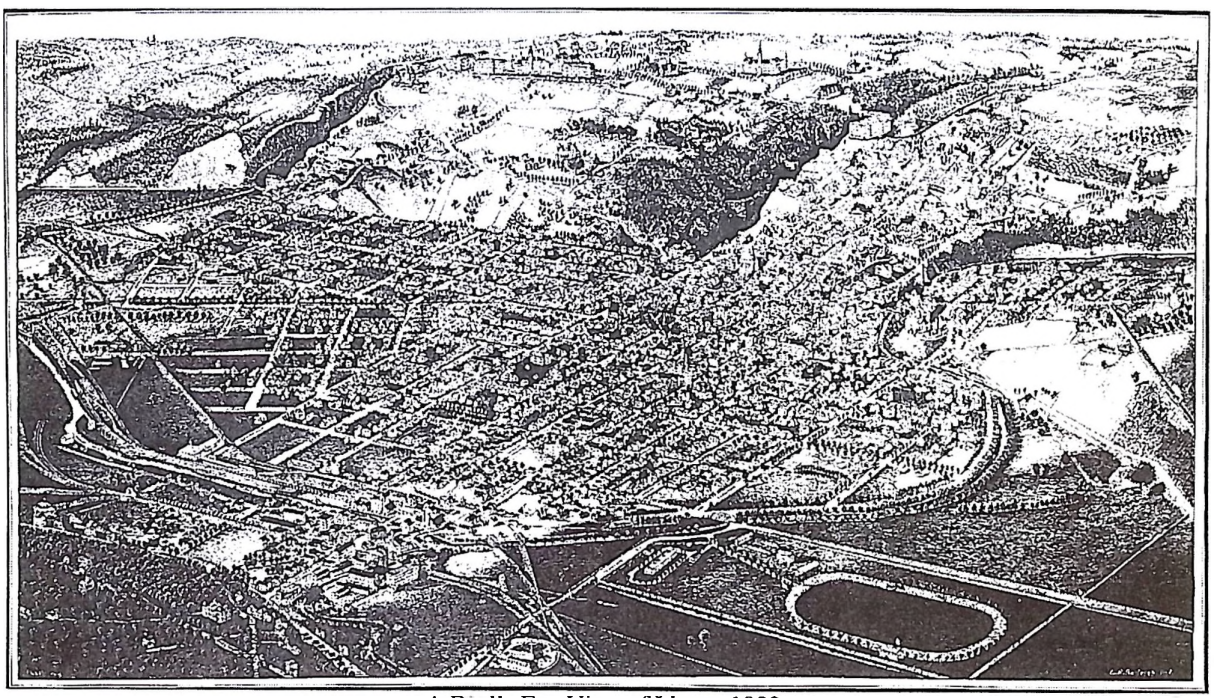
# Practicing Neighborhood and Community

## An Ethnographic History of African Americans and the Southside Neighborhood in Ithaca, New York



A Bird's Eye View of Ithaca, 1882.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

# 1. Introduction

## Ithaca and the Southside Neighborhood

Contrary to its reputation as a homogenous, progressive, middle-class university town, Ithaca, New York is strikingly diverse economically, racially/ethnically, and politically. Ithaca's landscape is also quite striking, marked by steep hills, deep gorges, the largest of the Finger Lakes, and a wide, usually gray sky. Many class and racial/ethnic hierarchies correspond to this geography, exemplified by the relationship between Cornell University on East Hill and the residents of downtown Ithaca. Besides "town and gown" are the lines that divide The Flats, as Ithaca's downtown neighborhoods are known. While neighborhood boundaries are never precise, each has a unique identity marked not only by geographical location and architectural style but also by its historical development and the socioeconomic status and ethnoracial identities of its residents.

The Southside neighborhood occupies the area southwest of Ithaca's downtown commercial district. Approximately bounded by West State Street, South Cayuga Street, South Meadow Street, and Six-Mile Creek, it is commonly recognized as Ithaca's Black[1] neighborhood. Indeed, since the 1830s the Southside has had the largest percentage of African American residents of any neighborhood in Ithaca. The Southside is also home to a number of

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[1] I use Black as an adjective, to describe not a color or race but a cultural and political experience, one that was reclaimed in the 1960s and 70s, expressed through the refrains of "Black Power" and "Black is beautiful." I capitalize Black because, like W.E.B. du Bois, "I believe that eight million Americans are entitled to a capital letter" (1899: 1). I use African American(s) as a sociocultural category because I think that 'black(s),' when used as a noun, essentializes people's identities to a color or race. The term African American more adequately encompasses the diverse heritage and experiences of people of African descent in the United States. I do not place a hyphen between African and American in order to emphasize the dynamic tension between these identities, and to avoid the use of African as simply a modifier for American. I refer to African Americans that were born in Ithaca or have lived here for a long time as Black Ithacans, following Deirdre Hill's (1994) suggestion that this is how residents refer to themselves. Furthermore, calling these long-term residents Ithacans implies that African Americans are not merely 'in' Ithaca, but are a part of Ithaca's past and present.

important African American institutions, including the St. James AME Zion Church and the Southside Community Center. At the same time, the Southside has always been a multiethnic, predominantly working-class neighborhood. Today 27.3 percent of neighborhood residents are African American, accounting for 18 percent of African Americans in the city (1990 Ithaca City Neighborhood Statistics Program). In no way is the Southside an exclusively Black neighborhood, nor do all Black Ithacans live on the Southside. But still, when many non-Black people speak of African Americans in Ithaca (if they do at all), they refer to the Southside neighborhood, while the Southside is used to refer to Ithaca's African American community.

The Southside is imagined in two conflicting yet interrelated ways: a 'bad' neighborhood on one hand, and the heart of the community on the other. Since the 1960s the Southside has suffered not only from real conditions of poverty, unemployment, run-down housing, absentee landlords, drug use, crime, and racist policing, but also from a negative image among both outsiders and neighborhood residents. In the imagination of many Ithacans the Southside is "poor," "drug-infested," "crime-ridden," "the ghetto," "the hood" (Scott, 1995), terms that reflect racist stereotypes about African Americans. Yet many Black Ithacans and neighborhood residents have fond memories of the Southside neighborhood. Also, in recent years local historians have developed an alternative narrative that celebrates the neighborhood's African American history to counter these disparaging images.

However, historical representations by both community members and local historians tend to conflate neighborhood and community, perpetuating the identification of African Americans in Ithaca with a particular socioeconomic and geographical location. In a society where marking difference is a part of establishing hierarchies of race and class, labeling the Southside a Black neighborhood has meant that the area has been ignored or disparaged. I argue

that a more complex understanding of how the Southside neighborhood and the African American community have been "practiced" historically can serve not only as a corrective to the historical record but can also contribute to solving contemporary problems faced by Southside residents and Black Ithacans.

**Neighborhood and Community, Space and Race**

Neighborhoods and communities are overlapping and interrelated, but they are not the same. A neighborhood may give rise to a sense of community, and members of a community may choose or be forced to reside in a particular neighborhood. However, a particular location does not automatically constitute a neighborhood, and a particular shared identity does not necessarily make a community.

In my consideration of neighborhood and community I draw on Michel de Certeau's (1984) concept of "spatial practice," which suggests that neighborhoods cannot be seen as pre-defined *places*, but as *spaces* that acquire meaning through social activity. De Certeau distinguishes between "place," a rationally organized geographic area where each element is put in its " 'proper'" location; and "space," a messier intersection of daily activities and cultural meanings by historical actors (117-118). James Clifford explains how de Certeau's concept of "space" applies to neighborhoods:

> For de Certeau, 'space' is never ontologically given. It is discursively mapped and corporeally practiced. An urban neighborhood, for example, may be laid out physically according to a street plan. But it is not a space until it is practiced by people's active occupation, their movements through and around them (1997: 186).

While geography is central to the definition of neighborhoods, the boundaries and meanings of these spaces are always fuzzy. Neighborhood spaces are "practiced" by residents as well as by those who frequent businesses and social institutions in that area. Spatial practices are not limited

to social interactions (shopping or waving to neighbors), but also include discourses such as historical representation.

Like neighborhoods, communities are never preexisting, but are "practiced," contested entities. A community is often thought of as arising naturally through a shared experience or a common cultural background, and is assumed to have some basis in physical proximity, a sense of place. Thus, neighborhood and community are often conflated. Yet communities may be "imagined" in ways that transcend time and space, such as in the remembering of history[2]. Such community memories often smooth over complex historical processes in order to forge a group identity, and also to combat negative stereotypes (Urciuoli 1996). Furthermore, communities are constructed not only through shared but also through competing practices and systems of meaning; they are defined in contrast to others/outsiders, and they are contingent on insiders defining themselves as such (Greenhouse et al, 1994).

Historically and today, throughout the United States African Americans have been subject to practices of residential segregation and other forms of discrimination which have relegated a great many of them to particular neighborhoods. But, contrary to popular stereotypes, not every neighborhood with a significant African American population is a 'ghetto.' African American communities have been internally diverse in terms of sociocultural and spatial practices. Furthermore, African Americans have asserted tremendous resilience and cultural continuity in developing their own communities, institutions and neighborhoods, signifying far more than just a reaction to oppression. Thus it is as important not to generalize about a homogeneous African American community and the spaces African Americans occupy as it is

[2] Benedict Anderson argues in *Imagined Communities* (1991) that the modern nation-state is not an abstract entity, but is "imagined" as a community through literature and "print capitalism." I would like to suggest that local history texts (as literature), newspaper articles, and historical memory are ways in which Ithaca's African American community has been "imagined."

politically and culturally necessary not to abandon the concept of African American community altogether.

**History and Ethnography**

My central question is how the Southside has been practiced— socially and discursively—as a Black neighborhood or the site of the African American community historically, in local historicity, and in local historiographies. I use Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney's definition of history as "an interpretation or construction that attempts to represent the past on the basis of information from the past" (1990: 6). Historicity can be understood as "the collective experience and understanding of history" (18); that is, how do people remember their collective past, and what meaning do they give to the past. Historiography is the representation of history, not only in writing but also through genres that range from historic walking tours to art installations.

Understanding these elements of how the past is remembered and represented is an ethnographic as well as an historical project. While my research has been oriented toward the past, much of my coursework has been in anthropology, not in history, sociology, American studies, or African American studies. I bring the tools of ethnographic inquiry to the archives as well as to the 'field,' asking similar questions of the past and present. I want to know "how did the past lead to the present" (the standard causal, progressive, linear framework of history), and "how does the present create the past?" How is history "used, experienced, remembered, or created"? (Tonkin et al, 1989). Thus, I discuss history, historicity, and historiography as interconnected strands throughout my paper.

One strand is to examine portrayals of neighborhood and community in local historicities and historiographies. These representations emerged through my fieldwork with the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership. This local agency has worked with Southside residents to preserve and celebrate the neighborhood's history, especially its African American heritage, as a strategy for preserving the neighborhood's physical integrity, building a sense of community, and for improving its image in the broader Ithaca community.

The Cornell-Ithaca Partnership (C-IP) is a Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) established in 1999 with a grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and matching funds from Cornell University. The mission of the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership is to bridge the gap between Cornell and 'the community,' linking a community-driven agenda with university resources to develop community knowledge and problem-solving capacity. C-IP tries to involve area residents in setting the agenda and participating in the process of knowledge production and problem-solving. The objective is to avoid both charity work as well as extractive research models, where 'the community' is treated as nothing more than a living laboratory.

Starting in early 2000, C-IP launched a number of neighborhood history projects in response to the threat of commercial development on the Southside along Meadow Street (Route 13), near the busiest intersection in the city. I first got involved by volunteering to take part in an oral history project in the fall of 2000. My experience during the oral history project led me to propose a thesis project to examine the historical and contemporary relationship between the Southside neighborhood and African Americans in Ithaca.

In February 2001, I began working at the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership, where I conducted historical and ethnographic research for C-IP neighborhood history projects as well as for my

thesis project. I conducted interviews, conducted documentary research, participated in C-IP and neighborhood meetings, collaborated with a new neighborhood association, and produced historical narratives on the Southside neighborhood and the African American community. Each project presented an opportunity not only to discover the Southside's history, but also to learn about the historicity of older Black Ithacans and C-IP's historiography.

The second strand, which occupies the largest chunk of my work, examines how African American community life was practiced in the Southside neighborhood during the first half of the twentieth century. Given the scarcity of documentary sources on African American life during this period, participant observation at C-IP and life history interviews were invaluable in reconstructing sociocultural history as well as understanding contemporary meanings of that past. Keeping social meaning in mind when heading to the archives also contributed to a richer image of the past. I consulted local history books, the archives of the DeWitt Historical Society, past issues of the *Ithaca Journal*, ethnographic/sociological studies conducted by Cornell researchers, census data, city directories, and deed records. Studies of other cities, neighborhoods and communities, and works on regional and national African American history and culture provided a comparative framework for my analysis.

I argue that between 1900 and 1950 the Southside, while never all Black, was an important locus of African American community life in Ithaca. During the nineteenth century, residential patterns included some concentration of African Americans near the southwestern edge of the city, but African American life was rather decentralized. After the turn of the century, the factors affecting the concentration of African American community life on the Southside included not only racism, discrimination and *de facto* segregation, or the significant

number of African Americans who lived on the Southside, but also the presence of African American institutions, community organizations, and businesses in the neighborhood.

In my historical writing for the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership, I focused especially on the 1920s through World War II, a period that many Black Ithacans remember as somewhat of a golden age for both the neighborhood and the African American community. I argue that it is this nostalgic historicity, rather than a critical historical analysis, which drives C-IP's neighborhood and oral history projects. What I found problematic in the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership's approach was not only the conflation of neighborhood and community, and race and space, but also the celebratory approach to history that de-emphasized both racism and African American identity, amounting to what I term a bland pluralism.

**The Politics of Community Partnership**

The final strand of my project is to examine the politics of community partnership. The Cornell-Ithaca Partnership's shifting and often contradictory definitions of neighborhood and community involve similarly ambiguous discourses and practices of 'partnership,' 'community building,' and 'improving quality of life.' I argue that the ambiguities allow C-IP to avoid confronting issues of race and class, and power relations between the university and local communities, which in turn impacts their ability to effect meaningful change.

Ideally, C-IP could be a venue for socially engaged research and action that would not only make Cornell resources available to Ithaca's most disadvantaged residents and provide learning opportunities for Cornell students, but would develop community-driven solutions to long-term problems. Instead, 'community building' and 'quality of life' activities often take place at a symbolic rather than practical level. These projects do not adequately acknowledge

and incorporate the knowledge that local residents already possess, and do little to build their political and economic capacity. The Cornell-Ithaca Partnership also carries with it many of the preexisting power dynamics between Cornell and Ithaca. A significant number of Ithacans distrust C-IP's Cornell affiliation, as well as C-IP's failure to deliver on a number of projects, resulting in low community participation and the perpetuation of a top-down approach by C-IP.

I must also evaluate my own role at Cornell-Ithaca Partnership as a student employee. My involvement at C-IP both facilitated and constrained my research, leading me in directions I did not originally anticipate, and thus must be taken into consideration at a deeper level than a superficial discussion of methods. In particular, my turn from ethnography and oral history to more document-based historical research was the result of the institutional politics within C-IP as well as C-IP's relationship with 'the community.' Reflecting upon my role at C-IP provides insight into the dynamics between theory, practice, and historical and ethnographic 'data', especially as they relate to theoretical and methodological issues in anthropology and history, knowledge and representation, and research and action. By taking an evaluative and self-reflective approach I have stayed true to my initial proposal, which was not to conduct a thorough ethnohistorical community study of the Southside, but to examine how neighborhood and community have been practiced in the past and in contemporary historical representations of the Southside neighborhood and the African American community.

## 2. Theory and Practice: Ethnographic and Historical Fieldwork in a Community Partnership Setting

As a student of anthropology and as an activist committed to social justice, I have questioned the politics of knowledge production in both my academic and extracurricular pursuits. I was attracted to the questions of neighborhood and community, and decided to examine these questions by working with the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership, because I wanted to bridge the divide between 'town and gown', academia and community, theory and practice. I envisioned conducting a participatory, action-oriented ethnographic and historical research project through which I would collaborate with the individuals and institutions that had a stake in the questions I was asking, in order to create knowledge that was both practical and ethnographically and historically valid.

These ideals reflect common strands among the theories and practices of participatory/action research, African American social sciences, and the contemporary "experimental moment" (Marcus and Fisher, 1987; in Limón, 1994: 7) in U.S. anthropology. These disciplines reject extractive positivist research models, instead seeing knowledge and its production as part of political-economic processes, and look to break down the dichotomy between researcher and subject by engaging in the co-creation of knowledge. In the following section I introduce the basic tenets of the disciplines, and then discuss the factors that restricted the extent to which I engaged in participatory and action-oriented research. These include my own position as a subject in the research, the tendency of anthropology to study 'culture areas,' and the institutional relations between Cornell and the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership, and local residents.

**Participatory/Action Research**

As is any discipline or practice, participatory/action research (P/AR) is difficult to summarize. This broad set of multidisciplinary approaches includes "Northern" action research and "Southern" participatory research, which I see as distinct yet interrelated.[3] The former is often associated with the work of Kurt Lewin (1948), university-based research, and industrial democracy movements in Western Europe and the United States. "Southern" participatory research is associated with Paolo Freire (1970), a popular educator from Brazil, Miles Horton and the Highlander School in Appalachia, and adult education for liberation among oppressed people throughout the world.

Despite their significantly different histories, the various approaches to P/AR share a number of common principles and stages of research. In a P/AR project, one or more outside researchers work in collaboration with a group or community to better their situation. The outsiders may be invited by a group or community, or they may initiate the research project themselves. Regardless, all parties work together to define the research problem. They engage in collaborative processes to draw out pre-existing knowledge, conduct further research, forge solutions, take action, and evaluate the actions taken (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Maguire, 1987). The objective isn't just to gain social knowledge, but also to build people's capacity to understand and change their own lives. Democratizing the research process, as well as solving real-life problems, is one way that P/AR projects also seek to democratize society and promote social change for liberation.

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[3] I use both "participatory" and "action" to describe the kind of research I envision engaging in because I think they are inseparable. Democratic participation between researcher(s) and stakeholders is itself a form of action, just as the knowledge developed through such collaborative efforts is directed toward social change. Taking the "participatory" out of "action research" leaves too much room for the co-optation of P/AR by state and corporate interests, because it is such an effective set of methods for generating knowledge and improving any situation. While I don't think that PAR can or should only take place with oppressed groups, I feel that the "aim of participatory action research is to change practices, social structures, and social media which maintain irrationality, injustice, and unsatisfying forms of existence" (McTaggart; quoted in Reason and Bradbury, 1999: 1).

P/AR practitioners argue that their approach to social science research is not only more democratic, but also generates better knowledge, because theories are tested in practice. Indeed, Kurt Lewin is often quoted as having said, " 'Nothing is as practical as a good theory'" (in Greenwood and Levin, 1998: 19). While P/AR has been criticized for being 'soft' research lacking in objectivity, Greenwood argues that action research is in fact more valid than most social sciences, because it is tested in action. It is difficult for P/AR researchers to draw spurious conclusions when they work hand-in-hand with stakeholders throughout the research process.

The need to engage in P/AR was evidenced by the questions Southside residents and Black Ithacans asked me during the course of the project: Why do you want to know? What's the information going to be used for? What's in it for us? At Cornell, at C-IP and in Ithaca more generally, Southside residents are often considered to be apathetic, hard to organize, and wary of outsiders. A study of neighborhood housing conducted in 1968 stated, "[r]esidents of the South Side are emphatically not joiners" (Esolen, 1968: 19). But residents' probing revealed a strong political position, not the lack of political consciousness. White sociologists Robert Blauner and David Wellman (1974) faced similar confrontations while studying a Black community in Berkeley, California. In their article "Toward the Decolonization of Social Research," they explain that these "questions were merely the tip of the iceberg. Beneath was a hostility toward the university, toward research in general, and toward sociologists in particular. Probing in these areas revealed a sophisticated consciousness of social processes that negates stereotypes as uninformed, apathetic and apolitical" (321). African American anthropologist John L. Gwaltney (1980) argues that the majority of African Americans, who compose what he calls "core black culture," have a deep mistrust of social science in general, and white anthropologists in particular. "This ill opinion does not flow from any generic anti-intellectual element in core

black culture, but is a reaction to the formidable element of racist misinterpretation which characterizes so much of the standard literature" (33). Many African Americans are also well aware that the economic benefits and prestige accrued by academics who research Black communities exacerbate the hierarchies of race and class that already characterize U.S. society. What it came down to during my project was that people in Ithaca (not just Southside residents or Black Ithacans) are sick of being studied, because they rarely see any tangible results.

Both P/AR practitioners and anthropologists in the United States have generally overlooked the fact that research and action were fundamental, inseparable tenets of the African American social sciences that emerged during the late 1960s and 70s. Informed by the civil rights movement, Black Power, and Black Nationalism, African American social scientists took white academics (and co-opted Black researchers) to task for misrepresenting Black experiences and upholding the racist status quo. In *Shadow and Act* (1966: 129-30) Ralph Ellison made this point exceedingly clear:

> Many of those who write of Negro life today seem to assume that as long as their hearts are in the right place they can be as arbitrary as they wish in their formulations.... They have made of the no man's land created by segregation a territory for infantile self-expression and intellectual anarchy. They write as though Negro life exists only in light of their belated regard, and they publish interpretations of Negro experience which would not hold true of their own or for any other form of human life.
> Here the basic unity of human experience that assures us of some possibility of empathetic and symbolic identification with those of other backgrounds is blasted in the interest of specious political and philosophical conceits. Prefabricated Negroes are sketched on sheets of paper and superimposed upon the Negro community; then when somebody thrusts his head through the page and yells, 'Watch out there, Jack, there's people living under here,' they are shocked and indignant (in Szwed, 1974: 163).

White studies of African Americans weren't simply incorrect; they were oppressive, depicting Black individuals, families, and communities as deviant, pathological, or merely a reaction to the legacy of slavery and racism. When theory did relate to practice, it usually took the form of policy recommendations to government agencies, such as Daniel Patrick Moynihan's infamous study *The Negro Family: a Case for National Action* (1965). In his report, Moynihan

recommended government intervention to remedy the " 'tangle of pathologies'" that characterized poor urban African American families (quoted in Bell, 2000: 50).

The Moynihan report catalyzed Black sociologists to act within and outside of academia, making a stand at the 1968 American Sociological Association meeting by forming a "Caucus of Black Sociologists" within the ASA (Bell, 2000: 50; Ladner, 1973: xxiv). In the anthology *The Death of White Sociology* Robert Staples argues that "Black sociology must be the science of liberation" (1973: 168). The role of the Black sociologist, he writes, is to unite theory and activism: "Not only must he [sic] develop the theories embodied in the discipline of Black sociology, he must also man the barricades" (172).

**Researchers and Others**

Both P/AR and African American social sciences challenge the need for objectivity in ethnographic research, which is thought to be achievable through distancing and Othering, whether across time, space, or cultural difference. This does not require that researchers be the "same" as the people they work with (i.e., only African Americans can study Black communities), but that that they situate themselves as subjects in the research, and explain the path by which they acquired their data.

The stereotypical image of the anthropologist is of a lone white person conducting fieldwork in a 'primitive' society far away from home (see Bohannan, 1964). Of course, so-called 'native' anthropology and the anthropological study of modern industrialized societies have gained legitimacy in recent decades. But in the popular imagination as well as within the discipline the sentiment remains: " 'You can't take the subway to the field!'" (Passaro, 1997). This attitude reflects both the presumed need for distance, whether cultural or spatial—a subway

ride isn't far enough—to obtain objectivity; and the continued failure to consider modern societies—those that have subways—as legitimate fields of ethnographic inquiry.

Anthropologists that *do* study at home are assumed to have arrived there by circuitous means, being "thrice born" in their "native land." As paraphrased by Victor Turner, Indian anthropologist M. N. Srinivas argues that an anthropologist is first born to a particular culture, and is born again by conducting fieldwork with an exotic Other with whom she eventually identifies. The third birth occurs when the anthropologist then turns back to her own culture "to find that the familiar has become exoticized" and hence worthy of study (Turner in Myerhoff, 1978: xiii).

I make no claims to be a seasoned anthropologist, but until recently I was intently engaged with Latin American studies and travel in Mexico, Central America, and Ecuador. During two summers in Guatemala and Nicaragua, respectively, I was involved in extended volunteer projects that immersed me in the language, culture, and daily life of a number of communities, somewhat resembling the stereotypical fieldwork experience. Becoming fluent in Spanish and developing 'kinship' ties with my host families marked a kind of "second birth." Yet the people I lived and worked with were not passive subjects; they were used to foreign volunteers, and never hesitated to ask me, "Why are you here?" When I answered that I was concerned with social issues in their country, as well as with United States military intervention throughout Latin America, they weren't satisfied, and pressed further: "Aren't there problems in your country, too?"

Over the years, these questions, as well as my growing concern with the politics of tourism and volunteerism, forced me to take a better look at the United States—not as the "exotic" place Turner suggests it can become, nor only as the source of destructive foreign policy

and global capitalism as I have seen it from abroad, but as a nation full of internal complexities and structural inequalities worthy of research and action. At the local level, I have become increasingly interested in the history and current events of Ithaca, which has been my home for over four years, almost longer than I lived in any one place growing up. I also recently moved to a downtown neighborhood that borders the Southside. In this way, my project represents a "third birth." However, I am not a 'native' Ithacan, nor am I African American. I am a Cornell student from a small town in Western Massachusetts. I am white and precariously middle class, carrying with me the tremendous privilege and weight of sixteen years of private education, thanks to my mother's hard work and sacrifice. Throughout this project I have had to negotiate my own identities and positions in regards to those of the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership staff and Southside residents with whom I have worked.

At the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership, this negotiation often revolved around language and politics. I came in with a set of self-proclaimed radical ideas about using history as a discourse of resistance, which would contribute to community organizing against commercial development. I was specifically interested in the African American history that occupied the space of the Southside. I was also intent upon deconstructing the "plastic words in the rhetoric of public policy"[4]: the ambiguous, shifting use of neighborhood and community. The Cornell-Ithaca Partnership was not a place where these concepts could be easily questioned. A comfy conflation of neighborhood and community replaced my language of "resistance" and "organizing" in order to make C-IP projects more palatable to HUD, Cornell, city officials, and factions within 'the community. C-IP's agenda also sought to smooth over class and racial differences to form a bland pluralism, which sometimes clashed with my focus on experiences specific to African Americans.

[4] Credit for this phrase goes to my friend Kate Rubin.

I established rapport with C-IP staff and students by being friendly, helpful, and considerate at the office, and by muting my politics and language. I learned to talk and write what I came to call "HUD-speak," which allowed me to fulfill my duties as an employee and avoid conflict with the director and other staff. I did, however, express my politics through my personal appearance and reports back from global justice demonstrations where I serve as a street medic for protesters. These were ways for me to continuously express my outsider position at C-IP. Through my very expression of difference, however, I was incorporated into C-IP's office culture, especially when student Lesley Ramirez included my testimony from the protests in Québec City as an example of C-IP's activism in her script for a play about C-IP and the oral history project.

Working with Southside residents and African Americans from other parts of Ithaca was a more scattered experience than my daily routine at the C-IP office. It was this part of my fieldwork in which feelings of discomfort over differences were less often resolved. While at times these difficulties may have stemmed from my identity as a young white middle-class college student who wasn't from Ithaca, they were also rooted in the institutional relations between Cornell and Ithaca, and were shaped by my role as a C-IP employee.

The continuing need to negotiate differences and similarities of politics, class, race, education, and hometown with the people I conducted research with points to a number of problems with Turner's suggestion that "thrice-born" anthropology can occur only after the "the commonplace has become the marvelous," creating an exotic distance that allows for a "purified look at ourselves" (in Myerhoff 1978: xiii). My question is, why the need for distance and purity? Otherness is never fixed, but constructed and shifting in relation to sameness. Passaro sees in Turner's paradigm the misguided premise

> that an epistemology of "Otherness" was the best route to objectivity, that as an outsider I would be without the ideological filters or stakes in the outcome of my study that an insider would have. But at this point at the close of the century, we already know that "objectivity" is not a function of "distance"; that "Otherness" is not a geographical given but a theoretical stance; and that we do indeed have a stake in our work. ...For most people the essential question was whether by doing fieldwork in the United States I was "distant enough" to produce adequate ethnographic knowledge. Whether I was "close enough" was never an issue (1997: 152-153).

Doing fieldwork in Ithaca, within the organization I worked for and in a neighborhood located only a few blocks away from my apartment, I was much closer than many researchers to my 'subjects.' But I was not living day-to-day in the Southside neighborhood, or continuously engaged in the practice of African American community. While I do not consider such practices to be necessary, or even reflective of the way anthropologists have really done fieldwork, I did not feel 'close enough' spatially, socially, or culturally. Often I felt that having something in common, such as living in the neighborhood or being more familiar with African American culture and history would have facilitated my understanding of the spatial, cultural, and historical practices of the Southside neighborhood and Black Ithacans.

I do not suggest that being Black would have automatically given me an enlightened understanding of Ithaca's African American community. Yet failing to acknowledge my whiteness in a culture—both local, regional, and national—where ethnoracial identity remains highly politicized would be irresponsible. The differences I had to negotiate were not inherent, fixed categories, but complex political and cultural positions that impacted my research.

**Destabilizing the 'field': practicing ethnography, history, and community partnership**

What I am working against is the treatment of the Southside as a 'culture area' (i.e., the site of the African American community). The same conflation of neighborhood and community that I observed at the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership occurs in the discipline of anthropology, which

is dominated by the notion of 'culture areas' and the practice of fieldwork in discrete, remote locations. Although anthropologists don't study exclusively 'primitives' anymore (nor did they ever),

> conceptions of "the field" that constituted and defined such "natives" persist in anthropological discourse and practice. The world as viewed by anthropology is still broken up into "areas" and "sites" sanctioned for study, peopled with those who might no longer be exotic but who are still coherent Peoples (Dominguez 1989) and necessary Others (Passaro, 1997: 148).

Even contemporary anthropologists studying the United States, "like anthropologists elsewhere in the world, [look] for 'villages'—relevant groups or collectivities of some sort" (Moffatt, 1992: 210). Studying ethnoracial groups and other marginalized communities has been one way to assert that such research still fits within the discipline of anthropology, as opposed to history or sociology (Abu-Lughod, 1991: 139).

In order to "decolonize" (Blauner and Wellman, 1974) my research, I had to decenter my notion of the 'field' both geographically and temporally, and challenge the distinctions between the past and the present, and between history and ethnography. Participant-observation, interviews, archival documents, newspapers, and secondary sources all contributed to my understanding of the past as well as to my analysis of how this past was being reconstructed by area residents and at C-IP.

**The Cornell-Ithaca Partnership as Fieldsite**

The Cornell-Ithaca Partnership was not merely a setting for my research, but actually constituted a 'field' of ethnographic inquiry. Interviews, which I arranged through C-IP, and community meetings, sponsored by C-IP, brought me to the Southside, as did activities in my own life, such as biking to the grocery store or marching in a demonstration. Although I was seeking to understand the history and historical memory of the Southside neighborhood and the African

American community as experienced by Southside residents and Black Ithacans, my 'field' was centered around the C-IP office on North Aurora Street. While running errands, writing grant proposals, writing meeting minutes, and completing other office tasks I was paying attention to representations of the Southside and the African American community, and the politics of community partnership, at C-IP.

Treating my experiences at C-IP as fieldwork, I kept detailed fieldnotes, which helped me keep track of my activities and the development of my ideas. I kept a small wirebound notebook with me at all times, in which I jotted down notes while in the 'field'; these notes might include phone numbers, appointment dates, or quotes from an individual in a meeting, and I always made sure to label each entry with the date and time. These are what Roger Sanjek calls "scratch notes" (1990: 95-96), and are similar to James Clifford's definition of "inscription" (1990: 51). Both Clifford and Sanjek consider such note taking in the field a kind of "interruption," because it often takes place in front of 'informants' who may not feel comfortable being studied (Sanjek 1990: 96). I was able to avoid the discomfort of being viewed as an anthropologist when scribbling away in my notebook by offering to keep meeting minutes, which was always appreciated and never questioned.

After returning home from the 'field, often after a long day sitting in front of a computer or in meetings at the C-IP office, I would sit down again in front of my computer to write up my fieldnotes before they got "cold" (Mead, 1977: 202; in Sanjek, 1990: 97). Drawing from my brief "scratch notes" and "headnotes" (Ottenberg, 1990), my fieldnotes consisted of a more or less chronological account of events, including the physical and temporal context in which they occurred, and were punctuated with my initial analysis.

Because I included my initial interpretations in my fieldnotes, they have proved extraordinarily useful in writing about my work at C-IP ethnographically, as well as in approaching history from an ethnographic perspective. Reading back through them, I was struck by the regular repetition of themes and my ability to recognize these continuities as they emerged. In this paper I lift passages from my fieldnotes, at times without needing to add much analysis to the events, because it is already contained within the notes; they form a nascent ethnographic text. However, my fieldnotes also trace the changes and discontinuities that emerged during the course of my project, destabilizing the tendency to treat fieldnotes as scientific data, and causing me to approach them as constructed, ambiguous texts (Ottenberg, 1990: 156).

My fieldnotes, the first step in writing the "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973; in Clifford, 1990: 52) of ethnography, stand in stark contrast to the weekly program updates and the various progress reports I wrote for C-IP. I was supposed to track the progress of my activities, categorized under "Neighborhood Quality of Life," according to "program goals and objectives." My training in holistic ethnographic fieldwork did not prepare me for this compartmentalized approach to research or community partnership.

**C-IP and 'The Community'**

From an ethnographic perspective, C-IP projects relating to African American history, the historic preservation of the Southside neighborhood, and improving neighborhood quality of life seemed to be intricately interrelated. Yet within the organization, not only were these projects poorly coordinated, but they were often at odds with each other, and with the goals of 'the community.' For almost a year John Lewis had been researching the history of the Southside and searching for ways to establish an action-oriented, community-based research agenda in

order to prevent the encroachment of commercial development into the neighborhood. Pat Pollak's idea for historic preservation, and hence community development, was to put up historic markers at important sites in the neighborhood. Diann Sams was still trying to finish up the oral history project, which had shifted its focus from the Southside neighborhood to recognizing the history of "the community" and building ties with Cornell students.

Since early 2000, historic preservation, especially designating the Southside neighborhood an historic district, had been John Lewis' project. However, by January 2001 formal historic preservation efforts had made little headway, lacking widespread community support for a number of reasons. First, too many properties are either extremely deteriorated or have been remodeled by the Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Service (INHS), and in their present state do not fit the aesthetic criteria for historic landmarks. Second, the current condition of these homes makes historic restoration cost-prohibitive. Third, restoring homes would lead to an increase in property taxes and the gentrification of the neighborhood, displacing many long-time residents, especially the elderly.

Under pressure from neighborhood residents to seek alternative ways to recognize the Southside's history, Pat conceived of the idea of erecting historic markers. But like historic districting, this was not a community-driven agenda. Nevertheless, I was enlisted to apply for a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to pay for historic markers.

Still trying to assess neighborhood residents' interest in historic preservation, John worked to organize a community meeting with the help of neighborhood residents, Frances Eastman, Claudia Jenkins, and Leslyn McBean. While John placed himself as an outsider by referring to the Southside as "that neighborhood" or "that area," the three women situated

themselves as insiders with experience organizing 'the community,' and were adamant that residents be consulted and centrally involved.

> The general consensus was that while nothing concrete should be done without involving the neighborhood (the cart before the horse), it might actually be good to show up with a chunk of money to do a project. Too often, explained both Claudia and Mrs. Eastman, groups come in with a great idea and nothing happens, or the project isn't completed. Being up front about plans to involve the community in decision-making processes, but also having $$$, would prove that [C-IP] is acting in "good faith"—otherwise, people will say " 'here we go again,'" [remarked Claudia] (Fieldnotes, February 15, 2001).

Applying for the CDBG money without community backing was seen as less problematic than raising the hopes of the community and then failing to deliver, or continuing a project without community input.

The issue of who represents 'the community' was raised at the next meeting, where Pat Pollak questioned the ability of the three women volunteers to organize the event so that a wide range of 'community members' would be represented. She suggested that "experts" also be involved, because they have a "broader" perspective on the history and the definition of the Southside neighborhood. Diann Sams' response was heated:

> "What makes you think this committee can't [give a broad perspective]!? ...Do you know what Leslyn *does*?" Ms. Sams explained that [Leslyn] works in community dispute resolution, knows the community, and would be insulted by the suggestion that she isn't capable of organizing and facilitating a successful community meeting. Furthermore, she said that a "broader" committee would mean repeating what happened in the fall, when a bunch of "experts" came in to tell the community what they need, and pushed community members away. After almost a year, Ms. Sams argued that the community is more than ready to discuss these ideas and make their *own* decisions—"that's what grassroots is." (Fieldnotes, March 2, 2001).

This was a tense discussion, where it was clear that Diann was extremely frustrated with C-IP's top-down approach to partnership, and with the racial and class dynamics of white experts telling Black community members who they are and what they need.

The CDBG proposal brought to light the dilemma in community partnership of timeliness and unfinished projects. The previous year, C-IP had submitted a CDBG proposal to build a

computer lab at the Southside Community Center, which was approved as part of a block grant targeting the entire Southside area. Excited to get the computer lab up and running, a good number of Southside residents joined C-IP's steering committee. But after countless meetings, the $45,000 expected in the fall of 2000 still hadn't been delivered, and a room sat empty and waiting at the Community Center. By June 2001, the community members had had enough of C-IP's promises, and formed an independent committee to follow through on the project. On one occasion, when I mentioned to a Southside resident that I worked at C-IP, he recounted the whole saga as a way to explain why he didn't want to collaborate with the organization.

Clearly, the timeliness of a community partnership initiative has a significant impact on the project outcome. Promises made to community members, if not kept, often sour and counteract the initial benefits of the project. The unfinished Southside computer lab was one example. Another case was the oral history book, which was set to be published in time for Black History Month in February 2001. But as of yet, the book still has not gone to print. The Cornell-Ithaca Partnership continues to assert that the book is on its way, any day now.

Some residents who participated in the project continue to grumble about when they're going to receive their copy, while others, including the students, seem to have forgotten about it altogether. When I asked Claudia Jenkins for help on another project, she declined, mentioning that she had been involved in "that book," but she doesn't know what's going on anymore (personal communication, October 5, 2001). This outcome is far from a surprise to many residents, who are used to outsiders (especially from Cornell) failing to deliver. If they felt some ownership over the project a year ago, the sense of partnership has surely diminished.

**Oral History Interviews**

My role at the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership, and C-IP's relationship with 'the community' were significant barrier to my understanding the historicity of Southside residents and Black Ithacans. Originally I intended to gain such an understanding by conducting oral history interviews, but I ended up relying more extensively on primary and secondary documents. I often felt that I wasn't conducting proper ethnographic research, and I was aware that my project did not fit the ideal model of participatory action research.

> Instead of doing the thing that anthropologists traditionally do, which is to go out into the "field" and start observing and talking to people there, I've been depending on [C-IP] to provide me with a window into "the community" (my supposed "field"). This has certainly provided me with many insights into how [the] Southside is viewed by particular individuals occupying particular positions within the Ithaca community (broadly defined). However, I'm not finding out how Southside is lived by residents, or how they talk about those experiences (Fieldnotes, March 15, 2001).

These difficulties were not, however, unique to my experience or the result of personal weakness. Rather, they suggest that the ideal of an 'organic' ethnographic process, in which the researcher 'naturally' inserts herself into the day-to-day activities of a community or neighborhood—the 'field'—and thus learns about their culture is itself problematic.

Most ethnographers encounter 'gatekeepers,' powerful or influential individuals who restrict or facilitate entry into a community, and end up relying on a few "key informants" chosen for complex political reasons (Sanjek, 1990: 398-400). In the initial stages of my research, Diann Sams acted as a gatekeeper by helping me identify community members to interview.

> I'm a little nervous about how she's "recruiting" community members to do oral history interviews with me, and how she envisions the end result. While I think having her be my "broker" is definitely one relatively efficient way to "gain entry," I wonder who she'll exclude, and who will later refuse to work with me because I'm associated with [the oral history project] (Fieldnotes, February 27, 2001).

Despite numerous roadblocks, I was able to conduct a number of interviews that gave me a sense of how older Ithacans remember the Southside. Helen Brown, who was born in Ithaca in 1917 and has lived on Cleveland Avenue her whole life, recalled that her street "used to be like a neighborhood, where everybody knew each other" (April 16, 2001). Mary Love, who moved to Ithaca from Alabama during World War II, explained that many native Black Ithacans left because there was "nothin' goin' on here" (May 16, 2001). Jemma Macera, whose Italian immigrant parents lived on South Plain Street before she was born, told me that as a child she was afraid to look down Cleveland Avenue (October 5, 2001). James Gibbs, Jr., whose father was the director of the Southside Community Center, and is now a Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at Stanford, provided me with a framework for understanding how the Southside, a heterogeneous area in terms of class and ethnoracial groups, was understood as Ithaca's "Bronzeville," or Black neighborhood (June 5, 2001). And Bernie Milton, the soul singer I interviewed for the oral history project, didn't talk about the Southside at all (November 15, 2000). Overall, what I encountered was often fragmentary, and was, like C-IP's oral history project, more focused on individual experiences and family stories than on community or neighborhood life.

My experience with interviews suggest that I may have romanticized oral history in my original thesis proposal, hoping that talking to older African Americans would give me an enlightened perspective on the past and the present. But interviews are not an uncomplicated way into historical or ethnographic reality. Interviews are necessarily complex communicative events often based on a set of assumptions about linguistic and social norms (Briggs, 1986). Interviews are affected by the personal identities of the interviewer and informant, and occur within a broader social context. They are what Briggs terms "metacommunicative" events in that they

involve not only communicating knowledge but also the meaning of communication itself. Misunderstandings occur when interviewers and informants do not share the same understanding of the speech event (interview) and how the results will be used. While the interviews I conducted often took the form of informal conversations, with my informants asking me probing questions as well as vice versa, they were not collaborative productions. Dr. Gibbs was an exception, as he read copies of my thesis proposal and gave me academically oriented feedback. This experience indicates the need to work away from 'studying down' and toward the collaborative co-creation of knowledge between outside researchers and local stakeholders.

**Documentary Research**

Due to the difficulties of what I considered proper ethnographic fieldwork with Southside residents, I began to take a more 'traditional' historical approach to my research. Utilizing research I'd been conducting for course credit, I wrote a historical introduction to the oral history book in May. This was followed in June by a more extensive piece on African American life between 1900 and 1950 (much of which is included here). Slowly but surely, I became identified as C-IP's resident historian, rather than an anthropologist.

An example of the more strictly historical route I took is the research I conducted in July on race-restrictive deed covenants, which Pat Pollack had presented to me as a side project earlier in the summer. This work excited me, because neither archives nor interviews had yet to offer a good explanation for why African Americans were concentrated on the Southside. This seemed to be an opportunity to get 'hard facts' about the *de facto* segregation that happened in Ithaca (and, to a certain extent, still happens today).

I conducted deed research in Tompkins County Clerk's office, in the basement of the courthouse on North Tioga Street. I found many deed restrictions just by flipping through deed

books, which was less time consuming and provided a more random sample than searching indexes by name or location, by which I was selecting based on biased assumptions (i.e., looking first at Cayuga Heights and not at the Flats or West Hill). When I found what I was looking for—"no part of the premises shall be conveyed or leased to, or occupied by any person other than a white citizen of the United States of America" (Royden Farm Subdivision, 1935-1947), I reacted physically. My own assumptions about 'liberal' Ithaca had been assaulted. This sensation of injury and outrage motivated me to continue researching the history of the Southside, to try to understand the causes for the concentration of African Americans in the neighborhood until around the time when restrictive covenants were ruled unconstitutional in 1948. The results of my research on restrictive deed covenants are included here in the section on the history of the Southside.

The emotional impact of this otherwise 'objective' research destabilized the usual dichotomy between the archives and the 'field.' As Mary Des Chene argues, archives can in fact be field sites if "we take an anthropological attitude toward the documents we peruse" (1997: 77). A few months earlier I had spent hours and hours transcribing data on African American households in Ithaca from the 1920 federal manuscript census. In my fieldnotes I wrote, "I felt like I was getting an inside look into people's lives; even though there is minimal information listed, it's probably the richest text I'm going to read on that period" (April 16, 2001). What impacted me most was the number of service positions held by African American men and women: cook, janitor, laundress, waiter, maid. Only a few individuals, it seemed, were hired as skilled laborers, and the two ministers appeared to occupy the highest profession among Black men. The evidence of a racist class structure filled me with frustration and anger. I also began to

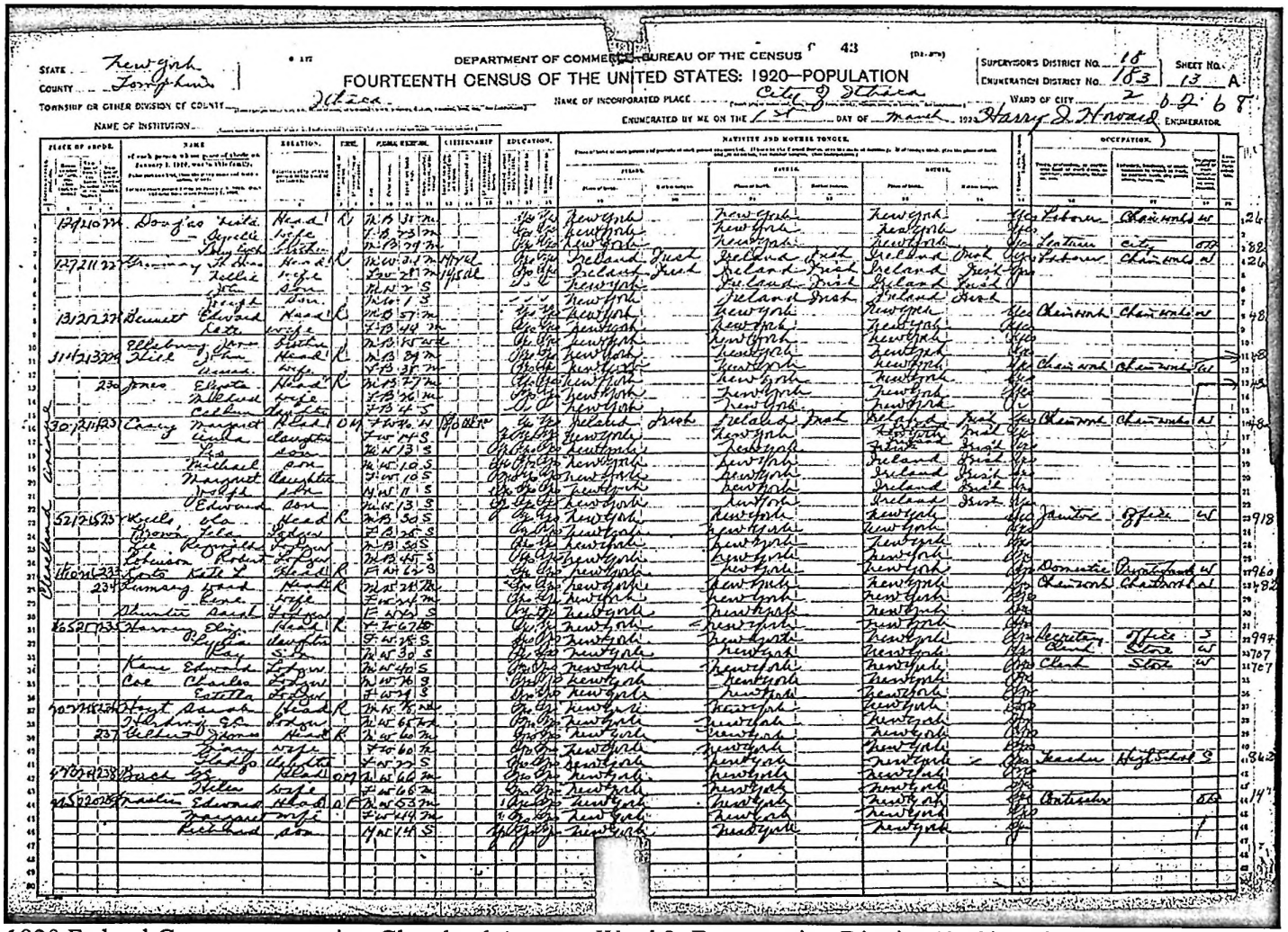


Figure 1. 1920 Federal Census manuscript. Cleveland Avenue, Ward 2, Enumeration District 43, City of Ithaca, Tompkins County, NY.

feel that I was getting closer to the past, much as talking to neighborhood residents or observing C-IP meetings brought me closer to the present.

Bringing an anthropological perspective to archival texts, however, means "treating both documents and their authors as interlocutors" (Des Chene, 1997: 77), listening to them as ambiguous conversations rather than as hard facts. Census records are especially rich yet troublesome documents. The 1920 census schedules I read were microfilmed copies of the original hand-written manuscripts, filled with illegible words in antiquated script and smudge ink. According to John Lewis, a significant number of the original schedules were destroyed by fire, including pages documenting African American residents. Most significantly, the categories of inquiry, the instructions given to census employees, and those individuals' personal biases impacted the data collected.

My experiences at the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership point to the need for a holistic approach to fieldwork and to the projects of history and ethnography. The past and the present, like the 'field' and the 'archive,' are not mutually exclusive, but are intricately connected. The 'field' of the ethnographic present not only occupies multiple physical locations, but also exists within a thick historical, economic, political, and sociocultural nexus. Indeed, contemporary ethnographies are increasingly inclusive of historical developments, and histories take into account cultural continuities, blurring the lines between historical anthropology, ethnohistory, or cultural history. Both ethnographers and historians are asking, "how did the past lead to the present" and "how does the present create the past" (Tonkin et al, 1989).

Blurring disciplinary boundaries was not an acceptable agenda at the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership. At C-IP I was compartmentalized as an historian, despite my continuous assertion that I was in fact an anthropology student doing research on the past and present. In C-IP

projects, the past was constructed as a bounded entity to be recorded and celebrated, thereby overlooking the complicated route by which contemporary conditions developed.

I also learned that who sets the agenda and how projects are carried out affects research outcomes. Without widespread community support, participation, and ownership, C-IP's history projects often failed to get off the ground, or worsened their perception in the community. My own attempts to conduct participatory ethnographic and historical research were limited by my role as a C-IP employee. As such, my understanding of Southside residents' and Black Ithacans' sense of historicity is less rich than my document-based research. This is also why I chose to look at C-IP's historical approach, and their conflation of neighborhood and community, which I discuss in the next section.

# 3. (Oral) History, (the Southside) Neighborhood, and (the African American) Community

In this section I discuss the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership's oral history project as an example of the conflation of neighborhood and community, and space and race. While C-IP history projects emphasized the Southside's African American heritage as a source of community pride, they also failed to explore African American culture or race relations in Ithaca, looking instead at individual and family experiences. The slippery language of neighborhood and community functions in ways that smooth over cultural and historical complexities and fail to address the structural conditions that the project set out to remedy: the low status of the Southside area, which is related to its identification as a poor and Black neighborhood.

## The Oral History Project

The threat of commercial development at the western edge of the Southside neighborhood in 1999 inspired the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership to launch a number of projects to prevent the demolition of neighborhood homes and improve the 'quality of life' by recording and preserving neighborhood history. C-IP historian John Lewis began exploring historic preservation strategies such as designating the Southside a historic district. Diann Sams, Alderwoman for the 2nd Ward, C-IP staff member, and a long-time African American resident of Ithaca, initiated a project to record the oral histories of Black Ithacans.

The oral history project was conceived as a participatory project between local residents and students that would not only preserve and highlight the history of Black Ithacans and the Southside neighborhood, but also demonstrate a positive outcome of university-community partnership. Cornell Professor Patricia Pollak, the director of the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership,

recruited students from Risley Hall, an arts-oriented dormitory where she was a faculty fellow, as well as two anthropology students (including myself), to conduct interviews and create artwork. Diann rallied a group of 'community members,' and acted as the negotiator between 'the community,' students, and the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership for the duration of the project.

The project began in September 2000 with a meeting of African American residents and Cornell students at the St. James AME Zion Church on Cleveland Avenue, where 'community members' talked about what life used to be like on the Southside. The conflation between the Southside neighborhood and the African American community was evident from the start of the oral history project, which was an outgrowth of efforts to preserve the neighborhood's history. The meeting was the result of many months of planning by Diann, John, Cornell Professor Barbara Ebert of City and Regional Planning, and members of Historic Ithaca and Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services. Preserving the Southside's history through establishing a historic district *and* by recording oral histories were the driving agendas.

The Southside neighborhood did not, however, end up being the primary focus or location of the oral history project. Only two of the Southside residents present at the initial meeting ended up participating in the oral history project, and Diann worked to recruit other Black Southsiders. Other participants came from elsewhere in Ithaca, although many of their stories contained references to the Southside. Yet many of the student participants (including myself) referred to it as the "Southside oral history project," based on the origins of the project, and our assumption that Black Ithacans necessarily live on the Southside, and the corresponding perception that the Southside is an African American neighborhood.

Outsiders' perceptions of a place and a community differ in quality and meaning from how insiders see it. The Southside occupies an important place in the memory of older Black

Ithacans, as residents who attended the initial meeting at St. James made clear. At one point, John Lewis asked: why was the Southside "where the action was?" The unanimous response, after a round of laughter, was the Southside had been where Black people lived. The memory of a tight-knit Black community on the Southside, woven with uproarious anecdotes about getting haircuts for a quarter, neighbors giving out snacks, and young men "eyeballing" girls as they walked home from work, along with more serious accounts of Ithaca's *de facto* segregation, required "goin' back 50 years!" It was this sense of historicity that drove the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership to focus on the Southside's African American history as a tool for building community and improving quality of life.

**Individuals and Community**

The oral history project emerged as one strand of a larger historic preservation effort that conflated the history of the Southside neighborhood with the history of the African American community. Yet the project ultimately focused less on the neighborhood, or even on community life, than on the experiences of individuals and their families. I argue that the focus on individuals, while appearing to conflict with the discourse of community, actually fits within C-IP's discourse of "bland pluralism," which overlooks not only cultural differences but also relations of power.

The questions that Cornell-Ithaca Partnership director Pat Pollak suggested to guide the students during interviews exemplified an a-cultural, individualized approach to oral history:

> Where were you born?
> Tell me about your brothers and sisters, about your family.
> What does family mean to you?
> What's the funniest thing that ever happened to you in town?
> What is it like living in Ithaca?
> Is there someplace else that you'd rather live?
> If your wish would come true, what would you hope for Ithaca as a community…?

> What do you most want people to understand or to know about you? (September 29, 2000).

Pat thought it would be good to "decide on some common themes to explore so that we end up with a cohesive piece that tells the individual stories of the [Southside] Neighbors but that also 'holds together.'" She expected that a common set of questions (defined by the interviewers), rather than a common set of experiences (lived by neighborhood residents) would make the oral history coalesce and serve the interest of C-IP's community building program.

I did not have access to tapes and notes from others' interviews, so it is difficult to generalize about how they were conducted. In weekly meetings at Risley, students reported that their interviews were very open-ended, and driven mostly by their informants. In my own interview I did not ask any of the questions I had prepared in advance until half way through the interview, and then only when they connected to what 'my community member,' Bernie Milton, had to say. Our interview was actually a dynamic conversation, shifting back and forth through time and space, and filled with vivid stories that Bernie used to highlight his career as a soul musician and martial arts instructor (Fieldnotes, November 15, 2001).

Not everyone was comfortable with this open-ended interview format. Leland, one of the resident artists from Risley, raised the question of how to conduct a 'productive' interview. He explained that his interview with the three Cooke sisters lasted for three hours, and he was overwhelmed by the quantity of information they provided.

> He started off by asking when and how their family got to Ithaca, and they took off from there, telling the story from the 1860s through today, and even talking about the future of Southside. He did try to get the basic facts for constructing a family tree, which includes a Mohawk Indian grandfather. But lots of issues came up besides just family history, including generational change, the neighborhood and various personalities within it, the growth of the Southside Community Center, life in Ithaca, etc. (Fieldnotes, October 3, 2000).

Leland thought it would be more 'productive' to guide the interviews with more pointed questions, rather than letting the sisters bicker about the order of events and 'digress' into family gossip. Leland's comments reflected many aspects of the "standard oral history frame":

> Such a frame teaches [oral historians] to view Western communicative patterns as the norm, while others are denied; to regard the individual as more important than the group, and judge views of self which differ from this norm as deviant. It trains them to keep control of the interview: the interviewee is expected to take the floor, yet their contribution to the discussion is kept within the boundaries of the topics selected by the interviewer (Kopijn, 1998: 144).

Here Leland took dominant white American (still a vague cultural designation, but more specific than Kopijn's reference to "Western" culture) communicative patterns as the norm, denying those aspects of African American culture that emerged during the interview (see also Briggs, 1986).

Through interviews and group meetings, student participants came to understand that the experiences of 'their community members' were never limited to the Southside neighborhood. Memories from the more recent past further demonstrated that African American life in Ithaca has become decentralized since the 1960s. By the end of the project, the students seemed to agree with C-IP staff that the stories didn't have much to do with the neighborhood. They also saw the stories as having little to do with African American culture or community life. Rather, they considered the stories to be personal accounts about family history. This view informed the names that Diann and Pat suggested for the oral history book: *The Story of Our Lives, Memories are Made of This, Sharing Our Past, Reflecting on the Past*, etc. The oral history was no longer marked by place—the Southside neighborhood—or by ethnoracial identity—the African American community—it was about universalized individuals and their families.

The final emphasis placed on individuals and families was not contradictory, but actually coincided with the discourse of community that C-IP staff used to avoid talking about race and

class during the course of the oral history project. An example of this evasion was the reference to "February," rather than specifying "Black History Month." But race and class, while never explicitly addressed, remained close to the surface. Differences were contained in the labeling of participants as "students" (white, middle- to upper-class young people not from Ithaca) and "community members" (Black, working- to middle-class people from Ithaca). "Town-gown" power differences were evident in the interactions between students and residents, but every attempt was made to minimize them by constructing the project as a "gift to the community." When students reported on their interviews, they did not mention ethnoracial identity or culture as important topics in the oral histories they had recorded.

Yet most narratives included in the oral history book mentioned ethnoracially and culturally marked experiences. For example, Frances Eastman, who moved to Ithaca in the 1940s, talked about living in Harlem during 1920s, when African American cultural life was blossoming. Sisters Dorothy Rollins and Anita Reed explained the differences in race relations between Ithaca's Northside and Southside before World War II. Diann Sams described how changing her hair from processed to natural and wearing Afro-centric clothes affected her political position on the Ithaca City School District in the 1980s (oral history book).

As a participant-observer I was confused by the apparent discord between the focus on individual rather than common experiences, and the use of community and neighborhood to talk around class and ethnoracial differences.

> I am perplexed by the town/community politics going on here, because this is, in many ways, about preserving the heritage of African Americans in Ithaca, but it is only talked about in coded language: "our stories," "the past," "neighborhood," "people." On the one hand, I feel that the project should be up front about its "subjects" and should enter into the (political) discourse of black history. On the other hand, I recognize the desire for residents to identify as that—residents, neighbors, people of Ithaca—and not be compelled at every moment to explicitly identify as African Americans. Nothing requires that this project become more than "just" telling stories if the residents don't want it. However, when it really comes down to it, I think that producing such a watered-down,

> feel-good version of oral history doesn't go very far. Yes, people feel validated by seeing their family histories written up in a nice little book, but that's it (Fieldnotes, November 30, 2000).

The tension I perceived between the individual and the community in the oral history project is a common paradox in United States culture. Anthropologist Hervé Varenne explains this apparent contradiction as part of the pervasive U.S. "logic of community building... [which] emphasizes the central, encompassing place of the individual, the person, the 'people' in their aggregation, as the motor of community" (1984: 294; in Urciuoli, 1996: 30). C-IP's version of "community building" focused on validating individual experiences, rather than addressing the structural location of the African American community in the broader sociocultural, political, and economic framework. The focus on individuals in a community inserted the oral history project into a discourse of diversity and multiculturalism, which is palatable only within an ideology of individualism. Urciuoli writes,

> The larger society is "diverse" insofar as it is composed of a number of "different" communities, each made of individuals like each other. Communities thus differ from each other in the ethnic traits that make up their content, not in the ways that social relations are politically organized (30).

Focusing on individuals and 'the community' (which was implicitly identified as African American) allowed the oral history project to slide over issues of identity, race, ethnicity, class, and power. Rather than addressing practical needs or seeking to affect political change, the "feel-good" quality of the oral history book prevailed in the end, as evidenced by the project's categorization under the C-IP program area of "Community Building" rather than "Neighborhood Quality of Life."

**Neighborhood and Community: Ethnoracial Difference and Multiculturalism**

What is the significance of discourses of community and neighborhood in relation to race and ethnicity? How is history used as a tool for improving the public image of and the quality of life in a neighborhood/community? Here I draw on Urciuoli's discussion of 'community' in U.S. culture:

> With the individual as the defining unit, the American notion of "community" presupposes the following: communities are based on consensus among like persons; communities control space; communities are based on a morality of achievement in ways that mask historical and political considerations (30).

Notions of community and neighborhood in Cornell-Ithaca Partnership history projects and in local historical memory involve a complex mix of the above factors. A shared racial or ethnic experience is automatically assumed to designate individuals as members in a community (i.e., the African American community). Urban communities are perceived as occupying particular neighborhoods, and areas with significant African American populations are often stereotyped as bad neighborhoods or 'ghettoes.' The conflation of neighborhood and community, space and race/ethnicity, thus spatially reinforces ethnoracial and class hierarchies. Such a conflation may also provide a strategy of resistance for stigmatized groups, by reclaiming spaces as essentially theirs. Another way to combat negative stereotypes is to reconstruct the history of a neighborhood/community based on achievements rather than pathologies. However, ignoring the complexities of historical, political, economic and sociocultural processes, as in the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership's oral and neighborhood history projects, creates the appearance of multiculturalism without addressing continuing inequalities.

Ideologies of race and ethnicity in the United States have to do with generalizing groups of people by shared ascribed traits, identities seen as fixed givens, that automatically bestow membership in a community. An oversimplified distinction is often made between 'race' as an

essential biological factor (i.e., it has an objective, physical, genetic basis that governs everything from skin tone to behavior), and 'ethnicity' as a cultural identity (e.g., national origin, language, religion).

In discourses of multiculturalism, ethnicity has replaced race as a more enlightened (no pun intended), less pejorative, and less threatening way to talk about difference. Urciuoli writes, "Ethnicization is a kind of mediating discourse: if the chief polarities are white, middle-class Anglo versus non-white, poor, and culturally/linguistically deficient, then being ethnicized is a way to mediate these extremes" (1996: 16). Urciuoli continues:

> Every "ethnic group" that now exists in the United States was once racialized; every immigrant population and particularly every population subsumed into the United States through slavery or colonization. Most immigrant populations have become ethnicized, while enslaved and colonized populations have had less success (17).

Indeed, the discourse on race in the United States today revolves primarily around the binary of white and black, reflecting the legacy of colonization and slavery. While some previously racialized groups have been "ethnicized" to varying degrees (especially European immigrants), African Americans are still considered Black—that is, they are still racially marked, despite the ethnicizing strategy of hyphenation. Race and ethnicity are not mere indexes of real (whether biological or cultural) differences, but are imbedded in structures of power and class. Within these structures, the line between race and ethnicity is rather blurry, which is why I use the composite term "ethnoracial."

The continuing racialization of African Americans is evidenced by the lumping together of Black people into a community. As outsiders, non-Black Ithacans generalize about the African American community, without knowing much about how insiders define or experience their community. When imposed by outsiders, such labeling serves to solidify categories based on the perception of racial difference. Yet the discourse of community is also an ethnicizing discourse

utilized by African Americans to assert political power. Community suggests internal coherence, cultural continuity, and self-help, and is called upon as a strategy of resistance, by asserting control over the definition of difference.

Among Black Ithacans there is considerable ambivalence about what community means to them. In a presentation titled "Town-Gown Relations and the Black Community," Jackie Melton Scott explained to her audience at the Africana Studies and Research Center that there is no "real" Black community in Ithaca, meaning that the African American population has little internal coherence or external political clout (1995). In the same series of presentations at the Africana Center, Diann Sams explained that she sometimes feels like an outsider to the African American community, even though she grew up here. She also pointed to divisions among African American residents in the Flats, Black civic and political leaders, and people of color on "the hill," implying that there is no monolithic African American community.

However, both Scott and Sams make clear that Black Ithacans share common political interests and a cultural history. They refer to the African American community to mark differences when talking about issues specific to African Americans to non-Blacks. They also use community when speaking to each other, as a call to unity. While community is clearly an important concept for Black Ithacans, it is not an intrinsic quality or abstract entity, but a culturally situated and politically employed ideal.

If the African American community is hard to define in the ethnographic present, thinking about the community historically presents some of the same difficulties. My historical work does, to a certain extent, generalize about Ithaca's African American community in the first half of the 20th century. This is due in part from the small size, geographic concentration, and relative homogeneity of the Black population through World War II, as well as because so little

has been recorded from this period. Determining what constituted the African American community after the war, when the population swelled with new migrants, and after civil rights struggles, when some African Americans gained class and spatial mobility, is a complicated task that I touch upon only briefly in my research. While located under the umbrella of 'the community,' the oral history project, with its focus on individuals and families, and erasure of ethnoracial markers, did even less to help me understand meanings of community to Black Ithacans.

The rhetorical slippage between community and neighborhood at C-IP is based upon the premise that communities occupy and control space. Time and time again, the term neighborhood (residents) was used interchangeably with community (members), and 'the community,' when uttered in relation to the Southside neighborhood, often referred to the African American community.

The interlocking perceptions and practices of ethnoracial identity and space, though not exclusive to Black communities and/or neighborhoods, are especially thick in regards to African Americans because of the history of racism in the United States. Until the Great Migration of the teens and twenties, the vast majority of African Americans lived in the South, constituting a majority in the "Black Belt" distinct from the rest of the majority white United States. In the South, mutual economic dependence dating back to the era of slavery required some spatial interaction between African Americans and whites, but knowing one's social (and spatial) 'place' was a matter of life and death for African Americans. Moving North was one way to transcend 'place,' but there African Americans encountered other spatial and socioeconomic limitations. From the late 19$^{th}$ century until the 1950s, both legally sanctioned and *de facto* segregation divided public and private spaces, and subsequently limited privileges and access to

political, economic, and sociocultural resources, between white and "colored." Beyond the proverbial back of the bus, residential segregation was perhaps the most significant and lasting development of the period, contributing to the 'ghettoization' of African in cities across the country. Part of my historical research has been to determine the impact of legal and *de facto* segregation in the concentration of African Americans on the Southside.

Residential segregation persists, despite the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling and the integration of many other areas of public life. The impact of continuing segregation has been not only to thwart the opportunities of millions of African Americans, but also to distort the perceptions that non-Black Americans have of African Americans. Even though African Americans now occupy all socioeconomic and spatial locations in U.S. society, the stigma of the 'ghetto' still applies to the neighborhoods where they live, even in Ithaca. Stereotypes are inherently judgmental; identifying a neighborhood as Black carries with it the heavy baggage of racism, prejudice and discrimination. The labeling of the Southside as Ithaca's Black neighborhood invokes negative stereotypes about African American communities and neighborhoods.

Destabilizing the coherence of the Southside as a 'culture area' i.e., the site of the African American community, is critical to undoing the conflation of race and place, and the negative stereotypes that accompany these concepts. This does not mean discounting Black Ithacans' memories of neighborhood and community. In fact, I am critical of the failure of C-IP history projects (as well as my own) to engage in the cultural continuities of African Americans in Ithaca over what Ferdnand Braudel (1980) calls the *longue durée*, or long term. I criticize the way in which C-IP projects insert the life stories of African Americans and the Southside neighborhood into the broader historical discourse of Ithaca in order to construct all Ithacans as equal members

of a city-wide community, rather than situating African Americans in a nexus of sociocultural, economic, political, and geographic processes that are still marked by inequalities.

This integrationist approach is part of the reason why African Americans have not been frequent subjects of anthropological inquiry in the United States. African American anthropologist John F. Szwed (1974) argues that anthropologists have "avoided the issue of gathering or analyzing data on other ethnic groups that might challenge the assumption of a melting pot society" (162). Szwed traces this trend to the work of Franz Boas, who challenged biological definitions of race and pointed to the accomplishments of African cultures as an argument against "the reliability of racial identity as a means of predicting cultural capacity" (157). But in doing so, Boas failed to look at the uniqueness of an African American culture, which led him "to infer that blacks, as a group, simply 'overlapped' white American culture, if only imperfectly." Into the 1940s, argues Szwed, "there was a tendency for scientists to deny the existence of *both* racial difference in capacity *and* deny any significant cultural differences between members of the two different 'races'" (158). From the 1940s through the 1960s, the "pejorative tradition" of Chicago School sociologists emphasized how racism and slavery had damaged African Americans and caused the development of a pathological community lacking in "'culture.'" For these social scientists, "Afro-American culture was—in Ralph Ellison's phrase—nothing more than the sum of its brutalization" (159). In C-IP history projects, de-emphasizing African American culture and identity was seen as a way to escape the constant emphasis on "brutalization," but it also perpetuated the invisibility of African American culture, even as it sought to make individual Black Ithacans more visible.

The celebration of the achievements of individual African Americans, their families' contributions to the Ithaca community, and the memory of a close-knit Black community are

elements common to initiatives that use history as a tool for community or neighborhood development. Urciuoli asserts that "Community discourses are about success and contribution, the antithesis of poverty discourses" (33). Remembering the Southside neighborhood as the site of a cohesive Black community, where neighbors greeted each other on the street, attended services at St. James AME Zion Church, participated in after-school activities at the Southside Community Center, and patronized local businesses is an attractive counter-image to harsh stereotypes about the neighborhood's recent history and contemporary situation. This is the kind of celebratory narrative that I was encouraged to produce from my historical research.

But overlooking historical complexities obscures the oppressive structural conditions that relegated African Americans to the Southside neighborhood and in low-paying jobs, which also set the stage for the deterioration of the neighborhood in later years. This is where I locate the political difference between "bland pluralism" and a critical multicultural approach. On the one hand, "bland pluralism," as employed by C-IP, recognizes diversity only in terms of individual experiences and 'melting-pot' collectivity, which bell hooks calls "the stuff of colonizing fantasy" (1994: 31). As Peter McLaren writes,

> Diversity that somehow constitutes itself as a harmonious ensemble of benign cultural spheres is a conservative and liberal model of multiculturalism that ... deserves to be jettisoned because, when we try to make culture an undisturbed place of harmony and agreement ... we subscribe to a form of social amnesia in which we forget that all knowledge is forged in histories that are played out in the field of social antagonisms (quoted in hooks, 1994: 31).

I see critical multiculturalism, on the other hand, as a project that acknowledges and respects differences and also challenges structured inequalities. This requires, as Micaela di Leonardo argues, "a radically reoriented vision of the United States, a vision containing diversity, multiculturalism—'difference'—but moving beyond beer-commercial banality to link that difference to power and history within and beyond American shores" (1998: 363). I do not

advocate for the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership to engage in stale identity politics, which they nearly do in their conflation and celebration of neighborhood and community. Rather, I would like to push for an explicit recognition of African American experiences, while treating identity, neighborhood, and community as shifting practices, not inherent categories, and locating them within historical processes of political, economic, and sociocultural inequality.

I consider my own historical research to be this kind of critical multicultural project. I have tried to get away from defining aspects of the past as 'positive' or 'negative,' instead examining the history of individuals, events, and socioeconomic structures that intersected in the practice of community and neighborhood, and what these processes meant to residents. This is what I take on in the next section, where I examine how the Southside neighborhood was enacted as a space of African American community life from the turn of the century until after World War II.

# 4. Remembering "Bronzeville": African American Community Life in the Southside Neighborhood, 1900-1950

For much of the twentieth century, the Southside neighborhood has been imagined and enacted as a locus of African American community life in Ithaca. In researching the neighborhood's history, I am simultaneously trying to understand how African Americans enacted community in the Southside neighborhood in the past, and to critically examine the intersections between race and place, community and neighborhood that accompany historical representations of the Southside in the present. I question the treatment of neighborhood and community as fixed, pre-existing categories, arguing instead that they are historically, socially, spatially, and discursively practiced.

My focus on practice, as well as the attention I pay to the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership's role in representing the history of the Southside neighborhood, distinguish my project from a long trajectory of African American community studies, which have had an overwhelmingly *spatial* orientation. In 1896 W.E.B. Du Bois undertook the first systematic sociological study of an African American community. *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) was the result of a thorough canvassing of Philadelphia's Seventh Ward, where twenty percent (not every single one) of the city's Negroes lived. However, Du Bois did not reduce either the experiences of Negroes in Philadelphia, or Philadelphia's "Negro Problem" to this ward. He recognized that "[t]o the average Philadelphian the whole Negro question reduces itself to a study of certain slum districts. His mind reverts to Seventh and Lombard Streets…" where, Du Bois acknowledged, one may observe the problems of crime and unemployment. Du Bois agreed that "all these problems are there and of threatening intricacy," but argued that "a slum is not a simple fact, it is

a symptom, and to know the removable causes of the Negro slums of Philadelphia requires study that takes one far beyond the slum districts" (5-6).

Studies of African American communities in Chicago, New York, Detroit, and other major northern metropolises proliferated from the 1920s through the 1970s. Chicago School sociologists in particular examined the impact of segregation and discrimination on the spatial and social practices of African Americans, especially the process of ghetto-formation (Drake and Cayton, 1945; Long and Johnson, 1947; Weaver, 1945; Vose, 1959; Taueber and Taueber, 1965; Bracey et al, 1971; Philpott, 1978; Hirsch, 1983). The process of ghettoization, according to these studies, began with the concentration of African Americans in previously heterogeneous 'slum' areas through legal and *de facto* segregation, leading to overcrowding and artificially high rents, and exacerbating already poor housing conditions and high poverty rates. According to these studies, segregation made ghettoes into "permanent enclosures" (in Philpott, 1978: x), where even upwardly mobile African Americans could not cross the 'color line.'

Into the early 1980s, researchers continued to apply "the urban community study format, and used the 'ghetto' as the primary conceptual and theoretical framework for understanding the black urban experience" (Trotter, 1996: 306-308). This 'ghetto' model was applied not only to large urban centers, but also to small towns and mid-sized cities. For example, in *Spout Spring: A Black Community*, anthropologists Peter Kunkel and Sara Sue Kennard describe the small, mixed-income, significantly African American neighborhood of Spout Spring, located in a small Midwestern city, as "their little ghetto" (1971: 17).

None of the studies of Ithaca's Southside neighborhood or African American community, which is remarkably similar in size, economy, and ethnoracial makeup to Spout Spring, has been conducted as holistic community studies, or has discussed the concentration of African

Americans on the Southside as a process of 'ghettoization' (Galvin, 1943; Phillips, 1956; Esolen, 1968; Horne, 1987, 1988; Montague, 1988; Hill, 1994). Nor is it my intention to do this here.

Instead, I draw on Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg D. Kimball's "Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond" (1996), whose approach to culture, power, and spatial practice reflects recent trends in African American urban history and community studies. Rather than merely trace the Black-white spatial relationships of segregation and 'ghettoization,' Brown and Kimball take a closer look at the spatial dynamics of power and culture among African Americans in Richmond, Virginia, and between Black and white Richmonders. They give a historical explanation of the formation of African American spaces in Richmond, particularly the neighborhood of Jackson Ward, in the broader context of the city's geography and social relations. However, they do not just produce maps of Black residences, work places, and public rituals, but also look at what these spaces meant culturally and politically.

> In considering how black Richmonders conceptualized their urban environment, we interrogate the cultural meanings they gave to the spaces they shared and the rhetoric and ideologies of urban space they developed. We suggest not only the street maps but also something of the mental maps that black Richmonders may have laid out and traveled. Our investigation treats city space as more than merely fixed residential and work patterns mapped on linear blocks; we see city space as an amalgam of fluid public spaces and institutions culturally defined by the inhabitants. Elizabeth Blackmar has noted how 'the crafted landscape functions symbolically; it is the physical incarnation of social priorities.' Similarly, we attend to the built environment as a means of exploring social, political, and economic ideology (82-83).

Like Brown and Kimball, I am not interested in a static map of the places where African Americans lived, worked, socialized, and went to church, but I want to investigate the cultural, political, and economic meaning of spatial and social practices.

In Ithaca, class and socioeconomic status, racism on behalf of real estate agents and white neighbors, and the ties of African American family and community life were important factors in the concentration of African American residence on the Southside. Yet while the Southside had

the highest percentage of African American residents of all of Ithaca's neighborhoods, African Americans were never a majority there. A significant number of African Americans also lived on the Northside and in other downtown neighborhoods. However, the spatial practices of African Americans in the Southside made the neighborhood, especially during the first half of the twentieth century, a locus of Black community life in Ithaca.

While African Americans often chose to live near one another and close to Black institutions, both overt and subtler forms of discrimination limited their housing options, resulting in residential concentration on the Southside. Red-lining by banks, the denial of home insurance, high rental deposits, and the claim that properties had already been taken made purchasing or renting a home outside of the Southside (besides pockets on the Northside) a difficult task. Race-restrictive deed covenants, legally enforceable until 1948, explicitly excluded African Americans (as well as immigrants) and/or made properties inaccessible to those of lower socio-economic status. While restrictive covenants were not as widespread in Ithaca as in larger cities, I consider them to be indicative of a significant level of native white racism and xenophobia in this purportedly liberal city, contributing to *de facto* segregation.

The practice of *de facto* segregation did not make the Southside an all-Black neighborhood. Rather, African American households were concentrated along certain blocks—Cleveland Avenue, South Plain Street, South Corn Street, Green Street, and Clinton Street. Outsiders' stereotyped perceptions of African Americans, both historically and today, have created an image of the Southside as a Black neighborhood that ignores the internal diversity within the neighborhood and among African Americans. For older Black Ithacans, the neighborhood has also been imagined and practiced as an African American space, but without the negative connotations that even well-meaning white Ithacans bring to such a designation.

Discussions of residential segregation often revolve around a binary of causation, of push and pull factors or 'choice' versus 'force.' Equally as important as racism, discrimination and segregation in the process of neighborhood formation was 'congregation,' the decision of African Americans to live near one another. A small minority (hovering between two and three percent of the total population) in a mostly white city, unwelcome in many public spaces except as servants, janitors, or waiters, having African American neighbors, businesses, churches, social events, and community services in a particular area was central to the maintenance of cultural identity and the building of political and economic power.

Many older Black Ithacans remember the Southside neighborhood as "the place to be" until around World War II. When asked why, their answer is simple: that's where Black people lived (Community History Meeting, September 12, 2000). The Southside was also where African Americans from other parts of Ithaca, especially the Northside, and Tompkins county came to worship, attend after school programs or social functions at the Southside Community Center, see the doctor, or have their hair done. Black institutions and businesses, as well as black-owned homes (and many rented ones, too) contributed to a web social interactions in the space of the Southside that formed the basis of a community. Today many residents express nostalgia for a 'real' neighborhood where people felt a sense of community, which they feel began to change in the 1950s, and which they have recently begun to try to rebuild.

An alternative name for the African American community on the Southside during the first half of the century, suggests Dr. James L. Gibbs, Jr., is "Bronzeville" (letter to author, May 1, 2001). Originally coined in 1930 by the editor of the Chicago *Bee*, an African American weekly newspaper, "Bronzeville" became a common nickname among residents for Chicago's

South Side. Sociologists St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton write in their 1945 study, *Black Metropolis*,

> "Ghetto" is a harsh term, carrying overtones of poverty and suffering, of exclusion and subordination. In Midwest Metropolis it is used by civic leaders when they want to shock complacency into action. Most of the ordinary people in the Black Belt refer to their community as "the South Side," but everybody is also familiar with another name for the area—Bronzeville....
> We shall use the term "Bronzeville" for Black Metropolis because it seems to express the feeling that the people have about their own community. They *live* in the Black Belt and to them it is more than the "ghetto" revealed by statistical analysis (383-385).

Although Ithaca's Southside has never approached the size, racial concentration, vibrancy, or 'ghetto' conditions as Chicago's Black Belt, "Bronzeville" emphasizes the positive aspects of a distinct African American community as seen by its members.

Understanding the Southside as containing Ithaca's "Bronzeville" calls attention to the particular ways in which African Americans experienced and perceived the space of Southside. In this work I do not replace "Southside" with "Bronzeville," because that is not what Ithacans—white or Black—call the neighborhood. However, I would ask the reader to keep in mind the distinction between the *general* Southside area and the *particular* ways in which African American community life took place in the neighborhood. I use the term "Bronzeville" not as a strictly geographical referent, but as a way to talk about a place of African American community life—residences, businesses, and institutions—in the Southside neighborhood while also recognizing the internal diversity of the neighborhood's residents.

The critical questions of neighborhood and community that underlie my historical account are informed by perceptions of the Southside from historical accounts as well as from the ethnographic present. While still unknown to most area residents, Ithaca's role in the Underground Railroad has received some attention from local historians (Galvin, 1943; Gallwey, 1963; Kammen, 1980; Klees, 1997; Mutunhu, 1979). These historical accounts tend to construct

the Southside as the place of Black history in Ithaca, from the early twentieth century to the present. Similarly, historical representations of the Southside neighborhood (including my own work for the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership) project a mythical moment when the Southside neighborhood was a tight-knit Black community. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, many older Black Ithacans remember a time when the Southside was the primary locus of African American community life in Ithaca. The neighborhood as a whole, I continually stress, has always represented a diversity of classes and cultures, never easily definable along physical or sociocultural lines. But within the broader boundaries of the Southside, from the turn of the century through World War II, was an identifiable "Bronzeville" that, while not exclusively Black, represented a geographical and sociocultural space for the practice of African American community life.

In the following sections I provide a historical analysis of the practices of neighborhood and community on the Southside. I review the early history of African Americans in Ithaca, including individuals who have been memorialized in local histories, and initial settlement patterns in the village. I discuss the Underground Railroad and abolitionist activities in Ithaca not only as they contributed to the development of the African American community, but also as events that are remembered as part of Ithaca's liberal self-image. Migration, labor, racism, and residential segregation are factors I consider in the early twentieth century formation of the Southside as a place of African American community life. Finally, I discuss at length how the Southside was practiced as Ithaca's "Bronzeville" until around World War II.

**Early History**

My purpose in this section is to provide a historical background as well as to draw attention to how African Americans have been remembered or forgotten in the local historical record. These gaps and misrepresentations motivate the dual focus of my research, which is to record and understand what happened, while also questioning how others have documented and interpreted these events.

Most histories of Ithaca and Tompkins County begin with the staggeringly beautiful geography of the Finger Lakes. The hills of Ithaca command a tremendous view of Cayuga Lake, carved by glaciers during the last Ice Age. Further erosion by the many streams and rivers that flow into the lake created the deep gorges for which Ithaca is so famous. Moss (1984: 30) writes, "There are few places in the world whose place qualities suggest that they benefit from the creative handtouch of some supernatural being," alluding to the Iroquois belief that the Finger Lakes were formed by the handprint of the Great Creator.

The Cayuga Indians have lived near the Lake for over 800 years. The Cayuga nation joined the powerful Iroquois Confederacy circa 1600, which became the League of Six Nations in the 1700s, a political organization whose legislative structure is said to have influenced the United States Constitution. French explorers and missionaries were the first Europeans to make contact with the Cayugas in the 1650s. The region came under British rule after 1713, and until the Revolutionary War the Cayugas and other Iroquois communities maintained a relatively autonomous community at the foot of Cayuga Lake. The Sullivan Expedition, ordered by General Washington in the summer of 1779, resulted in the genocide of the Cayugas, Oneidas and Mohawks, through forced displacement, battle, and the razing of settlements and agricultural lands (Abt, 1926:13-27).

The near extermination of indigenous people was not only a strategic move against the British, who had enlisted them against the Revolutionary forces. Genocide also meant gaining access to new territories for white settlement, regardless of previously agreed upon treaties. The Cayugas did not officially cede their territory to the State of New York until February 25, 1789, but as early as1781 their lands had been established as a Military Tract, from which Revolutionary war veterans could draw lots and begin settlement. Drawings for lots did not begin for another ten years, however, by which time a number of settlers had already arrived in what was to become Ithaca (Abt, 1926: 27).

Historical accounts of the first white settlers have until recently failed to include the African Americans that accompanied them to Ithaca. Before any white families located permanently near Cayuga Lake, in the summer of 1787 a group of would-be settlers originally from Kingston, Pennsylvania came to harvest wild marsh hay in the valley. Among those listed in the expedition were Robert McDowell and Richard Loomis (Abt, 1926: 28). While Abt makes no mention of the racial or ethnic identity of these men, recent historical accounts indicate that Richard Loomis was a slave owned by Robert McDowell (Montague, 1988: 88; Mutunhu, 1979: 15). Abt does note, however, that when McDowell brought his family to settle in Ithaca, he also brought with him two servants (1926: 30), one of whom may have been Richard Loomis. A plaque located at DeWitt Park lists McDowell, a Revolutionary war officer, as one of the original white settlers, but contains no mention of Loomis.

Little more is known about African Americans in the early village of Ithaca. Nineteen other white settlers from Kingston, New York had established households near the base of East Hill around the same time as McDowell, but many members of this tiny community were displaced after the drawing of military lots in 1791. Since few soldiers actually claimed their

lots, wealthy investors and high-ranking officers quickly gained access to large quantities of land, a process that occurred throughout the state (Abt, 1926: 30-31).

One such man was Simeon DeWitt, surveyor general of New York State, who established a field office in Ithaca in 1796 from which he completed a map of the state. He rapidly acquired titles to most of the valley, a total of 2,332 acres. DeWitt mapped out streets, surveyed lots, and leased them out to people willing to settle in the village he called Ithaca, in the township of Ulysses. In local histories DeWitt emerges as the charismatic founding father of Ithaca, "a man of vision and imagination, ...his enthusiasm... carried the young community along" (Deickmann, 1986: 32). Due to the efforts of men such as DeWitt, according to the dominant historical narrative, Ithaca grew rapidly, counting about 1000 residents in 1800 (Moss, 1984: 32). In 1806 it boasted 12 frame houses, one post office, and two "public houses" (Johnson, 1985: 17).

The early history of African Americans in the Ithaca area picks up in the rural town of Caroline (then part of Tioga County), where white settlers and slaves from Maryland and Virginia settled in 1804 and 1805. The lives of these slaves did not enter historical accounts until after 1960, when Sidney Gallwey, an Upstate New Yorker who attended Howard University, began researching local African American history while teaching school in Ithaca.

Gallwey's account of the life of Peter Webb, who was born into slavery in Mecklenburg, Virginia, has made Webb somewhat of a local hero. Dr. Joseph Speed of Virginia purchased Webb at the age of thirteen for ninety dollars (the price was one dollar per pound) shortly before traveling north to Caroline. In 1805 Speed registered Webb, along with three other young slaves, in the Tioga County Clerks office. When Webb came of age in 1811, he announced his desire to become free, and made an agreement with Speed to purchase his freedom. It took two years of

work on Speed's farm, followed by seven years at Hartford Mills and then at the Ithaca Hotel, for Webb to earn the three hundred fifty dollars, plus interest, he owed Speed. Webb was finally granted his freedom in December 1818 (Gallwey, 1960: 3-8). He was the first and last African American to emancipate himself in Tompkins County. Nine years later, in 1827, New York State abolished slavery (Landesman, 1999). Peter Webb's son, Frederick M., purchased the Speed homestead, known as Spring Farm, in 1870. Some of Webb's descendants, the Bailors and Van Dykes, still own the home, while others live in downtown Ithaca. Through the recovery of Webb/Bailor/VanDyke family records and other historical materials, some of which are held by the DeWitt Historical Society, the presence of African Americans in rural Tompkins county before abolition is slowly being re-inscribed in historical accounts.

While Peter Webb and his wife Phyllis remained in Caroline, farming near the cluster cabins that housed the Speed slaves, they also became active in a growing community of free African Americans in Ithaca and Tompkins County (Gallwey, 1960: 12). John Selkreg's hefty tome, *Landmarks of Tompkins County*, lists (according to the 1820 census) 18 slaves and 53 "free colored persons" in the towns of Ulysses (which then included Ithaca), Danby, and Hector (then a part of Tompkins County). In Caroline alone there were 32 slaves and no free African Americans (1894: 17). The exact number of enslaved and free African Americans in the village of Ithaca is unknown for 1820. Ten years later, following the incorporation of Ithaca as a village in 1821 and the statewide abolition of slavery in 1827, Ithaca's African American population grew to 112, and reached 136 in 1840 (Horne, 1988: 18) (see Appendix A). Most were probably freed slaves from nearby farms and rural areas, who moved to Ithaca to work for wages as domestics or unskilled laborers, and to live in a small but growing African American community (Horne, 1987: 3).

Figure 2. Peter and Phyllis Webb. DeWitt Historical Society.

Figure 3. Aunt Elsie Brooks. Photographed by Jefferson Beardsley, ca. 1871. DeWitt Historical Society.

If Peter Webb is today's best known historical African American figure, Aunt Elsie Brooks was Ithaca's most familiar Black woman during the 19th century. As Yvonne Singh explains in her thesis titled *The Life and Times of Aunt Elsie Brooks...* (1990), the details of her life are as contested today as they were at the time of her death in 1875. What is clear is that she was born a slave and was brought from Maryland to Danby by a man named Furness between 1810 and 1812. She later lived with her husband John Brooks at 24 Wheat Street, and worked as a washerwoman. She was often seen walking around town with a large basket on her arm, as depicted in a photograph by Jefferson Beardsley (DeWitt Historical Society). Accounts of her life in the *Ithaca Journal* paint a picture of Aunt Elsie as faithful, strong-spirited, outspoken, and well respected by both Black and white Ithacans (March 10, 1875). The *Journal* reported that 883 people attended her funeral, nearly causing the floor of the St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church to collapse (March 12, 1875) (in Singh, 1990: 6-17).

These accounts of Aunt Elsie's life suggest that African Americans had a visible presence, no matter how small, in Ithaca during the mid-19th century. Her life also points to the patterns of African American life during that time. Beginning in the 1820s, African Americans established households on and near Wheat Street[5], in the southwest part of the village now known as the Southside. From the start, the area was home to working-class people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and African Americans' movements were not restricted to that neighborhood. However, the neighborhood's strong African American presence led to the establishment of the county's first Black institution, the St. James African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, where Aunt Elsie worshipped and her funeral was held.

Until they established their own church, African Americans in Tompkins County attended white-dominated mainline Protestant churches, where they were required to sit in the

[5] Wheat Street was renamed Cleveland Avenue in 1908 (Sasche, no date).

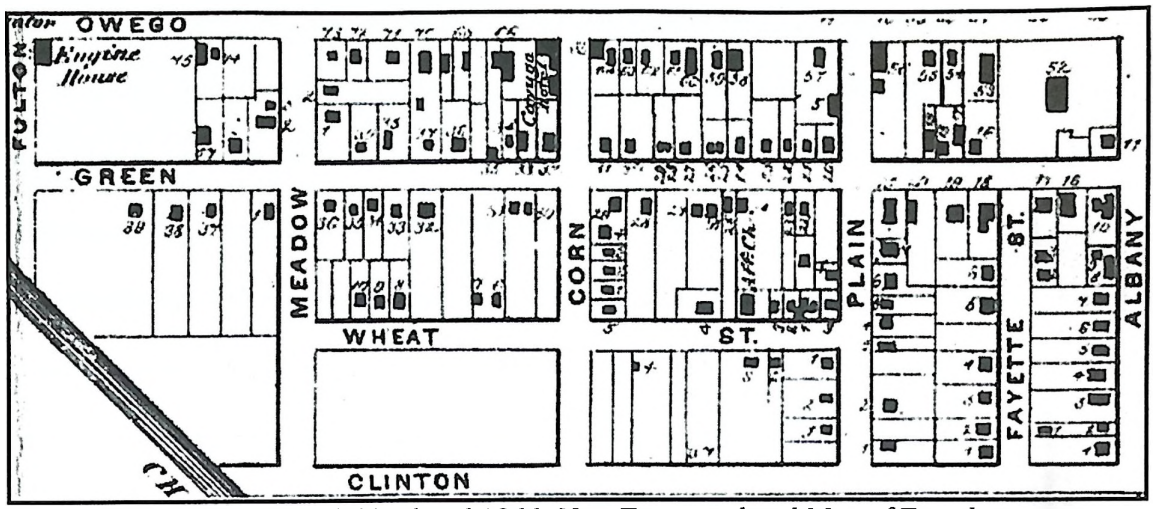


Figure 4. The Southside neighborhood 1866. *New Topographical Map of Tompkins County*.

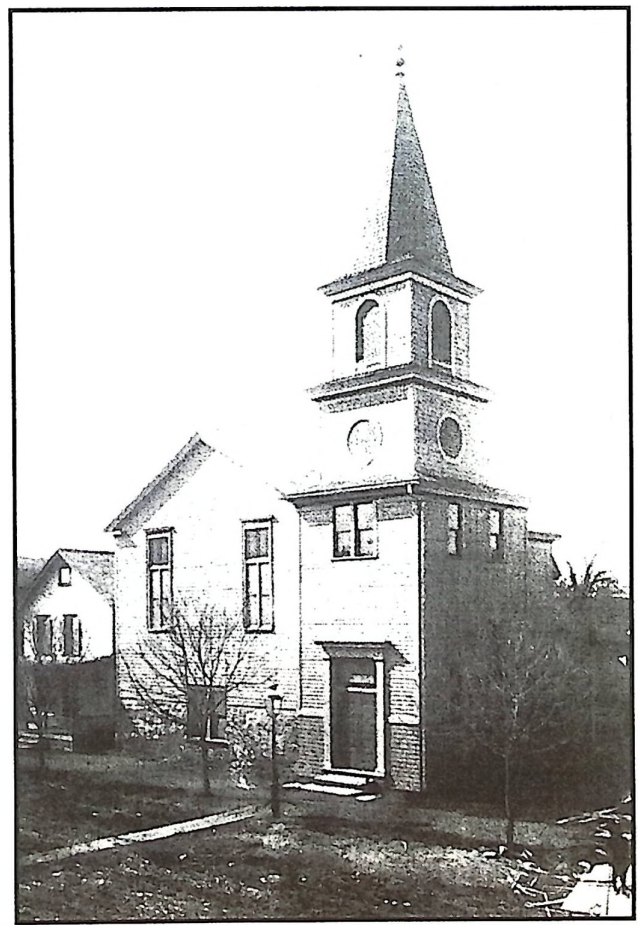

Figure 5. St. James AME Zion Church on Cleveland Avenue, ca. 1910. Sisler et al. 1988.

balcony (Deickmann, 1986: 58). In the 1825, a group of 18 African Americans led by Peter Webb, "withdrew in protest from the Methodist Episcopal Church" and founded the St. James AME Zion Church (Thornhill, April 1997).[6] For a number of years, the congregation worshipped in the home of the first pastor, Reverend Henry Johnson, at the corner of West Green and South Geneva Streets. In 1836 they purchased a lot on Wheat Street from Richard DeWitt, the son of the recently deceased Simeon DeWitt's, for five dollars, and built St. James (Montague, 1988: 90). After its construction, St. James became the geographic, social, and political center of African American community life in Ithaca and Tompkins County. Rural folk would often make the trek to Ithaca every Sunday to attend services. Ruth Reed Bailor, born in 1900, remembered her father's tale of walking to church with his brother all the way from their farm in Trumansburg and back (Kammen, 1984: 105). St. James is the oldest surviving church structure in Ithaca, and has been officially designated a historic site by the city of Ithaca, New York State, and the National Register of Historic Places.

**The Underground Railroad**

The St. James AME Zion church is especially known for its role in the abolitionist movement and as a station on the Underground Railroad. In recent years, the history of the Underground Railroad has been incorporated into Ithaca's self-image as a progressive, 'enlightened' city.[7] This ahistorical exceptionalism can be seen in the comments of *Ithaca Journal* columnist Tom Calarco: "If you were a runaway slave during the 1850s, Ithaca might have seemed like the Promised Land" (1993). However, white Ithacans were not always united

[6] The African Methodist Episcopal denomination was founded in New York City in 1796 (Howell, 1986).
[7] In 1995 the *Utne Reader* voted Ithaca the most "enlightened" city in the United States.

in the fight against slavery or for equal rights. As local historian Gretchen Sachse explains, "'We were not of one mind here, and it did divide the community.... Some things don't change in human nature, that's why history keeps recurring'" (in Crawford, 1997).

From the start, members of the St. James church were the primary agents of the Underground Railroad in Ithaca. Abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass spoke at anti-slavery conventions held at St. James in 1842 and 1852. In his notebook on July 22, 1852 Douglass noted that Ithaca as a whole had changed drastically in the ten years since his last visit, when "the community seemed sunk to the most hopeless depths of pro-slavery." But after the passage of the stringent Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, which made the federal government responsible for retrieving escaped slaves to their Southern owners, white Ithacans became more active in the abolitionist movement and the Underground Railroad. Douglass also credited the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as being "the most efficient agent in changing the sentiment of Ithaca, as well as elsewhere" (Foner, 1975: 238-239)

Douglass harbored some doubts over the place of white people in the fight against slavery. In his notebook he wrote:

> The meeting at Zion Church was, contrary to my expectation and partly to my wishes, largely composed of white persons. There are some things which ought to be said to colored people in the particular circumstances in which they are placed, that can be said more effectively among themselves, without the presence of white persons. We are the oppressed, the whites are the oppressors, and the language I would address to the one is not always suited to the other (Foner, 1975: 238).

While Douglass worked closely with both white and Black Americans in the abolitionist movement, he was uncompromising in his advocacy for African American liberation against white oppression. It was vitally important that African Americans be leaders in that struggle. His comments suggest that white Ithacans not only outnumbered but also may have overshadowed Black Ithacans' own participation in the abolitionist movement.

While many white Ithacans considered themselves abolitionists, St. James was a distinctly African American institution, and its members were the primary organizers of Underground Railroad activity. Horne argues that "white agents supported the cause but the presence of a vital black community in the village meant that the work was chiefly in the hands of blacks" (1988: 18). Mutunhu also asserts that the former slaves who settled in Ithaca after abolition in 1827 "became the key organizers and operators of the Underground Railroad passenger service in the county" (1979: 16). With the help of a broad network of white and Black abolitionists, pastors at St. James acted as "stationmasters," finding hiding spots for fugitive slaves on their way to Canada. It is debatable whether or not fugitives actually stayed in the church, although Ithaca native Claudia Jenkins claims that underground passages connect her home on West Green Street to the basement of St. James (Oral History Book).

Within Ithaca's African American community to the 1940s, argues Emma Corinne Brown Galvin, the first African American woman to earn a Ph.D. from Cornell, people shared a rich "lore" about the Underground Railroad, a set of stories passed down through families about their homes, neighbors, and ancestors. Galvin (1943: 3) relates stories from Ithacans who knew or were descendants of Harriet Tubman, whom they affectionately called "Aunt Harriet." Galvin also lists the many hiding spots throughout Ithaca, which included basements, secret rooms, and, in one house, a large brick oven (140-141).

Members of the St. James congregation and throughout the county offered not only hiding places but also material aid to escaped slaves. George Johnson, one of Ithaca's most prominent African Americans in the nineteenth century, is known to have aided 114 slaves to freedom. Born into freedom in Canandaigua, New York in 1835, he came to Ithaca with his parents in 1846. Johnson inherited his father's barbershop on North Aurora Street, where he

Figure 6. George Johnson, barber and Underground Railroad agent, late 1800s. DeWitt Historical Society.

served not only a large Black clientele but also many of Ithaca's white business leaders. He drew upon these connections to obtain money, shoes, and clothing from white Ithacans to aid escaped slaves on their way to freedom (Mutunhu, 1979: 26-29).

Some escaped slaves decided to stay in Ithaca rather than continue on to Canada. In an interview with Galvin, Mrs. Fred Smith of 210 Cleveland Avenue explained:

> My father came here through the underground railroad from Georgia on his way to Canada, but he never got no farther than right here, 'cause he came here and stayed. It had been such a long time to get here, he just didn't want to go no farther (1943: 142).

Another man who stayed was Daniel Jackson, born into slavery in 1814, who escaped Virginia in 1858. Upon arriving in Ithaca, the pastor at St. James arranged for him to work at Edward Esty's tannery. After the Civil War, Jackson defied Esty's advice and returned to Point Rocks, Virginia, to retrieve his aging mother. Jackson lived with his mother, his wife Martha, and four stepchildren at 143 West Green Street[8], until his death on July 6, 1889 at the age of 75. His mother died five days later at the age of 103. Their graves can be found in the Ithaca City cemetery. A eulogy, written by Edward Esty himself and printed in the *Ithaca Journal*, tells Jackson's story and demonstrates the paternalistic relationship between employer and employee that lasted for 25 years (Mutunhu, 1979: 23-24).

The paternalism evident in Esty's relationship with Jackson is indicative of 19th century race relations in Ithaca. While overwhelmingly anti-slavery from 1850 onwards, Ithaca's white majority did not necessarily want to see African Americans as equal participants in society. In his *Landmarks of Tompkins County*, Selkreg writes:

> Slavery cast its dark shadow over this county until so recent a date, comparatively speaking, that it almost astonishes the most thoughtful of us when brought to fully realize the facts. The first quarter of the present century had almost expired before the last remnant of the nation's curse was expelled (1894: 16-17).

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[8] After street numbers were changed in 1904, this address changed to 709 West Green Street, where Agway now stands.

Despite his contempt for slavery, Selkreg fails to mention any other landmarks relevant to African Americans in the following 1000 pages. As Horne writes,

> Certain Ithacans supported the Underground Railroad, and the city welcomed the presence of servants and laborers, but full equality was not an undisputed concept in Ithaca until long after World War I and the "Great Migration" (1987: 20).

If the *concept* of full equality was indeed undisputed in Ithaca by the 1920s the *practice* of full equality was not. The persistence of social and economic *inequality* is a theme that repeats itself throughout the twentieth century history of African Americans in Ithaca.

**Migration and Labor**

A small but significant percentage of the 209 African Americans living in Ithaca by 1860 came via the Underground Railroad. Census data from these years may be misleading because escaped slaves were unlikely to respond truthfully to questions regarding their place of birth, due to the stigma of slavery. By 1875, over half of black heads of household admitted to having been born in Southern states, although the total number of African Americans born in New York State (which included the children born to Southern migrants) was greater. This increase was probably the result of the decreasing stigma around slavery as well as migration by free Black Southerners starting in the late nineteenth century (Horne, 1987: 5-6).

Starting around the turn of the century, millions of African Americans began to leave the South in an exodus known as the "Great Migration." Waves of migration peaked in the years following the First World War and then again after World War II. Driven by economic hardship, Jim Crow, and racist violence, migrants were drawn by the promise of industrial work in Northern metropolises such as New York, Chicago, Detroit, and smaller cities such as Buffalo,

Syracuse, and Rochester. In Chicago, for example, the African American population, 60 percent of which were from the South, grew 140 percent between 1910 and 1920 (Grossman, 198: 270).

As was the trend elsewhere, migration in and out of Ithaca was closely connected to the labor market. With limited job opportunities and a small industrial base, Ithaca's African American population experienced more modest growth during the first waves of the Great Migration than other cities in Upstate New York. Besides a handful of Black business-owners and semi-professionals, most African Americans worked as unskilled laborers or in food and domestic service. The African American population grew from 364 in 1900 to 470 in 1910, a 29 percent increase. Opposite trends in other Northern cities during the next ten years the African American population decreased slightly, most likely due to out-migration by middle-class African Americans looking for better economic opportunities (Horne, 1987: 6). The African American population then swelled again from 453 in 1920 to 637 in 1930, a 40.6 percent increase. Oral histories and census data indicate that a more significant period of migration was after World War II, when more jobs opened to African Americans (see Appendix A).

The majority of newcomers were Black Southerners, numbering approximately 150 in 1920, marking a small degree of continuity with national trends during the first stages of the Great Migration. Hill indicates that many African American women were recruited by local domestic service agencies to work for wealthy families in Ithaca and at Cornell (1994: 29). Other Black Southerners came for seasonal farm work. Lisa Henderson's father, who came to Ithaca to do farm work in the 1940s, remembers that farm workers had been coming since the 1920s. "The accommodations were extremely poor, but the workers were able to bring money back to their families or start a new life in New York State," she told Hill (1994: 30).

Figure 7. "Colored people picking wax beans." Date unknown. DeWitt Historical Society.

Within the African American community, Southern migrants most likely occupied a somewhat lower socioeconomic status than "old settlers" born in New York State. As previously mentioned, middle-class African Americans were leaving Ithaca at the same time as working-class migrants were entering. However, skilled and semi-professional workers, as well as business owners hailed from both North and South. And regardless of their standing within the Black community, the majority of African Americans worked at the lowest rungs of Ithaca's economy.

Domestic service, especially on or around the Cornell campus, was one of the most common occupations for African American women and men. Of 125 Black servants at the turn of the century, more than one third worked in fraternity houses. Three employment agencies, operated by local women, placed cooks, waiters, janitors, and maids for the growing demand by Cornell-affiliated employers. As foreign immigration increased, the number of Black unskilled laborers decreased, but at the same time more had entered skilled trades. In 1900 there were two carpenters, two masons, one brick manufacturer, three stove mounters or repairers, two cigar makers, one letter carrier, one photographer, one baker, and two bootblacks, one with his own shop. Three Black barbers were listed, as were three caterers, and a secretary at Treman, King and Co., a hardware store owned by one of Ithaca's most prominent white businessmen. The few Black women that held skilled positions included one practical nurse, a Canadian-born dental assistant, a hairdresser, and the storekeeper at a grocery store at 519 West Clinton Street. Miss Jessie Johnson, who later became a music teacher, was employed as a typewriter in a law office (Horne, 1987: 9-10).

Many of the same labor patterns held true in the 1920s. For women, work outside their homes meant working in others' homes, usually as cooks (39) and domestics (30). Lucy Brown recalled:

> My mother worked for Professor Howard Merrick, who was the head of the Graduate School. She worked! I can tell you she only had Thursday and Sunday afternoon off. All the rest of the time she worked. Men worked long hours too. A few worked at the Ithaca Hotel. I remember hearing that they started off washing dishes and a few men got promoted to waiters, but all the waiters were Black. When I was young, when I was a child and when I was a young woman, all the waiters at the Ithaca Hotel were Black. And that was an evolving process and at one time that was lily white too! (Hill, 1994: 35).

The most common occupations for men were janitors (47 total, 28 in Cornell fraternities), cooks or chefs (22), and waiters (11). Twenty-one could be identified as skilled laborers, working at Morse Chain Works, the coal company, the Oil and Gas company, the salt company, and the Air Craft company (1920 federal census).

Until after World War II, some better-off African Americans left Ithaca to find work. In 1923 *The Monitor* reported that Harold Murray left Ithaca to work for the Noiseless Typewriter Company in Mexico. Lincoln Carter left Ithaca "to enter the clothing business" in New York City. Hugh Hall also left Ithaca for New York City (June 1923: 6). During World War II, Anita Reed and Dorothy Rollins moved to Washington, D.C., where government jobs were widely available, although the racial climate was more oppressive than in Ithaca. In Ithaca, the sisters say, African Americans were not hired because there was a shortage of jobs. After the War they returned to Ithaca to stay, along with many new migrants who found jobs in a growing and more open labor market (Oral History Book).

**Settling in Neighborhoods**

Class and race were interconnected factors that influenced where African Americans settled. In the 19th century Ithaca's neighborhoods, like most of urban America, were not clearly

defined by race and/or ethnicity, but by class. Clusters of working-class African Americans and immigrant groups shared neighborhoods, forming "salt-and-pepper" residential patterns (Hastings, no date: 3). In the New York towns of Elmira, Ithaca, and Saratoga Springs, explains local historian Clara Sutherland,

> Blacks formed discernable residential clusters by 1850, but yet nowhere was strict segregation the rule. Class rather than race was the best predictor of black residential location for most of the nineteenth century. Like their white, working-class counterparts, blacks first lived in undesirable, devalued areas and/or near the sources of employment. Finally, as industrialization provided a means of upward mobility for working-class whites (but not for blacks), these poor sections increasingly became the preserves of Afro-Americans alone (1988: 5).

African American settlers and working-class immigrants, especially Irish and Italians, shared the south side of town, which offered inexpensive homes on marshy land near the edge of the village. Like their European immigrant neighbors, African American households tended to cluster together on particular blocks, attracted by common cultural and familial ties, and limited by prejudice and their inability to afford homes in other areas of the city.

The residential concentration of African Americans on the south side of town increased as the turn of the century approached. The 1880 federal census shows that the highest number of African American households were located on "the block bounded by Wheat, Clinton and Plain Streets, and on West Green Street near Corn; on South Cayuga Street; and on North Albany Street. No block was solidly black." Twenty-nine live-in servants resided with their employers in other parts of the city, especially in the "still-elegant central district" near downtown. Twenty years later, most servants had relocated to the Cornell campus and adjoining residential areas. Fifty African Americans now lived north of Cascadilla Street. However, "the neighborhoods of 1880 were still strong, except South Cayuga Street, where only one black family remained. Wheat Street (now Cleveland Avenue), while not all black, was more nearly so than in 1880" (Horne, 1987: 13).

Local historian Gretchen Sasche (no date) confirms that by 1900, Wheat Street was more visibly divided between Black and white, with African Americans on the 100-block, spreading out along South Corn and South Plain Streets, and Irish Americans on the 200-block, extending onto South Meadow Street. "There is nothing to suggest that this segregation by block was deliberate or planned," argues Sasche. "It may, in fact, have been determined more by blacks desiring to live closer to their church and extended family members than by the Irish trying to move away from the blacks and create an Irish neighborhood." However, the increasing divisions by block, while not necessarily deliberately planned by Irish Americans, may have been rooted in the increasing racial tensions of the era, which occurred at a local and national level.

If Ithaca experienced relatively tranquil race relations during the nineteenth century, African Americans faced a rising tide of racism and xenophobia by the 1920s. The Ku Klux Klan, whose ranks peaked in 1924, with two million members nationwide (Southern Poverty Law Center, 1997), gained ground in Central New York. The Klan promoted their July 3rd rally in Binghamton with a 26-page pamphlet that included advertisements from Ithaca businesses.

> A local dry cleaning establishment substituted K's for the first letter of every word in its name and so announced itself KKK. The "Kornell Kleaning Kompany" promised to "klean your suits and press your pants," while the 100 PerCent American Garage in Newfield promised Klean, Kareful, Kourteous service. An ad for a service station on Linn Street [in Ithaca] proclaimed that "Kellogg Keeps Kerosene" which I suppose meant that Mr. Kellogg kept it on hand for sale (Kammen, 1982).

In October of 1925, regional chapters of the Klan met in Ithaca. They marched down State Street, and rallied at the fairgrounds, with crowds cheering them along. The *Ithaca Journal* reported that "frequent posters were borne in the line, proclaiming that the organization is not fundamentally opposed to any race or creed—and asserting its stand for the American government, pure homes, and the Bible in the schools" (October 5, 1925). The paper's coverage

of the event was hardly critical, describing the marchers with flowery language—"clothed in their flowing robes and peaked hoods of white"—and thinly veiled praise—they "made an attractive spectacle." While the *Journal* mentioned that there were "occasional expressions of disapproval" along the march route, the newspaper's failure to denounce the event, along with the presence of 500 Klan members indicate a significant level of Klan support, and thus racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia in Ithaca at the time. However, Mrs. Eleanor Washington, who was 85 when Field Horne interviewed her in 1987, claimed that "nobody paid any attention to the KKK and they just went away!" (1988: 26).

White racism affected African American residential patterns by increasing their concentration along particular blocks, rather than causing the segregation of an entire neighborhood. In the 1940s and 50s, notes James L. Gibbs, Jr., only the 100 block of Cleveland Avenue and the 200 block of Plain Street were "solidly African American." He continues,

> Other blocks were racially mixed (including our block, the 500 block of South Plain Street, which retained its racial mixture for the 45 years that my parents lived there. Given houses in the block would turn from black to white or from white to black, but the overall composition of the block as a whole remained pretty much the same). ...[T]he area of heaviest black concentration (albeit not solidly black) was rather concentrated, i.e. Cleveland Avenue, Green Street, South Plain Street, Corn Street, and a few blocks of Clinton Street (letter to author, May 1, 2001).

Gibbs points out that most other blocks on the Southside were solidly white, and included people from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Similar residential patterns continued into the 1960s, when "40 % of Ithaca's Black population lives on the South Side, and ... there is some racial concentration within the area (with relatively more Black families in the area bounded by Green St., Plain St., Center St., and State St.)" (Esolen, 1968: 34-35).

White Ithacans, whether or not they were from the Southside, noted in particular the 'Blackness' of Cleveland Avenue. Jemma Macera, the daughter of Italian immigrants who lived on South Plain Street until the Depression, recalls that as a child, "I was afraid to even look down

Cleveland Ave." Even though she attended school at Henry St. John Elementary with African American children from the Southside, and had Black friends, she feared what was perceived to be the Black neighborhood. In the 1960s, however, Jemma became a local civil rights advocate, working with the MOVE Housing Committee in its efforts to desegregate the city and provide affordable housing to low income residents (Interview, October 5, 2001).

As the African American population increased, they were not entirely limited to the Southside. The establishment of the Calvary Baptist Church on North Albany Street in the mid-1800s indicates the early and lasting importance of the Northside as what Dr. James L. Gibbs, Jr. calls "a secondary African American neighborhood" (letter to author, May 1, 2001). By the 1920s an equivalent number of Black homeowners lived on the Northside as on the Southside, and a handful of households could be found on Giles, Hudson, Eddy, Pearl, and East State Streets. About 75 African Americans 'lived-in' on East Hill, working for families, fraternities, boarding houses, and dormitories connected with Cornell University (1920 federal census).

The significant number of African American households on the Northside, a working-class neighborhood with a large number of Italian, Hungarian, and Jewish immigrants, indicates that class, as well as race, was an influential factor in limiting housing choices. According to white Ithacans who grew up on the Northside, such as Louis Fendrick, the neighborhood was " 'what one might call well-integrated'" in the 1920s. In the 1930s, recalled Anthony DiGiacomo, " 'The streets were a mix of Hungarian, Italian, Jewish and black people, but as far as I can remember there was very little racial tension or even an awareness of race. We all played together and got along fine'" (Hobbie, 1988: 122).

African Americans who grew up on the Northside remembered things somewhat differently. Interracial socializing wasn't unheard of, but it was out of the ordinary. Bernie

Milton calls his mother, a musician, composer, and teacher "ahead of her time" because all sorts of folks visited her home on North Albany Street to play music. In those days "you didn't see many white people coming in and out of a black person's house," he told me.

While relations between neighbors may have been cordial enough, the social world of African Americans was still limited by racism. Well-known cases of discrimination include famous African Americans who visited Ithaca. Both Paul Robeson and Marian Anderson, who performed sold-out shows at Cornell's Bailey Hall in the1940s, were denied rooms at the Ithaca Hotel (Montague, 1988: 103-104; *Syracuse Post-Standard*, 1996).

For the most part, racism in Ithaca was enacted more subtly, although experiences of racism affected older Black Ithacans in different ways. Leroy Smith didn't think it was as bad "up here" as it was in Louisiana, where he came from. Like Mr. Smith, native Ithacan Harold Cooke doesn't remember having any "race problems," except that "you could get ignored." Being ignored or avoided was a common way in which many African Americans describe having experienced discrimination and prejudice in Ithaca. Outward expressions of racism were enacted especially in restaurants, where African Americans could walk into a restaurant and wait without service. In one establishment, African Americans could stand at a counter, but they couldn't sit in the dining hall (Community History Meeting, September 12, 2000). One frequently told story is from the 1950s, when a Black man who sat for over an hour at the State Diner without service. Fed up, he left, went home, and returned to sit calmly with a shotgun in his lap, waiting until he was finally served (Montague, 1988: 104). Dr. Gibbs reports that Italian restaurants on the Northside discriminated against African Americans, and remembered the local chapter of the NAACP picketing an Italian restaurant on North Meadow Street (interview, June 6, 2001). According to Mrs. Ruth Mann, " 'Lionel Martin, a black policeman, brought suit against the

Villa Restaurant for refusing to serve him, and won'" (Montague, 1988: 104). These stories may refer to the same case.

During the first half of the century, living in a neighborhood with more Black neighbors provided a sense of community and safety, a factor that contributed to the residential concentration of African Americans on the Southside. The Wilson sisters, Anita Reed and Dorothy Rollins, born on the Northside, moved with their parents to Center Street on the Southside in 1944. In the oral history book Lesley Ramirez tells of her interview with the sisters:

> The family's move made for quite a racial difference for Dorothy [who was in her last year of high school]. On the Northside, the neighbors were mainly first-generation Hungarian and Italian immigrants. On the Southside, more of their neighbors were Black. This move made Dorothy extremely happy because it allowed her social circle to widen considerably. Living on the Northside meant that although Dorothy could participate in the daily events going on at the Southside Community Center, she could not go to evening events.
> She pauses a moment for an explanation of the time. In the early 1940s, Ithaca did not sport streetlights every 50 yards or so. Nor was the racial climate here friendly enough for parents to feel safe sending their children out across town in the dark.

The Wilson family's choice to relocate to an area with a stronger African American presence is not merely indicative of a hostile racial climate, but more significantly demonstrates the agency exerted by Black Ithacans as well as the importance of community life.

The racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic heterogeneity of Southside residents, and the location of a significant number of African Americans on the Northside and in other parts of downtown Ithaca through the 1940s, indicate the need to critically reexamine the perception of the Southside as a Black neighborhood. The availability of housing in other neighborhoods, the significant level of home ownership and long-term residence, the sense of safety, and the small African American population suggest that the Southside was far from a 'ghetto' during this period. It was during the 1960 that the neighborhood deteriorated physically and experienced more severe economic troubles, leading to its labeling as a 'ghetto,' although this was less a

reflection of real conditions or of the perceptions of neighborhood residents than an expression of white stereotypes about Black communities. As a neighbor of mine, a young African American man who grew up in Lousiana, told me, "Ithaca can't even *spell* ghetto."

**Restrictive Covenants**

In Northern cities such as Ithaca, where white racism wasn't codified in law, and where many whites expressed some level of tolerance toward African Americans, the prevailing attitude was, as Stephen Grant Meyer (2000) aptly titles his book on residential segregation, "as long as they don't move next door." Local legislation never sanctioned residential segregation as in the Jim Crow South, but Ithaca's neighborhoods became increasingly concentrated according to race in the 1920s. One contributing factor was race restrictive deed covenants, which have been discussed as significant legal tools for enforcing residential segregation in other U.S. cities, but have been almost entirely overlooked in local historical narratives.[9]

Restrictive covenants are private agreements between the grantor(s) and the grantee(s) of a deed of sale that place limits on the property rights of the grantee(s). The first such covenants had their origins in early nineteenth century Britain, where land-use restrictions were used to protect the upper-class status of residential parks. This strategy was first applied in the United States in the 1850s in St. Louis and Kansas City. In 1871, Frederick Law Olmstead used restrictive covenants in his Riverside development in the Chicago suburbs. The first race restrictive covenants appeared in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1901, stating " 'no part of said real estate shall ever be owned or occupied by any person of the Negro race'" (Hastings, no date: 4).

[9] Hobbie (1988: 193-194) is the only local historian who mentions deed restrictions in the development of Ithaca's neighborhoods, but she does not discuss how restrictive covenants affected African Americans.

Race restrictive covenants did not gain widespread use until the 1920s. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Southern cities and other cities facing a rising tide African American migration often passed race-restrictive zoning ordinances to enforce segregated housing. Both Hastings and Meyer argue that white-dominated municipal governments considered racial zoning a way to maintain 'order' in a time of intense racial animosity. While racist and unfair, legally sanctioned residential segregation replaced or at least supplemented more volatile methods of white community-enforced segregation, such as riots, lynchings, and pickets. Progressive-era reforms took racial divisions as natural and unchangeable, and promoted social order over equality and justice. This logic, combined with the doctrine of "separate but equal," made white reformers consider residential segregation a fair alternative to constant racial tension and violence (Hastings: 4; Meyer 2000: 7-9).

Due to the untiring efforts of the NAACP, the Supreme Court ruled racial zoning ordinances unconstitutional in the 1917 case *Buchanan v. Warley*. Though the ruling was ignored in many Southern cities until the 1950s, residents and real estate dealers in Northern cities turned to restrictive deed covenants as a private tool for maintaining segregation (Meyer, 2000: 23-29). Restrictive covenants were often a response to attempts by upwardly mobile African Americans to purchase homes in white neighborhoods, which inspired widespread panic among middle-class whites who feared the physical and moral deterioration of their neighborhoods with the influx of African Americans. Thus restrictive covenants were not always a primary cause of residential segregation, but they perpetuated segregation and exacerbated the problems within predominantly African American neighborhoods.

Race-restrictive deed covenants gained popularity after they were deemed constitutional by the 1926 Supreme Court ruling in *Corrigan v. Buckley*. The Court upheld decisions by lower

courts that race-restrictive deed covenants were private agreements and therefore were not covered by the Fifth and Fourteenth amendments, which only apply to actions by the state. NAACP lawyer Louis Marshall wanted to put forth the argument that because the courts often upheld restrictive covenants, that constituted state action, and was akin to racially discriminatory legislation. However, at the last minute the NAACP chose to argue that restrictive covenants violated the Civil Rights act of 1866, an argument that did not convince the Court to rule against private agreements between individuals (Meyer, 2000: 46). It was not until the 1948 case *Shelly v. Kraemer* that NAACP lawyers argued Marshall's point, and the Supreme Court ruled the enforcement of race-restrictive covenants unconstitutional. However, race-restrictive covenants themselves were not ruled illegal until after the Fair Housing Act of 1968 (Yinger, 1999).

In Ithaca, restrictive covenants pertaining to land use, cost, and race and nationality intersected in ways that limited the housing options of African Americans, who lived almost exclusively in the Flats until efforts to actively integrate the city began in the 1960s (MOVE, 1968; interview with Jemma Macera, October 5, 2001). Restrictive covenants did not apply to properties in the already-established downtown neighborhoods, but appeared in new subdivisions around 1900, and became more widespread from the 'teens through the 1930s. In the wealthier areas, especially those near Cornell, restrictions on land use and cost, combined with high property values, made homes out of reach to African Americans as well as to other working-class Ithacans. Not threatened by the possibility of 'undesirables' moving next door, real estate companies and residents in these exclusive neighborhoods had no need to include race or nationality restrictions in the deeds. On West and South Hills, however, where new developments in the 1930s were more geographically and economically accessible to rising working-class and middle-class Ithacans, the potential for 'undesirables' to achieve home

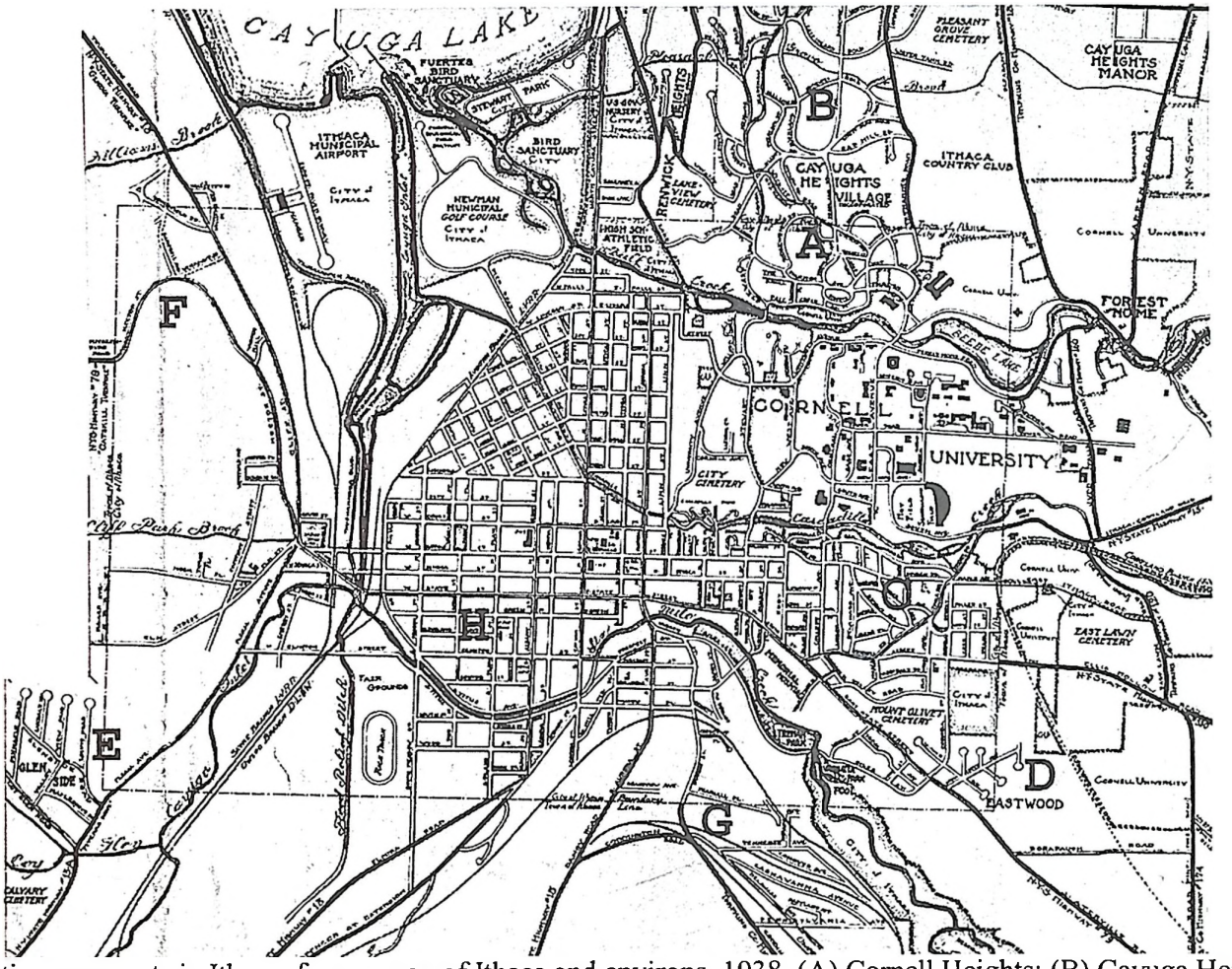


Figure 8. Restrictive covenants in Ithaca, from a map of Ithaca and environs, 1938. (A) Cornell Heights; (B) Cayuga Heights; (C) Bryant Heights; (D) Eastwood subdivision; (E) Glenside subdivision; (F) Royden Farm subdivision; (G) Pearsall subdivision; (H) Southside

ownership in these areas loomed closer. It was there that race and nationality restrictions appeared.

Ithaca's first restrictive covenants appeared in 1897, when Edward W. Wyckoff established a private residential development on the north side of Fall Creek Gorge. Annexed to the city in 1903, Cornell Heights was Ithaca's first suburb (Sisler, 1988: 176). Sisler adds, "As the original developer of Cornell Heights, Wyckoff determined the type of residential development it would be by the amount he charged for the lots and the architectural restrictions he placed on the deeds" (187). Most of the early residents were Cornell administrators and faculty members, who lived a genteel life far above "those Goose Pasture people," as they condescendingly referred to downtown residents (183).

Cornell Heights was originally planned to exclude rowdy Cornell students. When Frank S. Peer conveyed his home at 214 Thurston Avenue to Alpha Zeta fraternity, Wyckoff was outraged. In a letter to his attorney Jared T. Newman (the developer of neighboring Cayuga Heights), Wyckoff wrote:

> You are aware as to the efforts we have always made to the end of keeping fraternities from occupying houses on Cornell Heights. Mr. Peer, as I understand, recently deeded his Cornell Heights residence to a fraternity, which is now occupying the premises. These young men are causing considerable annoyance to the neighborhood by using adjacent property not their own as a playground, baseball field etc.... I would be very much gratified if we could work together in the protection of our property to the extent that these parties would understand that their presence was not desired there, and in the meantime I will employ such legal means as are within my power to relieve me from the injustice of Mr. Peer's failure to comply with the terms of the deed under which the property was conveyed (Edward G. Wyckoff papers; in Sisler: 186).

In subsequent years, other Cornell Heights homeowners, including Edward Wyckoff himself, would sell their houses to fraternities, in turn moving further north to Cayuga Heights.

Cayuga Heights was by far Ithaca's most exclusive neighborhood, and remains so today. For example, the deed for Lot No. 6 in the Remington Section of Cayuga Heights Road, sold by the Cayuga Heights Land Corporation to Robert L. Cause in July 1940, reads as follows:

> 1. The said premises shall not be used for commercial purposes or for an apartment house or fraternity house.
>
> ....
>
> 3. No house or other structure shall be constructed on the said premises until the plans and design thereof shall have been approved by resolution of the board of directors of the party of the first part; and *no house costing less than fifteen thousand dollars* ($15,000) shall be built thereon within ten years from the date of this conveyance. The purpose of this restriction is *to maintain and promote the beauty and attractiveness of the Remington Section as a high class residential development*" (Liber 256/402; my italics).

Cayuga Heights was incorporated as a village in 1926. While it remained a part of the Town of Ithaca, the decision to organize independently of the City was perhaps connected to the desire to maintain the "high class" character of the area (Abt, 1926: 133).

Land-use and home cost restrictions were common to developments on East Hill, where the rapidly expanding university demanded more housing for faculty and staff as students began to fill older homes in Collegetown. In the 1890s, two attempts to develop the farmland to the east of Collegetown failed to succeed. The Bryant Land Company began developing the upper part of East Hill in 1908 (Hobbie, 1988: 193), an area now known as Belle Sherman after the local elementary school. Hobbie found that "deed restrictions and discreet letters to realtors kept the area white and affluent.... Real estate agents were 'requested to call attention of desirable residents only to this locality'" (194). Furthermore, "[m]any conveyances included restrictions prohibiting the sale of liquor or the use of property for commercial purposes." For example, I found a land use restriction reading: "the lands hereby conveyed shall not be used for the sale of intoxicating liquors..." (Liber 180/362). Indeed, language restricting race or nationality did not need to be explicit, but could be coded in terms of desirability and stereotypes of the cultural habits of lower-class racial and ethnic groups.

Development expanded after 1926 with the sale of lots in Bryant Heights, a subdivision owned by Rochester real estate company Wagner-Albright. Their brochure "assured 'protection ... from shacks and undesirables' and promised 'we do not sell to objectionable people'" (in Hobbie: 198). Deed covenants in Bryant Heights included restrictions on land use ("no stable or piggery shall be maintained on the premises...") (Liber 237/145); property appearance ("the premises...shall be maintained in a neat and attractive manner") (Liber 230/159); and house cost ("no house erected on said lot shall cost less than five thousand dollars ($5,000)") (Libers 226/390, 233/29, 301/460). These restrictions dated to as late as 1947 (301/460).

In the Eastwood subdivision on East State Street, established in 1933, similar restrictions applied. The deeds also contained a provision for modifying the covenants. After fifteen years from the date of sale, the restrictions could be changed with the written consent of at least two-thirds of the homeowners within 300 feet of the said parcel (Libers 231/96, 248/230). Hence, a system was put in place that made neighborhood consensus necessary for any individual homeowner to change or remove the restrictions.

New residential developments on West and South Hills also contained deed restrictions, but were more explicit in their exclusion of 'undesirables.' John F. and Erma D. Daley purchased land near Coy Glen Road on the Floral Avenue Extension in June 1928, with no mention of any restrictions in the deed (Liber 215/62). In September of the same year, the Daleys sold the first lot in what would be named "Glenside" to Richard D. and Nellie C. Baker, with the following restrictions:

> 1. Only one residence shall be constructed on said lot for a period of ten years from the date hereof.
> 2. Plans for any residence to be constructed shall be approved by the parties of the first part before the building is started.
> 3. No livestock, with the exception of chickens, shall be kept on said premises.
> 4. *Both parties agree not to sell these premises or those which adjoin to any undesirable persons or persons who are not American citizens.*

> 5. Parties agree to keep their premises in a neat and attractive condition.
> *It being the intent and purpose of these restrictions to make and keep this tract a desirable community of homes* (Liber 256/463; my italics).

The wording of points 4 and 5 indicate that both the grantors and grantees wished to establish and maintain a new neighborhood free of 'undesirables,' which in the scantily coded language of the day included African Americans as well as immigrants. Later deeds of sale in Glenside, from 1931 through 1947, did not contain the restriction against "persons who are not American citizens," but maintained the restriction against "undesirable persons" or "elements."

West Hill's Royden Farm subdivision on new Hector Street, and the Pearsall subdivision on South Hill were more explicit in their class, race, and nationality restrictions. In Royden Farm, restrictions dating from 1935 through 1947 required that homes cost at least $5,000, and that "no part of the premises shall be conveyed or leased to, or occupied by any person other than a white citizen of the United States of America" (Libers 238/405, 257/295, 257/312). These restrictions, like those contained in the deeds from the Eastwood subdivision, could be modified upon the written agreement of two-thirds of neighboring homeowners.

One deed from the Pearsall subdivision, dated April 1944, required that the grantee "shall construct a suitable dwelling thereon which shall be at least 20 feet from the inside of the sidewalk and shall cost including the lot not less than $5,000." Furthermore, the grantor required "that the house is not to be sold or transferred at any time to negros [sic] or undesirable foreigners" (Liber 270/414). It is unclear whether these restrictions applied to all properties in the Pearsall subdivision, or if this was a single private agreement between grantor Gladys Sherwood and grantee Elbert W. Sherwood.

I suspect that their proximity to the downtown working-class areas neighborhoods, and the more modest price of building lots in these subdivisions, made them more geographically and economically accessible to 'undesirable elements.' Thus native white developers and

homeowners felt more threatened than those in more out-of-reach areas on East Hill. Whether or not African Americans sought to purchase homes in restricted areas is not known, so the direct impact on African Americans is unclear. Deed restrictions are most significant in their reflection of native middle-class white attitudes: protecting the character of a residential area by regulating house size, cost, use and appearance, and by excluding 'undesirables.'

The discourse of desirability that signaled the exclusion of immigrants and people of color—that is, "any person other than a white citizen of the United States of America"—points to the intersections between ethnic and racial identity, class, and citizenship that criss-crossed U.S. society from the turn of the century up to World War II. European immigrants, especially Irish and Italians, were categorized as non-native whites, in contrast to native whites, whose 'Americanness' was defined not only by birth in the U.S. but also by their identity as Protestants of Northern European descent. In Ithaca, the number of European immigrants far exceeded the African American population in the first decades of the century, and were probably perceived as more of a threat to neighborhood stability by middle-class native white Ithacans. In fact, the most miserable living conditions in Ithaca before the Depression were found in a community of poor immigrant squatters, known as the "Rhiners," along the western shore of the Inlet (Hobbie, 1988). In comparison to the Inlet, dilapidated areas on the Northside, or conditions in larger cities, the Southside did not come close to approximating slum conditions, nor was it so segregated as to constitute a 'ghetto.' However, restrictive covenants limited the housing options of African Americans as well as immigrants and other 'undesireables.'

**Bronzeville**

The area in which African American residences were most highly concentrated—along Cleveland Avenue, South Plain Street, South Corn Street, Green Street, and Clinton Street—is often what outsiders consider to constitute the Southside neighborhood. As I mentioned earlier, Dr. Gibbs suggests using the term "Bronzeville" when talking about this area of Black residences, as a distinct area within the rest of the Southside neighborhood.

I argue, however, that this "Bronzeville" was more than just a few streets on the Southside where a significant number of African Americans lived; the term applies also to a set of institutions, businesses, social organizations, and community activities that took place in and around the Southside neighborhood. The term "Bronzeville" also allows for the recognition that within the physical boundaries of the Southside neighborhood lived people of other ethnoracial backgrounds. Furthermore, the African American population was never large enough to be entirely self-sustaining. Inter-racial relations—political, economic, and social, both pleasant and unpleasant—were necessary aspects of everyday life.

The internal vitality of the African American community took place in relation to the ideology of "separate but equal" which dominated the American social landscape from the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision until it was overturned in 1954. Segregation, whether legally sanctioned or *de facto*, as in Ithaca, usually signified separate and *unequal*. Systematically overlooked and/or excluded from many realms of Ithaca's political, economic, and social life, African Americans had to pull together to meet the needs of their community. Black-owned businesses provided services unavailable in other parts of Ithaca, and Black patrons circulated money within the community. African Americans developed parallel institutions to white-dominated organizations, such as churches, community centers, political associations, and social

clubs. These parallel institutions were not merely replicas of white institutions, however, for they were often important vehicles for Black culture and political activism, working simultaneously for self-determination and to end segregation.

*The Monitor*

Published in the spring of 1923, *The Monitor*, Ithaca's short-lived Black newspaper, provides a wealth of material for understanding Black community life and political consciousness during the 1920s. *The Monitor* offered "news unbiased and unbossed" in "the interest of Kingdom Building and Racial Uplift" and "to inform our people in the Finger Lakes region on general topics of interest concerning themselves" (April, 1923: 1-2). In the tradition of Black newspapers since the abolitionist movement, *The Monitor* included coverage of national events, political commentary, notices and reviews of local cultural events, gossip columns, church updates and advertisements from Black- and white-owned local businesses.

*Black-owned Businesses*

Reading *The Monitor* and listening to oral histories gives a much thicker picture of economic and social life in the 1920s than what can be found in the census records. While the census lists only one job for men, and often none for women, many African Americans were simultaneously engaged in a number of income-earning pursuits, both working for wages and running a small business on the side. By the 1920s a significant number of African Americans owned their own businesses and were entering semi-professional positions. Miss Jessie Johnson had assumed her well-known role as a piano teacher. Charles O. Wilson, editor of *The Monitor*, was a notary public and tax consultant, as well as a private secretary for a white family. Levi Spaulding, previously a barber, became Ithaca's first black police officer. Hired in 1919, he

NEWS UNBIASED AND UNBOSSED

Non-Sectarian
Non-Denominational

# THE MONITOR

ADVERTISE AND GET RESULTS

Published in the interest of Colored People. Published in the interest of Kingdom Building and Racial Uplift.

Vol. I, No. 2 | ITHACA, N. Y., APRIL, 1923 | 5c the copy

## COMING! JAZZ A LA MODE, THURSDAY, MAY 10TH

**Cayuga Temple I. B. P. O. E. W. Daughters of Elks No. 54 Present Jazz a la Mode for the Purpose of Building Fund.**

This is planned to be one of the finest entertainments of its kind ever produced by our race in this section of the State.

Mr. Julius B. Jones, the noted Saxophone King, is doing wonderful work on the production end of the Minstrel Show and he anticipates bringing to the Ithaca Public an attractive production which you cannot afford to miss. Mr. Jones is also arranging a number of original lyrics and musical numbers which will be beautifully pleasing to the audience. Among the attractions are the following:

Eddie (Bozo) Williams will star throughout the show. He promises to furnish plenty of entertainment during the evening.

Special attention is called to Funny Frank Johnson who will be seen in a scene picturing the tomb of King Tut

JULIUS B. JONES

in the Sahara Desert. You will laugh for ages when you see this.

Mabel Baker in the Sheik of Alabam, and she really shouts it.

Mrs. E. (Bozo) Williams, the Prima Donna with the nightingale voice, will stir the audience with her silver tones.

Little Mae Bradley will be there on the Buck & Wing stuff. She really moves a wicked hoof and will take a crack at the world's record on the Broadway shuffles.

Anna Glashe in Contortion work.

Johnny Brown is the end man and he promises a lot of laughs during the evening.

The chorus of dashing, high stepping creole babies are a knockout and when they sing and dance you will get a thrill as never before.

After the show the Famous Elite Novelty Orchestra will furnish Jazz for the dance in which Jew Baby Jones will star on his saxophone.

This is the most lucrative and fascinating attraction ever staged by local talent. You have seen the light shoe dance and the exotic crawl but if you miss this treat, you have missed them all. Tickets are now on sale. Get them early, they are going fast.

## WE HAVE JUST BEGUN TO FIGHT —HELP US

The N. A. A. C. P. is now in the field with its **spring campaign membership drive.**

This organization is the one real organization standing, and working, for a real democracy in America. Many of the complicated problems confronting our race have been solved through its work, but yet there is lots more to be accomplished. It can, and will be, but in order to do so this organization must have the full cooperation of every negro in America, who believes in the full manhood rights, and of every white person who is a real believer in full democracy.

It behooves, every negro man and woman to stand back of this organization and push it with all the vim and vitality they have. We cannot all investigate the various outrages against our people from time to time in the South; all of us cannot go to Washington and battle with the law makers of our country for justice, neither are we in position to print and distribute good literature for the benefit of our people, but there is one thing every negro man and woman can do, we can become a member of the organization and allow our dollars and sincere cooperation help further this work. It is a great cause and one purely in the interest of every black man and woman.

No man, white or black, can conscientiously refuse to help this work as it stands for justice to all, and is endeavoring to prove to the world that the negro is a human being the same in the sight of God as any other race, with the same talents and possibilities as any other people, and due the same rights and protection as any other law abiding citizen in this country.

The Ithaca Branch is hot on the trail with its drive, and hope to get 200 new members which is their required quota. The officers of the drive consist of Col. John Hill, Major Lloyd Hammond, 12 Captains and 25 Lieutenants.

The appeal is being made to our white friends also, as we need their help, both financially and otherwise, to help us solve the various problems with which our race is confronted.

If one of the many Captains or Lieutenants should approach you for a membership, give it to him. In so doing, you are helping humanity and yourself.

Watch the N. A. A. C. P. thermometer—Remember 200 is the required number. Let every man make himself a committee of one. Join yourself and get the other fellow.

For further information write or phone Mr. T. M. Redmond, President Ithaca Branch, N. A. A. C. P., Cleveland Ave.—Phone 6306 or consult the Major of the drive, Mr. Lloyd Hammond, 106 Cleveland Ave.

## BRIEFS

A. Whitted, assistant chef at the Ithaca Hotel, is contemplating a large poultry and fruit farm at Lansing, north of Ithaca.

Miss Lillian Cornish of 205 E. State Street, has just returned from a week-end visit with relatives and friends at Elmira, N. Y.

WANTED—Bus Boy, at once. Apply at the Ithaca Hotel to Mr. C. H. Kent, head waiter.

Figure 9. *The Monitor*, 1923.

Figure 11. Levi Spaulding, Ithaca's first African American police officer. Dewitt Historical Society.

served until he died from a heart attack after apprehending a murder suspect in 1930 (Landesman, 1999).

Barbershops were not only the first businesses in Ithaca to be owned by African Americans, they were also important sites for the practice of African American culture. Older Black Ithacans remember barbershops as central part of daily life; in "those days" (the 1940s) the barber charged 25 cents (Community history meeting, September 12, 2000). As early as 1884, at least six of thirteen barbershops in Ithaca were black-owned (Horne, 1987: 9). In the 1920s, Harry B. Parker's "Equal Rights Barbershop" operated out of the Cayuga House (Hill, 1994: 34). His advertisement in *The Monitor* reads: "Yes, a Tonsorial Artist who takes pride in his work and his ability to give you the best service possible" (April 1923: 12). Joe Hopkins operated a barbershop out of the Elks Club when it was still located on Tioga Street (Hill: 34). Albert Curry of Pennsylvania had a shop on the West End (1008 West Seneca Street), Charles Moore of Georgia had a shop at 539 West Clinton Street, and Bert Johnson continued to run his father's shop on North Aurora Street (1920 federal census).

Women could get their hair done at Ora Spaulding's hair salon at the Cayuga House, who offered Marcel Waving (*The Monitor* June 1923: 11). Both Marion B. Wheaton's Bronze Beauty Shop and Geraldine's Beauty Salon were run out of their homes on South Plain Street. Tama Ellis and Hattie M. Jones also ran beauty parlors, and Edwina Walker worked as a hairdresser (1920 federal census).

Other women ran businesses at home. Stella Williams, of 113 S. Plain Street, had a doll and sewing shop (Hill, 1994: 34). Dressmaker Mrs. Georgia Andrews, of 413 East State Street advertised in *The Monitor*: "Being mentally clothed anew it is but natural that people should turn eagerly to new Spring apparel. This desire for new Spring clothes is as natural as the budding of

new leaves on the trees" (June 1923: 14). Mrs. Harry Harris operated an employment agency and catered ice cream parties on Sundays at her home at 503 North Albany Street (Horne, 1987: 10).

*The Monitor* not only ran advertisements but also lauded the accomplishments of local Black business-owners. "George Bailey of 118 S. Plain Street, Ithaca, is engaged in the business of repairing musical instruments. Bailey is reliable and a genius manufacturer of stringed instruments. He has been in this business for the past fifteen years. If you have an instrument that needs repairing or would like one built give George a chance. He is a member of the Silver Tone Mandolin Club and a Deacon of Calvary Baptist Church." J.F. Dorsey, of 121 South Aurora Street, was a general contractor specializing in: "Excavating, ClamShell and Crane Work, Sand and Gravel Hauling." *The Monitor* reads: "The progress which J.F. Dorsey has made in the past ten years is an example of what any man can do if he sticks to it. He started in our city as a general laborer and by thought, of which we speak in our editorial, he has succeeded in building a business of which anyone could be proud" (June 1923: 3). OJ Jones was not only the chef for Cornell's athletic club, preparing special meals for the crew and football teams, but was also owner of the XYZ Club at 141 South Aurora Street. *The Monitor* noted "Mr. Jones ... has acquired his widely known ability through 23 years of experience, serving in various large hotels before locating in his present position" (March 1923: 2). He was also "a 'professional' gambler who had a chauffer and servants" (Horne, 1987: 10). That Jones employed a driver and servants suggests that some more successful African American business-owners formed a local petit-bourgeoisie within the African American community.

Other businesses that advertised in *The Monitor* included Hughes Cleaners and Tailoring, at the corner of State and Corn St. Contractor A. B. Jones, of 132 Cleveland Avenue, advertised: "Floors Waxed and Cleaned. Old Floors a Specialty" (April 1923: 2). Walter "Peaches" Everetts

owned the Black and White Cab Company since 1920. (June 1923: 3). The Cayuga House, at 501 West State Street, was advertised as the "Leading Colored Hotel in City" by owner Thomas Russell (March 1923: 4). The Cayuga House was later owned by Jim Miller and was known as "Miller's" (Hill, 1994: 34).

Other Southside businesses, while white-owned, catered especially to African Americans in the neighborhood. The A&P at the corner of State and Plain Streets was one of the first supermarkets to open in the city, and was within walking distance of Southside residents. Both Jemma Macera's mother, an Italian immigrant who lived on South Plain Street in the 1920s, and Mrs. Mary Love, an African American woman from Louisiana who moved to South Corn Street in the 1940s, shopped at the A&P, lugging bags of groceries home. Across the street was Hart's Pharmacy, which had a devoted clientele who could make purchases on credit. These establishments became part of the neighborhood's identity, and their absence was felt after closing in the 1960s (James L. Gibbs, Jr., interview, June 5, 2001).

*Black Churches*

The earliest African American institution in Ithaca was the St. James AME Zion Church. Throughout the United States black churches were not only places of worship, but given the lack of other institutions they were also centers for political and social activity (Overacker, 1998). Church groups for youth, women, and men met on weeknights, and other community organizations held meetings there, lacking other space. Mrs. Helen Brown and Mrs. Mary Love, both long-time members of St. James, remember the church as the only place for young people to go until the formation of the Southside Community Center.

St. James, originally a one-story structure, went through a number of physical transformations. The second story was built in 1861, and in 1887 a group of white Ithacans

donated a bell for the tower. In his church history, Reverend Vincent W. Howell tells of turn-of-the-century financial troubles the congregation faced:

> Other exterior and interior repairs were made in 1895, but unfortunately this work resulted in a legal suit brought on by Holmes Hollister, the owner of a local lumber yard and mill. Thus, a mechanic's lean [sic] was placed on the property and the title to the church was lost until Hollister's death in 1912, at which time (July 13, 1913) his wife and children sold the property back to the members for $1.00 (1986: 41).

Hollister (who was white) probably sued because the congregation could not make payments for the work completed. Horne cites an article in the *Ithaca Daily News* (August 13, 1895), in which the congregation sought contributions from Ithaca residents to help with repairs: " 'The church is the only lasting institution that the colored people of our northern cities have...' it commented, saying that 90 % of Ithaca's 500 blacks 'are willing to go to this church'" (1987: 14).

In 1857 a second church, first known as Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal (colored), was established on North Albany Street, which Horne calls "the other center of the black community" (1987: 14). In 1903 the congregation changed its name to Calvary Baptist Church and built a new meeting house, which stands today at 507 North Albany Street. During the 1920s, various community activities and meetings were held on weeknights, including a Thursday evening talk "on some of the various questions of the day pertaining to the African-American question" (*The Monitor* March 1923: 5).

The establishment of a second church indicates the internal diversity within the African American community 150 years ago. Socioeconomic, political, and/or regional differences, as well as neighborhood residence, may have been deciding factors in who attended which church.

> A small number of families found housing on the North Side of Ithaca in the 1850s. These families tended to be newcomers from the South, and they were not highly skilled. Members of St. James AME had lived in Tompkins County for at least a generation and were mostly skilled laborers. A social division arose, and the newcomers decided to branch off and create their own neighborhood church. Wesleyan Methodist Church (colored) was founded in 1857. Betty Burke, an educator in Ithaca in the 1980s, believed that a skin color dynamic was present within the community in the 1850s. The darker members of S. James felt they should start their own congregation. Also, differences

> became evident between the old and new settlers. By this time there were sets of free African and ex-enslaved Ithacans who had founded a community by working, buying homes, and creating a church. Recent arrivals, on the other hand, consisted of ex-enslaved Africans from the deep and northern parts of the South. There were differences in how the newcomers wanted to worship. They wanted a more spirit driven service while the St. James was less emotional. The color dynamic is one hint of the class division. Most lighter skinned African American [sic] had elevated status positions while some darker community residents had less skills. These divisions were flexible. Parts of families worshipped at one church while the other worshipped at the other. By the late 19th century themes became apparent within the community between African Americans who considered themselves indigenous and the newcomers. As more newcomers came to town, older members of both churches considered themselves indigenous. Outsiders were important to the community, but not considered necessary by the older members (1994: 20).

Such tensions between "old settlers" and new migrants occurred in most Northern cities, starting as early as the 1850s in Ithaca; cities such as Chicago saw these tensions rise dramatically during the course of the Great Migration (Grossman, 1989). However, the difference between Methodist and Baptist churches, while significant, is less great than the contrast between these mainline denominations and evangelical, Pentecostal, and holiness churches that came to Ithaca in later years. Furthermore, greater tensions probably occurred between the "respectables" who attended church, and those individuals who spent their leisure time at drinking establishments such as Miller's and the Black Elk's club (interview with Dr. James L. Gibbs, Jr., June 5, 2001).

*Community Organizations*

Just as church groups addressed secular issues in the African American community, secular and political organizations often held their meetings at churches, especially at St. James. The Ithaca chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, chartered April 11, 1921, first met at the AME Zion Church. Original members included Allen Jones (the first president), T.L. Irvin, Miss Margaret Thomas, Mrs. Mabel Wright, and John Mason. Over the years, speakers they invited included Walter White, formerly the NAACP national secretary, W.E.B. DuBois, and Roy Wilkins. The NAACP advertised its membership drive in *The Monitor*:

> This organization is the one real organization standing, and working, for a real democracy in America. Many of the complicated problems confronting our race have been solved through its work, but yet there is lots more to be accomplished. It can, and will be, but in order to do so this organization must have the full cooperation of every negro in America, who believes in the full manhood rights, and of every white person who is a real believer in full democracy (April 1923: 1).

The local NAACP chapter remained active through the 1940s (NAACP, 1946), although it appears that they were no longer active by the 1960s (interview with Diann Sams, November 15, 2001).

Fraternal organizations with a less political agenda abounded in the first decades of the 20th century. These clubs were often Black auxiliaries of white-only organizations such as the Masons or Elks. The Henry Highland Garland Garnet Lodge, founded in 1892, sponsored the Black Masons, which met on the Titus block of West State Street (Hill, 1994: 28; Horne, 1987: 15). The Black Knights of Pythias, listed in the 1900 City Directory, met the second and fourth Wednesday of each month at the Odd Fellows Hall. A branch of the Order of the Eastern Stars was also formed around this time (Hill, 1994: 22). The Young Men's Club met in room 141, South Aurora Street, and in 1910 H. Harris was president and W.E. Payne was secretary (Hill, 1994: 28). The Civic Club, whose secretary and manager was Napoleon Jackson, was founded in 1911, and met at 317-319 East Seneca Street. The Benevolent Protective Order of Elks of the World Improved, Forest City Lodge 180, otherwise known as the Black Elks club, founded in the 1920s, first met at 119 South Tioga Street, and relocated to 536 West Green Street in the 1950s (Horne, 1987: 15-16).

Women's clubs were perhaps the most influential in the community life of African Americans in Ithaca, and many of their events were listed in *The Monitor*. The Daughters of Elks presented "Jazz A La Mode," attracting a multiracial crowd of 500 to Ithaca's Star Theater (April 1923: 1). Wa Ha Ma, Inc., the Tomahawks, and the Eastern Star Club were

mainly social clubs. *The Monitor* reported on Wa Ha Ma's "High Tea" using the sophisticated, flowery language of the times:

> On Thursday Night June 7, the Arch Board of Chiefs of the Wa Ha Ma, Inc., held a High Tea in their wigwam. The rooms were attractively arranged and decorated with palms and Wa Ha Ma ornamentations. A little canary bird as well as several beautiful goldfish helped to greet the guests.
> Mrs. Egbert Bowe was the lady of honor. The following ladies poured and assisted:--Mrs. Alonzo Brown, Miss Lucy Praether, Mrs. Gilbert Howard, Mrs. Nanie Jones, Mrs. Levi Spaulding, Mrs. Archie Moore, Mrs. Omer Jones, Mrs. I. Summerfiled, and Mrs. James Miller.
> Mr. James Miller was the steward of the evening and catered the tea in an unexcelled manner. The serving table was highly decorated with costly silver and flowers and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the menu which was very attractive both to the eye and taste. About 100 were present. All who attended expressed themselves as having an unusually pleasant evening (June 1923: 3).

A similar event was the Frances Harper Woman's Club's annual Mothers' and Daughters' banquet; in May, 1923 Mrs. Agnes Jordan, of 311 South Plain Street, hosted 93 guests to dinner and music (April 1923: 2). Mrs. Ruth Mann described the lavish dinner parties that social clubs and individuals sponsored: " 'People would set out their china and other fine dishes and wear beautiful gowns. Most people knew how to do things because they worked for the white folks. Blacks in Ithaca had a vibrant social life.'" (Hill 1994: 28).

*The Southside Community Center*

The Frances Harper Woman's Club was more than a social club, and was responsible for the establishment of the Southside Community Center. The name of the club, never explained in historical accounts of the Southside Community Center, deserves attention. According to historian Melba Joyce Boyd, author of *Discarded Legacy: Politics and Poetics in the Life of Frances E.W. Harper*, Frances Harper was a 19th century abolitionist, feminist, poet, essayist, and organizer. She began publishing her work in 1846, with the first of ten books of poetry, followed by short stories, novels, and political essays (Boyd, 1994: 12). Seeing her experiences of oppression as an African American and a woman as deeply interconnected, she not only was a

leader in the fight against slavery but also joined the women's temperance movement in the latter part of the 19th century. She established a Negro union of the Women's Christian Temperance Union in the 1880s, which pressed social reform and conducted charity work among the urban poor. The "conflict [of the WCTU] is not the contest of a social club," wrote Harper in 1888, "but a moral warfare for an imperiled civilization" (in Boyd, 1994: 206).

Meeting on Thursday evenings to do arts and crafts, the women of Ithaca's Frances Harper club followed Harper's legacy by discussing "how to bring the community together" (Hill, 1994: 34). Their idea was to establish a community center for Ithaca's African Americans, similar to the settlement houses for European immigrants on the North and West sides (Hobbie, 1988: 17, 125-126). However, the 1925 Klan rally put a damper on the Frances Harper club, whose numbers dropped from 135 original members to 50 (Hill, 1994: 38; *Ithaca Journal* April 26, 1938).

However, the women of the Frances Harper club persevered, and in March 1928 they founded the Serv-Us League. Led by Mrs. Jessie Cooper, the women rented a small house at 221 South Plain Street (*Ithaca Journal*, April 26, 1938). In 1930, the South Side House joined the Community Chest, an umbrella organization for social agencies in Ithaca (it later became the United Way), and was renamed the Southside Community Center. As activities expanded from a Thursday evening women's group to a full schedule of recreational and educational programs for all ages, the center needed more space. The Serv-Us league held bake sales and other community events to raise money towards purchasing a house at 305 South Plain Street. The community center occupied the two downstairs rooms, while rent from two upstairs apartments helped cover mortgage payments (Brooks, 1976).

The Southside Community Center was made nearly uninhabitable by the famous flood of 1935, when most of downtown Ithaca was inundated with deep, muddy water. Many older Ithacans have memories of the flood. Mrs. Ruth Mann recalled,

> Well, we were living on Cleveland Avenue no, we were on West Green Street and the water was about a block away. By the time it got to our house it was between one and two feet. We had to leave of course. I put my kids in winter snow suits to keep them warm, and we went to the Treman house where my sister's boyfriend was the janitor. We stayed there until the water went down. Once the rain stopped, it was only about two or three days... (Hill, 1994: 40).

Used to hard times during the Great Depression, people made due with what they had in the wake of the flood. While the Serv-Us League no longer had the South Side House, Mrs. Jessie Cooper and the newly hired director James L. Gibbs, formerly the director of Syracuse's Dunbar Community Center, led activities in schools, churches, and community centers, using meager funds provided by residents and the Community Chest.

By 1935, it had become apparent that the community center needed a new building. An article in *Opportunity* mentions that by that fall, six African American youths had been sentenced to prison, and both community members and city officials seemed to agree that their "delinquency" stemmed from the lack of meaningful activities (Dec 1940: 359). Now with the support of the wider Ithaca community, especially local business leaders such as Robert Treman, $10,000 for a new community center was raised in a public campaign. The Federal Works Progress Administration agreed to provide the labor if the community paid for materials. Work began in September 1937.

Before construction was complete, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt dedicated the new Southside Community Center in February of 1938 during a visit to Ithaca for Cornell's Farm and Home Week. Her presence made quite an impression on Southside residents; some still remember her visit, and even those who weren't there refer to the event. During the course of my

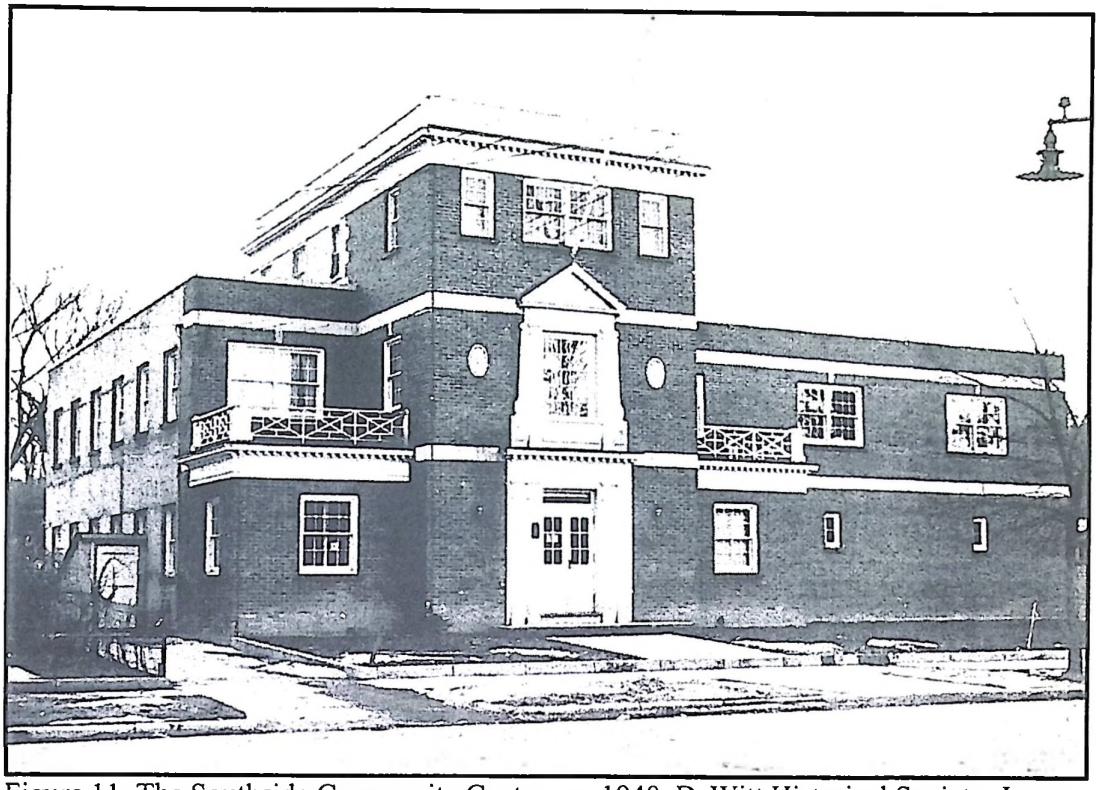

Figure 11. The Southside Community Center, ca. 1940. DeWitt Historical Society, James L. Gibbs Photograph Collection.

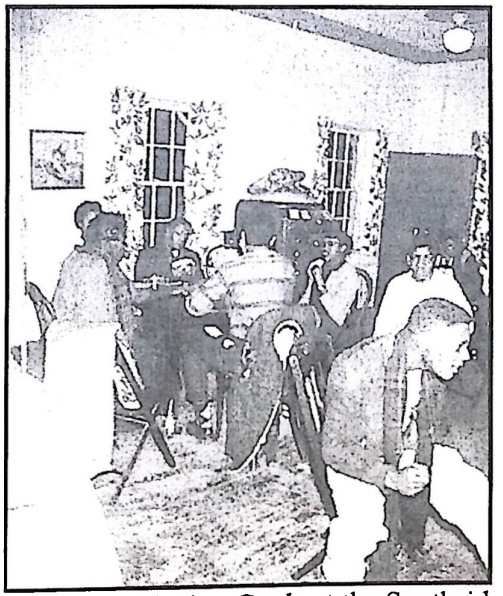

Figure 12. Playing Cards at the Southside, 1956. Photograph by Ruth Irma Phillips.

Figure 13. After school play at the Southside, 1956. Photograph by Ruth Irma Phillips.

project, when I mentioned that I was researching the history of the Southside, many older Ithacans, white and Black, asked me if I knew that Eleanor Roosevelt had visited the Southside Community Center. They often quoted the First Lady as having said that the Center was "a dream come true" for the African American community.

The dream was not realized until the following September, since the project ran over budget early on. A mortgage campaign was launched to raise the necessary $15,000 to finish construction, with the direct support of a number of residents who cosigned the loan notes. The center opened in September 1938, at a total cost of $49, 052. The debt was finally paid off in February 1944 (Brooks, 1976).

The Southside Community Center, under the direction of James L. Gibbs and his wife Hortense E. Gibbs, offered a wide range of programs. James L. Gibbs, Jr. suggests that "most older Ithacans ... will agree that the years when [my] father was the Director were a golden age" (personal communication, May 1, 2001). Besides after-school programs and sports, the center also served as an employment office, using the white business leaders on the board of directors to locate skilled jobs for African Americans at the Ithaca Gun, Cayuga Tool, and Morse Chain Companies. The *Ithaca Journal* reported that cooking classes would "train Negro girls for homemaking and fit them for jobs as cooks and waitresses" (April 26, 1938). The well-equipped new home included: a Gym-A-Torium (combined gymnasium and auditorium) named after Cornell alumnus and athlete Jerome "Brud" Holland, a library named after police officer Levi Spaulding, a kitchen, a dining room, a canteen, and game rooms, as well as offices and an apartment for the directors. The Center was "the place to be" well into the 1960s.

Almost every interview with older Black Ithacans includes reference to the Southside Community Center. According to Mrs. Helen Brown, "we all used to go there as teenagers,

'cause it was something new.... [People] came from all over, white and black. They had basketball games. It was the first place that was built that we had to go to. I don't remember going anywhere before that. Except for the church, AME Zion; been going there since I was a child" (interview, April 16, 2001).

The Southside Community Center had a different meaning for Ithaca's white majority than for African Americans. Many Black Ithacans remember the Southside Community Center as a result of African American self-help. To the contrary, *Ithaca Journal* articles from the 1930s strike a condescending tone when reporting on "our Negro citizens." The *Journal* lauded the white Ithacans who provided support for the center and minimized the efforts of Black Ithacans: with the opening of the center, "the unswerving faith and untiring efforts of the group of white people who have labored so long and earnestly with the loyal support of the Negroes of Ithaca, are rewarded." Furthermore, the editorial staff saw the center as exemplary of Ithaca's liberal tradition, the positive outcome of a "'community experiment in inter-racial co-operation'":

> This new center testifies among other things to the good will and tranquility which characterize racial relations in Ithaca. Our Negro citizens are part of the community and they are a credit to it. Even better relationships are now to be anticipated and at the same time a large group of citizens will have wholesome recreational advantages as well as the chance of self-improvement (April 26, 1938).

It is true that a broad coalition of African American community members, local business leaders and social service agencies were vital to the development of the Southside Community Center. The center's motivation, however, had always come from within the African American community, and was a direct response to their experiences of *not* being part of the broader Ithaca community. Hill reported that "Mrs. Lucy Brown remembers that the theme of racial uplift was dominant. 'I can remember Mrs. Galvin saying you need to be very proud of yourself,'" said Mrs. Brown (1994: 47).

The choice of South Plain Street for the Community Center, located half a block away from St. James AME Zion church and at the geographical center of the Southside neighborhood, indicated that this spot was already at the 'heart' of the African American community, and made it even more so by drawing African Americans from all parts of Ithaca to that location. Today, more than St. James AME Zion Church, the Southside Community Center symbolizes the overlapping spheres of neighborhood and community. When Ithacans say "Southside," they are often referring to the Community Center. For this reason I try, depending on the context, to specify the Southside *neighborhood*, to avoid confusion with the Center.

*Education*

The Southside Community Center served in part to enrich and correct the education African American children received in the local school system. While the schools have not always met the needs of Black students, local historians point to the importance of education among Black Ithacans dating to the early 1800s. In 1841 the *New York Colored American* reported on a "flourishing" school for "colored" children in Ithaca. By 1860 most African American children were attending school. Around the turn of the century, only 23 African American adults were illiterate, indicating that both recent migrants and long-time residents had attended some school (Horne, 1988: 20).

Starting in 1854, children from the downtown neighborhoods attended Central School, at the corner of West Buffalo and North Albany Streets. In 1972, Central was renamed after African American principal Beverly J. Martin, and relocated to the adjacent Boynton Middle School (Hobbie, 1988: 113-114).[10] In 1925, children from the Southside began attending the

[10] The old Central School building became the Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC), which is funded by the City of Ithaca. Some area residents argue that GIAC is more effective at serving the Ithaca community than the Southside Community Center. Hill writes, "Often discussed as a competitor by community members, the fact is GIAC services the broader Black community and non-African Americans in the similar fashion as the South Side Community

newly opened Henry St. John School, located at the corner of Clinton and South Geneva Streets. James Gibbs remembers that in his 6th grade class of 25 students, only 4 were Black, pointing to the fact that even though the Southside was seen as a Black neighborhood, African Americans were still a minority (interview, June 5, 2001). The building was converted into offices and apartments after the Henry St. John School closed due to city budget cuts in 1983. Hill argues that the loss of the school took away an important part of the neighborhood (1994: 59). Now students from the Southside attend the Beverly J. Martin School.

Jessie Johnson was the first African American to graduate from Ithaca High School, probably around 1879 (Landesman, 1999). *The Monitor* congratulated the three young women graduating from Ithaca High School in 1923, Misses Louise Eleanor Taylor, Eloisa L. Marine, and Evangeline Lucille Redmond. In addition, the editor wrote, "We wish more of our young people were graduating this year and hope that these young ladies will continue to study and make a mark for themselves and for the race, as there is plenty of room for such material and the race needs you" (June 1923: 5). The editorial reflects a Du Boisian philosophy of a "talented tenth" that would work for the uplift of all African Americans. These comments also suggest that few Black Ithacans made it through high school in the 1920s.

Even fewer African Americans from Ithaca or elsewhere attended Cornell University, which was founded in 1865 on the principle of providing study for any person in any field. Edward U.A. Brooks of Elmira was Cornell's first recorded African American graduate in 1894, and Sara Winifred Brown of Winchester, Virginia was the first Black woman to graduate in 1897 (Horne, 1988: 21). In 1943, Emma Corinne Brown Galvin was the first African American woman to earn her Ph.D. from Cornell, which then refused to hire her. She eventually gained a

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Center once did "(1994:55). I heard this sentiment expressed at GIAC's annual summer block party, when a man commented, "If only Southside would do something like this" (Fieldnotes, May 19, 2001).

position at Ithaca College, and taught classes at the Southside Community Center (Hill, 1994: 48). Cornell's Black student body was tiny until the 1968 Willard Straight takeover and the subsequent establishment of the Africana Studies and Research Center and affirmative action programs.

College-bound Black Ithacans were more likely to attend Ithaca College, which began as a music conservatory at the Boardman House next to DeWitt Park in 1892. The college expanded throughout downtown before moving to the top of South Hill in the 1960s. According to Bernie Milton his mother attended Ithaca College, becoming an organist, conductor, music teacher, and music writer (Oral History Book). It is unclear if William Powell, whom *The Monitor* called "one of our popular Ithaca Collegiates," was in fact a graduate of Ithaca College pursuing further studies at the Rochester Institute of Technology, or if he was simply an undergraduate at RIT at the time. *The Monitor* proudly tracked the activities of Ithacans studying away from home, showing that a college education was becoming a reality for at least some African Americans by the 1920s (April 1923: 4).

Black students who came to Cornell from elsewhere often became part of Ithaca's African American community. Thirteen women and fourteen men attended Cornell in 1905, where they felt excluded from student activities (Wesley, 1957: 57). Many of them worked in fraternity houses on campus, and decided to form their own association. What started as the Social Study Club at St. James church in the fall of 1905, grew into the Alpha Chapter of Alpha Phi Omega, the nation's first black fraternity. Alpha Phi Alpha was founded on December 4, 1906 at 411 East State Street, the home of Archie Singleton, who acted as a mentor to the students. The Eta Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority was founded by 1923 (Horne, 1987: 16).

Racism at Cornell surged in the 'teens. West Indian student James B. Clarke '12 published an essay describing his personal experiences as the object of bigotry on campus in *The Cornell Era*. He also told of two African American women who faced opposition from white students when seeking rooms in the Sage College dormitory (in Horne, 1988: 21). Excluded from on-campus housing, some Black students found lodging on the Southside. Mrs. Helen Brown had boarders live with her as recently as the 1970s and early 1980s (interview, April 16, 2001).

For most Black Ithacans, however, education and white-collar employment at Cornell have remained out of reach, and connections with students of color at Cornell have been minimal. As I mention in my introduction, the relations of power between town and gown have been inscribed in the geography of Ithaca, which features "Cornell as the big master on the hill" (Scott, 1995) and Ithaca's working-class residents and people of color on the Flats. The geography of local schools and community centers has been less politically laden, but nevertheless has been significant in the practice of neighborhood and community. For example, the Henry St. John School played an important role in community life in the Southside neighborhood. Furthermore, educational achievement was an important goal for members of Ithaca's African American community, despite the many obstacles Black students have felt in public schools and local colleges and universities.

The centrality of the Southside in the lives of African Americans from Ithaca and elsewhere is indicative of the significant African American identity of the neighborhood in the first half of the 20th century. Community institutions, organizations, and businesses, as well as the informal networks between friends and neighbors made the Southside a "Bronzeville" that many older Black Ithacans remember fondly. Mrs. Brown told me, "This used to be like a

neighborhood, where everybody knew each other" (interview, April 16, 2001). These good memories, rather than the experiences of racism or poverty, are what African American residents often emphasize when reconstructing their past.

This celebratory historicity is what I have been encouraged to represent in my work for C-IP. Throughout the writing process, C-IP staff insisted on emphasizing the "positives" as a way to boost neighborhood pride, and overlooked the "negatives" that reinforce the neighborhood's stigma. For community leader Leslyn McBean, highlighting the neighborhood's accomplishments was especially important because

> Right now the neighbors are reflecting on the positive aspects of the neighborhood's past, and want to get back there. They also may want to think about what they have now that is similar to the good things about the past, especially around quality of life (Fieldnotes, September 12, 2001).

After a long editing process, lasting from June to November, I finally printed and made copies available to the public of "A Snapshot of African American Life, 1900-1950," a historical narrative which covers much of the material included here, but without any of my critical conclusions (See Appendix B).

A critical analysis of the history of the Southside neighborhood and the African American community reveals that neighborhood and community have been *practiced* not through 'positives' or 'negatives' during a short 'snapshot' of time, but through myriad sociocultural, economic, and political processes over more than 200 years. Such an analysis also shows that the Southside did not develop as a solidly Black neighborhood, but was a heterogeneous working-class area with contested boundaries that was an important site of African American community life. In the next section I discuss the changes and challenges that Black Ithacans and the Southside neighborhood faced in subsequent decades, and how C-IP has sought to use history as a remedy for recent problems.

# 5. Changes and Challenges on the Southside

The historiography of African American life throughout the United States from World War II to the present follows two divergent narratives: one of Civil Rights triumphs and the progress of the Black middle class, the other of worsening urban problems and a growing Black underclass. Yet these were actually interrelated processes with uneven results, and which had significant spatial consequences. While some Black Ithacans achieved spatial and economic mobility, others were left behind, both on the Southside as well as in other low-income and working class downtown neighborhoods. The physical and social deterioration of the Southside, from the 'housing crisis' of the 1960s and 1970s to the problems of drugs and policing during the 1980s and 1990s, as well as its continued identification as a Black neighborhood, led to its labeling as Ithaca's 'ghetto.' Recent improvements in housing have led to better living conditions and to some gentrification, but traffic, dilapidated housing, and commercial development continue to challenge the neighborhood. These persistent problems are what the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership and area residents are attempting to combat through celebrating and preserving the neighborhood's history.

## From World War II to the War on Drugs

The period following World War II was one of significant change for Ithaca's African American community. With the war came increasing African American migration to Ithaca, greater job opportunities, more open housing, and a chance for upward mobility. A list of African American firsts in white-collar positions includes Anita Reed, hired in 1947 as secretary of the History Department at Cornell University (Oral History Book); Francis Eastman, who became head administrator of medical records at the county hospital in the early 1950s (Oral

History Book); and Ruth Taylor, who was hired as a stewardess for Mohawk Airlines in 1957 (Sachse, 1995). Advancements in employment were gradually accompanied by openings in the housing market created by Civil Rights activism and the Supreme Court ruling against the enforcement of race restrictive covenants. However, the majority of African Americans continued to hold low-wage jobs, and remained living in the Flats. Furthermore, daily forms of discrimination continued.

While the post-war boom opened new doors to advancement, it also had deleterious impacts on African Americans and the downtown area as a whole. Suburban developments to the north, east, and west of the city swelled in a process of 'white flight,' while shopping malls drew commercial activity away from downtown. Small businesses, especially those owned by African Americans, and the quality of life in mixed working-class neighborhoods suffered as a consequence.

> For many years both communities [Northside and Southside] were nice, comfortable places to live. Their residents were hard working individuals who took the initiative to help keep the neighborhood in good condition. Consequently, the homes in these neighborhoods were considered to be of good, sound quality. Exactly when the first signs of deterioration began to appear cannot be certain, but its gradual increase developed to a situation which made some remedial program necessary (Moss, 1984: 39).

In 1960, 14 percent of all housing in Ithaca was classified as substandard (MOVE: 5). A 1972 study showed that 45 percent of the houses on the Southside were "unsound" (in Moss, 1984: 48). Yet still, almost 80 percent of area residents (366 of 461 respondents) said they liked living on the Southside (Esolen, 1968: 18).

Southside residents recognized a number of reasons for the housing crisis besides the spatial shift of economic activity from urban to suburban areas. First, local banks redlined the area, refusing to grant mortgages and home equity loans to African Americans. Second, the demand for student housing made decent rental housing unaffordable for poor and working-class

people, and gave absentee landlords no incentive to improve their properties. Third, poor code enforcement by city officials allowed substandard conditions to continue. Finally, 40 percent of Ithaca's elderly population and 45 percent of female-headed households lived on the Southside, groups that lacked the financial resources, time, or know-how to maintain their houses, or lacked the power to influence landlords and city officials to improve conditions (Moss, 1984). The explanations given by residents counteract the tendency to pathologize the physical deterioration of the neighborhood as the fault of slovenly residents, but explain how racism and class barriers affected residents' ability to maintain their homes.

This housing crisis came to a head in the mid-1960s. A 1965 study of the "Negro housing situation" by the Tompkins County Commission on Human Relations reported that although 64 percent of Black Ithacans were homeowners, 80 percent of families felt that it was harder for African Americans to get housing. Over 75 percent said it didn't matter if they lived in a more white or a more Black neighborhood. Rather, 44 percent suggested that the solution depended upon improving the attitude of whites toward African Americans (in MOVE, 1968: 2).

Instead of tackling the underlying social, economic, and political causes of 'urban blight' city agencies launched 'urban renewal' and public housing projects in an attempt to revitalize downtown and provide affordable housing. Dilapidated immigrants' homes were demolished to make room for housing projects on the Northside, which are now primarily inhabited by African Americans, poor whites, and recent immigrants and refugees from Latin America and Southeast Asia. Projects were built in the Southside area, both on South Albany Street near Clinton, and south of Six Mile Creek (many of these homes were recently demolished and replaced by athletic fields and a skate park). West Hill was also the site of a large housing project, which removed many poor and African American residents far from the downtown area. While public housing

projects were originally conceived as measures to combat the negative effects of residential segregation and dilapidated housing, they often reinforced a class-based form of segregation by concentrating the poor in tighter geographical areas.

Neighborhood renewal had the opposite effect of more thoroughly integrating the Southside in terms of race, ethnicity, and class. Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services (INHS) was founded in 1976 in response to the deterioration of housing in a number of downtown neighborhoods and since the 1980s has done an excellent job at making homes on the Southside more livable. However, the effects of 'revitalization' have included gentrification and the subsequent displacement of elderly, low-income, and/or African American residents. Younger African American families also left the neighborhood (MOVE housing study, 1968), some leaving Ithaca altogether because there was "nothin' goin' on here" (interview with Mrs. Mary Love, May 16, 2001).

Other African Americans left the Southside due to increasing spatial and economic mobility after the civil rights struggles of the 1960s and Black Power in the 1970s. Mrs. Mary Love recalls that young people in particular began to change "after Martin Luther King and all that stuff" (interview, May 16, 2001). They were especially influenced by Black student activism at Cornell, which peaked during the 1968 takeover of Willard Straight Hall. During this time, the Southside Community Center took on a more Afro-centric program, a "new form of self-determination" that, argues Hill, eventually alienated wealthy white board members and negatively affected the Center's financial security and position within both the broader Ithaca and African American communities. Other African American community groups, such as Club Essence (a women's group established in 1973) and the Black Caucus (a political forum in the late 1970s and early 1980s), which did not meet at the Southside Community Center, marked the

decentralization of African American community life as well as the desegregation of public life in Ithaca community (Hill, 1994: 55-56). The incorporation of African American community groups and political leaders into the mainstream contributed to the evolution of Ithaca's image as a progressive and multicultural city, although ethnoracial and class disparities persisted.

If housing was the crisis Southside residents faced during the 1960s and 1970s, drugs, racial profiling, and other problems related to urban poverty posed challenges during 1980s and for much of the 1990s. In an article titled "A Tale of Two Cities," Rayfield Waller reported, "Many of those I spoke with, from the Commons to South Hill to Cornell, have formed an image of the Southside neighborhood as being 'the black community,' and as being 'the place where crime and poverty are at their worst.'" But, he argued, "neither perception is strictly true" (*Ithaca Times*, May 2, 1991). As Waller pointed out, the Southside did still have a significant number of African American residents, a high proportion of low-income residents, and the statistics on race/ethnicity and class overlapped significantly.

> According to the 1980 census, about 28 percent of the Southside neighborhood's residents were black. It appears that black Southsiders suffered disproportionately from poverty. ... [T]he Census Bureau found a 35 percent poverty rate among the black households in the Southside, compared to just under 18 percent of their white neighbors. Seventy-seven of the adult white residents had finished high school, and 28 percent completed four years of college; 58 percent of the black residents had high school diplomas, and 9.7 percent had finished college (May 2, 1991).

These statistics show that the Southside was not all Black, but that class and race were intricately connected in the situation of African Americans on the Southside, and that significant disparities existed between Black and white neighbors.

The African Americans that Waller interviewed did not deny the harsh conditions on the Southside, but had a different explanation for what caused them than white Ithacans. For example, Black Ithacans pointed out racial profiling by the police, tracking in school, and the lack of response from City Hall as major sources of racial inequality and negative perceptions of

the Southside. White progressives, while intellectually aware of the structural problems of racism, nevertheless saw the police as "caught in the middle," and "emphasized the need for citizens to participate more," turning the dynamics of oppression upside down by blaming the victims.

According to Waller, Black Ithacans were well aware of this tendency. " 'Who says a white Socialist or Communist cannot be racist? Here, it's just filtered down in a different way,'" said Greg Rolle, editor of the *Wheat Street Independent*, a monthly Black newspaper. Resident Matundu Makalani called Ithaca " 'a very segregated town,' where blacks have been made to feel that they cannot be included, and that whites do not want them to be. He says of the white progressive community that they have lived on their class privilege for so long that they have no idea what struggles blacks must face...." For a number of Black women on the Southside, Waller noted, this struggle included the feeling of living in a "concentration camp."

**Responding to Commercial Development**

In addition to the issues of housing, drugs, policing, and racism, the physical integrity of the Southside neighborhood as a whole is now threatened by commercial development. The recent construction of a new CVS drug store at the intersection of Clinton Street and Meadow Street, while welcomed by some neighborhood residents, has also caused considerable uproar over increased traffic and the bright lights that illuminate the large parking lot. More controversial, however, have been real estate developer Bill Lower's recent attempts to expand a narrow strip of commercial zoning along Meadow Street onto Cleveland Avenue, the 'heart' of the neighborhood.

Lower's path of destruction began in the early 1990s when he demolished 10 small houses known as the "Ten Commandments" on Meadow Street between Cleveland Avenue and Clinton Street. In their place he constructed a commercial building that now houses an employment agency and beauty salon. However, Lower's property lacked the 166-foot setback required to establish a drive-through bank at the busiest intersection in Ithaca (Fieldnotes, October 25, 2001). When the City denied his appeal for a zoning ordinance change in March 1999, Lower went directly to nearby residents and made an agreement by which they would approve of expanding the commercial zone in exchange for making Cleveland Avenue a dead end. Yet this document was never legally enforceable, according to Fifth Ward Alderman Ed Hershey, because residents don't have the authority to change zoning ordinances.

> Common council was "horrified," Hershey said, after reviewing the agreement. "He was giving away snow in the wintertime," Hershey said, referring to Lower's mere $10,000 offer [to build a barrier at the end of Cleveland Avenue]. Residents had no representation, Hershey said, and Lower was threatening to ruin the neighborhood by razing houses. "His deal was an attempt to eliminate opposition, and not deal with anyone in power" (*Ithaca Times*, November 2, 2000).

After the City rejected Lower's agreement and continued to deny an extension of the commercial zone, he razed three homes on Cleveland Avenue and Clinton Street, and bought demolition permits for four more.

Meanwhile, a group of neighborhood residents and Common Council members proposed to purchase or even to seize Lower's property by eminent domain, and turn the area at the end of Cleveland Ave into a neighborhood park. *Ithaca Journal* reporter Kevin Harlin wrote that the park "could buffer that fragile neighborhood from the expanding commercial traffic on Meadow Street." Harlin's use of "that" acts to distance the reader from the neighborhood, and also avoids using the stigmatized name of the Southside. His sense of the neighborhood's fragility, however, seems to accurately represent how many residents feel about the area. He quoted one "neighbor"


Figure 14. Map of proposed neighborhood park. Ronson Slagle, *Ithaca Journal*, October 21, 2000.

as saying, " 'Something has got to give. If we don't have a buffer here, the neighborhood is going to continue to erode" (October 21, 2000).

Not all Southside residents oppose commercial development, and some support Lower because of business connections or their relationship with him as a landlord. Those who are in favor of the park are primarily residents of Corn Street and the 200-block of Cleveland Avenue, who would be most affected by expanded commercial zoning. They are also predominantly white, middle-class, well-educated, and younger, representing not only the diverse makeup of the neighborhood but also the increasing gentrification that has followed INHS projects in recent years.

These residents are also the most interested in the neighborhood's history, and have been the most involved in the formation of a new neighborhood association, Cleveland Avenue and Neighbors—Diversity Overall (CAN-DO). Driven by community leader and County Board member Leslyn McBean, and underwritten by the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership, the association emerged after a C-IP-sponsored neighborhood history meeting in May, 2001. From July through November of 2001, I kept notes, typed up meeting minutes, and sent out mailings to community members as part of my C-IP duties. Initially, I saw CAN-DO, like C-IP, as a fieldwork opportunity, another way to gain access to community members from whom I could obtain historical knowledge. However, what I learned as a participant observer with CAN-DO had more to do with a select group of residents' sense of "historicity" and definitions of neighborhood and community than with gaining information about the past.

Among other issues, CAN-DO members are interested in using the history of the Cleveland Avenue area as a way to combat commercial development. They envision the park not only as a buffer zone and green area, but also as a place to recognize important figures in the

neighborhood's African American history, such as Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass. Another plan is to develop a self-guided walking tour of African American historic sites in the neighborhood, a project that I started with a CAN-DO subcommittee in the fall of 2001. C-IP director Pat Pollak sees the tour as a step toward erecting historic markers around the neighborhood, a project that was derailed last winter when the Community Development Block Grant proposal was not accepted.

What do CAN-DO members value about their neighborhood, and what is motivating their efforts to prevent commercial expansion by using history? An exercise during one of the first meetings asked members to say one word that describes what the Southside means to them. They mentioned:

> multicultural, diverse, "Mrs. Eastman" (she's the backbone of the community), neighborhood, community (know each other and organize together to meet collective goals), historic, heritage, heart, hope (because people in the neighborhood are clawing their way up), positiveness, growth, change, friendly, safe (fairly safe, it used to be very safe), strong, supportive (sometimes large) families, kids, spirit (including spirit of the past), cultural vibrancy, colorful, unappreciated, misunderstood, sharing, smiles, wealth (of history, knowledge and people), fragile (I'm worried about it), struggle, ghost town in our part (empty houses), neighborhood in transition (Fieldnotes, August 14, 2001).

This brainstorm provided a wealth of information about how these particular Southside residents view (or want to see) their neighborhood, and how the past fits into this vision. Unlike the African American residents Rayfield Waller interviewed ten years previously, CAN-DO members expressed positive feelings about their neighborhood, considering its "diversity" a strength, while acknowledging its "fragility."

The choice of "Cleveland Avenue and Neighbors" reflected the desire to designate a specific geographic area for representation than the more broadly defined Southside area. For CAN-DO members, this smaller area was more of a neighborhood. Centering around Cleveland Avenue also focused attention on the area's African American history, with Cleveland Avenue

and Plain Street at the 'heart' of what I am calling "Bronzeville." In fact, early brainstorms surfaced names including the "Wheat Street Neighborhood Association" and the "Freedom Neighborhood Association." Members suggested that the letterhead include the subtitle: "Guardians of the legacy of freedom," and listed important figures, buildings, and events in Ithaca's African American history, not all of which were even located on the Southside.

"Diversity Overall" was added to the name in response to the concern that focusing only on the neighborhood's African American history would perpetuate many of the same stereotypes other Ithacans have of the Southside ("drug dealing" and "Black people"), and would also overlook the experiences of newcomers such as Latino and Asian immigrants. Members wanted to see it become an inclusive, multicultural neighborhood association, and they felt that "Diversity Overall" would make the point clear. Plus, it added a twist to an already clever acronym. "CAN-DO" sounded like empowerment and action: "You CAN DO it!"

Despite the diverse attendance at CAN-DO meetings, the core membership reflects a growing minority in the neighborhood: progressive white middle-class professionals who have moved to the Cleveland Avenue area in the last 10 years. While many of these well-meaning newcomers have developed close relationships with their Black neighbors, and are honestly interested in the neighborhood's African American history, they exist outside of the Southside's African American community. This became clear when Reverend Jones, the new pastor at St. James AME Zion Church, attended his first meeting in October. After sitting quietly through most of the meeting, he interjected during a runaway discussion about neighborhood events CAN-DO might sponsor: rummage sales, caroling, shoveling snow, etc. He explained that many of the suggested activities were already held either at the church or at the community center, and urged the association to check with these established neighborhood institutions when planning an

event. The white people in the room didn't seem to understand and only after a lengthy discussion did they come around to understanding the importance of not conflicting with other organizations. What the discussion showed was that many white residents of the Southside, despite their appreciation for the neighborhood's history, don't understand the contemporary role of the church and the community center in the African American community life that takes place in the Southside neighborhood. I would argue that these white residents are appropriating a discourse of multiculturalism, while in practice their lives are still somewhat ethnocentric.

The ethnoracial and socioeconomic differences among Southside residents also point to the messiness of definitions of neighborhood and community. Residents who attend CAN-DO consider themselves to be part of a neighborhood, in that they share a geographical area, are familiar with one another, and have common concerns that range from traffic to development to trash. Including "Neighbors" in the association's name implies a sense of community, where people know each other, knock on each other's doors to invite them to neighborhood association meetings, and can more easily come to a consensus. As one member explained, "Neighborhood is just geographical; community is more vibrant." What constitutes community, however, often falls along ethnoracial and class lines, and is also defined by the institutions and organizations that neighborhood residents take part in. Nor are neighborhoods "just geographical." Both neighborhoods and communities are imagined and enacted through intersecting and contested practices.

# 6. Conclusions

My experience as a volunteer in the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership's oral history project, the interviews I had with community members, the archival research I conducted, and the neighborhood history projects I worked on as a C-IP employee, point to problems with both anthropological and historical research methodology as well as C-IP's approach to community partnership. Anthropologists and historians do not always engage their 'subjects' as co-creators of ethnographic knowledge, and do not orient their work toward solving practical problems. And while C-IP tries to be participatory and action-oriented, it does not employ a rigorous analysis of social reality, and thus fails to identify stakeholders and their needs, and to address structural conditions and affect change.

Initially I hoped to use oral history as a way to bridge the apparent gap between anthropological and historical methodology. I considered oral history as a way to get closer to the past and what it means in the ethnographic present. I also saw oral history as a way to do participatory research and to tell liberating historical narratives. I wrote:

> The radical potential of oral history … is to portray history through the words of those who experienced the recent past, people who voices aren't heard for myriad reasons, such as racism, sexism, poverty, the lack of education, and old age. Thompson [1998] argues that oral history sheds light on history which isn't otherwise seen, corrects mistakes and bias in the historical record, and transforms " the 'objects' of study into 'subjects,' mak[ing] for a history which is not just richer, more vivid and heart-rendering, but *truer*" (98-99). In terms of the historical content and research process of my project, I hope oral history will do all of the above. I want to shed light on a history that is largely ignored, correct distorted assumptions, and give voice to those who lived that history (May 2001).

One of my advisors pointed out that this perspective is "highly romantic" because I overlook the vicissitudes of memory: "Cannot people forget? Lie? Meld two or more events into one?" (Nick Salvatore, paper comments, August 2001).

While I agree that this view of oral history is overly romantic, I am not as troubled by issues of "truth" and "memory" than by questions of *knowledge* and *representation*. Less problematic than the potential for oral histories to misrepresent the past is the practice of oral history within the same extractive model as other historical and ethnographic research. Interviewing, transcribing, editing, and publishing are steps that remove the interviewee from the production of knowledge and the representation of her/himself and her/his community, regardless of how clearly her/his words come through on the page. The practice of oral history, whether for an academic project or a "gift to the community" is not inherently participatory, empowering, or liberating.

Similarly, recording the history of a neighborhood or community does not guarantee any tangible solutions to contemporary problems. The Cornell-Ithaca Partnership's oral and neighborhood history programs adopted a celebratory tone rather than analyzing hard questions of race, class, and power. I have argued that C-IP's "bland pluralist" historiography also conflates the Southside neighborhood and the African American community, which is not historically or contemporarily accurate, and fails to address the sociocultural complexities of neighborhood and community practice. Furthermore, I have shown that C-IP projects, while ostensibly community-driven, often perpetuated the top-down approach of both extractive university-based research and community service programs.

I have tried to break down stereotypes of African American neighborhoods and communities by looking at how "neighborhood" and "community" are practiced historically and in contemporary historicity. Yet at times I have felt that I did not adequately reconstruct the "no man's land created by segregation" through ethnographic inquiry. I am not so sure I have avoided sketching Ellison's "prefabricated Negroes." Of course, I did not set out to write a

comprehensive ethnography of Ithaca's African American community. Yet I feel that have left too many gaps unfilled, that I have extracted rather than co-created knowledge, and that my "results" do not solve real-life problems or lead to liberation; ultimately, "no revolution resulted" (Park, 1982: 20; quoted in Maguire, 1987: 42).

It is important to recognize the limitations of engaging in participatory/action research. As Patricia Maguire warns, "In its totality, participatory research imposes a heavy agenda on both researcher and participants. ...[C]onducting the 'ideal' participatory research project may be overwhelming" (1987: 46). In moments of frustration, I blamed myself for not being outgoing enough, or for an ingrained ethnocentrism or racism that sometimes made interactions with African American residents awkward. But psychology and white guilt aren't particularly helpful modes of self-evaluation, just as they produce bad social research. The individual choices I made, as well as the institutional and disciplinary context of my project, impacted the degree of participation in my project.

Ideally, I would have spent more time discussing my results with the people I interviewed, checking my narrative and analysis against their memory and current knowledge. However, many of my 'informants' were not very enthusiastic to participate in the beginning, and in some cases calling on them to do more work might be perceived as a bother. Also, my thesis is written for an academic audience, not for the general public.

Sharing my research with local residents has been channeled mostly through the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership. In the fall of 2001 I printed "A Snapshot of African American Life in Ithaca, 1900-1950," which unfortunately replicates the kind of apolitical, celebratory history I'm trying to destabilize here (see Appendix B). I also developed a guide to researching the history of African Americans in Ithaca and Tompkins County (see Appendix C), which has been widely

distributed through a C-IP exhibit at the Clinton House (a local theater and gallery), and which will be further publicized by the DeWitt Historical Society. The guide lists many of the sources I came across in my research, and also explains how to find and use the various primary and secondary sources. Finally, I worked with CAN-DO members to develop a walking tour of African American historic sites in the Southside neighborhood. While the tour was not ready to publicize by the end of my time at C-IP, a draft of the brochure will allow CAN-DO members to further develop the tour in the next few months (see Appendix D).

By working at C-IP and with CAN-DO, and by slowly making more of a public presence on my own, I have received some community feedback. Mrs. Frances Eastman, who has lived across from the Southside Community Center since the 1940s, and is one of the older African American residents involved in CAN-DO, asked me why I was only researching the history of African Americans, since the Southside wasn't ever all Black. Her question reinforced my adamancy about not essentializing neighborhood or community.

The historic research guide, which included my email address and C-IP's contact information, has been positively received from Cornell to City Hall. A graduate student emailed me to ask for more information on *The Monitor*, and the Mayor's Office called to receive a copy. After talking about local history with a support group for 'at risk' youth at Ithaca High School, I gave the counselor a number of guides so students could do research on their own.

Dialogue and collaboration are clearly important aspects of any process of knowledge production, whether ethnographic or historical. If the 'subjects' do not become partners in research, the knowledge will be less reflective of reality and less effective when put into action. Achieving such a partnership is ostensibly the goal of the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership.

C-IP neighborhood history projects have tried to be participatory and action-oriented. But rather than connecting current issues (e.g., commercial development) with past developments (e.g., *de facto* segregation), history is treated as a static thing in the past to be celebrated, a symbol upon which to build neighborhood pride and a sense of community. I propose that this approach is severely limited; not everybody cares about the past.

A fundamental question is if history is the best way to address the needs of the Southside today. Without neighborhood-wide support for historic districting or historic markers, will these tactics forestall commercial development? Furthermore, neighborhood residents face other issues besides commercial development, which became clear to me during the course of my project: housing, gentrification, traffic, trash, employment, environmental contamination, the heavy presence of social service agencies, policing, racial profiling, 'crime,' and safety.

In order to affect change, history must not simply memorialize the past, but also examine the structural processes that created today's situation. This means asking hard questions about power over the *longue durée*. It means addressing racism and class oppression, as well as culture, strength, and resiliency as factors that shaped the historical development of the Southside neighborhood and the African American community. I believe that a participatory, action-oriented process that incorporates ethnographic and historical research methods would be a better way to identify, research, and address contemporary problems as they relate to historical processes.

# APPENDIX A
## Population Data on African Americans in Ithaca

Number of African American inhabitants and as percentage of total population for New York State, Tompkins County, and the City of Ithaca.

| Year | New York State | | Tompkins County | | City of Ithaca | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | African Americans | (%) | African Americans | (%) | African Americans | (%) |
| 1820 | 39, 637 | 2.9 | 72[1] | 0.3 | | |
| | (29,279 free) | | (66 free) | | | |
| | (10,088 enslaved) | | (6 enslaved) | | | |
| 1830[2] | 44,945 | 2.3 | 234 (free) | 0.6 | 112 (free) | |
| | (44,870 free) | | | | | |
| | (75 enslaved) | | | | | |
| 1840 | 50,031 | 2.1 | 253 (free) | 0.7 | 136 (free) | |
| | (44,870 free) | | | | | |
| | (4 enslaved) | | | | | |
| 1850 | 49,069 | 1.6 | 325 | 0.8 | 206 | 3.0 |
| 1860 | 49,005 | 1.3 | 297 | 0.9 | 218 | 3.2 |
| 1870 | 52,081 | 1.2 | 401 | 1.2 | 271 | 3.2 |
| 1880 | 65,104 | 1.3 | 463 | 1.3 | | |
| 1890 | 70,092 | 1.2 | 397 | 1.2 | 282 | 2.5 |
| 1900 | 99,232 | 1.4 | 459 | 1.4 | 364 | 2.8 |
| 1910 | 134,101 | 1.5 | 533 | 1.6 | 470 | 3.2 |
| 1920 | 198,485 | 1.9 | 497 | 1.4 | 453 | 2.7 |
| 1930 | 412,814 | 3.3 | 706 | 1.7 | 637 | 3.1 |
| 1940 | 571,221 | 4.2 | 714 | 1.7 | 650 | 3.3 |
| 1950 | 918,191 | 6.2 | 949 | 1.6 | 852 | 2.9 |
| 1960 | 1,417,511 | 8.4 | 1,241 | 1.9 | 1,032 | 3.6 |
| 1970 | 2,168,949 | 11.9 | 1,851 | 2.4 | 1,340 | 5.1 |
| 1980 | 2,402,006 | 13.7 | 2,721 | 3.1 | 1,885 | 6.6 |
| 1990 | 2,859,055 | 15.9 | 3,132 | 3.3 | 1,916 | 6.5 |
| 2000 | 3,234,165 | 17.0 | 4,210 | 4.4 | 2,282 | 7.8 |

[1] Does not include Town of Caroline, where there were 32 enslaved African Americans in 1820 (Selkreg, 1894: 17).
[2] New York State abolished slavery in 1827.

Change in African American Population
City of Ithaca

| | +/- Population | % Change |
|---|---|---|
| 1830-1840 | +24 | +21.4% |
| 1840-1850 | + 70 | +51.5% |
| 1850-1860 | +12 | +5.8% |
| 1860-1870 | +53 | +19.6% |
| 1870-1880 | | |
| 1880-1890 | | |
| 1900-1910 | +106 | +29.0% |
| 1910-1920 | -17 | -3.6% |
| 1920-1930 | +184 | +40.6% |
| 1930-1940 | +13 | +2.0% |
| 1940-1950 | +202 | +31.1% |
| 1950-1960 | +180 | +21.1% |
| 1960-1970 | +308 | +29.8% |
| 1970-1980 | +545 | +40.7% |
| 1980-1990 | +31 | +1.6% |
| 1990-2000 | +366 | +19.1% |

# APPENDIX B

## "Snapshot: African American Community Life in Ithaca, New York, 1900to 1950"

# APPENDIX C

"Historical Research Guide:
African Americans in Ithaca and Tompkins County"

# APPENDIX D

"Historic Walking Tour: Southside's African American Heritage"

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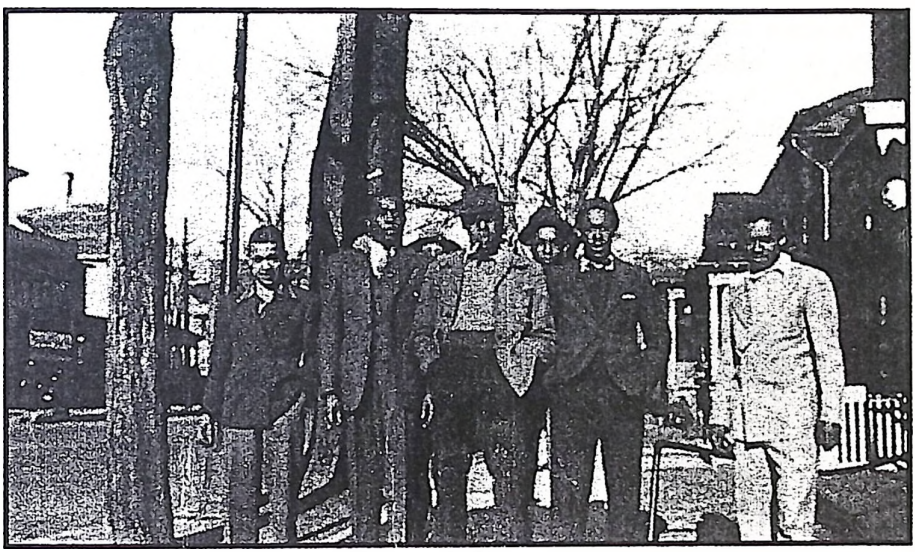
# Snapshot



## African American Community Life in Ithaca, New York 1900 to 1950

by
Ingrid W. Bauer

*Cover Photo*
State Street in the 1940s: Allen Jones, ?, ?, Bob Thomas, Claude "Sonny" Cook, William "Bill" Herndon, and Adolph Reed [left to right] (DeWitt Historical Society of Tompkins County, James L. Gibbs photo collection).

## About the Author

Ingrid Bauer earned her BA from Cornell University in January 2002. Born and raised in Western Massachusetts, she is now proud to call Ithaca home. In the fall of 2000, she volunteered to take part in the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership's oral history project. The following winter, she began conducting historical research for the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership. Her research formed part of her senior thesis examining the historical relationship between the Southside neighborhood and the African American community in Ithaca.

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## Preface

"Snapshot: African American Community Life in Ithaca, New York, 1900-1950" is part of an ongoing effort to recognize, preserve, and celebrate the history of the Southside neighborhood and Ithaca's African American community. Since 2000, the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership, residents of the Southside neighborhood, and members of the African American community have collaborated on a number of projects related to neighborhood and community history, including a book of oral histories, a play adapted from the book, and an exhibit of a "typical" Southside living room.

The decision to research the history of the African American community between 1900 and 1950 emerged from the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership's oral history project. When elder African Americans began talking about what life used to be life in the Southside neighborhood, they said it felt like "goin' back fifty years!" (Community history meeting, September 12, 2000). They remembered the Southside neighborhood as a vibrant locus of African American community life, despite the hardships they faced: migration, floods, the Depression, job discrimination, *de facto* segregation, and daily forms of prejudice.

This "Snapshot" demonstrates how the Southside developed as an important space for African Americans during the first decades of the twentieth century. The St. James AME Zion Church and the Southside Community Center, as well as social clubs, community organizations, and black-owned businesses played important roles in forging community life during this period. However, Ithaca was not officially segregated, and African Americans lived in other neighborhoods as well, as the Northside's Calvary Baptist Church attests. Furthermore, the Southside neighborhood was home to people of all ethnic and class backgrounds, from the wealthy business owners on South Albany Street to the Italian and Irish immigrants on the 200 block of Cleveland Avenue.

Since the 1950s, the Southside neighborhood has faced a series of challenges, from urban renewal to the war on drugs to the current crisis of commercial development. Remembering when the Southside was "where it's at" is not merely an exercise in nostalgia, but is a way for neighborhood residents to regain a sense of pride in their community today and to plan for a better future.

## Historical Background

The history of African Americans in Ithaca and Tompkins County reaches back more than 200 years. The first white settlers from Maryland and Virginia brought slaves with them to Ithaca and Caroline around 1805, and slaves were an integral part of the rural agricultural economy.

After New York State abolished slavery in 1827, formerly enslaved and free African Americans began settling in the village of Ithaca, whose African American community grew from nine in 1820, to 112 in 1830, to 136 in 1840 (Horne, 1988: 18). Many of them found homes in the southwest part of the village, or lived with their employers.

One of the first community achievements of Ithaca's African American population was to establish a church. A group of 17 African Americans, led by former slave Peter Webb, split from the white-dominated Methodist Episcopal Church around 1833. This group formed their own congregation of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, a denomination founded in New York City in 1796. After meeting for three years in members' homes, the congregation built the St. James AME Zion Church on Wheat Street in 1836. The church gained recognition as a state and national historic landmark in 1982.

The St. James Church and its congregation played an important role in the abolitionist movement and as a station on the Underground Railroad. Both black and white Ithacans came to see Frederick Douglass speak at anti-slavery conventions held at St. James in 1842 and 1852 (Foner, 1975: 237-241). Pastors of St. James Church worked with black and white abolitionists in Ithaca and in surrounding towns who helped former slaves escape to Canada. In homes throughout Ithaca, fleeing slaves were hidden in basements, secret rooms, and, in one house, the large brick oven (Galvin, 1943: 141-142). Harriet Tubman, a leader in the Underground Railroad who lived in nearby Auburn, N. Y., was one among many who led slaves to freedom through Ithaca. Some former slaves remained in Ithaca, where they found jobs and became part of the small but growing free black community.

## Settling in Neighborhoods

Since the 1830s, a significant number of African Americans have lived in Ithaca's Southside, which has always been a diverse working-class neighborhood. In the 19th century, African Americans did not only live in the Southside, but lived where they could afford to, forming residential clusters in working-class neighborhoods or "living-in" with their employers. Many decided to settle in the Southside because of the location of the St. James AME Zion Church, the tradition of Underground Railroad activity in the area, the ability of African Americans to purchase homes, and their desire to live in a black community. As early as the 1850s, some African Americans also began to settle in the Northside neighborhood.

In 1880, the first census year to provide detailed data on residential patterns, "Black households ... were scattered in several neighborhoods: Southside, with the greatest concentration on the block bounded by Wheat, Clinton and Plain Streets, and on West Green Street near Corn; on South Cayuga Street; and on North Albany Street. No block was solidly black." By 1900, only one black household remained on South Cayuga Street. More African Americans now resided on the Northside, with a total of 50 people living north of Cascadilla Street (Horne, 1987: 13).

By the turn of the century, the African American population on Wheat Street had grown. The street was also more visibly divided between black and white, with African Americans on the 100 block, spreading out along South Corn and South Plain Streets, and Irish Americans on the 200 block, extending onto South Meadow Street. "There is nothing to suggest that this segregation by block was deliberate or planned," argues local historian Gretchen Sasche. "It may, in fact, have been determined more by blacks desiring to live closer to their church and extended family members than by the Irish trying to move away from the blacks and create an Irish neighborhood" (DeWitt Historical Society, no date).

Little is known about the decision to rename Wheat Street. A petition to change the street's name to Cleveland Avenue was presented by residents and property owners to the Ithaca Common Council on July 15, 1908, passing by a vote of five to one on August 5th. Around this time, other Ithaca streets were being renamed "avenues" as well, perhaps to sound more sophisticated.

What is surprising was the decision to name Wheat Street after President Grover Cleveland, who had died only a few weeks earlier on June 24, 1908. Cleveland was unpopular for his role in the economic depression of the 1890s, and was also a Democrat. At the time, the Democratic Party was dominated by Southern conservatives who took a vehemently anti-black, anti-Catholic, and anti-Jewish stance. Sasche writes, "Perhaps by the time of his death all this was forgotten by a new generation of Wheat Street residents, who were interested in discarding their rural, old-fashioned name for a more modern and urban image." Another explanation could be that black residents, who may have opposed naming their street after Cleveland, did not, were not asked to, or were prevented from signing the petitions presented to Common Council.

Home ownership was a reality for some African Americans by the turn of the century. In 1900, about one third of the 117 black heads of household owned their own homes. (Horne, 1987: 9). The pattern continued in 1920, with an equal number of black-owned homes located on both the Southside and the Northside. There were also a handful of African American families on Giles, Hudson, Eddy, Pearl and East State Streets. About 75 African Americans "lived-in" on East Hill, working as cooks, domestics, and custodians for families, fraternities, boarding houses, and dormitories, primarily related to the growth of Cornell University (1920 federal census).

Class and race appear to be closely connected in the formation of residential areas. While residential segregation was not the law, as in the Jim Crow South, de facto segregation and discrimination occurred in Ithaca, as was common in many Northern communities. Race-restrictive deed covenants, which were legal until 1948, were common in new subdivisions near Cornell, as well as in the suburbs on West Hill and South Hill (Tompkins County deed records). Thus African Americans were limited to the downtown neighborhoods until the 1950s, when the impact of the civil rights movement and the efforts of local activists began to desegregate Ithaca's neighborhoods (interview with Jemma Macera, October 5, 2001).

## Migration

During the first half of the 20th century, millions of African Americans left the South in what is known as the Great Migration. Pushed by economic hard-

ship, prejudice, and racist violence, and pulled by family letters and newspaper reports, industrial jobs, and the promise of freedom from discrimination, rural African Americans headed to cities in the North and West (Grossman, 1989). Chicago, Detroit, and New York experienced a vast influx of migrants. Black Southerners also came to smaller cities such as Syracuse, Rochester, and Ithaca.

Census data show that Southern migrants began to settle in Ithaca as early as 1900, and gradually more arrived (Horne, 1987: 6). During the teens and twenties, however, Ithaca did not offer the number of industrial jobs that made migration to larger Northern cities particularly appealing to black Southerners. In fact, Ithaca's African American population decreased from 470 (3.2 percent of the total population) in 1910 to 453 (2.7 percent) in 1920. Yet migrants were making a mark on the population, perhaps replacing the long-established families from New York State. In 1920, about half of African Americans in Ithaca were born out of state, 150 were from Southern states (33 percent), and 58 were from Virginia (13 percent) (1920 federal census).

As Southern migrants came in during the 1920s, many other African Americans left Ithaca to find work or to continue their education. In 1923 *The Monitor*, Ithaca's first African American newspaper, reported that Harold Murray left Ithaca to work for the Noiseless Typewriter Company in Mexico. Lincoln Carter left Ithaca "to enter the clothing business" in New York City. Hugh Hall left Ithaca for New York City as well (June 1923: 6).

Oral histories and census data indicate that a more significant period of African American migration to Ithaca followed World War II. During World War II, sisters Anita Reed and Dorothy Rollins moved from Ithaca to Washington, D.C., where government jobs were widely available, although racism there was more overt than in Ithaca. In Ithaca, the sisters say, African Americans did not get hired because there was a shortage of jobs. After the War they returned to Ithaca to stay, as did many new migrants (Oral History Book).

## Race relations

While less overt than the racist Jim Crow policies of the South, daily forms of discrimination and prejudice affected the lives of Black Ithacans. Some older Ithacans don't remember having any "race problems" per se, except "you

could get ignored" (Community history meeting, September 12, 2000). When searching for housing, applying for a job, or getting a bite to eat, African Americans encountered subtle forms of hostility that prevented their participation as equals in the Ithaca community.

Explicit displays of racism, however, were not unheard of in Ithaca during the 1920s. The Ku Klux Klan, whose ranks peaked in 1924 with two million members nationwide (Southern Poverty Law Center, 1997), gained ground in Central New York (Haley, 1983). In the fall of 1925, five hundred members of the Klan marched through downtown Ithaca, where the streets were lined with thousands of supporters. That evening the Klan held a ceremony at the Circus Flats, concluding with the burning of a cross (*Ithaca Journal*, October 5, 1925). Clearly, many native white Ithacans supported the Klan. But Mrs. Eleanor Washington claimed that in the African American community, "nobody paid any attention to the KKK and they just went away!" (Horne, 1988: 26).

## Work

Until the 1950s, the majority of African Americans in Ithaca held blue-collar positions in industry and service work, while a few owned small businesses. Domestic service, especially at Cornell, was one of the most common occupations. At the turn of the century there were 125 black servants, more than one third of who worked in fraternity houses. Three employment agencies, operated by local women, placed black servants for the growing demand by Cornell-affiliated employers (Horne, 1987: 9).

The number of unskilled black laborers declined from 50 in 1880 to 40 in 1900, "perhaps reflecting the beginning of foreign immigration" (Horne, 1987: 9). However, by this time more black men had entered skilled trades. In 1900 there were two carpenters, two masons, one brick manufacturer, three stove mounters or repairers, two cigar makers, one letter carrier, one photographer, one baker, and two bootblacks, one with his own shop. Three black barbers were listed, as were three caterers, and a secretary at Treman, King and Co., a hardware store owned by one of Ithaca's most prominent white businessmen. The few black women who held skilled positions included one practical nurse, a Canadian-born dental assistant, a hairdresser, and the storekeeper at a grocery store at 519 West Clinton Street. Miss Jessie Jackson, who later became a mu-

sic teacher, was employed as a typist in a law office (1987: 10).

Many of the same labor patterns held true in the 1920s. For women, work outside their homes meant working in others' homes, usually as cooks (39) and domestics (30) (1920 federal census). Lucy Brown recalled:

> My mother worked for Professor Howard Merrick, who was the head of the Graduate School. She worked! I can tell you she only had Thursday and Sunday afternoon off. All the rest of the time she worked. Men worked long h o u r s too. A few worked at the Ithaca Hotel. I remember hearing that they started off washing dishes and a few men got promoted to waiters, but all the waiters were Black. When I was young, when I was a child and when I was a young woman, all the waiters at the Ithaca Hotel were Black. And that was an evolving process and at one time that was lily white too! (Hill, 1994: 35).

The most common occupations for men were janitors (47 total, 28 in Cornell fraternities), cooks or chefs (22), and waiters (11). Twenty-one could be identified as skilled laborers, working at Morse Chain Works, the coal company, the gas company, the salt company, and the Air Craft company (1920 federal census).

By the 1920s a number of African Americans were entering semi-professional positions. Miss Jessie Johnson had assumed her well-known role as a piano teacher. Charles O. Wilson, editor of The Monitor, was a notary public and tax consultant, as well as a private secretary for a white family. Levi Spaulding was Ithaca's first black police officer. Hired in 1919, he served until he died from a heart attack after apprehending a murder suspect in 1930 (Landesman, 1999).

## Black-Owned Businesses

Black-owned businesses, many of them located on the Southside, were centers for African American community life. Black-owned businesses provided services unavailable to members of the African American community, and contributed to neighborhood development by circulating wealth within the community.

Barbershops were not only the first businesses in Ithaca to be owned by Af-

rican Americans, they were also places to talk politics and gossip. As early as 1884, at least six of thirteen barbershops in Ithaca were black-owned (Horne, 1987: 9). In the 1920s, Harry B. Parker's "Equal Rights Barbershop" operated out of the Cayuga House (Hill, 1994: 34). His advertisement in *The Monitor* reads: "Yes, a Tonsorial Artist who takes pride in his work and his ability to give you the best service possible" (April 1923: 12). Joe Hopkins operated a barbershop out of the Elks Club when it was still located on Tioga Street (Hill, 1994: 34). Albert Curry of Pennsylvania had a shop on the West End (1008 West Seneca Street), Charles Moore of Georgia had a shop at 539 West Clinton Street, and Bert Johnson continued to run his father's shop on North Aurora Street (his father, George Johnson aided many fugitive slaves on their way through Ithaca, and was a loyal Republican who served for one year as Steward of the New York State Senate, 1872-73 (Hill, 1994: 18)).

Ora Spaulding's hair salon, located at the Cayuga House, offered Marcel Waving (*The Monitor* June 1923: 11). Both Marion B. Wheaton's Bronze Beauty Shop and Geraldine's Beauty Salon were run out of their homes on South Plain Street. Tama Ellis and Hattie M. Jones also ran beauty parlors, and Edwina Walker worked as a hairdresser (1920 federal census).

Other women ran businesses at home. Stella Williams, of 113 S. Plain Street, had a doll and sewing shop (Hill, 1994: 34). Dressmaker Mrs. Georgia Andrews, of 413 East State Street advertised in *The Monitor*: "Being mentally clothed anew it is but natural that people should turn eagerly to new Spring apparel. This desire for new Spring clothes is as natural as the budding of new leaves on the trees" (June 1923: 14). Mrs. Harry Harris operated an employment agency and catered ice cream parties on Sundays at her home at 503 North Albany Street (Horne, 1987: 10).

The editor of *The Monitor* was proud of local businessmen and, besides carrying their advertisements, took time to recognize their accomplishments. "George Bailey of 118 S. Plain Street, Ithaca, is engaged in the business of repairing musical instruments. Bailey is reliable and a genius manufacturer of stringed instruments. He has been in this business for the past fifteen years. If you have an instrument that needs repairing or would like one built give George a chance. He is a member of the Silver Tone Mandolin Club and a Deacon of Calvary Baptist Church." J.F. Dorsey, of 121 South Aurora Street, was a general contractor specializing in: "Excavating, ClamShell and Crane Work,

Sand and Gravel Hauling." *The Monitor* reads: "The progress which J.F. Dorsey has made in the past ten years is an example of what any man can do if he sticks to it. He started in our city as a general laborer and by thought, of which we speak in our editorial, he has succeeded in building a business of which anyone could be proud" (June 1923: 3). OJ Jones was not only the chef for Cornell's athletic club, preparing special meals for the crew and football teams, but was also owner of the XYZ Club, at the east end of the Green St. bridge. *The Monitor* noted "Mr. Jones ... has acquired his widely known ability through 23 years of experience, serving in various large hotels before locating in his present position" (March 1923: 2). He was also "a 'professional' gambler who had a chauffer and servants" (Horne, 1987: 10).

Other businesses that advertised in *The Monitor* included Hughes Cleaners and Tailoring, at the corner of State and Corn St. Contractor A.B. Jones, of 132 Cleveland Avenue, advertised: "Floors Waxed and Cleaned. Old Floors a Specialty" (April 1923: 2). Walter "Peaches" Everetts owned the Black and White Cab Company since 1920. (June 1923: 3). The Cayuga House, at 501 West State Street, was advertised as the "Leading Colored Hotel in City" by owner Thomas Russell (March 1923: 4). The Cayuga House was later owned by Jim Miller and was known as "Miller's" (Hill, 1994: 34).

## Education

In 1841 the New York Colored American reported that Ithaca had a " 'flourishing'" school for "colored" children. By 1860 most African American children were attending school. Around the turn of the century, only 23 African American adults were illiterate, indicating that both recent migrants and long-time residents had attended some school (Horne, 1988: 20).

It is unclear how long segregated schooling lasted in Ithaca. Starting in 1925, children from the Southside neighborhood attended the Henry St. John School, at the corner of East Clinton and South Albany Streets. The building was converted into offices and apartments after the Henry St. John School was closed due to budget cuts (Hobbie, 1988: 205). From 1854 onwards, children from the Northside attended Central School, at the corner of West Buffalo and North Albany Streets. In 1972, Central was renamed after African American principal Beverly J. Martin, and relocated to the adjacent Boynton

iddle School. The expanded school now serves children from both the North-
de and Southside neighborhoods (Hobbie, 1988: 113-114).

Jessie Johnson was the first African American to graduate from Ithaca High
chool, probably around 1879 (Landesman, 1999). Members of the African
merican community celebrated their high school graduates and college stu-
ents, and wished that more students would graduate. *The Monitor* congratu-
ted the three young women graduating from Ithaca High School in 1923,
isses Louise Eleanor Taylor, Eloisa L. Marine, and Evangeline Lucille Red-
ond. In addition, the editor wrote, "We wish more of our young people were
aduating this year and hope that these young ladies will continue to study and
ake a mark for themselves and for the race, as there is plenty of room for
uch material and the race needs you" (June 1923: 5).

Cornell University was founded in 1865 on the principal of providing study
or any person in any field. It was one of the nation's first institutions of higher
earning to open its doors to women and African Americans. Edward U.A.
Brooks of Elmira was Cornell's first African American graduate in 1894, and
Sara Winifred Brown of Winchester, Virginia was the first black woman to
graduate in 1897 (Horne, 1988: 21). In 1943, Emma Corinne Brown Galvin
was the first African American woman to earn her Ph.D. from Cornell, which
hen refused to hire her. She eventually gained a position at Ithaca College, and
aught folklore classes at the Southside Community Center (Hill, 1994: 48).

Although few local African Americans attended Cornell, students from else-
where participated in Ithaca's African American community. Thirteen women
nd fourteen men attended Cornell in 1905, where they felt excluded from stu-
dent activities (Wesley, 1957: 57). Many of them worked in fraternity houses
on campus, which led them to form their own association. What started as the
Social Study Club at St. James church in the fall of 1905, grew into the Alpha
Chapter of Alpha Phi Omega, the nation's first black fraternity. Alpha Phi Al-
pha was founded on December 4, 1906 at 411 East State Street, the home of
Archie Singleton, who acted as a mentor to the students. The Eta Chapter of
Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority was founded by 1923 (Horne, 1987: 16).

Ithaca College began as a music conservatory at the Boardman House next
to DeWitt Park in 1892. The college expanded throughout downtown before
moving to South Hill in the 1960s. According to musician Bernie Milton, born
on North Albany Street in 1942, his mother attended Ithaca College, and be-

came an organist, conductor, music teacher, and music writer (Oral History Book). It is unclear if William Powell, whom *The Monitor* called "one of our popular Ithaca Collegiates," was in fact a graduate of Ithaca College pursuing further studies at the Rochester Institute of Technology, or if he was simply an undergraduate at RIT at the time. *The Monitor* proudly tracked the activities of Ithacans studying away from home, showing that a college education was becoming a reality for some African Americans (April 1923: 4).

## Churches

The earliest African American institution in Ithaca was the St. James AME Zion Church, founded in 1833. Throughout the United States black churches were not only places of worship, but were also centers for political and social activity (Overacker, 1998). In Ithaca, St. James was an Underground Railroad Station, and its pastors carried on that legacy of activism in the community. Church groups for youth, women, and men met on weeknights. Other community organizations held meetings there, lacking other space until the formation of the Southside Community Center.

St. James, originally a one-story structure, went through many physical transformations over the years. The second story was built in 1861, and in 1887 a group of white Ithacans donated a bell for the tower. In his account of the church's history, Reverend Vincent W. Howell tells of turn-of-the-century financial troubles the congregation faced:

> Other exterior and interior repairs were made in 1895, but unfortunately this work resulted in a legal suit brought on by Holmes Hollister, the owner of a local lumber yard and mill. Thus, a mechanic's lean was placed on the property and the title to the church was lost until Hollister's death in 1912, at which time (July 13, 1913) his wife and children sold the property back to the members for $1.00 (1986: 41).

An article in the Ithaca Daily News (13 August, 1895) describes how the congregation sought contributions from Ithaca residents to help with the repairs. " 'The church is the only lasting institution that the colored people of our northern cities have...' it commented, saying that 90 % of Ithaca's 500 blacks 'are

willing to go to this church'" (Horne, 1987: 14).

In 1857 a second church, first known as "Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal (colored)," was established on North Albany Street, "the other center of the black community" (Horne, 1987: 14). In 1903 the congregation changed its name to Calvary Baptist Church and built a new meeting house, which stands today at 507 North Albany Street. During the 1920s, various community activities and meetings were held on weeknights, including a regular Thursday evening talk "on some of the various questions of the day pertaining to the African-American question" (*The Monitor* March 1923: 5).

## Community Organizations

Just as church groups addressed secular issues in the African American community, secular and political organizations often held their meetings at churches, especially at St. James. The Ithaca chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, chartered April 11, 1921, first met at the AME Zion Church. Original members included Allen Jones (the first president), T.L. Irvin, Miss Margaret Thomas, Mrs. Mabel Wright, and John Mason. Over the years, speakers they invited included W.E.B. DuBois, Roy Wilkins, and Walter White, the former NAACP national secretary. The NAACP advertised its membership drive in *The Monitor*:

> This organization is the one real organization standing, and working, for a real democracy in America. Many of the complicated problems confronting our race have been solved through its work, but yet there is lots more to be accomplished. It can, and will be, but in order to do so this organization must have the full cooperation of every negro in America, who believes in the full manhood rights, and of every white person who is a real believer in full democracy (April 1923: 1).

Fraternal organizations abounded in the first decades of the 20th century. The Henry Highland Garland Garnet Lodge, founded in 1892, sponsored the Black Masons, which met on the Titus block of West State Street (Hill, 1994: 28; Horne, 1987: 15). The Black Knights of Pythias, listed in the 1900 City Directory, met the second and fourth Wednesday of each month at the Odd Fel-

lows Hall. A branch of the Order of the Eastern Stars was also formed around this time (Hill, 1994: 22). The Young Men's Club met at 141 South Aurora Street, and in 1910 H. Harris was president and W.E. Payne was secretary (Hill, 1994: 28). The Civic Club, whose secretary and manager was Napoleon Jackson, was founded in 1911, and met at 317-319 East Seneca Street. The Black Elks club, Forest City Lodge 180, founded in the 1920s, first met at 119 South Tioga Street, and moved to 536 West Green Street in the 1950s (Horne, 1987: 15-16).

Women's clubs were perhaps the most influential in the community life of African Americans in Ithaca, and many of their social events were listed in The Monitor. The Frances Harper Woman's Club, however, was more than a social club. Meeting on Thursday evenings to do arts and crafts, the women also talked about ways to bring the community together. It was their idea to establish a community center for Ithaca's African Americans, similar to the "settlement houses" that served European immigrants on the Northside and the West End (Hobbie, 1988: 117, 125-126).

## The Southside Community Center

The members of the Frances Harper club overcame many obstacles, including the racist sentiments displayed during the 1925 Klan rally, to form the Serv-Us League in 1928 (Hill 1994: 38; *Ithaca Journal,* April 26, 1938). Led by Mrs. Jessie Cooper, they raised enough money from within the African American community to rent a house at 221 South Plain Street. In 1930, the South Side House joined the Community Chest, an umbrella group for social agencies in Ithaca (it later became the United Way). As their activities expanded, from a Thursday evening women's group to a full schedule of recreational and educational programs for all ages, so did their need for more space. The Serv-Us league held bake sales and other community events to raise money towards purchasing a house at 305 South Plain Street.

During the Great Depression residents of Ithaca faced hard times, but Southside residents were used to making due with what they had. The disastrous flood of 1935 made the South Side House uninhabitable. Drawing on resources throughout Ithaca, Mrs. Jessie Cooper and the newly hired director James L. Gibbs, of Syracuse's Dunbar Community Center, led activities in schools,

churches, and other community centers, using funds provided by residents and the Community Chest.

It soon became apparent that the South Side House needed a new building. An article in *Opportunity*, an African American magazine published out of New York City, mentioned that by the fall of 1935, six African American youths had been sentenced to prison, and both community members and city officials seemed to agree that their "delinquency" stemmed from the lack of meaningful activities (Dec 1940: 359). With the support of the wider Ithaca community, especially local business leaders such as Robert Treman, a public campaign garnered $10,000 for a new community center. The Federal Works Progress Administration agreed to provide the labor if the community paid for materials. Work began in September 1937.

Before construction was complete, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt dedicated the new Southside Community Center on February 17, 1938. The project was running over budget, and a mortgage campaign was launched to raise the necessary $15,000 to finish construction. Other community members cosigned the mortgage, which was finally paid off in February 1944. *The Journal* cheered for the campaign:

> This effort to raise funds for Ithaca's 'community experiment in inter-racial cooperation' has attracted state and national attention as well as local.
> Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt has said: 'It will provide a means of promoting and increasing the good will now existing between the races.' Governor Lehman writes: 'I am watching with keen interest the progress of the South Side Center, and I am very happy to contribute to its success.' Walter White, executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, asserted: 'You are intelligently facing the Negro problem here and it is tremendously important to make a success of this laboratory experiment which, if successful, will be followed in other states (26 April 1938).

The Center opened in September 1938, having cost a total of $49, 052 (*Opportunity*, Dec 1940: 360).

The Southside Community Center, directed by James L. Gibbs and his wife Hortense E. Gibbs of Syracuse, offered a wide range of programs. Besides after-school programs and sports, the Center also served as an employment office, calling on white business leaders who sat on the board of directors to lo-

cate skilled jobs for African Americans at the Ithaca Gun Factory, Cayuga Tool Company, and Morse Chain Company. The well-equipped new building included: a Gym-A-Torium (combined gymnasium and auditorium) named after Cornell alumnus and athlete Jerome "Brud" Holland, a library named after police officer Levi Spaulding, a kitchen, a dining room, a canteen, and game rooms, as well as offices and an apartment for the directors. The Center was "the place to be" well into the 1960s, and it continues to serve the community today.

## Entertainment

Black social life in Ithaca was quite vibrant during the 1920s. Concerts, dances, dinners, picnics, and trips to friends and relatives throughout Central New York were much-heralded events.

Many community organizations doubled as social clubs. Wa Ha Ma, Inc., the Tomahawks, and the Eastern Star Club were women's social clubs. *The Monitor* reported on Wa Ha Ma's "High Tea" in the decorous language of the era:

> On Thursday Night June 7, the Arch Board of Chiefs of the Wa Ha Ma, Inc., held a High Tea in their wigwam. The rooms were attractively arranged and decorated with palms and Wa Ha Ma ornamentations. A little canary bird as well as several beautiful goldfish helped to greet the guests.
> Mrs. Egbert Bowe was the lady of honor. The following ladies poured and assisted:--Mrs. Alonzo Brown, Miss Lucy Praether, Mrs. Gilbert Howard, Mrs. Nanie Jones, Mrs. Levi Spaulding, Mrs. Archie Moore, Mrs. Omer Jones, Mrs. I. Summerfiled, and Mrs. James Miller.
> Mr. James Miller was the steward of the evening and catered the tea in an unexcelled manner. The serving table was highly decorated with costly silver and flowers and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the menu which was very attractive both to the eye and taste. About 100 were present. All who attended expressed themselves as having an unusually pleasant evening (June 1923: 3).

A similar event was the Frances Harper Woman's Club's annual Mothers' and Daughters' banquet. In May of 1923, Mrs. Agnes Jordan, of 311 South Plain Street, hosted 93 guests to dinner and music (June 1923: 2). At these lavish

events, " 'People would set out their china and other fine dishes and wear beautiful gowns,'" says Mrs. Ruth Mann. " 'Most people knew how to do things because they worked for the white folks. Blacks in Ithaca had a vibrant social life'" (Hill, 1994: 28).

Held by the Daughters of Elks in May 1923, Jazz A La Mode gave a thorough sampling of local musical and theatrical talent. The Elite Novelty Jazz Band, with pianist Miss Gorumm, violinist Mr. Robinson, and saxophonist Julius "Jew Baby" Jones, provided music throughout the show. Other acts included "Funny" Frank Johnson as King Tut in the Sahara Desert, Mabel Baker in the Sheik of Abraham, and Mrs. E. "Bozo" Williams, "The Prima Dona with the nightingale voice" (*The Monitor*, April 1923: 1).

The Ithaca Colored Brass Band, active between 1905 and 1911, was managed by John Wye. The Silver Tone Mandolin Club, of which George Bailey was a member, played through the 1920s (Hill 1994: 28).

Since African American communities in Central New York were rather small and isolated, frequent gatherings of family and friends in nearby towns and cities built regional connections. Around the turn of the century, the Webb-VanDyke-Bailor family, including white relatives and friends, held yearly picnics in Brooktondale. Margaret Williams, born in Owego in 1895, spent summers with relatives in Vestal, and remembers attending these gatherings:

> One time I remember going out there [to Brooktondale] from Vestal, and Kip took out his army fife and played, "Molly Put the Kettle on and We'll Take Tea." [The picnic] wasn't all black. There was a lot of white people, too. It wasn't segregated. Mabel Webb, daughter of Peter and Lucina [Williams' great-aunt], played piano for the picnics and everybody danced (Nizalowski 1986: 55).

With the advent of automobiles, black Ithacans "motored" to other cities in Central New York to attend social events. Charles T. Haley explained that his family, from Bath, Steuben County, did the same.

> On almost any worthy occasion Black families, the Haley family included, would travel to various cities and towns within a fifty-mile radius to visit other Black families, hold reunions, attend picnics, cultural events (dances, concerts, jazz fests), and of course weddings and funerals. On the surface this may not

> seem very much different from what most white families did then or now. But for Blacks these trips were of special importance because they provided the means by which racial and cultural cohesiveness could be maintained. ... These soirees were also means through which the young people could meet future spouses (1985: 55).

Such events were covered in *The Monitor's* "who's who" and "social" columns:

> Miss Lillian Cornish of 205 E. State Street, has just returned from a weekend visit with relatives and friends at Elmira, N.Y. (April 1923: 1)

> The young ladies of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority at Syracuse University gave a formal spring dance on Saturday, May 12, at the Odd Fellows hall, Syracuse, New York. Many out of town guests were there. Ithaca, Utica, and Hamilton were all represented. Those from Ithaca who attended the affair were the Misses Teal, Caine, E, and M. Taylor, Singleton, Wathal Payne, F. L. Thompson, and R. L. Harvey. (June 1923: 3).

> Messrs. Joseph Reynolds and Hugh Harley motored from Binghampton to visit Mrs. R. Hill and to attend the Jazz a la Mode (June 1923: 6)

Haley suggests that these events were perhaps for the "proper" African Americans in Central New York towns, pointing to the intra-community class divisions that arose following the Great Migration (1985: 56). George S. Schuyler, who grew up in Syracuse in the early 1900s, also recalled social divisions within the African American community.

> Schuyler's mother prided herself on maintaining high cultural and household standards and discouraged him from associating with blacks who had recently migrated from the South because "they didn't know how to act." Young George was well aware of an "underworld class" with the "expected contingent of pimps, gamblers, roustabouts, hoboes, and tramps." Above this group were the "poor but respectable" laborers and domestics with homes and families but with little schooling. At the top were the chefs, butlers, coachmen, and others who worked for wealthy whites and, according to Schuyler, did not "fraternize with the riffraff" (Sernett 1995: 74).

In Ithaca, the African American community in the first decades of the 20th century was too small to experience many internal class divisions. However, Dr. James L. Gibbs Jr., who spent his childhood in Ithaca, remembered tensions between the "respectables" who attended church and the Southside Community Center, and those who spent their leisure time at the drinking establishments, and were more likely to get in trouble with the law. The social events described in The Monitor were attended primarily, by the former, not the latter. Dr. Gibbs also suggested that fights and arrests outside of bars, such as Miller's at the corner of South Corn and West State Streets, led white Ithacans to make broad generalizations that did not reflect the majority of the African American community (Interview, 5 June 2001).

## Conclusion

Given the economic and social limitations that African Americans faced in Ithaca, they managed to build a strong, vital community in the first decades of the 20th century. Much of this community life took place on the Southside, not only because many African Americans lived there but also because most of Ithaca's black-owned businesses, institutions, and social life were located in the neighborhood. While at least half of all African Americans lived in other parts of Ithaca, primarily in their own homes on the Northside or with employers on East Hill, the Southside was where they went to church, attended political and social events, participated in Southside Community Center activities, had their hair done, or went shopping.

Recognizing, preserving, and celebrating the rich African American heritage of the Southside neighborhood is an important step toward improving the quality of life and reinforcing a sense of community for current neighborhood residents of all ethnic and class backgrounds.

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Kammen, Carol. "Ithaca's anti-slavery convention." *Ithaca Journal*, June 28, 1980.

Landesman, Stephen G. "They made a difference: Tompkins' African Americans weave two centuries of history." *Ithaca Journa*l, February 6, 1999.

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Sasche, Gretchen. "Renaming Wheat Street." Unpublished article, DeWitt Historical Society Archives, no date.

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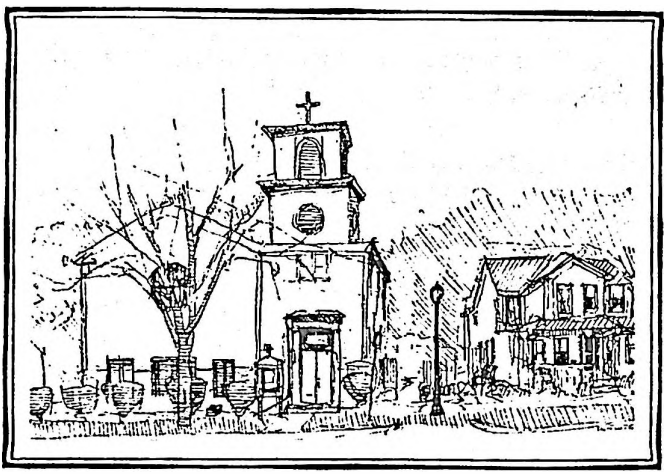
A Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Cornell University, the City of Ithaca, and Ithaca Community agencies and organizations, cooperating.

# Historical Research Guide:

## African Americans in Ithaca and Tompkins County



Sketch of the St. James AME Zion Church on Cleveland Avenue (Lauren Berke 2001). St. James, built in 1836, is Ithaca's oldest surviving church structure, and was designated a national historic landmark in 1982.

This guide lists local resources for researching the history of African Americans in Ithaca and Tompkins County. Uncovering, preserving, and celebrating the area's African American heritage is a source of pride for the entire community. Use it to trace the history of your family, home, or neighborhood!

# I. LOCAL HISTORY

## 1. Books

Most of the following books are available at the Tompkins County Library, Tompkins County Museum/DeWitt Historical Society, and/or Olin Library at Cornell University. Search the library catalogue by title or author, or keywords "Ithaca" and "history."

Abt, Edward Henry. *Ithaca.* Ithaca, NY: R.W. Kellogg, 1926.

Burns, Thomas. *Initial Ithacans.* Ithaca, NY: Press of the Ithaca Journal, 1904.

Deickmann, Jane March. *A Short History of Tompkins County.* Ithaca, NY: DeWitt Historical Society, 1986.

Gallwey, Sidney. *Peter Webb: Slave-Freeman-Citizen.* Ithaca, NY: DeWitt Historical Society, 1960.

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Klees, Emerson. *Underground Railroad Tales With Routes Through the Finger Lakes Region.* Rochester, NY: Friends of the Finger Lakes Publishing, 1997.

Selkreg, John H., *ed. Landmarks of Tompkins County, New York.* Syracuse, NY: D. Mason & Co, 1894.

Sisler, Carol U., Margaret Hobble, and Jane M. Deickmann, *eds. Ithaca's Neighborhoods: The Rhine, the Hill, and the Goose Pasture.* Ithaca, NY: DeWitt Historical Society, 1988.

Snodderly, Daniel R. *Ithaca and Its Past.* Ithaca, NY: DeWitt Historical Society, 1982.

Sutherland, Cara *ed. A Heritage Uncovered: The Black Experience in Upstate New York, 1820-1925.* Elmira, NY: Chemung County Historical Society, 1988.

## 2. Unpublished articles

These unpublished works can be found in the DeWitt Historical Society Archives, Black History Collection.

Gallwey, Sidney. "Early Slaves and Freemen of Tompkins County." Paper presented to the Ithaca Council for Equality, Ithaca, NY, January 30, 1962.

Horne, Field. "Ithaca's Black Community." 1987.

Sasche, Gretchen. "Renaming Wheat Street." Date unknown.

## 3. Cornell theses

A number of Cornell graduate students have conducted research related to Ithaca's African American history. These works may be difficult to find because they do not always appear in library catalogue searches, and they are stored in a number of locations. For theses stored in Cornell's Library Annex or Kroch Library's Rare and Manuscripts Division, a Cornell I.D. is required. Other theses are located in the stacks or reference sections that are open to the public. Some copies are held by the DeWitt Historical Society.

Galvin, Emma Corinne Brown Galvin. *The Lore of the Negro in Central New York State.* Cornell University thesis, 1943. (Africana Reference, Kroch Rare and Manuscripts, Olin stacks)

Hill, Deirdre Hazel Pauline. *Without Struggle There Is No Progress: An Ethnohistoric Study of Ithaca, New York's African American Community.* Cornell University thesis, 1994. (Africana Reference, DeWitt Historical Society)

Phillips, Ruth Irma. *A Study of Leisure Time, Educational and Social Activities Provided by the South Side Community Center of Ithaca, New York.* Cornell University thesis, 1956. (Library Annex)

Singh, Yvonne. *The Life and Times of Aunt Elsie Brooks...* Cornell University Thesis, August 1990. (Africana Reference, Kroch Rare and Manuscripts)

## 4. Other related items

These books and articles can be found at Olin Library and at the Africana Library.

Foner, Philip S., ed. *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, vol. 5 (1844-1860). New York: International Publishers, 1975.

See pages 237-241 for Douglass' account of his 1854 visit to Ithaca for an anti-slavery convention held at St. James AME Zion Church.

Haley, Charles T. "Afro-Americans in Upstate New York, 1890-1980." *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, Vol.9 No.1 (Jan. 1985), 51-57.

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Sernett, Milton C. "On Freedom's Threshold: The African-American Presence in Central New York, 1760-1940." *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, Vol.19 No.1 (Jan. 1995), 43-91.

Sernett, Milton C. " 'On Freedom's Trail:' Researching the Underground Railroad in New York State." *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, Vol.25 No.1 (Jan. 2001), 7-33.

## 5. Videos

These videos record local leaders addressing contemporary issues confronted by the African American community. The videos are available for viewing at the Africana Library.

Sams, Diann. "Black Politics in Ithaca." Videorecording. Africana Studies and Research Center, Cornell University, October 4, 1995.

Scott, Jackie Melton. "Town-Gown Relations and the Black Community." Videorecording. Africana Studies and Research Center, Cornell University, September 20, 1995.

Thornhill, Cleveland. "The Black Church as a Community Resource." Videorecording. Africana Studies and Research Center, Cornell University. October 18, 1995.

## II. NEWSPAPERS

### 1. The Ithaca Journal

Issues of the *Ithaca Journal* (and other Ithaca newspapers) dating back to the early 1800s can be found on microfilm at the Tompkins County and Olin Libraries. Issues from recent years may also be available through online periodical search engines. The following list is a sample of articles since the early twentieth century.

"A New Community Center." February 18, 1938.

Brooks, Rodney. "Southside Community Center began as a women's club." August 31, 1976.

Kammen, Carol. "Ithaca's anti-slavery convention." June 28, 1980.

Landesman, Steven G. "They made a difference: Tompkins' African Americans weave two centuries of history." February 6, 1999.

*Then and Now* columns: 2/5/1991, 1/6/1993, 2/20/1993, 2/4/1995, 2/25/1995, 2/1/1997, 2/7/1998, 2/14/1998, 2/13/1999, 2/20/1999, 7/3/1999

"Thousands See 500 March in Klan Parade" October 5, 1925.

## 2. African American newspapers

*The Monitor*. Ithaca, NY. Vol.1 No.1-3 (March-June 1923).

Reporting news "Unbiased and Unbossed" in the "Interest of Kingdom Building and Racial Uplift," *The Monitor* listed local community events, carried advertisements, and had columns pertaining to current events and politics. Originals can be viewed at Kroch Library, and copies are available on microform (film 6230) in Olin Library.

*The Wheat Street Journal* and other newsletters published by African American community groups. Copies can be found at the Africana Library.

# III. PRIMARY SOURCES

## 1. Your Community

Your family, friends, and neighbors are invaluable resources for researching local history. Although official records of African American history may be scarce, family stories, photo albums, papers, and interviews provide an intimate window into the past. Beginning with these resources, you can then look for primary documents to fill in the blanks.

## 2. Local history archives

The DeWitt Historical Society's Black History Collection (Archives: V-3-2-13) contains photographs, news clippings, family notes, and other items related to the history of African Americans in Tompkins County. The Black History Photo Collection (D 5.12-44) features photographs from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The James L. Gibbs Photo Collection (FBO 0067.1-74) documents the construction of the Southside Community Center and community life during the 1930s and 40s.

Other archival resources at the DeWitt Historical Society include family genealogy files, obituary listings, cemetery listings, and deeds.

## 3. US Census

Federal census manuscripts from 1790 through 1920 provide detailed information including name, address, age, race, employment, place of birth, and so on. Census manuscripts from different years can be found at the DeWitt Historical Society, Olin Library, the Tompkins County Clerk's Office, and the Church of the Latter Day Saints.

## 4. Ithaca City Directories

Ithaca City Directories were published from 1864 to 1989. These volumes list all businesses and residents in the city, including addresses, phone numbers (after the 1940s), marital status, race (until the 1940s) and occupation. The DeWitt Historical Society has a complete set, and selected years can be found in Olin Library.

## 5. Maps

Sanborn Insurance Maps, City of Ithaca Maps, and Bird's Eye Views of Ithaca provide information on the physical environment of Ithaca and may help locate par-

ticular properties as they developed over time. Maps can be found at the Tompkins County Clerk's Office, DeWitt Historical Society and in Olin Library's Maps Collection.

## 6. Deed records

Deed records show the history of property transfers as well as restrictions pertaining to land use and, in some cases, the race, ethnicity, or nationality of a potential buyer. The deeds are listed by name of grantee (buyer) and by grantor (seller). Deed records are located in the Tompkins County Clerk's Office.

## 7. Tax records

Tax records, available at the Tompkins County Assessment Office, may indicate property ownership even when no deed records exist. The Assessment office also provides tax maps, neighborhood information and property listings that may be useful in researching neighborhood history and individual homes.

## 8. Birth, Marriage, and Death records

These records may help trace the life history of an individual. They can be obtained from the City or County Clerk's office.

## 9. Church records

Church registers and other documents contain information about members of the congregation as well as the history of the community. Contact clergy or other church leaders at St. James AME Zion, Calvary Baptist, and other churches in Ithaca.

# IV. COMMUNITY RESOURCES

**DeWitt Historical Society of Tompkins County**
Tompkins County Museum
401 East State Street
Ithaca, NY 14850
(607) 273-8284, FAX (607) 273-6107
dhs@lakenet.org.
http://www.lakenet.org/dewitt

**Tompkins County Public Library**
101 East Green Street
(607) 272-4555
http://www.lakenet.org/tcpl/home.html

**Olin and Kroch Libraries, Cornell University**
Cornell main campus, across from Uris Library and the Clocktower.
(607) 255-4144
Kroch Library Rare and Manuscripts Collection
(607) 255-3530
Library Annex
(607) 253-3431
http://www.library.cornell.edu/okuref/oku/

**Africana Studies and Research Center**
John Henrik Clark Library
310 Tripphamer Road
Ithaca, NY 14850
(607) 255-3822
http://www.library.cornell.edu/africana

**Historic Ithaca**
109 West State Street
(607) 273-6633

**Tompkins County Clerk's Office**
Tompkins County Court House
320 North Tioga Street, basement
(607) 277-0622

**Ithaca City Hall**
Clerk's Office
Planning Department
108 East Green Street
(607) 274-6570

**Southside Community Center**
305 South Plain Street
(607)273-2517

**St. James AME Zion Church**
116 Cleveland Avenue
(607)273-4053

**Calvary Baptist Church**
507 North Albany Street
(607)273-7291

**Church of the Latter Day Saints**
114 Burleigh Avenue
(607) 257-1334

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A Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Cornell University, the City of Ithaca, and Ithaca Community agencies and organizations, cooperating.

# The Southside's African American Heritage Walking Tour

## Ithaca, NY

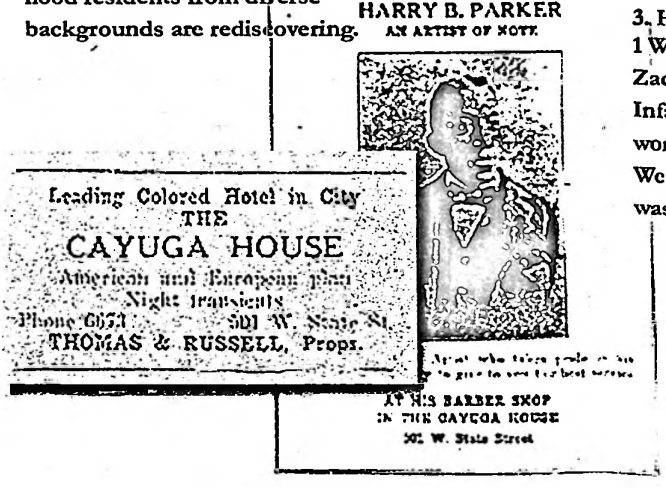
Aunt Elsie Brooks, born a slave in Maryland, came to Dryden in 1812. After New York State abolished slavery in 1827, she lived with her husband on Wheat Street, and worked as a washerwoman. When she died in 1875, over 800 people attended her funeral at St. James church.

# The Southside's African American Heritage Walking Tour

Ithaca NY

The Southside neighborhood has an African American heritage that dates back 180 years. From the founding of the St. James AME Zion Church in 1833, to the Underground Railroad, to the construction of the Southside Community Center in 1938, the Southside was "the place to be."

This walking tour provides an introduction to the Southside's history, for native Ithacans and visitors alike. Some sites have been well documented, while relatively little is known about others; some have been torn down or replaced, while others have been restored. All of them tell stories of a past that neighborhood residents from diverse backgrounds are rediscovering.




## HISTORIC SITES

1. St. James AME Zion Church
116 Cleveland Ave.

The St. James African Episcopal Methodist Church was chartered in 1833 by a group of 18 African Americans who withdrew from the Methodist Episcopal Church in protest. Harriett Tubman and Frederick Douglass are known to have visited St. James, which was an Underground Railroad station. Designated a national historic landmark in 1982, St. James is Ithaca's oldest remaining church structure.

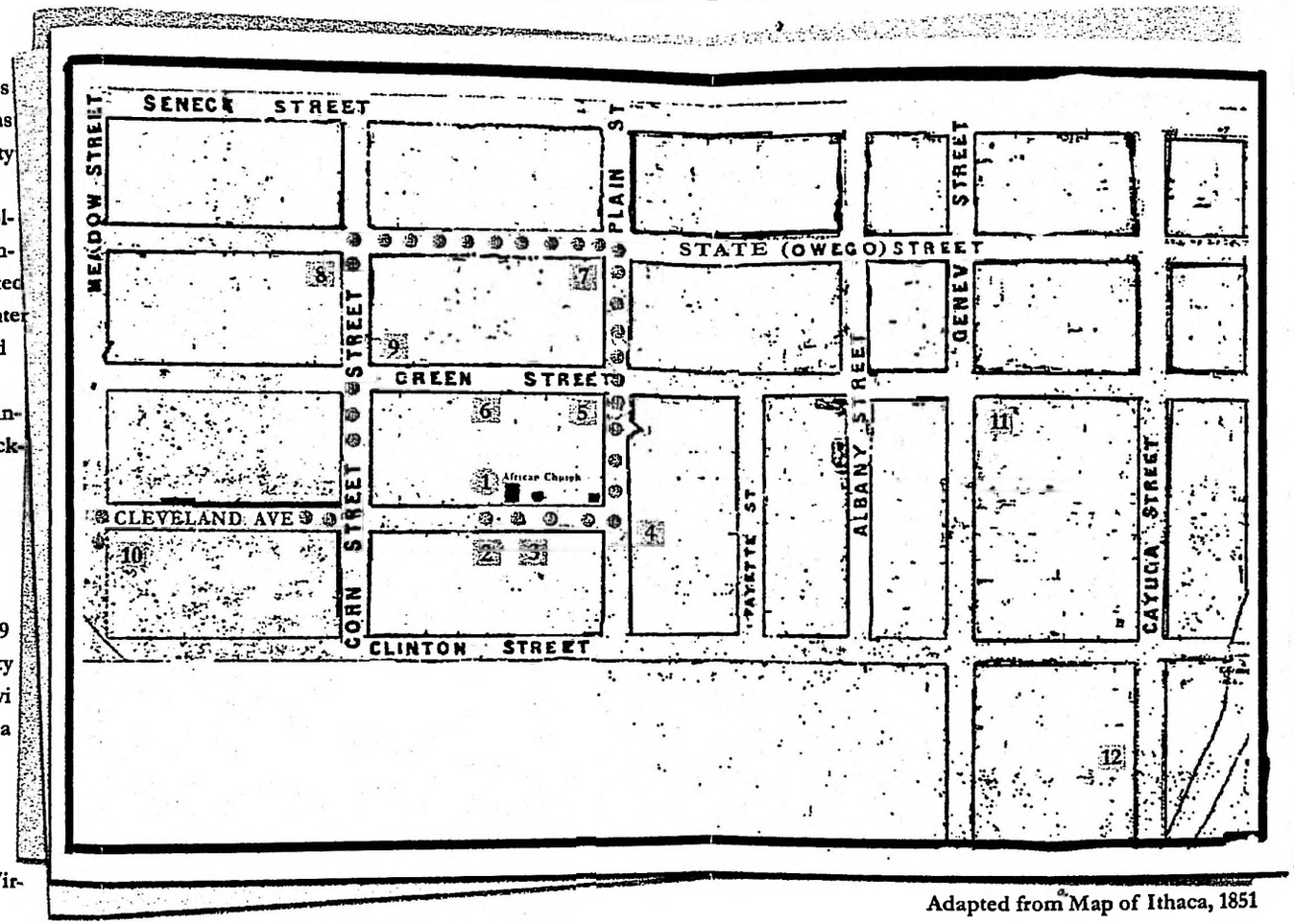
2. Home of Thomas Jackson
11 Wheat St. (111 Cleveland Ave.)

Born a slave in 1820, Thomas Jackson escaped Virginia in 1842, and finally reached Ithaca in 1850. Soon thereafter, the Fugitive Slave Law was passed, and he moved to Toronto for a brief time. Upon returning to Ithaca, Jackson worked as a gardener, farm hand, saw-miller, and general laborer. By 1860 he had married Mary Ann, an escaped slave from Maryland who worked as a laundress.

3. Home of Zachariah Tyler
1 Wheat St. (109 Cleveland Ave.)

Zachariah Tyler served the 26th U.S. Colored Infantry during the Civil War. After the war he worked as a whitewasher, and was pastor at the Wesleyan Methodist (Colored) Church, which was later renamed as Calvary Baptist Church.

# SOUTHSIDE AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE WALKING TOUR MAP




Adapted from Map of Ithaca, 1851

4. Southside Community Center
305 South Plain St.

From the 1920s through the Depression, members of the Frances Harper Women's Club ran the South Side House, which was destroyed in the flood of 1935. Community members, local business leaders, and the Federal Work Progress Administration collaborated to build the new Southside Community Center in 1938, which was dedicated by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. The center offered after-school programs, sports, and employment services, making Southside "the place to be." Today, the Center continues to serve Southside residents of all backgrounds.

5. Home of Levi and Ora Spaulding
501 West Green St.

Levi Spaulding was Ithaca's first African American policeman. He served from 1919 until 1930, when he died in the line of duty after apprehending a murder suspect. Levi also operated a barbershop, and Ora had a hair salon at the Cayuga House.

6. Cooke Family Home
515 West Green St.

The Cooke family came to Ithaca from Virginia in the 1890s. The home has passed from mother to daughter ever since. The house was a stop on the Underground Railroad. African American men who helped build the Ithaca and Owego railroad in the 1860s also boarded here.

7. Home and office of the Drs. Galvin
401 West State St.

Mr. and Mrs. Galvin came to Ithaca in the 1940s. They were both doctors—he was a general practitioner, and she was the first African American woman to earn a Ph.D. at Cornell.

8. Cayuga House
501 West State St.

The "Leading Colored Hotel in the City" was first owned by Thomas Russell, and later by Jim Miller. It was also home to Harry B. Parker's Equal Rights Barber Shop and Ora Spaulding's hair salon.

9. Forest City Lodge 180 (Black Elks Club)

First located at 119 Tioga St., the Black Elks Club relocated to 536 West Green St. at the corner of South Corn St. in the 1950s.

10. Ten Commandments Houses
300 block of Meadow St.

Nine identical houses, known by neighborhood residents as the "Ten Commandments," housed Irish and Italian immigrants. These small houses contained no more than a few rooms and an attic. They were torn down in the early 1990s.

11. Macera Family Home
125 West Green Street

The Macera family purchased this home in the 1930s, at the height of the Great Depression. The original owner was noted abolitionist and Quaker, Benjamin Halsey, who never turned a runaway slave away. As station on the Underground Railroad, the home is said to provide a sense of security and safety to those who enter it.

12. Site of Brum/ Johnson Home
326 South Cayuga St.

This site was home to a long line of Underground Railroad agents, starting Titus Brum, who purchased a home here in 1824. George A. Johnson, who married Brum's daughter, was a barber, a community leader, and is said to have aided 114 slaves to freedom. The Johnsons had two children: Bert, also a barber, and Jessie, the first Black graduate of Ithaca high school, who gave piano lessons. A number of secret rooms where slaves are said to have taken refuge were discovered when the house was demolished in 1927 (it was replaced by the current home).