

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**African American Heritage in Kansas City, Missouri
Name of Multiple Property ListingMissouri
State**National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form**

This form is used for documenting property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (formerly 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information.

☒ New Submission☐ Amended Submission**A. Name of Multiple Property Listing**

African American Heritage in Kansas City, Missouri

B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

1. Settlement Patterns
2. Industry, Commerce, & Employment
3. Arts & Culture
4. Health & Medicine
5. Education
6. Religious & Community Organizations
7. Politics & Government

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D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation.

Signature of certifying official

Title

Date

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

African American Heritage in Kansas City, Missouri
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Missouri
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I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

DRAFT

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Missouri
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E. STATEMENT OF HISTORIC CONTEXTS

INTRODUCTION

This Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF), African American Heritage in Kansas City, Missouri, is organized around the built resources and historic landscapes that are associated with African Americans in Kansas City, Missouri. This MPDF provides a context for understanding the activities and experiences of African Americans in Kansas City, as well as a basis for evaluating physical resources that resulted from those activities and experiences.

The period of significance for this MPDF is 1826-1975. The start date, 1826, coincides with the first settlement of African Americans within the current (2025) borders of Kansas City, Missouri. The end date, 1975, coincides with the date for contexts whose historic significance and patterns extend beyond fifty years prior to the present-day (2025). Significant patterns and events that began in the mid-twentieth century and earlier that relate to the struggle for housing equality, school integration, and civil rights, among others, extended well into the 1970s and beyond. The end date of 1975 reflects the continuing significance of these events and leaves this MPDF open for future expansion as additional research is uncovered and as additional historical insights are revealed with time.

The boundaries for this MPDF correspond to the municipal limits of Kansas City, Missouri, as defined in 2025 (see *G. Geographical Data*). The boundaries for this MPDF may change should the official limits of Kansas City be altered in the future.

Language and Terminology

Language used to describe individuals and groups carries power and significance. This type of terminology often extends beyond providing neutral descriptors. It can influence how people experience their own identities and interactions, shape both positive and negative perceptions of people and groups of people, and play a critical role in reinforcing institutional power structures. Centuries of racial prejudice and discrimination has shaped language surrounding historically marginalized and disenfranchised groups of people, often dehumanizing them, reinforcing stereotypes, and perpetuating systemic inequalities.

This MPDF seeks to discuss race with inclusivity and respect. The language and terminology used in this MPDF is based on recommendations related to the use of sensitive language from several sources, including the American Psychological Association's (APA) style guide on race and ethnic identity¹ and the National Archives' "Statement on Potentially Harmful Content,"² which provides guidance on presenting sources that carry views and opinions that are outdated, biased, offensive, and possibly violent.

¹ "Bias Free Language," American Psychological Association, accessed December 19, 2024, <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language>.

² "NARA's Statement on Potentially Harmful Content," National Archives, accessed December 19, 2024, <https://www.archives.gov/research/reparative-description/harmful-content>.

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Because this MPDF discusses race, racism, and historic perspectives toward race, sensitive language does appear. This includes language used historically that is now considered to be outdated, derogatory, and offensive, particularly in primary source materials and when referring to the names of organizations that historically made use of these terms. The APA notes, “historians and scholars writing analyses of past events or times or of historical figures must be careful not to misrepresent the ideas of the past in an effort to avoid language bias.”³ As such, within this MPDF, the names of organizations created by and for African Americans are used freely, including those with terminology that may be considered outdated today. Other associated terminology, including terminology that was historically intended to be harmful, is included within quotation marks, usually within a primary source quotation. This is not intended to perpetuate or pardon this language, but to honestly and accurately recount historic attitudes toward race.

The terms African American and Black are used interchangeably, with the understanding that people of African descent have widely varied cultural backgrounds, histories, and experiences. Terms for racial groups are capitalized, including Black and White, following guidance from the National Association of Black Journalists.⁴

Language and terminology can be deeply personal, and preferences can vary widely within a particular group of people. With this in mind, this MPDF strives to use language and terminology in a respectful manner.

Before Missouri: Indigenous Nations and Colonial Settlement

People have lived in the area now called Missouri for at least twelve to fourteen thousand years.⁵ Little is known about specific social groups of ancient Indigenous peoples who lived in Missouri before approximately one thousand years ago, but extant archaeological resources give insight into general settlement patterns and cultural practices. The first inhabitants likely settled in the region due to its wealth of resources, particularly the confluence of three of the continent’s major rivers—now called the Missouri, Ohio, and Mississippi.⁶ Early groups were primarily nomadic and relied on hunting for sustenance but eventually diversified to a mixture of hunting and gathering. Evidence of controlled burning practices, the early growth of agriculture, and more permanent settlements began approximately five to seven thousand years ago, and the earliest burial mounds were created around 3500 BCE.⁷

Permanent settlements became more widespread around one thousand years ago, the largest of which was a settlement now called Cahokia.⁸ Developed around present-day St. Louis, it grew into one of the largest and most advanced cities of precolonial North America. At its height around 1100 CE, the city center covered approximately six square miles and had a population of as many as twenty thousand people, while as many as

³ “Historical Context,” American Psychological Association, accessed December 19, 2024, <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/historical-context>.

⁴ “NABJ Statement on Capitalizing Black and Other Racial Identifiers,” National Association of Black Journalists,” <https://nabjonline.org/blog/nabj-statement-on-capitalizing-black-and-other-racial-identifiers/>.

⁵ Greg Olson, *Indigenous Missourians: Ancient Societies to the Present* (University of Missouri Press, 2023), 18-19.; Ron Soodalter, “The Tribes of Missouri Part 1: When the Osage & Missouriia Reigned,” *Missouri Life*, February 6, 2022.

⁶ Olson, *Indigenous Missourians*, 18.

⁷ Olson, *Indigenous Missourians*, 25-27.

⁸ Soodalter, “When the Osage & Missouriia Reigned.”

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forty thousand people lived in the Greater Cahokia area, making it one of the largest metropolitan centers in the world at that time.⁹ Residents were from multiple cultural and ethnic groups that inhabited the surrounding area, including Algonquin, Muskogean, Caddoan, and Siouan-speaking people.¹⁰ Cahokia's influence extended across much of the Midwest, including trade networks with settlements as far away as present-day Wisconsin, Ohio, Kansas, and Oklahoma.¹¹ It is currently unknown what precisely led to the abandonment of Cahokia, but the population of the city center declined to approximately five to seven thousand people by 1300 and further dropped to approximately three to four thousand people by 1400.¹² While the area experienced some population regrowth by 1500, it declined again starting around 1700. The latter decline corresponds to a difficult period of White colonialization, warfare, disease, population movement, and environmental changes that occurred over the course of the eighteenth century.¹³

By the mid-seventeenth to the early eighteenth centuries, present-day Missouri was home to two main groups: the Osage (who historically called themselves the Wahzhazhe) and the Missouri (who historically called themselves the Nutachi). Osage oral tradition states that the group migrated from the Ohio Valley to present-day Missouri during the 1600s as part of a larger group of Dhegiha-speaking Oceti Sakowin, which also included the Omaha, Quapaw, Ponca, and Kaw (Kanza/Kansa). The Osage created a powerful kingdom with vast territory that extended across present-day Missouri, including present-day Kansas City, as well as Arkansas, Kansas, and Oklahoma.¹⁴ The Missouri were also part of the larger Oceti Sakowin nation but spoke the Chiwere language. Also a powerful group, the Missouri had lived on the Missouri River in present-day Saline County since roughly 1300.¹⁵ Other groups in present-day Missouri around this period included the Illini (Illinois), Chickasaw, Quapaw, Ioway, and Otoe.¹⁶

While Spanish colonialists may have interacted and traded with Indigenous people from present-day Missouri as early as the mid-1500s, the first documented instance of White Europeans entering the area occurred in 1673, when a group of French colonialists traveled down the Mississippi River from Ottawa to the mouth of the Missouri River. Although Indigenous people already inhabited the area, the French group immediately claimed it for France. In 1682, another French expedition along the Mississippi River claimed the entire Mississippi Valley, which the colonialists named Louisiana. With the aim of expanding the New France empire, French colonialists launched an aggressive exploration campaign of the region, and regular contact between local Indigenous groups and French colonialists began around this time. As French colonizers traveled throughout the region and established extensive fur trading networks, they brought deadly illnesses and instigated warfare that continued to devastate the local Indigenous population over the next century and a half.¹⁷

⁹ Olson, *Indigenous Missourians*, 44, 52.

¹⁰ Olson, *Indigenous Missourians*, 63.

¹¹ Olson, *Indigenous Missourians*, 52.

¹² Olson, *Indigenous Missourians*, 61.

¹³ White, et. al., "After Cahokia: Indigenous Repopulation and Depopulation of the Horseshoe Lake Watershed AD 1400-1900," *American Antiquity* 85, no. 2 (2020): 263.

¹⁴ Sandra Walker, *History of the African Americans in Kansas City* (The Lowell Press, Inc., 1993), Chapter 1, np.

¹⁵ Soodalter, "When the Osage & Missouri Reigned."

¹⁶ Olson, *Indigenous Missourians*, 86.

¹⁷ Ron Soodalter, "The Tribes of Missouri Part 2: Things Fall Apart," *Missouri Life*, September 7, 2018.

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People of African descent also first entered present-day Missouri during this period, many through the institution of slavery. From the beginning of their New France campaign in the area, White French colonialists often brought enslaved and indentured Africans and Afro-French people on expeditions, where they worked as servants, navigators, and interpreters. Widespread slavery was introduced to the area in 1720, when White French colonialist Phillippe François Renault brought five hundred enslaved Black people from Santo Domingo to the St. Louis area, where they were forced to work in lead mines.¹⁸ The Black population continued to grow in the French territories of Louisiana and New France throughout the eighteenth century. While most were enslaved, some free Black people explored and settled in the region as well. A notable example is Jean Baptiste Pointe Du Sable, who established a trading post at the mouth of the Chicago River during the 1780s, which grew into the City of Chicago.¹⁹

In 1803, the United States purchased the territory of Louisiana, which virtually doubled the physical size of the country. The following year, President Thomas Jefferson commissioned the Corps of Discovery Expedition, led by United States Army captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, to explore the Louisiana territory and map a travel route to the Pacific Ocean.²⁰ York, a Black man who had been enslaved by the Clark family since his birth, served as an integral member of the party. He aided in navigating, provided medical aid to other party members, and although most enslaved African Americans were forbidden from possessing firearms, he wielded a rifle throughout the journey and regularly assisted with hunting.²¹ He also played a crucial role in communicating with Indigenous groups, becoming one of the primary ambassadors and interpreters among the party.²² On June 26, 1804, the party began mapping the mouth of the Kansas River, making York one of the first, if not the first, Black persons to set foot on the site of present-day Kansas City.²³ York requested manumission when the expedition ended in 1806, but Clark refused. York likely eventually gained freedom between 1811 and 1815 and eventually moved to Tennessee, where he lived until his death in 1832.²⁴ He posthumously became an honorary sergeant in the U.S. Army in 2001.²⁵

Following the Louisiana Purchase, the United States launched an aggressive and violent campaign to displace Indigenous groups in the region, continuing its pattern of displacement that eastern Indigenous peoples had already been experiencing. Indigenous groups in present-day Missouri faced continued conflict not only as White colonizers scrambled to claim land in the Louisiana territory, but also as displaced eastern Indigenous groups were being driven farther west.²⁶ By the time Missouri achieved statehood in 1821, Indigenous groups living within the Missouri borders included the Osage, Otoe-Missouria, Kaw (Kanza/Kansa), Quapaw, Chickasaw, Ioway (Iowa), Illini (Illinois), Lenape (Delaware), Sac & Fox, and Shawnee. While many of these groups had historically lived in the area, the Lenape, Sac & Fox, and Shawnee had only recently relocated,

¹⁸ Walker, Chapter 1, np.

¹⁹ Walker, Chapter 1, np.

²⁰ Soodalter, "Things Fall Apart."

²¹ Amanda Bellows, "The Forgotten Black Explorers Who Transformed Americans' Understanding of the Wilderness," *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 28, 2024.

²² Bellows, "The Forgotten Black Explorers."; Walker, Chapter 1, np.

²³ Walker, Chapter 1, np.

²⁴ Bellows, "The Forgotten Black Explorers."; Walker, Chapter 1, np.; G.S. Griffin, *Racism in Kansas City: A Short History* (Chandler Lake Books, 2015), 2.

²⁵ Griffin, 2-3.

²⁶ Soodalter, "Things Fall Apart."

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forced by White colonial westward expansion.²⁷ Those groups with historical ties to the region were pressured into signing treaties that ceded the vast majority of their land to the federal government.²⁸ The Osage retained a small portion of their land along the south bank of the Missouri River in present-day Kansas City until the Osage Treaty of 1825, which ceded the remainder of their land in Missouri to the United States.²⁹

There are currently no federally recognized Indigenous nations in Missouri.³⁰ Actions taken by White colonizers, the State of Missouri, and the United States government during the nineteenth century brutally forced Indigenous leaders and the majority of their people out of Missouri and onto reservations in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska. However, despite continued, severe discrimination and concerted attempts to eradicate Indigenous culture, most groups that historically lived in present-day Missouri have survived and reclaimed self-governance.³¹ The Osage, Otoe-Missouria, Kaw, Quapaw, Chickasaw, Iowa, Delaware, Sac & Fox, and Shawnee are all currently federally recognized nations, operating in the states and on the lands to which the federal government forcibly relocated them nearly two centuries ago.³² Most members live outside of Missouri, although approximately thirty thousand people of Indigenous descent live in the state (0.5 percent of the total population), and approximately two thousand people of Indigenous descent live in Kansas City (0.4 percent of the total population).³³ These Indigenous nations continue to reclaim and preserve their heritage, including oral traditions, religion, and language, demonstrating resilience and perseverance in the face of adversity.³⁴

Creation of Missouri: The Missouri Compromise and Missouri Statehood

The history of Missouri as a state is intrinsically tied to the institution of slavery and its legacy, beginning with the issuance of statehood. In 1820, the United States Congress passed the Missouri Compromise, a legislative response to the growing crisis over slavery and its expansion into new states.³⁵ The compromise began in early 1819 with arguments over Missouri's petition for statehood and whether the institution of slavery should be permitted or restricted in the new state. The North wished to prevent the spread of slavery, both over abolitionist concerns as well as fears of strengthened Southern representation under the Three-fifths Compromise, while the South wished to safeguard their economic and political stake in slavery and objected to its federal regulation within the states.³⁶ Following a year of bitter debates, the Missouri Compromise of 1820 ultimately allowed Missouri to join the Union as a proslavery state while simultaneously admitting Maine as a free state, maintaining a professed balance of representation between free and proslavery states, and prohibited slavery in the remaining Louisiana Purchase territory north of the 36th parallel.³⁷

²⁷ Olson, *Indigenous Missourians*, 178.

²⁸ Soodalter, "Things Fall Apart."

²⁹ Soodalter, "Things Fall Apart."

³⁰ Ron Soodalter, "The Tribes of Missouri Part 3: Homecoming," *Missouri Life*, October 8, 2018.

³¹ Soodalter, "Homecoming."

³² "Indian Entities Recognized by and Eligible to Receive Services From the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs," Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, January 8, 2024.; Soodalter, "Homecoming."

³³ U.S. Census Bureau.

³⁴ Soodalter, "Homecoming."

³⁵ Griffin, *Racism in Kansas City*, 11.

³⁶ The Three-fifths Compromise, determined during the 1787 Constitutional Convention, ruled that three out of every five enslaved African Americans would be counted toward a state's population for the purposes of legislative representation, even though they were denied the right to vote. Griffin, 11-12.

³⁷ Griffin, 11-12.

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Missouri was not formally admitted to the Union until a year later, following continued discord over the state constitution. To further codify the institution of slavery in the state, and in a display of contempt toward the federal government, the Missouri convention included provisions within the constitution that, among other things, prohibited the emancipation of enslaved persons without the consent of their owners and required the state legislature to enact laws “to prevent free Negroes and mulattos from coming to and settling in this State, under any pretext whatever.”³⁸ These provisions presented few practices that were not already followed to some degree in other states, including those in the North. Several states criminalized the act of concealing those who escaped slavery, and as one North Carolina senator aptly stated during the Missouri conflict, “there is no place for the free blacks . . . no place where they are not degraded.”³⁹ However, the codification of these policies in the state constitution, which was unique to Missouri, and the spirit in which it was done, incited federal legislators and led to another heated, drawn-out debate.⁴⁰

In early 1821, Congress passed the Second Missouri Compromise, a resolution granting statehood to Missouri with its original proposed state constitution. Congress agreed to the proposed state constitution under the “fundamental condition” that Missouri legislators pledge that the state constitutional provision excluding free African Americans “shall never be construed to authorize the passage of any law . . . by which any citizens . . . of the States of this Union shall be excluded from the enjoyment of any of the privileges and immunities to which such citizen is entitled under the Constitution of the United States.” In other words, as historian John Robert Van Atta writes, “the Missouri legislature had to declare, without amending the controversial clause in its constitution, that the exclusion of free blacks meant not what it clearly said.”⁴¹ The Missouri legislature agreed to this condition, and Missouri officially gained statehood on August 10, 1821.⁴²

The Second Missouri Compromise did not last long. In 1825, Missouri passed legislation that denied free African Americans entry to the state without official naturalization papers, which African Americans could not obtain under current federal law. Later, in 1847, the Missouri legislature formally nullified their agreement to the congressional “fundamental condition” without opposition, ending the Second Missouri Compromise and contributing to increasing tensions that eventually led to the Civil War. This history of Missouri’s statehood, marked by political compromises that permitted and codified slavery and the discrimination of African Americans, had a lasting impact on Black Missourians that continues today.⁴³

³⁸ Walker, Introduction, np.; John Robert Van Atta, *Wolf by the Ears: The Missouri Crisis, 1819-1821* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 116.

³⁹ Van Atta, 118.

⁴⁰ Van Atta, 118.

⁴¹ Van Atta, 120.

⁴² Van Atta, 120.

⁴³ Van Atta, 120-121.

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1. SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

The first African Americans to settle in what became the city of Kansas City, Missouri, came involuntarily under the institution of slavery. While there are unfortunately very few accounts of slavery in western Missouri from the Black perspective, it was a visible and widespread part of life in the first non-Indigenous settlements within the current Kansas City borders, and it played a central role in the development of Kansas City.⁴⁴ Slavery was an intensely profitable enterprise for early White settlers in Kansas City and throughout Missouri, and White civic leaders and legislators worked fiercely to protect it.⁴⁵ Kansas City, located on the border of proslavery Missouri and the free territory of present-day Kansas, became a crucial and at times violent site of conflict in the struggle against slavery leading up to and during the Civil War. As a result, the institution of slavery is deeply woven into the fabric of Kansas City's early settlement and growth. Slavery helped shape the built environment and social landscapes of early Kansas City and severely restricted and oppressed early Black residents, both enslaved and free. While the Emancipation Ordinance of Missouri ended the institution of slavery in Kansas City and the surrounding state in 1865, the legacy of slavery persisted long after. Racist White power structures, policies, and attitudes continued to affect the development of the City and continued to restrict and oppress the lives and movements of Black Kansas Citizens throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴⁶

1.1. Early to Mid-Nineteenth Century: Early Development, Slavery, and Civil War

1.1.1. Early Development

Kansas City, Missouri, is located on the western border of the state at the confluence of the Kansas and Missouri Rivers. It originated from three main non-native settlements that formed during the first two decades after Missouri became a new proslavery state: Chouteau's Landing, first established within the current city borders in 1826; Westport, first established in 1833; and the Town of Kansas, first established in 1838. Both free and enslaved African Americans contributed to the early population and development of each of these settlements, which grew over the course of the nineteenth century from a handful of small, clustered frontier outposts into the major urban center and transportation hub of Kansas City, Missouri.⁴⁷

In 1822, a small group of primarily French American fur traders and at least one enslaved Black man established Chouteau's Landing, a trading post on the north bank of the Missouri River in present-day North Kansas City, Missouri.⁴⁸ The group was drawn to the location for its proximity to existing Indigenous nations and trade networks, especially the Kaw (also called the Kanza/Kansa) people who were the region's primary fur trappers. The group initially preferred a location on the south bank of the river for easier access to the Kansas

⁴⁴ Kristen K. Epps, "Before the Border War: Slavery and Settlement of the Western Frontier, 1825-1845," in *Bleeding Kansas, Bleeding Missouri: The Long Civil War on the Border*, ed. Jonathan Halperin Earle and Diane Mutti Burke (University Press of Kansas, 2013), 30.

⁴⁵ Walker, Introduction, np.

⁴⁶ Walker, Introduction, np.

⁴⁷ James R. Shortridge, *Kansas City and How it Grew, 1822-2011* (University Press of Kansas, 2012), 10-11, 16.; Sophie Roark, Rachel Nugent, and Elizabeth Rosin, "Westport Historic Resources Survey" (Historic Kansas City, 2017), 55.

⁴⁸ North Kansas City, Missouri, is an independent municipality within the larger present-day Kansas City metropolitan region. Kansas City, Missouri, borders it on the north, east, and south, while Kansas City, Kansas, borders it on the west. Shortridge, 10-11.; Epps, 33.

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River valley, but this land was still under treaty as Osage Nation territory, which prohibited United States expansion into the area.⁴⁹ The group was led by François Chouteau, whose family were prominent fur traders in eastern Missouri and helped establish the city of St. Louis, and François's wife, Bérénice Thérèse Ménard Chouteau, who came from a family that was active in the Illinois state government.⁵⁰ Both François and Bérénice were enslavers prior to their move from St. Louis, and at least one enslaved Black man traveled with them to settle Chouteau's Landing.⁵¹

After a flood destroyed the initial Chouteau's Landing settlement in the spring of 1826, the settlement quickly rebuilt on the south bank of the Missouri River, which the federal government had obtained the previous year under the Osage Treaty of 1825.⁵² This settlement, centered at the foot of present-day Harrison and Gillis Streets, was the first non-Indigenous settlement within the current borders of Kansas City, Missouri.⁵³ The settlement steadily grew, and by the early 1830s, the new Chouteau's Landing had a population of at least a hundred people, including enslaved African Americans.⁵⁴ Many of the French American settlers continued their involvement in the fur trade, and most also established small farms located in the present-day West Bottoms area.⁵⁵ Enslaved African Americans were forced to labor in the fur warehouses and on the farms. In 1837, Bérénice Ménard Chouteau purchased an enslaved child named Nancy to serve as a companion and servant for her daughter.⁵⁶

In 1833, White land surveyor John Calvin McCoy established Westport, a trading post settlement centered near the current intersection of Westport Road and Mill Street.⁵⁷ McCoy had traveled to the area two years prior with his father, Isaac McCoy, a White Baptist minister who worked as a missionary among Native American nations and helped enact the Indian Removal Act of 1830.⁵⁸ After traveling to the area, John McCoy purchased land and established Westport at the diverging point for the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails as they continued westward from Independence, Missouri.⁵⁹ McCoy also acquired land along the south bank of the Missouri River at the foot of present-day Grand Avenue, approximately half a mile from Chouteau's Landing, and established a wharf called Westport Landing to facilitate the delivery of goods to Westport.⁶⁰

African Americans, both enslaved and free, were involved in the early settlement and development of Westport. John McCoy and other leading White members of the Westport settlement were enslavers, and they openly promoted the institution of slavery and Missouri's status as a proslavery state, claiming it was essential to the local economy.⁶¹ However, McCoy and other Westport enslavers also permitted enslaved African Americans to

⁴⁹ Shortridge, 11.

⁵⁰ Epps, 33.; Shortridge, 10.

⁵¹ Epps, 33.

⁵² Shortridge, 10-11.

⁵³ Shortridge, 11.

⁵⁴ Shortridge, 11.

⁵⁵ Shortridge, 11.

⁵⁶ Epps, 33.

⁵⁷ Roark, Nugent, and Rosin, "Westport Historic Resources Survey," 55.

⁵⁸ Kansas Historical Society, "Isaac McCoy" (Kansapedia, March 2022), <https://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/isaac-mccoy/19388>.

⁵⁹ Roark, Nugent, and Rosin, "Westport Historic Resources Survey," 55.

⁶⁰ Roark, Nugent, and Rosin, "Westport Historic Resources Survey," 55.; Walker, Chapter 3, np.

⁶¹ Epps, 36.

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buy their own freedom and remain in the area, leading to a small population of free Black residents.⁶² Enslaved African Americans, including a man named Tom who was enslaved by McCoy, supplied labor to build the settlement, including Westport Landing and an approximately four-mile trail leading from the wharf to Westport, which roughly follows present-day Grand Avenue.⁶³ Both enslaved and free African Americans also supplied wheelwright and blacksmith services to colonizers traveling west on the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails.⁶⁴

In 1838, John McCoy and a group of thirteen other White men with connections to Westport and Independence, Missouri, formed a town company and purchased a tract of land surrounding Westport Landing from a resident of Chouteau's Landing and established a settlement called Kansas, named after the nearby river.⁶⁵ The initial tract of land fronted the south bank of the Missouri River roughly from present-day Troost Avenue to Broadway Avenue and extended south from the river roughly to present-day Independence Avenue.⁶⁶ The settlement of Kansas joined a network of trade with Chouteau's Landing, Westport, surrounding Indigenous communities including the Osage and Kaw Nations, and westward colonizers.⁶⁷ It formed a close relationship with Westport in particular, with the two communities sharing business leaders as well as access to river transportation and trade related to the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails.⁶⁸

Like at Chouteau's Landing and Westport, African Americans were involved in the settlement and development of the Kansas settlement from its inception, although most did not come willingly. During the mid-nineteenth century, a considerable number of White Southerners, many of them enslavers, moved to the Kansas City area and the rest of Missouri from the Upper South states of Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia. They were drawn to the area by economic opportunity and cheaper land, as well as higher prices for enslaved African Americans in western slave markets.⁶⁹ Northerners, including abolitionists, as well as German and Irish immigrants also migrated to the Kansas City area and Missouri during this period, but an estimated two-thirds of the state's population in the mid-nineteenth century came from the Upper South.⁷⁰ Most of the political and business leaders in the Kansas settlement throughout the mid-nineteenth century had migrated from the South, and many were enslavers.⁷¹ As a result, a considerable number of African Americans also settled in the area, the majority of whom were forcefully brought by their enslavers.⁷² However, a small but significant population of free African Americans also settled in Kansas City during the antebellum period, having purchased their own freedom, escaped, or had been issued manumission by their enslavers.⁷³

⁶² African American Heritage Trail, "Steptoe Neighborhood."

⁶³ Susan Jezak Ford, "Biography of John Calvin McCoy (1811-1889), City Founder," Kansas City Public Library Missouri Valley Special Collections, 2003, <https://kchistory.org/document/biography-john-calvin-mccoy-1811-1889-city-founder>; Epps, 36.; Shortridge, 20.

⁶⁴ Epps, 36.

⁶⁵ Shortridge, 16.

⁶⁶ See Map 5 in Shortridge, 16.

⁶⁷ Shortridge, 16.

⁶⁸ Shortridge, 19.

⁶⁹ Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri's Small-Slaveholding Households, 1815-1865* (University of Georgia Press, 2010), 24-25.; Lyle Wesley Dorsett, "Slave Holding in Jackson County, Missouri," *Missouri Historical Society* 20, no. 1 (October 1963), 2.

⁷⁰ Burke, 25.

⁷¹ Dr. Girard T. Bryant, R. Richard McKenzie, and George Griffin, *The Spirit of Freedom: A Profile of the History of Blacks in Kansas City, Missouri*, (The Office of Housing and Community Development, 1978), 2.

⁷² Burke, 25-26.

⁷³ Shortridge, 27.; Walker, Chapter 2, np.

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Development of the Kansas settlement was initially slow. The town company carried debt on its land purchase into the mid-1840s, which prevented the sale of lots with clear titles, as well as limited the amount of capital available for promotion and building. Members of the company also disagreed on how to promote and survey the town, which led to a standstill of development.⁷⁴ In 1844, a flood devastated the Kansas settlement, Chouteau's Landing, and the Chouteau's Landing farmland in the present-day West Bottoms area.⁷⁵ Chouteau's Landing did not recover, with most of its population relocating or assimilating into the Kansas settlement rather than rebuilding.⁷⁶ The Kansas settlement rebuilt slowly, spending the next several years resurveying and promoting.⁷⁷ By 1848, the total population stood at about 700.⁷⁸

Development picked up in the following decade and in 1850 the town company petitioned Jackson County to organize the Town of Kansas. In 1853 they petitioned the state of Missouri to charter the City of Kansas, which was quickly shortened to Kansas City.⁷⁹ In 1854, the U.S. Congress passed the controversial Kansas-Nebraska Act, which established the territories of Kansas and Nebraska. The Act repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820 that had prohibited slavery in this region and instead established self-determination within Kansas and Nebraska, allowing residents of the territories to decide whether or not to permit slavery. The Kansas-Nebraska Act significantly diminished land previously designated as Indian Territory and displaced thousands of Native Americans as the United States continued its pursuit of westward White expansion and settler colonization.⁸⁰ The Kansas-Nebraska Act led to intense conflict and violence between proslavery and abolitionist groups throughout the region, including in Kansas City. It also initially disrupted the economies of both Kansas City and Westport, which had previously enjoyed a strong network of trade with the local Osage and Kaw Nations. However, it ultimately spurred an economic boom that lasted well into the late nineteenth century. Land speculation in the Kansas Territory surged, and local leaders focused on transforming Kansas City into a major railroad hub, positioning it as a gateway for westward transportation.⁸¹

When Kansas City was incorporated in 1853, its population stood at approximately 2,500, while Westport had a comparable population of 2,000.⁸² Westport's population generally remained steady through the Civil War, only rising to 2,800 by 1867.⁸³ This was driven by escalating violence specifically in the Westport area during the war, as well as strategic decisions by White leaders with investments in both Kansas City and Westport to focus their attention on Kansas City and its development.⁸⁴ In Kansas City, intense speculation tied to the Kansas-Nebraska Act caused the population to swell to 7,180 by 1857.⁸⁵ That year, city officials began a project to excavate the steep bluffs that rose south of the Missouri River to facilitate future growth and development, an ambitious undertaking that took nearly fifteen years to complete and drastically reshaped the natural

⁷⁴ Shortridge, 16.; Epps, 34.

⁷⁵ Shortridge, 11, 16.

⁷⁶ Shortridge, 11.

⁷⁷ Shortridge, 16-17.

⁷⁸ Shortridge, 17.

⁷⁹ Shortridge, 20.

⁸⁰ Shortridge, 20.

⁸¹ Shortridge, 20, 29.

⁸² Shortridge, 20.; Roark, Nugent, and Rosin, "Westport Historic Resources Survey," 55.

⁸³ Roark, Nugent, and Rosin, "Westport Historic Resources Survey," 55.

⁸⁴ Roark, Nugent, and Rosin, "Westport Historic Resources Survey," 55.; Shortridge, 20.

⁸⁵ Shortridge, 20, 25.; Roark, Nugent, and Rosin, "Westport Historic Resources Survey," 55.

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landscape.⁸⁶ Labor for the excavation was largely carried out by Irish immigrants, who were specifically recruited for the project.⁸⁷ By the end of the decade, a number of street excavations had been successful and many new subdivisions were surveyed, extending south to present-day 20th Street.⁸⁸ However, by 1860, escalating tensions over slavery as well as the financial panic of 1857 led Kansas City's population to drop to 4,418, including 166 enslaved and twenty-four free African Americans.⁸⁹

1.1.2. Slavery in Missouri and Kansas City

Institutionalized slavery was widespread in Kansas City and throughout Missouri. It played a significant role in their early development, and it violently impacted the lives of both enslaved and free Black residents and their descendants. The population of enslaved African Americans rose rapidly in antebellum Missouri, from 10,222 in 1820 to 114,931 in 1860.⁹⁰ In Jackson County, the population of enslaved African Americans increased from 193 in 1830 to 3,316 in 1860. In 1860, there were 134 enslaved African Americans in Westport and 166 in Kansas City.⁹¹ A smaller but significant population of free African Americans also lived in Missouri and Kansas City throughout the antebellum period, persevering in the face of restrictive laws and other rampant racism that sought to prevent their settlement. Some free African Americans were able to purchase their own freedom or escape enslavement, while others were issued manumission from their enslavers.⁹² The population of free African Americans in Missouri rose from 605 in 1820 to 3,572 by 1860, with twenty-four living in Kansas City and two living in Westport in 1860.⁹³

Slavery in Missouri differed from the large-scale plantation system typically associated with slavery in the Deep South.⁹⁴ The majority of enslaved African Americans and their enslavers who migrated to Missouri came from the backcountry regions of the Upper South, which never saw the full-scale plantation activity found further south.⁹⁵ Instead, slavery in the Upper South was characterized by "small slaveholding" practices, with most enslaving households holding ten or fewer African Americans in bondage.⁹⁶ Slavery in antebellum Missouri largely mirrored these small slaveholding practices, with the majority of enslavers throughout the state classified as small slaveholders.⁹⁷ Enslaved labor was used extensively for agricultural work throughout the state, but the majority of farms were much smaller than the large, commercial cash crop plantations of the Deep South. Most individual farmers and farming households in Missouri enslaved two or three African Americans,

⁸⁶ Shortridge, 21.

⁸⁷ Shortridge, 27.

⁸⁸ Shortridge, 25.; See Map 7 in Shortridge, 22.

⁸⁹ Shortridge, 25.; Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, February 2005), Table 26.

⁹⁰ Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, September 2002), Table 40.

⁹¹ Walker, Chapter 2, np.; Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 1.; Gibson and Jung, "Historical Census Statistics . . . For Large Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States," Table 26.

⁹² Walker, Chapter 2, np.

⁹³ Gibson and Jung, "Historical Census Statistics . . . For the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States," Table 40.; Gibson and Jung, "Historical Census Statistics . . . For Large Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States," Table 26.; Diane Euston, "Tracing Steptoe, Westport's Black Neighborhood," *Martin City Telegraph*, February 28, 2021, <https://martincitytelegraph.com/2021/02/28/tracing-steptoe-westports-black-neighborhood/>.

⁹⁴ Dorsette, 8.

⁹⁵ Burke, 26.

⁹⁶ Burke, 26.

⁹⁷ Dorsette, 9.

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who often labored alongside their enslavers in the field and in the home.⁹⁸ In Kansas City, stolen labor was largely used to support domestic work as well as commerce and trade, and most enslavers held one or two African Americans in bondage.⁹⁹

Some of the wealthiest White residents in Kansas City were exceptions to this small slaveholding practice. In 1860, Amelia Evans, the sister of Milt McGee, who was one of Kansas City's most prolific early developers, enslaved twelve African Americans. Thompson McDaniel, who established one of Kansas City's earliest neighborhoods and its first hotel, enslaved nine African Americans by 1860.¹⁰⁰ The Porter Plantation, centered around present-day 27th Street and Troost Avenue, and the Miller Plantation, located south of the present-day Kansas City International Airport, while classified more as mid-size farms than true plantations, were additional exceptions to the typical small slaveholding practices within the current borders of Kansas City, Missouri.

In 1834, Methodist minister James Porter, his wife Jane Thomas Porter, and forty enslaved African Americans left Tennessee and established the Porter Plantation, a 365-acre farm bordered on the north and south by present-day 23rd and 31st Streets and on the west and east by Locust Avenue and Vine Street.¹⁰¹ African Americans enslaved by the Porters constructed a house for the Porter family at the northeast corner of present-day 28th Street and Tracy Avenue (no longer extant), as well as cabins for their own housing (no longer extant).¹⁰² The farm contained a hay field, a corn field, an orchard, and a pasture for livestock.¹⁰³ By the start of the Civil War, up to one hundred enslaved African Americans labored on the farm.¹⁰⁴ Following the Civil War, the Porter family subdivided and sold the land.¹⁰⁵ The present-day neighborhoods of Beacon Hill, Longfellow, Mount Hope, Wendell Phillips, and Key Coalition overlay the former Porter Plantation.

In the late 1830s or early 1840s, Jesse and Margaret Miller migrated from the Upper South and established the Miller Plantation, a 368-acre farm located in the southeast corner of Platte County on land currently owned by the Kansas City International Airport.¹⁰⁶ Ruins of the main house's stone foundation as well as the farm's burial ground were still extant as of 2019.¹⁰⁷ The farm's primary crop was hemp, but it also grew corn, hay, and potatoes and raised cattle, pigs, and sheep.¹⁰⁸ By 1850, twelve enslaved African Americans labored on the farm, and by 1860, the enslaved population of Miller Plantation had increased to sixteen.¹⁰⁹ During the Civil War, an enslaved Black man named George Washington successfully escaped the Miller Plantation, joined the Union Army, and became a corporal in the First Kansas Colored Infantry Regiment, the first Black regiment to see

⁹⁸ Dorsette, 9.

⁹⁹ Walker, Chapter 2, np.

¹⁰⁰ Shortridge, 26.

¹⁰¹ "Porter Farm," The Porter Farmstead Historic Preservation Project, accessed September 25, 2024, <https://porterfarmhistory.com/porterfarm/>; "The Porter Farm," *Kansas City Star*, February 21, 1926.

¹⁰² "Porter Farm," The Porter Farmstead Historic Preservation Project.

¹⁰³ "Porter Farm," The Porter Farmstead Historic Preservation Project; "The Porter Farm," *Kansas City Star*.

¹⁰⁴ Cortlynn Stark, "Yes, Kansas City's Troost Avenue was Named for a Slaveholder. And That's Not All We Found," *The Kansas City Star*, May 28, 2021, <https://www.kansascity.com/news/your-kcq/article251695313.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Stark, "Kansas City's Troost Avenue was Named for a Slaveholder."

¹⁰⁶ Jimmy S. Johnson, III, "The Miller Plantation: An Archaeological Interpretation of a Northwest Missouri Antebellum Slave Site" (1998), 30-31.

¹⁰⁷ Landrum & Brown, Incorporated, "Replacement Terminal, Kansas City International Airport," Environmental Assessment, Section 106 Evaluation, and Section 4(f) Statement (U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, February 2019), 3-22.

¹⁰⁸ Johnson, "The Miller Plantation," 30-31.

¹⁰⁹ Johnson, "The Miller Plantation," 30.

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combat during the Civil War.¹¹⁰ Washington survived the war and established his own farm in Douglas County, Kansas, where he and his wife Armanda Simpson, who was also formerly enslaved, raised six children. Washington died in 1931 at the age of ninety-one.¹¹¹

Although the practice of slavery in Missouri and Kansas City largely differed from that in the Deep South, it functioned as an equally brutal system of racism and oppression. Federal and local legislation governing slavery and the movements of African Americans restricted the lives and livelihoods of both free and enslaved Black residents in Kansas City and throughout the state.¹¹² The Missouri Constitution of 1821 enshrined control and violence against enslaved African Americans with provisions that restricted their movements without the permission of their enslavers and subjected them to public whippings or the death penalty for conspiracy, insurrection, “seditious speeches,” or attending “unlawful assemblies.”¹¹³ The state Constitution also included a provision that prohibited free African Americans from traveling to and settling within the state. Although the federal government formally mandated that the state could not enforce this provision, it permitted the language to remain, thereby maintaining the sentiment that free African Americans were not welcome.¹¹⁴

White Missourians attempted to prevent free African Americans from settling in the state throughout the antebellum period. Many believed that the presence of free African Americans threatened the institution of slavery. In 1825, Missouri passed legislation that denied free African Americans entry to the state without official naturalization papers, which African Americans could not obtain under current federal law.¹¹⁵ In 1855, Missouri enacted a measure that established funds for the deportation of free African Americans from the state.¹¹⁶ The *Daily Western Journal of Commerce*, a White publication based in Kansas City, advocated in 1858 that all free African Americans should be removed from the state.¹¹⁷ Another newspaper based in Liberty, Missouri, declared in 1859 that “the evil of having free Negroes among us is a serious one.”¹¹⁸ Enslavers were concerned that the increased presence of free African Americans would inspire those who were enslaved to rebel or attempt escape.

The movements and actions of African Americans, both free and enslaved, were heavily monitored and restricted. In 1847, it became illegal in Missouri to teach African Americans, free or enslaved, to read or write, an attempt to restrict their opportunities for education and employment outside of slavery.¹¹⁹ That same year, the state enacted a law requiring White supervision of all religious services led by African Americans.¹²⁰ In 1855, Kansas City officials passed an ordinance that prohibited free or enslaved African Americans from gathering after dark, required free African Americans to carry city-issued passes and enslaved African

¹¹⁰ Johnson, “The Miller Plantation,” 30.

¹¹¹ Johnson, “The Miller Plantation,” 30, 33.

¹¹² Walker, Chapter 2, np.

¹¹³ Walker, Chapter 2, np.; Griffin, 9.

¹¹⁴ Van Atta, 118.

¹¹⁵ Van Atta, 120-121.

¹¹⁶ Walker, Chapter 3, np.

¹¹⁷ Dorsette, 18.

¹¹⁸ Walker, Chapter 3, np.

¹¹⁹ Griffin, 9.

¹²⁰ Griffin, 6.

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Americans to carry passes issued by their enslavers, and imposed a curfew on all African Americans prohibiting movement throughout the city after 10 p.m.¹²¹

In 1850, the United States Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, which stripped African Americans accused of escaping slavery of their right to a trial by jury, imposed heavy penalties and imprisonment for anyone who assisted freedom seekers, and mandated that all citizens, including those living in free states, were legally bound to help capture freedom seekers.¹²² This legislation inflamed tensions between abolitionist and proslavery groups. While it led to widespread abolitionist resistance and the passage of laws in Northern states that offered legal protections for freedom seekers, it also heightened violence against both free and enslaved African Americans, particularly in proslavery states such as Missouri.¹²³ Free African Americans were frequently assumed to have escaped slavery and were required to provide proof of their freedom; in some instances, free African Americans were forced back into enslavement.¹²⁴

In addition to facing extreme government-imposed restrictions, African Americans also endured cruel physical and psychological abuse at the hands of enslavers and other White people. Slave markets at Westport Landing and later Kansas City and in Westport were active places of torment for enslaved African Americans.¹²⁵ Green Burke, a Black man born into slavery around 1822 in Saline County, Missouri, recollected in a history recorded after the Civil War the harsh conditions he endured at the Westport Landing market. He explained that the market contained a large cabin where enslaved African Americans were “packed together like dumb animals” and had “no chance to live as human beings.”¹²⁶ The cabin was windowless, with only a small opening in the roof for light and ventilation, and the only food given to those clustered inside was tossed to them through the roof opening. Burke recounted that White market dealers treated enslaved African Americans “like cattle” and forced the older Black men to dye or pluck out their gray hair to appear younger and command a larger auction price.¹²⁷

Burke was only eight years old when he first encountered the slave market. At that time, he was sold away from his mother, whom he did not see for another thirty-five years. After his mother was taken away, he recalled that “I could not help but throw myself on the floor and cry.”¹²⁸ The separation of enslaved families was a common practice in Kansas City, and enslavers often used separation of family members as a threat to instill fear and prevent enslaved African Americans from resisting or retaliating.¹²⁹ This practice had an enduring emotional and psychological impact on African Americans throughout the United States, creating generational traumas

¹²¹ Dorsette, 16.

¹²² Walker, Chapter 2, np.; Griffin, 13.

¹²³ Harriet C. Frazier, *Runaway and Freed Missouri Slaves and Those Who Helped Them, 1763-1865* (McFarland & Company, Inc., 2004), 106.

¹²⁴ Walker, Chapter 2, np.; Walker, Chapter 3, np.

¹²⁵ The Westport Landing—Kansas City slave market was located at the foot of present-day Main Street (no longer extant), and the Westport slave market was located at the present-day intersection of Westport Road and Pennsylvania Avenue (no longer extant). Walker, Chapter 2, np.; Walker, Chapter 3, np.; Griffin, 4.

¹²⁶ Walker, Chapter 3, np.

¹²⁷ Walker, Chapter 3, np.

¹²⁸ Walker, Chapter 3, np.

¹²⁹ Dorsette, 10.

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that resonated through Black communities for centuries. During the Civil War, Burke successfully escaped to Kansas, where he joined the Union Army. He lived into the 1920s, past the age of one hundred.¹³⁰

Many African Americans fought the oppression they endured with purposeful acts of resistance, both large and small. They secretly learned to read and write, intentionally worked slowly, broke tools, stole from their enslavers, escaped, and in some instances killed their abusive enslavers.¹³¹ In 1848, Stephen and John Scott, two enslaved Black men from Kansas City, escaped and stole horses, saddles, guns, and a mule from various White residents. In 1853, Abe Newby, an enslaved Black man in Platte County, stabbed a foreman to death to escape a beating, and in 1859, an enslaved Black man in St. Joseph shot and killed his enslaver.¹³²

Particularly after Kansas was established as a free territory in 1854, newspapers in the Kansas City area frequently reported on the escapes of enslaved African Americans.¹³³ Some freedom seekers likely used the Blue River, which runs along the east side of Kansas City, Missouri, and through present-day Swope Park, as a key route to reach the free territory of Kansas. By following the waterway, freedom seekers could strategically throw off their scent to evade tracking dogs.¹³⁴ While many enslaved African Americans achieved freedom on their own or with the help of other bondspersons, others found assistance through the Underground Railroad, a covert network of abolitionists who helped enslaved African Americans escape to free states and territories before and during the Civil War.¹³⁵ There is no existing historical evidence that safe houses or other physical locations related to Underground Railroad activity existed within the current borders of Kansas City, Missouri.¹³⁶ However, as a proslavery city bordering the free Kansas Territory and not far from the free Iowa and Nebraska Territories, Kansas City was in close proximity to Underground Railroad activity.¹³⁷ Many freedom seekers from Kansas City and Missouri successfully made their way to nearby Underground Railroad stops in the Kansas communities of Lawrence, Leavenworth, Topeka, and Quindaro, as well as Tabor, Iowa.

Lawrence, Leavenworth, and Topeka were all strongholds of abolitionist activity during the mid-nineteenth century, and all contain documented Underground Railroad sites.¹³⁸ One abolitionist in Lawrence claimed that “No less than one hundred thousand dollars’ worth of slaves passed through Lawrence on their way to liberty during the territorial period.”¹³⁹ John Armstrong, a White abolitionist and Underground Railroad conductor in Topeka, estimated that three hundred freedom seekers passed through his home during the antebellum and Civil War period, and stated that “every one of them was taken north and eventually reached Canada.”¹⁴⁰ In Leavenworth, William D. Matthews, a free Black abolitionist and Underground Railroad conductor, operated a boardinghouse that assisted freedom seekers. Matthews helped many enslaved African Americans cross the

¹³⁰ Walker, Chapter 3, np.

¹³¹ Griffin, 10.

¹³² Griffin, 10.

¹³³ Dorsette, 16-17.

¹³⁴ Don Bradley, “Trekking the Swope Park Blue River for the Underground Railroad,” *Martin City & South KC Telegraph*, December 11, 2023, <https://martincitytelegraph.com/2023/12/11/trekking-the-swope-park-blue-river-for-the-underground-railroad/>.

¹³⁵ Griffin, 12.

¹³⁶ Frazier, 176.

¹³⁷ Walker, Introduction, np.

¹³⁸ Frazier, 177.; “Special Resource Study: Underground Railroad,” (National Park Service, 1995), 32.

¹³⁹ Frazier, 177.

¹⁴⁰ Frazier, 177.

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Missouri border and settle in Kansas and other free states.¹⁴¹ During the Civil War, Matthews became a lieutenant in the Independent Battery, U.S. Colored Light Artillery at Fort Leavenworth and recruited fellow African Americans into the Union Army.¹⁴²

The community of Quindaro, Kansas, now a part of Kansas City, Kansas, was founded in 1857 by a group of individuals from Lawrence and the Wyandot Nation with the intent of creating a port of entry into the free territory of Kansas.¹⁴³ The majority of early Quindaro residents opposed slavery and the community eventually gained a significant population of free African Americans.¹⁴⁴ While there is no existing historical evidence that suggests widespread, organized Underground Railroad activity within Quindaro, there are accounts of freedom seekers crossing the Missouri border into Quindaro and receiving assistance.¹⁴⁵ George Washington, the Black man who escaped enslavement on the Miller Plantation, found refuge in Quindaro when he first crossed the Missouri border into Kansas.¹⁴⁶

1.1.3. Settlement Patterns of African Americans in Early Kansas City

During the antebellum and Civil War periods, due to scattered and de-centralized development, Kansas City experienced little racial segregation in its residential neighborhoods.¹⁴⁷ Enslaved African Americans lived in close proximity to their enslavers, who were dispersed throughout most of the city's residential areas.¹⁴⁸ Census and city directory data from 1860 show that the small population of free African Americans grouped together in the dense McDaniel's Addition neighborhood around the present-day intersection of 6th and Walnut Streets, but the same area also housed White residents (see *Map 3*).¹⁴⁹ This distribution pattern can be partly explained by Kansas City's relatively small size and mixed commercial and residential land use during this period.¹⁵⁰ Enslavers also had a vested interest in keeping those they held in bondage nearby, allowing for stricter surveillance and control. White communities often operated an unspoken "neighborhood watch" network, where White people worked together to monitor the movements and activities of African Americans to prevent organizing, uprising, and freedom seeking. Close proximity was advantageous for this kind of network.¹⁵¹

One of the earliest residential areas in Kansas City was located on Pearl Street, a two-block stretch that developed in the late 1830s and 1840s atop the bluffs overlooking the Westport Landing area.¹⁵² John McCoy, who helped establish both Westport and Kansas City, and Bérénice Chouteau, who helped establish Chouteau's Landing and remained in Kansas City following the flood of 1844, both owned houses on Pearl Street, as did

¹⁴¹ "William D. Matthews," in *Kansas City Black History, Second Edition* (Kansas City Black History Project, 2023), 11.

¹⁴² "William D. Matthews."

¹⁴³ William E. Banks and Martin Stein, "Quindaro Townsite," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Park Service, 2002), 8:5.

¹⁴⁴ Banks and Stein, 8:3-8:4.

¹⁴⁵ Banks and Stein, 8:15-8:17.

¹⁴⁶ Frazier, 176.

¹⁴⁷ Shortridge, 25-26.

¹⁴⁸ Shortridge, 26.

¹⁴⁹ Shortridge, 27.

¹⁵⁰ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 39.

¹⁵¹ Griffin, 6.

¹⁵² Shortridge, 19.

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several other early White city leaders.¹⁵³ Pearl Street was eventually demolished during the bluff excavation projects of the late 1850s and 1860s, which drastically reshaped the city's landscape.¹⁵⁴

The dense neighborhood of McDaniel's Addition, centered between present-day Independence Avenue and 7th Street from Main to McGee Streets, developed in the late 1840s and early 1850s during Kansas City's steady early development and expansion.¹⁵⁵ The Union Hotel, constructed in 1857 at the southeast corner of Sixth and Main Streets (no longer extant), served as one of Kansas City's major hotels during this period, and by 1860, McDaniel's Addition contained the largest concentration of Kansas City's wealthiest White households.¹⁵⁶ As Kansas City grew during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, newer commercial development replaced much of early McDaniel's Addition, and urban renewal in the mid-twentieth century covered the area with parking lots and the Interstate (I)-35/I-70 corridor.

Another early residential area was McGee's Addition, which was centered on Grand Avenue between Twelfth and 20th Streets and extended from Main to Holmes Streets.¹⁵⁷ McGee's Addition began development in the late 1850s, just as the bluff excavation project started, and played a key role in promoting southward expansion of the city. It became home to many of Kansas City's White middle-class merchants and artisans, and a commercial district also developed along Grand Avenue, which served as the main route to Westport.¹⁵⁸ As in McDaniel's Addition, additional commercial development eventually replaced the residential parts of McGee's Addition, which is now part of the present-day Crossroads District.

Residential development of Quality Hill also started during the late 1850s, centered between 9th and 11th Streets and extending from Broadway Avenue on the east to the bluffs overlooking the West Bottoms on the west.¹⁵⁹ Originally named Coates's Addition, residents soon nicknamed it Quality Hill as a reflection of its paved streets and the majority masonry construction of its buildings. Quality Hill catered to upper-class White residents, including its primary developer Kersey Coates.¹⁶⁰ Quality Hill is an existing neighborhood in present-day Kansas City and the Quality Hill Historic District was placed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in 1977, although it experienced some redevelopment in the 1950s and has continued to experience significant redevelopment since its listing.¹⁶¹

African Americans lived throughout the Pearl Street, McDaniel's Addition, and McGee's Addition neighborhoods, although very few lived in Quality Hill.¹⁶² Kersey Coates, the primary developer of Quality Hill, was a White Quaker abolitionist from Pennsylvania, and the majority of the neighborhood's early residents

¹⁵³ Shortridge, 19.

¹⁵⁴ Shortridge, 50.

¹⁵⁵ Shortridge, 26.

¹⁵⁶ Shortridge, 26.; See Map 9 in Shortridge, 26.

¹⁵⁷ Shortridge, 23.

¹⁵⁸ Shortridge, 23.

¹⁵⁹ Shortridge, 24.

¹⁶⁰ Shortridge, 24-25.

¹⁶¹ Linda Backer and Edward J. Mischuk, "Quality Hill," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Park Service, 1977).; Rachel Nugent, "Quality Hill Center Historic District—Quality Hill Towers," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Park Service, 2017).

¹⁶² See Map 10 in Shortridge, 27.

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were also White abolitionists from the Northeast.¹⁶³ Most enslavers and other proslavery residents shunned Coates and his development, resulting in very few enslaved Black residents in the Quality Hill neighborhood, while the high cost of property excluded free African Americans in Kansas City from settling there.¹⁶⁴ By 1860, McDaniel's Addition was the most densely populated of these neighborhoods, and thereby contained the largest concentration of African Americans, both enslaved and free.¹⁶⁵

While early residential neighborhoods in Kansas City experienced little racial segregation during this period, Union Cemetery (NRHP 2016), the oldest public cemetery in the city, was segregated from its inception. Union Cemetery was established in 1857 halfway between Kansas City and Westport as a united project between the two settlements.¹⁶⁶ It is centered between 27th and 30th Streets from north to south and between Warwick and McGee Trafficways from east to west. African Americans were restricted to the northeast corner of the cemetery, initially designated as "Potter's Field."¹⁶⁷ In 1927, Harriet "Hattie" Drisdorn Kearney was the first African American buried in the segregated White portion of the cemetery.¹⁶⁸ Born into slavery, Hattie was purchased in 1855 at the age of nine by Charles Kearney, an Irish immigrant who settled in Westport. Kearney issued Hattie manumission in 1857, but with limited opportunities available to her even after the Civil War, she remained with the Kearney family and worked as their housekeeper until her death.¹⁶⁹

1.2. Late Nineteenth Century: The Great Exodus, Reconstruction, and Population Expansion

1.2.1. Late Nineteenth Century Growth

By the end of the Civil War in 1865, Kansas City had been devastated by political tensions and border wars.¹⁷⁰ While a large part of its early economy was tied to the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails, many westward travelers had found alternative routes during the conflict. Construction of the railroad connecting Kansas City to both St. Louis and the west had also stalled during the war, trade came to a near standstill, and many businesses struggled or closed altogether.¹⁷¹ However, the period between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the twentieth century was a period of tremendous transformation and growth for Kansas City. The city experienced substantial urbanization and economic growth tied to industrialization and the expansion of transportation networks, and Kansas City achieved its status as a Midwestern metropolis.¹⁷²

The Pacific Railroad finally completed construction to Kansas City in late 1865, connecting it with St. Louis.¹⁷³ In 1869, construction of the Hannibal Bridge across the Missouri River was complete, and with it, a branch of the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad connected Kansas City with Chicago.¹⁷⁴ African Americans

¹⁶³ Shortridge, 24-25, 51, 53.

¹⁶⁴ Shortridge, 51.

¹⁶⁵ See Maps 8 and 10 in Shortridge, 25-26.

¹⁶⁶ Susan Jezak Ford, "Union Cemetery," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Park Service, 2016), 7:1.

¹⁶⁷ African American Heritage Trail, "Union Cemetery.;" Ford, "Union Cemetery," 8:7.

¹⁶⁸ African American Heritage Trail, "Union Cemetery."

¹⁶⁹ African American Heritage Trail, "Harris Kearney House.;" African American Heritage Trail, "Union Cemetery."

¹⁷⁰ Walker, Chapter 3, np.

¹⁷¹ Walker, Chapter 3, np.; Shortridge, 31.

¹⁷² Walker, Chapter 3, np.; Shortridge, 29-31, 53.

¹⁷³ Shortridge, 31.

¹⁷⁴ Shortridge, 34-35.

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provided a substantial portion of the labor for the construction of the Hannibal Bridge.¹⁷⁵ In 1878, Kansas City's first Union Depot (no longer extant) was completed along the railyards in the West Bottoms along present-day Union Avenue between Santa Fe Street and Forrester Road.¹⁷⁶ With these strong new railroad networks came unprecedented industrial growth in Kansas City, particularly in cattle farming and meatpacking.¹⁷⁷ While the bluff excavation project of the 1850s and 1860s eliminated the physical barrier between the Missouri River landing and southward development, tall bluffs still separated the railyards and stockyards in the West Bottoms from the central business district to the east. This was solved in the 1880s with another intensive engineering project that constructed a system of roadcuts, cable cars, and a tunnel that connected Union Depot in the West Bottoms with the central business district, facilitating easier trade and further altering the landscape.¹⁷⁸

The physical footprint of Kansas City expanded southward and eastward significantly during this period. In 1860, 20th Street served as the southern boundary of Kansas City, while Woodland and Troost Avenues served as the eastern boundaries.¹⁷⁹ By 1885, the city limits expanded eastward to Cleveland Avenue and southward to 31st Street.¹⁸⁰ In 1897, the city acquired a section of land to the east, extending to Skiles Avenue on the east and roughly from Rochester Avenue to the north and 17th Street to the south. That same year, Kansas City officially annexed Westport in an acquisition of land extending east to Prospect Avenue and south to 29th Street.¹⁸¹

Kansas City's population exploded during this period from only 4,418 residents in 1860 to 163,752 by 1900.¹⁸² The Black population also dramatically increased, but not before a brief decrease immediately following the war. After finally achieving emancipation in 1865, some formerly enslaved African Americans chose to stay in Kansas City, but many others left the city and the surrounding area in search of better opportunities for themselves and their children.¹⁸³ One Kansas City publication described African Americans leaving in droves, filling the city's streets with commandeered wagons and on foot, carrying with them all they owned.¹⁸⁴ Soon, however, more African Americans began to settle in Kansas City, drawn from rural areas by economic and educational opportunities offered by urbanization and industrial growth. In the 1880s, Kansas City's Black population increased by sixty-eight percent, while the Black population of the surrounding areas in Jackson County decreased by forty percent.¹⁸⁵ Kansas City's Black population also increased during the Great Exodus, a significant movement of African Americans from the South to the Midwest and West that began during the post-Reconstruction era.¹⁸⁶ From a population of twenty-four free and 166 enslaved African Americans in 1860, 17,567 African Americans lived in Kansas City by 1900.¹⁸⁷

¹⁷⁵ Griffin, 46.

¹⁷⁶ Shortridge, 40-41.

¹⁷⁷ Shortridge, 35-36.

¹⁷⁸ Shortridge, 47-49.

¹⁷⁹ See Map 35 in Shortridge, 78.

¹⁸⁰ See Map 35 in Shortridge, 78.

¹⁸¹ Roark, Nugent, and Rosin, "Westport Historic Resources Survey," 61.; See Map 35 in Shortridge, 78.

¹⁸² Gibson and Jung, "Historical Census Statistics . . . For Large Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States," Table 26.

¹⁸³ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 5.; Walker, Chapter 3, np.

¹⁸⁴ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 5.

¹⁸⁵ Schirmer, 28.

¹⁸⁶ Walker, Chapter 3, np.

¹⁸⁷ Gibson and Jung, "Historical Census Statistics . . . For Large Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States," Table 26.

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1.2.2. Black Migration and the Great Exodus

After the Civil War, many African Americans left the South and moved north and west, both in search of better opportunities and to escape the horrific realities of racist violence that were especially pervasive in the South. Between the Civil War and World War I, approximately 400,000 African Americans left the South.¹⁸⁸ Cities from New York to San Francisco, including Kansas City, experienced a steady increase of Black residents from the South throughout the late nineteenth century and into the mid-twentieth century.¹⁸⁹ Called the Great Exodus, this movement was distinctive as the first wave of mass migration of African Americans from the South to the Midwest and West following the Civil War.¹⁹⁰ During the late 1870s and 1880s, the movement was largely driven by the desire to seek refuge from the oppressive conditions of the South that increased following the Reconstruction era, including systemic racism, disenfranchisement, and violence.¹⁹¹ Kansas in particular became a major destination for migrants, called Exodusters; thousands of African Americans passed through Kansas City on their journey, and many stopped and settled there instead of continuing on to Kansas.¹⁹²

While millions of African Americans achieved freedom from slavery at the end of the Civil War, they continued to face racist oppression and violence perpetuated by White power structures, with conditions especially harsh in the South.¹⁹³ Southern states enacted severe discriminatory legislation (Jim Crow laws) that denied African Americans suffrage and mandated segregation, and terrorist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) used lynchings and mob violence to further torment the safety and livelihoods of African Americans.¹⁹⁴ The exploitative systems of sharecropping and tenant farming also severely limited economic opportunities for African Americans, leading to extreme poverty.¹⁹⁵ Conditions worsened after the end of the Reconstruction era in 1877 as the region dismantled many of the economic and political advancements that African Americans had accomplished during Reconstruction.¹⁹⁶

During the Great Exodus of the 1870s and 1880s, thousands of African Americans made the difficult decision to leave their homes and communities and make the arduous journey west in order to escape the horrors they faced in the South.¹⁹⁷ Migrants during this movement primarily came from the states of Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas and made their way to Nebraska, Oklahoma, and especially Kansas.¹⁹⁸ Crucially, migrants were “not drawn by the attractions of Kansas” but “driven by the terrors of Mississippi and Louisiana.”¹⁹⁹ However, Kansas in particular became the main destination for many due to its reputation as a free state and abolitionist stronghold before and during the Civil War. The Homestead Act of

¹⁸⁸ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 72.

¹⁸⁹ Jon Cohen, “‘Gone up North, Gone out West, Gone!,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, March 1987, 72.; Williams, “Black Families Recall Kansas Roots.”

¹⁹⁰ Arvarh E. Strickland, “Toward the Promised Land: The Exodus to Kansas and Afterward,” *Missouri Historical Review* 69, no. 4 (1975), 376-377.; Cohen, 72.

¹⁹¹ Strickland, 378.

¹⁹² Suzanna M. Grenz, “The Exodusters of 1879: St. Louis and Kansas City Responses,” *Missouri Historical Review* 73, no. 1 (1978): 54-55.; Strickland, 377.

¹⁹³ Strickland, 376.

¹⁹⁴ “What Was the Exodus?,” Exoduster Awareness, Inc., n.d., Available at the Black Archives of Mid-America.; Cohen, 76.

¹⁹⁵ Phillip G. Smith, “The Exodusters: An Ongoing Legacy,” *Dollars & Sense*, n.d., Available at the Black Archives of Mid-America, 59.

¹⁹⁶ Sheeka Sanahori, “Before the Great Migration, There Was the Great Exodus,” *National Geographic*, June 17, 2024, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/great-exodus-midwest-nicodemus-kansas>.

¹⁹⁷ Strickland, 376.

¹⁹⁸ Smith, “The Exodusters,” 59.; Sanahori, “Before the Great Migration.”

¹⁹⁹ Strickland, 376.

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1862, which allowed any adult—regardless of race—the opportunity to claim 160 acres of land at a relatively low cost in Kansas and other western regions, was another key factor. Kansas’s proximity to the South made it more accessible than the more distant western territories, leading many migrants to seek land there.²⁰⁰ Benjamin “Pap” Singleton, a Black man who escaped from slavery in Tennessee to Canada and returned after the Civil War, was instrumental in the Great Exodus to Kansas (see 6.2.2. *Fraternal Organizations*). He established the settlements of Singleton Colony, Dunlap Colony, and Nicodemus in Kansas for Black migrants and vigorously promoted the resettlement of African Americans from the South to Kansas. Calling himself “The Moses of the Colored Exodus,” he led thousands of migrants from the South to their new homes.²⁰¹

Far more African Americans attempted to reach Kansas than actually succeeded, however.²⁰² Many never made it beyond the Mississippi River, and others were forced to stop in St. Louis and Kansas City, unable to complete their journey after exhausting their limited savings.²⁰³ In the spring and summer of 1879, when the Great Exodus movement reached its peak, thousands of African Americans traveled to Kansas City on their way to Kansas.²⁰⁴ It is unknown precisely how many migrants participated in the Exodus of 1879, but the Missouri governor estimated that between fifteen and twenty thousand African Americans crossed through the state that year.²⁰⁵ Many were destitute and on the brink of starvation when they arrived in Kansas City, leading to the widespread organization of relief efforts (see 6. *Religious & Community Organizations*).²⁰⁶ Mayor George Shelly organized relief efforts at the city level, and the *Kansas City Daily Journal* and other local publications encouraged individual Kansas Citians to assist migrants, who “arrived in a wretched condition, most were hungry, many appeared ill and few had the money needed to purchase food and lodging.”²⁰⁷ Black Kansas Citians and Black churches provided much of the aid, supplying migrants with food and clothing.²⁰⁸ Assistance also came from individuals and organizations in other areas from Iowa to Ohio, including Chicago.²⁰⁹ While a considerable amount of aid poured in, the local community struggled to house the large group of migrants, leading to a tent encampment colloquially known as Stragglers Camp, south of Truman Road between Charlotte Street and Virginia Avenue.²¹⁰ Another encampment of migrants also formed in the nearby community of Wyandot, now a part of Kansas City, Kansas.²¹¹ The majority of migrants during the Exodus of 1879 eventually made their way to their destinations in Kansas, either settling in migrant communities or successfully obtaining their 160-acre land claims.²¹² An estimated one-third, however, stopped at the Missouri-Kansas border and became residents of Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas.²¹³

²⁰⁰ Sanahori, “Before the Great Migration.”

²⁰¹ Strickland, -379.; Sanahori, “Before the Great Migration.”

²⁰² Sanahori, “Before the Great Migration.”

²⁰³ Sanahori, “Before the Great Migration.”; Grenz, 54.

²⁰⁴ Grenz, 55.

²⁰⁵ Grenz, 55.

²⁰⁶ Griffin, 36.; Grenz, 54.

²⁰⁷ Grenz, 54.; Griffin, 36.

²⁰⁸ Grenz, 64.

²⁰⁹ Grenz, 65.

²¹⁰ Griffin, 36.; Walker, Chapter 4, np.; See Map 36 in Shortridge, 79.

²¹¹ Griffin, 36.

²¹² Grenz, 70.

²¹³ Sanahori, “Before the Great Migration.”; Sherry Lamb Schirmer, *A City Divided: The Racial Landscape of Kansas City, 1900-1960* (University of Missouri Press, 2002), 27.; Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 29.

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Although Black migrants escaped some of the harshest conditions of the South, they continued to face significant injustices in their new homes. Many who settled in cities struggled with inadequate housing and limited employment opportunities, often relegated to low-paying, dangerous jobs by White employers. Despite these challenges, their migration reflected remarkable agency, perseverance, and resilience, as they sought better lives under the harsh realities of systemic discrimination.²¹⁴

1.2.3. Settlement Patterns of African Americans in Late Nineteenth Century Kansas City

As Kansas City expanded over the course of the late nineteenth century, most residents did not live in racially segregated neighborhoods.²¹⁵ During this period, African Americans generally lived in small, integrated communities alongside White neighbors and other neighbors of color, and their population remained fairly evenly distributed across the city's wards and census districts.²¹⁶ While several notable Black enclaves developed, these areas also included significant White populations.²¹⁷ The formation of these neighborhoods was largely shaped by factors such as socioeconomic status, walking distance of employment, and proximity of Black cultural institutions, rather than deliberate efforts to restrict where African Americans lived.²¹⁸

Racist White power structures disproportionately limited African Americans to unemployment or low-paying jobs, and many in Kansas City faced extreme poverty.²¹⁹ Black homeownership was low throughout this period, with most African Americans renting from White landlords. By 1896, only thirty-five African Americans owned property in the entire city.²²⁰ Many residents experienced poor living conditions, often residing in run-down houses that were overcrowded with multiple families or occupying cramped, cheaply constructed tenements with only two or three rooms.²²¹ However, there are no records of intentional efforts by White residents to exclude African Americans from specific residential areas or instances of open, purposeful acts of hostility by White residents related to the settlement and movement of African Americans within the city before the turn of the century.²²² African Americans certainly faced other forms of systemic racism during this period, but formal structures of residential segregation had not yet taken root in Kansas City.²²³

African Americans were also not yet systematically barred from many public facilities until the end of the century, although they faced disproportionately high rates of unemployment, underemployment, and limited opportunities for social and occupational mobility.²²⁴ African Americans regularly interacted with other communities of color and White residents, and interracial marriages occurred.²²⁵ The racially integrated settlement patterns seen in late nineteenth century Kansas City were not unusual. Across both the North and South during this period, African Americans commonly lived in neighborhoods that were both racially and

²¹⁴ Cohen, 78.

²¹⁵ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 59.

²¹⁶ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 59.; Schirmer, 32.

²¹⁷ Schirmer, 32.

²¹⁸ Schirmer, 34.

²¹⁹ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 59-60.; Griffin, 44.

²²⁰ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 29.

²²¹ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 30.

²²² Schirmer, 34.

²²³ Schirmer, 34.; Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 60.

²²⁴ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 60-61.

²²⁵ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 60-61.

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socioeconomically integrated.²²⁶ Racial covenants and other discriminatory housing policies did not emerge on a widespread, systemic scale until the twentieth century, at which point they began to shape the development of racially segregated cities across the United States.

During the late nineteenth century, many African Americans in Kansas City worked as domestic laborers and lived in tenements interspersed throughout the city, often in close proximity to wealthy White residents.²²⁷ African Americans also congregated in several main areas in Kansas City, including Church Hill, Belvidere and Hick's Hollow, several residential areas in the West Bottoms, and the East Side (see *Map 4*).²²⁸

The cultural heart of Kansas City's Black community during this period was Church Hill, which extended from 9th to 11th Streets and from Charlotte Street to Troost Avenue.²²⁹ Kersey Coates, the White Quaker abolitionist responsible for the initial development of Quality Hill, also developed Church Hill. Coates helped establish its Black community by selling lots exclusively to African Americans in the years immediately following the Civil War. Coates also provided lots for the Allen Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and Second Baptist Church, both located at Tenth and Charlotte Streets (neither extant), and Lincoln School, located at Eleventh and Campbell Streets (no longer extant), all of which became important Black cultural institutions during this period.²³⁰ By the 1880s, Church Hill housed approximately fifteen percent of Kansas City's Black population. The neighborhood itself similarly contained about fifteen percent Black residents, who lived among a majority White population, many of them German immigrants who had generally been pro-abolition.²³¹ Most African Americans in Church Hill were lower middle class, and many were employed as domestic laborers in nearby neighborhoods.²³² In the early twentieth century, downtown commercial expansion displaced many of Church Hill's residential buildings.²³³ The I-70/US-71 corridor now covers much of the area.

The West Bottoms was home to several housing enclaves during the late nineteenth century. Hell's Half Acre was the earliest and most impoverished.²³⁴ Located north of the railroad tracks and Union Depot, stretching from about 9th Street north to the Missouri River, the area was originally established as a temporary encampment for Black construction workers employed on the Hannibal Bridge in the 1860s.²³⁵ The Black population grew in the late 1870s and 1880s as dozens of families arrived from Texas and Mississippi as part of the Great Exodus, and they established the Mount Olivet Baptist Church near Mulberry Street (no longer extant).²³⁶ While African Americans formed a significant portion of Hell's Half Acre, German, Irish, and Italian immigrants constituted the majority of the population.²³⁷ Most Black residents worked as laborers, while White residents worked as laborers or were proprietors of saloons, stores, and other businesses.²³⁸ The area's poverty

²²⁶ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 65.

²²⁷ Shortridge, 53.

²²⁸ See Map 22 in Shortridge, 52.

²²⁹ Shortridge, 54.; Walker, Chapter 4, np.

²³⁰ Shortridge, 54.

²³¹ Shortridge, 54.; Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 63.

²³² Shortridge, 54.; Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 63.

²³³ Shortridge, 86.

²³⁴ Shortridge, 42.

²³⁵ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 63.; Griffin, 46.

²³⁶ Shortridge, 42.

²³⁷ Griffin, 46.; Shortridge, 54.

²³⁸ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 63.

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was extreme. Sanitation was limited, water came from polluted wells, and disease and lice spread rampantly.²³⁹ The area also became a sanctuary for outlaws and grifters who gathered at its numerous saloons.²⁴⁰ The population of Hell's Half Acre was incredibly transient, with residents moving out as soon as they could secure better accommodations.²⁴¹

Two additional residential areas emerged in the West Bottoms during this period. One developed around the intersection of 9th and Genesee Streets, close to the meatpacking plants. Ninth Street contained a small commercial district, and houses stretched north to the Missouri River and south to St. Louis Avenue. The other residential area developed south of the railroad tracks, around the Kansas City Live Stock Exchange Building (extant, NRHP 1983), on the state line at 16th Street. This was the largest of the West Bottoms residential districts, and Black residents established St. John's AME Chapel on Genesee Street and Sumner School on Wyoming Street (neither extant).²⁴² Both neighborhoods had similar demographic compositions as Hell's Half Acre, but did not suffer the same levels of poverty.²⁴³ Rapid industrial development in the early twentieth century ultimately displaced the residents of all West Bottoms neighborhoods, pushing them eastward.²⁴⁴

In the 1880s and 1890s, Belvidere and Hick's Hollow developed along two ravines to the northeast of Church Hill and the central business district.²⁴⁵ These ravines initially served as temporary encampments for those who arrived during the Great Exodus.²⁴⁶ By the 1890s, the population of these areas grew significantly as Black residents left the poor conditions of Hell's Half Acre in search of better conditions, and the population was about forty percent African American.²⁴⁷ African Americans established Pleasant Green Baptist Church and Garrison School (neither extant), both in the Belvidere area.²⁴⁸ Although slightly better than Hell's Half Acre, living conditions consisted of inexpensive, poorly constructed frame houses on unpaved streets and alleyways with poor sanitation. Residents relied on polluted cisterns for water or carried it from nearby saloons.²⁴⁹ Most Black residents in the area worked as laborers, teamsters, or domestic workers, while White residents were employed as both laborers and in salaried positions. The population of Belvidere and Hick's Hollow was racially and socioeconomically integrated, with Black and White residents evenly distributed throughout, including both White middle-class and Black and White working-class groups.²⁵⁰

In the 1890s, another Black enclave emerged in the Lincoln-Coles area on the east side of Kansas City, centered along The Paseo Boulevard, stretching from 12th and 25th Streets between Troost and Woodland Avenues.²⁵¹ This area was developed during the real estate boom of the late 1880s when builders constructed hundreds of

²³⁹ Griffin, 46.

²⁴⁰ Shortridge, 42.; Griffin, 47.

²⁴¹ Griffin, Griffin, 47.

²⁴² Shortridge, 42-43.

²⁴³ Shortridge, 42-43.

²⁴⁴ Walker, Chapter 4, np.

²⁴⁵ Schirmer, 37.

²⁴⁶ Schirmer, 37.

²⁴⁷ Schirmer, 37.; Shortridge, 54.

²⁴⁸ Shortridge, 54.

²⁴⁹ Schirmer, 37.; Shortridge, 54.

²⁵⁰ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 64.

²⁵¹ Schirmer, 39.; Shortridge, 86-87.

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spacious two-story homes on speculation for the upper-middle-class market.²⁵² When the real estate boom collapsed in 1890, many of these homes were left vacant, and developers quickly dropped prices, offering homes for sale or lease at below-market rates to attract buyers and tenants. This made the neighborhood accessible to the growing population of Black professionals.²⁵³ By 1900, the area's population was approximately twenty-nine percent African American.²⁵⁴ The neighborhood was fully integrated, but concentrations of Black residents emerged near the intersection of The Paseo and 24th Street, which became known as Negro Quality Hill.²⁵⁵ This area housed many of Kansas City's growing population of African Americans professionals, including teachers, physicians, and businesspeople.²⁵⁶

In Westport, the Black enclave of Steptoe emerged, centered on Steptoe Street, stretching from 42nd to 44th Streets between Jefferson Street and Wornall Road.²⁵⁷ As in Kansas City, Westport remained fairly heterogeneous during the late nineteenth century, with African Americans interspersed throughout the area.²⁵⁸ However, a concentration of Black families had settled around Steptoe Street by the late 1860s to early 1870s.²⁵⁹ Most Steptoe residents worked as farm and general laborers and domestic workers.²⁶⁰ In 1868, Steptoe residents constructed Penn School near 42nd Street and Pennsylvania Avenue (no longer extant).²⁶¹ They also established St. Luke's AME Church (no longer extant) and the initial St. James Baptist Church building, located at 40th Terrace and Mill Street (no longer extant).²⁶²

1.3. Early Twentieth Century: Emergence of Racial Covenants and Racial Segregation

1.3.1. Early Twentieth Century Growth

Kansas City continued to grow as a metropolitan hub of transportation and commerce during the early twentieth century. The city's economy remained anchored by the railroad and related industries.²⁶³ In 1914 Union Station (extant, NRHP 1972) opened as the third largest train station in the country.²⁶⁴ Located at Main Street and West Pershing Road, which was considerably north of the central business district at the time, it encouraged the continued expansion and development of Kansas City's core commercial district.²⁶⁵ The strong railroad network

²⁵² Schirmer, 39.

²⁵³ Schirmer, 39.; Shortridge, 86-87.

²⁵⁴ Shortridge, 87.

²⁵⁵ Shortridge, 87.; Schirmer, 39.

²⁵⁶ Walker, Chapter 4, np.

²⁵⁷ Steptoe Street was renamed West 43rd Terrace in 1933. Steptoe Lives, a local organization dedicated to the history of the Steptoe neighborhood, successfully petitioned the City of Kansas City to return the name to Steptoe Street in 2023. See "Steptoe Neighborhood," Historic Kansas City, accessed August 4, 2024, <https://www.historickansascity.org/team/steptoe-neighborhood/>.

²⁵⁸ Euston, "Tracing Steptoe."

²⁵⁹ This area may have also housed the small population of free African Americans in Westport before 1865, but the first records of a Black family settling in the neighborhood was in 1867. Bradley Wolf, "St. James Baptist Church," Kansas City Register of Historic Places Registration Form (City of Kansas City, Missouri, 2013), 9:6.; Euston, "Tracing Steptoe."

²⁶⁰ Euston, "Tracing Steptoe."

²⁶¹ African American Heritage Trail, "Penn School."

²⁶² Wolf, "St. James Baptist Church," 9:7.; African American Heritage Trail, "Steptoe Neighborhood."

²⁶³ Shortridge, 62.

²⁶⁴ Shortridge, 68.

²⁶⁵ Shortridge, 68-69.

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continued to support the stockyard and meatpacking industries that contributed to the city's growth during the late nineteenth century, which continued to prosper throughout this period.²⁶⁶

Kansas City fully embraced the City Beautiful Movement, which emerged in cities across the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The movement aimed to improve urban areas through aesthetically pleasing design, improved infrastructure, and parks and green spaces. The city invested in an expansive system of parks and boulevards that became one of the most prominent examples of City Beautiful design across the country.²⁶⁷ This system of parks and boulevards also strategically razed some of Kansas City's earliest and most impoverished neighborhoods. The displacement of their residents, including many African Americans, contributed to heightened racial tensions in the city and the ensuing residential segregation that emerged during this period.²⁶⁸

The physical footprint of Kansas City continued to expand. By the turn of the twentieth century, 49th Street served as the southern boundary of Kansas City, while Cleveland and Prospect Avenue served as the primary eastern boundaries, with a section extending eastward to Skiles Avenue from Rochester Avenue to 17th Street.²⁶⁹ In 1909, Kansas City nearly doubled its previous size, annexing additional land to the south and east. The new boundaries of Kansas City extended along the south bank of the Missouri River from the state line on the west to Booth Avenue on the east and stretched south along the state line on the west to 77th Street, with the eastern boundary extending south from the river to 77th Street along Booth Avenue, Skiles Avenue, Eastern Avenue, and Bennington Avenue (see *Map 1*).²⁷⁰ With this expansion, Kansas City encompassed an area of approximately sixty square miles. These boundaries remained until after World War II.²⁷¹

Kansas City's population also continued to grow. In 1900, the population stood at 163,752, including 17,567 Black residents. By 1930, both the overall and Black populations had more than doubled, to 399,746 and 38,574 respectively.²⁷² The growing Black population was partly driven by ongoing migration of Black families from the South and rural areas of Missouri. African Americans faced increasing terrorism and violence in rural Missouri, including frequent lynchings, and many hoped they would find safer conditions in urban areas with larger Black communities such as St. Louis and Kansas City.²⁷³ Beginning in the mid-1910s, African Americans also began another mass migration from the South, known as the Great Migration. This movement built on the ongoing migration of Black families who left the South throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries to escape horrific violence, poverty, and discrimination. The Great Migration itself was largely instigated by industrialists from the North who actively recruited Southern Black workers to alleviate labor shortages brought on by World War I. A series of floods and boll weevil infestations also devastated the Southern agricultural economy in the 1910s, further prompting many Black farmers and sharecroppers to seek better opportunities in northern industrial centers. The Great Migration continued beyond the war as the agricultural economy

²⁶⁶ Shortridge, 62.

²⁶⁷ Shortridge, 62.

²⁶⁸ Schirmer, 39.

²⁶⁹ See Map 35 in Shortridge, 78.

²⁷⁰ Shortridge, 78.; See Map 35 in Shortridge, 78.

²⁷¹ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 70.

²⁷² Gibson and Jung, "Historical Census Statistics . . . For Large Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States," Table 26.

²⁷³ Walker, Chapter 5, np.

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struggled to recover following World War I and as economic challenges deepened during the Great Depression.²⁷⁴ From 1910 to 1930 alone, an estimated 1.5 to 2 million African Americans left the South.²⁷⁵ While the Great Migration had less of an immediate and concentrated impact on Kansas City than the Great Exodus, many African Americans settled in the city as part of this movement.²⁷⁶

1.3.2. Becoming a Segregated City

The early twentieth century marked a turning point in the settlement patterns of Kansas City. Before the twentieth century, most Kansas City residents did not live in racially segregated neighborhoods.²⁷⁷ However, a number of developments led Kansas City to become intensely segregated by the end of the 1920s. Commercial and industrial expansion, combined with early attempts at urban renewal through the parks and boulevard system, destroyed several neighborhoods that housed significant Black populations, forcing them to find housing elsewhere. Increasing populations of both African Americans and other groups placed additional pressure on existing Black enclaves. The use of racially restrictive covenants also emerged in the 1910s, significantly restricting and limiting where African Americans were permitted to live. Racial hostility grew, fueled by the false and racist belief that the presence of African Americans caused neighborhood deterioration and falling property values, largely promulgated by White realtors and developers. White residents employed violence and intimidation toward Black Kansas Citians in a deliberate, and sometimes organized, effort to keep them from moving to specific neighborhoods. As a result, Black Kansas Citians were more than twice as likely to live in an all-Black neighborhood in 1930 than they were in 1900.²⁷⁸

1.3.3. Expansion and Displacement

As Kansas City continued to grow in the early twentieth century, industrial and commercial expansion displaced residents from several enclaves that had developed in the late nineteenth century.²⁷⁹ In the West Bottoms, an influx of new factories, warehouses, meatpacking plants, and railroad lines transformed the area into a primarily industrial one. By 1910, residents were displaced from Hell's Half Acre and the area around the Kansas City Live Stock Exchange Building.²⁸⁰ Church Hill, located just east of downtown, also began losing its housing stock to the rapidly expanding commercial district.²⁸¹ This destruction of housing forced many residents to move elsewhere in the city, leading to overcrowding and deteriorating conditions.²⁸²

The construction of Kansas City's park and boulevard system also deliberately displaced many residents, including African Americans, from several low-income areas throughout the city as well as helped initiate an increasingly segregated city. Designed by City Planner and Landscape Architect George Kessler, the park and boulevard system was a City Beautiful initiative that began in 1895 and continued into the 1920s.²⁸³ From its

²⁷⁴ Cohen, 75-76.

²⁷⁵ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 72.

²⁷⁶ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 72.

²⁷⁷ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 59.

²⁷⁸ Charles Edward Coulter, *Take Up the Black Man's Burden: Kansas City's African American Communities, 1865-1939* (University of Missouri Press, 2006), 249-250.

²⁷⁹ Schirmer, 39-41.

²⁸⁰ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 77.

²⁸¹ Shortridge, 86.

²⁸² Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 76.

²⁸³ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 79-80.

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inception, White officials used the park and boulevard system to reshape the city's physical and social landscape. The system created racially and economically segregated residential areas by displacing impoverished and racially mixed neighborhoods, encouraging wealthy White residents to move away from the increasingly industrial and commercial downtown to new residential areas to the south and west, and creating physical barriers between specific neighborhoods.²⁸⁴ Kessler openly promoted the system as a tool that would naturally segregate the city into specific land uses and prevent working-class housing and commercial development into wealthy White residential areas.²⁸⁵ The Kansas City Board of Commissioners of Parks and Boulevards also explicitly stated that one of the goals of the system was to "give a permanent residence character to certain sections of the city" in an effort to protect the "best and most valuable residence property" from economically disadvantaged residents, racial minorities, and nonresidential land uses.²⁸⁶

Through its design and implementation, the parks and boulevard system served as one of the earliest examples in Kansas City of targeted urban renewal.²⁸⁷ It destroyed several of the most economically disadvantaged residential enclaves while making no provisions for helping displaced residents relocate. The construction of West Terrace Park displaced the West Bottoms residential community centered around 9th and Genesee Streets, which had housed an integrated population of Black and White residents, as well as a primarily Irish American community immediately to the south. Penn Valley Park displaced the Vinegar Gulch enclave, another primarily Irish American community located in a ravine by the Oklahoma Creek. Hundreds of residents were forced to relocate into increasingly overcrowded neighborhoods in the northeast and east, exacerbating economic strain and limiting housing options.²⁸⁸

1.3.4. Racially Restrictive Covenants

As Kansas City expanded residential development to accommodate its growing White population, it systemically barred African Americans from new neighborhoods through racially restrictive covenants. These covenants were legal agreements attached to property deeds that restricted where African Americans were permitted to live. Their use became a primary mechanism in establishing and maintaining racially segregated neighborhoods in Kansas City and throughout the United States.²⁸⁹

Racially restrictive covenants first became common across the country in the 1910s, partially in response to the movement of African Americans to urban areas during the Great Migration, as well as due to a rising Black middle class that made African Americans more visible to White residents.²⁹⁰ Racial covenants were legally enforceable agreements between developers, neighborhood associations, and property owners that prohibited the sale, occupancy, or lease of property and land to specific racial groups, particularly African Americans.²⁹¹ The principle behind racial covenants stemmed from the racist, manufactured belief that racial segregation would protect property values, real estate profits, and neighborhood stability. By World War I, real estate

²⁸⁴ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 81.

²⁸⁵ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 80.

²⁸⁶ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 79-80.

²⁸⁷ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 80.

²⁸⁸ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 80.

²⁸⁹ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 38.

²⁹⁰ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 38.

²⁹¹ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 38.

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developers in Kansas City and other urban areas adopted racial covenants to control the movement of African Americans and create exclusively White neighborhoods.²⁹²

J.C. Nichols, one of the most influential real estate developers in Kansas City during this period, was a pioneer of racially restrictive covenants and played a major role in their widespread adoption across the country.²⁹³ From the 1910s to the 1940s, Nichols was responsible for some of the most expensive developments in the Kansas City area. These include the Country Club Plaza commercial and residential district and the adjacent Sunset Hills residential neighborhood in Kansas City, Missouri, and the residential neighborhoods of Mission Hills and Prairie Village in Kansas City, Kansas.²⁹⁴ His approach to maintaining exclusivity and high property values involved establishing restrictions on building materials and lawn maintenance, and, critically, banning African Americans and often other racial minorities from his developments.²⁹⁵ Deed covenants that required minimum house prices and taxes for street maintenance had existed before Nichols, but they usually expired a few years after construction. Nichols established a new approach of implementing covenants that would remain in effect indefinitely and transfer with a property from one owner to the next. He also made them difficult to repeal by requiring approval from the majority of homeowners in the area.²⁹⁶ Additionally, Nichols was one of the earliest developers to include racial restrictions within deed covenants.²⁹⁷ As a result, property values in his developments did tend to remain high; his deed covenants also ensured the perpetual exclusion of African Americans in his developments.²⁹⁸

Nichols's success in using racist deed covenants that were indefinite, transferrable from owner to owner, and difficult to repeal spread rapidly across the United States during the interwar years.²⁹⁹ In 1917, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a racial zoning ordinance in Louisville, Kentucky, with the court ruling that local governments could not use zoning laws to explicitly create racially segregated areas. This was not done out of any sense of equality; rather, the court ruled that such ordinances interfered with the right of a property owner to sell to whomever they pleased.³⁰⁰ However, from 1918 through the 1920s, state Supreme Courts across the country, including Missouri, upheld racially restrictive covenants as legal and enforceable.³⁰¹ White real estate developers and neighborhood associations continued to widely promote and enforce deed covenants, using them as powerful tools to create segregated communities.³⁰² By 1945, deed covenants were nearly universal in all new developments across the country.³⁰³

In Kansas City, racially restrictive covenants had become standard in new residential developments by the 1920s, including Hyde Park, Coleman Heights, and Valentine. By 1926, seventy to ninety percent of residential

²⁹² Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 38.

²⁹³ Shortridge, 89.

²⁹⁴ Griffin, 61.

²⁹⁵ Shortridge, 89.

²⁹⁶ Shortridge, 84.

²⁹⁷ Griffin, 61.

²⁹⁸ Shortridge, 84.

²⁹⁹ Shortridge, 114.

³⁰⁰ Richard Rothstein, *Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (Liveright Publishing, 2017), 45.

³⁰¹ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 39.

³⁰² Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 90.

³⁰³ Shortridge, 114.

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property south of 27th Street was subject to racial covenants.³⁰⁴ Retroactively implementing covenants in established neighborhoods also became popular.³⁰⁵ The Santa Fe neighborhood, for example, first developed in the 1890s, established a set of new covenants in 1931 that prohibited the sale, lease, or sublease of property to African Americans for a period of thirty years.³⁰⁶ The Supreme Court outlawed the enforcement of these covenants in 1948 in the landmark *Shelley v. Kraemer* case. However, they continued to appear on property deeds throughout the metropolitan area through the 1960s.³⁰⁷ Between 1900 and 1962, a total of 1,597 explicit racially restrictive covenants were recorded across subdivisions in Jackson, Platte, and Clay Counties in Missouri and Johnson County in Kansas.³⁰⁸

1.3.5. White Acts of Terrorism and Intimidation

During the early twentieth century, Kansas City's Black population continued to expand, but racial covenants barred them from virtually all new residential developments in the city. The growing population was instead pushed into the residential enclave in the Lincoln-Coles district, which became increasingly overcrowded and deteriorated. Instead of recognizing these conditions as symptoms of systemic discrimination and unequal access to housing, employment, and education, White Kansas Citians instead associated the presence of African Americans with the negative conditions of the neighborhood, including deteriorating buildings, poor schools, and high crime.³⁰⁹ White power structures perpetuated a false and racist belief that African Americans were responsible for the social and economic problems affecting the community. One 1913 housing study in Kansas City wrote that "no class of people . . . is so shiftless, indolent, and lazy" as African Americans and equated African Americans with immorality, inherently malicious behavior, disruptive conduct and criminal activity, and a decline in property values.³¹⁰ Amid great advances in education and a growing Black middle class, deliberate concentrated attention by White power structures on the behavior and character of African Americans as the cause of urban problems led White residents to not only justify racial segregation, but also to employ violence and terrorism to enforce it.³¹¹

As the Black population expanded and moved closer to predominantly White neighborhoods, amid widespread racist fearmongering, White residents responded to their presence with hostility and violence.³¹² Nearly all incidents of racial violence related to housing in this period occurred in areas bordering the Black community in the Lincoln-Coles district.³¹³ As early as 1911, Black families were targeted with homemade bombs when they moved within close proximity to the racial dividing line at 27th Street.³¹⁴ That year, the national office of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) received a letter from a Black resident of Kansas City who wrote that Black residents "suffered repeated attempts to destroy their property by an

³⁰⁴ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 90.

³⁰⁵ Shortridge, 89.

³⁰⁶ African American Heritage Trail, "Santa Fe Neighborhood."

³⁰⁷ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 90.

³⁰⁸ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 90.

³⁰⁹ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 84.

³¹⁰ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 85.

³¹¹ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 85.

³¹² Walker, Chapter 5, np.

³¹³ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 88.

³¹⁴ Coulter, 250.

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organization of white men who have demanded that they leave the neighborhood.”³¹⁵ The letter continued, “in the block in which I live five explosions of dynamite have occurred in the past year, causing considerable damage to our homes and much mental uneasiness on the part of our families.”³¹⁶ Local newspapers reported that six African American homes were bombed that year along Montgall Avenue, and other Black families in the area received written threats to leave within thirty days.³¹⁷ The home of Hezekiah Walden, a teacher who worked at Lincoln High School, at 2442 Montgall Avenue was completely destroyed.³¹⁸

In 1919, a bombing targeted the home of Reverend Samuel and Lucy Bacote on the 2200 block of Kansas Avenue, where they had lived for twelve years.³¹⁹ In 1922, the home of Dr. W.H. Bruce in the 1200 block of East 26th Street was bombed three times.³²⁰ That same year, the home of sisters Sadie Collins and Ida Williams in the 2200 block of East 21st Street was bombed a month after they moved in.³²¹ Black residents appealed to the mayor and chief of police, but they provided no support in locating those responsible for the bombings or in preventing further acts of violence.³²²

In addition to bombs, letters and signs, threatening African Americans with violence and death became common tools of intimidation.³²³ In 1927, letters were sent to homes and the *Kansas City Call* threatening, “You can move them up here, but I’ll blow up the first n— that tries to come in a house up here,” and stating that African Americans “have no business in this neighborhood. They ought to live in the hole north of Independence Avenue . . . if they move into any houses in this neighborhood they will be made into sausage meat.”³²⁴ In 1928, posters appeared on trees in an area near 25th Street and Park Avenue warning, “Danger! Colored people are hereby notified that they will not be allowed to live in this block. This block is white and is going to stay white at any cost.”³²⁵ In 1932, signs appeared in areas on Prospect Avenue between 19th and 21st Streets stating that the neighborhood was “a white district for white people.”³²⁶

Efforts to keep African Americans from moving into White neighborhoods were also formally organized through the creation of White neighborhood associations.³²⁷ The Greenwood Improvement Association, the East Side Improvement Association, and the Southeast Improvement Association, all established in the early to mid-1920s, were explicitly formed to prevent the eastward movement of African Americans. They warned White property owners not to sell or lease to Black families and disseminated flyers with threats such as “Warning. We must restrict our homes against Negroes,” and “Colored people are hereby notified that they will not be allowed to live on this block.”³²⁸

³¹⁵ Coulter, 250-251.

³¹⁶ Coulter, 250-251.

³¹⁷ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 87.

³¹⁸ Coulter, 252.

³¹⁹ Coulter, 252.

³²⁰ Coulter, 252.

³²¹ Coulter, 252.

³²² Coulter, 251.

³²³ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 87.

³²⁴ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 87.

³²⁵ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 87-88.

³²⁶ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 88.

³²⁷ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 87-88.

³²⁸ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 88.

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1.3.6. Black Acts of Resistance

Despite threats, bombings, and organized campaigns of intimidation, many African Americans refused to leave their homes, demonstrating incredible fortitude and an unwillingness to succumb to fear and violence. As horrific acts of racial violence and segregationist policies continued throughout this period, African Americans continued to fight to maintain their homes and their place in a city that sought to push them out.³²⁹

As segregation expanded and African Americans were increasingly forced into specific areas of the city and excluded from others, Black activists and leaders protested against their increasing confinement and overcrowded and deteriorating conditions. In Kansas City, as in other cities across the country, the rise of segregated housing sparked a surge in solidarity, a growing presence of Black activism in electoral politics, and widespread protests against both segregation and poverty.³³⁰ This period saw intense community organizing and mobilization, leading to the establishment of key institutions such as the Elks Lodges for Negroes in 1906, The Paseo Branch of the YMCA and YWCA in 1907, the Kansas City chapter of the NAACP in 1915, the *Kansas City Call* newspaper in 1919, and the Urban League in 1920 (see 6. *Religious & Community Organizations* and 7.2. *Civil Rights Activism*).³³¹

1.3.7. Settlement Patterns of African Americans in Early Twentieth Century Kansas City

Beginning in the early twentieth century, residential segregation grew significantly in Kansas City. Before 1900, Black Kansas Citians typically lived in racially integrated neighborhoods. However, each decade after 1900 saw a greater number of African Americans living in increasingly segregated neighborhoods.³³² As racial covenants excluded African Americans from new developments in the south and west of the city, the Black community largely remained in the east, particularly between 9th and 27th Streets and from Charlotte Street to Prospect Avenue, and in the north, in the Belvidere area (see *Maps 5 & 6*).³³³ While African Americans had previously considered factors such as community and cultural institutions, commuting distances, and housing costs when selecting where to live, they were increasingly constrained within the Lincoln-Coles district or in Belvidere, whether by choice or not.³³⁴

By 1930, only sixteen percent of African Americans in Kansas City owned their own homes.³³⁵ Many Black community leaders promoted homeownership during this period as a major goal in achieving social progress. However, even for the growing population of Black professionals who could afford to purchase homes, racially restrictive covenants effectively prevented most from doing so.³³⁶ As racial covenants limited African Americans' ability to live in most areas of the city, overcrowding became prominent.³³⁷ One-quarter of all Black families who rented rooms or apartments housed unrelated lodgers.³³⁸ One Kansas City resident

³²⁹ Coulter, 252.

³³⁰ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 86.

³³¹ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 86-87.

³³² Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 82.

³³³ Walker, Chapter 5, np.

³³⁴ Schirmer, 42.

³³⁵ Coulter, 255.

³³⁶ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 30.

³³⁷ Shortridge, 89.

³³⁸ Coulter, 256.

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described his childhood apartment on the 1300 block of The Paseo, which had been subdivided into twelve small rooms. His family lived in one room while renting out the other eleven, and occasionally even rented out the hallway. He recalled, “People were packed in like lambs going to slaughter. There were whole families sleeping in one room. All these people shared one bath.”³³⁹

Many African Americans displaced by industrial expansion in the West Bottoms and the parks and boulevards system relocated to the Belvidere area. By 1910, Belvidere was marked by widespread poverty, overcrowding, and poor living conditions. A 1913 housing survey revealed that nearly half of the homes lacked access to water, and almost a quarter were without baths or toilets.³⁴⁰ The racial distribution of the Belvidere area remained relatively stable from the late nineteenth century onward, with the Black population consistently making up about one-third of the total population.³⁴¹ This distribution pattern was partly due to many Black residents favoring the Lincoln-Coles area when their economic situation allowed. Lincoln-Coles offered closer proximity to Black cultural and commercial institutions, and, at least at the beginning of the twentieth century, more comfortable housing and better streets.³⁴² Additionally, many White residents chose to stay in Belvidere rather than moving to new residential districts during this period, particularly those who had established cultural institutions within the district. These included a population of Russian Jews, who established the Orthodox synagogue Tefares Israel (no longer extant), and a population of Italian Americans, who established the Holy Rosary Catholic Church at 911 East Missouri Avenue (extant). As a result, Belvidere remained relatively racially integrated throughout this period.³⁴³

By the 1920s, most African Americans in Kansas City lived in the Lincoln-Coles district. Segregation and overcrowding in this area increased significantly. While African Americans made up only twenty-five percent of this area’s population in 1900, by 1920 they made up almost seventy-five percent.³⁴⁴ Additionally, while this area offered better amenities than the Belvidere area at the beginning of the century, it faced similar problems by the 1910s; a 1912 survey found that a quarter of the houses lacked water, half the dwellings had no sink, the ratio of people to bathtubs was 24 to 1, and typical apartment buildings provided water to all occupants from a single faucet in a hallway.³⁴⁵ Sewer and water lines rapidly became inadequate.³⁴⁶ Most of the Black population within this area settled in the Bowery neighborhood, which stretched from Admiral Boulevard to 27th Street between Troost Avenue to The Paseo, and included the area once known as Negro Quality Hill.³⁴⁷ By 1920, this roughly twenty-two block area had a population of 4,295.³⁴⁸ What had once been spacious homes became crowded apartments, with one survey revealing an average of four and a half families per residence.³⁴⁹

³³⁹ Coulter, 256.

³⁴⁰ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 78.

³⁴¹ Schirmer, 43.

³⁴² Schirmer, 49.

³⁴³ Schirmer, 49.

³⁴⁴ Shortridge, 88.

³⁴⁵ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 82.

³⁴⁶ Shortridge, 88.

³⁴⁷ Schirmer, 45.; African American Heritage Trail, “The Bowery.”

³⁴⁸ Walker, Chapter 5, np.

³⁴⁹ Shortridge, 88.

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The Steptoe neighborhood, which had emerged in Westport in the late 1860s to early 1870s, was one exception to the poverty and overcrowding experienced by many African Americans in Kansas City during this period. Continuing from its nineteenth-century settlement patterns, the neighborhood was characterized by single-family residences, not tenements. It was not a very densely populated enclave and there was very low unemployment. In contrast to the Belvidere and Lincoln-Coles areas, the quality of life in Steptoe reflected the growth of the Black middle class and the emergence of a nascent professional class of Black Kansas Citians.³⁵⁰

The 54th Street neighborhood emerged as another small Black enclave outside of the crowded Belvidere and Lincoln-Coles areas during this period. Initially platted outside of the City limits by White real estate developers George W. and Anna Mozier in the mid-1880s, the area stretched from East 53rd to East 55th Streets between Prospect and Agnes Avenues.³⁵¹ This area was largely inhabited by White residents during the late nineteenth century, but the Moziers began selling lots to Black families in the early 1900s. By 1910, the area had been annexed by the City of Kansas City and was home to many Black or biracial families, with the majority owning their own homes.³⁵² In 1911, the area to the east of the Mozier plat was platted as Dunbar Park, stretching from East 53rd to East 55th Streets between Agnes and Walrond Avenues, and eventually extended one block east to College Avenue.³⁵³ Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, homes in the Dunbar Park plat were specifically marketed to Black homebuyers, with advertisements touting the area as “the best colored addition on the market; location high and sightly; good water, rich soil, plenty of fruit and free rock for building purposes.”³⁵⁴ As more families moved to the area, a distinct Black enclave coalesced into a tight-knit community, and opportunities for homeownership offered upward mobility and advancement. The 54th Street neighborhood remained a distinct and relatively isolated Black enclave well into the mid-twentieth century, largely due to racist and discriminatory real estate practices and redlining policies that restricted African American expansion into new areas of the city from the 1920s to the 1950s.³⁵⁵

After World War I, at least two additional housing additions were developed specifically for Black homebuyers. The Holly Addition, located at 36th and Topping in the Leeds district (see *Map 6*), was advertised for “Colored, People, Exclusively.” Within six months, nearly all of the one hundred homes in the development were sold. Another development, the College Hill Addition, was situated near Garfield and 23rd Street. However, these homes pushed against previous informal boundaries of Black development and settlement, and both developers and homebuyers met resistance from White residents in the area. During construction, a bomb caused minor damage to two of the homes. However, the homes were still ready for occupancy by the end of 1922.³⁵⁶ The Leeds district in particular, located on Kansas City’s far East Side and away from the Black core in the Lincoln-Coles area, remained a distinct community for much of the interwar period and into the mid-twentieth century. Its residents, many of whom were migrants from Southern states, were drawn to the area’s semi-rural character and wished to maintain the agricultural traditions with which they were familiar.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁰ Walker, Chapter 5, np.

³⁵¹ Patricia Cleary Miller, *Westport – Missouri’s Port of Many Returns* (The Lowell Press, 1983), 69.

³⁵² U.S. Census Bureau, “1910; Census Place: Kansas Ward 13, Jackson, Missouri.”

³⁵³ African American Heritage Trail, “54th Street Neighborhood,” accessed October 16, 2024, <https://aahtkc.org/54th-street-neighborhood/>; Jackson County Clerk Records, “Original Dunbar Park Plat, 1911” (Instrument #1911K0827797).

³⁵⁴ “Ad,” *Kansas City Star*, April 28, 1912, 32.

³⁵⁵ Griffin, 81.

³⁵⁶ Coulter, 254.

³⁵⁷ Coulter, 264.

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1.4. Mid-Twentieth Century: Redlining, The Troost Divide, and Urban Renewal

1.4.1. Mid-Twentieth Century Change in Kansas City

Kansas City experienced significant economic, physical, and social change during the mid-twentieth century. In the 1930s, the Great Depression brought economic hardship, and the railroad, stockyard, and meatpacking industries all but collapsed.³⁵⁸ In response, the Pendergast administration organized New Deal-like programs that employed workers to build bridges, roads, and civic buildings, including the current City Hall and Jackson County Courthouse, before dramatically collapsing itself in 1939 due to corruption and organized crime (see 7. *Politics & Government*).³⁵⁹ The economy picked up in the 1940s as World War II introduced key manufacturing industries to the city, leading to economic and population growth.³⁶⁰ In 1951, however, the stockyard and meatpacking industries, which had rebounded, faced another blow when a flood decimated the West Bottoms, after which they decentralized and never returned to their previous strength.³⁶¹ Later on in the 1950s, Kansas City began construction on its expansive highway system, opened its international airport, and acquired its first major-league baseball team.³⁶² By the end of the 1950s and into the 1960s, the urban core experienced significant decline as a result of suburban sprawl, with a loss of commercial activity to suburban malls.³⁶³

The physical boundaries of Kansas City drastically expanded during this period. The city instigated an aggressive series of annexations that quintupled its physical size by 1963 (see *Maps 1 & 2*).³⁶⁴ The city continued its southward and eastward expansion, but it also significantly extended north, crossing the Missouri River. The result was an irregularly shaped city that enclaved or nearly enclaved several independent cities, including North Kansas City, Gladstone, Raytown, and Grandview, and spanned four counties: Jackson, Clay, Platte, and Cass.³⁶⁵ The city executed a few minor annexation projects in the north and south after the 1960s, but the footprint has generally remained the same since 1963.³⁶⁶

Kansas City's overall population grew at a more modest rate. From a total population of 399,746 in 1930, it stood at 507,247 in 1970, an increase of just under twenty-seven percent.³⁶⁷ Breaking down the population by race, however, reveals significant change that took place during this period. The Black population increased considerably, with many African Americans continuing to migrate to Kansas City from the South and surrounding rural areas.³⁶⁸ In 1930, the Black population stood at 38,574, around ten percent of the total population. By 1970, 112,120 African Americans lived in Kansas City, an almost two hundred percent increase,

³⁵⁸ Griffin, 66.

³⁵⁹ Griffin, 66.; Shortridge, 97.

³⁶⁰ Shortridge, 97-98.

³⁶¹ Shortridge, 132.

³⁶² Shortridge, 97, 105.; Daniel Herriges, "'Kansas City's Blitz': How Freeway-Building Blew Up Urban Wealth," *Strong Towns*, June 24, 2020, <https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2020/6/23/kansas-citys-blitz-how-freeway-building-blew-up-urban-wealth>.

³⁶³ Shortridge, 132.

³⁶⁴ Shortridge, 97.

³⁶⁵ See Map 48 in Shortridge, 103.

³⁶⁶ Daniel Herriges, "Kansas City's Fateful Suburban Experiment," *Strong Towns*, May 6, 2020, <https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2020/5/5/kansas-citys-fateful-suburban-experiment>.

³⁶⁷ Gibson and Jung, "Historical Census Statistics . . . For Large Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States," Table 26.

³⁶⁸ Cohen, 75-76.

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and formed just over twenty-two percent of the total population.³⁶⁹ At the same time, the White population in Kansas City increased from 360,725 in 1930 to 400,599 in 1950, but then dropped considerably to 328,550 by 1970.³⁷⁰ These numbers reflect an increase in concentration of the Black population and a simultaneous net decrease of the White population, which was largely fueled by the discriminatory practice of redlining, racist actions of the real estate industry, and white flight from the city to outlying suburban areas.³⁷¹

1.4.2. Redlining

In 1933 and 1934, the federal government established the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), both New Deal agencies whose purpose was to address the housing and mortgage crisis that arose during the Great Depression. The HOLC refinanced mortgages for homeowners who were at risk of foreclosure and purchased distressed mortgages to alleviate lenders and reduce the risk of further financial instability. The FHA created federally insured mortgages to reduce financial risk for private lenders and encourage them to offer loans to borrowers. Both agencies also promoted lower down payments, longer loan terms, and loans to first-time homebuyers.³⁷² Additionally, HOLC and FHA mortgages were amortized, which meant that each monthly payment covered both principal and interest, which allowed homeowners to steadily build equity in their properties. If a homeowner with an amortized mortgage sold their home, they would retain any equity they had accrued, along with any appreciation in the property's value.³⁷³ While the HOLC and FHA made homeownership and equity building more affordable and attainable for millions of White families, their federally backed mortgages were systemically denied to African Americans.³⁷⁴

The HOLC and FHA established overlapping guidelines for the types of mortgages they would accept, which included racial restrictions.³⁷⁵ J.C. Nichols, the developer responsible for some of the earliest racial covenants in Kansas City, helped the FHA with their mortgage policies.³⁷⁶ The HOLC and FHA used these guidelines to conduct surveys of cities across the United States, including Kansas City, producing a series of color-coded maps and area descriptions that gauged risk levels for individual neighborhoods.³⁷⁷ Neighborhoods were assigned one of four grades: (A), Best/green; (B), Still Desirable/blue; (C), Definitely Declining/yellow; and (D), Hazardous/red. Neighborhoods assigned the highest grade of "A," colored green, were deemed minimal risks, while those assigned the lowest grade of "D," colored red, were considered high risk areas to accept mortgages.³⁷⁸ The HOLC describes "hazardous" neighborhoods as being "characterized by detrimental influences in a pronounced degree, undesirable population or an infiltration of it."³⁷⁹ It cautioned that conservative, responsible lending should "refuse to make loans in these areas [or] only on a conservative

³⁶⁹ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 98.

³⁷⁰ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 98.

³⁷¹ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 99.

³⁷² Todd M. Michney, "How and Why the HOLC Made Its Redlining Maps," *Mapping Inequality*, accessed August 27, 2024, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/howandwhy>.

³⁷³ Rothstein, 63-64.

³⁷⁴ Michney, "How and Why the HOLC Made Its Redlining Maps.," Rothstein, 199.

³⁷⁵ Michney, "How and Why the HOLC Made Its Redlining Maps."

³⁷⁶ Griffin, 62.

³⁷⁷ Michney, "How and Why the HOLC Made Its Redlining Maps."

³⁷⁸ Robert K. Nelson, "Introduction," *Mapping Inequality*, accessed August 27, 2024, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/introduction>.

³⁷⁹ Charles Marohn, "The Local Case for Reparations," *Strong Towns*, September 21, 2020, <https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2020/9/18/the-local-case-for-reparations>.

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basis.”³⁸⁰ Neighborhoods where African Americans lived were automatically assigned grade D and colored red, even if they were solid middle-class neighborhoods with primarily single-family homes.³⁸¹

These maps were used as a tool for redlining, named after the assigned Grade D color. Redlining made it difficult or impossible for people to obtain mortgage financing in areas that were assigned as “hazardous,” thereby limiting their ability to become homeowners.³⁸² While the majority of neighborhoods with the lowest grade of D in cities across the country had primarily White, often immigrant or Jewish, populations, the brunt of redlining fell upon Black neighborhoods, which were universally categorized as “hazardous” regardless of socioeconomic class. Redlining purposefully and effectively extended public and private capital to native-born White residents and denied it to African Americans. As homeownership was one of the most significant pathways to intergenerational wealth accumulation in the United States during the twentieth century, discriminatory redlining practices have had lasting impacts on wealth inequality.³⁸³

The 1939 HOLC map for the Kansas City metropolitan area (see *Map 7*) designated a total of fifty-two percent of Kansas City, Missouri, as Grade D, Hazardous.³⁸⁴ The population in Grade D areas included African Americans as well as White Jews and immigrants from Italy and Belgium.³⁸⁵ The map assigned Area D25, which overlaid the Lincoln-Coles area, as Grade D, and its area description labeled it as “that old section where values were ‘shot’ several years ago,” and “ragged in every respect.”³⁸⁶ The map assigned all areas surrounding the Lincoln-Coles area as Grade D or Grade C. The area description for Area D24, which overlaid the present-day Mount Hope neighborhood, labeled it as “threatened with negro encroachment from the north.”³⁸⁷ Similarly, the area description for Area D29, which overlaid the present-day neighborhoods of Washington-Wheatley, Ingleside, and East Community Team South, noted a small Black population and suggested that additional “negro encroachment” was likely.³⁸⁸

In the postwar expansion of the 1940s, White speculators and real estate agents exploited African Americans’ inability to secure federally backed mortgages while simultaneously preying on White racist fears to collude in a practice called blockbusting.³⁸⁹ First, blockbusters encouraged and circulated racist stereotypes to convince homeowners that the presence of Black neighbors would lead to falling property values and rising crime. Although these prejudices were not new, blockbusters amplified the specific false and racist beliefs that had historically tied African Americans with neighborhood decline.³⁹⁰ Then, they employed a number of tactics to suggest an “infiltration” of Black residents into White neighborhoods.³⁹¹ Often, they bought scattered properties

³⁸⁰ Nelson, “Introduction.”

³⁸¹ Nelson, “Introduction.”; Rothstein, 64.

³⁸² Nelson, “Introduction.”

³⁸³ Nelson, “Introduction.”

³⁸⁴ Marohn, “The Local Case for Reparations.”

³⁸⁵ Marohn, “The Local Case for Reparations.”

³⁸⁶ “Greater Kansas City,” *Mapping Inequality*, accessed August 27, 2024, https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/map/MO/GreaterKansasCity/area_descriptions#loc=12/39.0656/-94.5454.

³⁸⁷ “Greater Kansas City,” *Mapping Inequality*.

³⁸⁸ “Greater Kansas City,” *Mapping Inequality*.

³⁸⁹ Rothstein, 95.

³⁹⁰ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 109.

³⁹¹ Rothstein, 96.

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in mostly White neighborhoods and rented them to African Americans.³⁹² They also hired Black women to push strollers through White neighborhoods, hired Black men to drive cars with radios blasting through White neighborhoods, sent agents with paid Black men to White neighborhoods to knock on doors and inquire if homes were for sale, and called residents in White neighborhoods and asked to speak to someone with a stereotypically Black name.³⁹³ One agent claimed to have organized house burglaries to frighten White residents into thinking that their neighborhood was becoming unsafe.³⁹⁴

As the blockbusters planned, fear spread among White residents and they began to flee and rapidly sell their homes, which the blockbusters purchased at below market value. They then turned around and sold the houses to African Americans at highly inflated costs. Because African Americans could not access federally backed mortgages, blockbusters offered to finance the homes themselves, requiring substantial down payments and exorbitant monthly payments.³⁹⁵ Many African Americans accepted these terms, hoping to escape dilapidated tenements and overcrowded conditions, even though they plainly understood the blockbusters' tactics. Throughout this period, editorials in local Black-owned newspapers repeatedly condemned the practices of blockbusting real estate agents. "It has been suggested all along," one article wrote in 1956, that White flight from Kansas City's southeast neighborhoods "was inspired by real estate agents with their eyes on commissions."³⁹⁶ However, many African Americans hoped to escape dilapidated tenements and overcrowded conditions, so they still purchased from the blockbusters.³⁹⁷ High monthly payments were designed to make residents struggle to keep up, as blockbusters would evict a resident after a single missed or late payment. Having built no equity in the arrangement, evicted African Americans were left with nothing, while the deed reverted back to the blockbusters, who restarted the entire process.³⁹⁸ Throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, blockbusting practices and White flight caused neighborhood after neighborhood in Kansas City to transform from nearly all White to nearly all Black.³⁹⁹

The Fair Housing Act of 1968, part of the Civil Rights Act, outlawed the practice of redlining. However, housing discrimination persisted long after its passage. FHA subsidies for new home construction, provided under the 1968 Act, were distributed in a decentralized manner. These funds were managed by private real estate firms and banks and went to where they were least needed, the White suburbs. Blockbusting also continued as speculators exploited FHA programs, leading to a vacancy crisis. East Kansas City saw significant decline, with abandoned homes and buildings becoming more widespread.⁴⁰⁰ Discriminatory and predatory practices such as reverse redlining, where exploitative loans were heavily marketed to African Americans, persisted into the twenty-first century. For example, reverse redlining was a significant factor that contributed to the 2008 financial collapse.⁴⁰¹

³⁹² Griffin, 80-81.

³⁹³ Rothstein, 95.; Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 111.

³⁹⁴ Rothstein, 96.

³⁹⁵ Griffin, 80-81.; Shortridge, 115.

³⁹⁶ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 110.

³⁹⁷ Griffin, 80-81.

³⁹⁸ Rothstein, 96.; Griffin, 80-81.

³⁹⁹ Shortridge, 115.

⁴⁰⁰ Griffin, 92.

⁴⁰¹ Rothstein, 109.

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1.4.3. The Troost Divide

While racial covenants and redlining systemically impacted where African Americans could live in Kansas City, they alone did not contribute to the stark segregation of the city's East Side, particularly the abrupt and persistent barrier along Troost Avenue that became known as the Troost Wall or the Troost Divide. Beginning in the 1950s, Troost Avenue became Kansas City's most significant cultural divide that endures today.⁴⁰²

By the mid-1950s, racial covenants were declared unconstitutional and White flight was well underway, providing new, although still difficult, opportunities for housing. Further fueled by the nascent but growing Civil Rights Movement, African Americans increasingly moved from the previously pigeonholed Lincoln-Coles area in search of better housing.⁴⁰³ Additionally, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the landmark 1954 case *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, theoretically beginning the process of school integration (see 5. *Education*).⁴⁰⁴

White residents pushed back against the expansion of African Americans into new areas of the city with continued violence and racist policies. White residents terrorized African Americans with bombs and other forms of intimidation into the 1960s.⁴⁰⁵ Additionally, following the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, the local school board intentionally and effectively maintained segregated schools by manipulating school attendance boundaries.⁴⁰⁶ They selected Troost Avenue, which was both the city's longest north-south thoroughfare as well as conveniently near the western boundary of the congested Black Lincoln-Coles district, as the dividing line.⁴⁰⁷ Over the next two decades, the school board guided segregated zones with frequent shifts in the attendance areas of its schools in the north and south ends of the city, but the east-west divide along Troost Avenue remained consistent.⁴⁰⁸ The reformulation of additional city boundaries followed, which had a highly effective consequence of retaining most of the city's White residents within predominantly White neighborhoods and Black residents within predominantly Black neighborhoods.⁴⁰⁹ Even today, zip codes, census tracts, and voting wards remain largely partitioned along Troost Avenue.⁴¹⁰

1.4.4. Urban Renewal

Kansas City faced increasing urban decline and economic stagnation in the mid-twentieth century as suburbanization increasingly drew new commercial activity and residential development away from the urban core.⁴¹¹ In a revitalization effort, the city orchestrated a series of ambitious urban renewal projects. Initiated in the 1950s and 1960s, these projects aimed to clear "blighted" areas, improve and expand infrastructure, and

⁴⁰² Shortridge, 116.

⁴⁰³ Griffin, 80.

⁴⁰⁴ Griffin, 79.

⁴⁰⁵ Griffin, 80.

⁴⁰⁶ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 104.

⁴⁰⁷ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 104.

⁴⁰⁸ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 104-105.

⁴⁰⁹ Shortridge, 116.

⁴¹⁰ Griffin, 79-80.

⁴¹¹ Griffin, 83.

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modernize the downtown.⁴¹² However, rather than initiating revitalization, these projects largely resulted in razed communities, widespread displacement, and exacerbated racial and economic inequities.⁴¹³

The Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954 provided the impetus for massive mid-century urban renewal projects across the United States. Under these laws, city governments could use eminent domain to clear “blight” and redevelop the land with federal subsidies. The stated intent was to stimulate the construction of quality, government-subsidized housing to replace deteriorated neighborhoods. However, opposition from the private real estate industry complicated these efforts. The National Association of Real Estate Boards labeled public housing as “socialism,” fearing it would challenge segregation and reduce housing discrimination, which were both key sources of political and economic power for private developers. Real estate and development lobbyists worked to ensure federal policies would allow almost complete local control over urban renewal projects. As a result, federal funding was often diverted toward private development projects rather than addressing housing for displaced low-income populations.⁴¹⁴

From the early 1950s to the early 1970s, Kansas City invested \$80 million, two-thirds of which was federally funded, into eighteen urban renewal projects.⁴¹⁵ More than 5,100 acres were redeveloped, which displaced two thousand households. Of these households, nearly twenty-nine percent were Black, even though African Americans made up only twelve percent of the city’s population in 1950.⁴¹⁶

A significant element of Kansas City’s urban renewal projects was the construction of major highways, including I-70 and US-71. These projects bulldozed through established neighborhoods, dividing communities and displacing thousands of residents. Highway 71, which began construction in 1951 and took fifty years to complete, cut through the hearts of Ivanhoe, Beacon Hill, and Key Coalition, all primarily Black neighborhoods, and displaced approximately 10,000 residents, both Black and White.⁴¹⁷ Led by local Black activist Mamie Hughes, residents protested against the division of their neighborhoods. While they were unsuccessful in stopping the bulldozers, they successfully advocated for infrastructure such as bridges and stoplights to provide connection points across the highway corridor.⁴¹⁸

The Attucks project, started in 1953, was one of the earliest projects to target a predominantly Black community. Stretching from Truman Road to 19th Street between The Paseo and Brooklyn Avenue, the project cleared fifty-four acres of the Lincoln-Coles district and displaced more than six hundred primarily Black families.⁴¹⁹ After sitting vacant for some time, Parade Park Homes, Kansas City’s first Black-owned housing co-op, was constructed in 1961 (extant). With 510 units, Parade Park Homes could accommodate fewer families

⁴¹² Griffin, 82.

⁴¹³ Griffin, 82.

⁴¹⁴ Griffin, 82-83.

⁴¹⁵ Griffin, 83.

⁴¹⁶ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, xx.

⁴¹⁷ Griffin, 84.

⁴¹⁸ Griffin, 84.

⁴¹⁹ Griffin, 84.; Bek Shackelford-Nwanganga, “Parade Park Offered Black Kansas City Families a Chance for Home Ownership,” *KCUR*, August 10, 2022, <https://www.kcur.org/history/2022-08-10/parade-park-offered-black-kansas-city-families-a-share-of-home-ownership-now-its-crumbling>.

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than it had displaced, but it also offered its new residents ownership and control of their homes.⁴²⁰ Concurrently, the Eastside project cleared what little remained of the Church Hill and adjacent Irish American neighborhood north of 12th Street on the eastern edge of downtown.⁴²¹ This area became a primarily commercial and industrial district as well as part of the I-70/Highway 71 corridor.⁴²²

Kansas City's urban renewal initiative also included several public housing projects, which was a requirement for any city that used federal urban renewal funding.⁴²³ However, these developments were strictly segregated.⁴²⁴ Guinotte Manor (extant), constructed for White residents at 4th Street and Troost Avenue, cleared and replaced part of the integrated Belvidere neighborhood.⁴²⁵ Riverview Homes (extant), constructed for White residents at 5th Street and The Paseo Avenue, cleared and replaced Hick's Hollow.⁴²⁶ T.B. Watkins Homes (extant) was constructed for Black residents near 13th and Vine Streets, north of the I-70 corridor.⁴²⁷ Wayne Minor Court (extant) was constructed for Black residents near 9th Street and Woodland Avenue, also north of the I-70 corridor.⁴²⁸ Both T.B. Watkins Homes and Wayne Minor Court cleared concentrated areas of "blight" within the historically Black Lincoln-Coles district.⁴²⁹

Kansas City's experience with urban renewal was not unique. Across the United States, similar projects under the banner of modernization and economic recovery displaced tens of thousands of residents and small businesses and destroyed thousands more units than they replaced.⁴³⁰ Sometimes referred to as "negro removal," urban renewal disproportionately displaced African Americans; nationwide, African Americans lived in nearly seventy percent of all homes destroyed for urban renewal.⁴³¹ In Kansas City and elsewhere, urban renewal did not halt the decline of the urban core. Instead, it contributed to decentralization while displacing thousands of residents.⁴³²

1.4.5. Settlement Patterns of African Americans in Mid-Twentieth Century Kansas City

By 1940, seventy-one percent of Black Kansas Citians lived between Troost Avenue, Jackson Avenue, Independence Avenue, and 27th Street.⁴³³ Until the late 1940s and early 1950s, East 27th Street in particular acted as an informal boundary line on the East Side of Kansas City, with very few Black residents living south of this line.⁴³⁴ This was a cumulative effect of racist White power structures and actions, including terrorism and intimidation, racially restrictive covenants, and redlining. However, as the Black population continued to grow, and as urban renewal projects destroyed Black neighborhoods and displaced hundreds of Black residents,

⁴²⁰ Shackelford-Nwanganga, "Parade Park."

⁴²¹ Shortridge, 108.

⁴²² Griffin, 83.

⁴²³ Shortridge, 109.

⁴²⁴ Griffin, 84.

⁴²⁵ Shortridge, 109.; Griffin, 84.

⁴²⁶ Shortridge, 109.

⁴²⁷ Shortridge, 109.

⁴²⁸ Shortridge, 109.

⁴²⁹ Shortridge, 117.

⁴³⁰ Griffin, 82-83.

⁴³¹ Griffin, 83.

⁴³² Griffin, 86.

⁴³³ Griffin, 79.

⁴³⁴ Griffin, 81.

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the already cramped and dire conditions within the Lincoln-Coles area became even more pressing.⁴³⁵ Following the 1948 Supreme Court decision in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, which outlawed the enforcement of racial covenants, Black Kansas Citians began moving into neighborhoods just south of East 27th Street that had previously excluded them.⁴³⁶ This shift, combined with redlining and blockbusting practices, created a snowball effect: as Black families moved in, White families rapidly moved out, accelerating racial turnover. Although the school board continued to uphold a rigid racial boundary along Troost Avenue, neighborhoods east of Troost Avenue and south of East 27th Street quickly transitioned from all-White to predominantly Black. By the late 1960s, the majority of Kansas City east of Troost Avenue, stretching as far south as the Hickman Mills neighborhood along the southern boundary of the city at East 119th Street, had become predominantly Black.⁴³⁷

Movement south beyond the longstanding racial boundary at East 27th Street helped to alleviate population pressure in the Lincoln-Coles area but simultaneously marked the emergence of a new economic stratification within Kansas City's Black community. Previously, both working- and middle-class African Americans had been confined to the overcrowded Lincoln-Coles area, and Black residents experienced similar housing conditions regardless of income level. However, only affluent African Americans could afford to purchase the larger homes in the formerly White neighborhoods south of East 27th Street, especially as mortgages that made homeownership more attainable were denied to Black buyers. As a result, many neighborhoods south of East 27th Street became home to Kansas City's Black doctors, lawyers, and teachers, while Black working-class residents remained in the Lincoln-Coles area. This shift signaled the first significant economic divide within the city's Black population.⁴³⁸ Starting in the 1970s and 1980s, many middle- and upper-class Black families also moved out of Kansas City and into the surrounding suburbs to the east and south, such as Raytown, furthering the economic divide.⁴³⁹

The Santa Fe neighborhood (NRHP 1986), stretching from East 27th Street to Linwood Boulevard between Prospect and Indiana Avenues, was one of the first neighborhoods south of East 27th Street into which Black Kansas Citians moved. In the summer of 1948, Dr. D.M. Miller, Superintendent of General Hospital No. 2, and Clara Miller purchased a home at 2944 Victor Street (extant), becoming the first Black homeowners and residents in the neighborhood.⁴⁴⁰ Despite the *Shelley v. Kraemer* ruling earlier that year, the Millers and other Black families continued to face hostility. Fearing retaliation from their White neighbors, the Millers delayed their move until December 1948. Upon arrival, they were met with harassment, including verbal abuse, surveillance by unknown cars at all hours of the night, and finally a court summons as neighbors filed petitions seeking their eviction. Over the next two years, the Millers defended their right to reside in their home through a protracted legal battle that involved twenty-eight separate lawsuits, four of which reached the Missouri Supreme Court. Ultimately, the Court declined to hear the cases or transfer them to the Circuit Court of Appeals, effectively ending the legal efforts to remove the Millers from their home. With the precedent set, Black families began moving into the neighborhood in increasing numbers; between 1950 and 1953, the Santa Fe

⁴³⁵ Shortridge, 117.

⁴³⁶ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 90.

⁴³⁷ Euston and Reidy, "Segregation in KC: How the School District Helped Create the Troost Divide."

⁴³⁸ Shortridge, 117.

⁴³⁹ Euston and Reidy, "Segregation in KC: How the School District Helped Create the Troost Divide."

⁴⁴⁰ Jami Parkison, *Santa Fe Place: Moving to the Top of the Hill* (The Lowell Press, 1994), 15.

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neighborhood saw Black homeownership grow at a rate four times higher than any other area of Kansas City where African Americans were allowed to purchase property.⁴⁴¹

Community leader and activist Rosemary Smith Lowe (see 7.1.4.1. *Freedom, Inc.*) was another early Black resident of the Santa Fe neighborhood. In 1952, she purchased a home at 3232 East 29th Street (extant), where she relocated from a home on East 23rd Street (no longer extant) with her four sons.⁴⁴² Like the Millers and other Black homebuyers in the neighborhood, Lowe encountered immediate hostility, this time from the White couple who had sold her the property. On the day of her move, the sellers refused to vacate the premises, with one of them reportedly telling her, “I didn’t think that you had the nerve to move in here on us.”⁴⁴³ With no alternative, Lowe and her children initially occupied the second story while the previous owners remained on the first. The following day, Lowe successfully pressured the couple to leave. Reflecting on the experience in a 2019 oral history, Lowe described it as “a horrible feeling.”⁴⁴⁴

James Edward White, Sr., Lowe’s son, was eight years old when they moved to the three-story home, which he recalled was “like moving into a mansion” compared to the cramped two-bedroom home their family had previously occupied. In a 2024 oral history, White explained that his mother purchased the home not only for herself and her children, but also for her two sisters and White’s grandmother.⁴⁴⁵ He described the purchase as “the most profound spiritual moment of [Lowe’s] life.”⁴⁴⁶ In addition to her involvement with Freedom, Inc. and serving as Kansas City’s first Black ward committeewoman, Lowe also served as President of the Santa Fe Neighborhood Association. In recognition of her contributions to the community, the City designated East 29th Street between Prospect and Indiana Avenues as Rosemary S. Lowe Lane in 2006.⁴⁴⁷ White continues to reside at the family home as of 2025.⁴⁴⁸

1.5. Late Twentieth Century and Beyond

Although legislation outlawed racial covenants and redlining in the mid-twentieth century, the social, economic, and physical effects of segregation have persisted in Kansas City. Troost Avenue remains a physical barrier within the landscape, upheld by municipal boundaries that remain today.⁴⁴⁹ One early 1990s study identified Kansas City as one of the thirteen most hypersegregated metropolitan areas in the United States, while a 2000 study ranked it as the eleventh most racially segregated city in the country.⁴⁵⁰ While recently more African

⁴⁴¹ Parkison, 15-16.; Priscilla Jackson-Evans, “Santa Fe Place Historic District,” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Park Service, 1986), 8:11.

⁴⁴² James Edward White, Sr., “Interview with James Edward White, Sr.,” Interview by Rachel Alison, October 31, 2024.

⁴⁴³ Rosemary Smith Lowe and James Edward White, Sr., “Interview with Rosemary Smith Lowe,” Interview by Oralea McKinzy and Gene Chavez, August 1, 2019, Kansas City Public Library: Speaking of Kansas City, Regional Oral History Collection, <https://speakingofkc.org/collection/interview-rosemary-smith-lowe>.

⁴⁴⁴ Lowe and White, “Interview with Rosemary Smith Lowe.”

⁴⁴⁵ James Edward White, Sr., “Interview with James Edward White, Sr.”

⁴⁴⁶ Lowe and White, “Interview with Rosemary Smith Lowe.”

⁴⁴⁷ White, Sr., “Interview with James Edward White, Sr.”

⁴⁴⁸ White, Sr., “Interview with James Edward White, Sr.”

⁴⁴⁹ Griffin, 79-80.

⁴⁵⁰ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 1.

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Americans have moved into the suburbs, which has decreased overall segregation levels for the greater metropolitan area, the inner city remains intensely segregated.⁴⁵¹

The racially segregated neighborhoods of Kansas City, Missouri are the result of racist and discriminatory actions made over the course of the city's history by White officials and White political and economic leaders. These decisions determined where and for whom different types of housing was constructed, which neighborhoods were denied access to credit and mortgage funding, which areas were chosen for urban renewal and highway construction, and which racial groups were systematically maneuvered into specific neighborhoods.⁴⁵² The cumulative impact of these decisions helped shape, and continues to shape, the built landscape of Kansas City, Missouri, and has had a lasting and negative effect on Black residents.⁴⁵³

The dense concentration of Black Kansas Citians into racial enclaves created an atmosphere of close-knit neighborhoods and communities that were forged through a shared set of circumstances. These communities, in the face of consistent and systemic oppression and racism, formed strong bonds of unity and resilience that were instrumental in forming distinct cultural, economic, social, and religious institutions and organizations that enriched Black life in Kansas City.

⁴⁵¹ Eric Adler, Mará Rose Williams, and Savanna Smith, "KC Area Has Been One of the Most Racially Segregated in America. But Not Anymore.," *Kansas City Star*, January 7, 2019.

⁴⁵² Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 34.

⁴⁵³ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 34-35.

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2. INDUSTRY, COMMERCE, & EMPLOYMENT

The Black labor that contributed to the early development of Kansas City was overwhelmingly forced and stolen under the system of institutionalized slavery. White civic and business leaders promoted slavery as not only a profitable business venture, but as essential to the economic growth of the city.⁴⁵⁴ In both the urban core and the agricultural outskirts of the city, enslaved African Americans were forced to support the growing local economy. Following the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, African Americans continued to face significant challenges in the struggle for economic equality as racist White power structures severely limited their access to jobs, living wages, and opportunities for upward mobility. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Black workers played a crucial role in Kansas City's transformation into a center of industry, but White employers continued to exploit their labor, relegating them to the most dangerous and physically demanding jobs while paying meager wages. Despite these obstacles, African Americans successfully pushed for better employment opportunities in both the public and private sectors. During the late nineteenth century, African Americans began establishing a presence in government agencies, including the fire department, police department, and postal service, and they continued making strides in the public sector during the twentieth century. Black entrepreneurship also emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, driven by a determination to achieve economic independence. As Kansas City and its Black community grew over the twentieth century, thriving Black businesses and commercial districts developed, providing jobs, goods, and services that were often denied by White employers and establishments.

2.1. Early to Mid-Nineteenth Century: Institutionalized Slavery

Prior to the Civil War, the vast majority of African Americans in Missouri and Kansas City were forced to provide labor under the institution of slavery. Agriculture was a key industry in antebellum Missouri, and enslaved labor was used extensively for agricultural work throughout the state. Many early White settlers in the state moved from the agricultural regions of the Upper South and settled along the fertile lands surrounding the Missouri River, stretching from Pike County, just north of St. Louis County, in the east to Jackson, Clay, and Platte Counties in the west. This region along the Missouri River in central Missouri became known as "Little Dixie," alluding to the region's strong cultural, political, and economic ties to the South, and particularly to the institution of slavery.⁴⁵⁵ Overall, the population of enslaved African Americans represented ten percent of the state's population by 1860; in certain counties of Little Dixie, however, particularly those in the center of the state, they represented as much as fifty-three percent of the population.⁴⁵⁶ While the majority of farms in this region and throughout Missouri did not operate on the same level as the large-scale, commercial cash crop plantation system commonly associated with the Deep South (see 1.1.2. *Slavery in Missouri and Kansas City* for more information on "small slaveholding" practices), agriculture supported by stolen labor nonetheless played an important role in the state's early economy. Hemp and tobacco were the main crops in Missouri, and

⁴⁵⁴ Walker, Introduction, np.

⁴⁵⁵ Robert W. Frizzell, "Southern Identity in Nineteenth-Century Missouri: Little Dixie's Slave-Majority Areas and the Transition to Midwestern Farming," *Missouri Historical Review* 99, no. 3 (April 2005): 239.

⁴⁵⁶ Frizzell, 242.

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farms also produced cotton, feed grains, and livestock.⁴⁵⁷ Enslaved African Americans provided much of the labor, but often worked alongside their White enslavers in both the field and in the home.⁴⁵⁸

In the Kansas City area, enslaved African Americans were forced to provide labor on the small farms in the West Bottoms area, established by the Chouteau's Landing settlement in the late 1820s.⁴⁵⁹ The Porter Plantation, a 365-acre farm bordered on the north and south by present-day 23rd and 21st Streets and on the west and east by Locust Avenue and Vine Street, used enslaved labor to maintain a hay field, a corn field, an orchard, and a pasture for livestock.⁴⁶⁰ On the Miller Plantation, a 368-acre farm located in the southeast corner of Platte County, enslaved African Americans provided the grueling labor to grow and process hemp, and also grew corn, hay, and potatoes and raised cattle, pigs, and sheep.⁴⁶¹

Slavery in the greater part of the Kansas City area was distinctly more urban, however.⁴⁶² The majority of enslaved African Americans worked within the urban core as personal cooks, drivers, domestic laborers, and valets for White enslavers.⁴⁶³ Many also worked in the local businesses of their enslavers, performing domestic duties and hospitality work.⁴⁶⁴ Enslavers commonly "hired out" enslaved African Americans to other White individuals who either could not afford to be enslavers themselves or who were in need of additional temporary labor.⁴⁶⁵ While the enslaver usually received most of the payment for the labor performed, it was customary for enslaved individuals to receive wages for their hired work. Although hired wages were minimal and were at times confiscated by their enslavers, they became a crucial way for enslaved African Americans to earn money for themselves, which they could use to purchase goods or even freedom for themselves and their families.⁴⁶⁶

The small population of free Black Kansas Citians during the antebellum period also largely worked in the city center. For example, in 1860, James M. Mahoney worked as a barber, Clarinda Crump worked as a housekeeper, Manuel Points worked as a teamster, Thomas Tyler worked as a cook at the Union Hotel (no longer extant), and William Hater worked as a porter at the Clairborn House Hotel (no longer extant).⁴⁶⁷

2.2. Late Nineteenth Century: Economic Growth and Industrialization

By the end of the Civil War in 1865, Kansas City's economy was severely affected by political tensions and violence on the border. During the war, trade had come to a halt, the Chamber of Commerce had dissolved, and many businesses struggled or closed altogether.⁴⁶⁸ However, Kansas City experienced tremendous economic growth in the decades following the war, largely tied to the growth of the railroad and subsequent

⁴⁵⁷ Frizzell, 247-248.

⁴⁵⁸ Dorsette, 8.

⁴⁵⁹ Epps, 33-34.

⁴⁶⁰ "Porter Farm," The Porter Farmstead Historic Preservation Project.; "The Porter Farm," *Kansas City Star*.

⁴⁶¹ Johnson, "The Miller Plantation," 30-31.

⁴⁶² Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 3.

⁴⁶³ Walker, Chapter 2, np.

⁴⁶⁴ Epps, 38.

⁴⁶⁵ Burke, 107.

⁴⁶⁶ Burke, 117.

⁴⁶⁷ Griffin, 4.

⁴⁶⁸ Walker, Chapter 3, np; Shortridge, 31.

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industrialization.⁴⁶⁹ The railroad arrived in 1869 with the construction of the Hannibal Bridge across the Missouri River, for which African Americans provided a substantial portion of the labor.⁴⁷⁰ The Kansas City Stockyards opened soon after in 1870, and in 1871 Kansas City held its first Industrial Exposition.⁴⁷¹ By the end of the century, the city's economy was thriving.⁴⁷²

Despite the overall economic vitality of this period, most African Americans struggled to make a living. By 1880, over ninety percent of Black workers in Kansas City worked in low-wage general or domestic labor.⁴⁷³ Following the Civil War, particularly in the period after Reconstruction, thousands of African Americans migrated to Kansas City from rural areas of Missouri and the South, partly in search of better employment opportunities.⁴⁷⁴ However, competition for employment was acute for both Black and White workers, and Black workers were less likely than their White counterparts to receive the scarce job opportunities available. Most migrants accepted work wherever they could, and wages were often extremely low.⁴⁷⁵

During the late nineteenth century in Kansas City, the work experiences of low-wage Black and White workers were similar, as the class position of both groups was more determinative of their life chances than race during this period. While African Americans were undoubtedly the most exploited segment of the labor force, their struggle for higher wages and improved living conditions was closely linked to that of low-wage White and immigrant workers. However, manufactured racism led White workers to view their Black counterparts as competitors, undermining any attempts to build class unity between Black and White low-wage workers. Industrialists in Kansas City and elsewhere fostered this division in an attempt to stifle any attempts at unionizing.⁴⁷⁶

The stockyards played a vital role in the city's economy as it recovered from the Civil War. Over the course of the late nineteenth century, the Kansas City stockyards became the second-largest stockyards in the country, second only to Chicago.⁴⁷⁷ At that time, Kansas City was an important terminus for many of the large cattle drives originating in Texas, and served as a shipping point to broader markets. By the end of the nineteenth century, meatpacking represented over ninety percent of the city's industrial output and eventually became the city's first million-dollar industry.⁴⁷⁸ The stockyards also played a vital role for Black employment in late nineteenth century Kansas City. While many other businesses refused to employ African Americans, the stockyards and meatpacking plants gladly exploited Black workers desperate for employment.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁶⁹ Walker, Chapter 3, np.

⁴⁷⁰ Griffin, 46.

⁴⁷¹ Walker Chapter 3, np.

⁴⁷² Shortridge, 53.

⁴⁷³ Walker, Chapter 4, np.

⁴⁷⁴ Coulter, 20.

⁴⁷⁵ Walker, Chapter 4, np.

⁴⁷⁶ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 75.; Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 10.

⁴⁷⁷ John Herron, "Making Meat: Race, Labor, and the Kansas City Stockyards," Kansas City Public Library: The Pendergast Years, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://pendergastkc.org/articles/making-meat-race-labor-and-kansas-city-stockyards>.

⁴⁷⁸ Herron, "Making Meat."

⁴⁷⁹ Rick Halpern and Roger Horowitz, *Meatpackers: An Oral History of Black Packinghouse Workers and Their Struggle for Racial and Economic Equality* (Twayne Publishers, 1996), 65.; Herron, "Making Meat."

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While the stockyards would hire Black workers, they relegated them to the most hazardous and disagreeable positions and offered no opportunity for advancement.⁴⁸⁰ Hours were long and irregular, and the pace of work was relentless and contributed to regular injuries. Cuts and scrapes were common, and more serious injuries such as burns and amputations occurred frequently. Workers also suffered from swollen joints, sore knuckles, and back and neck pain caused by long hours spent hunched over carcasses. Prolonged labor often resulted in arthritis and other disabilities.⁴⁸¹

However, the availability of jobs and relatively high pay made the stockyards a desirable place of employment for Black workers. Only a small number of African Americans working as Pullman porters and teamsters earned more than stockyard workers during this period.⁴⁸² As a result, the stockyards became a major attraction for African Americans migrating from rural Missouri and the South to Kansas City, contributing significantly to the growing Black population during this period.⁴⁸³ By the end of the nineteenth century, nearly twenty-five percent of meatpacking workers were Black, and the stockyards were the single largest employer of Black laborers in Kansas City.⁴⁸⁴

While the railroads and stockyards boomed in the West Bottoms, several business districts were also rapidly growing, including those along Main Street in the city center, Grand Avenue in McGee's Addition, and in Westport.⁴⁸⁵ However, only one percent of business and professional workers during this period were Black. Nonetheless, this small number represented new opportunities and established a critical economic foundation for Kansas City's Black community as it continued to grow.⁴⁸⁶ Of this small group, most Black business and professional workers were men. However, there were a few women entrepreneurs who emerged in the late nineteenth century. As early as the late 1860s, Elizabeth Cecil Cotton and Alpha Smith Minor owned and operated a dressmaking and notions shop in the West Bottoms, which became the first store in Kansas City to sell "ready to wear" clothing (no longer extant).⁴⁸⁷ Tom Bass, one of the most widely known Black businessmen in the region during this period, established the Tom Bass Stable in Westport at 39th and Main Streets in the 1890s (no longer extant). Born into enslavement in Mexico, Missouri, in 1859, Bass learned the skill of horse training and gained international recognition as a master horseman. He also invented the Bass bit, which prevented harm to horses during training.⁴⁸⁸

Some Black Kansas Citians also entered the public sector during this period, marking a significant step toward greater inclusion in government employment. Two Black men, William Davis and Lewis Tompkins, began working as police officers upon the establishment of the Kansas City Police Department (KCPD) in 1874. Davis left the KCPD after a few years, but Tompkins continued to serve as an officer for fifteen years.⁴⁸⁹ In 1883,

⁴⁸⁰ Coulter, 24.

⁴⁸¹ Herron, "Making Meat."

⁴⁸² Halpern and Horowitz, *Meatpackers*, 65.

⁴⁸³ Halpern and Horowitz, *Meatpackers*, 65.

⁴⁸⁴ Herron, "Making Meat."

⁴⁸⁵ Walker, Chapter 4, np.

⁴⁸⁶ Walker, Chapter 4, np.

⁴⁸⁷ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 14.; Walker, Chapter 4, np.

⁴⁸⁸ Walker, Chapter 4, np.; African American Heritage Trail, "Tom Bass."

⁴⁸⁹ Jazzlyn Johnson, "History of Black Officers in the Kansas City Police Department," *The Voice*, February 22, 2022, accessed November 19, 2024, <https://www.communityvoiceks.com/2022/02/22/history-of-black-officers-in-the-kansas-city-police-department/>.

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James Crews began working for the local postal service as a substitute letter carrier, and soon advanced to become the first regular Black letter carrier in Kansas City. He remained with the postal service for forty-seven years before retiring in 1930.⁴⁹⁰ In 1887, Edward S. Baker became the first known Black man hired as a firefighter for the Kansas City Fire Department (KCFD).⁴⁹¹ Although the department had employed Black men since its founding in 1867, they were largely relegated to working in the horse barns and were denied the opportunity to become firefighters. Fire Station No. 11 was organized in 1890, becoming the only all-Black fire company in the state of Missouri, and that year Baker became the first Black firefighter in Kansas City to be promoted to rank of captain.⁴⁹² The company initially operated out of a tent in the Belvidere area, but soon moved to a commercial storefront at 1309 Independence Avenue (extant, second story removed).⁴⁹³ In 1892, the all-Black No. 13 hose reel company formed and operated from the basement of Fire Station No. 4 at 1405 Pennsylvania Avenue (no longer extant).⁴⁹⁴

2.3. Early Twentieth Century: Emergence of Black Entrepreneurship

In the beginning of the twentieth century, African Americans in Kansas City still had little economic influence. By 1912, while African Americans represented nearly ten percent of the city's population, they possessed only 0.0124 percent of the city's total assessed wealth.⁴⁹⁵ That year, the per capita wealth of White Kansas Citians was \$667.96, while the per capita wealth of African Americans was only \$80.61.⁴⁹⁶ Employment opportunities were scarce, especially as the overall population surged, and Black workers were denied a living wage. According to a 1912 study, the average family in Kansas City required approximately \$600 a year in order to maintain a decent standard of living, yet most Black families earned far less. Nearly seventy-five percent earned under \$600 a year, with one-third struggling to survive on less than \$300.⁴⁹⁷

The stockyards continued to be one of the largest employers of Black workers throughout the early twentieth century. By 1920, the Armour & Company facility alone employed 2,000 Black workers, including 250 Black women.⁴⁹⁸ However, the willingness of the stockyards to hire Black workers stood in stark contrast to White-owned businesses elsewhere in Kansas City, who increasingly refused to hire Black workers. By 1929, only 308 out of the city's 1,235 businesses employed African Americans.⁴⁹⁹ Of those, only forty-eight allowed integration of Black and White workers.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁰ Daniel Coleman, "Nelson and James Crews," Kansas City Public Library: The Pendergast Years, accessed November 20, 2024, <https://pendergastkc.org/articles/nelson-and-james-crews>.

⁴⁹¹ *Hoye's City Directory of Kansas City, MO, 1888-1889* (Hoye Directory Co., 1888), 82.

⁴⁹² Gillis, 25.

⁴⁹³ "Don't Get New Station," *The Kansas City Post*, February 15, 1908, 2.

⁴⁹⁴ "The Ladder and Reel," *The Sunday Mail*, February 28, 1892, 5.; *Hoye's City Directory of Kansas City, Missouri*, (Hoye Directory Co., 1893), 761.

⁴⁹⁵ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 10.

⁴⁹⁶ Walker, Chapter 5, np.

⁴⁹⁷ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 10.

⁴⁹⁸ Halpern and Horowitz, *Meatpackers*, 65.

⁴⁹⁹ Halpern and Horowitz, *Meatpackers*, 65.

⁵⁰⁰ Walker, Chapter 6, np.

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As segregation increased during the early twentieth century, many African Americans found themselves gradually pushed from occupations they formerly held. White-owned hotels employed fewer Black waiters and bellboys, fewer Black nurses were employed to care for White children, and White barbers displaced Black barbers.⁵⁰¹ Most African Americans in Kansas City who were fortunate enough to find employment during this period generally worked in low-wage jobs.⁵⁰² For many families, everyone had to work to support the family, including children. One 1913 housing study found that Lincoln High School, the only high school at the time for Black children, enrolled only 311 students, of whom 104 were boys, suggesting that children regularly worked to support their families.⁵⁰³ Black women were also significantly represented in the workforce. While there has never been a period in history where the majority of Black women could choose not to work outside of the home, twice the number of Black women worked during this period than their White counterparts. In 1912, sixty-three percent of Black women between the ages of fourteen and sixty contributed to the city's workforce. Over half worked as laundresses earning \$1.35 per hour, while thirty percent worked as domestic laborers, earning an annual income of \$200.⁵⁰⁴

While many White-owned businesses rejected Black workers, African Americans were able to find some employment opportunities in the public sector, such as the Metropolitan Street Railway Company, the KCPD, and the KCFD.⁵⁰⁵ However, opportunities within these institutions were still scarce, and Black workers were largely segregated and denied opportunities for professional advancement. Within the KCPD, Black officers were largely restricted to District 6, headquartered at 2011 Flora Avenue (no longer extant), whose territory encompassed the majority-Black Lincoln-Coles district. Black officers were also prohibited from arresting White people without approval from White officers.⁵⁰⁶ One of the Black men to join the force during the early twentieth century was Lafayette Tillman, who graduated from Oberlin College and became first lieutenant of the 49th Infantry Regiment in the Spanish-American War of 1898. Tillman joined the KCPD in 1902 and stayed on the force until his death in 1914.⁵⁰⁷

By 1920, only eleven Black police officers and six Black detectives served within the entire state of Missouri, with eight of those officers and one detective serving in Kansas City.⁵⁰⁸ During the 1920s, Charles Edwards and Matthew A. Foster, both White men, respectively became the KCPD Chief of Police and the head of the city's Board of Police Commissioners. Under their leadership, the KCPD launched a series of "anti-vice" raids, which largely and brutally targeted the Black community.⁵⁰⁹ Despite these challenges, inclusion within the department slowly progressed. In 1929, Cornelius "Tug" Carter, an officer stationed at Flora Avenue, was promoted to become the first Black sergeant in the KCPD.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰¹ Theodore A. Brown, *K.C.: A History of Kansas City, Missouri* (Pruett Publishing Co., 1978), 97.

⁵⁰² Walker, Chapter 5, np.

⁵⁰³ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 83.

⁵⁰⁴ Walker, Chapter 5, np.; Walker, Chapter 6, np.

⁵⁰⁵ Walker, Chapter 5, np.

⁵⁰⁶ "'Tug' Carter K.C.'s First Negro Police Sgt.," *The Kansas City American*, August 22, 1929, p1.

⁵⁰⁷ Gillis, 23.

⁵⁰⁸ Johnson, "History of Black Officers in the Kansas City Police Department."

⁵⁰⁹ "Kansas City 'Clean-up' On," *The Kansas City Star*, February 2, 1921, p17.

⁵¹⁰ Johnson, "History of Black Officers in the Kansas City Police Department."

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Fire Station No. 11 remained the only fire station in Kansas City manned entirely by Black firefighters, although a few Black firefighters were assigned to majority-White stations during this period. In 1908, after No. 11 had petitioned the city for a new, purpose-built firehouse for many years, officials instead assigned a newly constructed station on Virginia Street to an all-White company and No. 11 was relocated to an older, outdated firehouse at 1812 Vine Street (exterior walls extant as ruins).⁵¹¹ In the 1920s, after twenty-five years at Fire Station No. 11, Joseph King, Jr. was assigned to the KCFD headquarters at Fire Station No. 2, located downtown at 1020 Central Street (extant, NRHP 1982).⁵¹²

Employment in other sectors of the city was largely closed to African Americans. They were often permitted to take examinations for employment but were never contacted for work or were repeatedly informed that there were no available positions.⁵¹³

Against the backdrop of employment discrimination within White-owned businesses and increasing segregation within Kansas City, local Black churches and organizations encouraged and assisted the development of Black-owned businesses and Black professionals.⁵¹⁴ Some Black-owned businesses operated in the downtown business district during this period, including the Burton Publishing Company (722 Main Street, no longer extant), Southside Pressing Company (1509 Main Street, no longer extant), and the Ashcraft Barber Shop (331 West 6th Street, no longer extant).⁵¹⁵ Other African Americans opened businesses that were largely grouped together in several areas around the Black enclave in the Lincoln-Coles district. One such area developed on 12th Street between Vine Street and Woodland Avenue, one developed around 18th and Vine Streets, and another developed around 31st Street and Troost Avenue.⁵¹⁶ In addition to providing African Americans with goods and services, Black-owned businesses in these commercial districts created a sense of economic vitality and mobility for the Black community and provided safe and welcoming places for Black Kansas Citians to shop.⁵¹⁷

By 1911, Kansas City's Black community owned eighty-five tailor shops, seventy-five pool halls, and twenty-five dry cleaners. There were also four undertaking parlors, seven saloons, one shoe store, one dry goods store, and a number of restaurants.⁵¹⁸ In 1912, Black professionals included four dentists, twenty-three physicians, and six attorneys earning between \$1,200 and \$1,500 a year. This growing group of Black professionals represented significant economic and educational strides for the Black community, but in 1912 the population of Black professionals still only represented less than one percent of the city's total Black population.⁵¹⁹

Black community leaders worked diligently to support Black workers and increase Black entrepreneurship. Reverend James Wesley Hulse of St. Stephen Baptist Church was a major proponent of African Americans owning their own businesses and heavily encouraged his congregation to patronize them. He once informed his

⁵¹¹ "Don't Get New Station," *The Kansas City Post*, February 15, 1908, 2.

⁵¹² "Bury Joseph King; Fireman for 40 Years," *The Kansas City Call*, April 17, 1936, 3.

⁵¹³ Walker, Chapter 6, np.

⁵¹⁴ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 15.; Halpern and Horowitz, *Meatpackers*, 66.

⁵¹⁵ Walker, Chapter 5, np.

⁵¹⁶ Walker, Chapter 5, np.; African American Heritage Trail, "31st & Troost Commercial District."

⁵¹⁷ Walker, Chapter 5, np.

⁵¹⁸ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 14.

⁵¹⁹ Walker, Chapter 5, np.

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congregation that if they utilized the services of a White undertaker, they would “have to make funeral arrangements in a White church.”⁵²⁰ In 1926, the People’s Finance Corporation was founded with T.B. Watkins as president with the goal of providing loans to aspiring Black business owners.⁵²¹

The 18th and Vine Street commercial district in particular became one of the cornerstones of Black economic activity in the early to mid-twentieth century.⁵²² While a significant portion of the commercial and retail operations within this district were White-owned up to and through World War II, by the mid-twentieth century it was recognized as the center for Black commerce in the city and home to some of the most prominent Black professionals.⁵²³ Early businesses included the Street Hotel, the first Black hotel in Kansas City, operated by Reuben and Della Street at 18th Street and The Paseo Boulevard (no longer extant). The Street Hotel later became a Green Book site.⁵²⁴ The Lincoln Building at 1601-1607 18th Street housed the Lincoln Furniture Company, offices for doctors and attorneys, and the Lincoln Dance Hall on the third story (extant).⁵²⁵ The district office of the Standard Life Insurance Company at 1507 18th Street employed twenty-five local agents to service the community and took great pride in giving African Americans rates that other companies extended to White customers (no longer extant). Edward Jones operated The Peoples Undertaking Company at 1211 18th Street (no longer extant).⁵²⁶ In 1919, the *Kansas City Call* newspaper opened at 1311 18th Street (no longer extant) and moved to 1715-1723 18th Street (extant) in 1922.⁵²⁷

2.4. Mid-Twentieth Century: The Great Depression, World War II, and Growing Black Entrepreneurship

Widespread conditions of poverty within the Black community worsened during the Great Depression.⁵²⁸ In 1930, approximately sixty-seven percent of the total Black population over the age of ten in Kansas City was employed, but over fifty percent still worked in low-wage positions, and Black workers continued to face exclusion from employment at many White-owned businesses.⁵²⁹ Thirty-five percent of African Americans worked in domestic and personal service jobs, while thirty-one percent worked in manufacturing and mechanical industries.⁵³⁰ As employment opportunities vanished during the Depression, an increasing number of African Americans found themselves jobless or underemployed. Whereas eighty-five percent of Black men in Kansas City were in the job market in 1920, only seventy-three percent of Black men were wage earners by 1930.⁵³¹ Additionally, while Black women had always largely worked outside of the home, the number of Black women workers increased during this period, demonstrating a need for families to make up for the

⁵²⁰ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 13.

⁵²¹ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 15.

⁵²² The “Historic Resources of the 18th and Vine Area of Kansas City, Missouri” MPDF and the 18th and Vine Historic District were both listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1991.

⁵²³ Coulter, 258.; Philip Thomason, “18th and Vine Street District,” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Park Service, 1991), 8:3.

⁵²⁴ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 14.; African American Heritage Trail, “Street Hotel.”

⁵²⁵ African American Heritage Trail, “Lincoln Building.”

⁵²⁶ Walker, Chapter 5, np.

⁵²⁷ Walker, Chapter 5, np.

⁵²⁸ Walker, Chapter 6, np.

⁵²⁹ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 16.

⁵³⁰ Walker, Chapter 6, np.

⁵³¹ Coulter, 273.

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unemployment or underemployment of Black men. However, the majority of job opportunities available for Black women were limited to low-paying positions, such as laundresses, waitresses, and domestic workers, and they were often not steady or secure.⁵³²

The Depression had a substantial impact on the Kansas City industrial market. Three hundred companies went bankrupt between 1929 and 1933 alone. Meatpacking employment declined by twenty-five percent, and those who were able to retain their jobs found their wages cut and their workweeks shortened.⁵³³ More than half of the 1,600 jobs in the stockyards held by Black workers in 1920 either no longer existed or were held by White workers by 1930.⁵³⁴ The employment that had sustained many Black workers throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the stockyards and railroads all but disappeared.⁵³⁵ Within just a few months of the Depression's onset, Black workers, especially Black men, saw fewer job openings than they had just a few years earlier. They also found a racialized ceiling on what little work they were able to obtain.⁵³⁶ As a result, many African Americans in Kansas City were jobless or working too sporadically to support their families. They sought the assistance of a variety of government agencies, such as the Missouri Employment Service, but more often than not they were directed to contact the local chapter of the Urban League, a Black-led mutual aid organization (see 6. *Religious & Community Organizations*).⁵³⁷

In 1931, Kansas City Mayor Tom Pendergast and City Manager Henry McElroy implemented their Ten-Year Plan, an initiative to provide jobs for unemployed laborers during the Depression while improving city infrastructure.⁵³⁸ The city passed a \$50 million bond initiative in 1931, and several years later the Plan received some federal funds through programs such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which helped finance improvements to the city's roads, sewer system, water works, parks, and pedestrian walkways. One of the largest infrastructure projects was the paving of Brush Creek (extant), a small waterway that runs along present-day Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. Numerous buildings were also constructed, including the Municipal Auditorium (301 West 13th Street, extant), City Hall (414 East 12th Street, extant), the Police Department Headquarters Building (1125 Locust Street, extant), and the Jackson County Courthouse (415 East 12th Street, extant).⁵³⁹ Fire Station No. 11 also received a new building at 2033 Vine Street (extant), the first and only firehouse in Kansas City purpose built for Black firefighters.⁵⁴⁰

One of the most enduring legacies of the Pendergast machine was its ability to keep Kansas City working throughout the worst of the Depression. Projects under the Ten-Year Plan used manual labor even when machinery would have been more efficient; as a result, many Kansas Citians were employed while their counterparts in other cities struggled to find work.⁵⁴¹ The Plan also worked to line the pockets of Pendergast and

⁵³² Coulter, 274.

⁵³³ Herron, "Making Meat."

⁵³⁴ Coulter, 274.

⁵³⁵ Coulter, 272.

⁵³⁶ Coulter, 273.

⁵³⁷ Coulter, 273.

⁵³⁸ Matt Reeves, "When Federal Millions Poured Into Tom's Town" (Kansas City Public Library and The Kansas City Star: What's Your KCQ, October 7, 2019).

⁵³⁹ Reeves, "When Federal Millions Poured Into Tom's Town."

⁵⁴⁰ "Fire Company Moves Monday Into New Home," *The Kansas City Call*, September 18, 1931.

⁵⁴¹ Coulter, 271.

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members of his machine; much of the concrete used for the numerous infrastructure and building projects came from Pendergast-owned companies.⁵⁴² Nevertheless, between 15,000 and 22,000 workers in Kansas City found employment through these projects throughout the 1930s.⁵⁴³ However, White workers were given priority for most job assignments under the Plan, and Black workers remained hard-pressed to find work that could sustain themselves and their families. One of the few exceptions was the Brush Creek project, which employed a higher number of Black laborers than other projects; Black workers accounted for approximately 600, or twenty percent, of the 2,700 individuals employed.⁵⁴⁴ It is unknown how many, if any, Black workers contributed to the new Fire Station No. 11 building.

Additional employment opportunities surfaced with federally funded programs such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the Public Works Administration (PWA), the Civil Works Administration (CWA), and the National Youth Administration (NYA). However, Black residents in Jackson County were initially excluded from these programs until federal officials threatened to withhold funding from the entire state of Missouri unless racial restrictions were lifted.⁵⁴⁵ Once Black workers were admitted to these programs, administrators still overwhelmingly prioritized White workers.⁵⁴⁶ The National Reemployment Service, tasked with finding jobs for unemployed workers, established a classification system that largely limited Black workers to domestic and personal service labor, regardless of their qualifications.⁵⁴⁷

While African Americans faced extreme and worsened poverty throughout the Depression, for many it felt like much of the same. Harold L. Holliday Sr., a Black lawyer who served in the Missouri House of Representatives, described his childhood in Kansas City during the Depression in a 1976 oral history:⁵⁴⁸

The Depression and that sort of thing didn't have any impact on me when it first started. It never did particularly, because we were poor to begin with. We were poor when it was over. And we were poor while it was going on. So the impact . . . we still ate.⁵⁴⁹

Throughout the Great Depression, Black women organizers gave growing attention to the limited employment opportunities for African Americans in Kansas City, particularly in the stores they regularly frequented. In 1931, the Housewives League, a local branch of the National Negro Business League, launched an initiative to encourage shopping at businesses and stores in the city that offered employment opportunities to Black residents. Throughout the 1930s, African Americans in the city also led a "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaign to advocate for fair employment practices and support businesses that hired Black workers.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴² Coulter, 271-272.

⁵⁴³ Reeves, "When Federal Millions Poured Into Tom's Town."

⁵⁴⁴ Coulter, 272.; Walker, Chapter 6, np.

⁵⁴⁵ Coulter, 287.

⁵⁴⁶ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 19.

⁵⁴⁷ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 20.

⁵⁴⁸ African American Heritage Trail, "Harold L. Holliday Sr."

⁵⁴⁹ Harold Holliday, "An Interview with Harold Holliday," Interview by Horace M. Peterson III, September 17, 1976, Black Archives of Mid-America, Available at the Kansas City Public Library Missouri Valley Special Collections, https://kchistory.org/audio/interview-harold-holliday?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=7fd9a1ae9ec8d9475080&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=.

⁵⁵⁰ Walker, Chapter 6, np.

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As African Americans encountered discriminatory employment practices in White-owned industries and businesses, they also confronted racist policies as they shopped for goods in White-owned businesses. In the 1930s, Adler's, a department store in the downtown business district (1212 Main Street, no longer extant), announced that due to complaints from White customers, the store would no longer allow Black customers to try on hats and garments. The store attempted to placate their Black customers by claiming that management disliked the new policy, but felt it was "forced" to adopt it.⁵⁵¹ Other department stores enacted similar policies. The Jones Store (12th and Main Streets, no longer extant), which had previously upheld a non-discriminatory policy toward African Americans, reversed its stance in 1935 after receiving "complaints from whites" and began requiring Black women to use a separate restroom in the basement boiler room. The Black community quickly organized and protested, threatening to cancel their accounts. A month later, the store announced a "compromise" by installing a wall in the main restrooms to separate Black and White customers.⁵⁵² This "myth of the bigoted client" to justify segregation was a misdirection tactic that White business owners and decision leaders frequently employed and perfected throughout the Jim Crow period.⁵⁵³

Support within the Black community continued for the establishment and patronization of Black-owned businesses due to the parallel desires to further Black economic power and opportunity and escape racist discriminatory practices at White establishments. In 1930, the Men's Progressive Club sponsored the first African American Business Exposition, and in 1939, the Kansas City Negro Chamber of Commerce was organized under the leadership of James H. Herbert.⁵⁵⁴ Through efforts like these, as well as the continued efforts of organizations such as the People's Finance Corporation and the staunch support of African Americans to shop exclusively at Black-owned businesses, the number of Black-owned businesses steadily rose.⁵⁵⁵

In 1931, Kansas City contained eighteen Black-owned grocery stores with a capital investment of approximately \$85,000 and a combined annual payroll of \$108,300. That same year, there were sixteen Black-owned taxicab businesses with fleets ranging from one to twenty cabs. By 1934, the number of taxi businesses had increased to twenty, and by 1940, African Americans owned fifty-seven percent of taxi businesses throughout the city.⁵⁵⁶ That year, the only areas in the Lincoln-Coles district where White-owned businesses outnumbered those owned by African Americans were on Prospect Avenue between 18th and 24th Streets and Brooklyn Avenue between 10th and 28th Streets.⁵⁵⁷ Black businesses thrived, despite the Depression, as they provided goods, services, and products to their loyal customers. The resulting economic vitality led to the continued proliferation and diversification of Black-owned businesses.⁵⁵⁸

Many hoped that the war effort during World War II would ameliorate the dire unemployment that African Americans faced throughout the 1930s. However, discriminatory employment practices continued, and African Americans still found themselves unable to find work. As the United States entered the war, North American

⁵⁵¹ Walker, Chapter 6, np.

⁵⁵² Walker, Chapter 6, np.

⁵⁵³ Schirmer, 147.

⁵⁵⁴ Walker, Chapter 6, np.

⁵⁵⁵ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 15.

⁵⁵⁶ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 15.

⁵⁵⁷ Walker, Chapter 6, np.

⁵⁵⁸ Walker, Chapter 6, np.

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Aviation announced plans for a bomber plant in Kansas City, but the company maintained that Black workers would not be considered for employment.⁵⁵⁹ In March of 1942, over 1,300 African Americans gathered at the Municipal Auditorium to protest the discriminatory practices of the wartime industries.⁵⁶⁰ Similar protests to discrimination in wartime industries were held in major cities across the United States, including a march on Washington in 1941, organized by A. Philip Randolph, the national president of the Pullman car porters' union (see 7.2. *Civil Rights Activism*).⁵⁶¹

The protests led President Roosevelt to establish the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) that could recommend the cancellation of defense contracts in cases of ongoing discrimination. However, Roosevelt's appointed chairman Mark Ethridge defended the practice of segregation in defense plants, claiming that nondiscrimination was a federal order "in the Nazi dictator pattern," and that "not even the mechanized armies of the earth, Allied or Axis . . . could now force the Southern white people to give up the principle of social segregation" in war industries.⁵⁶² Public uproar forced his resignation as chairman, but he remained as an FEPC member.⁵⁶³ The FEPC proved to have little to no teeth in forcing industries to establish equal hiring practices. In Kansas City, Standard Steel responded to the establishment of the FEPC by saying, "We have not had a Negro working in twenty-five years and do not plan to start now."⁵⁶⁴

Opportunities for Black Kansas Citians to obtain government positions also remained limited throughout the Great Depression and World War II. In 1936, B.H. Muldrew became the first Black postal window clerk at Station B, located at East 15th Street and Prospect Avenue (no longer extant).⁵⁶⁵ However, meaningful gains in public employment were significantly undermined following the collapse of the Pendergast political machine in 1939 and the subsequent Reform Movement (see 7.1.2. *The Rise of Black Support for the Democratic Party and the Pendergast Machine* and 7.1.3. *The Reform Movement*). After Lear B. Reed assumed leadership of the Board of Police Commissioners, the KCPD saw a significant rollback in Black employment, with the majority of Black officers removed from the force.⁵⁶⁶ By 1941, out of six to seven hundred KCPD employees, only twelve were Black.⁵⁶⁷ Police brutality against Black Kansas Citians also increased, culminating in the violent assault and killing of Harrison Ware by White officers. After facing public pressure, Reed ultimately resigned.⁵⁶⁸ Despite the KCPD's overwhelmingly White and male composition throughout the 1940s, Genevieve Allen broke new ground in 1945 by becoming the city's first unofficial Black policewoman. Initially hired as a clerk, Allen was promoted to Acting Policewoman during World War II, when the department faced significant personnel shortages as many officers enlisted into military service.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁵⁹ Walker, Chapter 6, np.

⁵⁶⁰ Walker, Chapter 6, np.

⁵⁶¹ Rothstein, 161-162.

⁵⁶² Rothstein, 162-163.

⁵⁶³ Rothstein, 163.

⁵⁶⁴ Rothstein, 166.

⁵⁶⁵ African American Heritage Trail, "James Crews Post Station."

⁵⁶⁶ Johnson, "History of Black Officers in the Kansas City Police Department."

⁵⁶⁷ "Justice Has a Dollar and Cents Value, Too," *The Kansas City Call*, August 29, 1941, p25.

⁵⁶⁸ Schirmer, 227.

⁵⁶⁹ Johnson, "History of Black Officers in the Kansas City Police Department."

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Opportunities within the KCFD also remained slim. As retired KCFD Battalion Chief Cecil Daniel later recalled, “When I filled out an application for the fire department in 1941, I really had little hope of getting on. There were only 10 black firemen in the whole city—and they were in the Negro company, No. 11.”

Opportunities for promotion were also limited. As Daniel stated, “...the only way you could be promoted was if one of the two black captains died or retired, and then there were eight men waiting for that job.”⁵⁷⁰ Despite numerous vacancies in the KCFD following the onset of World War II, Black firefighters were still prohibited from filling vacancies in White companies.⁵⁷¹

In the late 1940s, Black community leaders advocated for expanded employment opportunities within the KCFD, and their sustained efforts successfully pressured Mayor John Gage and Fire Chief John Lynch to hire additional Black firefighters. By the 1950s, Black companies were assigned to several stations, including No. 15 (825 Mulberry Street, no longer extant), No. 18 (2534 Prospect Avenue, extant), No. 9 (919 West 24th Street, extant), and at the Municipal Airport.⁵⁷² As each new company was established, many experienced men who began their careers at Fire Station No. 11, such as Eugene King and Herman Lewis, were appointed to leadership roles as captains.⁵⁷³ In 1953, a new post office substation was also opened at 1825 Vine Street (extant). Muldrew, who had become the Kansas City’s first Black postal window clerk in 1936, became superintendent of the new Crews substation, named in honor of James Crews, the first Black letter carrier in Kansas City.⁵⁷⁴

The KCPD also began to make progress during the 1950s. In 1952, Leon M. Jordan returned to the KCPD following a leave of absence during which he served as Chief of Police in Liberia, Missouri. Upon his return, he was promoted first to sergeant and later to lieutenant. In 1954, Rosie Mason began working for the department; however, like Genevieve Allen before her, she served in an unofficial capacity, as the police academy did not admit women at the time. That same year, Jordan’s former partner, Clifford Warren, was assigned to a newly created special investigative unit focused on cases involving Black residents. In 1956, Warren was promoted to lieutenant and appointed administrative aide to Police Chief Bernard Brannon, becoming the highest-ranking Black administrative official in the department to date.⁵⁷⁵ Alvin Brooks, who served in the KCPD from 1954 to 1964, noted that this period was significant for the department:

When I came on, the police department was just getting to the point where black folks could arrest white folks. So I came on in the period where we could arrest them, but the districts were still restricted. In other words, our assignments were strictly to the black districts. And it was a quota system. It was a quota system in terms of the number of black officers that they would hire. They only hired enough to police those black areas. And those black areas, as I recall, were from Troost to Prospect and from 12th Street to 23rd Street.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁰ “Fire Heroism, Climb Against Bias Recalled,” *The Kansas City Star*, June 24, 1974, 1.

⁵⁷¹ “Negro Fireman Dies,” *Kansas City Journal*, April 13, 1936, 1.; *Kansas City, Missouri, Fire Department 1868-2006*, 24-25.

⁵⁷² “Fire Department Now Integrated,” *The Kansas City Call*, May 16, 1958, 1.

⁵⁷³ “70 Years of Continuous Service,” *The Kansas City Call*, July 14, 1989, 2.; “Fire Heroism, Climb Against Bias Recalled,” *The Kansas City Star*, June 24, 1974, 1.

⁵⁷⁴ African American Heritage Trail, “James Crews Post Station.”

⁵⁷⁵ Johnson, “History of Black Officers in the Kansas City Police Department.”

⁵⁷⁶ Alvin Brooks, interview by Horace M. Peterson, III, *Speaking of Kansas City: Regional Oral History Collection*, June 2, 1976, <https://speakingkc.org/collection/interview-alvin-brooks>.

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According to Brooks, Districts 123 and 124 that covered the predominantly African American neighborhoods of Kansas City were patrolled by six Black police officers.⁵⁷⁷ In 1957, Dowdal Davis of *The Kansas City Call* was the first African American appointed to the Board of Police Commissioners.⁵⁷⁸ In 1958, six Black police officers were reassigned from the police headquarters to Sheffield Station where they patrolled along with White police officers.⁵⁷⁹

Integration of the Kansas City Fire Department began in 1958 and was a swift affair. At the time, there were approximately 75 Black firefighters employed by the city (out of 680 total), fifteen of whom had reached the rank of captain. There were also five all-Black stations (Nos. 11, 18, 9, 15, and Municipal Airport). Several Black captains were put in charge of all-White companies, including Captain George Boyd of Station No. 11, who was put in charge of Station No. 26 at 6402 East 37th Street and Captain Cecil Daniel, who moved to Station No. 2 at 1020 Central. Captain James Mining, a White firefighter, was moved to Station No. 11 as a part of the department's integration efforts.⁵⁸⁰ *The Kansas City Call* commended the KCFD, stating that "the abandonment of segregation in the fire department is a major step...the fire department becomes the first city government to become truly operated on a democratic basis."⁵⁸¹ Integration of the fire department also lifted the ban on promoting Black firefighters beyond the rank of captain. In 1960, Captain Raymond E. Daniel became the first Black firefighter promoted to battalion chief. Within a month, his brother Cecil Daniel was also promoted to battalion chief.⁵⁸²

In 1960, Clarence M. Kelley, a White man who had worked for the FBI from the 1940s through the 1960s, became Chief of the KCPD. Kelley perpetuated segregation in the KCPD and police brutality against African Americans in the community. He was known to firmly defend White officers against complaints of racial profiling and violence, regardless of the scenario.⁵⁸³ According to Brooks, Kelley generally overlooked the needs of under-served communities in Kansas City, stating, "Kelley was not sensitive to the black community, nor to the Mexican American community, and to that fact, the poor white community." In the 1960s, KCPD staff was over ninety-four percent White.⁵⁸⁴ Brooks noted that he was overlooked for a promotion, despite scoring higher on the test than the White officer who was ultimately given the position.⁵⁸⁵ By the late 1960s, some progress had been made with the police academy finally opening its doors to women. Rosie Mason graduated from the academy in 1967, becoming the first official African American police officer in the KCPD, and was later promoted to detective in 1971.⁵⁸⁶

During the unrest following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, KCPD had nearly 1,300 officers, but only five percent were Black.⁵⁸⁷ Following the events of 1968, Kelley refused to take

⁵⁷⁷ Alvin Brooks, interview by Horace M. Peterson, III.

⁵⁷⁸ "New KC Police Board Wins Community Approval," *The Kansas City Call*, March 1, 1957, p3.

⁵⁷⁹ "Congratulations to Firemen!" *The Kansas City Call*, May 16, 1958, p19.

⁵⁸⁰ "Fire Department Now Integrated," *The Kansas City Call*, May 16, 1958, 1.

⁵⁸¹ "Congratulations to Firemen!" *The Kansas City Call*, May 16, 1958, p19.

⁵⁸² "Fire Department Now Integrated," *The Kansas City Call*, May 16, 1958, 1.; *Kansas City, Missouri, Fire Department 1868-2006*, 33.

⁵⁸³ Kubic, 78.

⁵⁸⁴ "City Shaken By Riots," *The Kansas City Star*, May 5 1968, p1.

⁵⁸⁵ Alvin Brooks, interview by Horace M. Peterson, III.

⁵⁸⁶ Johnson, "History of Black Officers in the Kansas City Police Department."

⁵⁸⁷ Kubic, 83.

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accountability for KCPD's role in accelerating the unrest, instead placing the blame on the Black Panthers, SCLC, and other civil rights groups. In the late 1960s and into the 1970s, Kelley created a specific squad to monitor and intimidate 'radical' Black activists. In 1973 President Nixon nominated Kelley as Director of the FBI, although after his departure racial profiling and police abuse of Black citizens persisted. Black police officers remained less than six percent of the overall police force in Kansas City by the end of the 1970s.⁵⁸⁸

Other prominent African American members of the KCPD or Police Board of Commissioners in the twentieth century included Lloyd DeGraffenreid, John Layton, John Wells, Major Marylyn Brauninger-Stovall, Rev. David O. Shipley, Girard T. Bryant, Gwendolyn M. Wells, Julia A. Bush, and Darryl Forte.⁵⁸⁹

The 18th and Vine commercial district in particular prospered during the postwar period, serving as a significant anchor of Black economic and social life.⁵⁹⁰ The increase in segregation during the postwar period under the practice of redlining, which largely restricted the growing Black population to Kansas City's East Side, ironically boosted development of the 18th and Vine commercial district and its Black-owned businesses through the 1950s and 1960s.⁵⁹¹ The People's Finance Corporation operated within the district, as did the United Negro Democratic Association, the Urban League, and the local chapter of the NAACP. The district was home to the newspaper offices of the *Kansas City Call* and the *Kansas City American*. The Lincoln Building (1601 East 17th Street, extant), Shannon Building (no longer extant), and Roberts Building (1826-1830 Vine Street, extant) housed professional offices occupied by doctors, dentists, and lawyers. Several life insurance companies held offices within the district, including the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, McKinley Neal, Acme Life, and Universal Life. Funeral homes, hardware stores, drug stores, and grocery stores operated out of various buildings and storefronts. Theaters, dinner clubs, and dance halls provided entertainment within the district, and nearly every block contained restaurants of various sizes and specialties.⁵⁹²

2.5. Late Twentieth Century and Beyond

After the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, integration of businesses and population dispersion out of the Lincoln-Coles district gradually led to the decline of its commercial districts. Many stores closed as shoppers went elsewhere, and most Black professionals moved or opened their offices downtown or other sections of the city.⁵⁹³

Among those Black professionals was William H. Johnson, Sr., who in 1965 became the first Black architect to join the Kansas City Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. That year, he opened his own firm downtown in the Law Building at 1201 Grand Boulevard (no longer extant). Johnson designed several public buildings in Kansas City during his career, including the Holy Temple Homes at 5100 Leeds Trafficway (1970, demolished), the Linwood Multipurpose Center addition at 3200 Wayne Avenue (1971, extant), the Allen Gardens Housing Project at 3800 Elmwood (1971, demolished), and the Linwood YMCA at 3800 East

⁵⁸⁸ Kubic, 136.

⁵⁸⁹ Johnson, "History of Black Officers in the Kansas City Police Department."

⁵⁹⁰ Thomason, "18th and Vine Street District," 7:4.

⁵⁹¹ Coulter, 294.

⁵⁹² Walker, Chapter 6, np.; Thomason, "18th and Vine Street District," 7:1-4.

⁵⁹³ Thomason, "18th and Vine Street District," 7:5.

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Linwood Boulevard (1975, extant). Johnson also designed his own home at 100 W. Bannister Road (1971, extant), where he eventually operated his firm until he retired in 1998 and where he lived until his death in 2008.⁵⁹⁴

Many commercial buildings in the Lincoln-Coles district sat vacant and were eventually razed, causing remaining businesses to leave the area. By 1975, the *Kansas City Star* described 18th and Vine as “a ghost town, complete with its urban tumbleweeds—broken glass, potholes, cracked sidewalks and boarded-up buildings.”⁵⁹⁵ By the early 1980s, many buildings were replaced with vacant lots and parking lots.⁵⁹⁶ However, revitalization efforts in the 18th and Vine commercial district beginning in the 1990s created the American Jazz Museum, the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, the restoration of the Gem Theater, and new adjacent housing. The *Kansas City Call* still operates from the building at 1715-1723 18th Street (extant), and the Black Archives of Mid-America operates from the Parade Park Maintenance building at 1722 East 17th Terrace. The 18th and Vine district continues to serve as a vibrant center of Black life in Kansas City.

⁵⁹⁴ African American Heritage Trail, “William H. Johnson, Sr.”

⁵⁹⁵ Zeb Larson, “There Goes the Neighborhood: What Really Caused the Decline of 18th and Vine,” *Scalawag Magazine*, December 8, 2020, <https://scalawagmagazine.org/2020/12/kansas-city-mo-black-music-history/>.

⁵⁹⁶ Thomason, “18th and Vine Street District,” 7:5.

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3. ARTS & CULTURE

Black jazz, baseball, and barbecue are cornerstone elements of Kansas City's cultural identity, each playing a significant role in shaping the city's history. Jazz music flourished in Kansas City in the early twentieth century, with legendary musicians establishing the city as a major jazz center on a national stage. The Kansas City Monarchs, one of the most celebrated and well-known Negro League teams, also played a pivotal role in the city's identity, showcasing Black talent and helping to pave the way for integration in Major League Baseball. Kansas City's distinctive style of barbecue, which blends influences from Black cooking traditions, became famous nationwide for its rich flavors and techniques, further cementing the city's place as a cultural center. Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in the face of systemic racism and hardship, African Americans in Kansas City built lasting cultural institutions that are central to the city's identity and continue to shape its cultural landscape.

3.1. Jazz

Jazz is one of the most influential and distinctive musical genres to emerge from the United States, with roots deeply tied to Black culture and experiences. During more than 250 years of enslavement in the Americas, Africans and African Americans used singing to express their daily experiences and emotions. Their singing evolved into distinct musical forms, such as the spiritual. Spirituals often referenced Christian narratives of triumph over oppression, including stories of heroes confronting powerful adversaries and the Israelites' bondage in Egypt, paralleling the lived experiences and struggles of enslaved African Americans.⁵⁹⁷ Well known examples include "Go Down Moses" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot."⁵⁹⁸ This music served many purposes during enslavement, one of the most important as an expression and assertion of the humanity of those enslaved. With their singing, enslaved African Americans relayed musical traditions found in the various African cultures from which they and their ancestors were forcibly taken. Furthermore, as enslaved individuals were prohibited from reading or writing, oral tradition through song was a fundamental source of communication and communion, and a way of preserving history and culture.⁵⁹⁹

Following the Civil War, African Americans continued to document their experiences through music, building on spirituals and creating different styles to express their newfound freedom and all it entailed, including blues, ragtime, and jazz.⁶⁰⁰ Jazz traces its origins to New Orleans, but it simultaneously developed across the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with unique regionalities.⁶⁰¹ Black musicians across the country, including those from New Orleans, New York, Chicago, and Kansas City, developed distinct approaches to performances rooted in the vocal traditions born from enslavement.⁶⁰² Jazz musicians fused elements of the African American and European American musical traditions into a music style that spoke to

⁵⁹⁷ Sandra Jean Graham, *Spirituals and the Birth of a Black Entertainment Industry* (University of Illinois, 2018), 1.

⁵⁹⁸ Graham, *Spirituals and the Birth of a Black Entertainment Industry*, 32.

⁵⁹⁹ Leonard Brown, *Kansas City—And All That's Jazz* (Andrews McMeel Publishing, 1999), 1.

⁶⁰⁰ Brown, *And All That's Jazz*, 1-2.

⁶⁰¹ Thomas J. Hennessey, *From Jazz to Swing: African American Jazz Musicians and Their Music, 1890-1935* (Wayne State University Press, 1994), iv.

⁶⁰² Brown, *And All That's Jazz*, 2.

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their own experiences as well as to the realities of the entertainment industry at the turn of the century. It also represents the attempts of Black entertainers to explore their role in American society.⁶⁰³

During the 1920s, jazz became the “soundtrack of the Roaring Twenties.”⁶⁰⁴ Known as the Jazz Age, this period saw jazz gain widespread popularity nationally and internationally.⁶⁰⁵ Master musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton, Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington, Bessie Smith, Alberta Hunter, and Bennie Moten were pioneers of the genre and created the foundations for jazz performance and aesthetics. The invention of the radio and phonograph expanded its reach, increasing exposure and creating high demand for the new music.⁶⁰⁶ With a growing population of African Americans, Kansas City became a hub for jazz performance in the 1920s and 1930s. Its rise was also in large part due to the “corrupt but economically stimulating” Pendergast political machine (see 7.1.2. *The Rise of Black Support for the Democratic Party*).⁶⁰⁷

From 1925 to 1938, Pendergast and his associates controlled Kansas City with crime as a profitable side business, particularly liquor, gambling, and vice.⁶⁰⁸ Pendergast’s machine and a bribed police force allowed drinking and gambling to flourish through the Prohibition years. After the onset of the Great Depression, Pendergast continued to foster a legally permissive environment where the clubs and dance halls across the city could run around the clock.⁶⁰⁹ These clubs provided important jobs through the Depression, particularly for Black musicians. While the Depression had a chilling effect on Black entertainment elsewhere in the country, there was “no shortage of work” in the clubs and music halls of Kansas City.⁶¹⁰ At the same time, the lively activity of the clubs and dance halls within the increasingly Black Lincoln-Coles district helped perpetuate the false and racist belief among White residents that the presence of African Americans led to neighborhood decline.⁶¹¹ Nevertheless, Kansas City became an important setting for the development of some of the country’s most influential jazz musicians. Jazz giants such as Bill “Count” Basie, Bennie Moten, Lester Young, Ben Webster, and Jimmy Rushing, as well as local names such as Mary Lou Williams, Julia Lee, and Charlie “Bird” Parker honed their skills in the Kansas City jazz scene. They created a distinctive style of jazz called “Kansas City Sound,” which earned the city and its performers a jazz reputation second only to New York City.⁶¹²

The Musicians Local 627, also called the Colored Musicians Union, formed circa 1917 and became instrumental in fostering the jazz scene in Kansas City.⁶¹³ Local and traveling jazz performers could register with the Local 627 to facilitate getting paid or to file a formal grievance. Many of the leading jazz performers in the country are members of the Local 627, including Bill “Count” Basie, Bennie Moten, Jay McShann, Julia Lee, Charlie “Bird” Parker, Baby Lovett, and Pete Johnson.⁶¹⁴ In 1928, Musicians Local 627 opened the Mutual

⁶⁰³ Hennessey, iv.

⁶⁰⁴ Brown, *And All That’s Jazz*, 2.

⁶⁰⁵ Brown, *And All That’s Jazz*, 2.

⁶⁰⁶ Brown, *And All That’s Jazz*, 2.

⁶⁰⁷ Coulter, 218.

⁶⁰⁸ Brown, *And All That’s Jazz*, 25.

⁶⁰⁹ Coulter, 272.

⁶¹⁰ Walker, Chapter 6, np.

⁶¹¹ Shortridge, 88.

⁶¹² Coulter, 218.

⁶¹³ Edward J. Miszczuk, “Mutual Musician’s Foundation Building” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Park Service, 1979), 8:i.

⁶¹⁴ Miszczuk, 8:i.

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Musicians Foundation at 1823 Highland Avenue (extant, NRHP 1979, NHL 1981). The Foundation served as a second home, a training ground, and a vital source of employment for approximately ninety percent of musicians who performed in Kansas City throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Still open today, it is the oldest continually operating jazz club in the country.⁶¹⁵

By the end of the 1930s, jazz clubs were prolific in Kansas City, with hundreds of musicians and advertisements from over eighty different clubs appearing weekly in *The Kansas City Call*.⁶¹⁶ Clubs could be ephemeral, opening and closing quickly and unpredictably, but between 150 and 200 music venues operated in Kansas City at its peak in the 1930s.⁶¹⁷ Resident Irene Marcus recalled, "Everybody belonged to a club. Why, we went to dances two or three nights a week . . . When did we sleep? We didn't. We were young and having fun."⁶¹⁸ Jazz clubs continued to be a main source of entertainment during the war years of the early 1940s. As local businessowner G. Lawrence Blankinship stated, "Kansas City at that time was a mecca of entertainment," with soldiers stationed in surrounding forts regularly visiting the city's clubs on the weekends. "Eighteenth and Vine was just a hub . . . everybody came through there at some time."⁶¹⁹ However, the fall of the Pendergast regime in 1939 hurt many jazz clubs. While they had been allowed to operate through the night, serve alcohol, and host gambling operations under Pendergast, the successive reform government targeted jazz clubs, particularly those in Black neighborhoods, implementing closing times and cracking down on illegal gambling. As clubs in Kansas City faced a downturn, many musicians began moving on to other cities, such as New York and New Orleans. "Kansas City died after Pendergast," stated Kansas City jazz musician Jay McShann.⁶²⁰ By the 1950s, many Black jazz clubs had closed. Desegregation and subsequent commercial movement from the Lincoln-Coles district in the 1960s and 1970s largely shuttered the rest.⁶²¹

In Kansas City, jazz clubs and dance halls were segregated through the 1960s. Clubs for the Black community were often owned by White landlords, but many were operated by Black managers.⁶²² Black clubs were mostly located east of The Paseo Boulevard on 12th and 18th Streets. The Lone Star (1708 East 12th Street, no longer extant), Sunset (1715 East 12th Street, no longer extant), Havana Inn (East 12th and Vine Streets, no longer extant), Boulevard Room (East 12th Street and The Paseo, no longer extant), Paseo Tap Room (1416 East 12th Street, no longer extant), and Orchid Room (East 12th and Vine Streets, no longer extant) were close to 12th and Vine Streets, while the Blue Room (in Street's Hotel at East 18th Street and The Paseo, no longer extant), Yellow Front (East 18th Street and Tracy Avenue, no longer extant), Subway (Ashton and Park Avenues, no longer extant), Wolf's (northwest corner of East 18th and Vine Streets, no longer extant) El Capitan Club (1618 East 18th Street, extant, contributing resource to the 18th and Vine NRHD, 1991), Scott's Theater Restaurant (1701 East 18th Street, extant, contributing resource to the 18th and Vine NRHD, 1991), Lucille's Paradise

⁶¹⁵ Miszczuk, 8:i-1.

⁶¹⁶ Brown, *And All That's Jazz*, 25.

⁶¹⁷ Larson, "There Goes the Neighborhood."

⁶¹⁸ Brown, *And All That's Jazz*, 25.

⁶¹⁹ G. Lawrence Blankinship, "An Interview with G. Lawrence Blankinship," Interview by Horace M. Peterson III, June 21, 1976, Black Archives of Mid-America, Available at the Kansas City Public Library Missouri Valley Special Collections, https://kchistory.org/audio/interview-g-lawrence-blankinship?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=7fd9a1ae9ec8d9475080&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=1.

⁶²⁰ Larson, "There Goes the Neighborhood."

⁶²¹ Larson, "There Goes the Neighborhood."

⁶²² Larson, "There Goes the Neighborhood."

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(1711 East 18th Street, no longer extant), and the Zelmaroda (1912 East 18th Street, no longer extant) were close to 18th and Vine Streets. Black dance halls included the Labor Temple at 14th Street and Woodland Avenue (no longer extant), Lyric Hall at 1731 Lydia Avenue (no longer extant), The Paseo Hall at 15th Street and The Paseo Boulevard (no longer extant), Lincoln Hall in the Lincoln Building at 1601 East 18th Street (extant, contributing resource to the 18th and Vine NRHD, 1991), and Dreamland Hall at 22nd and Vine Streets (no longer extant).⁶²³ In 1929, Sarah Rector, a wealthy Black-Muscogee Creek oil magnate, opened a dance hall called Del Ray Gardens on 34th Street (no longer extant) in the Leeds neighborhood.⁶²⁴

While White audiences were happy to receive Black entertainment, they did not want to enjoy it alongside other African Americans. Black entertainers consistently performed at segregated White establishments where other African Americans were denied access, including clubs, dance halls, and theaters. One such instance occurred in 1937, when nationally renowned entertainer Ethel Waters performed at the segregated Main Street Theater (1400 Main Street, extant). Despite strong interest from Black Kansas Citians to see the performance, they were not permitted to attend, leading the Black community to organize a protest. In response, Waters held a special performance at midnight for a Black audience at her own expense.⁶²⁵

White clubs where Black performers frequently appeared were primarily located downtown. Although Black patrons were denied access, the careers of Black performers often launched at these venues, and The Kansas City Call regularly highlighted the success of Black performers who secured bookings. These included the College Inn (Sherman Hotel at East 9th and Locust Streets, no longer extant) and Barney Google's at 9th Street and Grand Avenue (extant). East 12th Street around Cherry Avenue featured a prominent cluster of clubs (no longer extant), including the Reno Club, King Kong Lair, Amos 'n' Andy's, Greenleaf Gardens, and Dante's Inferno. Milton Morris's Hey-Hay Club was at 4th Street and Cherry Avenue (no longer extant), and the Nite After Nite was at 8th Street and Charlotte Avenue (no longer extant). Larger dance hall establishments included the Pla-Mor Ballroom at 3142 Main Street (no longer extant) and the El Torreon Ballroom at 3101 Gillham Plaza (extant, NRHP 2021).⁶²⁶

Kansas City played an important role in the history of jazz in the United States. The city's vibrant jazz scene in the early to mid-twentieth century fostered a unique and influential sound that left a lasting impact on the genre. With legendary musicians like Count Basie, Charlie Parker, and Mary Lou Williams performing in the city, Kansas City became a mecca for jazz development and remains an important symbol of Black history and culture.⁶²⁷ In 1997, the American Jazz Museum opened at 1616 East 18th Street in the 18th and Vine Street district, which celebrates and preserves the cultural impact of jazz music on the city.

⁶²³ Brown, *And All That's Jazz*, 26-27.

⁶²⁴ Gary R. Kremer, "'Just Like the Garden of Eden': African-American Community Life in Kansas City's Leeds" *Missouri Historical Review* 98, no. 2 (January 2004): 137.

⁶²⁵ Walker, Chapter 6, np.

⁶²⁶ Brown, *And All That's Jazz*, 26.

⁶²⁷ Brown, *And All That's Jazz*, 2.

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3.2. Baseball

Professional baseball emerged in the United States in the late nineteenth century as a result of urbanization and industrialization. As thousands of workers joined the industrial workforce, they sought affordable entertainment during their free time, leading to the rise of professional baseball teams by 1870. By 1900, professional teams represented nearly every major city across the United States. Economic growth, rising standards of living, and shorter working hours in the early twentieth century led to the substantial growth of White professional baseball.⁶²⁸ Black franchises developed simultaneously, but with slower progress.⁶²⁹ Black baseball teams faced financial challenges due to limited backing, as few Black entrepreneurs had the capital or were willing to invest in professional teams. Black teams also struggled to gain access to playing fields, a majority of which were exclusive to White teams. In the early twentieth century, Black teams were still largely unorganized, lacking league affiliation and formal contracts, which hindered their development. Black teams made strides during World War I, and the Midwest-based Negro National League (NNL) formed in 1920.⁶³⁰ The NNL struggled throughout the decade, however, still plagued by lack of funding. After the Great Depression struck, the NNL collapsed in 1931.⁶³¹

In Kansas City, early informal neighborhood teams developed in the West Bottoms in the late nineteenth centuries, including the Plug Uglies and the Nose Crackers.⁶³² In 1890, the Kansas City Maroons played against the St. Louis Black Mohawks at Exposition Park, located at Montgall Avenue and Truman Road, the first recorded game in Kansas City between semi-pro Black teams. The teams played before a small, integrated crowd.⁶³³ In 1920, during a meeting at the Paseo Branch of the YMCA, the Kansas City Monarchs formed as a charter member of the NNL.⁶³⁴ Backed by White sports executive J.L. Wilkinson from Des Moines, Iowa, the Monarchs enjoyed more stability than some of their counterparts throughout the 1920s. Although Wilkinson had not been involved with all-Black teams previously, he did have experience in promoting semi-professional baseball, and he had earned a reputation for treating his players well regardless of race. His previous team, All-Nations, consisted of African American, Indigenous American, Asian American, and White players, and had become well known throughout the region before it dissolved in World War I.⁶³⁵

In 1921, the Monarchs played their first interracial contest against the Kansas City Blues of the American Association League, a local all-White baseball league, at Association Park. The park restricted Black spectators to the top fourteen rows of seats, even when Black teams were playing.⁶³⁶ The Blues won, but in another matchup the following year, the Monarchs beat the Blues 6-5. Following their victory, the *Kansas City Call* wrote:

From a sociological point of view, the Monarchs have done more than any other single agent in Kansas City to break down the damnable outrage of color prejudice that exists in the city . . . [When] . . . both

⁶²⁸ Neil Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball: The Rise and Ruin of a Black Institution* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 3.

⁶²⁹ Lanctot, 3.

⁶³⁰ Lanctot, 4.

⁶³¹ Lanctot, 14.

⁶³² Walker, Chapter 4, np.

⁶³³ Larry Lester and Sammy J. Miller, *Black Baseball in Kansas City* (Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 9.

⁶³⁴ Lanctot, 14.

⁶³⁵ Coulter, 229.

⁶³⁶ Lester and Miller, 6.

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racers sit side by side and root for their particular favorite and think nothing of it, then after a while the same relation may be carried to the workshop, and the ball grounds may be the means of causing someone to be employed where he would not otherwise have been considered, just because “he sat next to me out at the ball park Sunday—he’s a pretty good fellow.”⁶³⁷

Similarly, under the headline “The New City Champions,” the *Kansas City Star* wrote:

The series has done more to boost Negro-organized baseball in this town with the white fans than anything else could have done. While they have always attended in large numbers, still the games they saw were regular league games and they have generally believed that it was an inferior grade of ball. But their eyes are open more now to the fact that it isn’t lack of ability that keeps the Negro ball players off the big time—it’s color.⁶³⁸

The *Star* and *Call* articles incited Thomas J. Hickey, president of the American Association, to ban interleague play between the two teams.⁶³⁹ However, this game, and the article in the *Star*, was an early forecast of the role that Black baseball teams, and the Monarchs, would play in breaking down racial barriers. The Monarchs enjoyed immense success throughout the 1920s, playing to crowds of four to five thousand spectators.⁶⁴⁰ The crowds were racially integrated, and the Monarchs resisted efforts to enforce segregation at their games. The team’s ability to attract Black and White spectators helped solidify the team’s legacy and its significance in Kansas City’s historical memory.⁶⁴¹

In 1924, the Monarchs promoted the first Negro World Series, facing Hilldale of the Eastern Colored League. The Monarchs won the ten-game series 5-4, with one game called off due to darkness. Three games were played before full-capacity crowds at Muehlebach Park, later called Municipal Stadium, at the corner of East 22nd Street and Brooklyn Avenue (no longer extant), which the Monarchs began using in 1923. The final game was played in Chicago, where the Monarchs won 5-0 and were crowned the “World’s Colored Champions.”

After the collapse of the NNL in 1931 following the onset of the Depression, the Monarchs also struggled and were forced to play a limited roster. However, they continued to play to interracial crowds of three to six thousand in Muehlebach Park.⁶⁴² In 1937, the team joined the New American League (NAL).⁶⁴³ The NAL and the Monarchs continued to struggle financially, despite the presence of stars such as Hilton Smith, Newt Allen, and Buck O’Neil. In 1941, pitcher Satchel Paige joined the team, and the Kansas City Monarchs regained financial stability. Paige became a major draw for the Negro Leagues, and the Monarchs became the dominant team. The team won NAL championships in 1941, 1942, and 1950, and claimed their second Negro World Series Championship in 1942.⁶⁴⁴ Despite wartime travel restrictions, the Monarchs averaged six to seven

⁶³⁷ “Local Leaders Had Good Season,” *Kansas City Call*, October 27, 1922.

⁶³⁸ Lester and Miller, 6.

⁶³⁹ Lester and Miller, 6.

⁶⁴⁰ Coulter, 231.

⁶⁴¹ Coulter, 231.

⁶⁴² Coulter, 233.

⁶⁴³ Lanctot, 14-15.

⁶⁴⁴ Coulter, 234-235.

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thousand fans a game at Muehlebach Park. When Paige pitched, crowds often reached 30,000.⁶⁴⁵ The Monarchs' success led to remarkably high wages for the players. Star players earned up to \$1,000 a month, five to ten times more than the average Black worker in Kansas City, while other players made \$300 to \$500 a month.⁶⁴⁶ In 1945, Jackie Robinson briefly signed with the Monarchs as an infielder.⁶⁴⁷

After World War II, African Americans intensified their push to end segregation. Black activists and newspaper editors pressured team owners in the White major leagues to integrate. Facing declining crowds and growing Black populations in Northern cities, the owners eventually relented. In 1947, the Brooklyn Dodgers signed Robinson from the Monarchs. Robinson became the first Black player in the major leagues in more than 50 years, leading to a wave of Black players entering the majors. Several Monarchs, including Satchel Paige, Ernie Banks, Elston Howard, and Buck O'Neil, also moved on to major-league careers. With integration of the major leagues, support for the Negro Leagues dwindled, and by the 1960s, most franchises had folded. The Monarchs played their final game in 1964.⁶⁴⁸

After the Negro Leagues ended, Buck O'Neil worked to keep the memory and legacy of the Monarchs alive. In 1990, he helped establish the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, located at 1616 East 18th Street in the 18th and Vine Street district, which is a major institution dedicated to preserving the history and culture of Black baseball.

3.3. Barbecue

Barbecue traditions largely trace their origins to the Deep South. When the Louisiana Purchase opened territories in the North and West, enslaved African Americans who involuntarily migrated North with their enslavers brought their Southern culinary traditions to new regions. Produce, meat, and game available in Missouri was similar to that of the South; hickory and oak were also available as a fuel source for cooking fires.⁶⁴⁹

Barbecue became an early tradition in Kansas City as an avenue for people to celebrate civic and cultural events. In 1858, Colonel McGee hosted a citywide Fourth of July barbecue, donating a whole bison to the barbecue pit. In 1869, after a crowd of more than 40,000 celebrated the opening of the Hannibal Bridge, Father Bernard Donelly wrote that spectators “marched to the barbecue grounds, located in Colonel Steen’s pasture at the eastern terminus of Ottawa Street, near present-day 12th Street and Troost Avenue.”⁶⁵⁰ Local newspapers announced barbecues for various events, such as the expansion of the Pacific Railroad Company into Kansas City in 1868, or a barbecue celebrating the Democratic victories held at the Kansas City Fairgrounds in October of 1876.⁶⁵¹ In its first edition on September 18, 1880, the *KC Evening Star* featured an article titled “The Grand Barbecue,” detailing a celebration of the new railroad connection from Fort Scott to south Kansas

⁶⁴⁵ Coulter, 235.

⁶⁴⁶ Coulter, 235.

⁶⁴⁷ Lanctot, 105.

⁶⁴⁸ Coulter, 235.

⁶⁴⁹ Andrea Broomfield, *Kansas City: A Food Biography* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 82.

⁶⁵⁰ Broomfield, *A Food Biography*, 88.

⁶⁵¹ “Railroad Barbeque - Breaking Ground on the Pacific,” *Kansas City Journal*, July 14, 1860, p. 2.; “Dawn of Day,” *The Kansas City Times*, October 13, 1876, p.4.

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City. Of the railroad connection, the article stated, “The people are so much elated over it that a grand old-fashioned barbecue was determined upon, and to-day the event is being celebrated in a manner and style peculiarly characteristic of Kansas City pluck and enterprise.”⁶⁵²

While White political parties and wealthy White citizens hosted barbecues, it was African Americans who butchered, prepared, and cooked the meal. Enslaved African Americans worked in all areas of food production and service, operating as cooks, bakers, butchers, waiters, bartenders, and railroad porters.⁶⁵³ After Emancipation, African Americans continued to work in these occupations. The Great Exodus movement, coupled with the booming meatpacking industry in Kansas City, married the barbecue traditions brought by enslaved African Americans from the South with easily accessible and abundant meat sources.

As Kansas City became a major rail hub, numerous Black men flocked to the city to work as porters, cooks, and waiters in rail cars and steamboats. Many workers who began their food service careers with the railroads or steamboats, such as Henry Perry and George Gates, eventually settled in Kansas City and opened their own restaurants.⁶⁵⁴ Others were drawn to Kansas City stockyards and packinghouses, and followed the same career path as their counterparts in transportation, leaving the meatpacking industry to start their own business.⁶⁵⁵

In the early twentieth century, the combination of knowledgeable pitmasters and inexpensive, abundant meat created the perfect conditions for a thriving barbecue culture. Kansas City’s location at the intersection of the Kansas and Missouri Rivers and the plethora of railways solidified the city’s position as a transportation hub. Trains and overland trails transported livestock to Kansas City’s numerous stockyards and packinghouses, drawing workers from the south with opportunities in the transportation and meatpacking industries. Most packinghouses threw away “poorer” cuts of meat such as ribs, brisket, snouts, ears, and feet. Oak and hickory trees, traditional fuel sources for barbecue pits in the south, grew throughout Missouri and were easily accessible.⁶⁵⁶

Through the early twentieth century, barbecue traditions and teachings remained almost exclusively held by African Americans, and throughout this period, most barbecue restaurants in Kansas City were Black-owned. Many of their customers were White, however, and as the popularity of barbecue grew, so did the number of White entrepreneurs attempting to open their own barbecue enterprises. White-owned barbecue restaurants became more common in the 1950s, and Black-owned barbecue restaurants suddenly had to compete with their White counterparts for customers.⁶⁵⁷

Kansas Citians assimilated barbecue into everyday life. By the time Arrowhead Stadium was constructed in the 1970s, tailgating was a form of barbecue pageantry. Tailgaters hauled smokers and other barbecue equipment to Arrowhead on game day, unwilling to merely grill hot dogs and burgers. Tailgate barbecues morphed into

⁶⁵² “The Grand Barbeque,” *The Kansas City Star*, September 18, 1880, p.1.

⁶⁵³ Broomfield, *A Food Biography*, 81.

⁶⁵⁴ Broomfield, *A Food Biography*, 85.

⁶⁵⁵ Broomfield, *A Food Biography*, 86-87.

⁶⁵⁶ Doug Worgul, *The Grand Barbecue: A Celebration of the History, Places, Personalities and Techniques of Kansas City Barbecue*, (Kansas City Star Books, 2001), 14-15.; Andrea Broomfield, *Iconic Restaurants of Kansas City* (Arcadia Publishing, 2022), 50.

⁶⁵⁷ Worgul, *The Grand Barbeque*, 61.

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modern-day barbecue competitions in the 1980s with the first American Royal World Series of Barbecue, held in Kansas City in 1980, and the founding of the Kansas City Barbeque Society (KCBS) in 1985. Now, however, most barbecue restaurants in Kansas City are White-owned, and most participants in KCBS competitions are White.⁶⁵⁸

3.3.1. Black Barbecue Pitmasters

3.3.1.1. Henry Perry

The self-proclaimed “Barbecue King,” Henry Perry is credited with being the first person in the country to operate a commercial barbecue business.⁶⁵⁹ Born in Shelby County, Tennessee, just outside of Memphis in 1875, Perry began barbecuing at seven years old. By the time he was fifteen, Perry was working as a cook on a steamboat, traveling up and down the Mississippi River as far north as Minneapolis and Chicago before settling in Kansas City in 1907. Perry worked as a saloon porter in Quality Hill before opening his own barbecue stand in 1908.⁶⁶⁰

Before Perry opened his barbecue stand along Banks Alley in Kansas City’s Garment District, barbecues were traditionally a function of large festivals, celebrations, and political gatherings. Barbecue was popular with White and Black Kansas Citians alike, but at the time, no restaurant or restaurateur sold barbecue commercially. Perry, who had barbecued all his life, saw a business opportunity. He opened his stand, selling barbecue sandwiches and ribs to droves of hungry citizens. By 1911, Perry operated a stand at East 18th and Vine Streets, digging a trench in the ground, lining it with bricks, and pitching a tent in order to slow-cook meats for up to twenty-four hours. Perry had no means of refrigeration in his stand, so his barbecue had to sell out every day. His growing popularity meant that the lack of refrigeration was not an issue. In a 1911 interview with the *Kansas City Star*, Perry bragged that he had “never seen the meat yet I couldn’t barbecue,” naming “sheep, hogs, geese, chickens, fish, rabbits, squirrels, ‘possums, oysters, and most everything you ever heard of” as fodder for his cook fire.⁶⁶¹ Perry claimed to have a special technique to barbecue, smoking the meat directly over oak and hickory and supplying customers with a spicy, peppery, vinegar-based sauce that reflected his southern barbecue roots.⁶⁶²

Perry never let food go to waste. Between 1915 and 1925, Perry operated a barbecue restaurant out of an old trolley barn at 1514 East 19th Street (no longer extant).⁶⁶³ According to local historian Sonny Gibson, 19th Street at the time was a dead end that abutted the railroad tracks, and Perry would get meat from trains leaving the packinghouses.⁶⁶⁴ For much of the early twentieth century, packinghouses discarded cuts of meat like ribs, brisket, and offal, or sold them at a deep discount. By 1916, Perry’s barbecue stand was listed in the City

⁶⁵⁸ Worgul, *The Grand Barbeque*, 61.

⁶⁵⁹ “Henry Perry Has Cooked Good Barbecue for 50 Years,” *The Kansas City Call*, February 26, 1932, p. 11.

⁶⁶⁰ Broomfield, *A Food Biography*, 88-89.; Daniel Coleman, “Biography of Henry Perry,” Missouri Valley Special Collections, accessed October 23, 2024, https://kchistory.org/document/biography-henry-perry-1875-1940-restaurateur?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=5cd67f15c0c3cfcda4b&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=1&search=henry%2520perry.

⁶⁶¹ “In King Barbecue’s Court,” *Kansas City Star*, January 17, 1911, p. 14.

⁶⁶² “Henry Perry Has Cooked Good Barbecue for 50 Years,” *The Kansas City Call*, February 26, 1932, p. 11.

⁶⁶³ Coleman, “Biography of Henry Perry.”

⁶⁶⁴ Broomfield, *Iconic Restaurants*, 50.

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Directory. By 1920, Perry's restaurant at 19th and Vine had become a popular gathering place for Kansas City's Black community. He operated numerous barbecue establishments throughout the years, including one at 1403½ East 17th Street (no longer extant), one at 1900 Highland Avenue (no longer extant), and one at 502 Westport Road (extant) for one year during 1934.⁶⁶⁵

Perry's success inspired other barbecue entrepreneurs. By 1916, newspaper advertisements appeared for "Henry Perry, Barbeque King" as well as Mrs. A. D. Turner's Barbecue at 1747 Forest Avenue (no longer extant) and R. W. Alexander's at 1172 East 18th Street (no longer extant). By 1930, barbecue had become so popular in Kansas City—with nearly one hundred barbecue restaurants in operation—that some New York City restaurants began serving "Kansas City Barbecue."⁶⁶⁶ In addition to operating a barbecue empire, Perry was well known for his philanthropy. Beginning in 1921, Perry established a yearly tradition of distributing free food to the elderly, young, and poor. At the annual event in 1929, Perry handed out 150 pounds of meat and dozens of loaves of bread with the help of his patrons and apprentices.⁶⁶⁷

As the "Barbecue King," Perry built the framework for the modern-day Kansas City barbecue culture and is responsible for the creation of two Kansas City barbecue juggernauts: Arthur Bryant's and Gates Bar-B-Q. Barbecue is traditionally taught through apprenticeships. Perry ran his businesses with the help of apprentices, teaching them everything he knew about barbecue, including his technique of smoking meat directly over oak and hickory, which became a staple flavor profile in Kansas City barbecue. Perry's most important apprentices were Charlie and Arthur Bryant, who then opened their own restaurant (now known as Arthur Bryant's Barbeque), as well as Arthur Pinkard, who went on to train George and Arzelia Gates of Gates Bar-B-Q⁶⁶⁸.

3.3.1.2. *Charlie and Arthur Bryant*

Born in 1902 near Calvert, Texas, Charlie Bryant moved to Kansas City as a child. Charlie began working for Henry Perry at an unknown date, and eventually started his own barbecue restaurant at East 14th Street and Woodland Avenue (no longer extant) in 1927. While Charlie learned his method for smoking meat directly over the fire from Perry, he created his own recipe for a barbecue sauce that, according to his obituary in *The Kansas City Call*, "spread his fame as a barbecue man far and wide."⁶⁶⁹ In 1929, Charlie moved the restaurant to 1921 East 18th Street (no longer extant). When Henry Perry had a stroke in 1931 that left him paralyzed on one side, Charlie took the reins at Perry's restaurant during Perry's recovery. That same year, Charlie's younger brother Arthur visited Kansas City after graduating from Texas Prairie View A&M, and decided to stay and learn the barbecue business. Perry died in 1940, leaving his restaurants to Charlie Bryant, who rebranded them as Bryant's Barbecue or Charlie Bryant Barbecue (both names are seen in newspaper ads). Charlie retired due to ill health in 1946, selling his business to Arthur.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶⁵ Broomfield, *A Food Biography*, 88-89.

⁶⁶⁶ Broomfield, *A Food Biography*, 90.

⁶⁶⁷ Coulter, 120-121.

⁶⁶⁸ Broomfield, *A Food Biography*, 90-91.

⁶⁶⁹ "Death to Popular Barbecue Man, 60," *The Kansas City Call*, October 17, 1952, 2.

⁶⁷⁰ Broomfield, *Iconic Restaurants*, 135.

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Like his brother Charlie, Arthur credits Henry Perry with teaching him how to barbecue.⁶⁷¹ After buying the business from Charlie, Arthur Bryant made changes to the restaurant and sauce, but the cooking method for the meat remained the same. Arthur upgraded the restaurant's decor and equipment, installing linoleum floors and formica tables to replace sawduck planks and wood tables, and outfitting the restaurant with electricity and refrigeration. The sauce became less spicy, though it remained vinegar based. In addition to reformulating the sauce, Arthur began serving homemade pickles and french fries made in boiling lard.⁶⁷²

By 1958, Arthur moved the business to its present-day location at 1727 Brooklyn Avenue (extant).⁶⁷³ At the time, the Kansas City Athletics played at Municipal Stadium, located at East 22nd Street and Brooklyn Avenue (no longer extant), a few blocks away from Arthur Bryant's. The scent of barbecued meat would waft from Bryant's to the stadium, tantalizing visiting sports-goers, who would end up walking to Bryant's in search of the smell. Even sportscasters broadcasting the games over the radio would comment on the smell of Bryant's barbecue, providing free national advertising and building up Kansas City's reputation as a barbecue destination.⁶⁷⁴

In 1974, journalist and Kansas City native Calvin Trillin wrote an essay in the *New Yorker* entitled "American Fried," where he claimed that Arthur Bryant's was "the best damn restaurant in the world."⁶⁷⁵ Following Trillin's essay, Bryant's popularity skyrocketed, with celebrities and politicians like Robert Redford, Jack Nicholson, and President Jimmy Carter visiting the restaurant. According to barbecue lore, Arthur Bryant is also credited with inventing burnt ends, a Kansas City barbecue staple that has gained national popularity. Arthur would cut the burnt bits off the point of a brisket after the fat rendered and put them out for customers to snack on while they waited for their order.⁶⁷⁶ When Arthur Bryant died in 1982, he left the restaurant to his niece, Dortha, who eventually sold the business to The Rauschelbach Group, who still operate the restaurant today.⁶⁷⁷

3.3.1.3. Arthur Pinkard and the Gates Family

Not much is known about Arthur Pinkard, Henry Perry's other significant apprentice. Pinkard was born in 1880 and worked as a cook in Kansas City restaurants, as well as having jobs as a janitor and on a WPA road crew. At some point, Pinkard apprenticed for Henry Perry, learning the "Henry Perry way" of slow cooking meat over coals instead of using smokers or other barbecuing devices. According to Ollie Gates of Gates Bar-B-Q, this method meant that "the meat juices drip directly onto the coals." This was a method specific to Perry and his former apprentices, as Gates explained in an interview, "As far as I know Bryant's and Gates are the only places in town that use that method."⁶⁷⁸ In 1942, Pinkard began working at Ol' Kentuck Bar-B-Q, located on the northwest corner of East 19th and Vine Streets (extant, contributing resource to the 18th and Vine NRHD, 1990). George and Arzelia Gates purchased the restaurant in 1946, keeping Pinkard on as a cook and changing

⁶⁷¹ Broomfield, *A Food Biography*, 90.

⁶⁷² Broomfield, *A Food Biography*, 90-91.

⁶⁷³ Broomfield, *Iconic Restaurants*, 135

⁶⁷⁴ Worgul, 14-15.

⁶⁷⁵ Worgul, 26.

⁶⁷⁶ Broomfield, *Iconic Restaurants*, 136.

⁶⁷⁷ Worgul, 26-27.

⁶⁷⁸ Worgul, 21.

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the name to Gates Ol' Kentucky. Pinkard passed along his barbecue knowledge to the Gateses before retiring in the early 1950s. The restaurant changed locations frequently in the late 1940s to early 1950s before it moved to East 24th Street and Brooklyn Avenue (no longer extant) in 1951; a second location at East 12th Street and Highland Avenue (no longer extant) opened in 1954. Unlike many other barbecue restaurants in Kansas City, the Gates family purpose-built restaurants, the first of which opened at East 12th Street and Brooklyn Avenue (extant) in 1958. That same year, the restaurants were rebranded as "Gates and Son Bar-B-Q," reflecting the addition of Ollie Gates, George and Arzelia's son, to the business. With a degree in building construction and training from the U.S. Army School of Engineering, Ollie had an active role in designing the layout of the kitchens, customer flow, and dining rooms of the new location. From 1962 to 2000, Gates Bar-B-Q opened ten additional locations, including a nightclub and a Las Vegas outpost.⁶⁷⁹

Otis Boyd

Boyd was one of the few early pitmasters in Kansas City with formal culinary training. After attending culinary school in Chicago, he relocated to Kansas City in the early 1940s and established Boyd's Bar-B-Q, later called Boyd N' Son Barbecue, at 5510 Prospect Avenue (extant). Originally a soul food restaurant that offered a variety of dishes alongside barbecue, growing demand for his special sauces led him to focus exclusively on barbecue by 1948. Other than preferring to smoke his barbecue over red oak, Boyd focused on his tart sauce recipe, stating that "your sauce is ninety percent of your barbecue."⁶⁸⁰ Boyd N' Son operated out of its original Prospect location until Boyd retired and the restaurant closed in 1995.⁶⁸¹

3.3.1.4. "Amazing" Grace Harris

Harris was one of the few women who worked as a professional pitmaster in Kansas City throughout the twentieth century.⁶⁸² Born in 1940 in Carroll County, Mississippi, Harris spent her early childhood years in New Orleans, where she developed a love of blues and barbecue. In 1954, she and her family moved to Kansas City, Kansas, where her grandfather operated a nightclub called Fancy Dancing, cementing her love of music.⁶⁸³ Harris began working for Otis Boyd at Boyd N' Son Barbecue in 1968, where she learned the craft of barbecue.⁶⁸⁴ In 1985, Harris began working at the Grand Emporium, a blues and jazz nightclub, upon its opening at 3832 Main Street (extant, NRHP 1983).⁶⁸⁵ Harris had already earned a reputation for her barbecue well before working at the Grand Emporium. However, it was there that Harris earned the nickname "Amazing Grace" and the reputation for being "as good at what she does as the musicians who play [at the Grand Emporium] are at what they do."⁶⁸⁶

During her career as a pitmaster, Harris developed fifty-two different flavors of sauces, including hot, mild, international, and spicy sour. While at the Grand Emporium, Harris also served ribs, wings, rice and beans,

⁶⁷⁹ Worgul, 32-34.

⁶⁸⁰ Connie McCabe, "KC BBQ," *Saveur Magazine*, May 21, 2007, <https://www.saveur.com/article/Travels/KC-BBQ/>.

⁶⁸¹ McCabe, "KC BBQ."

⁶⁸² Jill Silva, "Why Female Barbecue Pitmasters are Still a Rarity in KC and Beyond," *Kansas City Star*, August 30, 2016, <https://www.kansascity.com/living/food-drink/article98599527.html>.

⁶⁸³ Worgul, 47.

⁶⁸⁴ McCabe, "KC BBQ."

⁶⁸⁵ The Grand Emporium Hotel and Saloon is a contributing building to the South Side Historic District, listed on June 9, 1983.

⁶⁸⁶ Worgul, 47.

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potatoes, and coleslaw.⁶⁸⁷ The Grand Emporium, owned by local entrepreneurs Roger Naber and George Myers, often hosted live music seven nights a week and was named “Best Blues Club in America” by the Blues Foundation in Memphis.⁶⁸⁸ Harris described working at the Grand Emporium as “a love thing,” stating, “I love to give these musicians this barbecue because it’s what I love. They love to give me the blues because that’s what I love.”⁶⁸⁹ Harris retired when the Grand Emporium closed in 2004.⁶⁹⁰

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⁶⁸⁷ McCabe, “KC BBQ.”

⁶⁸⁸ “Grand Emporium,” UMKC Digital Special Collections, accessed March 7, 2025, <https://library.umkc.edu/grand-emporium-collection-added-to-umkc-digital-special-collections/>.

⁶⁸⁹ Worgul, 47.

⁶⁹⁰ “Grand Emporium.”

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4. HEALTH & MEDICINE

4.1. Late Nineteenth Century

The first hospital in Kansas City, known simply as City Hospital, was established around 1870. The facility, a small frame building at present-day 22nd Street and Kenwood Avenue (no longer extant), included several beds designated for “Negro and Mexican indigents;” however, many White physicians refused to treat Black patients.⁶⁹¹ In response to the lack of healthcare accessible to African Americans in the area, Dr. Solomon H. Thompson, Sr. and Dr. Thomas C. Unthank, both local Black physicians, co-founded Douglass Hospital, a private hospital for African Americans in the Quindaro neighborhood of Kansas City, Kansas, in the late 1890s (no longer extant).⁶⁹² Dr. Thompson was originally from West Virginia and graduated from Howard University School of Medicine in 1892, after which he moved to Kansas City, Kansas.⁶⁹³ Dr. Unthank was originally from North Carolina and graduated from Howard University School of Medicine in Washington, D.C. in 1898 before moving to Kansas City, Missouri.⁶⁹⁴ In addition to providing crucial healthcare to the local Black community, Douglass Hospital served as a teaching facility that encouraged African Americans, including Black women, to study medicine.⁶⁹⁵ For several years, Douglass Hospital remained the only hospital in the area that would willingly and reliably treat Black patients, and many Black residents of Kansas City, Missouri, crossed the state line to receive medical services there.⁶⁹⁶

4.2. Early Twentieth Century

As Kansas City experienced rapid growth during the early twentieth century, its healthcare industry also expanded and numerous new hospitals opened. However, there remained few medical facilities open and welcoming to African Americans. Black patients at City Hospital were treated in segregated facilities and were relegated to beds in the basement.⁶⁹⁷ Another significant challenge to providing adequate healthcare for Black residents was a lack of Black medical professionals, largely due to the absence of training facilities and medical schools open to African Americans in Kansas City and the broader region.⁶⁹⁸ Black doctors and nurses who had achieved education and training were often barred from practicing at White hospitals.⁶⁹⁹ As a result, medical care for African Americans in Kansas City was woefully substandard. In the 1910s, mortality rates for Black Kansas Citians were double that of the national average, and mortality rates for Black infants in Kansas City were nearly double that of White infants.⁷⁰⁰ In many Black neighborhoods, services like sanitary inspections

⁶⁹¹ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 42.; Walker, np.; “City Hospital,” Kansas City Public Library, accessed March 10, 2025, <https://kchistory.org/image/city-hospital-2>.

⁶⁹² Jazzlyn Johnson, “Kansas City General Hospital #2 Was #1 for the Area’s Black Residents,” accessed November 19, 2024, <https://www.communityvoiceks.com/2021/02/22/kansas-city-general-hospital-2-was-1-for-the-areas-black-residents/>.

⁶⁹³ Groundwork Northeast Revitalization Group, “Dr. S.H. Thompson Sr. and S.H. Thompson Jr.,” Clio: Your Guide to History, August 28, 2022, <https://theclio.com/entry/152555>.

⁶⁹⁴ Nancy J. Hulston, “Thomas C. Unthank,” Kansas City Public Library: The Pendergast Years, accessed March 10, 2025, <https://pendergastkc.org/articles/thomas-c-unthank>.

⁶⁹⁵ Groundwork Northeast Revitalization Group, “Dr. S.H. Thompson Sr. and S.H. Thompson Jr.”

⁶⁹⁶ Johnson, “Kansas City General Hospital #2 Was #1 for the Area’s Black Residents.”

⁶⁹⁷ Coulter, 209.

⁶⁹⁸ Thomas McCormally, *For All Children Everywhere, Children’s Mercy Kansas City* (Chandler Lake Books, 2017), 70.

⁶⁹⁹ Coulter, 209.

⁷⁰⁰ McCormally, 69.

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and health supervision, street cleaning and trash collection, and indoor plumbing were inadequate or entirely non-existent, exacerbating poor health among the Black community.⁷⁰¹

Local Black physicians—including Dr. Thomas C. Unthank, Dr. J. Edward Perry, and Dr. William Thompkins—emerged as key leaders advocating for greater access to healthcare for the Black community.⁷⁰² The Douglass Hospital in Kansas City, Kansas, was in such high demand that Dr. Unthank opened a separate facility with twenty-six beds on the Missouri side of the state line in 1902, located in the Lincoln-Coles district at 1227 Michigan Avenue (no longer extant).⁷⁰³ Kansas Citian Leon H. Jordan served as President of the Board and the facility had a staff of twelve physicians and ten medical consulting staff.⁷⁰⁴ Around the same time, Dr. Perry established the Perry Sanitarium at 1214 Vine Street (no longer extant), which housed fifteen beds as well as a medical facility to train Black doctors and nurses.⁷⁰⁵ Nellie Palmer served as the first Superintendent of Nurses.⁷⁰⁶ Upon founding the facility, Perry stated:

If there ever is to be a large group of Negro doctors and nurses, they will have to be developed in a Negro hospital. I'm going out and build a hospital. I'm going to dedicate myself to the training of young men so they will not have to experience the difficulties I have had in trying to get specialized training.⁷⁰⁷

In 1908, City Hospital opened new, expanded facilities, called General Hospital No. 1, at present-day 23rd and Holmes Streets (extant). Dr. Unthank successfully urged city leadership to retain the previous City Hospital building, a brick building initially constructed in 1884 at 22nd Street and Kenwood Avenue (no longer extant) and already remodeled several times, as a hospital for Black and Hispanic patients. The hospital was alternately called the Colored Division of General Hospital No. 1, the Old City Hospital, and General Hospital No. 2. During its first three years of operation, General Hospital No. 2 had an all-White staff of doctors, nurses and Superintendent. In 1911, however, several Black doctors were finally appointed to General Hospital No. 2, including Dr. Unthank, Dr. Roscoe Haskell of St. Louis, Dr. O.R. Bush, Alexander Gillespie, and George McMecken.⁷⁰⁸ That same year, the “Negro School of Nursing” opened in General Hospital No. 2, although it remained under White supervision.⁷⁰⁹ Many students who studied at General Hospital No. 2 went on to open their own practice, including Dr. J.O. Henry, who served as a hospital intern after World War I and later opened a practice at 1309 East 18th Street (no longer extant) in 1920.⁷¹⁰

While Black healthcare professionals continued making inroads, they still faced backlash from their White counterparts. In 1912, fourteen out of eighteen White staff members at General Hospital No. 2 submitted a petition asking that Black doctors and interns be removed from the staff and replaced with White staff.⁷¹¹

⁷⁰¹ Walker, np.

⁷⁰² Thomas McCormally, *For All Children Everywhere, Children's Mercy Kansas City* (Chandler Lake Books, 2017), 70.

⁷⁰³ Johnson, “Kansas City General Hospital #2 Was #1 for the Area's Black Residents.”

⁷⁰⁴ Walker, np.

⁷⁰⁵ Walker, np.; Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 42, 46.

⁷⁰⁶ Walker, np.

⁷⁰⁷ “Funeral Services Held for Dr. J. Edward Perry,” *The Kansas City Call*, May 25, 1962, p1.

⁷⁰⁸ Coulter, 210.

⁷⁰⁹ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 43-44.

⁷¹⁰ Coulter, 211.

⁷¹¹ Walker, np.

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Nonetheless, by 1914 William J. Thompkins was appointed the first Black Superintendent of General Hospital No. 2, becoming the first city-owned hospital in the United States with an all-Black staff and leadership.⁷¹²

In 1913, the Perry Sanitarium changed its name to the Provident Hospital and Nurse Training Association. A year later, it merged with another group led by Phyllis Wheatley, who sought to establish a dedicated Black hospital, becoming the Wheatley-Provident Hospital and Nurse Training Association. In 1916, the organization purchased the old St. Joseph Catholic School at 1826 Forest Avenue (extant, NRHP 2020) and fundraised \$29,000 to remodel the building. The hospital remained in that location until the 1970s. At the time, it was the only hospital solely owned and operated by Black Kansas Citians.⁷¹³ By 1915, other facilities that provided medical, health, and care services for African Americans in Kansas City included the South Side Day Nursery, the Industrial Home for Children, St. Simon's Nursery, the Working Girls' Home, Rescue Home for Colored Girls, Old Folks and Orphans Home, and the Federation of Colored Charities.⁷¹⁴ Dr. Thompkins also urged city leadership to open a public bathhouse for African Americans at 17th Street and The Paseo (no longer extant), which opened in 1919.⁷¹⁵

In 1920, Dr. Thompkins founded a unique program that established an intensive training school for pathology and bacteriology, open to any Black doctor throughout the country free of charge. Under Thompkins' leadership, by the mid-1920s the General Hospital No. 2 was equipped with a pathology lab, an X-ray lab, an out-patient clinic, a separate ward for tuberculosis patients, living quarters for interns, and a home for nurses. At that time, General Hospital No. 2 had forty-two black doctors and ten interns. At the nurse training school, there were twenty teachers, three supervisors, and thirty-two nursing students.⁷¹⁶

Katherine Richardson, a White staff member of Mercy Children's Hospital, appealed to White Kansas Citians for financial support of the Wheatley-Provident Hospital and its doctor and nurse training program, successfully garnering numerous contributions from the broader community. Richardson also convinced over eighteen White physicians to sign on to train Black physicians in pediatrics. In April 1923, the Model Ward at Wheatley-Provident opened after the efforts of Robertson and Dr. Perry, and Children's Mercy doctor Dr. Robert Schauflier taught the first clinic to Black medical students.⁷¹⁷ That year, the American College of Surgeons gave the hospital a Class A rating, one of only three Black hospitals in the U.S. to receive the distinction. Minnie Crosthwaite, one of the first Black social workers in Kansas City, managed the hospital.⁷¹⁸ In 1925, White philanthropists Frank Niles and William Volker donated over \$65,000 to expand the Wheatley-Provident Hospital and add the Mercy Children's Wing. Local Black activists and medical professionals, including Minnie Crosthwaite, were also instrumental in the expansion campaign.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹² Coulter, 210.

⁷¹³ McCormally, 70.

⁷¹⁴ Walker, np.

⁷¹⁵ Coulter, 215.

⁷¹⁶ Coulter, 210-211.

⁷¹⁷ McCormally, 72-73.

⁷¹⁸ Delia C. Gillis, *Black America Series: Kansas City* (Arcadia Publishing, 2007), 31.

⁷¹⁹ McCormally, 73.

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In 1927, a fire destroyed the General Hospital No. 2 building, and the city was finally forced to construct a new Black hospital. There was contention over the location of the new hospital as White residents protested the first proposed location at the edge of a White residential district. The City relented, instead selecting a site west of General Hospital No. 1 on 22nd Street.⁷²⁰ On March 2, 1930, the grand opening for the new General Hospital No. 2 was held, and by April the facility began accepting patients in its 250-bed facility (no longer extant).⁷²¹ That year, the new hospital reportedly had 292 persons on the payroll which included fifty-one student nurses and seventy-two “professionals.”⁷²² General Hospital No. 2 remained the most prominent medical facility for African Americans in Kansas City until the 1950s.

4.3. Mid-Twentieth Century

Following World War II, many Black doctors and medical professionals returned from service and were frustrated with conditions on the home front. In 1947 Black doctors went on strike to protest conditions at General Hospital No. 2, which lacked equipment, supplies, and trained staff. According to Dr. Samuel U. Rogers who helped organize the protest, “health care in those days was not just separate, it was grossly unequal.”⁷²³ Healthcare workers also sought accreditation of General Hospital No. 2 from the American Medical Association.⁷²⁴ City administrators quickly accepted the protestors' demands, and while some improvements were made, they were not as substantial as many had hoped.

In the 1950s, Wheatley-Provident continued to be the foremost hospital for Black Kansas Citians, but it faced a significant lack of funding. The medical community reached out to religious leaders for support in funding a new facility, and Reverend John W. Williams of St. Stephen's Baptist Church founded the Greater Kansas City Baptist and Community Hospital Association to assist in fundraising. Despite ongoing resistance from city leadership, which preferred to close Wheatley-Provident entirely, Reverend Williams's tireless commitment and that of the Black community of Kansas City eventually succeeded in raising the necessary funds, although it took well over a decade.⁷²⁵ In 1972, after significant activism by Black community leaders, Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Hospital opened at 2525 Euclid, replacing the aged Wheatley-Provident Hospital. The hospital operated until 1983, when it was redeveloped into the Luther King Village Apartments (extant).⁷²⁶

In 1957, amid budget concerns and integration of city schools and other facilities, the City Council voted to merge General Hospitals No. 1 and 2.⁷²⁷ During the 1950s, several other private medical facilities had Black Kansas Citians on their staff, including Menorah Hospital, St. Mary's, St. Josephs, and St. Luke's.

⁷²⁰ Coulter, 212-213.

⁷²¹ Coulter, 213.

⁷²² Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 45.

⁷²³ Julius A. Karash, "Hospitals Symbolized Pride in Community," *The Kansas City Star*, n.d., available in "African American History" Vertical File at the Kansas City Public Library Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁷²⁴ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 45.

⁷²⁵ L.V. Dixon, "The Martin Luther King, Jr., Hospital of Kansas City, Missouri," *Journal of National Medical Association* Vol. 64, No. 6 (November 1972): 551-552.

⁷²⁶ Karash, "Hospitals Symbolized Pride in Community."

⁷²⁷ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 46.

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In 1976, the new integrated Truman Medical Center opened at 2301 Holmes, replacing the old General Hospital Nos. 1 and 2.⁷²⁸

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⁷²⁸ Mathew Powers and Clio Admin. "Children's Mercy Research Institute and Hospital Hill." Clio: Your Guide to History. August 4, 2023. Accessed November 20, 2024. <https://theclio.com/tour/2089/1>.

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5. EDUCATION

5.1. Late Nineteenth Century: Emergence of Formal Black Education and Black Schools

Prior to emancipation in 1865, both free and enslaved African Americans in Missouri were prohibited from attending school or learning even basic literacy and math. In 1847, Missouri passed an ordinance banning the operation of schools for African Americans and the teaching of reading, writing, and arithmetic to African Americans to limit opportunities and employment outside of enslavement. Violators faced severe fines or jail.⁷²⁹ These restrictions were common in proslavery states across the United States. Despite these restrictions, many African Americans secretly taught themselves and established covert schools to teach each other to read and write.⁷³⁰ They recognized knowledge as a powerful tool that White people deliberately gatekept and used to control and oppress them. The ability to read and write were not just skills, but symbols of freedom and empowerment.⁷³¹

After the Civil War, education and the establishment of schools became one of the highest priorities for African Americans across the United States, who saw education as an essential means of self-determination, advancement, and dignity.⁷³² Immediately following the war, Black communities established schools and teaching facilities themselves, which built on the efforts of those who taught literacy to themselves and each other before emancipation.⁷³³ Sabbath Schools, sponsored by churches, were one example of community-led education. Operating in the evenings and on weekends, these schools taught African Americans of all ages to read and write.⁷³⁴ In addition to teaching literacy, Sabbath Schools also helped foster a sense of community and collective identity.⁷³⁵

State- and municipal-funded public schools for Black students established by municipal school districts became an important draw for many African Americans who migrated from rural areas to cities as part of the Great Exodus and the Great Migration. Many public schools were segregated, a condition that was codified with the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* doctrine of “separate but equal.” In this landmark case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregation in public facilities, as long as the facilities were equal, was constitutional.⁷³⁶ Black public schools were typically anything but equal to their White counterparts. They received far less funding, were often located in substandard facilities with inferior supplies, and constantly moved locations or closed. Early Black schools were typically located in rented rooms or buildings instead of purpose-built educational buildings. However, schools often employed extremely talented Black educators who had successfully

⁷²⁹ Walker, np.

⁷³⁰ Marvin Ray Aaron, *The Higher Education of African Americans in Kansas City, Missouri: A History of Lincoln Junior College 1936-1954 (Dissertation)* (University of Missouri - Kansas City, 1999), 74.

⁷³¹ Aaron, 74-75.

⁷³² Coulter, 181.

⁷³³ Coulter, 180.

⁷³⁴ Aaron, 74-75.

⁷³⁵ Coulter, 180.

⁷³⁶ Kevin Fox Gotham, “Missed Opportunities, Enduring Legacies: School Segregation and Desegregation in Kansas City, Missouri” *American Studies* 43, no. 2 (2002): 225.

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navigated immense obstacles to higher education. They provided important educational access to Black children.⁷³⁷

Black principals and teachers emerged as influential leaders within the Black community during the late nineteenth century and into the early twentieth. Like to Black religious leaders, Black educators felt a responsibility for shaping their community's progress, advocating for better opportunities and working to secure a brighter future for the next generation of Black children. In Kansas City, J. Silas Harris emerged as one the early leading Black educators. Harris served as principal at several schools, including the Black Penn and Garrison Schools. Harris consistently urged the community to advocate for funding, resources, and better facilities for Black schools. He also frequently spoke with the school board about issues facing Black schools and was vocal in his support for expanding the teacher training program at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri.⁷³⁸ Richard T. Coles, who worked at Sumner and Garrison Schools, was another prominent early educator. A graduate of Hampton Institute, he helped establish the Pleasant Green School (later called Garrison School), which included a manual training program.⁷³⁹ Other prominent early educators included W.W. Yates, Joe E. Herriford, J.D. Bowser, and J.W. Baldwin, among others.

After many African Americans had been denied the right to education under the institution of slavery, they made remarkable progress in improving literacy in the late nineteenth century, despite facing continued barriers. Between the 1860s and 1880, illiteracy among the formerly enslaved population in the United States dropped from ninety-five to seventy percent. By 1910, illiteracy rates had dropped further to thirty percent.⁷⁴⁰

5.1.1. Schools in the Late Nineteenth Century

Immediately following the Civil War, African Americans in Kansas City formed Sabbath Schools. In 1865, the "Congregational Sabbath School, Colored" began operating from the Congregational Church for African Americans at 10th and McGee Streets (no longer extant). Reverend Jonathan Copeland served as superintendent of the school, which in 1865 had five teachers and an enrollment of one hundred students.⁷⁴¹

The new Missouri constitution in 1865 rekindled state support for public schools, which had stalled during the Civil War. Subsequent legislation allowed municipalities to organize school districts and school boards, which could levy taxes for the construction and maintenance of dedicated school buildings and for staff salaries.⁷⁴² While Missouri residents initially objected to the idea of a public school system, resistant to change from a system that was partly public and partly private, public support soon formed.⁷⁴³ In 1866, the state passed additional legislation requiring municipalities to establish and maintain one or more separate schools for African Americans in areas with more than twenty Black children of school age.⁷⁴⁴ However, the law lacked enforcement mechanisms and many Black children were provided no schools at all; when schools were

⁷³⁷ Coulter, 181.

⁷³⁸ "Help for Negroes," *Kansas City Journal*, December 2, 1900, p5.

⁷³⁹ Coulter, 36.

⁷⁴⁰ James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 65.

⁷⁴¹ Aaron, 76.

⁷⁴² Preston Connor, "Allen School," Kansas City Register of Historic Places Registration Form (Kansas City, Missouri, 2008), 6.

⁷⁴³ Connor, "Allen School," 6.

⁷⁴⁴ Elizabeth Rosin and Rachel Nugent, "Historic Resources of the Kansas City Missouri School District Pre-1970," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Park Service, 2012), E:10.

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provided, they were often highly inadequate and unequal to facilities meant for White children.⁷⁴⁵ The Kansas City, Missouri, School District (KCMSD) formed in 1867. Soon after, they established schools specifically for Black children in accordance with both the educational and segregation mandates of the state constitution.⁷⁴⁶

The same year it formed, the KCMSD established Lincoln School, the first public school for African Americans in Kansas City.⁷⁴⁷ Utilizing the organizational and educational efforts of the Congregational Sabbath School, Lincoln School first operated from the same location at the Second Congregational Church. There, James Dallas Bowser, one of the earliest Black educators in Kansas City and the first principal of Lincoln School, taught classes to Black students from across the city.⁷⁴⁸ In 1869, Lincoln School moved into a building within the primarily Black Church Hill neighborhood at 9th and Charlotte Streets (no longer extant). By 1878, over five hundred students were enrolled. Due to the school's growth, the KCMSD finally approved construction of a new, purpose-built school facility at 11th and Campbell Streets (no longer extant). In 1882, secondary level courses were introduced at Lincoln School, and in the following decade under Principal Gabriel N. Grisham, an annex was added for the express purpose of teaching high school.⁷⁴⁹

The Westport School District also formed in 1867. Building on an existing school that was formed in 1856 by Nathan Scarrit, a White reverend of the Westport Methodist Church, Westport's first public school operated from the church building before the town constructed Main School at 42nd Street and Waddell Avenue (no longer extant).⁷⁵⁰ Some reports maintain that Main School may have initially been integrated until a dedicated Black school was established in 1869. Minutes of the Westport School District in 1867 note a population of 420 "educable children" in Westport, including 340 White children and 40 Black children.⁷⁵¹ However, information on whether Black children attended Main School is difficult to find, and it is unclear if the school was integrated at the outset; if it was, it would have been against state law at that time.

In 1869, the Westport School District established Penn School, Westport's first school specifically for Black children, which first operated from a room in a rented building on present-day Pennsylvania Avenue.⁷⁵² Marian Ellis, a White resident of Westport, was one of the school's earliest teachers.⁷⁵³ The school moved to various rented locations several times before finding its first permanent home in 1869, a brick building at 4237 Penn Street (present-day Pennsylvania Avenue, no longer extant).⁷⁵⁴

⁷⁴⁵ Walker, np.; Rosin and Nugent, "Historic Resources of the Kansas City Missouri School District Pre-1970," 8:16.

⁷⁴⁶ Coulter, 181.; Elizabeth Rosin, Rachel Nugent, and Lauren Rieke, "Lincoln High School," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Park Service, 2013), 8:16.

⁷⁴⁷ Rosin, Nugent, and Rieke, "Lincoln High School," 8:16.

⁷⁴⁸ Walker, np.; Aaron, 76.

⁷⁴⁹ Coulter, 181-182; Rosin and Nugent, "Historic Resources of the Kansas City Missouri School District Pre-1970," 8:13.; African American Heritage Trail, "Lincoln High School."

⁷⁵⁰ Main School was renamed Allen School when Kansas City annexed Westport in 1889. The initial school building was later replaced by the current Allen School building in 1912 (extant, KCRHP 2009). Connor, "Allen School," 7, 12.

⁷⁵¹ Connor, "Allen School," 8.

⁷⁵² Connor, "Allen School," 13.; Coulter, 183.

⁷⁵³ Coulter, 183.; Eve Aspinwall, "What Happened to Kansas City's First School for Black Students—and Its Historical Marker?" *Kansas City Star*, July 22, 2023, <https://www.kansascity.com/news/your-kcq/article277548703.html>.

⁷⁵⁴ Aspinwall, "What Happened to Kansas City's First School for Black Students—and Its Historical Marker?"

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In 1869, the KCMSD established the second public school for Black students in Kansas City. Located in a single room in the all-White Benton School at 14th and Liberty Streets in the West Bottoms, Miss Anna Wilson, a Black resident of Kansas City, served as its first teacher. In 1880, the KCMSD established Sumner School, named after White abolitionist Charles Sumner, in a repurposed building at Santa Fe and 8th Streets, also in the West Bottoms (no longer extant). Within a few years, the school moved to a three-story building at 9th and Louis Streets (no longer extant).⁷⁵⁵ In 1883, the Wendell Phillips School, named for a White abolitionist, opened in a rented building at 19th and Cherry Streets, with W.W. Yates as the first principal. Originally called Cherry Street School, the school spent several years moving between rented spaces in the area before settling into a facility on Cherry Street between 19th and 20th Streets in 1885, where it remained until the early 1910s (no longer extant).⁷⁵⁶

In 1886, Douglass School was established in a former gunpowder storage building at 29th Street and Broadway Boulevard, earning it the nickname “Powder House School” (no longer extant). Alberta Brodie served as its first teacher. Like many other Black schools in Kansas City during this period, it moved multiple times before settling in a permanent location at 27th and Jarboe Streets in the West Bottoms in 1891 (no longer extant). In 1911, Anna H. Jones was hired to serve as principal of Douglass School, becoming the first Black woman principal in the district.⁷⁵⁷ In 1890, R.T. Coles opened the Garrison School at Independence and Forest Avenues (no longer extant).⁷⁵⁸

In 1893, Attucks School was founded in a rented building at 1827 East 18th Street in the Lincoln-Coles district (no longer extant). Named for Crispus Attucks, a Black man killed in the Boston Massacre, W.H. Williams served as the school’s first principal. Several years later, the school moved to a different building at 2108 East 18th (no longer extant). However, as the Lincoln-Coles district grew rapidly, construction began in 1904 on a new building. The prominent two-story brick building, located at 1815 Woodland Avenue, was the first Black school constructed of brick in Kansas City (extant, NRHP 1991).⁷⁵⁹

At the end of the nineteenth century, the rapid growth of Kansas City necessitated additional schools, and small neighborhood schools continued to be formed in homes or rental spaces throughout the city. In 1898, a two-story frame building was rented at Prospect and Rochester Avenues in the Hick’s Hollow neighborhood, known as Page School (no longer extant). J. Silas Harris served as principal. Students at the new school had previously been taught in “two small rooms of a frame residence.”⁷⁶⁰ Bruce School opened in 1898 in a rented storeroom on 15th Street near Myrtle Avenue in the Lincoln-Coles district, with an enrollment of thirty-five students and one teacher in its first year.⁷⁶¹ The following year, it moved to a nearby block, and then to a one-room schoolhouse at 1329 Jackson (no longer extant) in 1900.⁷⁶² In 1899, Kansas City annexed Westport and Penn School was incorporated into the Kansas City School District. In 1903, Blue Valley School opened on 12th

⁷⁵⁵ Coulter, 182.

⁷⁵⁶ Coulter, 182.

⁷⁵⁷ Coulter, 183

⁷⁵⁸ Walker, np.

⁷⁵⁹ Landmarks Commission of Kansas City, Missouri, “Kansas City Public Schools Survey (pre-1940) Final Report,” October 1989, 16.

⁷⁶⁰ “An East Bottoms Negro School,” *The Kansas City Star*, August 10, 1898, p2.

⁷⁶¹ Walker, np.

⁷⁶² Coulter, 183.

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Street near the Amoco Steel plant in an area then outside the city boundaries.⁷⁶³ At the turn of the century, Roundtop School was established at 29th Street and Norton Avenue (no longer extant). The following year, it moved to a frame school building at 2949 Myrtle Avenue and was renamed Booker T. Washington School (no longer extant).⁷⁶⁴

In 1898, R.T. Coles of the Garrison School introduced a manual training program to the curriculum, teaching children how to use basic tools. At that time, Black students who wanted to complete manual training had no options, as the only nearby higher education institution for Black students, Lincoln University in Jefferson City, did not offer vocational training.⁷⁶⁵ By 1901, the KCMSD formally approved Coles's manual training curriculum, and the program was expanded to Douglass School. The KCMSD "erected a separate building for this department," and furnished it with some mechanical equipment.⁷⁶⁶

5.2. Early Twentieth Century: Segregation, Underfunding, and Overcrowding

In 1905, Missouri passed a compulsory education law requiring children between the ages of eight and fourteen to attend public or private school for at least half of the school term unless they were homeschooled. The law also required children between the ages of sixteen and eighteen to attend school unless they were employed. Children of any age could be exempt if they were too poverty stricken to be adequately clothed, were disabled, or if the child's labor was necessary to support the family.⁷⁶⁷ In 1909, the state expanded the ban on educating Black children in White schools to include private schools.⁷⁶⁸

As Kansas City grew and the population expanded during the late nineteenth century and into the early twentieth, the population of Black children enrolled in Kansas City public schools increased. From 1880 to 1915, the number of Black students in the city's public schools rose from 623 to 3,654, out of 46,684 total students citywide.⁷⁶⁹ In 1909, the KCMSD annexed dozens of acres outside the city limits, which included Blue River School.⁷⁷⁰ By 1915, the city contained ten Black elementary schools and one Black high school, which were staffed by 86 teachers.⁷⁷¹ By the end of World War I, the KCMSD had closed two elementary schools, leaving eight.⁷⁷²

Hiring Black educators and administrators to oversee and teach at Kansas City's Black schools was an increasing priority for many Black residents during this period. Many teachers in Kansas City's Black schools were White, and Black residents noted that Black students faced psychological and emotional repercussions when White teachers taught from a Eurocentric educational perspective, as students were denied educators with an intrinsic understanding of Black culture, history, and circumstances. Kansas City educator J. Silas Harris

⁷⁶³ Coulter, 184.

⁷⁶⁴ Coulter, 184.

⁷⁶⁵ "Negro Pupil's Work," *The Kansas City Journal*, June 6, 1899, p12.

⁷⁶⁶ "Training Colored Boys," *Kansas City Journal*, February 4, 1901, p6.

⁷⁶⁷ Aaron, 63.

⁷⁶⁸ Gotham, "Missed Opportunities," 223.

⁷⁶⁹ Rosin and Nugent, "Historic Resources of the Kansas City Missouri School District Pre-1970," E:16.

⁷⁷⁰ Rosin and Nugent, "Historic Resources of the Kansas City Missouri School District Pre-1970," E:16.

⁷⁷¹ Rosin and Nugent, "Lincoln High School," 8:17.

⁷⁷² Coulter, 184.

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wrote in 1917, “To know of the home life and environments of the negro is absolutely essential, and this of itself unfits the white man and white woman for the work that they are trying to do in our negro schools.”⁷⁷³

5.2.1. Schools in the Early Twentieth Century

In 1906, enrollment at Lincoln School reached seven hundred, necessitating a new school building at 19th Street and Tracy Avenue, with J.B. Neevil as contractor (no longer extant). The former high school annex was absorbed into the elementary school.⁷⁷⁴ As the only high school for Black students in the city, Lincoln School was a prominent fixture in the Black community. In 1910, Joe E. Herriford succeeded W.W. Yates as principal, holding the role from 1896 to his death in 1910. Herriford led efforts to rename the elementary branch of the Lincoln School as Yates School after the long-time educator.⁷⁷⁵ Around that time, Mrs. B.J. Williams, whose husband T.W.J. Williams had served as the principal of Bruce School, established a vocational school out of her home to train young Black women and girls in domestic service. Eventually, operation of the vocational school was taken over by the KCMSD and it moved into the Bruce School building, ultimately training hundreds of women for employment.⁷⁷⁶

Between 1910 and 1920, the KCMSD constructed no new schools for Black students. During this same period, it constructed 13 new elementary schools, one new high school, and four additions to existing school buildings for White students.⁷⁷⁷ The population of Black students continued to rise, but instead of constructing new schools to serve them, the KCMSD instead consolidated existing Black schools. Wendell Phillips School, located at 19th and Cherry Streets, was closed, and its students were transferred to Bryant School at Howard (now 24th Terrace) and Vine Streets, which was subsequently renamed Phillips School (extant). Enrollment soon reached nearly 500.⁷⁷⁸

By the end of the 1910s, Black students were still housed in older buildings that were increasingly overcrowded and outdated. At Lincoln High School, Black students themselves were enlisted to construct wood frame additions to accommodate their growing student body.⁷⁷⁹ Frustration and discontent with the condition of Black schools in the city intensified within the Black community. In a 1918 *Kansas City Star* editorial, J. Silas Harris wrote, “I am in a position to know that the negro schools of Kansas City are the poorest supervised schools of any large city in the United States. In fact, the supervision of the negro schools is a farce and an insult to the taxpayers.” He continued, “In many instances, the children of this race are housed in miserable old ‘shacks.’”⁷⁸⁰ At Penn School, the community pleaded for upgrades to the facility, where students and teachers faced deplorable conditions. The building lacked proper sewer connections, creating an “open cesspool” that bred illness and disease, as well as a leaking roof and inadequate heating.⁷⁸¹

⁷⁷³ “Urges Negro Teachers for Negroes,” *Kansas City Star*, February 17, 1917, p3.

⁷⁷⁴ Rosin and Nugent, “Lincoln High School,” 8:13.; “Repairs on School Houses,” *The Kansas City Times*, June 20, 1905, p2.

⁷⁷⁵ Coulter, 182.

⁷⁷⁶ “K.C. Has Housemaid Training School,” *The Kansas City Post*, June 22, 1919, p16.

⁷⁷⁷ Walker, np.

⁷⁷⁸ Coulter, 182.

⁷⁷⁹ “Are the Negro Schools of Kansas City Keeping Pace with the Whites?” *The Kansas City Sun*, December 27, 1919, p1.

⁷⁸⁰ “Criticizes the Negro Schools,” *The Kansas City Star*, March 8, 1918, p6.

⁷⁸¹ “Asks Improvements at Penn School,” *The Kansas City Star*, May 3, 1918, p18.

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By this time, many of Kansas City's schools, a number of which had been constructed in the late nineteenth century, faced deteriorating facilities, lack of supplies, and inadequate funding. Improvements for both Black and White schools throughout Kansas City during the 1910s was largely stymied by the World War I moratorium on nondefense related construction. By the early 1920s, conditions were so severe that the KCMSD resorted to half-day schedules for thousands of students, both Black and White.⁷⁸² However, conditions at Black schools were markedly worse than those at White schools.

In 1920, community leadership, including the Parent-Teachers Association, the Kansas City branch of the NAACP, the City Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, the Kansas City Medical Society of Black Doctors, the Civic League, the Lincoln High Alumni Association, the Inter-City Lawyers Club, the Negro Business League, and the Inter-Denominational Ministerial Alliance submitted a memorandum to the school board. The memorandum denounced school overcrowding, lack of maintenance and adequate facilities, and outdated equipment, particularly at Lincoln High School. It called for the KCMSD to provide a modern, up-to-date high school, along with a normal training school and junior college.⁷⁸³

Nelson C. Crews, editor of the *Kansas City Sun*, emerged as an outspoken advocate of improving the city's Black schools. When a bond measure for school funding was put forth in 1921, Crews urged Black citizens to vote against it unless it expressly guaranteed funding for Black schools. In a 1921 *Sun* editorial, Crews decried that the Cherry School building, which was already outdated and deteriorated when it was reallocated as a Black school, "was patched up and put into service. It is dark, unsanitary, miserably located and wholly un-modern." He continued that Yates School was "about ready to collapse from old age" and that Bruce School was just "a bevy of shacks with no sewage outlet." Of the proposed bond, Crews stated: "Five million is a whole lot of money. Negro schools ought to receive at least a tenth of it." He continued, "School taxes are just as burdensome for us as for any other class of citizens . . . We are entitled to the same returns as any other class of citizens."⁷⁸⁴ Although the school board made vague promises, when the bond passed, the money was used to construct several new schools for White students. At that time, the student body at Lincoln High School, which was built for a capacity of 250 students, had 750 enrolled. While the board conceded to adding an auditorium at Lincoln High School, it was already overcrowded and insufficient by the time it was completed, and as Crews predicted, the board did not approve a new Black high school for another 15 years.⁷⁸⁵

Despite lack of support from the school district, local groups and school leadership continued efforts to improve access to education for Black students in Kansas City. In 1921, under Principal Henley Cox, Phillips School instituted a special education program dubbed "Opportunity School," which added vocational training in domestic service to its curriculum.⁷⁸⁶ In 1921, Lincoln High School students once again contributed labor themselves for the construction of an addition, this time at Bruce School. In 1922, a two-story addition was added on the east facade of Attucks School.⁷⁸⁷

⁷⁸² Rosin and Nugent, "Historic Resources of the Kansas City Missouri School District Pre-1970," E:17.

⁷⁸³ Coulter, 184-185.

⁷⁸⁴ "Our Weekly Sermon," *The Kansas City Sun*, March 5, 1921, p6.

⁷⁸⁵ Coulter, 182, 187.

⁷⁸⁶ Coulter, 183.

⁷⁸⁷ Coulter, 197-98.; African American Heritage Trail, "Western Baptist Bible College."

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In 1921, the KCMSD closed Sumner School in the West Bottoms and transferred its students to Garrison School in the Lincoln-Coles district, although the next year they were relocated again to Douglass School. After another brief move the students finally settled into the former Morse School, originally constructed for White students, at 2121 Charlotte Street (no longer extant). In 1927, it was officially renamed Sumner Elementary.⁷⁸⁸ In 1928, the KCMSD closed Blue Valley School.⁷⁸⁹ In 1930, reflecting the racial shift in the neighborhood from predominately White to predominately Black, the aging Irving School at 24th Street and Prospect Avenue in the Lincoln-Coles district was designated a “negro school” and renamed Booker T. Washington School (no longer extant). Built in the 1880s for White students, the school building was already outdated when it was converted to use for Black students.⁷⁹⁰

In the 1920s, numerous bonds were passed to improve public schools across Kansas City, addressing delayed improvements caused by World War I. Between 1923 and 1932, at least eighteen new buildings or additions were constructed. However, a majority benefited White schools in the district.⁷⁹¹ Nevertheless, despite chronic unequal funding and subpar facilities, by 1930 educators in Kansas City had reduced the rate of illiteracy among African Americans to a remarkably low 4.4 percent.⁷⁹²

5.3. The Great Depression and World War II

While the onset of the Great Depression greatly impacted the Kansas City economy, the introduction of federal programs allowed the district to fund long overdue improvements to area schools. In 1930, the KCMSD finally relented to providing a new high school for Black students, funded through the Public Works Administration. The previous year, over 1,100 students were enrolled in Lincoln High School, which had earlier expanded to a capacity of 800. Students were forced to crowd into frame buildings attached to the main structure to attend classes.⁷⁹³ Charles A. Smith, the White District Architect for KCMSD, designed the new Lincoln High School at 21st Street and Woodland Avenue (extant, NRHP 2013). Completed in 1936 at a cost of \$700,000, the new school building featured laboratories, manual training rooms, music and creative art spaces, a woodshop and lumber rooms, a gymnasium, and a large, 1,200 seat auditorium.⁷⁹⁴ Upon completion of the new Lincoln High School building, the former building became home to the R.T. Coles Vocational School and Junior High School, which opened as the second secondary school for Black students in Kansas City.⁷⁹⁵ In 1938, students at R.T. Coles won first place in the Better Homes exposition for their model homes.⁷⁹⁶

During the 1930s and 1940s, an increasing number of Black children living in smaller surrounding cities, such as Independence, Harrisonville, and Pleasant Hill, were bused long distances to schools in Kansas City rather than provided local facilities. As a result, many Black families sent their children to live with relatives in

⁷⁸⁸ Coulter, 182.

⁷⁸⁹ Coulter, 184.

⁷⁹⁰ African American Heritage Trail, “Booker T. Washington School.”

⁷⁹¹ Rosin and Nugent, “Historic Resources of the Kansas City Missouri School District Pre-1970,” E:17-18.; “Building Program,” *Kansas City Times*, January 3, 1930, p2.

⁷⁹² Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 73.

⁷⁹³ Coulter, 195.

⁷⁹⁴ African American Heritage Trail, “Lincoln High School.”; Rosin and Nugent, “Lincoln High School,” 8:13-14.

⁷⁹⁵ Walker, np.

⁷⁹⁶ “Coles School Exhibit at Better Homes Exposition,” *The Kansas City Call*, February 25, 1938, p9.

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Kansas City rather than subject them to long commutes; other families moved to be closer to schools.⁷⁹⁷ This practice began in the early twentieth century but increased during the interwar period. Between 1904 and 1940, nearly thirteen percent of students at Lincoln High School came from areas outside of KCMSD boundaries.⁷⁹⁸

Black leadership in Kansas City remained committed to improving the conditions of the city's Black schools, which continued to face overcrowding, underfunding, and neglect from both the KCMSD and local and state governments. In 1940, the *Kansas City Call* noted that "we pay negro teachers \$25 per month for the same hours of labor and character of work that white teachers are paid \$65 to \$85 per month for doing."⁷⁹⁹ In 1941, Kansas City operated fourteen Black schools out of a total of 95—twelve grade schools and two high schools. That year, of the 6,274 Black students in city schools, 4,512 attended elementary school, while 1,762 attended high school.⁸⁰⁰ By the end of World War II, during the 1945-1946 school year, Kansas City's Black schools had grown to serve 5,248 elementary students and 2,062 high school students, bringing the total Black enrollment to 7,310.⁸⁰¹

5.4. Post-World War II: De Jure School Integration

Following World War II, the discriminatory practice of redlining continued to prevent African Americans from seeking housing in newer suburban areas, increasing segregation and severely restricting housing options and educational choices for Black Kansas Citians.⁸⁰² Black residents congregated in the Lincoln-Coles district, many to be closer to the only schools available to their children.⁸⁰³ In 1947, the city unveiled its new Master Plan, which further worked to segregate Black and other non-White populations from White neighborhoods. The Master Plan was wide sweeping and covered all areas of city life, including schools.⁸⁰⁴ It divided the city into "white" and "negro" districts for purposes of zoning and locating schools, with racial segregation as one of the guiding principles.⁸⁰⁵ In 1957, as Kansas City annexed hundreds of square miles in the surrounding area, Missouri passed legislation barring automatic expansion of the KCMSD when city boundaries increased through annexation. This allowed annexed suburbs to establish new school districts that were essentially exclusive to suburban White residents.⁸⁰⁶

As postwar population growth continued, the need for new and upgraded schools in Kansas City became acute. In 1950, there were approximately 8,887 Black students enrolled at Kansas City public schools, amounting to over 16 percent of the city's overall student enrollment. In 1952, Booker T. Washington school was closed, with overcrowding used as a justification. By 1954, the number of Black students had climbed to 14,527.⁸⁰⁷ That year, the district employed 372 Black teachers and principals.⁸⁰⁸

⁷⁹⁷ Gotham, "Missed Opportunities," 225.

⁷⁹⁸ Coulter, 188.

⁷⁹⁹ "Neglect of Negro Schools a Disgrace," *The Kansas City Call*, June 28, 1940, p1.

⁸⁰⁰ "Teachers' Institute On Monday," *The Kansas City Call*, September 5, 1941, p25.

⁸⁰¹ "A School Study," *The Kansas City Star*, June 8, 1954, p8.

⁸⁰² Gotham, "Missed Opportunities," 227.

⁸⁰³ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 185-186.

⁸⁰⁴ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 144-145.

⁸⁰⁵ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 149.

⁸⁰⁶ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 188.

⁸⁰⁷ Rosin and Nugent, "Lincoln High School," 8:18.

⁸⁰⁸ "A School Study," *The Kansas City Star*, June 8, 1954, p8.

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5.4.1. Brown v. Board of Education, 1954

In 1954, the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* struck down the discriminatory policy of racial segregation in public schools. However, following the ruling, the KCMSD intentionally and effectively maintained segregated schools by manipulating school attendance boundaries.⁸⁰⁹ It eliminated the previously explicit “racial” attendance zones in favor of “neighborhood” attendance zones for public schools. Attendance zones were drawn around existing segregated neighborhoods, which were increasingly segregated due to White flight, effectively maintaining a de facto system of racially segregated schools.⁸¹⁰ During the 1950s and subsequent decades, the KCMSD repeatedly redrew attendance zones with boundaries that perpetuated segregation. Troost Avenue, near the western edge of the heavily segregated Black Lincoln-Coles district, became the primary dividing line in Kansas City. Known as the “Troost Wall” or the “Troost Divide,” it effectively split the city into two distinct halves: east of Troost, with a predominantly Black population, and west of Troost, with a predominately White population.⁸¹¹

Between 1954 and the early 1970s, the racial composition of schools east and west of the “Troost Wall” changed dramatically. East of Troost, Lincoln High School was the exception, starting and remaining all Black. Other schools east of Troost, however, saw significant change. Central High School, all White in 1954, became 97 percent Black by 1961. Paseo High School, all White in 1954 and 9.7 percent Black in 1960, became 98 percent Black by 1969. Southeast High School, all White in 1954, became 98 percent Black by 1973. During the same period, schools west of Troost remained predominantly White. By the early 1970s, every elementary, middle, and high school east of Troost was greater than 90 percent Black. In contrast, every elementary, middle, and high school west of Troost remained less than 50 percent Black.⁸¹²

Amid the Civil Rights Movement, in 1963 Black and White Kansas Citizens protested the KCMSD board, arguing that the district’s school zoning policy upheld racially segregated schools and demanding the board redraw school zone boundaries to cross the “Troost Wall.”⁸¹³ Local Black advocacy groups also staged protests against the school board, stating that available resources, including qualified teachers, were frequently allocated to White schools where there was less of a need. Despite these efforts, nearly every new school constructed after *Brown* was de facto racially segregated.⁸¹⁴ Other groups like the NAACP, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) also got involved, culminating in the SCLC bringing suit in 1973 to fully desegregate Kansas City public schools.⁸¹⁵

During this period, the KCMSD also merged or closed numerous Black schools in Kansas City and constructed several new schools that were already slated as part of an on-going building program. In 1954, Lincoln Junior College and Kansas City Junior College merged. In 1955, the beloved Penn School in Westport closed and was

⁸⁰⁹ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 104.

⁸¹⁰ Gotham, “Missed Opportunities,” 227-228.

⁸¹¹ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 104.

⁸¹² Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 105.

⁸¹³ Gotham, “Missed Opportunities,” 231.

⁸¹⁴ Gotham, “Missed Opportunities,” 231-232.

⁸¹⁵ Gotham, “Missed Opportunities,” 233.

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destroyed by a fire the following decade.⁸¹⁶ In 1955, Phillis Wheatley School, which had been located at East 54th Street and South Benton Avenue in a turn-of-the-century, wood-frame schoolhouse that lacked indoor plumbing (extant), also received a new, modern school building. The original Phillis Wheatley schoolhouse initially consisted of a one room school, and the school was later expanded with an additional classroom. Initially located at East 54th Street and Prospect Avenue, the two-room schoolhouse was moved to its current location in 1928. After the school moved to its new location, the original Phillis Wheatley schoolhouse served as an important neighborhood hub and community center, a role it continues to serve today.⁸¹⁷ The new Phillis Wheatley School was constructed at 24th Street and Agnes Avenue (extant), and the former building was sold to the Willis Chapel AME church.⁸¹⁸ Other buildings and additions were proposed for the city's Black schools, including an addition to the Yates School. In 1959, Lincoln High School was bursting at the seams with an enrollment nearing 1,000. A four-story addition was constructed by Kansas City firm Hewitt & Royer, adding much needed classrooms, a library, and specialty science, art, and training facilities.⁸¹⁹

5.4.2. Jenkins v. State of Missouri, 1977

In 1973, local advocacy groups convinced the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) to launch an investigation of KCMSD. The HEW found that integration of public schools in Kansas City had not been adequately implemented and required the district to adopt a comprehensive desegregation plan. KCMSD subsequently enacted their Plan 6-C, which involved busing Black students to predominantly White schools, where they were often received with hostility from White residents.⁸²⁰

In 1977, the KCMSD filed a lawsuit naming 18 suburban school districts in Missouri and Kansas, the states of Missouri and Kansas, and three federal agencies (the U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development [HUD], Health, Education, and Welfare [HEW], and Department of Transportation [DOT]). The lawsuit contended that these entities were responsible for the entrenched segregation of the city, creating a barrier to school integration that was too burdensome for the district to overcome.⁸²¹ In 1978, the KCMSD was realigned as a defendant and the case proceeded to trial with the plaintiff schoolchildren suing both the KCMSD and the state of Missouri and the KCMSD crossclaiming against the state.⁸²² *Jenkins v. State of Missouri* spent years in litigation. The Judge later dismissed the suburban school districts in Kansas and Missouri from the case, a decision he later regretted, as “the problem of school desegregation was redefined as a local, rather than a metropolitan problem.”⁸²³

Finally decided in 1984, the case found that following the *Brown* decision, the KCMSD had indeed repeatedly redrawn school attendance zones to unofficially retain segregated schools. Judge Russell G. Clark ordered the KCMSD to implement a new program to upgrade existing schools, introduce facilities to entice White students

⁸¹⁶ African American Heritage Trail, “Penn School.”

⁸¹⁷ African American Heritage Trail, “54th Street Neighborhood.”

⁸¹⁸ “Two New Schools,” *The Kansas City Times*, February 5, 1954, p23.; Rosin and Nugent, “Historic Resources of the Kansas City Missouri School District Pre-1970,” F:46.

⁸¹⁹ Rosin and Nugent, “Lincoln High School,” 8:14.

⁸²⁰ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 334.

⁸²¹ Rosin and Nugent, “Lincoln High School,” 8:20.

⁸²² Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 336-337.

⁸²³ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 336-337.

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from the suburbs to attend inner city schools, and create a magnet school program. However, the district's poor financial situation prevented substantial changes to Kansas City schools.⁸²⁴

5.5. 1975 to Present: Continued De Facto School Segregation

As a result of ongoing White flight and suburbanization, enrollment at Kansas City public schools dropped from 77,000 in 1963 to 44,000 in the 1980s.⁸²⁵ By 1995, students at KCMSD schools were 22.1 percent White and 77.9 percent non-White or Black.⁸²⁶ At that time, Kansas City, Missouri, had the only majority-minority school district in the state.⁸²⁷ Desegregation of Lincoln High School was a long, protracted affair, and was not fully desegregated until 1978, when it became a magnet school. That year, it was renamed Lincoln Academy for Accelerated Study, and later the Lincoln College Preparatory Academy in 1986.⁸²⁸ In 1995, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the Kansas City desegregation plan that forced state funding for city schools on the basis that “once the vestiges of legally enforced segregation were removed, it would not be illegal for the school district to maintain and run racially segregated all-black or all-white schools,” as long as facilities were “equal” for all races.⁸²⁹ After state funding was pulled from Kansas City schools, a number of schools closed, staff were laid off, and student busing and other transportation ended.⁸³⁰ The situation has not improved since, exacerbated by the introduction of charter schools. An Urban League report from 2019 found that the Kansas City school district “is more segregated today than in the 1990s.”⁸³¹

5.6. Higher Education

Prior to the Civil War, opportunities for advanced education for Black Americans were severely limited. In 1862, the act 18 Act enabled the federal government to establish public land-grant colleges, although it did not require colleges that would admit African Americans.⁸³² In 1890, the Morrill Act was expanded, aimed at former Confederate states with the express purpose of creating land-grant institutions for Black citizens or requiring existing institutions to include programs for Black citizens.⁸³³

Following the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, Black colleges incorporated teacher training programs into their curricula to create a large pool of Black educators to work in the country's segregated school systems.⁸³⁴ In the early decades of the twentieth century, “normal schools” for training teachers that were open to Black Kansas Citians were largely concentrated in the former free state of Kansas. They included the Kansas State Agricultural College in Manhattan, the Manual Training Normal School at Pittsburg, Kansas, the State Normal

⁸²⁴ Rosin and Nugent, “Lincoln High School,” 8:21.

⁸²⁵ Rosin and Nugent, “Historic Resources of the Kansas City Missouri School District Pre-1970,” E:26.

⁸²⁶ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 308.

⁸²⁷ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 333.

⁸²⁸ African American Heritage Trail, “Lincoln High School.”

⁸²⁹ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 339.

⁸³⁰ Gotham, *Constructing the Segregated City*, 339-340.

⁸³¹ Diane Euston and Tim Reidy, “Segregation in KC: How the School District Helped Create the Troost Divide,” *Martin City Telegraph*, July 19, 2020.

⁸³² Anderson, 388.; National Archives, “The Morrill Act of 1862,” accessed August 16, 2024, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/morrill-act>.

⁸³³ Paula Young, “Black Colleges and Universities: Their Past, Path, and Leadership,” in *Survival of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, ed. Edward Forth (Lexington Books, 2013), 41.

⁸³⁴ Young, “Black Colleges and Universities,” 41.

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School at Emporia, and Western University in Kansas City, Kansas.⁸³⁵ In Missouri, the only colleges open to Black students were the Stowe Teachers College (present Harris-Stowe State University) in St. Louis and Lincoln University in Jefferson City.⁸³⁶

In the early twentieth century, local Kansas City educators and leaders consistently urged the city to establish a junior college for Black students. The first junior college for White students was established in 1915.⁸³⁷ Some elementary schools, as well as Lincoln High School, did attempt to institute junior college programs, although they struggled to stay afloat.⁸³⁸ In 1936, after decades of agitating, administrators at Lincoln High School finally succeeded in establishing a junior college in a separate classroom of the school.⁸³⁹ Once again, it was local members of the Black community, rather than city, state, or federal government, that made the opportunity come to fruition.

The University of Missouri (also called Mizzou) was established in 1839 and opened in 1840. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the school remained segregated per Missouri law. In 1936, Lloyd Gaines filed a lawsuit against the University to gain admission to its law school, setting off a long and contentious battle to desegregate the university (see 7.2. *Civil Rights Activism*). During the 1930s and 1940s, legal battles against segregation in institutions of higher education picked up across the U.S., and sensing a changing tide, some colleges and universities began to admit Black students on an individual basis. Harold Holliday, a graduate of Lincoln High School, became the first Black student to graduate from the University of Kansas in 1948, and within a few years Black enrollment topped 150. The following year, the first Black student was admitted to the private Jesuit school at Rockhurst University in Kansas City, Missouri. In 1950, the first Black students were finally admitted to the University of Missouri.⁸⁴⁰

In 1951, Lincoln Junior College had an enrollment of 91 students, down from the previous year's 150 students. *The Kansas City Call* noted that students enrolled at the Junior College consisted primarily of Kansas Citians, but also included students from rural areas outside of Kansas City, and some from as far as Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. That year, general education was added to the curriculum for the first time.⁸⁴¹ In 1954, the Lincoln Junior College was consolidated with the Junior College of Kansas City.⁸⁴²

In 1889, the Western Baptist Bible College (WBBC) for Black students was established in Independence, Missouri, and relocated to Macon in 1892.⁸⁴³ In 1920, the college purchased a 6-acre tract at 21st Street and

⁸³⁵ Aaron, 93.

⁸³⁶ Ryan Delaney, "Little Known Supreme Court Case from Missouri was Early Stepping Stone to School Desegregation," *National Public Radio*, accessed October 31, 2024, <https://www.stlpr.org/education/2018-12-12/little-known-supreme-court-case-from-missouri-was-early-stepping-stone-to-school-desegregation>.

⁸³⁷ Aaron, ii.

⁸³⁸ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 78.

⁸³⁹ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 78.; Aaron, ii.

⁸⁴⁰ University of Missouri, "The History of Mizzou - Timeline," accessed October 31, 2024, <https://missouri.edu/timeline/>; Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 77.; Rockhurst University, "Rockhurst University Historical Facts," accessed October 31, 2024, <https://www.rockhurst.edu/about/historical-facts>.

⁸⁴¹ "Expect 91 in Junior College," *The Kansas City Call*, August 24, 1951, p13.

⁸⁴² "School Merger Plan," *The Kansas City Times*, August 19, 1954, p2.; Aaron, 19.

⁸⁴³ Western Bible Baptist College, "History," accessed October 31, 2024, <https://wbckc.org/history/>.

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Woodland Avenue in Kansas City.⁸⁴⁴ The college operated at that location for nearly a decade before outgrowing the space. In 1927, they purchased the former Gillis Orphan's Home (built 1900) and the Margaret Klock Armour Memorial Home property.⁸⁴⁵ The Gillis building was later renamed Goins Hall when the WBBC moved onto the property in 1929, and the Memorial Home building was renamed Johnson Hall (demolished 2016).⁸⁴⁶ The WBBC taught theology and provided teacher training courses. Numerous prominent ministers and leaders in Kansas City's Black community attended WBBC, including Reverend D.A. Holmes.⁸⁴⁷

However, the purchase of the property put the school in debt, and by the onset of the Great Depression, WBBC found itself in a financial crisis. In 1929, the school published a call in the *Word and Way* newspaper stating, "The school finds itself faced by an emergency. The situation is critical. If the school is to survive and serve it must have more money. Its friends among the white and Negro baptists of the state must come to its relief and support."⁸⁴⁸ The WBBC was forced to close its doors for the 1935-1936 school year, but following a period of reorganization reopened in 1937. The school still operates in Kansas City as of 2024.⁸⁴⁹

⁸⁴⁴ "New Home Purchased for Western Baptist College," *The Baptist Record*, September 24, 1920, p1.

⁸⁴⁵ Andrea Herries and Debbie Sheals, "Gillis Orphan's Home," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Park Service, 2017), 8:17.

⁸⁴⁶ Herries and Sheals, 8:17.

⁸⁴⁷ "Seminary Observes 50th Year," *The Kansas City Call*, May 17, 1940, p6.

⁸⁴⁸ "Western Baptist College - An Emergency," *Word and Way*, April 4, 1929, p2.

⁸⁴⁹ African American Heritage Trail, "Attucks School."

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6. RELIGIOUS & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Black religious institutions, fraternal organizations, benevolent and mutual aid organizations, and community centers played vital and often interconnected roles in advancing Black social, political, and economic causes, while also addressing the psychological and moral needs of their communities. These institutions served as the backbone of Black resistance to oppression, providing a foundation for solidarity and helping to cultivate a strong sense of shared identity and community among those they served.⁸⁵⁰

6.1. Religious Institutions

6.1.1. Black Religious Institutions in the Early United States

Churches and other religious institutions played a pivotal role in Black communities in the United States since the nation's early foundation. For Black communities, places of worship have long served as more than spiritual centers, but as the “womb of Black culture” and as “cultural brokers” for their congregants.⁸⁵¹

Most Black religious institutions founded before and after the Civil War were predominantly Methodist or Baptist Protestant Christian churches, both of which were European religious movements that White colonialists brought to North America. In the eighteenth century, White Methodists were opposed to slavery, providing an impetus for many African Americans, free and enslaved, to join the denomination. However, White leadership later retreated from this position, leading African Americans to form their own independent churches and congregations.⁸⁵² Meanwhile, by the mid-eighteenth century, the Baptist movement had spread throughout the northern United States and later expanded its missionary efforts into the southern states. As a result of these efforts, many enslaved African Americans in the South adopted the Baptist faith, and the earliest Black Baptist churches were established in the mid-1700s in Virginia and South Carolina.⁸⁵³

During the period of institutionalized slavery in the South, both enslaved and free African Americans attended church services primarily at White churches. However, many also worshiped privately in homes, fields, or clandestine gathering spaces, a practice that scholars refer to as “the invisible institution.” These secret spaces provided a sanctuary for spiritual expression and community building outside the control of White authorities.⁸⁵⁴ Freedom seekers who successfully escaped to the North often formed abolitionist missionary associations and societies.⁸⁵⁵ In Missouri, few independent Black churches formed prior to emancipation.⁸⁵⁶ The first formed in Independence, Missouri, in 1863 by Thomas Hale, a formerly enslaved Black man.⁸⁵⁷

⁸⁵⁰ Paul Lawrence Dunbar, “Hidden in Plain Sight: African American Secret Societies and Black Freemasonry,” *Journal of African American Studies* 16, no. 4 (2012): 623-624.

⁸⁵¹ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Duke University Press, 1990), 17.

⁸⁵² Steven E. Mitchell, “Invisible History: Preserving the African American Experience in Missouri,” Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Summer 1997, accessed July 11, 2024, <https://mostateparks.com/sites/mostateparks/files/invisiblehistory.pdf>, 50.

⁸⁵³ Lincoln and Lawrence, 22.

⁸⁵⁴ Dunbar, 622–637.

⁸⁵⁵ Lincoln and Lawrence, 20.

⁸⁵⁶ Mitchell, “Invisible History,” 3.

⁸⁵⁷ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 60.

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6.1.2. Black Religious Institutions in Late Nineteenth to Early Twentieth Century Kansas City

As in cities across the United States, churches founded in Kansas City after the Civil War served more than just the spiritual needs of their congregants. Typically built or established in the physical center of Black communities, churches formed the backbone of neighborhoods and functioned as community centers, meeting facilities, offered recreational activities, and sometimes provided education.⁸⁵⁸ One of the earliest known Black churches in Kansas City was established circa 1865 by formerly enslaved pastor Henry Roberson.⁸⁵⁹ Initially held in a small meeting house, a new \$5,000 church building was constructed under Roberson's leadership near 10th and Charlotte Streets in the Church Hill neighborhood (no longer extant). Initially named the Second Baptist Church and later dubbed the Charlotte Street Church, by 1881 the congregation exceeded five hundred members. As the congregation rapidly grew, Roberson spent over a decade fundraising to construct a second church building in 1893. At that time, the congregation held nearly one thousand members.⁸⁶⁰ Shortly after, Roberson retired and Samuel William Bacote took over as a pastor, a position he held for over 50 years. Bacote led efforts for an even larger, two-story, brick church, completed in 1898 (no longer extant). During his time as pastor at Second Baptist, Bacote enrolled in Kansas City University, where he earned both a bachelor's and a master's degree. He became the first Black graduate to earn a degree from the institution.⁸⁶¹ By the onset of World War I, the Second Baptist Church had a congregation of nearly 3,000.⁸⁶²

The Allen Chapel AME Church was initially formed in the 1860s by three Black church leaders who held services at Straggler's Camp, the tent encampment established by migrants during the Great Exodus (see 1.2.2. *Black Migration and the Great Exodus*).⁸⁶³ Under the leadership of William B. Cushley, a permanent building was constructed at 10th and Charlotte Streets in the Church Hill neighborhood, across from the Second Baptist Church (no longer extant). As the congregation grew, it became a central place of worship and community for the growing population of Black professionals in the area.⁸⁶⁴

Many other small congregations were also founded in the late nineteenth century, initially renting out commercial spaces or holding meetings in members' homes. Other churches included the Vine Street Church (originally Shiloh Baptist Missionary and later Paseo Baptist) in 1884. The Ebenezer AME Church was formed by members who had split from Allen Chapel AME and started meeting in a rental space in 1886, and the Metropolitan Missionary Baptist was established in 1896.⁸⁶⁵ Smaller neighborhood churches were also founded in the late nineteenth century, including St. Luke's AME Church, founded in Westport in 1879 (no longer extant), Greenwood Baptist Church, founded in 1892 in the West Bottoms (no longer extant), St. James Baptist Church, founded in 1883 in Westport (replaced in 1939, KCRHP 2013), and the Sun Rise Baptist Church on

⁸⁵⁸ Mitchell, "Invisible History," 3.

⁸⁵⁹ Coulter, 201.; Second Baptist Church, "The 1960 Year History of Second Baptist Church," accessed July 16, 2024, https://secondbaptistkcmo.org/images/SBC_History_160.pdf.

⁸⁶⁰ Coulter, 202.

⁸⁶¹ Coulter, 44, 202.

⁸⁶² Coulter, 44, 202.

⁸⁶³ Allen Chapel AME Church, "History," accessed July 12, 2024, <https://www.allenchapelkc.org/history/>.

⁸⁶⁴ Allen Chapel AME Church, "History."

⁸⁶⁵ Paseo Baptist Church, "Our History," accessed July 16, 2024, <https://paseobaptist.org/about/our-history/>; Coulter, 205.; Allen Chapel AME Church, "History."

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Bell Street (no longer extant).⁸⁶⁶ Others included the Varrick Chapel AME (1902), Asbury Chapel AME (prior to 1880), Centennial M.E. (1880s), St. Matthews AME Zion (1911), and Bethel AME (1912).⁸⁶⁷

In the early decades of the twentieth century, thousands of African Americans from the South moved to Kansas City as part of the Great Migration (see *1.3.1. Early Twentieth Century Growth*), and numerous new churches were established during that time. Many, like the Willis Chapel AME Church in the Leeds-Dunbar neighborhood and St. Peter's AME followed the model of Reconstruction-era churches, starting out as revivals in tents and later moving into permanent quarters after gaining a consistent following.⁸⁶⁸ Notably, St. Peter's AME was founded in 1915 by Reverend Litha Beard, a Black woman, which was rare in both Black and White denominations of that era.⁸⁶⁹ Although a majority of Black churches established in Kansas City were Protestant, Bishop John J. Hogan, who was White, founded St. Monica Mission for Colored Catholics at East 17th Street and Lydia Avenue in 1909, the first Catholic church for Black Kansas Citians (extant).⁸⁷⁰

In 1913, there were reportedly nineteen Black churches in Kansas City with a combined membership of 7,156 people, as well as sixteen associated "missions."⁸⁷¹ During the period of rapid settlement in Kansas City in the 1910s and 1920s, driven by the Great Migration, many churches found themselves with a large influx of congregants in need.⁸⁷² Subsequently, new churches were established and existing churches expanded their facilities. By the onset of World War I, the Allen Chapel AME Church boasted a pool, basketball court, bathhouse, gymnasium, library, and daycare for residents of the surrounding Church Hill neighborhood.⁸⁷³ By the end of the 1920s, Kansas City contained at least forty Black churches, ranging from the prominent St. Stephen Church to smaller congregations that met in homes or rental spaces.⁸⁷⁴

In the first half of the twentieth century, migration and urbanization profoundly reshaped Black life in the United States. During this time, Black churches led by Black ministers became an "indispensable and fundamental anchor for Black communities," serving both as sources of continuity and agents of social change.⁸⁷⁵ At Vine Street Church, pastor T.H. Ewing was a driving force in promoting the economic development of the Black community. Ewing organized an economic club for members of his congregation, aimed at fostering financial empowerment within the community. The club encouraged members to establish savings, open bank accounts, purchase homes, and form private investment groups for members to pool their money and purchase real estate. Daniel Arthur Holmes later took over as head of Vine Street Church. Under his leadership, the congregation grew into one of the three largest Black churches in Kansas City. By the onset of

⁸⁶⁶ Coulter, 207-209.

⁸⁶⁷ "St. Peter's African Methodist Episcopal Church," *The Kansas City Post*, August 11, 1928, p14.

⁸⁶⁸ "Willis Chapel African Methodist Church," *The Kansas City Post*, August 4, 1928, p14.

⁸⁶⁹ "St. Peter's African Methodist Episcopal Church," *The Kansas City Post*, August 11, 1928, p14.

⁸⁷⁰ St. Monica Catholic Church, "About Us," accessed July 16, 2024, <https://stmonicakc.org/about-us#:~:text=Monica%20Catholic%20Church%20is%20the,1913%20is%20still%20used%20today.>

⁸⁷¹ A. Earl Martin, *Our Negro Population: A Sociological Study of the Negroes of Kansas City, Missouri* (F. Hudson Publishing Company, 1913), 18.; Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 61.

⁸⁷² Lincoln and Lawrence, 119.

⁸⁷³ Coulter, 204-205.

⁸⁷⁴ Coulter, 199.

⁸⁷⁵ Coulter, 199.

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World War I, the congregation had roughly six hundred members, one hundred of whom reportedly owned their own homes.⁸⁷⁶

Reverend James Wesley Hurse, founder of St. Stephen Baptist Church, was another early proponent of advancing economic opportunities for African Americans. Hurse first began preaching in a tent in the West Bottoms before taking over leadership of Pilgrim Baptist Church in 1901. He later organized St. Stephen Baptist Church in a small chapel at the convergence of Admiral Boulevard, Charlotte Street, and 6th Street (no longer extant). Under Hurse's leadership, the church rapidly expanded. In the early 1920s, with a congregation nearing 1,000, the church moved to a larger facility in the former Central Presbyterian Church building at 910 Harrison (no longer extant). By the end of the decade, St. Stephen was the largest Black church in Kansas City.⁸⁷⁷ Like Ewing, Hurse promoted the economic advancement of his community, urging members to frequent Black businesses and invest in real estate.⁸⁷⁸ However, unlike some of Kansas City's other large churches, the congregation at St. Stephen primarily consisted of working-class members. The church often hosted labor meetings, including those held by the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (see 7.2. *Civil Rights Activism*).⁸⁷⁹

In the early twentieth century, the Ebenezer AME Church occupied various rental spaces, residences, and small churches to accommodate the needs of its growing congregation. By the onset of World War I, the church had constructed a \$30,000 stone church at 17th Street and Tracy Avenue to serve a congregation of nearly one thousand (no longer extant). In addition to its spiritual mission, Ebenezer engaged in secular social and political activities. The church organized debates on women's suffrage, held services conducted by the Kansas City chapter of the NAACP, and hosted female guest preachers.⁸⁸⁰ The Second Baptist Church also hosted meetings of the Kansas City chapter of the NAACP, and held sessions of the National NAACP Convention in 1923 (see 7.2. *Civil Rights Activism*).⁸⁸¹ In addition to social justice organizations, Second Baptist Church had secular functions, including performances, speeches, and the Sunday Forum, a gathering of local citizens who discussed current events and issues impacting their community.⁸⁸² D.A. Holmes of Paseo Baptist Church (formerly Vine Street Church), regularly participated in protests against injustice, excessive force by Kansas City police against Black citizens, and corruption in local government.⁸⁸³

Mt. Tabor AME was one of the earliest churches in the Leeds-Dunbar neighborhood, established as a "crude tabernacle" at 34th Street and Drury Avenue in 1917 (no longer extant). In 1920, it was renamed Gilbert Memorial AME Church after Reverend A.A. Gilbert, and moved to another location at 3608 Bellaire Avenue (no longer extant). The congregation relocated several times until eventually building a permanent church building at 3704 Topping Avenue, and in 1928 had 36 members (extant).⁸⁸⁴

⁸⁷⁶ African American Heritage Trail, "Reverend Daniel Arthur Holmes.," Coulter, 46.

⁸⁷⁷ Coulter, 203.; "St. Stephen Baptist Church – Golden Anniversary Celebration Pamphlet," 7.

⁸⁷⁸ Thelma Thurston Gorham, ed., *Meeting the Challenge of Change: A Sixty-Year History of St. Stephen Baptist Church*, (Grimes-Joyce Printing Co., 1964), 14.

⁸⁷⁹ "Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters In Big Victory," *The Kansas City Call*, June 29, 1934, p11.; Coulter, 47.

⁸⁸⁰ Coulter, 205-206.

⁸⁸¹ Coulter, 129.

⁸⁸² Coulter, 202.

⁸⁸³ "Daniel Arthur Holmes," Kansas City Public Library: The Pendergast Years, accessed October 21, 2024, <https://pendergastkc.org/articles/daniel-arthur-holmes.>; Coulter, 89.

⁸⁸⁴ "Gilbert Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Church," *The Kansas City Post*, August 11, 2028, p14.

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In 1926, a fire destroyed the 1898 Second Baptist Church building, and the congregation met at the YMCA while a new building of terra cotta, stone, and brick was constructed for \$125,000 at 3620 East 39th Street (extant). Architects Besecke and DeFoe designed the Neo-Classical building and Robert E. Evans served as the contractor. The new church featured an auditorium, chapel, Sunday school, dining room, and kitchen, among other amenities.⁸⁸⁵ Following its completion in 1928, it became a significant landmark for Kansas City's Black community, along with the prominent St. Stephen, Allen Chapel AME, and Ebenezer AME.⁸⁸⁶

By the 1920s, despite enduring continued racism and discrimination, Black Americans had made significant strides. Among the key drivers of this progress was the clergy, both nationally and in Kansas City. As the head of their congregations, Black pastors and ministers played a pivotal role in shaping and modeling leadership, promoting community values, and driving social change within their communities. As author Charles Coulter aptly notes, "many of these men became clergy because they were leaders, not leaders because they were clergy."⁸⁸⁷

The onset of the Great Depression heavily impacted Black communities, and Black churches that had expanded to accommodate growing congregations were left with large debt burdens.⁸⁸⁸ Nonetheless, many Black churches in Kansas City continued to expand or construct new facilities, a testament to their importance among their congregations. In 1931, Vine Street Baptist was renamed Paseo Baptist Church and moved into a new \$165,000 building at 25th Street and The Paseo (extant). The former church on Vine Street was razed in 1937.⁸⁸⁹ In the late 1930s, St. Stephen Baptist Church was destroyed by fire. The congregation briefly met in the Paseo Dance Hall at Truman Road and The Paseo Boulevard in the early 1940s until they purchased the dance hall and embarked on a building campaign. The new church building at 1414 Truman Road, which incorporated the previous dance hall, was designed by White architect Ernest O. Bostrom and completed in 1947 (extant).⁸⁹⁰

While most of the Black churches in Kansas City followed tenants of the Baptist, Methodist, or other Protestant Christian denominations, churches of other denominations were also founded in Kansas City. Spiritual churches included the David Spiritual Temple of Christ (1508 Garfield), Abyssinia Spiritual Church (2021 East 9th), International Spiritual Church of Christ (1412 East 19th), Jerusalem Spiritual Church (1509 East 24th), Soul Saving Spiritual Church of Christ (1608 The Paseo), St. John Spiritual Temple (1724 Euclid), Way of the Cross Spiritual Church of Christ (15236 Campbell), Garfield Spiritual Temple of Christ (2209 East 12th), and Azviah Spiritual Temple of Christ (1019 Michigan). The Christian Science Society (1601 Woodland) and the Beacon Light Seventh-Day Adventist Church (1224 Euclid) also served Black Kansas Citians.⁸⁹¹ The Ethiopian Spiritual Synagogue (1509 East 21st) was frequently led by women pastors, including Reverend Cuscelia Bell and Mrs. J. Pastor in the 1930s.⁸⁹²

⁸⁸⁵ Unnamed article, February 13, 1927. Available in the "Second Baptist Church" Vertical File at the Black Archives of Mid-America.

⁸⁸⁶ Coulter, 203.

⁸⁸⁷ Coulter, 47.

⁸⁸⁸ Lincoln and Lawrence, 119.

⁸⁸⁹ "Paseo Baptist Church Celebrates 70th Anniversary With Historical Narrative," *The Kansas City Call*, August 8, 1952, p5.

⁸⁹⁰ African American Heritage Trail, "St. Stephen Baptist Church."

⁸⁹¹ "Church Directory," *The Kansas City Call*, December 16, 1938, p17.

⁸⁹² "News of the Church," *The Kansas City Call*, July 15, 1938, p 17.

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6.1.3. Black Religious Institutions in Mid-Twentieth Century Kansas City

At the close of World War II, Kansas City reportedly contained over one hundred Black churches.⁸⁹³ By that time, the nascent Civil Rights Movement began to foment and crystallize. Many of Kansas City's Black churches and clergymen proved pivotal in the fight for equality. St. Stephen Church actively encouraged Black Kansas Citians to vote, promoted their political leadership, and supported their business endeavors. St. Stephen was also instrumental in fundraising for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Hospital.⁸⁹⁴

While the history of Black religious institutions in Kansas City was traditionally centered around Protestant Christian denominations, the 1950s saw the establishment of the city's first mosque, Muhammad's Temple Number 30. The mosque was founded by local followers of the Nation of Islam, a U.S.-based sect of Islam.⁸⁹⁵ In the 1970s, the mosque purchased the former Kansas City Baptist Temple building at 2715 Swope Parkway to serve its congregation of over 1,000 (no longer extant).⁸⁹⁶ During the mid-twentieth century, the Nation of Islam was heavily involved in the national Civil Rights and Black Power movements, with prominent converts including Malcom X and Muhammed Ali. In later years, the mosque was renamed Masjid Omar (Omar Mosque) and relocated to 2700 East 49th (extant).⁸⁹⁷

In the 1970s, a small group of Black Muslim immigrants settled in Kansas City and established a place of worship in an empty apartment, which later evolved into the Islamic Society of Kansas City.⁸⁹⁸ They purchased a plot of land in south Kansas City and built a mosque, completed in 1981. By late 1980s, the Islamic Society of Kansas City purchased more land for a cemetery and in 1989 established an Islamic School.⁸⁹⁹

While the role of Black churches began to change in the later mid-century period, they remained crucial leaders for their communities. As Reverend Williams of St. Stephen, a longtime advocate for social, political, and economic justice, stated in 1975:

“If you read history correctly you'll find that most black movements started in the church, but in recent years that has changed . . . At one time, we had no other avenue for leadership, but now we have blacks at all levels. Of course, this doesn't eliminate the church from a leadership role.”⁹⁰⁰

Since the Civil War, Black churches served as meeting places, sources of education, provided charitable contributions, encouraged employment and entrepreneurship, and led the fight for civil rights. Over time, Black churches in Kansas City grew from tent revivals on the banks of the Missouri River to congregations swelling in the thousands. Congregations split or merged, demographic shifts forced some to relocate or shutter entirely,

⁸⁹³ Coulter, 199.

⁸⁹⁴ African American Heritage Trail, “St. Stephen Baptist Church.”

⁸⁹⁵ CrescentPeace.org, “Muslim in the Metro,” accessed July 16, 2024, http://www.crescentpeace.org/uploads/3/4/8/0/34806452/muslim_in_kc.pdf.

⁸⁹⁶ “Pastor Defends Sale of Temple to Muslims,” *The Kansas City Star*, August 11, 1973, p1.; “Black Muslims Here Shun Violence, Build Businesses,” *Kansas City Times*, September 16, 1974, p1.

⁸⁹⁷ Clio and Allen, “Masjid Omar,” Clio: Your Guide to History, July 22, 2022, accessed July 17, 2024, <https://theclio.com/entry/154490>.

⁸⁹⁸ CrescentPeace.org, “Muslim in the Metro.”

⁸⁹⁹ CrescentPeace.org, “Muslim in the Metro.”

⁹⁰⁰ “Black Church in Transition,” *The Kansas City Star*, April 7, 1975, p1.

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and new denominations settled within the city. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Black churches continued to proudly serve as cultural beacons of their communities and provide necessary services. During the AIDS crisis of the 1980s, Kansas City Black churches encouraged testing and screenings, while during the COVID-19 crisis many area churches promoted vaccinations and general prevention methods.⁹⁰¹ While the role of Black churches may have changed over time, their commitment to serving as pillars of support, advocacy, and community leadership has remained steadfast.

6.2. Benevolent Societies, Fraternal Organizations, and Social Clubs

While Black churches and clergy played a prominent role in the spiritual, social, political, economic, and domestic lives of their communities, another support system developed in tandem with Black churches proved nearly as influential. Mutual aid societies and benevolent associations, fraternal organizations, and social clubs all enriched and promoted advancement for Black Americans.

Sociologists differentiate voluntary associations from other groups (churches, labor unions, political clubs, or trade organizations) in that they fill the needs left unattended by major social institutions and bring people together with a shared sense of commitment.⁹⁰² Voluntary associations were particularly valuable to developing societies, and thus proliferated in the Post-Revolution United States.⁹⁰³ While voluntary associations or mutual aid societies may have existed among enslaved populations, the nature of institutionalized slavery suggests they were likely fragile and short-lived, and the lack of historic record leaves little information.⁹⁰⁴

Prior to emancipation, both free and enslaved Black Americans had few opportunities to safely gather. As scholar Robert D. Putnam stated, “slavery was, in fact, a social system *designed* to destroy social capital among slaves and between slaves and freemen.”⁹⁰⁵ Following emancipation, Black Americans sought avenues for rebuilding the social and communal networks they had long been denied. Benevolent societies and fraternal organizations offered numerous benefits to their members, including social interaction and discussion of prevalent issues, financial assistance and support, business connections, and sometimes political backing.⁹⁰⁶ Black benevolent societies focused on providing members and those in need with sickness and disability benefits, pensions, burial insurance, charity, education, opportunities for discussion, and moral guidance.⁹⁰⁷

Fraternal organizations were typically a self-selecting group of men, women, or gender-integrated members, representatively governed with local chapters. Like benevolent or mutual aid societies, fraternal organizations provided their members with insurance and financial aid, but they were also more active in civic functions and participated in moral rituals that created an atmosphere of shared values and identity.⁹⁰⁸

⁹⁰¹ “Professor Helps Black Churches Preach Good Health,” *The Kansas City Star*, February 28, 2021.

⁹⁰² Robert L. Harris, “Early Black Benevolent Societies, 1780-1830,” *The Massachusetts Review* 20, no. 3 (1979): 607.

⁹⁰³ Harris, “Early Black Benevolent Societies, 1780-1830,” 608.

⁹⁰⁴ Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Lynn Oser, “Organization Despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations,” *Social Science History* 28, no. 3 (2004): 375.

⁹⁰⁵ Skocpol and Oser, 369.

⁹⁰⁶ Galbraith, et al., “African American Resources in Portland, Oregon,” E:97.

⁹⁰⁷ Harris, “Early Black Benevolent Societies, 1780-1830,” 610.

⁹⁰⁸ Skocpol and Oser, 370.

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6.2.1. Benevolent and Mutual Aid Societies and Social Clubs

Following the Civil War, African Americans were more likely than Whites to join voluntary associations.⁹⁰⁹ In the face of rapid urbanization, industrialization, and the settler colonization of the American West, the Progressive Movement swept the country in the early twentieth century with efforts towards reform. Benevolent and mutual aid societies were established en masse, largely focused on labor reform, child welfare, temperance, women's suffrage, care for the poor, and sanitation. Although both Black and White organizations shared goals on many of these broader issues, many Black organizations placed added emphasis on improving the conditions of Black Americans. The Great Exodus had brought thousands of new residents to Kansas City, and these organizations and associations filled a need not being met by the local government or other institutions.

Furthermore, in the late nineteenth century, women's social groups became a publicly acceptable way for women to socialize outside the home. Some social groups focused on shared interests like literature, art, or music. However, many also advocated for issues close to their communities, including temperance, suffrage, sanitation, and child welfare. While Black social or benevolent societies paralleled the goals of many White women's groups, for Black women, a key focus was also social justice and racial equality.⁹¹⁰

In 1893, Josephine Silone Yates, a former teacher at the Lincoln Institute in Jefferson City, and Anna Jones cofounded the Kansas City Colored Women's League (KCCWL), which initially operated from rented rooms at 1027 Charlotte Street in the Church Hill neighborhood.⁹¹¹ The KCCWL later became affiliated with the National Colored Women's League (later National Association of Colored Women [NACW]), and Yates served as President of NACW from 1901 to 1903. The KCCWL, which consisted of women's groups from both Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas, as well as Topeka and Lawrence, developed the first settlement house managed by Black women in Kansas City.⁹¹² In December 1906, the Kansas City Federation of Colored Women's Clubs (KCFCWC) held their state convention at Second Baptist Church.⁹¹³ Throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, the Kansas City Federation, of which Ida M. Becks was Vice President, promoted Progressive era reforms. They frequently joined with parents and administrators of local Black schools to petition the Kansas City School Board for more adequate facilities.⁹¹⁴

Some of the early twentieth century social societies founded in Kansas City included the Brotherhood, the Civic League, the Negro Social Workers, and the "Colored" YMCA.⁹¹⁵ In 1907, the Civic League was founded with the "objective of developing the people commercially, intellectually, and morally."⁹¹⁶ In 1913, Reverend E.S. Willett of the Negro Episcopal Church served as President of the Brotherhood, which consisted of Black social workers whose "sole object is the betterment of the race." Members conducted surveys and produced reports on the conditions of African Americans in Kansas City, including housing and sanitation, child welfare, industrial

⁹⁰⁹ Skocpol and Oser, 369.

⁹¹⁰ Coulter, 37-38.

⁹¹¹ Coulter, 38.

⁹¹² Doretha K. Williams, *Kansas Grows the Best Wheat and the Best Race Women: Black Women's Clubs in Kansas 1900-1930 (Dissertation)* (University of Kansas, 2011), 64.

⁹¹³ "Missouri State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs - Call to the Seventh Annual Convention," *The Rising Son*, February 2, 1907, p1.

⁹¹⁴ "Scarritt Patrons Protest," *The Kansas City Times*, January 22, 1926, p15.

⁹¹⁵ Martin, *Our Negro Population*, 153.

⁹¹⁶ Martin, *Our Negro Population*, 154.

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conditions, and “morals.”⁹¹⁷ Led by President Luellen Williams, the Negro Social Workers consisted of roughly 20 women members who led similar efforts, although also conducted outreach and charitable programs for the needy in their communities.⁹¹⁸

In 1910, the National Urban League (NUL) was founded and in 1919 a local Urban League chapter was formed. Ida Becks was instrumental in forming the local chapter, with the aim of improving race relations and promoting employment, housing conditions, and recreational opportunities for Black Americans. Becks was initially moved to improve access to recreational opportunities for Black servicemen stationed at Camp Funston in Kansas during World War I. The Urban League set up a community center on the second floor of the Shannon Building at 1518 East 18th Street, initially called the War Camp Community Service Club. It offered lodging, employment services, and recreational activities for servicemembers and veterans.⁹¹⁹

As the Great Migration began in the 1910s, the Urban League’s community center evolved into the Vine Street Community Center and was later opened to the entire community, not just servicemembers.⁹²⁰ In 1920 it formally became the Community Service Urban League office, with a gymnasium on the second floor.⁹²¹ During its first month after opening, the center was utilized by 2,500 Black youth. Soon, the needs of the organization required opening a second small center at 941 Bell Street in the West Bottoms. The second month after its opening, the Urban League office reportedly hosted 108 meetings for 48 different groups. By the following year, approximately 40 to 50 groups a month utilized the facility, which saw 850 weekly visitors. Of its many functions, the Urban League provided employment assistance for many of the newly arrived Black migrants. The facility was open around the clock, and when needed, young men slept on the community center’s floors, chairs, or wherever space was available.⁹²² In 1931, the Urban League Center moved their office to 1905 Vine Street, and in 1936 moved again to a three-story home at 1408 The Paseo. This office later housed a free nursery school funded by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and conducted training programs for nurses and doctors.⁹²³ The Kansas City Federation of Colored Women changed to the Kansas City Association of Colored Women (KCACW) in 1930.

During the Great Depression, federal policies substantially increased government funded social welfare programs. New Deal policies sought to address major national issues, including poverty, unemployment, labor laws, housing, and other issues targeted by Progressive era reformists.⁹²⁴ While many New Deal policies were discriminatory, others expanded federal benefits for African Americans, including employment opportunities, social security, unemployment aid, and low-rent housing. By 1939, the WPA provided basic income for approximately one million African Americans, or nearly 15 percent of the Black population in the United States. As a result, many benevolent societies, both Black and White, either dissolved, shifted focus, or joined

⁹¹⁷ Martin, *Our Negro Population*, 154.

⁹¹⁸ Martin, *Our Negro Population*, 154.

⁹¹⁹ Coulter, 129.

⁹²⁰ Gary R. Kremer, *Race and Meaning: The African American Experience in Missouri* (University of Missouri Press, 2014), 136.

⁹²¹ “Where the Charity Money Goes,” *The Kansas City Star*, November 13, 1925, p35.; Coulter, 129-130.

⁹²² Coulter, 130.

⁹²³ Coulter, 132-33.

⁹²⁴ Nili Tannenbaum and Michael Reisch, “From Charitable Volunteers to Architects of Social Welfare: A Brief History of Social Work,” University of Michigan School of Social Work, Accessed October 18, 2024, <https://ssw.umich.edu/about/history/brief-history-of-social-work>.

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larger, more targeted organizations like labor unions. Progressive Era social clubs and benevolent societies saw a general decline or stagnation following the Depression. By the early 1940s, the *Kansas City Negro Directory* listed only a few organizations, including the Kansas City chapter of the NAACP at 2117 Montgall, the NAACP Youth Council, the YMCA, and the YWCA.⁹²⁵

By the mid-twentieth century, most benevolent groups had either disintegrated or evolved to meet the changing needs of their communities. New groups were also established, including the Twin Citian Club, with Gertrude Whitley as a charter member and the first president. In 1943, the club held its first meeting in Whitley's home at 2432 Park Avenue (extant). While the Twin Citian was initially a social club, it participated in Civil Rights activism and boycotts of area department stores throughout the 1950s.⁹²⁶ In the 1960s, it continued to promote philanthropic endeavors, including fundraising for book drives, organizing charity balls and parades, and funding scholarships.⁹²⁷ The Kansas City chapter of the Jack and Jill Club was established in 1964, following its founding in Pennsylvania by Marion Stubbs Thomas in 1938.⁹²⁸ Smaller, neighborhood-specific clubs, like the Monroe Fellowship Club, were also formed to address issues facing individual neighborhoods and communities.⁹²⁹

By the postwar era, many of the urgent needs addressed by Progressive era reformers had either been ameliorated or were managed by government agencies. Thus, social clubs returned to their early roots as small organizations focused on specific interests or issues. Nonetheless, these postwar social groups and organizations continued to serve the function of creating avenues of community building that were instrumental in Black communities across the United States.

6.2.2. Fraternal Organizations

In the United States, early fraternal organizations were imported from Europe and were initially exclusive to White Anglo or European members. Many vehemently opposed the inclusion of African Americans and sought to prevent them from forming their own organizations.⁹³⁰

6.2.2.1. Black Fraternal Organizations in the Early United States

Although Black fraternal organizations may have existed earlier, the first nationally recognized Black fraternal order in the United States was founded in the late eighteenth century in Massachusetts by Prince Hall, a Black abolitionist and leader in the free Black community in Boston, who established a Black lodge of Free Masons in 1787. By 1865, the United States contained 23 Black Masonic lodges in 22 states with 2,700 members.⁹³¹ The first Black order of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows was established in the 1840s, which by 1886 had

⁹²⁵ *Kansas City Negro Directory 1941-1942*, accessed July 17, 2024, <https://kchistory.org/book/kansas-city-negro-city-directory#page/220/mode/2up>, Available at the Kansas City Public Library.

⁹²⁶ Kremer, *Race and Meaning*, 140.

⁹²⁷ "Socially Speaking," *Kansas City Call*, November 15, 1963, p6.

⁹²⁸ "Our History," "Jack and Jill of America, Inc.," accessed October 21, 2024, <https://www.jackandjillinc.org/our-history>.

⁹²⁹ "New Club," *The Kansas City Call*, November 15, 1963, p6.

⁹³⁰ Skocpol and Oser, 383-385.

⁹³¹ Skocpol and Oser, 383-385.

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become the largest Black fraternal order with over 1,000 lodges and 52,000 members nationwide. A Black order of the Knights of Pythias was established in 1886.⁹³²

While the earliest nationally recognized Black fraternal organizations established in the United States were aligned with pre-existing European or White American organizations, in most cases Black orders operated parallel to White orders, with different goals and governance. However, following emancipation, independent Black fraternal orders were established by and for Black Americans, primarily in the South, providing opportunities for collaboration and brotherhood among newly free African Americans. The degradation of institutionalized slavery had taken a substantial toll on the emotional well-being of Black Americans, and “Lodges, along with their mother churches, sought to reinvest these newly freed men and women with a sense of their own humanity and worthiness, and also to establish family units.”⁹³³

Black women played a more prominent role in fraternal organizations than White women. Sociologists attribute this difference to the fact that Black women were employed outside the home more than White women, and in some cases were the sole or primary economic providers. This provided Black women with independent earning power and gave them a strong role within the family unit. In addition, due to the broad discrimination they faced, Black women required larger kin networks, and fraternal organizations provided sickness, disability, and death insurance that fostered community and security. Finally, Black women’s prominent roles in Black churches often conferred similar social capital in fraternal organizations.⁹³⁴

6.2.2.2. *Black Fraternal Organizations in Missouri and Kansas City*

The first Black fraternal order in Missouri was founded by Reverend Moses Dickson as a secret order in the 1840s as part of the underground railroad.⁹³⁵ In 1871, it was incorporated as the International Order of Twelve Knights, with its sister order the Daughters of Tabor, in Independence, Missouri.⁹³⁶ By 1901, the Knights and Daughters of Tabor was the second largest Black fraternal order in the world, with 3,000 members in Missouri. Joe E. Herriford, a prominent Black educator in Kansas City, served as a Grand Officer for the Kansas City Order of Twelve Knights.⁹³⁷ A Black Masonic lodge was established around 1865 in St. Louis, followed by a lodge in Kansas City (Rone Chapter, No. 25) in 1870. In 1881, an official Certificate of Organization was filed, formalizing Black Masonry in the state.⁹³⁸ The first Black Masonic lodge in Kansas City was at 3rd Street and Delaware, although by 1903 had moved to a property at 1803 Woodland Avenue (no longer extant).⁹³⁹

In 1886, Kansas City was home to the western headquarters of the Transatlantic Society, whose aim was to encourage emigration to Liberia in Africa. Reverend H. Moore served as President of the order.⁹⁴⁰ In the late

⁹³² Skocpol and Oser, 387.

⁹³³ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 53.

⁹³⁴ Skocpol and Oser, 416.

⁹³⁵ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 50.

⁹³⁶ Skocpol and Oser, 398.

⁹³⁷ “Knights of Tabor Meet Here,” *The Kansas City Star*, June 22, 1902, p1.

⁹³⁸ “Twenty-Eight Years Old,” *Kansas City Journal*, January 15, 1899, p5.; Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 51.

⁹³⁹ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 53.

⁹⁴⁰ “A Meeting of Colored People,” *Kansas City Journal*, March 12, 1886, p4.

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1880s, the Ancient Sons and Daughters of Jerusalem was organized in Kansas City, with James R. King, the ‘father and founder,’ boasting a membership of nearly 4,000 spanning 18 states by 1900.⁹⁴¹

In his 1913 thesis *Our Negro Population*, Asa E. Martin enumerated at least thirty societies led by Black Kansas Citians, with total combined memberships of 8,055.⁹⁴² At that time, the Sisters of Mysteries Ten was the largest society, with 1,500 members and 21 lodges, followed by the Odd Fellows, with 1,100 members and six lodges. Other organizations with at least 100 members included the Masons (876), Knights of Pythias (940), K.P. of E. & W.H. (300), United Brothers of Friendship (500), International Order of Twelve (500), Sons and Daughters of Jerusalem (350), Heroines of Jericho (479), Household of Ruth (600), Order of the Eastern Star (150), Court of Colanthe (400), and K.P. of E. & W.H. Court of Colanthe (300).⁹⁴³ According to Martin, members of fraternal organizations in Kansas City “take a great deal of interest in everything their chapters do and attend the meetings with much more regularity than those of their respective churches.”⁹⁴⁴

Like benevolent and mutual aid societies, fraternal organizations offered benefits for their members, who paid fees for their inclusion, including burial insurance and sickness benefits. In the early twentieth century, they typically focused their efforts on five major issues: widows, orphans, care of the sick, burial of dead, and special donations. During the Progressive Era, fraternal societies also felt a responsibility towards upholding morality and the rule of law, although Martin noted that in many instances Black fraternal orders shielded their members from the law, largely because racial prejudice often unfairly turned the law against Black Kansas Citians.⁹⁴⁵

Fraternities and sororities for Black Kansas Citians were also established, including a local chapter of the Alpha Kappa Alpha in 1920 (later the Beta Omega Chapter of Omega Psi Phi), the Alpha Alpha Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta in 1925, and the Beta Lambda Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha around 1920.⁹⁴⁶

The onset of the Great Depression saw a national decline or leveling off in membership for both Black and White fraternal organizations as membership fees became unaffordable for many. During the interwar years, as the fight for racial equality intensified, Black fraternal organizations took an increasing role in political activism and the fight for civil rights.⁹⁴⁷ However, like benevolent associations, many of the benefits conferred by fraternal organizations, including mutual aid, became more readily available through government-run social welfare programs. Finally, the rapid expansion of recreational and entertainment opportunities, such as radios, movies, television, and auto travel combined with increased employment opportunities and a growing Black middle class, saw participation in fraternal organizations wane.⁹⁴⁸

However, fraternal organizations, and particularly fraternities and sororities, continued to have relevance in Black communities due to their ability to promote social and educational causes and to enable a sense of

⁹⁴¹ “Grand Council Meets,” *Kansas City Journal*, August 29, 1900, p3.

⁹⁴² Martin, *Our Negro Population*, 141.

⁹⁴³ Martin, *Our Negro Population*, 142.

⁹⁴⁴ Martin, *Our Negro Population*, 143.

⁹⁴⁵ Martin, *Our Negro Population*, 146.

⁹⁴⁶ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 54-55.

⁹⁴⁷ Skocpol and Oser, 372.

⁹⁴⁸ David T. Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 173.

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community. In the early 1930s educators in Kansas City organized the Pan Hellenic Council, Incorporated of Greater Kansas City to gather Black Greeks from across the city to promote and encourage Black youth to attend college. The council continued meeting and serving the Black youth of Kansas City through the 1970s and is still in operation as of 2025.⁹⁴⁹

Despite the stagnation of fraternal organizations following the Depression and World War II, in the mid-twentieth century, Black fraternal groups played an increasing role in the fight for civil rights and racial equality. Furthermore, with the proliferation of for-profit and employer provided insurance, fraternal organizations had more capacity to focus on community service and political activism.⁹⁵⁰ Members of Black fraternal orders built substantial networks to launch political careers, and some orders participated in legislative lobbying. Since many Black fraternal orders had international ties, these overseas connections were used during the Civil Rights Movement to gain broad international support, and sometimes financial backing, from outside the United States.⁹⁵¹ In the 1960s and 1970s, Black fraternal orders in Kansas City conducted outreach and promoted education, often providing scholarships to area youth.⁹⁵² They also promoted voter registration drives, urged the preservation of affirmative action, donated to defense funds, and built health clinics.⁹⁵³

While Black fraternal orders and organizations shifted their focus in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, many are still in operation and, like churches and benevolent organizations, continue to provide valuable contributions to their communities.

6.3. Community Centers, Charitable Organizations, and Community Resources

6.3.1. Niles Home for Children

One of the earliest facilities to care for the city's orphaned Black children was founded in 1883 by Black bricklayer Samuel Eason. Eason rented a building to house homeless Black children and aging Black women, using his own personal savings. The organization officially incorporated as the Colored People's Charity Association in 1883.⁹⁵⁴ Eason sought funding from White philanthropists to continue running the orphanage. Following his death in 1920, other individuals, including co-founder of the segregated⁹⁵⁵ Children's Mercy Hospital Katherine Richardson, continued his efforts. In the 1920s, Frank C. Niles, a White cigar distributor and philanthropist, donated substantial funds to construct a larger facility, which was later named Niles Home for Children in honor of his significant contribution. The new facility at 1911 East 23rd Street, which opened in

⁹⁴⁹ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 57.

⁹⁵⁰ Skocpol and Oser, 422.

⁹⁵¹ Skocpol and Oser, 423.

⁹⁵² "More Progress Seen for Blacks," *Kansas City Star*, January 6, 1976, p4.

⁹⁵³ "Drive Aims to Register Blacks," *Kansas City Times*, September 20, 1976, p21.; "Shriners told to Increase Affirmative Action," *Kansas City Times*, August 21, 1978, p2.

⁹⁵⁴ Coulter, 214.; McCormally, 70.

⁹⁵⁵ Katherine Richardson and her sister Alice co-founded Mercy Children's Hospital in the 1890s at a time when there were few practicing women doctors, and were thus keenly aware of prejudice. While Mercy Children's hospital was a segregated institution, this was largely due to the political climate of the time period, and the Richardsons frequently decried the fact that their institution was not open to children of all races. Katherine continued to support the mission of Black medical professionals throughout Kansas City during her lifetime.

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1924, had a full-time staff of nine that looked after forty children aged six to twelve. Alice Grade served as first superintendent, a role she held until her death in 1949.⁹⁵⁶

6.3.2. Florence Crittendon Home

In 1925 local activists led by Elizabeth Bruce Crogman organized a home for unwed Black mothers. They purchased a residence at 2446 Michigan and within a year, the Florence Crittendon Mission (a philanthropic organization) approved a charter for the facility. In 1930, the Florence Home for Colored Girls moved to a three-story colonial building at 2228 Campbell, with White philanthropist William Volker a prominent financial supporter of the new facility.⁹⁵⁷ By the 1940s, the organization had expanded their services to include counseling, education, shelter, and medical care for women in need. In 1958, the facility was renamed simply the Florence Home, and in the 1970s merged with the Florence Crittendon Home, which had previously been segregated.⁹⁵⁸

6.3.3. Big Sister Home for Negro Girls

In 1928 Pearl M. Dabney, along with the Kansas City Urban League, studied the need for a home for neglected and unhoused Black girls ages 12-18. In 1934, the Big Sister Home for Negro Girls opened at 2326 Brooklyn Avenue.⁹⁵⁹ Fredericka Perry was the first superintendent and Rosetta Walker Gibson was the first house mother. Upon Gibson's death in 1944, she donated her home at 2519 Park Avenue to the organization to replace the aging Brooklyn Street facility.⁹⁶⁰

6.3.4. The Paseo YMCA/YWCA

One of the most significant social welfare organizations for the Black community of Kansas City was the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). The formation of a Black YMCA in Kansas City was spearheaded by Edward Ross at the turn of the century. Ross, a wholesale drug clerk, met with like-minded community members in the home of Lucinda Day on Lydia Street.⁹⁶¹ Eventually, the small group recruited more members, and in 1903 established the Colored YMCA of Kansas City in a room at 912 East 12th Street (no longer extant).⁹⁶² In 1907, a fundraising campaign was initiated and several small buildings were purchased on The Paseo.⁹⁶³ Eventually, the YMCA raised funds for a new building, completed in 1914 at 1824 The Paseo Boulevard (extant, NRHP 1991).⁹⁶⁴ At that time, the Paseo YMCA had 250 members, hosted regular debates and intellectual talks, and offered night school.⁹⁶⁵ By the 1920s, the Paseo YMCA was one of the largest and most prominent facilities for the Black community in Kansas City. The facility boasted a gymnasium, a

⁹⁵⁶ Coulter, 214.

⁹⁵⁷ Coulter, 214.

⁹⁵⁸ Jason Roe, "Florence Home for Colored Girls," Kansas City Public Library: The Pendergast Years, accessed November 19, 2024, <https://pendergastkc.org/articles/florence-home-colored-girls>.

⁹⁵⁹ Coulter, 214.

⁹⁶⁰ Coulter, 214-215.

⁹⁶¹ Coulter, 135.

⁹⁶² Coulter, 135.

⁹⁶³ Phil Thomas, "Paseo YMCA, Kansas City, Missouri," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Park Service, 1991), 8:1.

⁹⁶⁴ Coulter, 136.

⁹⁶⁵ Martin, *Our Negro Population*, 155.

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cafeteria, and a large lobby that held graduations, rallies, and musical performances.⁹⁶⁶ Like the Urban League, as new arrivals flooded into Kansas City in the 1910s and 1920s, the YMCA provided temporary housing in its 45 dorm rooms and 90 beds.

Soon after the new YMCA building was constructed, members of the Kansas City Colored Women's League advocated for a Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in the city. League member Jean McCampbell appealed to the national YWCA to establish a branch, which was granted in 1915. In 1916, Ida M. Becks started a grassroots campaign among women of various church congregations to lay the groundwork for the Kansas City YWCA.⁹⁶⁷ In 1918, under Becks' leadership, the YWCA established a home for unhoused Black women at 2228 Michigan Avenue (no longer extant). The following year, a Black Kansas City branch of the YWCA, initially called the Blue Triangle League, was officially chartered. It first operated out of the YMCA facility on The Paseo before purchasing a small building at 1501 East 19th Street, which had offices on the first story and dormitories on the second (no longer extant).⁹⁶⁸ The organization assisted recent women arrivals to Kansas City, ran summer camps, led social education conferences in area schools, and operated recreational programs from table games to volleyball.⁹⁶⁹

The Blue Triangle League boasted many prominent women as members, including Anna Jones, Jean McCampbell, Ida M. Becks, Myrtle Foster Cook, and Josephine Yates (II), among others. In 1928, Elsie Mountain became Executive Secretary of the Kansas City YWCA. Under her leadership, the organization promoted employment opportunities for Black women, offered vocational programs in sewing, handcrafts, and food service, and ran the Girl Reserves program which involved field trips, performances, and mentorship from professional women.⁹⁷⁰ During Mountain's tenure, the YWCA moved to a larger space at 2200 Brooklyn Avenue. Mountain held the position as president until her death in 1945. In 1948, the YWCA facility was demolished and a new structure was constructed.⁹⁷¹

6.3.5. Community Centers

In addition to the YMCA and YWCA, various facilities around Kansas City served as meeting and gathering spaces for the Black community, including churches and schools. In 1914, Garrison School Principal R.T. Coles' vision came to life when the Garrison Square Field House was completed at 1124 East 5th Street (extant). The Field House was constructed to serve the community surrounding Garrison School, and included a library, gymnasium/auditorium, club rooms, and a public bath. A playground and recreational equipment were also completed on the surrounding grounds, and the facility became an important gathering place for the surrounding Black community.⁹⁷² In 1919, the Garrison Field House hosted important civic events, including the Garrison Forum, a "negro civic betterment organization," founded in the 1880s by R.T. Coles.⁹⁷³ Local organizations like the PTA, the Negro National Civic Movement, and the Poro Club used the Field House. It

⁹⁶⁶ "Paseo Y.M.C.A.," *The Kansas City Sun*, January 7, 1922, p4.

⁹⁶⁷ Coulter, 139.

⁹⁶⁸ Coulter, 140.

⁹⁶⁹ Coulter, 141-142.

⁹⁷⁰ Kremer, *Race and Meaning*, 135.

⁹⁷¹ Coulter, 150.

⁹⁷² "Picture of Prof. R.T. Coles in Garrison Library," *The Kansas City Sun*, June 5, 1915, p1.

⁹⁷³ "Two Talks at Negro Forum," *The Kansas City Times*, March 24, 1919, p6.

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also hosted musical and theatrical performances by local students and professionals. The Field House serves as the Garrison Community Center as of 2025.

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7. POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

7.1. Political Leadership and Organization

The history of Black political power in Kansas City is complex. While governments in formerly Confederate states worked to disenfranchise African Americans following the Civil War and into the twentieth century, local White politicians in Kansas City succeeded in part by actively seeking the support of Black voters; as a result, Black Missourians were never excluded from voting in the same way or to the same degree as African Americans in Southern states. Factional machine politics in Kansas City in particular effectively tempered attempts to disenfranchise local Black voters as both Republican and Democratic parties courted Black votes in order to win increasingly competitive elections. As White politicians blatantly exploited African Americans for their own political advantage, they simultaneously played a role in expanding the political participation of Black voters in Kansas City.⁹⁷⁴

As a result, while it was not until well into the twentieth century that independent Black political candidates from Kansas City made significant strides in local, state, and national government, Black Kansas Citians asserted notably more influence over local politics than their counterparts in the South throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁹⁷⁵ Kansas City also witnessed one of the earliest instances in the country of Black political realignment toward the Democratic Party.⁹⁷⁶ Black political activism eventually led to broader political empowerment and representation for Black Kansas Citians, particularly amid the Civil Rights Movement of the postwar era, when independent Black political organizations emerged that changed the trajectory of Black representation in city, county, and state government.

7.1.1. Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Before the Civil War, Missouri limited voting rights to White men and excluded African Americans from participating in civic and political life. Following the war, African Americans pushed to secure expanded rights, but Missouri and the Kansas City area continued to see strong opposition to these efforts. In the fall of 1865, a group of Black Missourians formed the Missouri Equal Rights League in St. Louis, considered to be the first Black political activist organization in the state. In response, more than one hundred White residents from Kansas City, Westport, and Independence gathered to voice their opposition to Black suffrage, equality, and interracial marriage.⁹⁷⁷ Democrats, then the party of the Confederate South, primarily led this opposition. However, even among Republicans, the party of Lincoln and emancipation, there was significant resistance to Black enfranchisement in Missouri. In 1868, for example, a majority of Republican Union loyalists in Missouri

⁹⁷⁴ John McKerley, "The Long Struggle over Black Voting Rights and the Origins of the Pendergast Machine," Kansas City Public Library: The Pendergast Years, accessed November 5, 2024, <https://pendergastkc.org/articles/long-struggle-over-black-voting-rights-and-origins-pendergast-machine>.

⁹⁷⁵ John McKerley, "The Long Struggle."

⁹⁷⁶ John McKerley, "The Long Struggle."

⁹⁷⁷ John McKerley, "The Long Struggle."

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helped defeat a state amendment to codify Black suffrage.⁹⁷⁸ In 1870, however, Republicans at the federal level passed the Fifteenth Amendment, which granted suffrage to Black men across the country.⁹⁷⁹

African Americans in Kansas City became increasingly active in politics during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1888, Black Kansas Citian Paul Jones attempted to run for City Attorney as a Republican but was discouraged by the party. Undeterred, Jones ran under the Union Labor ticket, and although he lost, he won a large number of Black votes. At the turn of the century, Black Kansas City educators, including James Dallas Bowser, Richard T. Coles, G.N. Grisham, and Paul Gaston became active in local politics. Lack of support for Black schools, combined with the general condition of discrimination, compelled leaders in various fields, including churches, schools, and fraternal organizations, to become involved in broader political and social movements. Grisham, Coles, and Gaston formed a Black political party at the turn of the century, but it was short-lived.⁹⁸⁰ While local White politicians and leaders increasingly supported Black voting rights for their own gain, they still actively opposed and effectively repressed Black political representation.⁹⁸¹

As White Republicans and Democrats alternated control of local politics, boss politics within the parties coalesced into rival factions that angled for control of various wards throughout the city.⁹⁸² Local Democrats had largely divided into two boss factions by the late nineteenth century—the “Goats,” led by James F. Pendergast, and the “Rabbits,” led by Joseph B. Shannon.⁹⁸³ James “Big Jim” Pendergast, an Irish American saloon owner from the West Bottoms, began his political career in 1892 as an Alderman from the First Ward. Big Jim used his status as a working-class immigrant to gain favor with other immigrant and working-class residents, including African Americans.⁹⁸⁴ James Pendergast eventually controlled three of the sixteen wards in the City, but never exerted sufficient power to fully control the outcome of elections.⁹⁸⁵ Joseph “Joe” Shannon moved from St. Louis to the Ninth Ward in northeast Kansas City in 1879. He became involved with local Democratic labor unions and began working in city government in 1892, but lost his position in 1894 when the Republicans took control. Determined to establish a stable political presence, he began seeking elected positions himself, directly competing with Pendergast.⁹⁸⁶ The faction names “Goat” and “Rabbit” reportedly originated from derogatory remarks from members of the Shannon faction, who insulted Pendergast and his supporters by calling them “goats,” a reference to the Irish Americans in the West Bottoms who raised goats as pets. In retaliation, the Pendergast faction began calling Shannon and his supporters “rabbits,” claiming they would be forced to “live outside and eat snow like rabbits” after losing elections.⁹⁸⁷

In 1900, Black Kansas City Democrats organized the Negro Central League to back White Goat mayoral candidate James Reed in exchange for the faction’s promise to create job opportunities within the city

⁹⁷⁸ John McKerley, “The Long Struggle.”

⁹⁷⁹ Walker, np; Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 7.

⁹⁸⁰ Coulter, 33.

⁹⁸¹ John McKerley, “The Long Struggle.”

⁹⁸² McKerley, “The Long Struggle.”

⁹⁸³ McKerley, “The Long Struggle.”

⁹⁸⁴ Micah W. Kubic, *Freedom, Inc. and Black Political Empowerment* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2016), 20-21.

⁹⁸⁵ McKerley, “The Long Struggle.”

⁹⁸⁶ Mary Frances Ivey, “Joseph B. Shannon,” Kansas City Public Library: The Pendergast Years, accessed March 4, 2025, <https://pendergastkc.org/articles/joseph-b-shannon>.

⁹⁸⁷ “Origin of ‘Goats’ and ‘Rabbits,’” *Kansas City Star*, January 20, 1924.

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government for African Americans. After a narrow victory, Reed opened positions in the fire department and other municipal departments to African Americans, further securing Black voter support for his reelection in 1902. Support for Reed was so strong during the 1902 election that one White Democrat noted that the Kansas City Democratic party “no longer claims to be a strictly white man’s party.”⁹⁸⁸

Longstanding White resistance to Black political empowerment did not disappear, however, and a racist backlash emerged in response to the growing Black political presence and rising Black middle class in Kansas City. In 1908, Southern Democrat Thomas T. Crittenden, Jr. ran for mayor, using fearmongering to rally an already skittish White voter base fueled by racist anxieties. He promoted White supremacy, limiting Black enfranchisement, and excluding Black citizens from jury service. Crittenden’s racist rhetoric succeeded, and he won the race and secured a Democratic majority on the City Council.⁹⁸⁹ In response, during the 1908 Missouri gubernatorial race, Black Kansas Citians delivered a decisive victory for White Republican Herbert Hadley over Crittenden’s endorsed candidate, William Cowherd. In the wake of Cowherd’s defeat, fellow Democrats distanced themselves from Crittenden’s platform of White supremacy.⁹⁹⁰

In 1910, James Pendergast retired from politics. His brother Thomas “Tom” J. Pendergast succeeded his City Council seat, but stepped down in 1916 to expand his political aspirations.⁹⁹¹ Tom Pendergast took the lesson of Cowherd’s defeat to heart, and following his brother’s example, Tom specifically courted Black and immigrant communities through promises of employment and the protection of immigrant- and Black-owned businesses, including gambling and saloon enterprises.⁹⁹² From then on, the Goat faction became the dominant Democratic group in Kansas City, consistently beating Shannon’s Rabbit faction.⁹⁹³ In 1918, the Republicans ran William C. Hueston, a Black Kansas Citian, for alderman of the Eighth Ward, a move that was largely seen as political posturing by Black voters. Leaders including C. A. Franklin, L. Amasa Knox, D. A. Holmes, and others attempted to seat their own, independent Black candidates, and in 1922 ran Theron B. Watkins for Eighth Ward Alderman, although he was ultimately defeated.⁹⁹⁴ In June 1920, the *Kansas City Star* reported the first Black juror, a Penn School teacher, was to serve on a circuit court jury.⁹⁹⁵

7.1.2. The Rise of Black Support for the Democratic Party and The Pendergast Machine

In the 1920s, several political events accelerated the shifting party loyalty and political climate of Black voters in Kansas City. In 1922, Republican reformers took over city politics, led by Matthew Foster, appointed as Kansas City Board of Police Commissioner in 1921. Under Foster, the Republican party’s platform of reforming “vice districts” earned the support of Black Progressive reformers and *The Kansas City Call*. However, Foster’s reform platform specifically targeted Black neighborhoods, and the Republican party refused to nominate any Black candidates to city leadership. Under Foster’s reign, police violence against Black Kansas

⁹⁸⁸ McKerley, “The Long Struggle.”

⁹⁸⁹ McKerley, “The Long Struggle.”

⁹⁹⁰ McKerley, “The Long Struggle.”

⁹⁹¹ John E. Hansan, “The Pendergast Machine of Kansas City, Missouri (1900-1939),” accessed November 1, 2024.

<https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/people/pendergast-machine/>.

⁹⁹² Schirmer, 153.

⁹⁹³ Nancy J. Hulston, “Casimir John Joseph Michael Welch,” Kansas City Public Library: The Pendergast Years, accessed March 4, 2025, <https://pendergastkc.org/articles/casimir-john-joseph-michael-welch>.

⁹⁹⁴ Schirmer, 153.

⁹⁹⁵ “The First Negro Juror Here?” *The Kansas City Star*, June 15, 1920, p8.

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Citizens escalated, culminating in the brutal beating of Darius Hendricks, falsely accused of robbery, by Kansas City police in 1931.⁹⁹⁶

In subsequent years, the Republican party repeatedly alienated the Black voter base by excluding them from political discourse, using derogatory language, and consistently rejecting requests to provide substantive benefits to their Black constituents.⁹⁹⁷ Admission of the racist and violent Ku Klux Klan (KKK) into city and state politics in the 1920s, its overt support for Republican candidates, and the refusal of the party to denounce the KKK wholesale, ultimately forged a link between the two organizations in the minds of Black voters.⁹⁹⁸ As a result, Democrat Tom Pendergast, along with his City Manager Henry McElroy, took over near complete control of Kansas City government during the 1925 city charter election due to the support of Black voters who were disgusted and disillusioned by the Republican Party.⁹⁹⁹

Declining Black support for the Republican Party in Kansas City was a bellwether for national politics, which would see the shift occur nearly a decade later. The rising Pendergast Machine was uniquely poised to fill the void, and its overtures to the Black community of Kansas City were credited with the growth of the influential Black music, jazz and nightlife scene of the 1920s and 1930s (see 3. *Arts & Culture*).¹⁰⁰⁰ To counter the backlash against the Republican Party's support of racist groups like the KKK, they attempted to court the Black vote by nominating their first black candidate, Reverend J.W. Hurse, to Alderman, although ultimately he was not elected.¹⁰⁰¹

Tom Pendergast utilized associates across the city to garner support for his machine. Casimir Welch and Felix Payne, associates who lived in the predominantly Black Lincoln-Coles neighborhood, were instrumental in persuading the Black community to support the Pendergast faction. Casimir "Cas" Welch, a White man from Michigan who moved to Kansas City in 1882, operated the "Jeffersonian Democratic Club" from a garage at 15th and Troost (no longer extant). While he initially worked within Shannon's Rabbit faction as a vote solicitor, he eventually switched sides to the Goat faction in 1924. Beginning in the 1910s, Welch served as a political brawler but also gained a reputation within the Black community for being sympathetic to people in trouble, regardless of race. Serving as a neighborhood justice of the peace, he helped members of the community with their legal problems and was known as being tough but just and benevolent. Working under Pendergast, Welch was largely responsible for expanding the Democratic strategy of aiding the Black community in return for votes. While both Democrats and Republicans had previously given small amounts of money to Black voters on election day or promised positions within the city government to Black workers, Welch broadened this approach to offer ongoing support. His approach, although paternalistic, provided the Black community with food, fuel, general employment, and access to better health and education services while reducing brutal

⁹⁹⁶ Schirmer, 158.

⁹⁹⁷ Schirmer, 155

⁹⁹⁸ Schirmer, 158.

⁹⁹⁹ William Worley, "The Decline and Fall of the Pendergast Machine," Kansas City Public Library: The Pendergast Years, accessed October 31, 2024, <https://pendergastkc.org/articles/decline-and-fall-pendergast-machine>.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Jeffrey L. Pasley, "Harbinger of the New Deal Coalition: The Pendergast Machine and the Liberal Transformation of the Democratic Party," Kansas City Public Library: The Pendergast Years, accessed November 1, 2024, <https://pendergastkc.org/articles/harbinger-new-deal-coalition-pendergast-machine-and-liberal-transformation-democratic-party>.

¹⁰⁰¹ Pasley, "Harbinger of the New Deal Coalition."

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discrimination from the police and the courts. In exchange, Black voters were expected to back Pendergast and Goat faction candidates at the polls.¹⁰⁰²

Felix Payne, a Black man originally from Marshall, Missouri, was one of the most influential African Americans in Kansas City during the height of the Pendergast machine in the 1920s and 1930s. After moving to Kansas City around the turn of the twentieth century, he became involved in real estate and entertainment, particularly in the 18th and Vine neighborhood where he opened nightclubs and gambling operations, and he eventually controlled the district's illegal numbers racket. He was also active in politics, particularly in support of the Democratic Party, and used his charisma to address both Black and White political rallies. He eventually worked as an associate under Tom Pendergast and used his enormous influence to persuade the Black community to support Pendergast and his machine.¹⁰⁰³

Dr. William Thompkins, a local Black physician and political leader, also played a crucial role in securing Black votes for the Pendergast Machine by leveraging his influence and connections within the Black community. He believed the Democratic Party, although flawed, offered the best prospects for Black advancement, and he emerged as one of the loudest voices to support a break with traditional Black support of the Republican party. Thompkins worked with Payne and Welch to form a critical voting bloc in the Lincoln-Coles district.¹⁰⁰⁴ In 1928, Thompkins partnered with Payne to establish *The Kansas City American*, a Democratic-leaning Black newspaper to counter Chester Franklin's Republican-leaning *The Kansas City Call*.¹⁰⁰⁵ The newspaper was backed by Tom Pendergast, who believed it necessary to have a newspaper endorsement to advance his political movement. Thompkins boasted that the paper pushed the Democratic percentage of the Black vote in Kansas City up to forty-seven percent during the 1928 election, nearly double what it had been in 1924.¹⁰⁰⁶ During the 1928 election, in addition to local Pendergast gains, L. Amasa Knox won a seat in Missouri's state legislature.¹⁰⁰⁷

In the 1930s, Pendergast's political influence successfully seated Missouri Governor Guy B. Park, as well as Harry S. Truman as a U.S. Senator. Due to the successful courtship by the Pendergast Machine, combined with the benefits of the New Deal, in 1932 nearly 70 percent of Black voters in Kansas City supported the Democratic Party.¹⁰⁰⁸ However, some scholars speculate these totals may be inflated due to corrupt 'ghost voters' in Casimir Welch's precinct.¹⁰⁰⁹ That year, the Missouri Supreme Court gave Home Rule to Kansas City, and the Pendergast machine cemented their control of local and state politics.¹⁰¹⁰ Tom Pendergast used the ruling for his own political gain, declaring sole control of the Kansas City police in order to secure Black votes.

¹⁰⁰² Hulston, "Casimir John Joseph Michael Welch."; Pasley, "Harbinger of the New Deal Coalition."

¹⁰⁰³ David Conrads, "Felix Payne," Kansas City Public Library: The Pendergast Years, accessed March 4, 2025, <https://pendergastkc.org/articles/felix-payne>.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Pasley, "Harbinger of the New Deal Coalition."

¹⁰⁰⁵ Conrads, "Felix Payne."

¹⁰⁰⁶ Pasley, "Harbinger of the New Deal Coalition."

¹⁰⁰⁷ Schirmer, 153.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Walker, np.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Pasley, "Harbinger of the New Deal Coalition."

¹⁰¹⁰ Walker, np.

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Under home rule, police violence against Black residents did see a marked decrease, however it was “the only significant benefit African Americans would obtain from that alliance.”¹⁰¹¹

In 1934 President Roosevelt named William J. Thompkins, Kansas City physician and political activist, as Recorder of Deeds in Washington D.C. in Roosevelt's new ‘Black Cabinet.’¹⁰¹² However, that year, elections in Missouri were swept with a wave of racist violence in what was referred to as the “bloodiest city election in the history of the country.” Black Kansas City Democratic precinct captain William Findley was killed, and eleven other African Americans were injured.¹⁰¹³

In 1937 the United Negro Democrats of Missouri incorporated with Felix Payne, Franklyn Clark, Dr. Seymour Hill, and Mrs. Claudia Wiseman as leaders in Kansas City.¹⁰¹⁴ By the late 1930s, the discovery of Pendergast’s corruption and election fraud resulted in numerous legal challenges. In 1939 Tom Pendergast was personally indicted on charges of tax evasion, plead guilty, and spent a year in federal prison before his death in 1945.¹⁰¹⁵ Although the Pendergast machine had largely been dismantled, in 1940 Harry S. Truman, with the aid of William Thompkins, utilized the Pendergast playbook to enlist Black votes in Truman’s bid for senate.¹⁰¹⁶ After the downfall of the Pendergast machine, a reform movement under the banner of the Citizen’s Association (CA) ticket quickly took power, largely on the support of Kansas City White women. Although some Black leaders like Reverend D.A. Homes and Theron B. Watkins supported the reform movement, “it was not the dominant political expression in Black Kansas City.”¹⁰¹⁷

7.1.3. Reform Movement

In 1940, the City Council in Kansas City hired Laurie Perry “L. P.” Cookingham as City Manager to reform city government after the Pendergast era. In the 1920s and 1930s, Cookingham had served as a City Manager for various communities in Michigan. In short measure, Cookingham overhauled Kansas City’s municipal government, cleared the vestiges of corrupt Pendergast appointments, and balanced the city’s budget. Cookingham also annexed numerous surrounding areas, including the area home to present-day Kansas City International Airport, implemented vast roadway expansions, and was responsible for many of the urban renewal programs of the post-war era.¹⁰¹⁸

Some Black leaders did slowly make progress on the local political scene at this time. In 1940, W. Franklyn Clark was appointed as the first Black Clerk in Kansas City. The following year, Theron B. Watkins became the

¹⁰¹¹ Schirmer, 162.

¹⁰¹² Walker, np.

¹⁰¹³ Kelly, Dan, “How KC’s Bloody Election Day in 1934 Tarnished the City and Scarred a 6-Year-Old Girl,” *The Kansas City Star*, August 21, 2022, accessed November 20, 2024, <https://www.kansascity.com/news/your-kcq/article264419901.html>.

¹⁰¹⁴ Walker, np.

¹⁰¹⁵ Hansan, “The Pendergast Machine of Kansas City.”

¹⁰¹⁶ Pasley, “Harbinger of the New Deal Coalition.”

¹⁰¹⁷ Kubic, 33.

¹⁰¹⁸ Ray F. Lucas, “Cookingham, Laurie Perry,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed November 01, 2024, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/cookingham-laurie-perry>.

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only African American appointed to the new Housing Authority of Kansas City.¹⁰¹⁹ In 1946, pharmacist James McKinley Neal was elected to the state legislature, where he served until 1964.¹⁰²⁰

7.1.4. Mid-Twentieth Century Activism

In the mid-century, the growing Civil Rights Movement fueled louder agitation for independent Black political leadership in Kansas City. In 1959, changes in city government saw internal politics push Cookingham out of his role as City Manager and he was forced to resign.¹⁰²¹ Civil rights advocacy groups like the Community Committee for Social Action (CCSA) and the NAACP grew more aggressive about integrating city facilities, church leaders spoke publicly about issues facing the Black community, and *The Kansas City Call* continued to be a source of political activism, although it remained firmly Republican until the 1960s.¹⁰²²

Although the reformists had made broad changes to city government, factional machine politics did not go away, and little changed for the city's Black constituents. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the five city wards with predominantly Black citizens were controlled by three White factional leaders.¹⁰²³ While the Black population of Kansas City skyrocketed in the mid-century, Black residents still lacked representation on the City Council and in other areas of local governance. After the City annexed large swaths of land, the City proposed redrawing district boundaries and expanding City Council from nine to thirteen members, and a battle over the district or at-large election process ensued.¹⁰²⁴ Louis Wagner, a White member of the Jeffersonian Club faction that controlled one of the wards with a Black majority, enlisted Democratic Committeeman from the 14th Ward Leon Mercer Jordan to drum up Black voters in favor of the twelve-district plan.

7.1.4.1. Freedom, Inc.

Leon Jordan was a former military service member, social worker, public school teacher, Kansas City police officer, and Chief of Police in Iberia, Missouri. In 1955, he purchased the Green Duck tavern from Tim Moran, the White representative of the 14th Ward who had supported Jordan's bid for Committeeman.¹⁰²⁵ During the City Council redistricting campaign, Jordan conducted significant outreach, contacting community members he knew and personally asking them to work the polls. After the twelve-district plan failed, Jordan was convinced that factional politics and the Democratic Party in general were unproductive allies in advancing gains for African Americans in local politics. Through the process of training community members, Jordan conceived his idea for an independent Black political organization.¹⁰²⁶

In 1962, Leon Jordan, along with business owner Bruce R. Watkins (step-son of Theron B. Watkins), real estate agent Fred Curls, attorney Leonard Hughes, chiropractor Dr. Charles Moore, and entrepreneur Howard Maupin

¹⁰¹⁹ African American Heritage Trail, "Theron B. Watkins."

¹⁰²⁰ James McKinley Neal, Interview by Rose Bell, March 11, 1975 (Black Archives of Mid-America, Available at the Kansas City Public Library Missouri Valley Special Collections).

¹⁰²¹ Lucas, "Cookingham, Laurie Perry."

¹⁰²² Kubic, 43.

¹⁰²³ Kubic, 33.

¹⁰²⁴ "Rosemary Smith Lowe," Kansas City Black History, accessed November 2, 2024, <https://kcblackhistory.org/articles/rosemary-smith-low>.

¹⁰²⁵ Kubic, 44.

¹⁰²⁶ Kubic, 45.

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met at Green Duck Tavern to plot a course for independent Black political leadership.¹⁰²⁷ After a larger meeting held at the Carver Theater, which Jordan also owned, the group and their supporters founded Freedom, Inc., a local advocacy organization focused on increasing Black representation in local politics. The organization was incorporated shortly after.¹⁰²⁸ In its early years, the success of Freedom, Inc. was largely attributed to the grassroots efforts to mobilize the Black residents of the 14th Ward and the formation of Black Precinct Captains to conduct outreach to their communities.

Several months after Freedom, Inc.'s foundation, Leon Jordan ran for reelection as committeeman of the 14th Ward. Moran, his former ally, sponsored rival candidate James Mason. While Jordan was the incumbent, his chances were considered slim since he lacked support from the political machine. Jordan enlisted Rosemary Smith Lowe to run for committeewoman of the 14th Ward. Jordan was successful and Lowe was defeated, but the partial victory was enough to prove that independent Black political power was possible without backing from White factions.¹⁰²⁹ In the 1963 municipal election, the redistricting program had ensured at least one Black City Council member, and several prominent members of the Black community ran for positions. In the primary, Freedom, Inc. put forth Bruce R. Watkins against NAACP president Lee Verdis Swinton and attorney and civil rights activist Harold Holliday, also a Freedom, Inc. member. While Watkins was the board chairman of Freedom, the organization did not automatically endorse him, instead remaining neutral while organizing the broader Black community to the polls. Nevertheless, Watkins won his primary, and he and Earl Thomas, who had stepped down as principal of Lincoln High School to run in the election, became the first Black Kansas Citians on the City Council.¹⁰³⁰ Ultimately, Watkins and many other Freedom, Inc. candidates prevailed, with numerous Black precincts providing the crucial margin of victory in several races. This solidified the organization's influence and demonstrated its ability to effectively mobilize and engage the Black electorate independently.¹⁰³¹ In the subsequent election in 1964, Rosemary Smith Lowe became the first Black ward committeewoman in the city.¹⁰³²

Another impact of Freedom, Inc. was the demise of the factionalist Democrats, who had long courted and relied on the Black vote to remain in power.¹⁰³³ During the 1960s, Freedom, Inc. showed Kansas City municipal leaders the power of an organized Black electorate. Black politicians successfully lobbied City Council for legislation benefiting their community, including the well-fought 1963 public accommodation ordinance, dramatically increasing Black voter registration, and seating Leon Jordan and Harold Holliday as state representatives in 1964.¹⁰³⁴ In 1966, Watkins won his race for Jackson County Circuit Court, becoming the first Black elected official in Jackson County, a position he held until 1973.¹⁰³⁵ Watkins hired several new Black

¹⁰²⁷ Amy Hart, *The Founding of Freedom: A Kansas City Civil Rights Organization Since 1962 (Thesis)* (Central Missouri State University, 2006), 112.

¹⁰²⁸ Hart, 81-82.

¹⁰²⁹ Kubic, 54.

¹⁰³⁰ Kubic, 56-57.; Hart, 99.; David Conrads, "Earl D. Thomas," Kansas City Public Library: The Pendergast Years, accessed March 4, 2025, <https://pendergastkc.org/articles/earl-d-thomas>.

¹⁰³¹ Kubic, 60-61.

¹⁰³² "Rosemary Smith Lowe," Kansas City Black History.

¹⁰³³ Kubic, 62.

¹⁰³⁴ Kubic, 74.

¹⁰³⁵ Kubic, 75.; Hart, *The Founding of Freedom*, 101.

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employees and appointed Phillip B. Curls his Chief Deputy Clerk.¹⁰³⁶ Bruce R. Watkins was a significant figure in Kansas City politics, serving as chairman of the Jackson County Democratic Committee before his death in 1980.

Throughout the 1960s, Freedom-backed politicians in Kansas City and Jackson County advanced policies for the Black community. Watkins pushed the Housing Authority of Kansas City (HAKC) to build more low-income housing, advocated using federal urban renewal funds to improve existing housing stock rather than for gentrification, pushed for a local fair housing law, and argued for reform of the Kansas City Police Department (KCPD).¹⁰³⁷

The civil unrest following the funeral of Martin Luther King, Jr. further radicalized Black Kansas Citians to civic action (see 7.2. *Civil Rights Activism*). In 1968, facing mounting attempts to crush their organization with smear campaigns, Freedom Inc. closed ranks and once-rival NAACP president Herman Johnson joined the organization and won a seat as state representative.¹⁰³⁸ In 1970, weeks before the election to re-seat Leon Jordan in the Democratic primary, Jordan was murdered outside the Green Duck Tavern. Orchid Jordan, Leon's widow, ran for his seat in the state House of Representatives, which she won and served on for the next sixteen years.¹⁰³⁹

In the 1970s, Freedom, Inc. became fully institutionalized, strengthened their ability to mobilize Black voters, and continued to leverage their voting bloc. In the 1971 municipal election Freedom Inc. backed Charles Hazley, Richard Tolbert, and Harold "Doc" Holliday, Jr., all young men in their 20s, against incumbents endorsed by *The Kansas City Call*, Black clergymen, and Black business leaders. Ultimately, Tolbert and Hazley were victorious, and Holliday lost by a narrow margin.¹⁰⁴⁰ Despite their victories, the organization faced controversy and backlash. Shortly after the election, Tolbert abruptly resigned, and Freedom's bid to seat a replacement was thwarted when Joanne Collins, a moderate Republican, was elected. Collins became the first Black woman, and only the third woman, elected to Kansas City Council.¹⁰⁴¹ In 1974, there were fifteen Black elected officials in Kansas City and Jackson County.¹⁰⁴² In 1972, Phillip B. Curls, Sr. was elected to the Missouri House of Representatives, later joining the state senate in 1983.¹⁰⁴³

In the 1975 municipal election, Bruce Watkins ran against Emanuel Cleaver for City Council, with Watkins winning the seat. However, in 1979 Watkins again vacated his seat on City Council, running to become the first Black Mayor of Kansas City, although he was defeated by challenger Richard Berkley. Watkins died abruptly from lung cancer in 1980, and it would not be until 1991 that Kansas City would have its first Black Mayor, Watkins' former political opponent Emanuel Cleaver.¹⁰⁴⁴

¹⁰³⁶ Hart, 102.

¹⁰³⁷ Kubic, 77.

¹⁰³⁸ Kubic, 90.

¹⁰³⁹ Kubic, 97-99.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Kubic, 107-108.

¹⁰⁴¹ Kubic, 113.

¹⁰⁴² Hart, 124.

¹⁰⁴³ Kansas City Black History, "Phillip B. Curls, Sr." accessed November 3, 2024, <https://kcblackhistory.org/articles/phillip-b-curls-sr>.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Hart, 104.

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7.1.5. 1975-Present

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, a number of influential Black politicians held positions at the city, county, and state levels of government. Alan Wheat, a Freedom, Inc. member, served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1983 to 1995 and attorney Mark Bryant was a City Council member from 1983 to 1991. In 2004 Emanuel Cleaver represented Missouri in the U.S. House of Representatives.¹⁰⁴⁵ Other Black Kansas City politicians to serve in Missouri in the twenty-first century include Yvonne Wilson, Representative Melba Curls, Representative Sharon Sanders Brooks, Representative Craig C. Bland, Representative Michael R. Brown, and Representative Leonard Hughes, IV.¹⁰⁴⁶

7.2. Civil Rights Activism

7.2.1. Late Nineteenth Century Civil Rights Activism

During the Reconstruction era, Southern states enacted measures to limit the rights of African Americans and retain a de facto plantation system of forced labor. In response, the federal government passed the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Constitutional Amendments. Also known as the Reconstruction or Civil War Amendments, they were intended to guarantee freedom and some civil rights to the formerly enslaved through abolishing slavery, guaranteeing equal rights for the newly emancipated, and enfranchising all men regardless of religion, race, or prior servitude. However, by the late 1870s, the nation and its political leaders weakened their resolve to extend equality to all, largely to secure White votes. U.S. Supreme Court decisions on civil rights cases in the 1880s weakened the provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment and allowed states to enact Jim Crow laws across the south.¹⁰⁴⁷ Finally, in 1896 the U.S. Supreme Court decision in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case dealt a devastating blow to any progress in civil rights.

The *Plessy* verdict effectively legitimized government sanctioned racial discrimination. Black communities across the United States felt the effects almost immediately, including in Kansas City. During the early twentieth century, Kansas City's neighborhoods rapidly became more racially segregated, expounded by Kansas City realtors who refused Black buyers and renters from settling in "desirable" areas. Those who were undeterred faced increasing threats of violence (see 1.3. *Early Twentieth Century: Emergence of Racial Covenants and Racial Segregation*).¹⁰⁴⁸

7.2.2. Early Twentieth Century Civil Rights Activism

During the early twentieth century, persistent racial violence and discrimination, as well as sweeping social, political, and economic changes—including industrialization, urbanization, immigration, labor disputes, and the ongoing settler colonization of the West—brought many of the country's issues and inequities into sharp focus.¹⁰⁴⁹ In response, numerous organizations were formed with the aim of addressing the concerns of American citizens, including temperance, suffrage, child welfare, and labor rights. Although both Black and

¹⁰⁴⁵ Hart, 128.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Hart, 131.

¹⁰⁴⁷ NPS, "Civil Rights in America: Racial Voting Rights" (National Park Service, 2007, rev. 2009), 7.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Schirmer, 42.

¹⁰⁴⁹ NPS, "Civil Rights in America," 8.

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White organizations operated concurrently to promote many of these issues, the advancement of equal rights and opportunities for African Americans was a key factor for Black activists.¹⁰⁵⁰

Following the horrific 1908 race massacre in Springfield, Illinois, a group of both Black and White activists, including at least two Black women from the Kansas City area— Josephine Silone Yates and Kathryn Johnson—convened to discuss racial justice, leading to the creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).¹⁰⁵¹ The national office of the NAACP opened in New York City in 1910, and by 1914 Kansas City had an active chapter led by local Black educator Woody Jacobs. Other chapter members included Charles Stark, a frequent contributor to the *Kansas City Sun* and *Kansas City Call*, and Hugh O. Cook, vice principal of Lincoln High School.¹⁰⁵² The Committee on Urban Conditions Among Negroes, later renamed the National Urban League (NUL), was also founded in New York City in 1910.¹⁰⁵³

During World War I, many African Americans served in the armed forces and hoped that their participation fighting for their country would advance racial equality in the United States. However, Black participation in the war had little impact on challenging White power structures or deeply entrenched racism, nor did it improve the treatment of African Americans in the United States. Instead, Black servicemen returned home to face a growing racist backlash to the expanding Black population, particularly the rising Black middle class, which manifested in racial violence, lynchings, and anti-Black terrorist groups like the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). In response, African Americans spearheaded a growing resistance, establishing organizations across the country to combat institutionalized racism and discrimination.

In 1918, Marcus Garvey inaugurated the New York Division of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which he had initially founded in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1914.¹⁰⁵⁴ In 1919, the African Brotherhood and the League for Democracy were also established in New York. That same year, the National Race Congress formed in Washington D.C., composed of Black Baptist ministers and pastors, including Reverend John Goins of Kansas City. World War I also served as a catalyst for the emergence of a new form of Black Activism, Pan-Africanism, which sought to eliminate colonialism and white supremacy across the globe.¹⁰⁵⁵

In Missouri, Governor Frederick Dozier Gardner founded the Missouri Negro Industrial Commission (MNIC) in 1918, the first state agency that evaluated the conditions of Black Missourians. The MNIC appointed sixteen Black commissioners, who were unpaid, with Nathaniel C. Bruce selected as the first chairman, to study methods for improving the circumstances of Black Missourians. Unfortunately, Gardner's motivation for its formation may have been an empty, self-serving means to garner Black votes, and the Committee held virtually no power to enact change.¹⁰⁵⁶

¹⁰⁵⁰ NPS, "Civil Rights in America," 8.

¹⁰⁵¹ NAACP, "Our History," accessed July 18, 2024, <https://naacp.org/about/our-history>; Coulter, 128.

¹⁰⁵² Coulter, 128.

¹⁰⁵³ Hart, 68.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Emmanuel Destenay, "African Americans, World War I, and the Awakening of a 'Colored' Manifest Destiny," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* (2023): 13-14.

¹⁰⁵⁵ NPS, "Civil Rights in America," 10.; Destenay, 14.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Greene, et al., *Missouri's Black Heritage*, (University of Missouri Press, 1993), 142.

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Local organizations also formed in Kansas City during this time, and many Black Kansas Citians emerged as local leaders in the fight for racial justice, including C.A. Franklin, who founded the *Kansas City Call*, lawyer L. Amassa Knox, Reverend D.A. Holmes, and entrepreneurs Homer Roberts and Theron B. Watkins.¹⁰⁵⁷ In 1919, local Black social worker Ida M. Becks and Black physician Dr. J.E. Dibble helped establish the Kansas City chapter of the NUL, headquartered downtown at 1211 McGee Street (no longer extant).¹⁰⁵⁸ That same year, prominent Kansas Citians Clarence R. Groves and Samuel Richard Hopkins established the National Negro Constitutional Conservation League of America (NNCCCLA). Initially housed in offices at 1315 East 18th Street (no longer extant), the organization worked to promote the political rights of the city's African Americans. The organization was short-lived, but it was one of many early attempts at bringing attention to the issues facing the Black community.¹⁰⁵⁹

In 1920, a conglomeration of Black women's clubs formed the City Federation of Clubs. This organization staged protests and boycotts, including a boycott of a local theater's segregation policy and a protest of local furniture shops that refused equal credit opportunities to Black customers.¹⁰⁶⁰ By the mid-1920s, discontent amongst the Black community had spread beyond the civil rights organizations established up until that point. At the annual educational forum of the National Negro Education Congress held in Kansas City, one of the event's major topics was the condition of African Americans in U.S. cities and how to address inequities.¹⁰⁶¹

One of the most significant local efforts combating discrimination against Black Kansas Citians centered around the use of the City's largest park, the now 1,800-acre Swope Park. In 1924, the Kansas City Board of Parks and Boulevards decided to "set aside certain tennis courts, picnic grounds, and ball diamonds for use by African Americans." The Board stated it did not intentionally prohibit the use of other facilities by Black residents, but internal Board documents suggested a discriminatory agenda. Black-led protests against the decision moved the board to act clandestinely to enact racial segregation of the park.¹⁰⁶² In 1927, a Black Camp Fire Girls troop was ordered to vacate a shelter at Swope Park during a rainstorm. The troop later lodged a formal complaint against the Board, who contended the action was not Board-ordered, despite conflicting testimony from Park employees. The Board's denial of any misconduct prevented the troop from taking legal action. Instead, many Black organizations moved their outings and events to the Paradeway along The Paseo to avoid further injustice and in silent protest against the Board.¹⁰⁶³

In 1927, Homer Roberts and attorneys Carl Johnson and L. Amassa Knox filed a lawsuit against the park board for segregating individual courses within the Swope Park Golf Course. Ellis D. Parsons, president of the Golf Club, claimed that the policy was in the best interest of Black golfers. Using the "myth of the bigoted client," Parsons claimed that the golf club was attempting to protect African Americans from the potential violence of White golfers, stating, "if the Negroes attempt to play golf at Swope Park, it will cause a race riot."¹⁰⁶⁴

¹⁰⁵⁷ Schirmer, 148-149.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Hart, 68.; "The Urban League of Kansas City," University of Kansas, accessed October 18, 2024, <https://exhibits.lib.ku.edu/exhibits/show/national-urban-league/ulkc>.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Coulter, 162.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Schirmer, 150.

¹⁰⁶¹ Coulter, 165.

¹⁰⁶² Schirmer, 150.

¹⁰⁶³ Schirmer, 151.

¹⁰⁶⁴ "Public Playgrounds Do Not Cause Riots," *The Kansas City American*, August 16, 1928, p1.

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Unfortunately, Circuit Court Judge Brown Harris agreed with the Board and ruled in their favor.¹⁰⁶⁵ Following significant pressure from the Black community, the park board allowed Black golfers to play Course #2 in 1934, and then segregated that course exclusively for Black golfers in 1938.¹⁰⁶⁶

The federal relief programs initiated during the 1930s to combat the Great Depression extended employment opportunities to African Americans and other minorities, and while they included discriminatory labor practices, they provided work to many African Americans during the Depression. President Roosevelt also established the Civil Rights Section of the Justice Department. As a result of Roosevelt's actions, many Black voters changed allegiance from the Republican party to the Democratic party.¹⁰⁶⁷

During the interwar years, frustrations gradually increased and nascent civil rights groups emerged locally as well as nationally. Initially, most of these organizations were small-scale and decentralized, focusing on a single or a narrow range of issues, and in the beginning lacked broad momentum or widespread support.¹⁰⁶⁸ However, some signs of a more militant approach to fighting discrimination were developing that would ultimately culminate in the period of post-war activism and the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁰⁶⁹

7.2.2.1. Early Civil Rights Labor Activism

In the late 1920s, the Black labor movement began to pick up steam. Kansas City was a major rail hub, and the Pullman Company owned the sleeping train cars that traveled in and out of the city. The Pullman Company was one of the largest employers of African Americans, who worked as porters in their sleeping cars. The Pullman Company marketed itself as a generous benefactor of Black workers, funding newspapers, churches, and other Black organizations. In many communities, including Kansas City, work as a porter was considered an esteemed profession, providing workers with stable employment and relatively high wages. However, porters worked for tips, were frequently discriminated against by the company and its White passengers, and were denied advancement. In 1925, the national labor union Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) was established, led by prominent socialist and activist A. Philip Randolph. The Kansas City chapter of the union was one of the earliest, and by 1927 had enrolled 301 out of 386 porters in greater Kansas City.¹⁰⁷⁰ The Pullman Company, which had long resisted efforts to form a union, attempted to crush the organization through threats, intimidation, and even physical attacks on activists.

The Kansas City chapter continued to stay strong, and in 1934 Congress amended the Railway Labor Act to include sleeping-car workers in the ban on company-led unions.¹⁰⁷¹ Despite efforts to end the union, in 1935 the BSCP appealed to the National Mediation Board, which certified the organization as a representative of the

¹⁰⁶⁵ Schirmer, 151-152.; "Lose Swope Park Decision," *The Kansas City American*, August 16, 1928, p1.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Schirmer, 165.

¹⁰⁶⁷ NPS, "Civil Rights in America," 10.

¹⁰⁶⁸ NPS, "Civil Rights in America," 14.

¹⁰⁶⁹ "Porters to Get Charter on June 7, 1936," *The Kansas City Call*, June 5, 1936, p3.; "Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters In Big Victory," *The Kansas City Call*, June 29, 1934, p11.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Schirmer, 174.

¹⁰⁷¹ Schirmer, 175.

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porters, becoming the first Black-led labor organization to receive a charter in the American Federation of Labor (AFL).¹⁰⁷²

The labor movement was a key agent in uniting African Americans against discrimination in Kansas City. In the 1930s, Kansas City was the second largest meatpacking center in the United States after Chicago. The meatpacking plants, although located in Kansas City, Kansas, had long contributed to industrial development on both sides of the state line.¹⁰⁷³ Packinghouses were also one of the earliest industries in Kansas City willing to hire Black workers, providing employment opportunities for thousands of working-class Black Kansas Citizens. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Black and White (mostly Eastern European immigrant) workers labored side by side in the packinghouses without incident, and “packinghouses were the most integrated institution in Kansas City’s segregated society.”¹⁰⁷⁴ While early attempts at widespread packinghouse labor organization in the 1920s were largely unsuccessful, economic destabilization wrought by the Depression, combined with the determined efforts of City Socialists, led a successful movement at the Armour Packing Company.¹⁰⁷⁵

Socialist labor organizers successfully recruited Black packinghouse workers to join with the Croatians and other White immigrant workers in the Congress of Industrial Organizations’ (CIO) United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) union. In 1938, the CIO staged a “sit-down” at the Kansas City Armour plant after one White worker and five Black workers suffered wage cuts for filing a complaint against the unfair layoff of a longtime employee. The 1938 strike was one of the largest integrated labor strikes in Kansas City; of the 1,800 workers who went on strike, nearly half were Black.¹⁰⁷⁶ Public sympathy for the strike was high, and even local officials supported the union’s efforts. The strike ultimately resulted in arbitration and compromise, but it served as a symbolic demonstration of the power of collective action.¹⁰⁷⁷ Equally significant were smaller scale protests staged in Kansas City during this period, such as when Fred Harvey restaurant employees refused to clean the restaurant’s dishes after a Black busboy was unceremoniously fired.¹⁰⁷⁸

7.2.2.2. Demand for Higher Education

Amidst numerous concurrent efforts to combat discrimination in Kansas City and Missouri, a pivotal legal case emerged in 1938. Lloyd Gaines, a Black man from St. Louis, filed a lawsuit after he was denied admission to the University of Missouri Law School. *Gaines v. Canada* made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court, who ruled that under *Plessy*, the University had to admit Gaines or provide an equal opportunity for Black students to earn a law degree. Instead of admitting Gaines, the University chose to establish a separate “Black Law School” in an abandoned beauty school building, allocating only \$200,000 for its operation. Shortly after the ruling, Gaines went missing. Despite efforts from the NAACP and local organizations, his fate was never determined.¹⁰⁷⁹

¹⁰⁷² Nicholas D. Brown, *The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters: The Civil Rights Movement (Thesis)* (University of Toledo, 2015), ix.

¹⁰⁷³ Roger Horowitz, *Negro and White, Unite and Fight! A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930-90* (University of Illinois Press, 1997), 87.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Horowitz, *Negro and White, Unite and Fight!*, 92.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Horowitz, *Negro and White, Unite and Fight!*, 93.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Schirmer, 176.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Horowitz, *Negro and White, Unite and Fight!*, 99.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Schirmer, 176.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Schirmer, 176.

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In 1939, Lucile Bluford applied to the University of Missouri graduate school of journalism. Bluford had earned an undergraduate degree in journalism from the University of Kansas before beginning work at the *Kansas City Call* in 1932 and taking over as editor in 1937. After the University of Missouri denied Bluford's application, she filed a lawsuit, with the NAACP arguing her case. Bluford applied to and was rejected from the University eleven times, and her case with the NAACP later contributed to the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling.¹⁰⁸⁰ Bluford ultimately never attended graduate school and instead focused her efforts on activism and managing the newspaper. The University of Missouri eventually awarded Bluford an honorary doctorate in 1989.¹⁰⁸¹

7.2.3. Mid-Twentieth Century Civil Rights Activism

As the war in Europe gained momentum in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the pacifist group Fellowship for Reconciliation (FOR), led by A.J. Muste with James Farmer and Bayard Rustin, advocated for a more active role in promoting social change, which they called "relentless non-cooperation" with Jim Crow policies. Members of FOR aligned with other integrated advocacy groups, including the Wider Quaker Fellowship, and together members in Kansas City formed the Kansas City Society of Friends, also called the Penn Valley Friends.¹⁰⁸² In 1942, Kansas City members of FOR founded the Committee on the Practice of Democracy (COPOD) with the aim of promoting interracial cooperation and pursuit of equality. COPOD hosted numerous gatherings and talks to teach Black and White Kansas Citians how to fight racism in their communities.¹⁰⁸³

With the onset of World War II, the industrial and manufacturing sectors in Kansas City ramped up to boost the United States supply of munitions, weaponry, and other materials to aid the Allied forces. The Kansas City School District implemented a manual arts training program to train defense workers, but it initially excluded African Americans.¹⁰⁸⁴ Discrimination in wartime industries led to one of the first major demonstrations by Black Kansas Citians. In a bid to convince North American Aviation to locate its new bomber factory at the former Fairfax Airport, then-Mayor Don McCombs urged Black Kansas Citians to vote on a bond measure with the promise that the company would hire Black workers.¹⁰⁸⁵ When the bond passed, however, North American Aviation revealed they only planned to hire African Americans as janitors and had no intention of hiring them to work the factory line.¹⁰⁸⁶

The Black community led a campaign appealing to leadership in Washington, D.C. A. Phillip Randolph, who had helped organize the BSCP in the 1920s and 1930s, put out a call to Black Americans to march to D.C. in protest, later known as the March on Washington Movement (MOWM). The MOWM organized a forum and demanded that President Roosevelt ban race discrimination in the defense industry. In Kansas City, the *Kansas City Call* urged residents to attend a local protest coinciding with the March on Washington, and NAACP chapters on both sides of the state line organized the effort. On March 30, 1941, between 3,500 and 5,000 Black Kansas Citians marched on City Hall, the largest public protest in the history of the city. To prevent further

¹⁰⁸⁰ Brooks and Wilson, 8.

¹⁰⁸¹ Hart, 56.

¹⁰⁸² Van William Hutchinson, *Greater Kansas City and the Urban Crisis (Dissertation)* (Kansas State University, 2013), 225.

¹⁰⁸³ Hart, 68.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Schirmer, 181.

¹⁰⁸⁵ "Talk of Airport Bonds," *The Kansas City Star*, December 22, 1940, p8.; Schirmer, 182.

¹⁰⁸⁶ "City Officials, State Lawmakers, Workers, Say Negroes Must Have Jobs," *The Kansas City Call*, April 18, 1941, p20.

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agitation, the Kansas City Council quickly approved a resolution to ban discrimination at the Fairfax bomber plant and prohibited labor unions from excluding Black members.¹⁰⁸⁷ Nationally, the MOWM's continued pressure ultimately pressed Roosevelt to issue Executive Order 8802 on June 25, 1941, banning defense contractors from racially discriminatory hiring practices.¹⁰⁸⁸

The success of the Fairfax protest had far-reaching implications and increased awareness of the power of protest. Several small-scale, ad hoc protests took place in subsequent years, including in 1943 when 40 Black garment employees stopped work in protest of the firing of other Black employees. In 1943, Black employees at the Army mess hall in Kansas City protested after two Black men were denied service, and in 1945 Black women elevator operators at the County Courthouse stopped work after county deputies assaulted a Black woman. In 1944, employees of the Pratt-Whitney aircraft engine plant arrived at work to find signs in the worker cafeterias stating they were to be segregated, and a majority of Black employees walked off the job.¹⁰⁸⁹

In 1942, Black musician Paul Robeson performed at Kansas City Municipal Auditorium, a segregated venue (extant). During the show, Lucile Bluford approached Robeson backstage and questioned his decision to perform for a segregated audience. Previously unaware of the situation, Robeson returned to the stage, cleared his setlist, and sang "rousing freedom songs," while many White patrons left the auditorium.¹⁰⁹⁰ Robeson's performance inspired Black leadership to push for an end to racial segregation in public spaces, particularly the Municipal Auditorium. However, negotiations with city leadership failed to make any movement on the issue. Instead, the City tightened its controls, rounded up Black citizens in Swope Park and removed them to a separate "colored" area of the park.¹⁰⁹¹ Around the same time, musicians of the Kansas City Philharmonic fought their board's racist exclusion of Black audiences, and in 1943 the board ultimately relented.¹⁰⁹²

7.2.4. Post-War Civil Rights Activism

The onset of World War II and the conscription or voluntary enlistment of African Americans into the armed services once again accelerated calls for expanding civil rights nationwide. Booming wartime industries offered innumerable job opportunities, but many either blatantly or underhandedly denied African Americans the opportunity for equal employment. Black men who fought for democracy on behalf of the United States justifiably argued that they deserved equal treatment under the law, and social justice groups felt emboldened towards more militant action.¹⁰⁹³

In 1946, COPOD established a Fellowship House on Independence Avenue. The organization began small-scale protests against segregation, sending groups of Black and White diners to area restaurants.¹⁰⁹⁴ White allies in the fight to end racial injustice felt that more interaction between races, particularly in the geographically segregated Kansas City, was key to easing tensions:

¹⁰⁸⁷ Schirmer, 183-184.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Schirmer, 186.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Schirmer, 187-188.

¹⁰⁹⁰ "A Protest by Robeson," *The Kansas City Times*, February 18, 1942, p2.; "Robeson Cuts His People First, His Career Second," *The Kansas City Call*, February 27, 1942, P6.; Schirmer, 189.

¹⁰⁹¹ Schirmer, 190.

¹⁰⁹² "Oust Two Doctors from K.C. Philharmonic Recital," *The Kansas City Call*, December 11, 1942, p5.; Schirmer, 190.

¹⁰⁹³ NPS, "Civil Rights in America," 14.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Hart, 69.

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Segregation was self-reinforcing since it deprived whites of the personal contacts with African Americans that would upset their racial stereotypes—the same stereotypes that justified exclusion of Blacks from jobs, neighborhoods, and schools.¹⁰⁹⁵

Other allies of the Black community included members of the White Jewish community of Kansas City, including Beth Smith and Sidney Lawrence, who were keenly aware of the dangers of prejudice.¹⁰⁹⁶ Jewish Kansas Citian Esther Brown, after witnessing first-hand the disparity in educational opportunities wrought by segregation in the city's South Park neighborhood, later took her advocacy to nearby Topeka, Kansas, where she was instrumental in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case that ultimately ended legally enshrined segregation.¹⁰⁹⁷

In 1945, the NAACP and Women's Civil Rights club organized a picket at the Kansas City Music Hall and Municipal Auditorium, which remained segregated. The *Kansas City Call* urged readers to join the boycott. While the boycott successfully caused ticket sales to drop dramatically, city leadership conceded to desegregate city-sponsored events but refused to require private organizers to desegregate their events. The NAACP subsequently drafted an ordinance to ban discrimination in publicly owned facilities, but city leadership objected to the ordinance's provision to desegregate the Swope Park pool. Finally, *Call* business manager Dowdal Davis ran for City Council with the ordinance as part of his campaign. *The Kansas City Call* noted that "Passage of the measure might not come right away, but mere introduction of the ordinance will set people to thinking. When a matter is aired publicly, it becomes better understood. And as it becomes better understood, it gains support."¹⁰⁹⁸ Despite losing the race, Davis earned enough votes to convince the City Council to pass the ordinance in May 1951, although the Swope Park pool remained segregated.¹⁰⁹⁹

Shortly after, three Black women attempted to enter the pool and were denied. On behalf of the NAACP, attorneys Thurgood Marshall and Carl Johnson filed a suit against the City. The District Court denied the City's justification for the pool's segregation, but still upheld the pool's segregation provided the three plaintiffs were admitted. The City then appealed, closed the pool pending the decision, and spent the next two years litigating the issue. In 1953, the U.S. Court of Appeals denied the city's appeal, finally reopening the Swope Park pool in 1954. Although no unrest occurred following desegregation of the Swope Park pool, pool attendance dropped dramatically in the early years after its reopening.¹¹⁰⁰

In 1955, the brutal murder of Black teenager Emmett Till sparked anger and indignation toward the horrific injustices of racial discrimination on a national and global scale. The murders of Reverend George W. Lee, Lamar Smith, and Gus Courts, all Black Civil Rights activists in Mississippi, that same year furthered activist outrage.¹¹⁰¹ Protests like the bus boycott initiated by Rosa Parks and the activism of Martin Luther King, Jr. also

¹⁰⁹⁵ Schirmer, 201.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Schirmer, 209.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Hutchinson, 255-256.

¹⁰⁹⁸ "We Need Representation in High Places," *The Kansas City Call*, February 16, 1951, p22.

¹⁰⁹⁹ "Jim Crow Banned In Auditorium," *The Kansas City Call*, June 1, 1951, p1.; Schirmer, 198.

¹¹⁰⁰ Schirmer, 216-217.

¹¹⁰¹ Hart, 35-36.

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received increasing national recognition. In response, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the first Civil Rights Act of 1957, which established the United States Commission on Civil Rights. The following year, the Voting Rights Act created measures for federal enforcement of the Fifteenth Amendment. Voter registration in the South and urban areas increased exponentially, as did representation of African Americans in local, state, and federal government positions.¹¹⁰²

The Civil Rights Act of 1957 and the Voting Rights Act of 1958 combined to create the most comprehensive and progressive legislation to address equity and equality to date and were the first major pieces of federal civil rights legislation passed since Reconstruction. They were a significant, although initially limited, step toward addressing racial discrimination and securing civil rights for African Americans. While the laws' enforcement mechanisms were weak and it fell short of achieving immediate, widespread change, they marked a crucial turning point in the federal government's commitment to civil rights and laid the groundwork for more comprehensive legislation that would follow.¹¹⁰³

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This was a landmark piece of legislation that brought sweeping changes to society in the United States, addressing racial, gender, and other forms of discrimination across a range of areas. It outlawed segregation in public places, such as schools, hotels, and restaurants, and banned employment discrimination on the basis of race, gender, and religion. The Act also empowered the federal government to enforce desegregation efforts, theoretically making sure that schools and other public institutions would comply with the mandates. Additionally, it strengthened voting rights protections and established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to monitor and address workplace discrimination.¹¹⁰⁴

While national organizations like the NAACP were instrumental to providing the framework for civil rights activism, smaller, local organizations were key "movement centers" in propelling progress forward.¹¹⁰⁵ Organizations like COPOD, local branches of the NAACP, the Women's Civil Rights Club, and the Community Committee for Social Action (CCSA) embarked on a campaign for equal rights through boycotts, sit-ins, protests, mass demonstrations, and other actions. In Kansas City, due to the dedicated and organized efforts of the Black community and its allies, public places such as parks, pools, hotels, restaurants, universities, and golf courses finally began to desegregate by the mid- to late 1960s.¹¹⁰⁶

However, these gains also led to increased racist actions and violence by White people who were angered by the growing social and political power of African Americans. White individuals and groups continued their efforts to intimidate, harass, and threaten African Americans. The rise of the Black Power Movement in the 1960s, symbolized by activist and figurehead of the movement Malcom X, advocated for a more militant, radical approach to confront continuing racial discrimination and violence.¹¹⁰⁷

¹¹⁰² NPS, "Civil Rights in America," 18.

¹¹⁰³ NPS, "Civil Rights in America," 17.

¹¹⁰⁴ NPS, "Civil Rights in America," 17.

¹¹⁰⁵ Hart, 36.

¹¹⁰⁶ "And Then it Happened," Kansas City Public Library, accessed July 5, 2024. <https://kchistory.org/week-kansas-city-history/and-then-it-happened>.

¹¹⁰⁷ Hutchinson, 320.

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Following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 4, 1968, an initial “atmosphere of stunned shock” and sadness blanketed Kansas City.¹¹⁰⁸ On April 7, a peaceful march mourning King’s death proceeded through the city. However, tensions erupted on April 9, the day of King’s funeral. While Kansas City, Kansas, closed its schools in tribute, schools on the Missouri side of the state line chose to remain open. Kansas City’s failure to close its schools, combined with grief over King’s assassination and the slow pace of civil rights reforms, resulted in a public protest.¹¹⁰⁹ While Kansas City had a long history of racial tension, it was exceedingly rare for it to culminate in widespread violence. However, after decades of attempting reform through nonviolent action, frustrations finally boiled over. Hundreds of Black Kansas City youth gathered at City Hall demanding school closures for King’s funeral.¹¹¹⁰ Police used tear gas on protestors and in return, protestors vandalized White-owned businesses, many along Prospect Avenue, resulting in significant damage. Nearly 1,700 National Guard troops and seven hundred law enforcement officers were called in to quell the unrest, and gunfire was exchanged between the two camps. Ultimately, six African Americans were killed in the exchange.¹¹¹¹

Following the unrest, the City Council moved quickly to enact changes to housing ordinances and to desegregate housing sales and rental policies.¹¹¹² However, the incident highlighted the ongoing racial divisions that persisted in the city, and unrest continued throughout the summer of 1968. White flight increased over the next decade and residential segregation intensified (see 1.4. *Mid-Twentieth Century: Redlining, The Troost Divide, and Urban Renewal*).¹¹¹³ In 1969, the Kansas City chapter of the Black Panther party was formed by Pete O’Neal, which he dubbed the Black Vigilantes.¹¹¹⁴

The fight for social justice in Kansas City continued through the 1970s, as Bruce R. Watkins sought to require architects and engineers hired by the City to file affirmative action plans in line with other industries receiving publicly funded contracts.¹¹¹⁵ Organizations such as the Urban League of Kansas City (ULKC) continued to support efforts at lifting up the city’s Black community through job training and career fairs, promoting affirmative action policies, and encouraging higher education for Black youth.¹¹¹⁶ The Kansas City NAACP also remained active, and in line with the national organization, expanded their efforts to include civil rights for other marginalized groups.

7.2.5. Civil Rights in the Late Twentieth Century

Intermittent recessions in the late 1970s and early 1980s disproportionately impacted African Americans in Kansas City, with unemployment, scant financial backing for Black businesses, continued discrimination, and what Black leadership described as “dilution of affirmative action.” In 1980, the unemployment rate for White workers in the Greater Kansas City Metro area was at 5.1 percent, while Black workers were unemployed at a

¹¹⁰⁸ “Mayor’s Commission on Civil Disorder,” (City of Kansas City, Missouri, August 15, 1968), 8.

¹¹⁰⁹ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 82.

¹¹¹⁰ “And Then it Happened.”

¹¹¹¹ “And Then it Happened.”

¹¹¹² “And Then it Happened.”

¹¹¹³ Bryant, McKenzie, and Griffin, 83.

¹¹¹⁴ Hutchinson, 320.

¹¹¹⁵ “Watkins Protests Setback on Affirmative Action,” *The Kansas City Times*, February 28, 1976, p33.

¹¹¹⁶ “Career Fair,” *The Kansas City Star*, September 19, 1973, p49.

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rate of 14.5 percent. Two thirds of White workers made more than \$10,000 annually, compared to less than one-third of Black workers. For many in the Black community, it was clear that discrimination did not disappear after passage of the Civil Rights Act, it just became more covert.¹¹¹⁷

In the latter decades of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, local activism group Freedom Inc. continued to promote Black leadership and political candidates throughout Kansas City, and remain active today.¹¹¹⁸ The ULKC and Kansas City NAACP remain active organizations in the community, promoting voting rights, education, job training and placement, Black entrepreneurship, access to health care, fair housing policies, political representation, criminal justice, and social justice.¹¹¹⁹

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¹¹¹⁷ “Unemployment, More Than Any Other Problem, Stands In Blacks’ Way,” *The Kansas City Times*, July 29, 1980, p6.

¹¹¹⁸ Hart, 149.

¹¹¹⁹ Urban League of Greater Kansas City, accessed October 18, 2024, <https://www.ulkc.org/>; NAACP Kansas City Missouri Branch, accessed October 18, 2024, <https://naacpkc.org/>.

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F. ASSOCIATED PROPERTY TYPES

Properties eligible for listing on the NRHP under this MPDF—African American Heritage in Kansas City, Missouri—include buildings, structures, sites, objects, and/or districts associated with African Americans in Kansas City, Missouri, within the period of significance. These properties are significant for their ability to convey the history and lived experiences of Black Kansas Citians. Eligible properties must establish a significant association, per NRHP guidelines, with one or more of the historic contexts outlined in Section E, as well as meet one or more of the NRHP Criteria for Evaluation. Eligible properties must retain sufficient integrity per NRHP guidelines. Eligible properties must also meet all other general criteria for listing per NRHP guidelines.

PROPERTY TYPE DESCRIPTIONS

Per the National Park Service (NPS) *National Register Bulletin 16B: How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form*, property types covered under an MPDF should have “common physical and/or associative attributes.”¹¹²⁰ The types of properties eligible under this MPDF are numerous, and will most commonly share associative characteristics rather than physical ones. The common attributes of properties listed under this cover document are their significant *association* with aspects of African American heritage in Kansas City as outlined in the contexts in Section E. In contrast, property types listed under the MPDFs “Historic Colonnade Apartment Buildings in Kansas City, Missouri” and “Historic Resources of the Kansas City Missouri School District Pre-1970,” for example, would likely share significant *physical* characteristics in their design and/or materials.

Furthermore, *Bulletin 16B*’s guidance for selecting property types for an MPDF state, “the fullest extent of the significant historic values of a group of related resources should be considered.”¹¹²¹ Thus, in order to encompass the broad range of possible property types eligible for listing under this MPDF, the property types outlined in this MPDF follow those identified by the NPS *National Register Bulletin 16A, How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*, which outlines five different, overarching property types: buildings, sites, structures, objects, and districts.¹¹²²

Buildings

The NPS defines a building as a form of shelter principally constructed for human activity, which includes ancillary buildings like barns and sheds that may indirectly support human activity.¹¹²³

For the purposes of this MPDF, eligible buildings may include (but are not limited to) residential (including single- and multi-family), commercial, industrial, recreational, educational, religious, community, or civic

¹¹²⁰ *National Register Bulletin 16B: How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form*, National Park Service, revised 1999, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/upload/NRB16B-Complete.pdf>, 14.

¹¹²¹ *National Register Bulletin 16B: How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form*, 15.

¹¹²² *National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*, National Park Service, revised 1997, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/upload/NRB16A-Complete.pdf>, 15.

¹¹²³ *National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*, 15.

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buildings that are significantly related to African American heritage in Kansas City as outlined in Section E. Eligible buildings may be directly associated with significant events or activities related to African American heritage, such as Fire Station No. 11 at 2033 Vine Street, which has significant associations with Black firefighters in Kansas City and their struggle for equal opportunity and their efforts to desegregate the Kansas City Fire Department. Eligible buildings may also be the most significant or last extant reflection of the productive life of a significant Black Kansas Citian. For example, the residential building at 2626 East 28th Street may be eligible as the home of Satchel Paige, the celebrated baseball player who helped pioneer the desegregation of the Major Leagues, particularly since Municipal Stadium, where he played for the Kansas City Monarchs, is no longer extant.

Sites

The NPS defines a site as the location of a significant historical event, occupation, or activity; the location of a building or structure whether extant, ruinous, or missing; or the location of archaeological remains where the location itself holds “historic, cultural, or archaeological value” regardless of whether buildings or structures remain above ground.¹¹²⁴

For the purposes of this MPDF, eligible sites may include (but are not limited to) archaeological remains, such as ruinous buildings and structures or burial locations; gardens, parks, and designed landscapes; and urban plazas that are significantly related to African American heritage in Kansas City as outlined in Section E. For example, the ruins of the Miller Plantation, located in the southeast corner of Platte County on land currently owned by the Kansas City International Airport, may be eligible as a site for its ability to provide information on the lives and experiences of enslaved African Americans on local antebellum farms. Parade Park, located between East Truman Road, East 18th Street, The Paseo, and Woodland Avenue, may also be eligible as a site for its significance as the location of a protest during the unrest following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Structures

The NPS defines a structure as a physical construction that is distinguished from a building in that its primary purpose is for something other than human shelter.¹¹²⁵

For the purposes of this MPDF, eligible structures may include (but are not limited to) bridges, bandstands, park shelter houses, and swimming pools that are significantly related to African American heritage in Kansas City as outlined in Section E. For example, Swope Park Shelter #5, located in Swope Park between the Starlight Theater and the Kansas City Zoo, may be eligible as a structure. Prior to the desegregation of Swope Park in 1954, it was the only shelter accessible to Black Kansas Citians and served as an important recreational and gathering space. Similarly, the Swope Park Pool may be eligible as a structure for its association with the fight for desegregated public recreational facilities in Kansas City.

¹¹²⁴ *National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*, 15.

¹¹²⁵ *National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*, 15.

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Objects

The NPS defines an object as a physical construction that is distinguished from a building or structure in that it is “primarily artistic in nature” or “relatively small in scale and simply constructed.”¹¹²⁶

For the purposes of this MPDF, eligible objects may include (but are not limited to) works of public art, like murals, fountains, monuments, statues, and sculptures that are significantly related to African American heritage in Kansas City as outlined in Section E. Objects may have association with patterns of events that have made significant contributions to the lives and experiences of Black Kansas Citians, may represent the work of a Black master artist or craftsperson, or may represent African American heritage and exhibit high artistic value.

Districts

The NPS defines districts as concentrations of sites, buildings, structures, and/or objects that share a common historical association or aesthetic plan, design, or physical development.¹¹²⁷

For the purposes of this MPDF, eligible districts that are significantly related to African American heritage in Kansas City as outlined in Section E may be residential, commercial, or a mix of residential and commercial. Districts may be either contiguous or discontiguous. Demolition, urban renewal and transportation projects, and other factors have led to a significant loss of historic fabric associated with African American heritage in Kansas City. In these cases, a discontiguous district may be necessary and should be permitted to capture groups of significant buildings that retain sufficient integrity but that have been geographically separated by intervening development, such as highway construction or land clearing.

Primarily residential districts may contain both single- and multi-family homes and associated buildings, structures, sites, and objects. Residential districts may include portions of commercial districts or commercial corridors, institutional buildings such as schools and libraries, religious institutions, and public parks that all serve the surrounding community. Residential districts may also consist of apartment complexes and public housing complexes constructed during the urban renewal period in the 1950s and 1960s. These complexes displaced older residential buildings in integrated or predominately Black areas, and public housing was constructed as segregated housing. In cases such as these where an apartment or public housing complex replaced an older historically Black area, the period of significance for that particular district would not include the development or settlement of the older neighborhood.

Residential neighborhoods within the Lincoln-Coles district, such as Wendell Phillips and Washington-Wheatley, may be eligible as examples of areas that initially developed as racially integrated neighborhoods and became majority Black as the racist practices of racial covenants and redlining manufactured increasingly segregated conditions. Residential neighborhoods such as Key Coalition, South Round Top, Oak Park Northwest, and Oak Park Southwest may be eligible as examples of areas that were initially developed for White residents south of the East 27th Street divide and became majority Black during the mid-twentieth century period of White flight. Examples of potential discontiguous residential districts include Beacon Hill,

¹¹²⁶ *National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*, 15.

¹¹²⁷ *National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*, 15.

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Wendell Phillips, and Mt. Hope, which were all Black neighborhoods impacted by the construction of US-71. Parade Park Homes, the first Black housing co-op in Kansas City, as well as T.B. Watkins and Wayne Minor, which were segregated public housing projects, may also be eligible as examples of mid-twentieth century housing projects.

Due to racist practices of segregation, racial covenants, and redlining, vibrant commercial districts of Black-owned businesses formed around the Lincoln-Coles area, including clusters of commercial buildings around East 12th and Vine Streets, East 18th and Vine Streets, and East 31st Street and Troost Avenue. These districts faced vacancy and decline following integration of public spaces as well as suburbanization during the mid- to late twentieth century, resulting in many demolished resources and a decline in district integrity. Most commercial buildings in the 12th and Vine area have been demolished. The 18th and Vine area contains the most intact grouping of commercial buildings and was listed as a National Register Historic District in 1991. The extant grouping of commercial buildings at East 31st Street and Troost Avenue may be eligible as a commercial district.

PROPERTY TYPE SIGNIFICANCE

Many resources associated with African American Heritage in Kansas City, Missouri, have been lost as a result of continued development of the city, racist and discriminatory urban renewal and other land clearing practices, and vacancy. As the number of extant resources dwindles, the significance of the remaining resources increases.

Period of Significance

Properties eligible for listing under this MPDF will typically have achieved their significance during the period of significance (POS). The POS for this MPDF extends from 1826, the establishment of the first non-Indigenous settlement within the current borders of Kansas City, Missouri, to 1975, the date chosen for contexts whose historic significance and patterns extend beyond fifty years prior to present-day (2025). The POS for this MPDF may be updated to extend beyond 1975 as additional research is uncovered and as additional historical insights are revealed with time. Additionally, a property may have achieved significance within the past fifty years and still be eligible if it meets Criteria Consideration G (see below for additional information on criteria considerations). The POS for a property nominated under this MPDF will be based on the period of significant association with African American heritage in Kansas City, and may therefore postdate the original construction of the property.

Levels of Significance

Properties eligible for listing under this MPDF should be assigned a level of significance based on their prominence and their ability to convey historical themes within local, state, and national contexts. Most properties eligible for listing under this MPDF will have significance at the local level. However, given the scale of certain historical themes, such as racist zoning practices and the Civil Rights Movement, a property

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may have significance at the state or national level if it had a statewide or nationwide impact of exceptional value.

Areas of Significance

All properties eligible for listing under this MPDF will be significant under Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage: Black. Most properties will also be significant in at least one or more other areas under Criteria A, B, C, or D. Eligible properties may have been built by or for African Americans, or they may have been originally built for another ethnic group. If African Americans owned or leased a property during the period of significance, the property has the potential to be eligible.

Criterion A

Properties listed under this MPDF will be significant under Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage: Black. Properties may also be eligible for listing under this MPDF under Criterion A in other areas, including (but not limited to) Commerce, Community Planning and Development, Education, Entertainment/Recreation, Health/Medicine, Industry, Performing Arts, Politics/Government, or Social History. Properties eligible for listing under this MPDF under Criterion A are those that have significant associations with the contexts contained in Section E, and which illuminate and expand our understanding of African American heritage through the built environment in Kansas City during the period of significance.

For example, Central High School at 3221 Indiana Avenue may be eligible under Criterion A in the areas of both Ethnic Heritage: Black and Education for its significance as a historically Black school and as a powerful example of the effects of racial segregation in Kansas City, both legal and de facto. Central High School exemplifies the demographic shifts that occurred in certain schools after the establishment of the Troost Wall, an informal but powerful racial boundary shaped by policies of the Kansas City School Board in the mid-twentieth century. Initially an all-White school up to 1954, Central High School became 97 percent Black by 1961 as Black families began moving south of East 27th Street in the 1950s, subsequently resulting in White flight and a dramatic demographic shift east of Troost Avenue.

The Garrison Square Field House at 1124 East 5th Street was constructed for and used by the surrounding Black community and may be eligible in the area of Ethnic Heritage: Black. Constructed to include a gymnasium/auditorium, club rooms, and a public bath, it may also be eligible in the area of Entertainment/Recreation as a place used for leisure activities. Later used as an important gathering place and a venue for civic groups, including the Garrison Forum, a “negro civic betterment organization,” it may also be eligible in the area of Social History as a reflection of efforts to promote the welfare of the Black community.

Similarly, St. Stephen Baptist Church at 1414 East Truman Road may be eligible under both Ethnic Heritage: Black as well as Social History for its significant history of promoting mutual aid within the Black community and for promoting Black homeowners and business owners and helping them achieve economic independence. It may also be eligible under Social History: Civil Rights for its significant association with the Civil Rights Movement.

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Other areas of historic associations will generally require evaluation on an individual basis.

Criterion B

Properties listed under this MPDF under Criterion B must demonstrate a direct association with a Black historical figure who was significant in Kansas City within one or more of the contexts outlined in Section E. To achieve historic significance, these individuals may have provided significant community leadership, or they may have significantly excelled in areas such as commerce, communications, economics, education, entertainment, health/medicine, law, or politics. The accomplishments of these individuals must have occurred during the period of significance as well as have association with the property, which may vary depending on the area of significance. Properties listed under Criterion B may represent the most significant achievement in Kansas City of the individual with whom it is associated, best represent their careers or productive lives in Kansas City, or be the last extant example of their productive life in Kansas City.

For example, the homes of Satchel Paige at 2626 East 28th Street and Buck O'Neil at 3049 East 32nd Street may be eligible under both Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage: Black and under Criterion B for their respective association with Paige and O'Neil, both celebrated baseball players who pioneered the desegregation of the Major Leagues. Since Municipal Stadium, where they played for the Kansas City Monarchs, is no longer extant, their homes are the last and best extant representation of their productive lives in Kansas City.

The home of Sarah Rector at 2000 East 12th Street may be eligible under both Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage: Black and under Criterion B for its association with Rector, the first Black woman millionaire to live in Kansas City. Rector made her fortune outside of Kansas City, through inheriting oil-rich land in eastern Oklahoma. Therefore, her home is the best representation of her productive life in Kansas City.

Criterion C

Properties listed under this MPDF may be eligible under Criterion C if they have significance for their design, engineering, construction, artistic value, craftsmanship, or other physical characteristics. Properties listed under Criterion C may be significant if they were designed, planned, created, or constructed (formally or informally) by African Americans, either individually or as part of a joint effort, provided that their role was instrumental in the creation of the final product. This includes properties that were originally designed by African Americans, as well as properties that were later significantly redesigned, renovated, or rehabilitated by African Americans during the period of significance. Properties may have been constructed for either Black or White clients or as public projects. Properties eligible under Criterion C may be the work of a designer, planner, architect, landscape architect, engineer, artist, or other craftsman. A property may be significant for its distinctive design, form, or construction features that reflect the building's original or modified function that is associated with the history of African Americans in Kansas City, or resources may possess high artistic value or exemplify popular architectural styles or building types of the period. In some cases, the design, craftsmanship, materials, and construction techniques may reflect the ethnic background or socio-economic status of Black owners, designers, or builders. A property eligible for listing under this MPDF under Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage: Black and additional Criteria related to contexts in Section E could also be eligible under Criterion C

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for its merit in design or construction, despite not being associated with any Section E contexts related to that criterion.

The property at 100 West Bannister Road may be eligible under both Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage: Black and under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as the design of William H. Johnson, Sr., who in 1965 became the first Black architect to join the Kansas City Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Johnson designed the home in 1971, which also served as his home and office.

Criterion D

Properties eligible for listing under this MPDF may be eligible under Criterion D if they have the potential to yield important information that contributes to the understanding of African American heritage in Kansas City. These are generally archaeological sites with the potential to yield information not available through other sources. Properties eligible under Criterion D may include the archeological remains or ruins of buildings or structures that are significantly related to African American heritage in Kansas City as outlined in Section E, or they may include the archeological remains of African American burial sites. In order to be eligible for listing, a property's association with African American heritage in Kansas City must be identifiable through written or oral histories, and archaeological testing must have the potential to illuminate or expand on the knowledge of African American heritage in Kansas City.

The Miller Plantation, which currently exists in ruins in the southeast corner of Platte County, may be eligible under both Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage: Black and under Criterion D for its ability to provide information on the lives and experiences of enslaved African Americans on local antebellum farms.

Criteria Considerations

The NRHP program outlines specific categories of properties that are generally considered ineligible for listing under typical circumstances. However, through its Criteria Considerations (A through G), the program recognizes that properties within these categories may qualify for listing under certain limited conditions. While any of the seven Criteria Considerations may be applicable, those most relevant to properties nominated under this MPDF are likely to include Consideration A: religious properties, Consideration B: moved properties, Consideration C: birthplaces or graves, Consideration D: cemeteries, and Consideration G: properties that have attained significance within the past fifty years.

A religious property will likely qualify for listing under this MPDF in accordance with Criteria Consideration A if it derives its primary significance from its historical importance within the community. Black religious properties often extended beyond their religious functions and served as critical sites of mutual aid, activism, education, and as centers of community. Significance may be demonstrated through the property's function as a center for social support, civic engagement, or communal gathering.

A property that has been moved from its original location will likely qualify for listing under this MPDF in accordance with Criteria Consideration B if it is significant primarily for its architectural value, it is the surviving property associated with a significant person or event, or it was moved within the period of

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significance. Given the history of targeted urban renewal and other land clearing practices in Kansas City, consideration should be given as to why a property was moved, such as to save it from demolition.

A birthplace or grave of a significant Black historical figure will likely qualify for listing under this MPDF in accordance with Criteria Consideration C if it is the only remaining resource associated with that figure's productive life. Given the loss of historic fabric related to African American heritage in Kansas City, it is highly possible that a resource could meet this consideration.

A cemetery will likely qualify for listing under this MPDF in accordance with Criteria Consideration D if it derives its significance from graves of significant Black persons or from its association with historic events, such as a segregated burial site or a burial site of enslaved African Americans.

A property that has achieved exceptional significance within the past fifty years and beyond the period of significance will likely qualify for listing under this MPDF in accordance with Criteria Consideration G. Given that significant patterns and events that began in the mid-twentieth century and earlier that relate to the Black struggle in Kansas City for housing equality, school integration, and civil rights, among others, continued to evolve and exert influence well into the 1970s and beyond, it is highly possible that a resource could meet this consideration.

Integrity

All properties eligible for listing under this MPDF must retain sufficient integrity in the seven aspects of location, setting, materials, design, workmanship, feeling, and association as defined by the NPS in *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*.¹¹²⁸ According to *Bulletin 15*, properties "either retain integrity (this is, convey their significance) or they do not."¹¹²⁹ However, while integrity does not exist on a sliding scale, and while properties must have integrity in order to be eligible for listing, qualities that determine whether a property retains sufficient integrity to convey its historic significance will depend upon its period and area(s) of significance. A property will typically possess at least several aspects of integrity, if not all, but it does not necessarily need to retain all seven aspects as long as it is still able to convey its specific historic significance.

Generally, a property should remain in its original location, unless it was moved before or during the period of significance and/or its relocation does not impact its ability to convey its historic significance and association with African American heritage in Kansas City (see above information on Criteria Consideration B for moved properties). The relocation of a property may, in fact, contribute to its historic significance if it was moved to avoid demolition and therefore reflects the practice of targeted urban renewal and other land clearing practices, for example.

¹¹²⁸ *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, National Park Service, revised 1997, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/upload/NRB16B-Complete.pdf>, 44-48.

¹¹²⁹ *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, 44.

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A property should generally retain its historic relationship from its period of significance to the built fabric of the city and the neighborhood or area setting, including primary spatial organizational features such as street grid and building orientation, lot sizes, building setbacks, and general landscaping. Integrity of setting is particularly important for properties listed under the areas of Architecture, Community Planning & Development, and Landscape Architecture, for example. However, the loss of built fabric surrounding a property should not automatically preclude it from being able to convey its historic significance as long as it retains sufficient integrity itself. The loss of surrounding built fabric may also contribute to the history of urban renewal or economic inequality.

A property should generally retain its character-defining features from its period of significance, which may emphasize physical attributes like materials, workmanship, or design, or may focus on the associative characteristics of feeling and association, depending on the property type. A property may have been altered over time as different materials became available and as economic conditions allowed, impacting integrity of design and materials. However, if the essential physical features and historic significance of the property is still readable, such as through massing or other physical qualities, it may retain eligibility. For example, on a residential property located within a historically economically disadvantaged area, the use of inexpensive replacement materials on exterior features should not automatically reduce that property's historic integrity to render it ineligible; rather, it may reflect the economic constraints faced by Black property owners and residents who endured systemic economic discrimination. Such alterations—often made with affordability and durability in mind—can serve as tangible evidence of long-term socio-economic inequality within a community. As a result, while these alterations may on the surface impact integrity of materials, design, or workmanship, these alterations should not automatically disqualify a property from conveying its historic significance, particularly under Criteria A or B.¹¹³⁰

A property may also have been altered over time to support a new use(s). If these alterations occurred within the property's period of significance, they would become part of the historic significance of the property. If these alterations occurred beyond the period of significance, they should not automatically prevent the property's eligibility as long as the essential physical features and historic significance of the property is still readable. However, substantial and irreversible changes to a property, such as the removal of multiple character-defining features and incompatible or severely overwhelming additions, may negatively affect its ability to convey its historic significance, particularly under Criterion C.

For properties listed under Criterion D, integrity of design and workmanship may be compromised, particularly the ruins of formerly standing resources that have deteriorated. However, properties listed under Criterion D should still retain sufficient integrity such that they can convey important information potential illuminating significant African American heritage in Kansas City. Integrity of location, materials, and association are critical as they relate to the site's disturbance and the ability to accurately associate artifacts with one or more

¹¹³⁰ For more information, see "Architecture 101 – The Architecture of Arizona's Working Class Communities," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=385Dw_YXOac&ab_channel=ArizonaHistoricPreservation (for the discussion of integrity, forward to 36:54 of the video); National Council on Public History, "Repairing National Register Nominations: Underrepresented communities and integrity," accessed January 30, 2024, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/repairing-national-register-nominations-underrepresented-communities-and-integrity/>.

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historic contexts identified in Section E. Evaluation of integrity depends on the nature of the data required to address the research questions. For example, a property eligible under Criterion D does not need to visually reflect its historic period, but it must retain sufficient physical evidence to yield the anticipated information.

PROPERTY TYPE REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

To be eligible for listing under this MPDF, a resource must meet all of the following requirements:

- The resource must be located within the boundaries of the City of Kansas City, Missouri. The boundaries for this MPDF correspond to the municipal limits of Kansas City, Missouri, as defined in 2025 (see *G. Geographical Data*). The boundaries for this MPDF may change should the official limits of Kansas City be altered in the future.
- The resource must have significant association, per NRHP guidelines, with one or more of the historic contexts identified in Section E.
- The resource must have achieved its associative significance during the period of significance for this MPDF (1826-1975), or the resource must meet Criteria Consideration G. The period of significance for this MPDF may change in the future as additional research is uncovered and as additional historical insights are revealed with time.
- Resources must retain sufficient integrity to convey their significance under this MPDF.
- Resources must comply with all overarching NPS criteria for NRHP eligibility.

Telling the stories of Black historical sites is critical to telling the full story of not only Kansas City but the United States as a whole. Tangible places, whether buildings, sites, or districts, play an important role in shaping our collective memory. However, according to the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, only about two percent of the 96,000-plus NRHP listings nationwide center on Black history.¹¹³¹ This lack of representation prevents us all from reflecting on, learning from, and honoring a fuller understanding of the past, and underscores the necessity of recognizing and highlighting the ways in which African Americans have shaped and been shaped by the built environment.

¹¹³¹ “African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund,” *National Trust for Historic Preservation*, accessed June 19, 2025, <https://savingplaces.org/african-american-cultural-heritage>.; Mia Jackson, “A New Initiative to Protect Black History Starts with Coltrane,” *New York Times*, March 5, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/05/realestate/john-coltrane-house-philadelphia-black-history.html>.

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H. SUMMARY OF IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION METHODS

This Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF), African American Heritage in Kansas City, Missouri, was developed to provide a broad historic context for historic resources associated with African Americans in Kansas City, Missouri, and to provide a framework for their identification, evaluation, and listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Archival research was conducted at multiple repositories within the City of Kansas City, including the Black Archives of Mid-America, the Bruce R. Watkins Cultural Center, and the Missouri Valley Special Collections at the Kansas City Public Library. Books, journal articles, maps, and National Register Forms provided broad context. The African American Heritage Trail of Kansas City, Missouri, a virtual trail driven by contributions from the community, provided valuable information about specific places, people, and organizations important to Kansas City African American history. Newspaper articles and oral histories provided further information about specific events and personal lived experiences.

The Kansas City Planning & Development Department and local stakeholders provided crucial input and review for the draft historic contexts. Attendees of a public engagement meeting held at the beginning of this project provided input on themes, places, people, and events. In addition to the Kansas City Planning & Development Department, the following members of the community reviewed and provided valuable feedback on draft historic contexts:

- Dr. Carmaletta Williams, Executive Director of the Black Archives of Mid-America
- Erik Stafford, Local historian and Proprietor of the Kansas City Tour Company
- Glenn North, Director of Inclusive Learning & Creative Impact at the Kansas City Museum and the Poet Laureate of the 18th & Vine Jazz District

The geographic area for this MPDF covers the current (2025) borders of Kansas City, Missouri. The period of significance is 1826-1975, beginning with the first settlement of African Americans within the current borders of Kansas City and ending with the acknowledgement that significant patterns and events extend beyond these dates and continue to develop today. This MPDF may be expanded in the future as additional research is uncovered and as additional historical insights are revealed with time. Individual historic contexts and property types are organized around several themes that allow for a comprehensive representation of Black activities and experiences in Kansas City during the period of significance. Due to the thematic structure of Section E, property types in Section F may be associated with more than one context.

In addition to definitions outlined by the National Park Service in *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, *National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*, and *National Register Bulletin 16B: How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form*, registration requirements are based on an inclusive interpretation of physical and material integrity, particularly for resources in underrepresented and income-challenged communities. This MPDF recognizes that alterations to buildings often represent continued impacts of economic inequality in communities and that such alterations do not automatically preclude a resource's ability

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to convey historic significance. Many resources have also been lost due to continued development, urban renewal, and vacancy. As the number of extant resources dwindles, the significance of remaining resources increases.

This MPDF was initiated by the City Planning & Development Department of the City of Kansas City, Missouri, with partial support from an Underrepresented Communities Grant from the Historic Preservation Fund administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior.

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J. GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

AFL	American Federation of Labor
AME	African Methodist Episcopal
BSCP	Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters
CCSA	Community Committee for Social Action
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations
COPOD	Committee on the Practice of Democracy
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
CWA	Civil Works Administration
DOT	Department of Transportation (U.S. Department of)
FOR	Fellowship for Reconciliation
HEW	Health, Education, and Welfare (U.S. Department of)
HUD	Housing and Urban Development (U.S. Department of)
KCFCWC	Kansas City Federation of Colored Women's Clubs
KCCWL	Kansas City Colored Women's League
KCFD	Kansas City Fire Department
KCMSD	Kansas City Missouri School District
KCPD	Kansas City Police Department
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
MNIC	Missouri Negro Industrial Commission
MOWM	March on Washington Movement
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NACW	National Association of Colored Women
NNCCLA	National Negro Constitutional Conservation League of

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	America
NR/NRHP	National Register/National Register of Historic Places
NUL	National Urban League
NYA	National Youth Administration
PWA	Public Works Administration
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
UPWA	United Packinghouse Workers of America
ULKC	Urban League of Kansas City
WBBC	Western Baptist Bible College
WPA	Works Progress Administration
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

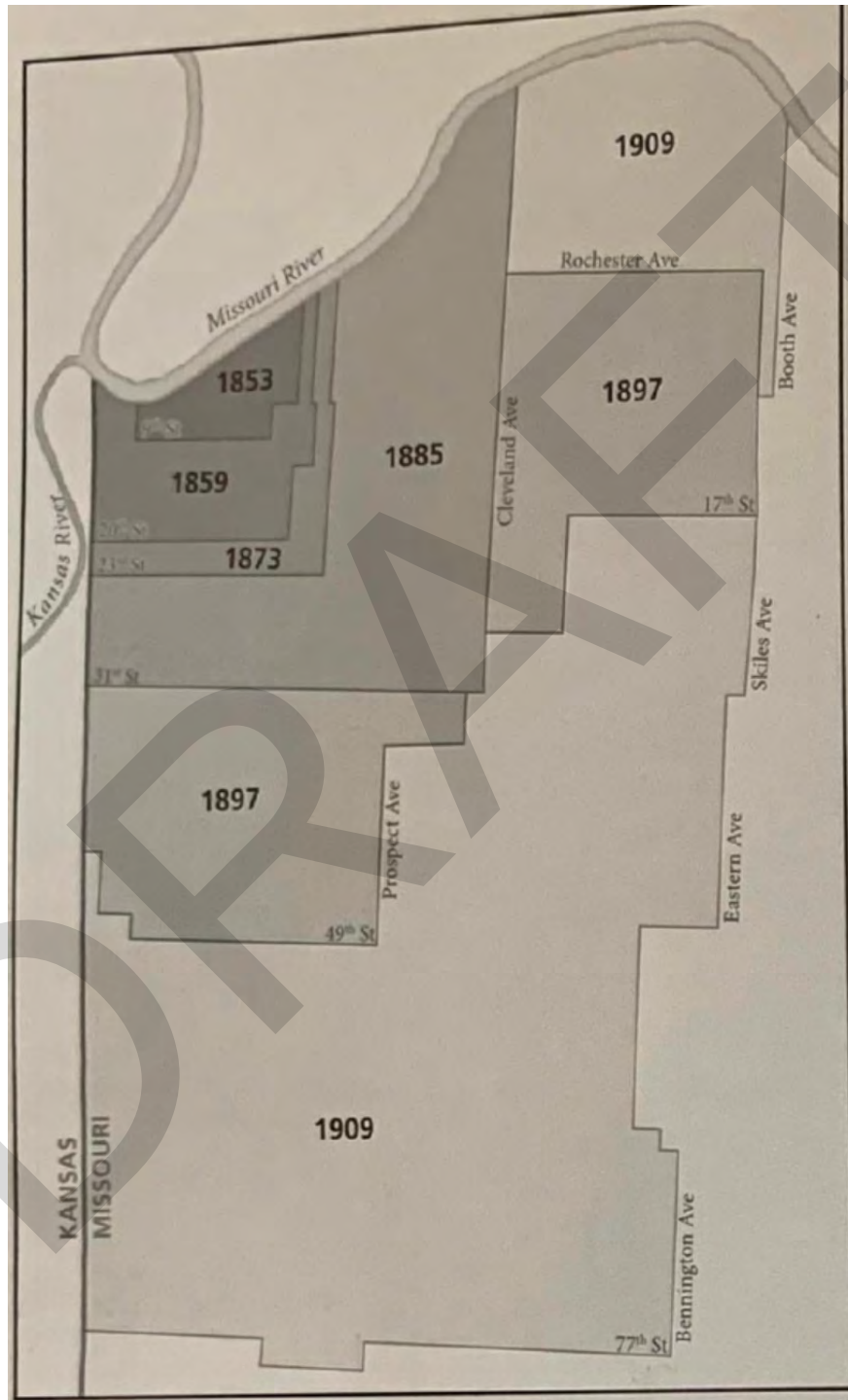
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K. MAPS

Map 1. City limits of Kansas City, Missouri, 1853-1909. Source: Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew*, 78.

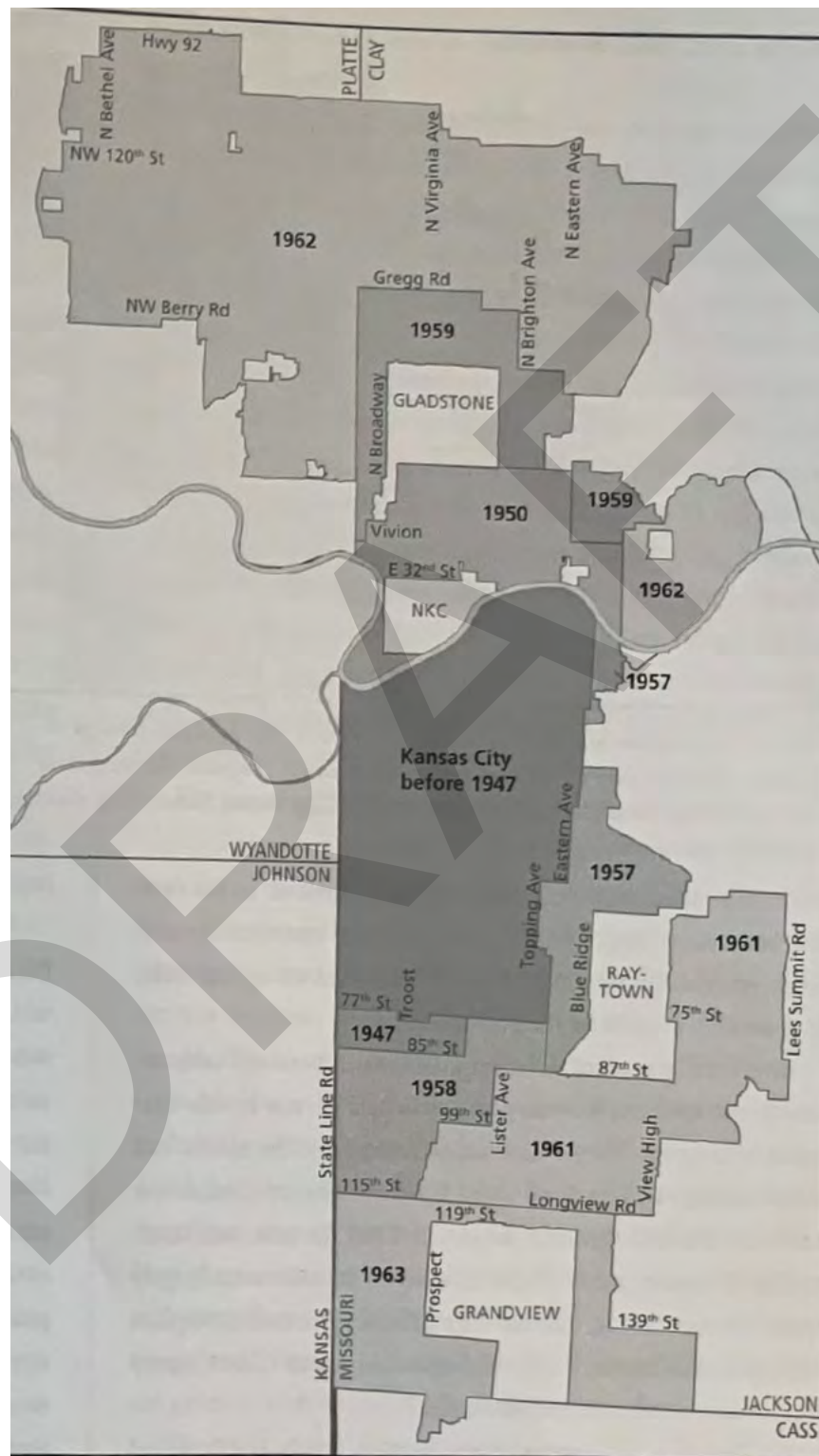


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Map 2. City limits of Kansas City, Missouri, 1947-1963. Source: Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew*, 103.

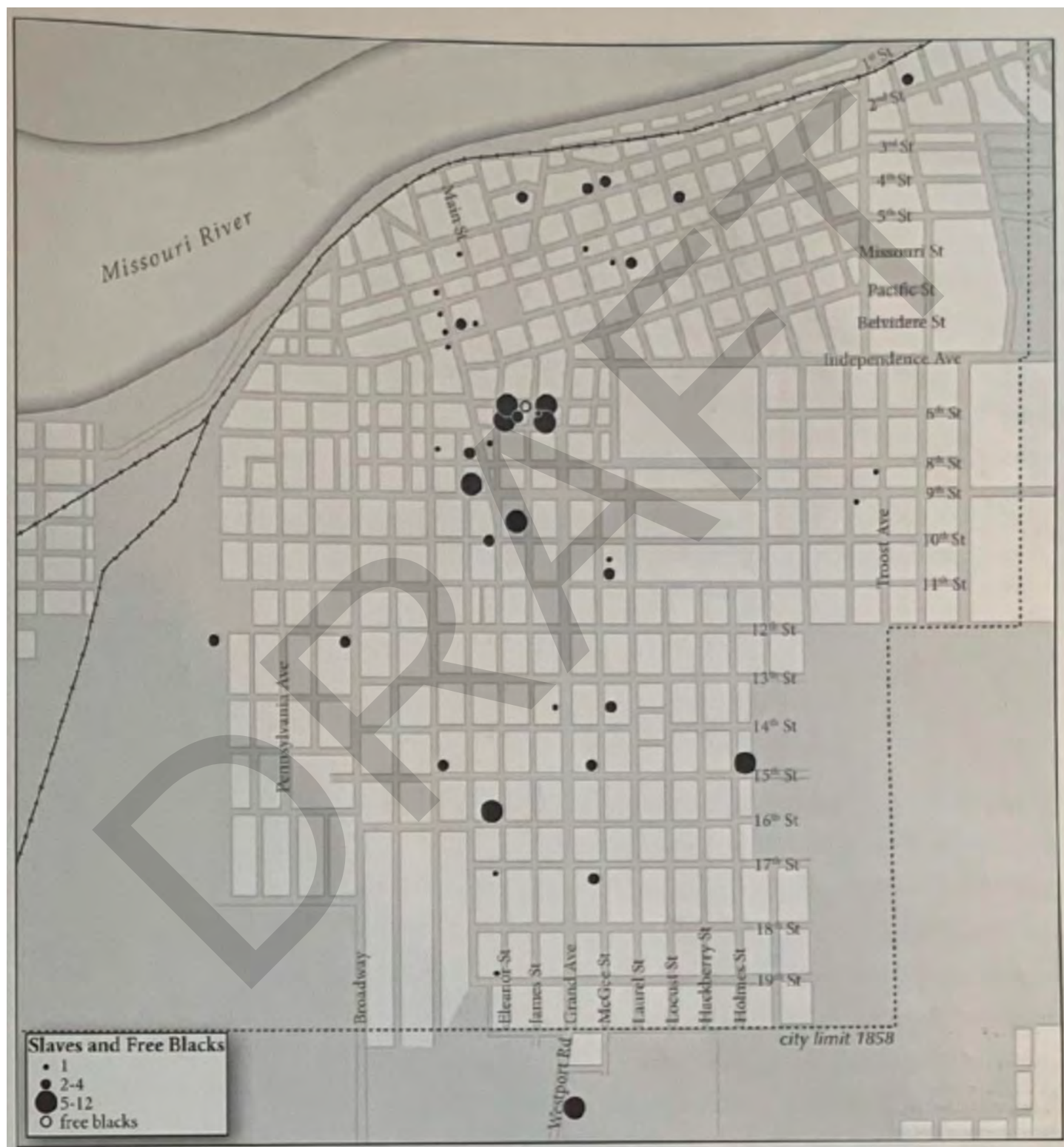


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Map 3. Enslaved and free Black residents in Kansas City, Missouri, 1860. Source: Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew*, 27.

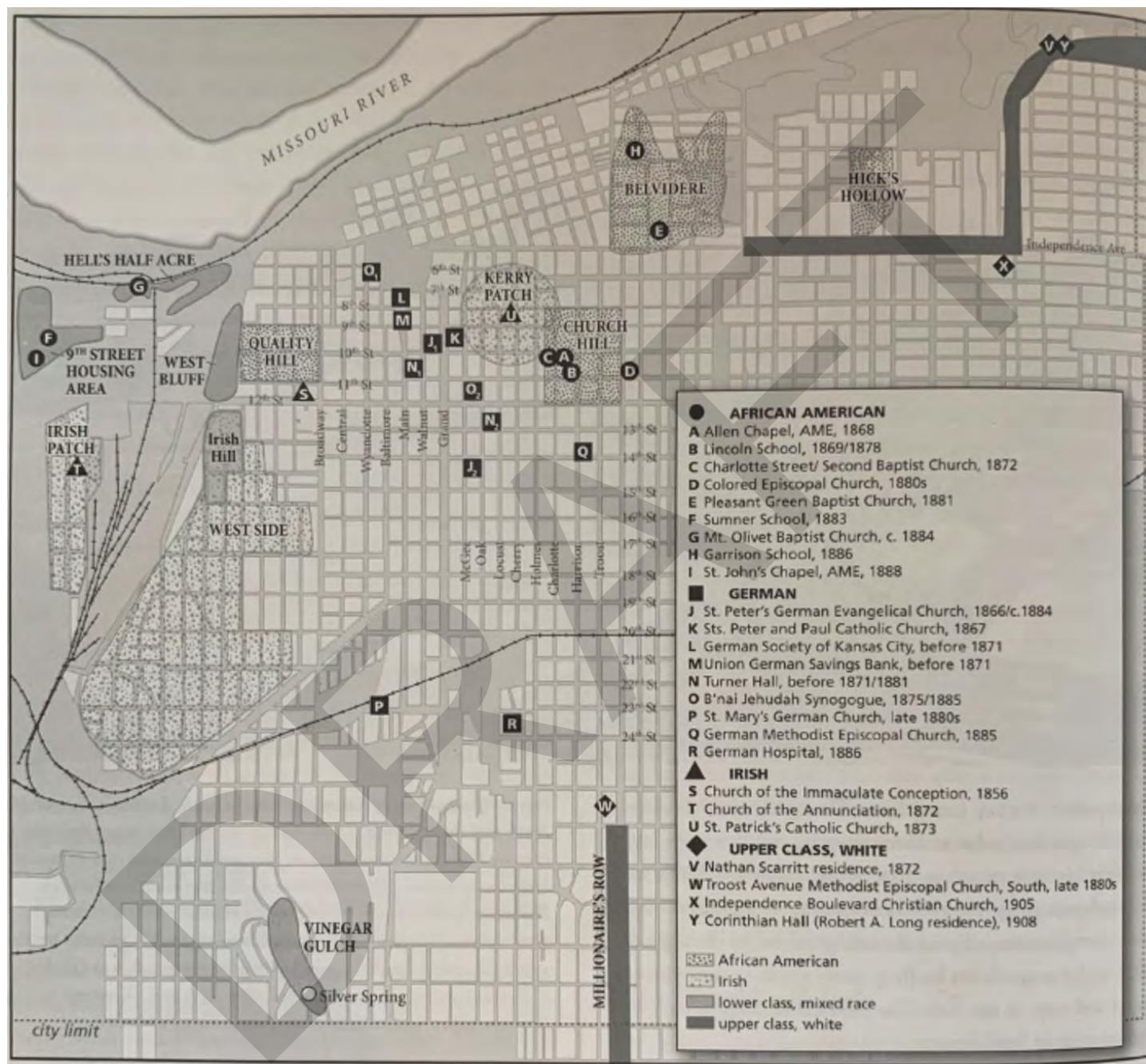


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Map 4. Neighborhoods in Kansas City, Missouri, circa 1886. Source: Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew*, 52.

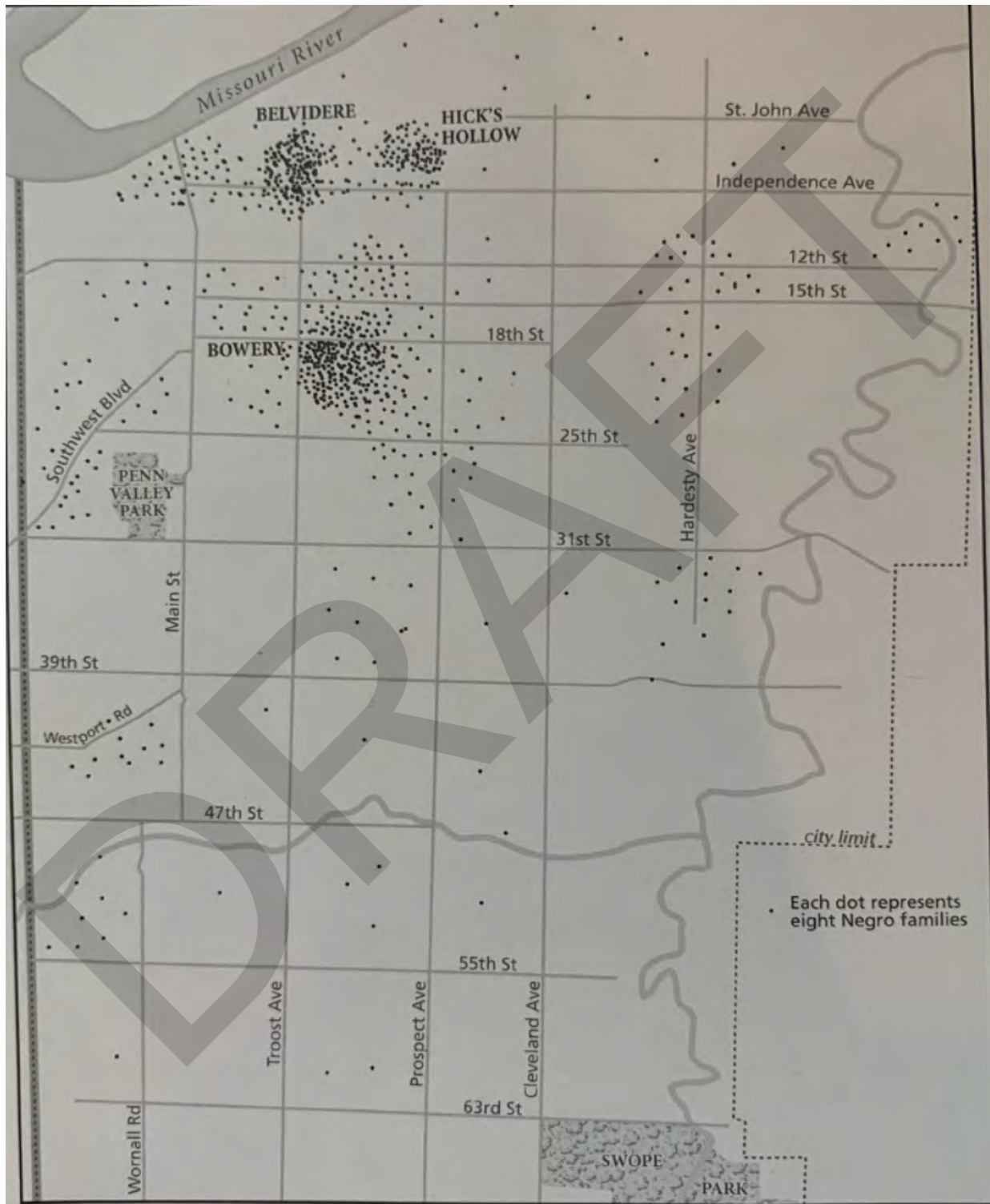


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Map 5. Black population in Kansas City, Missouri, 1910. Source: Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew*, 86.

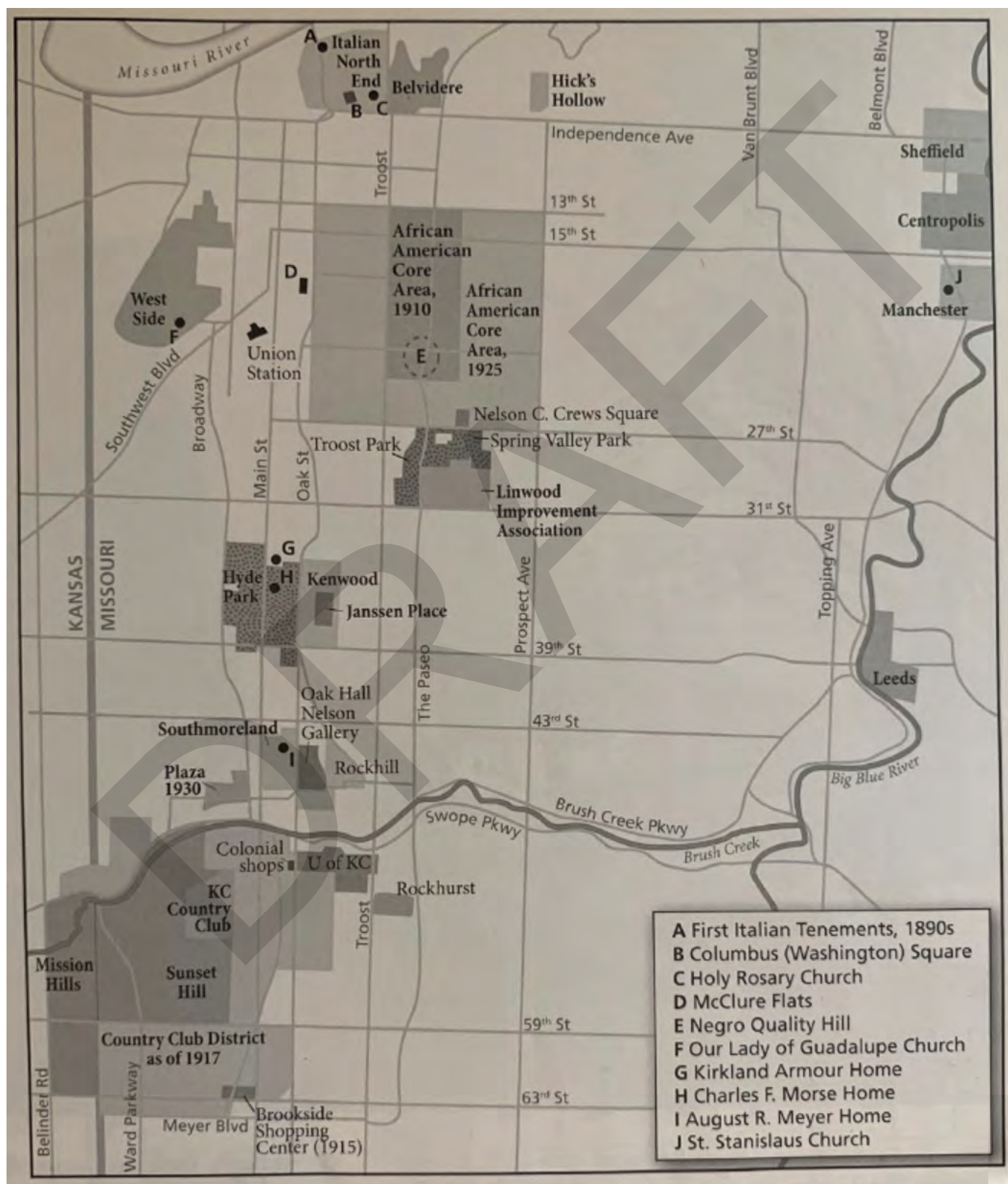


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Map 6. Neighborhoods in Kansas City, Missouri, circa 1925. Source: Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew*, 79.

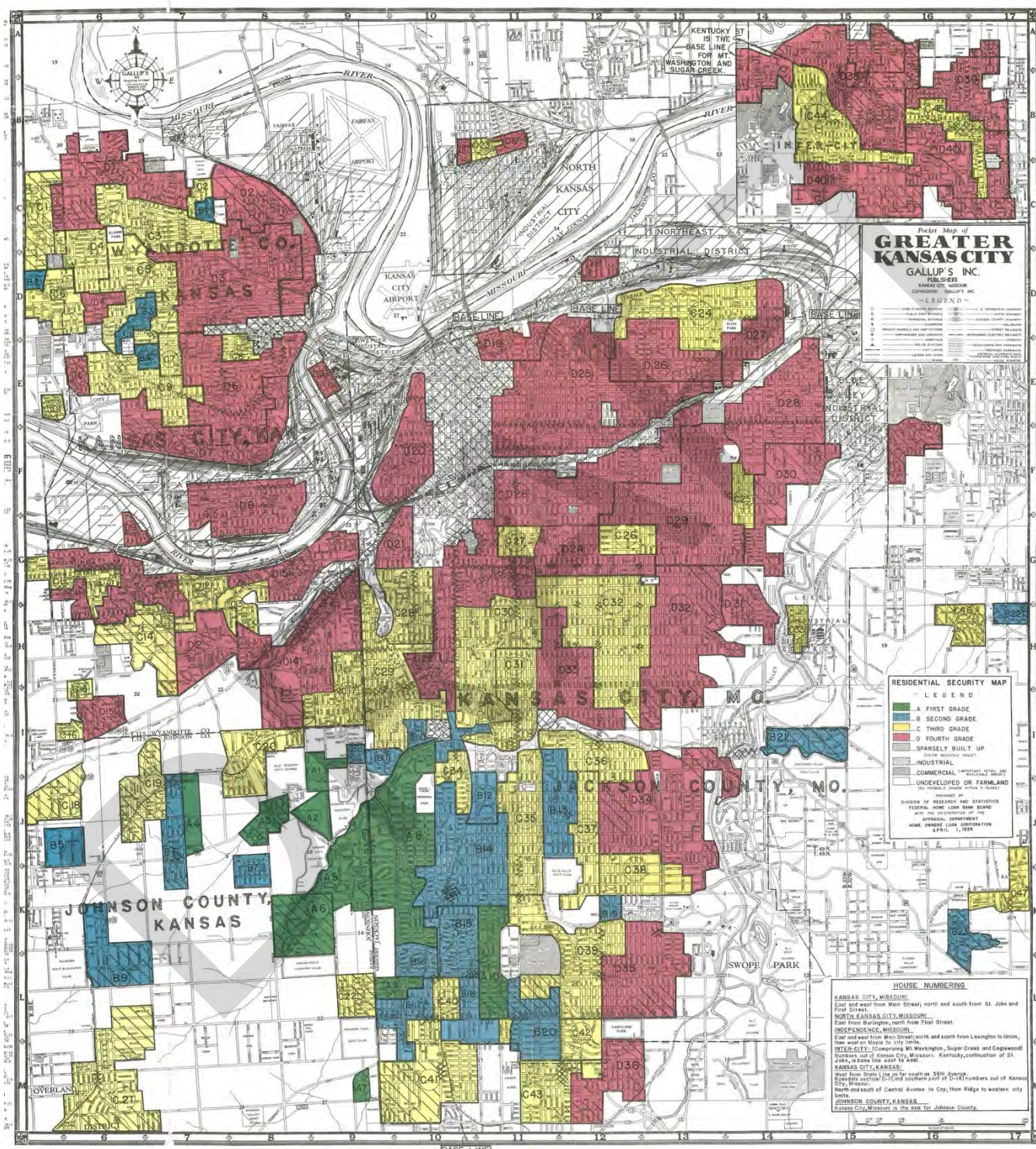


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Map 7. Home Owners' Loan Corporation map of Greater Kansas City (Missouri and Kansas), 1939. Source: Mapping Inequality.

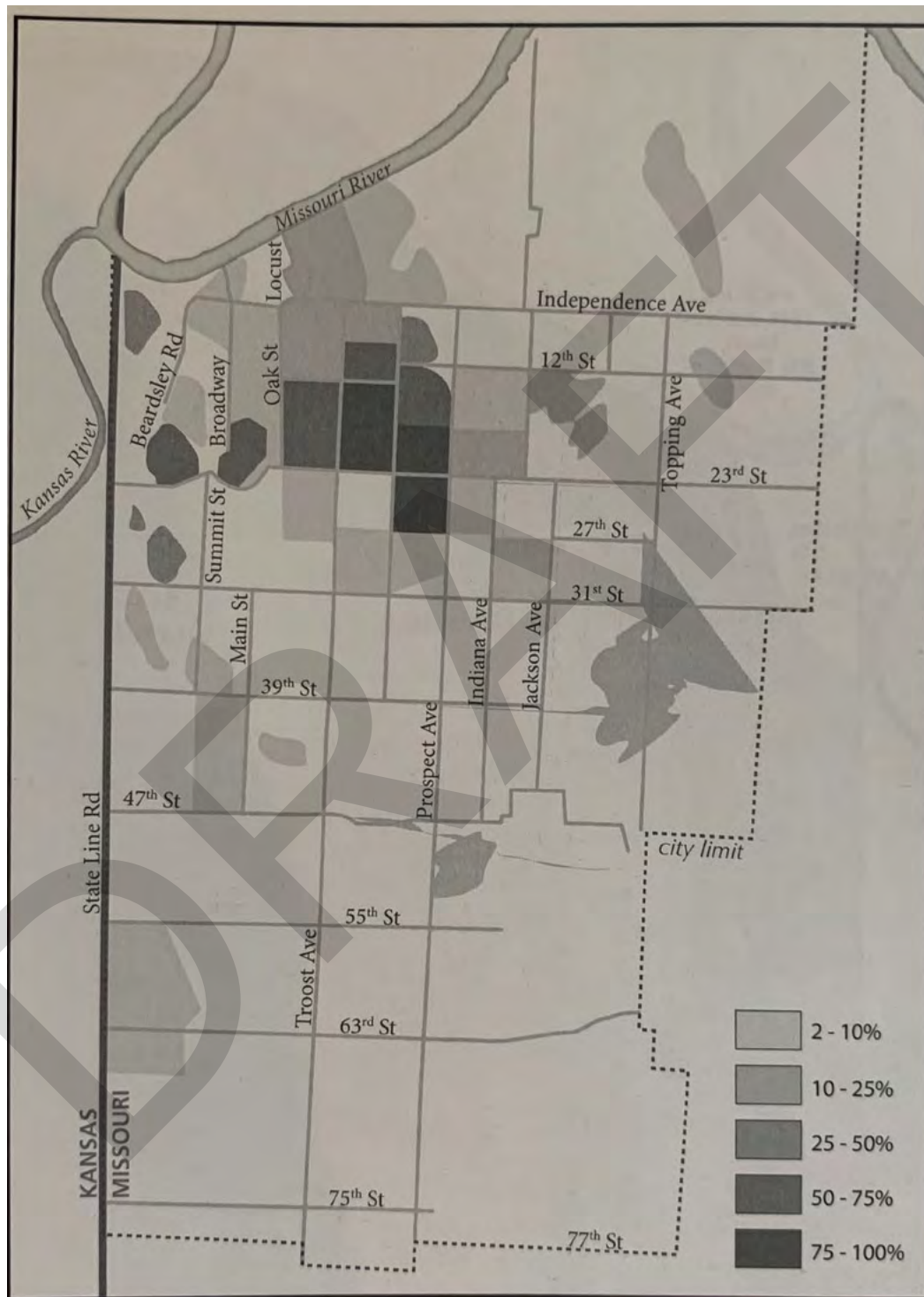


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Map 8. Black population in Kansas City, Missouri, 1940. Source: Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew*, 86.



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L. FIGURES

Figure 1. Circa 1925 photograph of St. Monica's Church at 1400 East 17th Street (extant), view northeast.
Source: Kansas City Public Library Missouri Valley Special Collections.



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Figure 2. Circa 1926 photograph of Wheatley Provident Hospital at 1830 Forest Avenue (extant, NRHP 2020), view southwest. Source: Kansas City Public Library Missouri Valley Special Collections.



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Figure 3. Circa 1930 photograph of East 18th Street, view east from between The Paseo and Vine Street (NRHD 1991). Source: American Jazz Museum.



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Figure 4. Circa 1930 photograph of East 18th Street showing the Boone and Gem Theaters on the left (both extant), view west from between Woodland and Highland Avenues (NRHD 1991). Source: American Jazz Museum.



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Figure 5. 1930 photograph of the Mutual Musicians Association Building at 1823 Highland Avenue (extant, NHL 1981), view east. Source: American Jazz Museum.



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Figure 6. Circa 1930 photograph of *The Kansas City Call* building at 1715 East 18th Street (extant, NRHD 1991), view north. Source: American Jazz Museum.

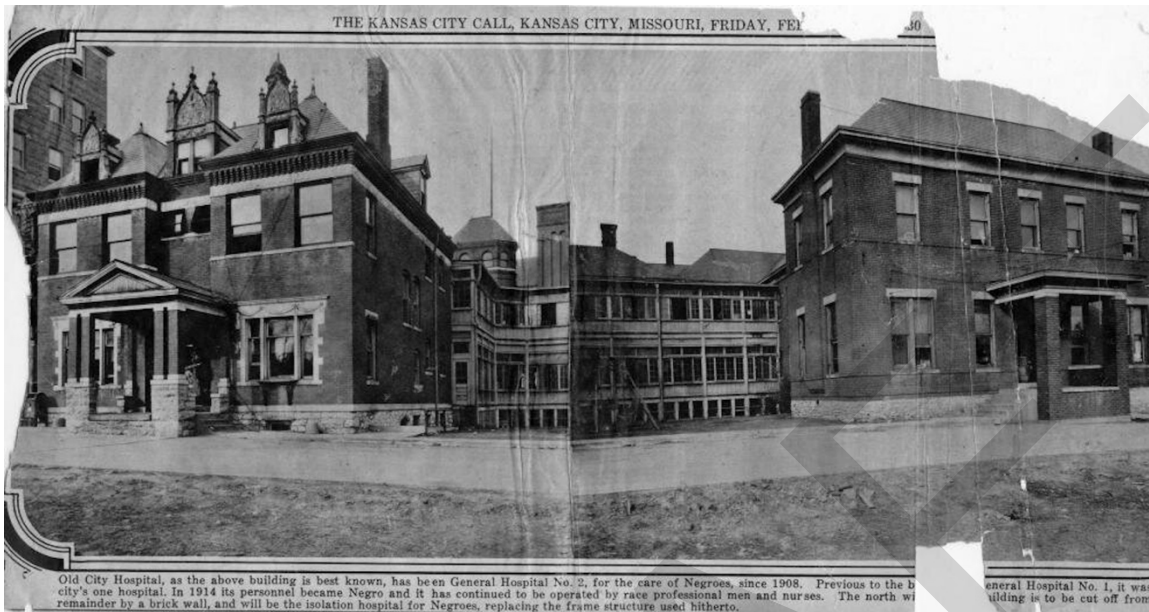


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Figure 7. Circa 1930 photograph of General Hospital #2 at the corner of East 22nd and Holmes Streets (no longer extant). Source: *The Kansas City Call*, February 1930.

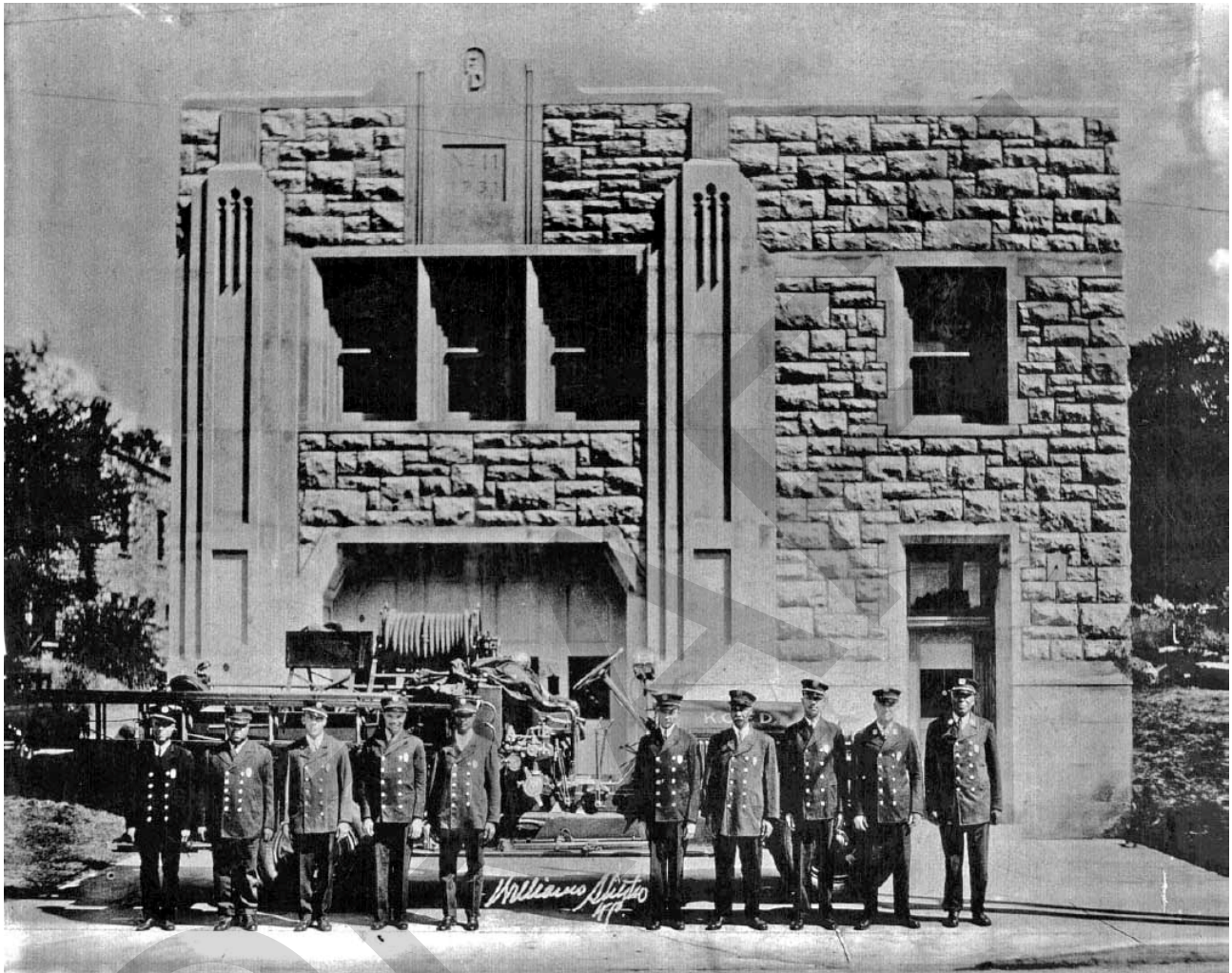


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Figure 8. Circa 1931 photograph of Fire Station No. 11 at 2033 Vine Street (extant), looking east. Source: Kansas City Planning and Development Department.



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Figure 9. 1940 photograph of the Phillis Wheatley Schoolhouse at 2820 East 54th Street (extant), looking northwest. Source: Kansas City Public Library Missouri Valley Special Collections.



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Figure 10. 1940 photograph of Perry's Barbecue at 1900 Highland Avenue (no longer extant). Source: Kansas City Public Library Missouri Valley Special Collections.



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Figure 11. 1940 photograph of the Green Duck Tavern at 2548 Prospect Avenue (extant), looking west. Source: Kansas City Public Library Missouri Valley Special Collections.



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Figure 12. 1940 photograph of a home in the Steptoe Neighborhood at 4212 Washington Street (extant), view west. Source: Kansas City Public Library Missouri Valley Special Collections.



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Figure 13. 1940 photograph of Buck O'Neil's home at 3049 East 32nd Street (extant, NRHD 1986), view southwest. Source: Kansas City Public Library Missouri Valley Special Collections.



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Figure 14. 1940 photograph of Penn School at 4237 Pennsylvania Avenue (no longer extant). Source: Kansas City Public Library Missouri Valley Special Collections.



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Figure 15. Circa 1941 postcard showing the Swope Park Swimming Pool at 6700 Lewis Road (extant), view southeast. Source: Kansas City Public Library Missouri Valley Special Collections.



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Figure 16. Circa 1942 photograph of Swope Park Shelter #5 at 6700 Zoo Drive (extant), view east. Source: Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department.



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Figure 17. Circa 1950 photograph of the YMCA Building at 1822-1828 The Paseo Boulevard (extant, NRHP 1991), looking west. Source: Kansas City Public Library Missouri Valley Special Collections.



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Figure 18. 1955 photograph of Municipal Stadium at the corner of East 22nd Street and Brooklyn Avenue (no longer extant). Source: Kansas City Public Library Missouri Valley Special Collections.



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Figure 19. 1955 photograph of St. Stephen Baptist Church at 1414 East Truman Road (extant), view northwest.
Source: The Clio.



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Figure 20. Circa 1964 photograph of *The Kansas City Call* building at 1715 East 18th Street (extant, NRHD 1991), view west. Source: Kansas City Public Library Missouri Valley Special Collections.



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