing with the Daniels family. Asbury also informed Sonnie of the property and asked him to come to Muncie so that he could pass the land onto him. When Asbury Sr. had passed, both James and Sonnie claimed ownership to the land. After Asbury Sr.’s death, there was a trial to determine ownership of Asbury Sr.’s land. Following the trial, Sonnie Daniels was awarded his father’s property. While the story is confusing at times the central point is this: Asbury McWilliams, Sr. a former slave from Alabama, died a property owner in Muncie, Indiana and left behind enough property for his children to squabble over.

Asbury was not the only African American man in Muncie to acquire land. Sara Sims explains that she moved to Muncie in 1907, as her father had moved here prior in order to create a better life for their family. Her father had bought a house, one in which she still lived in during the time of her interview (Sara Sims, J. Paul Mitchell, December 7, 2912). Not only had her father purchased this home during the early 1900s, he was also buying and selling land-lots throughout Muncie. Sara explains, “[M]y father bought a lot of lots because it was just $10 a lot.
Figure 4.1. Asbury McWilliams Sr.’s Kinship/Descendant Chart
Figure 4.2. George Kirby’s Addition to Muncie, 1872. Delaware County Plat Map, Muncie, Indiana, Book 1. Archives and Special Collections, Ball State University Libraries
And he owned a lot of property around here in Muncie...He bought them and sold them to different people” (J. Paul Mitchell, December 7, 1972). Interestingly enough, Asbury McWilliams Sr. also bought and sold land during his life in Muncie. The practice of buying land and re-selling it at a higher value enabled whites and blacks to improve their economic standing. Thomas Neely, a white business owner and real estate developer did this as well, as did his single adult daughter, Jennie; specifically mentioned in the Neely Diaries on May 24, 1888, June 9, 1888, and May 1, 1898 (http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/NlyThmsDiar). So, African Americans were taking advantage of similar opportunities.

Even before Asbury Sr.’s time in Muncie, African Americans seemed to be buying land in and around Muncie. Another interviewee, by the name of John Bragg begins by discussing his grandfather, who had moved to Indiana from North Carolina, before the Civil War. John’s grandfather was a runaway slave, and was described as not having any type of education. However, John’s grandfather had acquired 70 acres of land in Fountain City, Indiana, which is only 35 miles southeast of Muncie. John’s grandfather had gone to Fountain City, most likely for safety, as John explains it was, “[A]n underground slave town. A Quaker town, that’s my home” (J. Paul Mitchell and Hurley Goodall, February 13, 1973). John further explained that his grandfather had become a success because, “[H]e accumulated the farm, seventy acres, which was called a fairly wealthy man at that time” (J. Paul Mitchell and Hurley Goodall, February 13, 1973). While John’s grandfather did not own land in Muncie, this is just another example of African Americans obtaining land in/around Muncie.

Business ownership was also not out of the realm of possibility, even prior to the 1900s. Previously stated in chapter three, James Ferguson owned and operated a restaurant during the late 1800s. Throughout many interviews, individuals explain that African American-owned
restaurants were a large part of the Muncie community, as well as some ice cream parlors, barbershops, and even skating rinks. John Bragg, who moved to Muncie in the 1920s, also expressed the importance of owning his own business by stating, “I’ve always been figured on having me, on having my own business. And I think at that time it’s different now, but at that time that’s the only way you could look at things, so you could make really a decent living” (J. Paul Mitchell and Hurley Goodall, February 13, 1973). The mindset that Mr. Bragg had becomes important, because this type of attitude, towards owning one’s business, stems from the teachings of many African American political figures and religious leaders, which described a need for unity amongst the African American community, and the significance of entrepreneurship (Fitzpatrick 1990).

In regards to migration, it seems clear that employment opportunities were one of the main reasons why many African Americans began entering Muncie from all over the United States. When asked why many interviewees moved to Muncie, the answer was predominantly work or wages. Lucille Williams explains that they first came to Muncie in 1904, but before that her father had come here in search of work, “And they found that the Muncie Wire Mill and worked there for a while. And my father finally went on to Ball Brothers and finished his working days there at Ball Brothers. But after they did come to Muncie then a number of others of them followed” (Hurley Goodall, February 1, 1972). Through word of mouth, many other African Americans traveled to this area in hopes of finding work and higher wages.

Families would travel to Muncie because they knew of others living here at the time. Clem Findley, another resident whose family moved here in 1905, explained, “Well my dad and mother had friends here. A couple they were just like brother and sister the two families just like brother and sister. Mr. and Mrs. Powell was their name. And he came out here first and then he
kept after my dad to come” (Hurley Goodall, February 1, 1972). Other participants explain that both work availability and family ties brought their family to Muncie. Still others described that not work, but wages, were what brought them to this town. Mrs. Ida Wright explains that they also moved to Muncie in 1900 for wages, “Well, wages was one thing…In Ohio, wages that’s what – well, my husband, they only give him 50 cents a day. Not an hour – 50 cents a day, before we moved here. And after I come here and found out how the wages was, went back and we bundled up and we come to Muncie” (Hurley Goodall and Raymond White, June 30, 1971).

The pattern of both parents working outside the home continued throughout the early 1900s. Mrs. Ida Wright, who moved to Muncie in 1900, further explains that her mother moved to Muncie approximately three months after they had settled, to help watch the children while both she and her husband worked. Scott Harvey, who also moved here in 1900, talked about how his father and mother both worked, and when his father left their family, both he and his sister helped out where they could, “We worked at most anything that we could do. Papers and smashing baggage and she’d [his sister] wait tables and she played organ for the church” (J. Paul Mitchell, February 15, 1973).

**Education**

Although many found it necessary to work and go to school, education was something that was extremely important to African Americans during this period. Education was a way for African Americans to better themselves in a world filled with racism and hostility. One interviewee, Lucille Williams, who was a child when her family moved to Muncie in 1907, explains how her mother (a school teacher) would not allow for Lucille to miss out on educational opportunities. However, Lucille’s mother took this one step further, as she felt it was equally important to understand one’s own heritage: “[S]he felt that there were some things that I
was missing that I really needed to know to help the, have a different view of life as a Negro child. So she decided that the best thing for me to do was to go down to Louisville, Kentucky and go to a school there” (Hurley Goodall, February 1, 1972). Because of Lucille’s mother recognizing the importance of both academia and cultural heritage, Lucille felt like she had the ability to do anything, regardless of her skin color: “Because it [going to an all-Black school] has always made me feel that regardless of who it is, or what that there was, no one who was any different to me. That I could take advantage of anything that I might want to” (Hurley Goodall, February 1, 1972).

Although the above example shows the importance of education, not all experiences among Muncie’s African American population were the same. While education was important, sometimes helping out in one’s own family took precedence. At times, families would send for their relatives after they had established some type of living situation, and it was not uncommon for families to have relatives and friends take care of one another. Roy Buley explains that as a child growing up in the early 1900s, some of the children stayed with other members of the family, such as aunts (J. Paul Mitchell and Hurley Goodall, September 22, 1977). Still, others did not have the luxury of family ties, and had to take care of one another.

During the early 1900s, Sara Sims explains that she had grown up without a mother, and while her father worked and raised eight children on his own, some sacrifices were made (J. Paul Mitchell, December 7, 1972). Sara dropped out of school after the sixth grade, because she had a brother who was blind, and she was needed to stay home and take care of him: “But I quit because my father had to work and we didn’t have no housekeeper or nothing and I felt like it was my duty to stay home and kind of see after my blind brother” (J. Paul Mitchell, December 7, 1972). This is a prime example of the choices some African Americans, even at a young age,
made in order to support their family. Since this was an overall hard time for African Americans, many still made the best of it by supporting one another through family and friends.

**Collective Action**

Muncie’s African American population may not have experienced all the social luxuries that their white counterparts had, but they were described by Mrs. Findley, who came to Muncie during the gas boom, to be the sort who, “[J]ust made their own way” (Hurley Goodall, February 1, 1972). This quote is powerful, in that it shows how African Americans were creating their own avenues in all aspects of life: education, entrepreneurship, community/social development, etc. Although segregation was something that Muncie’s African Americans would experience, it did not stop their community from coming together for the common goal of self-care and betterment.

While Muncie’s African American community would attend house parties, theaters, and parks for recreation, there was one club that was organized specifically for the social benefit of African Americans. This club was known as the Epicurean Club, later to be renamed the Bachelor-Benedict Club. This club was created so to allow African American men and women the chance to enjoy private dances and social gatherings to “[C]reate a cleaner atmosphere for affairs that we might care to have” (Charles Booher, Hurley Goodall, February 1, 1972). This club also worked closely with other organizations like the YWCA, and would help with the Red Cross.

Through photographs and interviews and other sources found from archival research, one is also able to see that many African Americans in Muncie participated in other forms of entertainment. On such pastime, that took place as early as 1900, was joining musical bands (Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4). As described in “The Other Side of Middletown” digital repository,
Figure 4.3. Eagle Band. Photograph from Other Side of Middletown Photographs Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Ball State University Libraries
Figure 4.4. Ball Brothers Factory Band. Photograph from Other Side of Middletown Photographs Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Ball State University Libraries
it was not uncommon for these bands to be sponsored by local companies, participate in local celebrations, as well as compete in state and local contests (2015). The importance of the Muncie Eagle Band and Ball Brothers Factory Band is that it was a way in which Muncie’s African Americans could showcase their talents as musicians and incorporate themselves into the overall growth of Muncie as a town.

Another example of African American support was when they came together for a common goal; a goal that included all races and ethnicities found within the United States. These supportive endeavors would be related to World War I, and Muncie’s African American community’s participation in wartime efforts. Although unequally treated within the United States, many African Americans in Muncie freely entered into the armed forces during this time (Figure 4.5).

Furthermore, while they could not participate directly in battle, it was not uncommon for African American women to raise money and volunteer in charities such as the Red Cross (World War I - Black Participation, 1919: BSU Archives and Special Collections). Their willingness to fight and participate in war efforts, while living in a racially divided country, shows their loyalty and belief in a future with a better quality of life. The men pictured in the photograph below demonstrate Muncie’s African American approach as a collective community and their unified courage to fight for a country that did not always see them as equals.

While clubs and bands were integrated into African American life in Muncie, the strongest theme that developed when asked about social life was the church. The church, it would seem, was an important symbol for many African Americans throughout the entire United States. As mentioned in chapter two, the Bethel A.M.E. Church of Greencastle was a place that many African Americans sought. The church, in many aspects, seems to be a central locality, and
Figure 4.5. World War I Volunteers. Photograph from Other Side of Middletown
Photographs Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Ball State University Libraries
a way in which African Americans could come together for fellowship in Muncie. Mrs. Findley explains, “Church was the main thing in those days” (Hurly Goodall, December 1, 1972). Ella Woldridge, a born resident in 1901, remembers as a young girl the impact that the church had, “Well, the most important thing that we did was to go to church. And children in those days loved to go to Sunday school and church…” (Hurley Goodall, July 9, 1971).

The church was a community within a community, and allowed for African Americans to band together for support. In History of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (1868-1968) it is described how many new families who moved into the community, as early as 1888, “[G]ave great service in the development of the Church” (BSU Archives and Special Collections 1868). It is not surprising then that church officials seemed to be leaders within the African American community. According to Charles Booher, “Well, of course, I think without fear or contradiction, that most localities back in the earlier days were quite dependent upon their ministers for that type of leadership and most of them the ministers would never fail them” (Hurley Goodall, December 14, 1972).

**Muncie’s African American’s Overall Community: Early Years through Times of Struggle**

From interviews, it would seem that Muncie, prior to the 1920s, was a less toxic environment for African Americans compared to other towns in Indiana (see Ellwood, Indiana *in Loewen 2005*). Muncie was a place where African Americans could find work, land and business opportunities. One theme that became interesting was how individuals described the early years of Muncie (prior to the 1920s). In regards to neighborhoods, more than one interviewee describes how many neighborhoods were integrated. Grovelle Peele, born in Muncie in 1900, explains, “At that particular time [1880s-90s], we never ran into any problems. We lived in mixed
neighborhoods, of course, they were rental districts, out in the so-called _________ light district at that time, but we lived all over Muncie” (Hurley Goodall, no date). Lucille Williams, who moved here in 1904, concurred that many areas were integrated, and explains how everyone seemed to enjoy one another (Hurley Goodall, February 2, 1972). Even in regards to judicial treatment, Ella Woldridge, born in Muncie in 1901, explains that there was no difference in how law enforcement treated African Americans versus Whites (Hurley Goodall, July 9, 1971). Mr. and Mrs. Clem Findley, both residents in Muncie prior to 1910, explained in regards to racial trouble, “We didn’t have any of the trouble like that they have now of any racial trouble. We just went along. We just got along” (Hurley Goodall, February 1, 1972).

It would seem that although work availability and social life were a large factor in African American migration, the overall safety and security of Muncie was alluring to many. Clem Findley remembers that part of the reason why his father chose Muncie was due to the environment, “[H]e decided to come out here because he thought it was better than Pauling. And in Pauling, I can remember that well he was afraid of this town. My dad and my brother were always getting in trouble down there, and that’s the reason why he really wanted to get away” (Hurley Goodall, February 1, 1972). Further research through digital scans of census reports shows that what was understood to be “Pauling” was most likely Paulding, Ohio. Clem Findlay was from Ohio, and the only town in Ohio that may resemble “Pauling” is Paulding; a small village 77 miles northeast of Muncie, Indiana.

While African Americans who lived in Muncie during the early years were happy with their overall community, a change did come about when the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) rose to prominence throughout Indiana in the early 1920s. The KKK and Indiana have a strong history, in that D.C. Stephenson (the KKK’s Grand Dragon in Indiana) was a prominent politician and
Indiana’s Governor, Edward Jackson, was a Klan member. Not surprisingly, it was during the onset of the Ku Klux Klan when African Americans began to see a change in Muncie. It was during this time when many of the oral histories begin explaining how the overall “feeling” in Muncie’s community began to shift.

When asked the question of when things started to change in regards to Muncie’s overall character, Lucille Williams, who had been a resident since 1904, describes that it was when the KKK came to Muncie: “They, you could feel the change. Before that time, you did not have a feeling of segregation” (Hurley Goodall, February 1, 1972). Once the KKK made its way into Muncie, segregation began to strangle the rights that African Americans had once experienced: “Well, before that we could go almost any place we wanted to go. But after the Klan come then they began to close doors to us, so to speak” (Hurley Goodall, February 1, 1972). It was at this time that Lucille Williams describes, “[T]he Klan came along and is dampened the spirit of the people. I don’t know it stopped the progress, that’s what I feel. It really, and Muncie has never been the same. And I feel that it’s different even yet, to a number of cities here, even in Indiana. There is something that it is just not the same” (Hurley Goodall, February 1, 1972).

Although racism and segregation still prevailed in Muncie, it would seem that surrounding towns were more susceptible. The reason for this could be related to what Wells (1975) calls a “shared community membership” or sense of “we”. Wells explains while separation, racism, and prejudice may have been a part of a community’s overall makeup, they are bound by their self-definition of that community. One example of this taking place in Muncie was when Sherriff Puckett passed out weapons to both Whites and African Americans. Together both White and African American Muncionians created a strategy of defense if a mob entered the city due to Reverend John Johnson receiving the bodies of the young African American men
who were lynched in Marion, Indiana. Related to this sense of “we”, George Dale, the editor of the Muncie Post-Democrat and later the mayor of Muncie, spoke out against the KKK and their battle to control city policies. These examples help demonstrate that Muncie’s need to succeed as a town may have outweighed a desire to act in violence, which could have ultimately ended in Muncie’s overall self-destruction.

While the KKK may have marked a turning point in Muncie and the African American experience, there were still many positive factors that drew African Americans to this city. Additionally, African American desire to create their own foundation and life within Muncie was not going to dissipate due to exclusions and racism from White organizations. Even during the 1920s, which can described to be the strongest of the KKK years in this area, Muncie’s African Americans were still creating and supporting clubs, entering the workforce, and buying/owning property throughout the area; thus, practicing their socio-economic power within a community that they had helped build prior to Klan activity.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

[I] know it’s been important for me, to know that Negroes have been in these businesses and all things that they have done because a lot of younger people, particularly the ones that are even younger than I am, feel like you know Negroes don’t do anything, and they’ve been told that.

-Hurley Goodall (Muncie, Indiana 1972)

Muncie was a town that allowed development of a stable, economically diverse, and viable African American community, which was characterized by cooperation. Additionally, Muncie’s early progression appeared to be a “less toxic” experience than other towns in the midwest, as described in oral histories collected in 1972. These factors in part were due to the relatively large African American population that allowed African American small business owners to open shops, restaurants, and buy, sell and inherit land.

Everyday living informs us of “life” beyond what has been subjugated (Jackson 2011: 450). When looking into the development of any community, a researcher is able to see the types of relationships between peoples, the social roles and stigmas that are created, as well as the types of organization surrounding resources (Wells 1975:319). While African American pioneers are not often thought of during the 19th century (Lassiter et al. 2004), they were a vital part of the community development throughout many parts of the United States and can help strengthen the understanding of the foundation of development in north-central Indiana. Even before the onset of emancipation, African Americans began to move to areas for safety and fresh lands, “[E]mbracing the dream of all pioneers, regardless of color” (Lassiter et al. 2004:47-48). Not
only did they embrace this dream, but they began influencing the way in which the community they were living was formed.

The many roles and responsibilities of African Americans help showcase their “[S]kill, knowledge, and social responsibilities” (Jackson 2011:454). From this study, it is concluded that African Americans were advancing towards their own “American Dream” long before mass-protests, words from Civil Rights leaders and advocates, and even Presidents. Though difficult, Muncie’s African Americans were able to balance their goals with whatever types of cultural barriers the majority of the community had positioned against them. They negotiated their own community experience by cooperation, developing strong bonds with one another, and pursuing their goals of economic independence and social choice. By doing so, they became an integral part of Muncie’s identity from the beginning.

How we understand the progression of the African American experience in Muncie from 1870-1920 helps to enhance a continual rethinking of place and development amongst African Americans as a whole. The importance of the stories found within these pages help to strengthen our understanding due to the give-and-take of shared knowledge, creating a greater understanding of the past. If stories are left untold, it is not uncommon for incorrect versions to fill-in the gaps. When each generation becomes progressively misinformed, it not only results in a warped understanding of their past, but larger-scale damage such as culture-loss can occur. These are the types of crises that researchers strive to avoid. Yet through ethnohistorical data and research, many of these stories are now being brought forth in an effort to improve cultural identities, and further augment our understanding of the past.

The past of a community is ingrained in that community’s culture; as a community is a living organism that fluctuates as forces come within, and out of, its parameter. To manipulate or
disregard any part of everyday life is to upset the full interpretation of a community’s substance and culture. As indicated in the quote at the heading of this chapter, one man’s concern is that younger generations will never know of the strong African American foundation that was a part of Muncie’s development and Muncie’s heritage. However, he, community members, and researchers, continue to take a deeper look at Muncie’s African American past in order to strengthen this town’s history from within. It is the hopes of this thesis that these inquiries do not end, and that the analysis found within these pages help to strengthen the ongoing research that is Muncie’s Middletown.
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APPENDIX A: MUNCIE, INDIANA CENSUS STATISTICS IN 1870

AFRICAN AMERICAN POPULATION IN MUNCIE, IN 1870

African American Population in Muncie, Indiana 1870

MALE
FEMALE

28
20
African American Workers vs. Unemployed (Not Attending School) vs. Attending School in Muncie, Indiana 1870
African American Female Occupations in Muncie, Indiana 1870

- Keeping House/House Keeping/At Home
- Non-Household Jobs
- Unemployed (Not Attending School)
- Attending School

NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS
African American Male Occupations in Muncie, Indiana 1870
OCCUPATIONS

NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS

African American Occupations in Muncie, Indiana 1870
APPENDIX B: MUNCIE, INDIANA CENSUS STATISTICS IN 1880

African American Population in Muncie, Indiana 1880
African American Workers vs. Unemployed (Not Attending School) vs. Attending School in Muncie, Indiana 1880
African American Female Occupations in Muncie, Indiana 1880
African American Male Occupations in Muncie, Indiana 1880
African American Occupations in Muncie, Indiana 1880
APPENDIX C: MUNCIE, INDIANA CENSUS STATISTICS IN 1900 (charts only reflect the numbers that could be counted from the damaged digital scans of the 1900 U.S. Census)

African American Population in Muncie, Indiana 1900
African American Workers vs. Unemployed (Not Attending School) vs. Attending School in Muncie, Indiana 1900
African American Female Occupations in Muncie, Indiana 1900
African American Male Occupations in Muncie, Indiana 1900
African American Occupations in Muncie, Indiana 1900