

Processional Mobility and Celebratory Culture in Black North Carolina, 1865-1945

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of American Studies.

Chapel Hill
2017

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ABSTRACT

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(Under the direction of Bernard L. Herman)

In the three-quarters of a century following Emancipation, Black people moved to southern cities in search of commonality, community, and pleasure. This dissertation examines that movement through the lens of emergent celebratory public cultures. Seeking the intersections of pleasure and mobility, I focus on the experience of Black Southerners in celebratory procession. Understanding these performances as an index of affective experience in the transforming places of the New South, I argue that we can see the emergence of a New Black South in the urban spaces of a region being transformed by intraregional migration. These ambulatory landscapes functioned as roving centers of African American social and cultural life and established claims to public, civic, and domestic space, even as the South moved toward a re-institutionalization of white supremacist governance.

In this dissertation, I focus on three performative celebrations in three North Carolina cities: Emancipation Day celebrations, the masked processional holiday celebration of Jonkonnu, and the tobacco warehouse dance called the June German. My insights on these cultural institutions are informed by a broad and interdisciplinary archival study. This methodology has meant the use of a variety of sources and approaches--newspaper articles, advertisements, maps, architectural plans, cultural landscapes, oral history interviews, data visualizations--all intended to help recreate worlds of experience that remain on the margins of conventional historical study.

Structured around these three central manifestations of Black public culture, this study concludes with my examination of each of these forms of celebration in a contemporary context. This consideration of Black pleasure and celebration in our current landscapes suggests both the transtemporal centrality of movement and urban space, and its continued importance in public memory and history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dispensing with the usual format that saves the best for last, I must first thank Mary Williford for her constant support, feats of editorial prowess, and for checking my anxieties and dealing with many annoyances. It's the great pleasure of my life to be married to her.

I have also been blessed with studying and writing this dissertation in an exceptionally collegial department and college. My weekly meetings with Bernie Herman were the wellspring for this project. His ideas and sharp critiques carried me through the process of writing this dissertation and made it far better than it would have been otherwise. Though his name does not appear on my list of committee members or indeed, anywhere but one footnote, Bobby Allen is also an outsize influence on this document. Bobby is a model for mentorship, one who takes the ideas of graduate students seriously and treats each of us as colleagues and interlocutors. Patricia Sawin's name does appear on my committee, though that scarcely represents the intellectual and emotional labor she has invested in my development as a scholar over the past six years. Seth Kotch has been an eager collaborator and mentor, a candid and smart advisor who often turns casual conversation into profound insight. I have had the pleasure of taking more classes with Sharon Holland than any other professor, a fact which suggests my extreme debts to her and my awe at her ability to synthesize vast bodies of information in coherent and beautiful ways. Fitz Brundage, perhaps unwittingly, helped start me down the path to this dissertation. He and Claude Clegg have gamely served as the historians on my committee, holding my interdisciplinary self to strict accountability and the same exacting standards that marks their own excellent scholarship. I owe sincere and incalculable debts to them, and to each member of my committee.

The same is true for the many others in American Studies and without at UNC who contributed to this project. Marcie Ferris, Glenn Hinson, John Kasson, Joy Kasson, Tim Marr and many others have either read or talked to me about this project. They are all very fine teachers and scholars whose continued support and interest I am overwhelmed by. I have been grateful to be able to haunt the halls of Wilson Library regularly and gain access there to the greatest collection of material on the South amassed anywhere. Librarians and archivists in the Southern Historical Collection, and particularly in the North Carolina Collection, offered me frequent guidance and assistance. The North Carolina Digital Heritage Center, also housed in Wilson, served as both an invaluable resource and a model for archival and historical projects for the public good.

When I entered Carolina (for the second time,) it was in the company of a fantastic cohort of fellow Americanists. Sharing an office with M.E. Lasseter and Matt Swiatlowski was a joy, and a sure and important distraction from the process of writing this dissertation. Rachel Gelfand and Elijah Heyward, though not in the same office likewise offered friendship, support, and commiseration. To my writing group--Trista Porter, Stephen Mandravelis, Daniel Ackerman, I must offer thanks both for your many incisive comments and for allowing this interloper into what otherwise would have been a very fine convening of art historians. Josh Parshall deserves special mention because he and I have endured this process together, checking in on each other's writing daily and defending our dissertations on the same day. Josh has been a good editor and a better friend. Thanks.

Thanks also to my family. My in-laws, Jim and Sally, have offered much encouragement and many meals to Mary and me both throughout this process. I know they're glad that I'm now

a Tar Heel twice over. My parents, Pat and Jay, deserve much of the credit for my not only becoming the first person in my family to graduate college, but also stay on for the better part of a decade. Since I was small, they encouraged my near obsession with books, one that has served me well in the process of writing this. Zach and Kristen gave Mary and me a frequent place to stay, beers to drink, and stress relief in the form of dogs to pet. Thanks, all of you, and the many others I haven't named for supporting me, often in ways you didn't even now.

Finally, and again, I'll thank Mary Williford who made this worth writing and all things worth doing.

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Introduction: White Pleasure, Black Terror, and the Politics of Celebration

I begin with the problem of pleasure. In the years following the end of the Civil War and the dissolution of Reconstruction's radical apparatus for equitable governance, public cultures of celebration, festivity, and enjoyment flourished in the landscapes of the New South. These public cultures were often related to more prominent and documented cultures of resistance, though not exclusively. Instead—as with the examples of Emancipation Days, Jonkonnu, and the June Germans—these were moments of Black cultural expression that self-evidently evinced their own arguments for equality and ascendancy in an era when white supremacist culture and governance was being reasserted and codified.

Each of the public cultures of celebration that I write about rose from and informed everyday life in the places they were practiced. While they sometimes got their starts in the plans of the burgeoning group of middle class African American political and social leaders, these events each became powerful expressions of mass culture for hundreds, or sometimes thousands, of participants. The June German, of early twentieth-century Rocky Mount, North Carolina, for instance, began as a middle class Black appropriation of white cotillion culture, but quickly turned into a massive event replete with jitterbug contests, live radio broadcasts, and crowds of up to 25,000 people. That its existence was fleeting only added to its importance in the months between. In a slightly earlier period, Emancipation Day celebrations likewise drew massive crowds to cities throughout North Carolina, including Charlotte, the growing center of New

South enterprise. And in early twentieth-century Wilmington, the processional, masked culture of Jonkonnu served as an important signifier of Black presence in an old port city being remade by social and political transformations. Indeed, the places in which these events were staged and in which these cultures emerged are an integral part of the story here. Wilmington and Rocky Mount, where two of my stories are centered, exemplify the different types of cities that were being made and remade in an early twentieth-century region that was beginning its century-long move away from a rural culture. Wilmington was a port city deeply connected to the old southern Atlantic world. Rocky Mount grew from the agrarian world and an increasing emphasis on the tobacco trade. They exemplify the rocky transition toward urbanism that most often resulted in geographic marginalization of African American residents.

Each of these concerns inform a central issue, the problem of Black pleasure. This is a problem both historical and historiographical in nature. Uncovering enjoyment, an experience that is often played out in brief moments and that derives much of its importance from continued and personal recall and imagination, is a task that moves beyond the recorded. These fleeting moments, ones Kathleen Stewart calls “ordinary affects,” are brief experiences that add up to, in the aggregate, lasting perception. The accumulation of “the forces that come into view as habit or shock, resonance or impact” coalesce into memory and imbue an object, place, or event with meaning that is not bound by anything but the limits of communal experience made personal.¹

The larger public cultures that I uncover here are made of up of many small moments of experience that sometimes resist being captured entirely in the written word. The meaning of public cultures and mass events depends on both individual and collective meaning. One’s identity, as manifest in a crowd, “is something that is, simultaneously, intensely personal

¹ Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 1.

and irreducibly social.”² But crucially “what happens in crowds has an impact far beyond those who actually participate.”³ The power of a mass event is its ability to reach beyond the immediate occasion and instead be held in the memories of and enacted in the daily lives of participants, observers, and even those for whom experience of the event was secondhand. As crowd psychologists Stephen Reicher and Clifford Stott suggest, “many of the categories which are fundamental to us (class, gender, nation, and so on) have to be imagined since they are far too large for us ever to know or meet with all other members.” The crowd becomes the manifestation of Benedict Anderson’s imagined community: “what happens in crowds can therefore be read as emblematic for all those who identify with the social identity shared amongst crowd members.”⁴ The crowd holds the tension between what Charles Taylor calls microchoices and macrodecisions. This is the understanding of each individual member of a society (or in this case, a crowd,) that individual decisions are part of larger systems of meaning that Taylor defines as social imaginaries.⁵ A social imaginary then is the underlying structure of everyday life that goes mostly unnoticed, “the way people imagine their social existence,” an understanding that is most often “carried in images, stories, and legends.”⁶ To that list, I would add mass demonstrations and celebrations, and the ensuing wake of memories and stories recalled in the months afterward. The emergence and expansion of African American celebratory

² Stephen Reicher and Clifford Stott, “Becoming the Subjects of History: An Outline of the Psychology of Crowds,” in *The Street as Stage: Protest Marches and Public Rallies since the Nineteenth-century*, ed. Matthias Reiss (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 31.

³ Reicher and Stott, “Becoming the Subjects of History,” 37.

⁴ Reicher and Stott, “Becoming the Subjects of History,” 37.

⁵ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 23-25.

⁶ Taylor *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23.

public culture is a story told in the mixture of the high and low, the individual and the personal, in the moment and in the days and months afterward.

Celebratory and Commemorative Spaces

Apart from the institutions dedicated to leisure and amusement, cities in North Carolina were also marked by their widening spatial divisions. Wilmington was among the first cities in the state to erect a monument to the Confederate dead in 1872, while the citizens of Rocky Mount dedicated a massive Corinthian column commemorating the Confederate cause in May 1917.⁷ These monuments were the most visible and permanent manifestations of a white supremacist culture intent on “colonizing public spaces with their version of the past.”⁸ As the Civil War and antebellum culture faded not in memory but in the kind of daily consciousness that helps orient a person and direct their actions, white southerners (principally women) sought to re-place slaveholding ideology at the geographic and social center of urban life. In both the new and parklike cemeteries and downtown civic spaces, they had that memory rendered visible in stone and bronze. As W. Fitzhugh Brundage observes, “when white southerners set about codifying their heroic narrative and filling the civic landscape with monuments to it, they were conscious that the rituals of Black memory represented a form of cultural resistance”⁹ The creation of a white landscape was one designed to stifle Black expression and obliterate Black claims to public space.

⁷ “Confederate Soldiers Monument, Oakdale Cemetery, Wilmington,” *Commemorative Landscapes of North Carolina*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/commland/monument/291/>. “Nash County Confederate Monument, Rocky Mount,” *Commemorative Landscapes of North Carolina*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/commland/monument/269/>.

⁸ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 6.

⁹ Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 10.

The battle for this public space was not a new one. Mary Ryan argues that civic space was integral to the definitional work of citizenship in America nearly from its beginnings. Americans, of all regions and less frequently all races, “entered into public time and space to represent themselves in a profusion of custom-made identities.”¹⁰ Never uncontested geographies, the town centers and public squares in the postbellum transition to the twentieth-century became battlegrounds between the performative and the permanent. Large crowds of African American people took to the streets, while elite groups of white people put up monuments in an attempt to permanently mark the place and obscure any claims toward promised democratic ideals. These commemorative activities were only the most well documented of broader, often competing public cultures that were strictly stratified on the basis of race and, increasingly, class. They manifested in civic space, usually either in implied or direct contradiction to the more permanent displays of civic celebration represented by monuments and other memorials.

But civic spaces were not the sole province of communal celebration. Public cultures occurred in public spaces as well: those not owned by the mass of people but intended for their patronage. Amusement parks, pool halls, restaurants, dance halls, music clubs and other, often improvised or repurposed structures, served as venues for recreation, leisure, and celebration. These spaces and this kind of public have been less often the subject of scholarship, though cultural and social historians have been interested in the creation and emergence of cultures of leisure and fun for the past several decades. John Kasson’s *Amusing the Million*, was perhaps the

¹⁰ Mary Ryan, *Civic Wars : Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth-century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 59-60.

first and remains among the best chroniclers of the practices of the “new mass culture.” In his depiction, Coney Island is a place of carefully managed amusement that “promoted a sense of spontaneous gaiety through calculated means.”¹¹ Those calculations often reflected everyday life. Many of the multitude of commentators on the island’s parks reflected on the way that “the amusements to which people flocked resembled the features of their daily life.”¹² In both form and content, rides and games amplified and repurposed the everyday cultures of people in the process of adopting identities as workers and consumers. In these same transitional years of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, travelling vaudeville acts, movies, and burlesque shows brought the communal experience of amusement into growing towns and cities of the South. Writing both about the national context of amusement and its local peculiarities in Lexington, Kentucky, Gregory Waller claims, “leisure time...was increasingly seen as an aspect of daily life to be filled, regulated, and exploited for profit.”¹³

Movies were perhaps the most integral part of this culture of mass amusement. By the early twentieth-century, movie theaters situated in repurposed storefronts and grand new constructions, were thick on the ground in any Southern city big enough to warrant the name. But these films were only part of a range of activities on offer to residents both of southern cities and the surrounding countryside. These years also marked the belated emergence of consumer culture to the burgeoning, urbanizing South. Whereas major port cities like Charleston or Wilmington were long enmeshed in commodity markets, the rise of mercantile stores throughout

¹¹ John Kasson, *Amusing the Million : Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 2.

¹² Kasson *Amusing the Million*, 74.

¹³ Gregory A. Waller, *Main Street Amusements : Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896-1930* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 39.

the former backcountry meant an increased exposure for what had previously been a world made isolated by design. For African Americans especially, this new consumerism helped solidify ties beyond their immediate proximities and build stronger ties of race and region.¹⁴ Despite the recent historical focus on stores and other markers of a new consumerism, buying and selling did not mark the entirety or even majority of public cultures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century South.

Indeed, apart from the religious and educational institutions that made up so much of Black life in this period, African Americans formed a variety of official and vernacular groups with their own practices and places. Chief among these were a wide variety of organizations often segregated on the basis of sex. Dedicated to mutual aid, temperance, commemoration, or a myriad of other high-minded virtues, these groups also served as outlets for public amusement and celebration. I write, for example, about the range of connections inspired by a single lodge of one such group, the Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samaria.¹⁵ In short, urban, southern African Americans were both exposed to many more opportunities in these post-Reconstruction years and made much of their own lives in these southern cities despite continued and renewed obstacles to their economic success and social and cultural well-being. Offering portraits of

¹⁴ See, for instance, John Giggie's argument about the role of Black consumerism in the growth and change of religious practices: John M. Giggie, "Refining Religion: Consumerism and African American Religion in the Delta, 1875-1917," in *Dixie Emporium: Consumerism, Tourism, and Memory in the American South*, ed. Anthony Stanonis (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008): 137-174.

¹⁵ Perhaps the most accessible overview of fraternal organizations in African American culture is Trotter, Joe W. "African American Fraternal Associations in American History: An Introduction." *Social Science History* 28, no. 3 (2004): 355-66. John Giggie has written more specifically about these lodges in the postbellum South, though with a focus on their religious, rather than secular mission: John Giggie "For God and Lodge: Black Fraternal Orders and the Evolution of African American Religion in the Postbellum South," in *The Struggle for Equality: Essays on Sectional Conflict, the Civil War, and the Long Reconstruction*, eds. Vernon Burton, Jerald Podair, and Jennifer L. Veber (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011). And Carter G. Woodson's essay "Insurance Business Among Negroes," *Journal of Negro History* 14, No. 2 (1929): 202-226, charts the growth of fraternal and mutual aid organizations into more formal businesses using the example of the insurance industry.

individual cities as they were impacted by mass celebrations and entertainments, I build on the narratives of other historians writing about southern cities during the period. Especially instructive is Earl Lewis's *In Their Own Interests*, which catalogues the ways in which African Americans in Norfolk, Virginia, "transformed the city to meet their own needs."¹⁶ Lewis tells the story of a socially diverse set of African American citizens who sought to make those changes not simply in reaction to white racism, but rather through the creation of a social and cultural order that was at once reactive and insular, focused on African American interests but responsive to both the potential and the pitfalls of a city in many ways much like the ones discussed here. African American people in Norfolk, in Charlotte, Wilmington, Rocky Mount and a whole host of other southern cities were beginning the process of creating a Black South. These public cultures were the steps toward envisioning a South of their own making, where African American people held both political and social power.¹⁷ These public cultures would later be translated to the streets of places like New York or Philadelphia, cities that "brought to life new black metropolises," in the wake of the Great Migration.¹⁸ But for three generations, African Americans forged these public cultures in southern cities as they sought to remake the region.

Indeed, Norfolk could become an important center of African American life because it, like Wilmington, Rocky Mount, or Charlotte, was quickly becoming part of regional urban

¹⁶ Lewis, Earl. *In Their Own Interests : Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-century Norfolk, Virginia*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 3.

¹⁷ For thoughts on the way expressive cultures can be the basis of an identity group's construction of a utopia, I am indebted to Jose Esteban Munoz's important work on queer futurity. Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia : the Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press, 2009. While his work is not explicitly a part of the Afro Futurist scholarly endeavor, I have relied on it for guidance in large part because of his insights into the uses marginalized groups can make of their own visions of utopian futurity in hegemonic spaces.

¹⁸ Clare Corbould, *Becoming African Americans : Black Public Life in Harlem, 1919-1939*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 6-7.

growth. Though these changes were certainly propelled in large part by economic growth and activity, I am particularly interested here in the cultural institutions that arose as a result of those new sources of income. Wilmington was in the midst of a transformation toward mass culture in 1889-90. In those two representative years, the old port city had three booksellers, five confectioners, four fish and oyster dealers, three firms selling and repairing pianos, six restaurants, eighteen saloons, several nearby beaches and hotels, and dozens of fraternal and benevolent societies that catered to and celebrated a variety of ethnicities and professions.¹⁹ Twenty years later and one hundred and fifty miles inland, Rocky Mount was freshly incorporated and locked in the full embrace of the new mass culture of amusement. Ahead of prohibition the next year, the city in 1908 possessed two distilleries, three fraternal lodge halls (though none for African Americans,) an ice cream parlor, five pool rooms, more than a dozen eating houses and restaurants, and two “Theaters and Places of Amusement:” the Gem and the Opera House.²⁰ Wilmington was still an old city whose institutions were gradually adapting to a kind of sociality that could extend beyond one’s own familiars. And Rocky Mount was a town built on the tobacco industry and its mingling of different classes, if not races, in both working and recreational life.

Elsewhere, both in and outside of the South, spaces dedicated to leisure increasingly both reified the color line and became venues for the protests against its normalization. Victoria Wolcott writes that these often-unremarked sites of protest were in fact symbolically central to the burgeoning movement for civil rights. By demanding accommodation “African Americans

¹⁹ Julius A. Bonitz, ed., *Directory of the City of Wilmington, North Carolina, 1889*. (Wilmington, North Carolina: Messenger Steam Presses, 1889), 158-176.

²⁰ *Rocky Mount, N.C. Directory 1908-1909* (Rocky Mount, NC and Richmond, VA: Hill Directory Company), 158-171; 175.

challenged essential racial hierarchies when they occupied the most coveted forms of public space.”²¹ Before even the earliest formal attempts at integrating these spaces, African Americans were protesting prohibitions that kept them from an equal share in leisure time activities. Often this meant the creation of a space or adaptation of an existing form. Andrew Kahrl’s work on African American beaches is one such example. In his telling, coastal real estate and attractions owned and run by African Americans became an important vacation spot for Black middle and working class people.²² Kahrl’s important work on land ownership in a coastal context has its corollary in Anthony Stanonis’s *Faith in Bikinis*.²³ Besides the obvious overlap in geographic subject matter, both books stem from historical source material that shows the genesis of southern spaces as sites of leisure and recreation. Related to a growing literature on the South and tourism, these books pioneer a broadening of our understanding of the region as a place for pleasure, even or especially amid the daily indignities of Jim Crow.²⁴ Still, none of these books look at pleasure and celebration as affective experiences worth studying themselves, concentrating instead on political or economic structures. My work focuses on recovering the experience of African American pleasure and celebration in the Jim Crow South. It foregrounds the social imaginaries of diverse groups of people as they moved through the early part of a

²¹ Victoria Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters : The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 7.

²² Andrew Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours : African American Beaches from Jim Crow to the Sunbelt South* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

²³ Stanonis, Anthony J., *Faith in Bikinis : Politics and Leisure in the Coastal South Since the Civil War*. Athens ; London: The University of Georgia Press, 2014.

²⁴ On the South as a tourist destination and southerners as tourists see: Cox, Karen L. *Destination Dixie : Tourism & Southern History*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012; Starnes, Richard D, editor, *Southern Journeys : Tourism, History, and Culture in the Modern South*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003.

century marked alike by the legacies of antebellum enslavement and Reconstruction radicalism. Their lives speak to the truth and the prescience of W.E.B. DuBois as he inaugurated the century with his observation that “the problem of the twentieth-century is the problem of the color line.”²⁵ Those lines that served as the opening salvo of his first history of Reconstruction, “Of the Dawn of Freedom,” were preceded only by words from James Russell Lowell’s *The Present Crisis*. Lowell represents, and DuBois invokes, a “death grapple in the darkness” between old systems and the truth, observed if not presided over by a “God within the shadow/keeping watch.”²⁶ That sense of watchfulness, of a watching and being watched that was ever-present if not omnipotent, was itself an important part of the emergence of Black, public celebratory culture.

There was a tension inherent in these celebrations between eluding and attracting notice. Some events were spectacular in their presentation, often occurring in civic or public spaces and in disruption of ordered calm or countervailing defiance of similar white display. Grace Hale writes about the way that lynchings were part of a larger “spectacle of Black otherness,” that witnessed the display and performance of African American people as a form of inherent entertainment.²⁷ To have that spectacle turned on its head, as Black-organized parades and dances did, disrupted expectation and establishment. Still, as Saidiya Hartman suggests, these kinds of spectacles were not always representative of Black agency but were sometimes horrific scenes “in which terror can hardly be discerned.” This “enactment of subjugation,” in Hartman’s

²⁵ W.E. Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 2nd edition (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1903), 13.

²⁶ Du Bois *The Souls of Black Folk*, 13.

²⁷ Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness : the Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. 1st Vintage Books ed, (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 205.

terms, “reinforce the spectacular character of Black suffering.”²⁸ Hartman finds the origins of these impulses in nineteenth-century enslavement, a “promotion of innocent amusements and harmless pleasures” designed to “cultivate contented subjection” in enslaved people, which carried over into the twentieth-century.²⁹ Hartman’s is the most complete history of the origins of this subjection and the tension in celebratory forms between the unconscious capitulation to hegemony and the conscious expression of freedom. I extend her insights into the world of Jim Crow and its ever more complicated formulations of power and race. Hartman’s work adheres to a binary construction of subjection and resistance, a construction that has only recently begun to be challenged by scholars in African American studies. Indeed Kevin Quashie, a pioneering voice in the conception of Black culture “beyond resistance,” looks too at a variety of visual spectacles: the raised fists of Tommie Smith and John Carlos, Elizabeth Alexander’s reading at Barack Obama’s inauguration. He moves beyond the narrowly political though to think about interior life beyond public expression, suggesting that to do otherwise “is to disregard the richness of life.”³⁰ Quashie is interested in the means of expression, rather than its ends. What I examine here are the expressive cultures often associated with Blackness and the way those expressions are manifest in something other than resistance alone. I am interested then in the limits of resistance, and the way that these forms of public spectacle contextualize individual experience as a part of a larger whole. In building from this scholarship on spectacle, I am mindful too of its unconscious affirmation of the primacy of the visual as a field of study. I

²⁸ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-century America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3-4.

²⁹ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* 45

³⁰ Kevin Everod Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture*. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press), 2012, 8-9.

address the multiple materialities that informed both the public spectacle of celebration and the more quiet exercises of its planning and memory. The seen can reveal interiority, but spectacle also obliterates subtly by its very nature. I look to other sources then less as revealing the truth than as countering narratives most visibly told.

Celebration and festivity are most often a way of articulating a complex individual and collective worldview. They exist as a sort of challenge to the constraints and boundaries of everyday life, and can make manifest the deepest longings and greatest joys of a group brought together by common desire. The sort of archive necessary to understand that cultural work, one constructed out of silences and incidental mentions, is what I use here. The construction of that archive is one that requires a methodology deeply attuned to the rhythms of life for everyday people in the past, and mindful of the structures of power that can both reveal and disclose. The productive tension inherent in this source material necessitates a balance between the aggregate and the individual, and a reliance on frameworks that can treat meaning at multiple scales. Accordingly, I want to turn now to a discussion of the archival methodologies that I have employed here. Their construction is deeply implicated in our emergent understanding of Black public cultures of the twentieth-century, and tied to the competing narratives of Black public cultures that cohered around racial constructions of whiteness and Blackness in the twentieth-century South.

Archival Scarcity and Performative Materiality

The sources in most of my chapters appear relatively conventional. I cite primarily newspapers and archival manuscripts. The cliché—that newspapers serve as the first draft of

history— helps to animate my interpretations. ³¹Glenda Gilmore, in her introductory remarks to *Gender and Jim Crow*, observes that her research on Black women’s activism began with “the ‘made up’ quality of white accounts in archives.”³² Still, scouring archives for the kind of sources housed Gilmore mined has been frustrating and only rarely fruitful. Sources that reveal the names, let alone give insight into the experiences of ordinary people, are rare. Even less frequently are these sources written in their own words, or even as a representation of the interests of individuals among the mass of people participating in various manifestations of celebratory public culture. That absence comes from people separated from the present only by the time span of a few generations, but whose presence and activities largely eluded recording in the kind of written sources that are routinely saved and formally archived. The challenge is not just how to begin to write about these histories, but also what violence of obliteration we might enact or reify in trying to construct narratives around personages whose lives are already separated from us by the mediating influence of newspapers, government records, and other archival sources. In these records, I often read absence as revealing as much about history as archival presence. Indeed, as Trouillot suggests, “mentions and silences are the active, dialectical counterpoints of which history is the synthesis.”³³

My interest here is in an archive of source material that encompasses more than the written word. That does not mean that I am solely in search of orality. The assumption of African American orality, particularly among twentieth-century, urban dwelling African Americans

³¹ My use of “silencing” should be an indicator of the significant intellectual debt that I owe to Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.)

³² Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow : Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), xvi.

³³ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 48.

educated in and living amongst dominant white culture, is problematic. Whatever the truth of claims about orality, that particular assignation has long been used to justify omissions from written historical narratives (in Trouillot's terms, active silencing.) Certainly, African Americans in early twentieth-century Wilmington communicated orally and in large measure their community may have been formed around a culture of conversation not unlike the *sensus communis* David Shields captured in eighteenth-century salon society.³⁴ They also read newspapers and books, gave speeches and marched in parades, and otherwise communicated both within their community and to the larger population of the city and state. It is through interpretations of these forms of performative communication that I base much of this dissertation. Through modes of performance like processional culture, African American people were clearly staking out a role in a discursive community whose expressive lives went mostly unrecorded.

Still, there are traces of materiality and performance in archival collections. Following Ann Laura Stoler's lead, I approach archives "as spaces in which the senses and the affective course through the seeming abstractions of political rationalities."³⁵ The paradox of this research, and indeed perhaps most historical research in a world of digitization, is that it is subject to both archival abundance and scarcity. As Lara Putnam suggests, "our ability to read accurately the sources we find, and evaluate their significance," is not keeping pace with the rapacious growth of digital source material.³⁶ Scholars are confronted with a corpus of material whose context and

³⁴ David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.)

³⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain : Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 32.

³⁶ "Lara Putnam, "The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast," *American Historical Review* 121.2 (2016:) 377.

presentation is both vast and perhaps incompatible with longstanding research methodologies. Surfeit begets opacity.

The source of this abundance is evident. Recent advances in a variety of digital technologies make it possible to marshal the resources that inform this dissertation. I have been able to access a corpus of millions of pages of digitized content, almost all of it converted with reasonably accurate optical character recognition.³⁷ Less clear is the paradox of archival riches and inadequate interpretive frameworks. Large, searchable archives inspire more questions than they can answer, both at the level of the collection and with individual items within that collection. My chapter on Emancipation Days attempts to mediate scarcity with abundance by dealing with things at the scale of the collection, by treating historical knowledge as data.³⁸ I combine that approach with individual narratives that stem from and are informed by that broader contextualization. Individual items though obscure as much as they reveal. A finer-grained reading that seeks to treat the deeper implications of a particular text is often stymied by the apparent lack of much context or textual source of deeper information. As Katherine Hayles suggests, “narratives remain ... the perspectives that invest the formal logic of database operations with human meanings and gesture toward the unknown hovering beyond the brink of what can be classified and enumerated.”³⁹ This is a problem of archival scarcity, less in number than in conception. Digital sources allow for archival searches that permit the researcher to pay

³⁷ Specifically, my institution was among the first to partner with a for-profit company to embark on large scale digitization of pre-1923 newspapers, affording me with some three million pages of digitized, searchable newspapers. This is in addition to a robust and longstanding program of digitization and digital archiving like *Documenting the American South*.

³⁸ I hesitate to use the clichéd “big data” in part because it implies a kind of computational analysis which I have not performed. My method is far more mechanistic and a bit finer-grained.

³⁹ Hayles, Katherine. *How We Think : Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 183.

attention to narratives constructed on the margins but discoverable by the brute strength of repeated Boolean-enabled searches. Those narratives though are still often marginal and incomplete, lacking in many ways the broader contexts afforded more prominent actors and events. While that last is only the most recent version of a problem at least as old as the study of social history, it is one that can be mitigated in part by a methodology rooted in spatial and performative context. The digital turn in historical studies then must occasion new epistemologies. In order to better use digital resources, we must advance new modes of understanding that put our production of knowledge in sync with the possibilities of digital research and representation.

Spatial and landscape sources require method that tends to their materiality, one that we might think of as textually absented in the same manner of digital material. Absented material does not mean immateriality; rather, we might think of it as Johanna Drucker and others have, as a kind of performative materiality. Performative materiality “suggests that what something *is* has to be understood in terms of what it *does*.”⁴⁰ This requires us to push aside the textual metaphor and think of *using* sources, rather than reading them. What I offer here is an attempt to do that, to re-animate a series of materials that exist primarily as traces of past contact. As in postcolonial theory, that has often meant reading against or around the explicit meaning of textual sources. I take biases as a given: not necessarily details to be unpacked but a general viewpoint to be mindful of. Textual sources do a particular kind of work, both in the context of making history and in writing it. I try to be mindful of both of those uses. The kind of literal materiality that informs most readings of textual material is “based on a mechanistic model that suggests that the

⁴⁰ Johanna Drucker, “Performative Materiality and Theoretical Approaches to Interface,” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (2013), 4 <http://digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/7/1/000143/000143.html>.

specific properties of material artifacts or media can be read as if meaning were a self-evident product of form.”⁴¹ Clearly that is not the case and each piece of archival material, whatever its form, has a kind of “contingent materiality...exposed by performative dimensions of use.”⁴² Because my primary interest lies in the histories of landscape and movement, I rely on the representational. In Henri Lefebvre’s schema, I am attempting to bridge the divide between representations of space and representational spaces.⁴³ The sources for the history of representations of space are relatively numerous. They include the maps, diagrams, and official records that I utilize here. Uncovering the histories of representational space is a bit trickier. It necessitates a reading of the landscape for the historical meaning that it holds, as well as reading historical representations for the ways they might suggest meaning. I do that here, for instance, by interpreting the meanings of spatial proximity, by speculating on routes and paths, by paying attention to the way that people walked, marched, and otherwise moved, and how those practices changed over time. My evidence then often comes not just from what people *said* but through the ways that they performed their own, often multiple identities. I conceive of this an ethnography, an attempt to thickly describe the cultures and environments of a particular place and time. While my intent is not holistic re-creation of those worlds, I do depart significantly from existing historical scholarship, which has focused on other aspects of a place and time that historians struggle in common to better understand.

⁴¹ Drucker, “Performative Materiality and Theoretical Approaches to Interface,”14.

⁴² Drucker, “Performative Materiality and Theoretical Approaches to Interface,”15.

⁴³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1991), 38-39.

Histories of Commemoration and Celebration

Previous work on the growth of African American public cultures in the post-Reconstruction South has focused principally on activities memorial or commemorative in scope. Kathleen Clark's *Defining Moments* for instance, looks at the rise of commemorative cultures and middle class African American leadership in the fifty-year period following the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation. These commemorative cultures, ones that "had for a time dominated public culture in many parts of the urban South" likewise form part of the basis of my own work here.⁴⁴ Like Clark, I am particularly interested in the rise of Emancipation Day celebrations as visible expressions of community value and solidarity. But, whereas Clark uses these celebrations to chart the emergence of a middle class African American leadership cohort well versed in what would later be called "accommodationist" political practices, my work looks instead at the way these kinds of celebrations spawned vernacular public cultures. Clark's book, like Mitchell Kachun's *Festivals of Freedom*, looks at the emergence of historical narratives that came from leaders in African American communities. Kachun in particular views emancipation celebrations as the kind of precursor to "the beginnings of African American historiography."⁴⁵ He acknowledges the variety of different commemorative activities, but admits that his focus on the national picture largely obscures significant variations in regional, state, and local meanings that these events formed.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Kathleen Clark, *Defining Moments : African American Commemoration & Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁴⁵ Mitchell Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom : Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

⁴⁶ Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 14.

Kachun and Clark both focus on what we might term official culture, the more amply documented events and persons that often come to stand in for a representation of entire communities or entire practices. Both scholars are relying on the perception of a class of leaders and politicians for whom these celebrations served very different purposes than that mass of participants. Brundage's work, discussed earlier, opens up a world of commemorative activities practiced by mass groups of African American people. The multiplicity of voices that he relies on move past the ranks of the emergent elite, though his regional scope also means that many of these stories are mentioned in passing.⁴⁷ William Wiggins's earlier scholarship is nationally focused and, perhaps more than the others mentioned here, explicitly reflects on the continued importance of African American freedom celebrations. His title and stated purpose, though, do reflect the longstanding focus on celebrations of freedom, rather than any other sort of emergent celebratory culture.⁴⁸ This drive toward understanding *purposeful* celebration mirrors the respectability politics that dominated the most-frequently referenced articulations of African American life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Viewed in this light, the distinctions between W.E.B DuBois and Booker T. Washington seem less stark and their respective visions a manifestation of two competing ideologies of middle class status. Freedom mattered. Perhaps it was even at the center of many definitions of Black life. But it was also not the only organizing principle around which individual communities came together.

In the absence of hundreds of individual recollections, particularly of the Emancipation Day celebrations that form the basis of so much previous work, I turn to the combination of

⁴⁷ In particular, see Brundage, "Celebrating Black Memory in the Postbellum South," *The Southern Past* 55-104.

⁴⁸ See William Wiggins, *O Freedom! : Afro-American Emancipation Celebrations*, 1st ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987).

aggregated data (for its potential to show the constellations of purpose in which these celebrations arose,) and fine-grained interpretations of particular events, particular places, and particular people. And while these “festivals of freedom” were incredibly important to the emergence of an African American culture not defined by slavery alone, they were also not the sole manifestation of that culture.⁴⁹ Rather than concentrating on the larger ramifications of political economy, I tend instead to the cultural realm and the meaning and change that stem from the individual among the crowd. These were public cultures that were purposeful and individual and not concerned with the narrowly political, but with outright societal transformation.

Those larger social changes, particularly in the South and particularly, in the post-Reconstruction period, have been broadly conceptualized by historical scholarship in particular. The past two decades have seen scholarship that grapples sensitively with the emergence of communal histories and memories. These scholars seek to understand the processes at work in the distinctions we make between informal and unreliable memory and authoritative and rigorous history. What each of these writers—a group that includes Clark and Kachun, Brundage, along with David Blight, Caroline Janney, and others—tries to accomplish is an understanding of the moment at which the individual morphs into the collective and memory turns into history.⁵⁰ My

⁴⁹ Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 10.

⁵⁰ Those mentioned are only some of the scholars who are coping with the impact of memory on historical studies in an American context. Among the earliest of these pioneering works is Blight, David W. *Race and Reunion: the Civil War in American Memory*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001, which deals with Civil War memory in a national context that necessarily includes much about the southern states. Caroline Janney’s more recent work (Janney, Caroline E. *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013,) is a direct rejoinder to Blight’s and explores an alternative perception of narratives of unification across sectional lines. Brundage’s work, both the previously cited, *The Southern Past: a Clash of Race and Memory*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005, and his earlier edited collection (Brundage, W Fitzhugh, ed., *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000,) contextualize memorial and

objectives are similar, focusing on the retroactive assessment of memory turned into history and in the ways in which personal enjoyment gets turned into broader and often collective meaning. Akin to memory studies in an historical context, this is nonetheless a slightly different object of study whose interest lies more squarely in the immediate use of memory. This is an alchemical transformation that we often think of as memory, but that exists outside of the moment. As Trouillot suggests, “remembering is not always a process of summoning representations of what happened.” It is only later, that we come to a realization of a thing’s importance and we “only remember the revelation, not the event itself.”⁵¹ For my purposes, this field of historical memory studies seems to have much in common with some of its predecessors in historical studies. The anthropological shift in cultural and social history, somewhat neatly joined with memory studies in one of the early and definitive statements of that field, Pierre Nora’s “Between Memory and History.” What Nora’s essay shared with many of its immediate predecessors was a commitment to an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary explanation of “pastness.” Indeed, though practitioners of this field since have delved much further into neurological and other scientific explanations of memory, Nora suggested an almost evolutionary approach to the study of memory that was out of step with a field (history) whose lingering scientism was a remnant of an earlier belief in objective truth rather than an embrace of contemporary theorizing. “It is no longer genesis that we seek,” wrote Nora “but instead the decipherment of what we are in the

commemorative practices in the context of southern regionalism and culture. More recent works have extended Brundage’s insights into geography (Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman, *Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory*. 1st ed. Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2008,) tourism studies (Hillyer, Reiko. *Designing Dixie : Tourism, Memory, and Urban Space in the New South*. Charlottesville ; London: University of Virginia Press, 2014,) and oral history (Walker, Melissa. *Southern Farmers and Their Stories : Memory and Meaning in Oral History*. Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2006.)

⁵¹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past : Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1995), 15.

light of what we are no longer.”⁵² Memory, in Nora’s definition, is a kind of repertoire, a practice that “attaches itself to sites,” rather than the events around which we create history.⁵³ His is a method that looks for meaning and creative purpose in the everyday.

My method is premised on these same interdisciplinary strategies. Concerned less with large moments or major historical actors, I instead look at small things made large by their significance in everyday life. Much of this work is necessarily speculative. As Clifford Geertz suggested four decades ago, “cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape.”⁵⁴ Geertz’s notion of thick, close description helped give life to a school of historicism that deeply valued materiality and insights into the social world. One of the major contributions by American and Americanist scholars was to refuse the separation between the social and cultural worlds dictated by the French *Annales* school which helped inject more social theory into social and cultural history. Instead we find, as in the work of the American French historian Robert Darnton, meditations on the deep interconnections between individual and society, between the social and cultural.

Darnton mandated that scholars “stop straining to see how the documents ‘reflect’ their social surroundings, because they were imbedded in a symbolic world that was social and cultural at the same time.”⁵⁵ Darnton thus sought historical incidents that were lively and

⁵²Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations*, no. 26 (April 1, 1989):18.

⁵³ Nora, “Between Memory and History,” 22.

⁵⁴Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures; Selected Essays*. (Basic Books, 1973), 20.

⁵⁵Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 260.

demonstrative, events that under close scrutiny revealed themselves as meaningful rather than reductively representative of an entire group or culture. Following Darnton, I look into the meaning created through vernacular forms of celebration, to see how people “think with things, or with anything else that their culture makes available to them, such as stories or ceremonies.”⁵⁶ For Darnton, and other scholars of early modern worlds, this often manifests itself in studies of procession and movement. Rhys Isaac structured *The Transformation of Virginia* around a perspectival lens that sought to capture both instrumental and expressive actions. Viewing historical actors as just that, Isaac suggested that we might combine the tools of ethnography and drama to help stage historical actions in place.⁵⁷ Isaac, Darnton, and others like Simon Newman and Susan Davis find in the space of the emergent worlds that they write about a performance of creation and becoming.⁵⁸ This is both a conceptual space and actual place, a world emerging out of the material facts of locality.⁵⁹ These sources then act as a kind of guide for my own work, in large part because they are each concerned with “the world struggling to

⁵⁶ Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, 4.

⁵⁷ Rhys Isaac, “A Discourse on the Method: Action, Structure, and Meaning,” in *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 350-51.

⁵⁸ Susan Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Simon Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

⁵⁹ Arjun Appadurai rejects the decades-old argument over place and space, opting instead for a vocabulary he feels is more precise and reflective of everyday experience in a globalized world. He defines locality “as a phenomenological property of social life, a structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity and that yields particular sorts of material effects.” While I agree with his formulation, as well as the importance that he assigns to these words (following Raymond Williams,) I still tend to mostly use the more familiar terms described here because they are more reflective of common usage. Appadurai’s definition though is perhaps the most succinct one that describes the process of a location becoming imbued with both material and conceptual meaning to a person and it is his explanation that undergirds my own explanations of that process here. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 182.

emerge.”⁶⁰ These scholars of the early modern world recount the pangs of new communities and new societies struggling to be birthed.

In this way, those histories inform the experience of African Americans in the postbellum, post-Reconstruction South. Having finally taken at least a small part of their promised civil and human rights, they were then stripped of them through both everyday indignities and spectacular violence. What struggled to emerge in this time and this place was a culture that could encompass that shared history, but not be enslaved to it. A culture that could balance racial pride and the hidden relationships, networks, beliefs, and ceremonies forged in slavery with the promise of entrance into the citizenship of the broader nation. If a world had been forged by the crucible of slavery, these emergent public cultures of celebration were ones grappling with the formation of an African America, a nation that encompassed both the promise of its founding ideals and the many and continued contradictions in its treatment of people of African descent. That these struggles played out on and around the spaces of the United States and particularly of the South is no surprise. It was the South that served as the first site for these struggles, and for the competing visions of two new souths formed along racial lines. Public and civic space is perhaps the most visible and the most contested value in American life and its use often demands a struggle. I note the recurring theme of place in these earlier works because it is so central to my own work here. My argument coheres in both the particularities of Southern space, and in the abstract constructions of place and space. In what follows, I track the emergence and movement of public celebratory cultures through the changing spaces of early

⁶⁰ Darnton 140.

twentieth-century North Carolina and chronicle the ways these celebrations sought to create African American places.⁶¹

Placing Black Public Cultures

Crucial to the understanding of these performances of festivity, community, and pleasure, is the broader spatial context from which and in which they function. Each chapter builds on a history of a particular city at a particular time. My case studies are based in North Carolina, a state representative of broader shifts and trends in the South at the time. The Old North State was then emerging as an exemplar of new southern culture, with significant urbanization and industrialization and widening spatial segregation. The North Carolina of the period that I write about was in the midst of transforming itself into a state whose reputation for moderate progressivism helped mask the emergence of a post-slavery white supremacism as pervasive as any in the country. North Carolina fits as my subject here then both because of the stories unique to it and because of its ability to simultaneously embody these defining contradictions of the New South.

My first chapter pairs Concord and Charlotte, two emerging cities just twenty-five miles apart. Charlotte in some ways typifies the New South city as the center of shipping and commerce, while its neighbor grew from a combination of proximity and the burgeoning Piedmont textile industry. From this beginning, I move to Wilmington, a North Carolina city,

⁶¹ I take the concept of specifically African American places from the geographers Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods. In their introduction to *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, McKittrick and Woods use both the material and metaphorical example of the ocean to call attention to “the tension between the mapped and the unknown.” This tension is one that “reconfigures knowledge, suggesting that places, experiences, histories and people that ‘no one knows’ do exist within our present geographic order.” Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, “No One Knows the Mysteries at the Bottom of the Ocean,” in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Toronto, Ont.: Between the Lines, 2007), 4-5.

Old Southern in its origins, built on connections to the Atlantic world, as it adapts to an influx of industry and rural immigrants. I end with Rocky Mount, an inner-eastern North Carolina city largely created by those same forces, but adherent to the whims of twentieth-century North Carolina's king crop: tobacco. These are all species of different urbanisms in an era that saw both cities and numerous small towns pop up amid an increase of five million in village, town, and city populations between 1880-1910.⁶² Millions among that number were African Americans leaving the familiar countryside for the uncertain promise of the city. Once there, many of these new and generally young migrants, sought to "look out for new opportunities, resist indignities, and join new organizations."⁶³ They did so most often not by recreating the work and family structures of their rural pasts, but by adapting to the economic and social necessities of the city. They left the country to go to seed in the hands of their parents and grandparents, but did not forsake its cultural forms. With them to the city they brought both the political formations their immediate ancestors had forged within the midst of the institution of slavery and, as with Jonkonnu, some of its cultural practices as well. Theirs was a New South still very much ruled by the rural. Jack Kirby exposes the fallacy of "the New South" urbanism in a region that remained largely rural and poor into the twentieth-century. Cities thus acted as cultural and social hubs for the surrounding countryside well into the 1900s.⁶⁴ Materially, growing cities functioned as market and gathering places. Their symbolic function was perhaps greater, and the city, however small, still held a degree of promise for those living in its shadows.

⁶² Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South : Life after Reconstruction*, 15th anniversary ed. (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 55.

⁶³ Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 68.

⁶⁴ Jack Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost : The American South, 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), xiv.

This complex region, populated by a people centered squarely between the rural tobacco fields and the city's tall stone buildings, is both the backdrop for this story and in some ways the story itself. It is a character here, a place whose streets and alleys, intimate corners and massive warehouses, act often as both the instigator of and stage for the emergence of these complex African American public cultures.

To that end, I engage frequently with theories of space and place, landscape and locality. Thinking in an abstract way about the concrete realities of lived experience in place helps us comprehend the worlds of historical people trans-temporally. In general, I refer to the complex interactions of people and locality (or place if you prefer) as landscape, rather than making what can sometimes be a pedantic distinction between place and space. I do this because landscape better suits the range of comprehension and use that describes human interaction in place. The geographer Paul Groth suggests that "landscape denotes the interaction of people and place: a social group and its spaces, particularly the spaces to which the group belongs and from which its members derive some part of their shared identity and meaning."⁶⁵ Landscape suggests space that is not inert. Rather, it is alive and in possession of a constellation of meanings, a material thing with, around, and in which people interact. Much of my interest and the story I tell here thus relies on movement in landscape. To walk in the city, Michel De Certeau says, is to enact "a long poem" one that "manipulates spatial organizations no matter how panoptic" or otherwise invested in power they may be. ⁶⁶ In his formulation, "to walk is to lack a place...is the indefinite process of being absent and in search" of a fulfillment of some lack, whether it be

⁶⁵ Paul Groth, "Frameworks for Cultural Landscape Study," in *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. Todd Bressi and Paul Groth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1.

⁶⁶ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 101.

tangible or rooted in the ineffable.⁶⁷ These kinds of movements (procession, flow, or even the stolid insistence on not moving) are ones most clearly articulated in African American culture in the migration narrative.⁶⁸ Though I do attend to narratives of migration here (including the one that we have now universally dubbed “Great,) I see the migration narrative as simply one way of speaking about the importance of moving through and navigating landscapes. Movement—in the form of walking, dancing, marching, driving, riding—is both restrictive and freeing, something compelled and something volunteered, a performance of the liminal and marginal amid the established and ancient. It is a new thing among old ways and an old solution to problems created by new economies and renewed structures. The forms of cultural practice that I write about here are sometimes quite literally practices of navigation. In what follows I mark people moving in the particularities of the places in which they live. Intent on celebration, it is their performances in and of place that I chart here.

Chapter Outlines

The first chapter is a hybrid of sorts. It consists of a data visualization that maps the coincident rise of Emancipation Day celebrations and lynchings in North Carolina. An extended essay compares two instances of these competing forms of celebration in the neighboring cities of Charlotte and Concord. In comparing the visual and material rhetoric of each of these forms, I suggest the ways in which Black celebration was in a kind of dialogic with

⁶⁷ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 103.

⁶⁸ I take my point about the centrality of the migration narrative from Jasmine Farah Griffin, “*Who Set You Flowin’?*” : *The African-American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

celebrations of whiteness and condemnations of Blackness. This chapter sets the stage for the following two case studies in its reflections on the changing state of late nineteenth-century North Carolina and by dealing with the larger social context of Emancipation Days, which were the most visible and prominent form of African American celebration for a generation.

My second chapter deals with the processional culture of Jonkonnu in early twentieth-century Wilmington, North Carolina. Jonkonnu was an Afro-Caribbean masking tradition whose long history of performed resistance was quickly being regulated and co-opted out of tradition in post-1898 Wilmington. My story follows a woman named Maggie Washington on her journey through Wilmington one evening in 1911 as she transgressed spatial and social boundaries of race, class, and gender in her own performance of the tradition. I contextualize her movement on that night within the larger traditions of spectacular and quotidian mobility in Wilmington, paying special attention to both processional culture and everyday movement. I use Maggie Washington's own history and mobility as a way of understanding a city and region transformed by African American migration, first to its growing cities and eventually out of the South altogether. This chapter is a story of the promise and potential of the southern city, and of the movements into and out of its borders as that potential alternately grew and collapsed in the early years of the twentieth-century.

My third case study is of the June German, an appropriation of staid white cotillion culture that became the largest African American celebration in the South in the early years of the twentieth-century. Held on a Monday night in a lavishly decorated tobacco warehouse in Rocky Mount, the June German illustrates the transformation cultures of celebration had on spaces of labor. In terms both temporal and spatial these events were transformative and transgressive. By celebrating on the start of the working week and attracting a Black audience

that nearly equaled the city's population, the crowd at the annual June German suggested the ways in which celebration could present a vision of Black cultural and social power in a space that symbolized the foreclosure of economic advancement to most African Americans. In the tobacco warehouse they set about bringing both the population and the culture of a Black metropolis to Rocky Mount.

Finally, I conclude with an examination of each of these cultural forms in the present. The specific, localized celebrations of emancipation and freedom have given way to the nationalized multiculturalism of Juneteenth. Jonkonnu exists now primarily as a yearly, living historical re-creation amid a largely white colonial capital. And the June German slowly petered as African Americans left Rocky Mount and the circuits of prominent Black entertainers were increasingly closed to small Southern cities. Little remains in that city which has been decimated by the systemic forces that the June German represented a bulwark against. Each of these events take place against a backdrop of racist claims to public space that is now national in scope, but rooted in the cultures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century South. We are seeing not a revival of the kind of racial violence that marked that period and that so deeply informs the celebratory cultures that I write about here, but rather its return to centrality and prominence. Across boundaries of time and space, these cultures speak to us in our present moment. In many ways, we are heirs to the world they left us, though we have not necessarily fulfilled the promise embedded in these cultural performances. Ours too is a state, region, and country where space is still contested and white supremacy remains embedded in our landscapes. And sadly, ours is a world where Black people, whether they be engaged in celebration or protest, continue to attract official attention leading to regulation, arrest, death. It is fitting then that I end with the temporal and spatial migrations of these cultures to the context of our own contemporary moment.

Along those lines, I feel like I must transition us into what follows with an acknowledgment of my own voice. I will say, finally though perhaps most importantly, that it is a privilege of my being a scholar, a privilege of my whiteness, and a privilege of my place in time that I am able to call for a focus on the fun and pleasure that was had on city streets and in tobacco warehouses. I am not blind to those affordances. I also recognize that pleasure and pain, fun and degradation, are not always far removed from one another. But there is also a way in which the stories of racial uplift, the concern with civil rights and equality, masked a day to day form of living that remains almost entirely inaccessible to scholars. I recognize the irony and danger in trying to uncover this archive by focusing on events that were spectacular in their execution and rare in their occurrence. And yet, they allow a clear window into practices and perceptions that we might otherwise lose. In their exaggeration of the everyday and their stretching of the borders of propriety, the public cultures of celebration that I write about here powerfully if implicitly challenged the racist spatial order of their day. My work unveils those historical precedents as people of color find spaces and enact practices of pleasure and celebration today.

Chapter 1 Emancipation Day: Visualizing Public Spectacle

On January 1, 1899, thousands of African American celebrants streamed into the small town of Louisburg, North Carolina. An accounting written by local leaders S.P McKnight and H. Harris and published five days later set the scene. “Early Monday morning, people began to gather from all parts of the county, as they always do.” These visitors, from all over Franklin and nearby counties, came to “give their expressions of gratitude and joy...and review their history” in order that they could “correct their mistakes and receive counsel for the future.” By 12:30, the crowds had amassed and “the people were ready for the parade.”⁶⁹ This was the centerpiece of the annual celebration of Emancipation Day, put on by the Franklin County Emancipation Society and attended by thousands of African Americans from smaller towns and rural communities nearby. McKnight and Harris reserved their most effusive description for the midday procession, writing about small town streets veritably choked with humanity, a crowd so dense that “there was no space in the streets from the Court House to the Academy Grove.” “It seemed,” they wrote, “as if the town authorities had given us control of the town.”⁷⁰

The success of their celebration was rivalled at other Emancipation Day celebrations, as in the “monster mass meeting” of Wadesboro in 1910 or the tables groaning under “six hundred

⁶⁹ H. Harris and S.P. McKnight, “Emancipation Day in Louisburg,” *The Franklin Times* January 6, 1899.

⁷⁰ H. Harris and S.P. McKnight, “Emancipation Day in Louisburg,” *The Franklin Times* (Louisburg, NC), January 6, 1899.

pounds of barbecue, numerous chickens friend [sic] and baked and many other good things” at 1913’s Emancipation Day in Elm City.⁷¹ Their control of the city was likewise duplicated elsewhere, with a parade “about a mile in length” in Oxford, ten thousand spectators along the parade route in Kinston, or the parades and addresses held annually for decades in places as far flung as Asheville, Elizabeth City, and Winston-Salem.⁷² And this was not a spectacle confined only to the landscapes of North Carolina, but a commonplace annual celebration in every southern state and throughout much of the United States. In the final years of the nineteenth-century, Emancipation Day was perhaps the most visible form of African American celebration in the United States.

But the control of the city, as these correspondents well knew, was also fleeting. Emancipation Day represented the performance of a variety of freedoms—of travel and movement, of celebration— but was undertaken in landscapes marked by an increasing hostility to African American residents. The principal material form that this oppositional culture of institutionalized racism took was the in the variety of memorials erected to the lost cause of the Confederacy. As W. Fitzhugh Brundage suggests, this was a period “when white southerners set about codifying their heroic narrative and filling the civic landscape with monuments to it,” conscious all the while of the “rituals of Black memory [that] represented a form of cultural resistance.”⁷³ These monuments were permanent reminders, as one 1910 account from an emancipation celebration in Oxford, North Carolina put it, of the “Confederate dead, who fought

⁷¹ “Colored Population Celebrate,” *The Charlotte News* (NC) January 3, 1910. “Emancipation Day at Elm City,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), April 11, 1913.

⁷² “2,000 Colored People,” *Public Ledger* (Oxford, NC), January 4, 1907. “Emancipation Day at Kinston Celebrated in Great Style,” *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), January 3, 1919.

⁷³ Brundage, W. *The Southern Past: a Clash of Race and Memory*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005: 10.

heroically for what *they perceived* to be right [emphasis mine.]”⁷⁴ These two reckonings with the recent past, one material and permanent, one performative and ephemeral, represented the conflict between the emerging public cultures of the New South. But it was the spectacular violence of lynching that created an environment of fear, terror, and disorder, and a landscape symbolically marked by its seemingly totalizing power. To reckon with the history of Emancipation Days is, in part, to reckon with its ghastly opposite, the mob lynchings that scarred the landscapes of the South in the same spaces and across the same years that African American people took to the streets to celebrate their freedom and visibly, powerfully assert their presence.

In what follows, I examine these overlaps in visual, spatial, and material registers. Far from suggesting any kind of equivalency between Emancipation Day celebrations and mob lynchings, I instead look at their common origins in a society navigating expressions of fear and power. Through a reading of the visual rhetoric of each of these spectacles, I examine the way in which they spoke to each other, sometimes directly, sometimes implicitly, as public spectacles emerging amid the tumult of a redefined nation and region. Lynching and emancipation celebrations came to serve as exemplars of white and Black public cultures, respectively, and functioned as the most visible public expressions of a divide that played out in the contested geographies of the transforming region. Lynchings sought to obliterate, to do violence to both physical bodies and to the emergent Black body politic. Emancipation Day celebrations destabilized that uninterrogated power and gave overt and visible expression to Black progress and orderliness in contrast to white savagery and disorder. The power of these Emancipation Day parades was as a counterspectacle, one designed to refuse the obliterating power of mob lynching and establish expressive, visible Black public culture.

⁷⁴ “Celebrate Emancipation Day” *Public Ledger* (Oxford, NC), January 1, 1910.

This balance between African American celebratory culture and white-led memorialization and celebration marked the emergence of Black public cultures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century South. Black paraders, dancers, and festivalgoers had to cope with both spatial and symbolic manifestations of oppositional white public cultures. These cultures of opposition were encoded in both the geographic and figurative landscapes, often through a combination of the physical and the rhetorical. In the following pages, I look at North Carolina from the end of the Civil War to the early years of the twentieth-century, examining Emancipation Day celebrations in their broader social and spatial contexts. I use these processional celebrations as a way of examining the competing visions of racialized public cultures then being enacted in public and civic space. We can see the performative spectacle of Emancipation Day as one meant to establish a separate public culture, a competing vision of a new South that projected the possibilities of emancipation into the future. Lynching served as a highly visible celebration of whiteness and condemnation of Blackness, while Emancipation Day celebrations functioned as a representation not simply of resistance but of enduring presence.⁷⁵ I will use the following pages to think about what the memory of emancipation looked like, and how it became a part of the urban landscape of a new, Black, south. To do that, I will look to both the aggregating power of digital visualizations, paired with individual narratives. Each of these approaches require that we question a long, unselfconscious adherence to the totalizing power of white centered narratives, and move instead toward an understanding of the Black south modelled on its own spatial and visual evidence. Using the processional cultures of

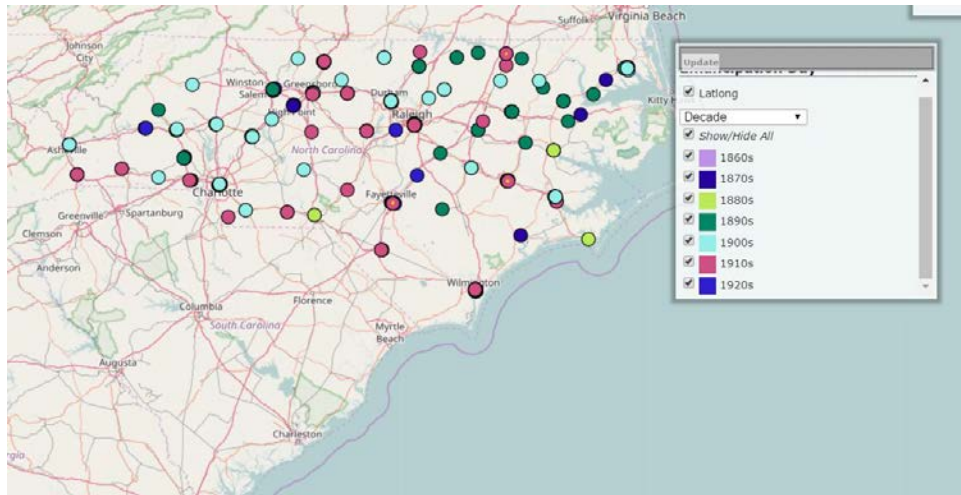
⁷⁵ This suggests a common undercurrent on the limits of resistance and the balancing of resistance and pleasure that is present throughout this work. On moving away from resistance as the defining trait of Blackness see Kevin Everod Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2012.

Emancipation Day celebrations, I will look at the ways that Black people put foot to pavement in marches that celebrated their emancipation, and visibly modelled the freedoms they would look for in the coming years.

Visualizing Emancipation

The scholarship around Emancipation Day celebrations, while not voluminous, has tended comprehensively to the origins and political culture of these celebrations.⁷⁶ Building on this previous definitional work, my interest is in thinking about the *practice* of Emancipation Day. By tending to the many instantiations of this particular freedom celebration across geographic and generational space, I hope to at least begin approximating the meaning and experience of these freedom celebrations. With the construction of data included here, I am making a gesture toward an understanding of the *institutional* and communal nature of these celebrations for the individuals and towns that celebrated them on a yearly basis. Here, as with the other festivals and celebrations I write about, I am interested in impact, the long term relationship between individuals, groups, and the celebration, especially in the days, weeks, and months after it had passed.

⁷⁶ The most comprehensive of these studies are Clark, Kathleen Ann. *Defining Moments : African American Commemoration & Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005, Kachun, Mitchell A. *Festivals of Freedom : Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003 and Wiggins, William H. *O Freedom! : Afro-American Emancipation Celebrations*. 1st ed. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987.



Screenshot of [Visualizing Emancipation](https://emancipation.web.unc.edu/prsp-exhibit/visualizing-emancipation)

Because Emancipation Day was an annual event, people could look forward to its repetition the following year. These insights, coupled with the larger data, reveal the ongoing importance of Emancipation Days even as African Americans confronted massive societal shifts for both good and ill. The interactive visualization here (<https://emancipation.web.unc.edu/prsp-exhibit/visualizing-emancipation>) is the most comprehensive portrait of Emancipation Day celebrations occurring in a single place. This map illustrates the ubiquity of these celebrations, and their success in helping create a landscape marked by persistent annual traditions that flourished in the 1870s. These celebrations steadily grew in number and influence throughout the first years of the twentieth-century. The information for this exhibit comes largely from white run newspapers, a source that almost certainly excludes a significant number of celebrations whose parameters did not adhere to the standards of newsworthiness for largely white audiences. Indeed, we might be able to attribute what appears to be a rise in celebration numbers to newspapers that increasingly began to cover news from local African American communities

because of the increase in Black consumers.⁷⁷ Though the newspapers still largely relied upon sources that were visible and legible to white audiences, this reporting sometimes stumbled upon revealing absences that suggested the tension between these emerging public cultures and long held practices of necessity that saw Black people concealing both the facts and the nature of their celebrations.

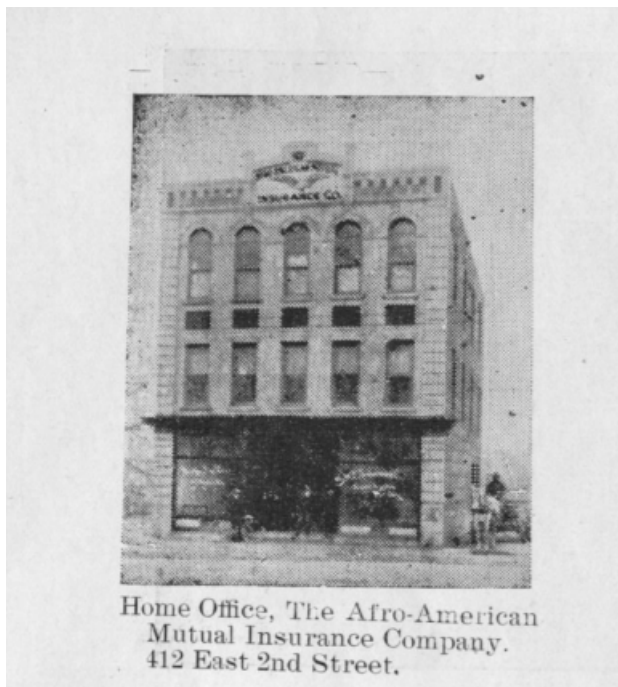
Perhaps the best example of this comes early on, with an 1873 notice in the *Raleigh News* “the Freedmen of Wilmington did not publicly celebrate Emancipation Day.”⁷⁸ This article suggests, as do others over the next decades, that in the absence of public celebrations, celebrants passed the holiday in more private commemorations. Clearly African American people understood the importance of a balance between celebrations intended for their own communities, and ones premised on the kind of spectacular visibility that we can see represented in a procession like the one in Louisburg that opened this chapter. By filtering and sorting the data spatially visualized on this map, we can better understand both the geographic context of Emancipation Day celebrations and the specific forms and activities that largely persisted throughout the seven decades of its most frequent annual occurrence. Perhaps most importantly, we can see the types of spaces in which these celebrations occurred, noting that even with the rise of significant African American clubs and institutions, Emancipation Day continued to be held most frequently in civic, church, or other public spaces that by their very nature could admit the largest number of participants and onlookers. Emancipation Day then persisted as a largely public celebration, one whose meaning took on additional valences because of the different types

⁷⁷ As part of this broader trend, many newspaper began producing columns or sections devoted explicitly to news centered on African Americans. See for instance, “The Colored Column” of Elizabeth City’s *North Carolinian* or a similar column in Concord’s *The Standard*. “The Colored Column,” *The North Carolinian*, December 19, 1901.

⁷⁸ “North Carolina,” *The Raleigh Daily News*, January 3, 1873.

of spaces that it occurred in. What this data does not show in detail are the means by which Emancipation was celebrated in individual cities, and particularly the way in which the celebration worked as both memory practice and organizing principle for possible futures of the Black South. Accordingly, I want to shift now to an in depth discussion Emancipation Day in 1915 Charlotte, and the way that year's celebration accounted for the first fifty years of freedom.

Colored Charlotte and the Visibility of Progress



Charlotte began as a relatively small town in the years before the Civil War. By the 1870s it had blossomed into a “regional trading center” on its way to becoming “the center of the Piedmont textile industry” by the first years of the twentieth-century.⁷⁹ Like other cities of its size, part of the growth of Charlotte into a major city came from a steadily growing African American population and particularly a middle class who made significant economic and social investments in the community.

These newcomers built institutions, like the Afro American Mutual Life Insurance Company or the A.M.E. Zion Publishing House. Equally important was their investment made in the birth of an Emancipation Day celebration that would itself serve as a capacious institution for African

Home Office of The Afro-American Mutual Life Insurance Company from "Colored Charlotte"

American life in the city. Though early records of

⁷⁹ Janette Thomas Greenwood, *Bittersweet Legacy: the Black and White "Better Classes" in Charlotte, 1850-1910*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 1.

churches, clubs, and organizations in Charlotte are not abundant enough to state definitively, it seems that many Black residents of Charlotte travelled to Raleigh for what was informally the state's celebration of freedom in the years immediately after emancipation. In 1878, for instance, a small group of Charlotteans joined a railroad excursion to the capital for that year's observance.⁸⁰ In a few years, Charlotte had its own celebration that quickly became an important signifier of the aspirations of many of its leaders.

In 1885, concurrent with the rise of the Confederate memorial landscape, Charlotte residents marked the New Year and the commemoration of emancipation with many of what had become the usual hallmarks. Marching in time to music supplied by a brass band, "a large procession of men and women proceeded" to a local church, "where an address appropriate to the occasion was delivered by Rev. J.A. Tyler, colored."⁸¹ Following the completion of these exercises, the brass band struck up again leading the crowd in singing "'The Star Spangled Banner' and a number of other productions" before breaking into a rendition of "Dixie." The anonymous, presumably white newspaper writer recounting this devoted much of his column to the crowd's reaction to that song. Once "Dixie" began, he wrote, "their shouts fairly rent the air," suggesting that it was an anthem "they considered absolutely necessary for the completion of their emancipation celebration." Whether this a true accounting of the reaction to a song whose complicated history may well have invited some kind of enthusiasm among some of Charlotte's African American residents, or simply something of a mischaracterization, this moment is telling. This may have been a moment of cheer over the re-appropriation of a song (as with

⁸⁰ "The Colored Excursion to Raleigh," *Charlotte Observer* (NC), January 3, 1878.

⁸¹ "Celebrating Their Emancipation and Hurrahing for Dixie," *Charlotte Observer* (NC), January 2, 1885.

Lincoln's famous postwar request for the tune,)⁸² that the reporter mistook. Or it may well have been the reporter's own projection onto the scene. Even if that's the case, I suspect that this was partially a moment calculated to impress white onlookers, many of whom "heard the band playing Dixie and... say it was excellently rendered."⁸³ Indeed, it seems unlikely to be a coincidence that this was the first year the celebration was covered by a local white newspaper. The spectacle of the massive parade, capped as it apparently was by "Dixie," was fodder for white audiences. In the coming years, the celebrants of Emancipation Day in Charlotte would make their annual observance central to the carefully crafted self-image of Black Charlotte. Emancipation Day became a way not only to commemorate and celebrate the granting of state sanctioned freedom, but also to illustrate the progress and position of African American people in Charlotte. Sometimes the spectacle of the celebration was calculated to impress onlookers, as was the case here. But there was a persistent tension between representing Black Charlotte to outsiders and to itself.

The most characteristic example of this tendency came in 1915 with the publication of *Colored Charlotte*. Designed as both guide and supplement to the fiftieth anniversary celebration of emancipation in Charlotte, the pamphlet purported to serve as a comprehensive illustration of African American life in Charlotte. The slim volume, around fifty pages total, was distributed as a souvenir of emancipation and multi-generational progress during that year's program at the

⁸² The definitive history of the song's origins, *Way Up North In Dixie*, also at least begins the work of accounting for the song's extraordinary longevity and popularity among many groups: Howard L. Sacks and Judith Rose Sacks, *Way up North in Dixie : a Black Family's Claim to the Confederate Anthem*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993.

⁸³ Celebrating Their Emancipation and Hurrahing for Dixie," *The Charlotte Observer*, January 2, 1885.

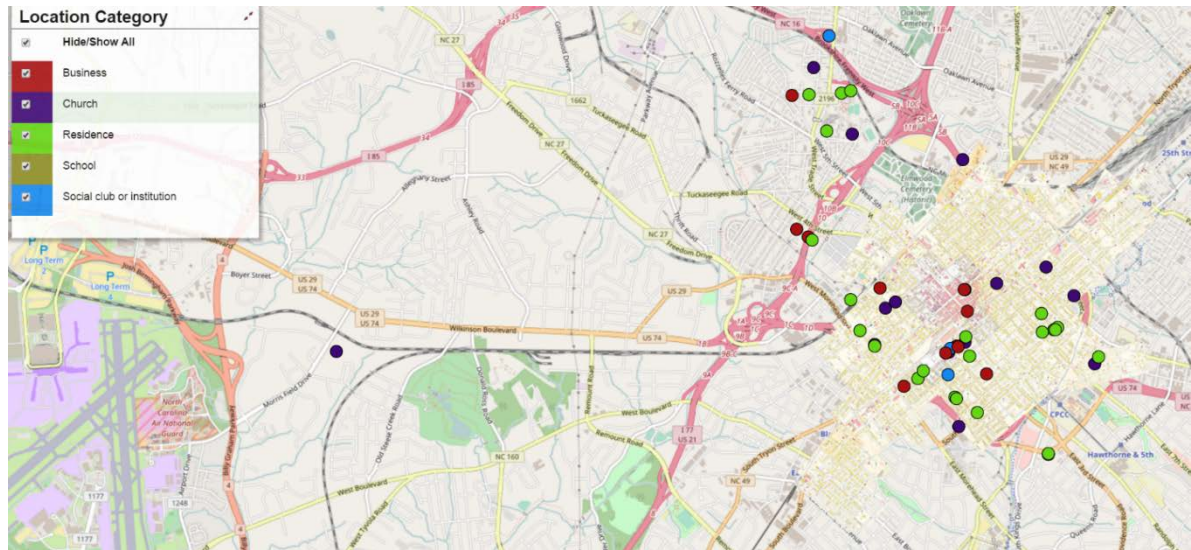
city's "municipal auditorium" on north College Street.⁸⁴ These were intended then primarily for celebrants at the event to serve as a kind of memento of that year's festival and marker of a half century of freedom. Accordingly, the book opens with an extended explanation of its own existence. In the words of the G.W. Clinton, Bishop of the area's African Methodist Episcopal Zion churches, the book stemmed from "the idea of placing before the members and friends of the race in printed form facts which tell the story of successful endeavor." Those facts "can not fail to prove beneficial in many ways." Bishop Clinton continues that "it is quite befitting that that we take note of what has been done along the line of substantial race progress in our own immediate community for our own encouragement and inspiration."⁸⁵ The explicit purpose of the pamphlet then was to serve as a reminder and inspiration of racial progress, principally for a Black audience. Still, we can read this pamphlet as part of a genre of similarly laudatory portraits of other southern cities that were aimed at increasing business and tourism to growing cities. In many ways this volume reads similarly, giving as it does frequent praise to a city still marked by many racial divisions. This pamphlet was intended simultaneously as a document for Charlotte's African American population, but marked by their keen awareness of frequent and pervasive observation and surveillance on the part of the city's white officialdom. As with the 1885 parade described above, they knew white people were watching. Bishop Clinton's introduction states as much, claiming "as a people we have not done much in the way of publishing the achievements of our race," but rather have ceded influence to "other people more diligent in advertising our

⁸⁴ "Emancipation Day Celebrated in City," *The Charlotte Observer*, January 2, 1915; *Charlotte, North Carolina City Directory* Asheville, NC: Piedmont Directory Company, 1916:522.

⁸⁵ *Colored Charlotte: Published in Connection with the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Freedom of the Negro in the County of Mecklenburg and the City of Charlotte, North Carolina*. Charlotte, N.C.: A.M.E. Zion Job Print, 1915.

shortcomings.” The book would serve an instruction manual of sorts in the ways of both celebrating African American achievement and being mindful of the ways to best visualize that success for observers both Black and white. *Colored Charlotte* acted as a visual primer for what the book’s compilers viewed as the legacy of emancipation and its potential for the coming generation.

Indeed, we can see this book as a kind of aspirational procession, a map of the titular *Colored Charlotte*. As with the parades at the center of Emancipation Day, it sought to direct its viewer through a set route, illustrating in remarkable detail the people and places that made up this separate city. It serves as a visual, if not spatial, map of fifty years of progress, guiding its viewers past important landmarks in a succession of photographs and brief, symbolically laden captions. The pictures featured in the book are particularly remarkable because they aestheticize and promote a version of everyday Black life in Charlotte. Unlike the Emancipation Day parades, which were festive, an explicit amplification of African American culture, the pamphlet sought to center a perception of quotidian life as the focus of its call to heightened visibility. If we spatialize the routes outlined in *Colored Charlotte*, as I have done here, we can better understand the geographic legacy of the first fifty years of freedom, and the visual and spatial models that this book, and by extension the celebration it was printed to accompany, were projecting. (<http://elijahgaddis.com/dhp-projects/black-charlotte-1915/>.)

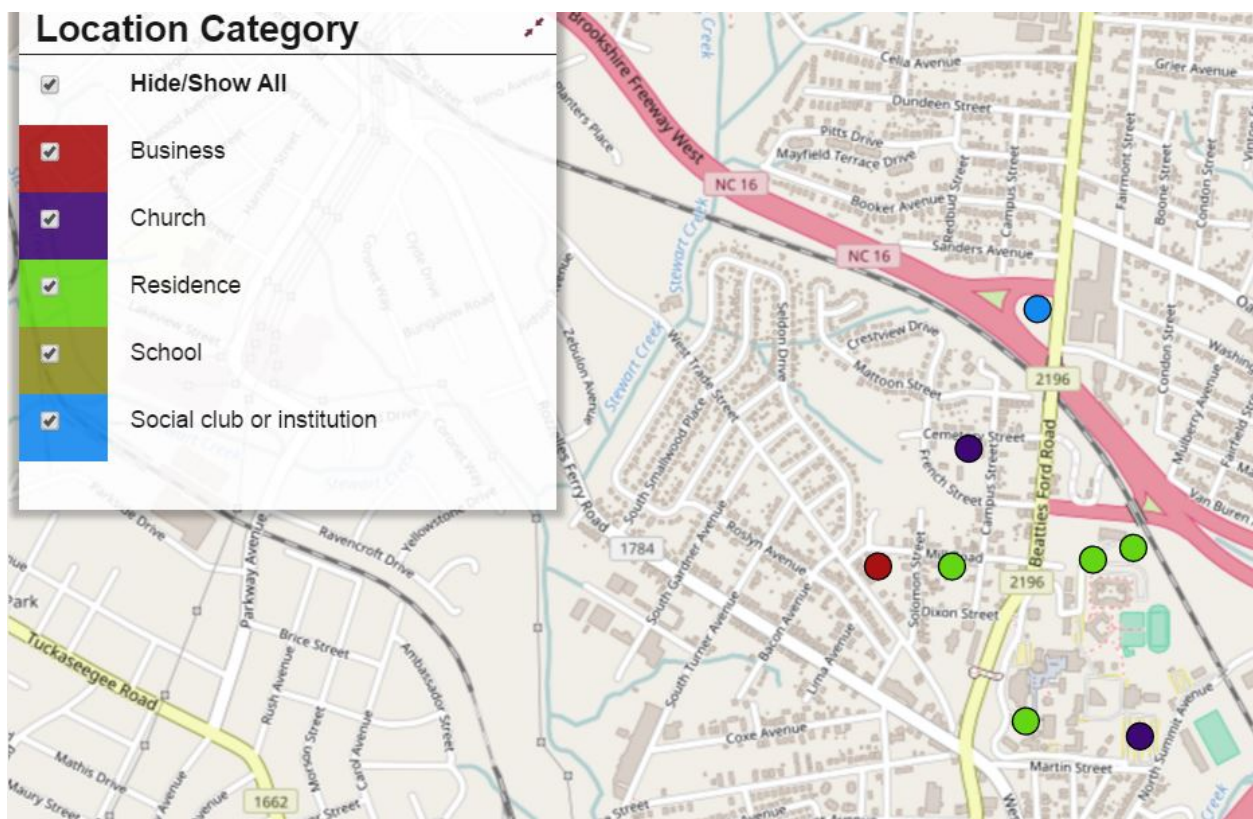


Black Charlotte, 1915

Rather than conforming to what we might think of as a legible *processual* route, this map of Black Charlotte instead shows a series of household, businesses, and institutions scattered around the city. These population nodes represent the uneven possibilities for settlement and development for African Americans in the growing city. As Black people either came to the city or established more permanent lives there in the previous two generations, their patterns of settlement were dictated by economic factors, and by the evolving nature of spatial segregation. As David Goldfield suggests, “segregation, evident in churches since the late eighteenth-century, spread as southern cities developed new institutions and technologies.”⁸⁶ Thomas Hanchett writes about this new segregation in Charlotte specifically, attributing the move toward a fully spatially segregated city to the business interests that began to dominate the landscape of the city. As racial zoning laws become prevalent in Charlotte and elsewhere “downtown interests shunned Black storekeepers, neighbors pressured landlords to evict Black tenants, and in the suburbs

⁸⁶ David Goldfield, *Region, Race, and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1997): 139-140.

developers inserted restrictive covenants into ever lot deed forbidding ownership or residence by anyone of the ‘colored race.’”⁸⁷ These population nodes represent the uneven possibilities for settlement and development for African Americans in the growing city. As Black people either came to the city or established more permanent lives there in the previous two generations, their patterns of settlement were dictated by economic factors, and by the evolving nature of spatial segregation. These population centers then represent attempts to capitalize on sparsely inhabited land inside the borders of the growing city, and to establish communities in those areas. Take for instance Biddleville, a population center written about in *Colored Charlotte*. As we can see in

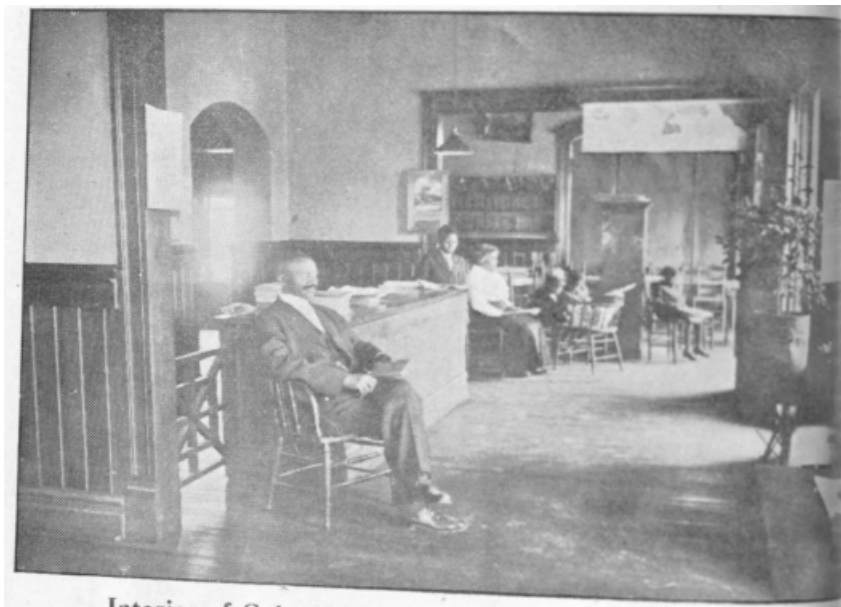


Detail, Biddleville

this figure, Biddleville formed its own small core with Biddle University at its center.

⁸⁷ Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998 :) 116.

The work of *Colored Charlotte*, as I have suggested above, was aspirational and imaginative, a way of constructing a social map of the city and the connections between these places in the absence of real geographic connections. The volume was a processional, but one enacted through a conceptual geography that asked its viewers to imagine community spread throughout the space of the city. As de facto segregation become de jure, these nodes become the hubs of social and cultural life in Black Charlotte. The importance of this book is not then as a mode of resistance to a dominant white power structure, the markers of which were becoming ever more visible as Charlotte surpassed Wilmington as the state's largest city. Instead, *Colored Charlotte* aims to posit a correlative Black economic culture. The title here is telling, as is the map above: they both represent a separate Charlotte. Some of Black Charlotte's institutions were legible to white observers, close analogues to their own businesses and organizations. But on the whole it was a separate city, one designed for the needs of African American residents of



Photograph of segregated library from "Colored Charlotte"

Charlotte. We can see this bifurcation in some of the book's illustrations. Take for instance this photograph of the recently constructed library designated for "the sole and exclusive use of the Negroes of Charlotte."⁸⁸ It

⁸⁸ *Colored Charlotte : Published in Connection with the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Freedom of the Negro in the County of Mecklenburg and the City of Charlotte, North Carolina*. Charlotte, N.C.: A.M.E. Zion Job Print, 1915.

was a segregated library, built along with other Black public institutions like the Good Samaritans Hospital, as part of the legal instantiation of segregation in early twentieth-century Charlotte. But here we can see the compilers of this book taking pride in that separation, refusing its dehumanizing potency, and instead celebrating it as a centerpiece of their city, Black Charlotte. These centers, as I have suggested above, were not literal. Instead, *Colored Charlotte* brings these separate geographic nodes together in a holistic vision of the Black city, one constructed in interstitial space.

The book's first pages lay out its intentions and format, including tables of facts and figures that charted advances in categories like literacy, home ownership, and African American produced publications. But by far the bulk of the volume is given over to photographs. In a description of the book's content that appears early on, the majority of the volume is quickly passed over as "information which has been gotten from different sources and compiled in this book." But the types of photographs get special attention as they are enumerated one by one: "the pictures of the homes, churches, schools and individuals" which "can not be other than educative and inspiring to the youth of the race."⁸⁹ The primary focus of the book then and its principal pedagogical function is as a visual work. This is perhaps surprising in a city where much of African American life was dominated by educational institutions, like Biddle University. Reading was a practice that carried with it a degree of pride in addition to its practicality as a communicative function. We can see this resort to visual rhetoric as an outgrowth of emancipation celebrations. While each year's celebration culminated in public exercises, usually marked by addresses, Emancipation Proclamation readings, and resolutions,

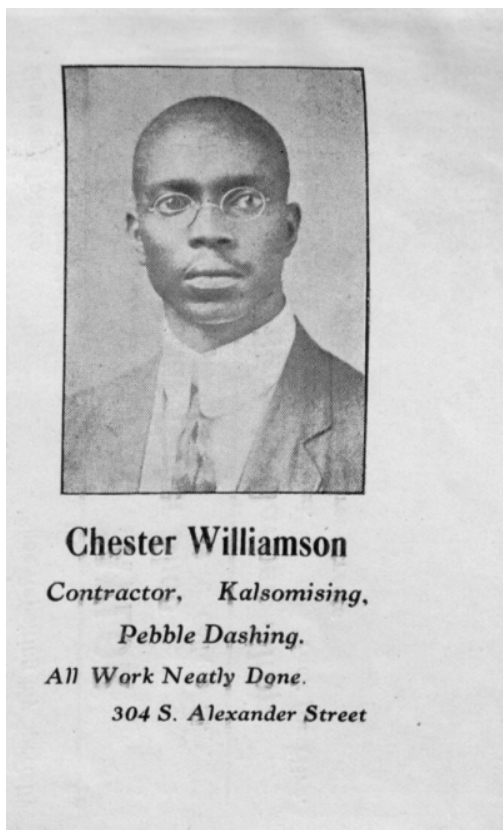
⁸⁹ *Colored Charlotte*, 2.

the festivities were inaugurated by a massive parade. Unlike the speeches and other formal activities, the parade acted as a showcase for the mass of Black humanity in Charlotte. The procession was a showcase of both organizations and individuals, a visible and audible representation of the variety of Charlotte's population that was far more diverse (and undoubtedly more raucous) than the university professors and clergymen who dominated the rostrum at the courthouse, City Hall, or municipal auditorium. Characteristic of those parades was one held on New Year's Day, 1890. The parade began with a variety of groups ("the Charlotte Light Infantry, the Neptune Fire Company, the two bands, several carriages, and a host of colored pedestrians,") assembling around City Hall at 10:00 a.m. From there, "the procession moved down Tryon street to Trade, and down East Trade to the suburbs of the city where a salute of two rounds was fired, after which the procession moved on to Zion M.E. church."⁹⁰ Proceeding as it did through the main streets of Charlotte, accompanied by loud brass bands, this was a parade entirely impossible to ignore. It was premised on a kind of spectacular visibility that flew in the face of a racial uplift strategy in Charlotte that saw Black leaders "downplaying the importance of politics and stressing economic advancement instead." That strategic move, which substituted notice for acceptance, was one that *Colored Charlotte* broke away from.

The pictures featured in the book are particularly remarkable because they aestheticize and promote a version of everyday Black life in Charlotte. Unlike the Emancipation Day parades, which were festive, an explicit amplification of African American culture, the pamphlet sought to center its perception of quotidian life as the focus of its call to heightened visibility. As the introduction suggests, the illustrations in the book fall into two categories: photographic portraits, and photographs of buildings, principally houses, churches, and schools. Many of the

⁹⁰ "Emancipation Day," *Charlotte Observer* (NC), January 2, 1890

portraits are of community leaders like ministers and teachers. But true to the democratic spirit behind the venture, many of the advertisements were also based around portraits of individual business proprietors. Some, as with Chester Williamson, a contractor, painter, and “pebble [dasher]” who promised, “all work neatly done,” were analogous in form to their socially elite counterparts. Williamson’s portrait has the bespectacled contractor dressed neatly in a suit and tie, his face positioned straight toward the camera with gaze just slightly averted to the right. He projects an air of sober modesty, his patterned tie the only hint of personality against the background of the portrait studio. His photograph is similar to most of the portraits of Charlotte’s male leaders featured here, similarly posed against a backdrop which gives no hint of their vocation, calling, or personality.



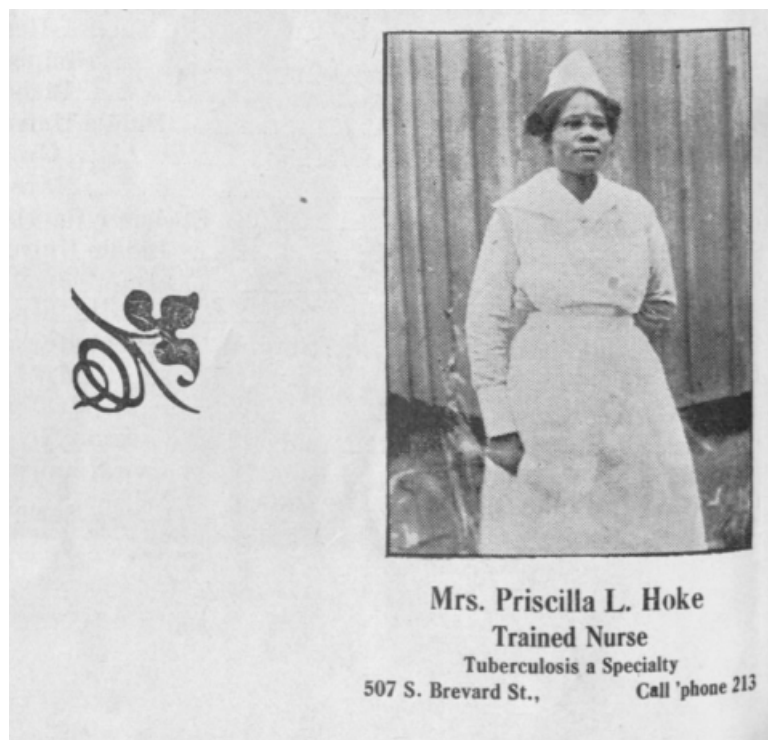
Portrait of Chester Williamson, Contractor from "Colored Charlotte"



Portrait of the Reverend B.J. Ivey from "Colored Charlotte"

These portraits effectively give equal weight to the emerging elite upper middle class and the working professional. The juxtaposition between the two suggests both the democratic spirit of the venture, and the need to reevaluate our perception of the historical Black middle class, which here is defined principally by ownership and industry rather than educational or economic attainment.

Similarly, the advertising portraits that pose people at work reposition the perception of labor and its place in Black Charlotte. Mrs. Priscilla L. Hoke was a trained nurse who hired out to African American residents of Charlotte. Like Williamson or Reverend B.J. Ivey she is posed with a kind of stiff formality, with one arm held behind her back and just the barest suggestion of a smile on her face. Her surroundings and the extent of her portrait are far different than the more

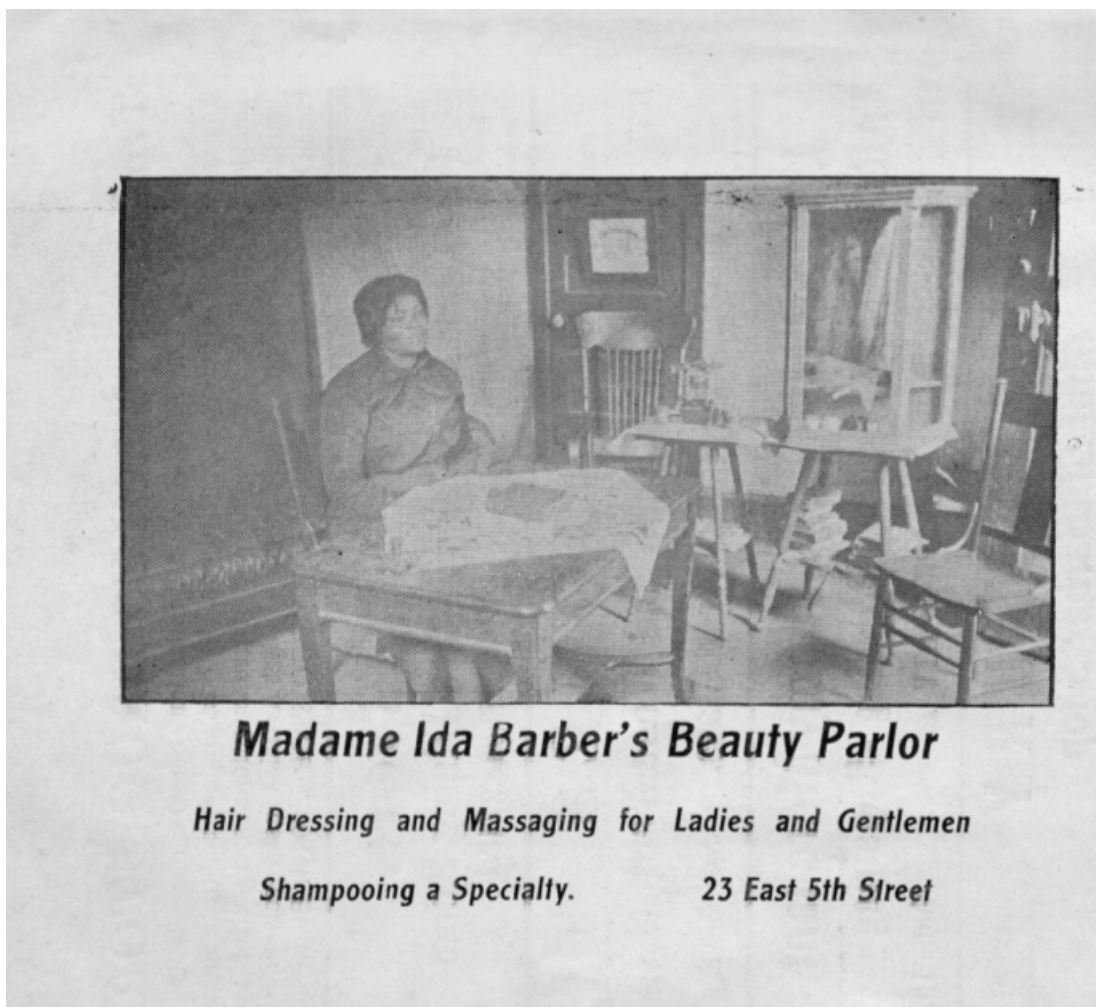


Mrs. Priscilla L. Hoke, Trained Nurse. "Colored Charlotte."

formal portraiture throughout the book. To begin with, the perspective of her photo is wider, revealing almost her entire body, clad in a neat white uniform and topped with a peaked white cap. The arm not held behind her back is clutching some tool of her trade, unidentifiable against

the white expanse of her uniform. Immediately behind her is a small expanse of yard characterized mostly by waist high weeds, and one corner of a board and batten sided structure. We are meant to read the structure and yard, I think, as part of a household, which gives the crisp whiteness of Hoke's uniform an identifiable modernity, set against a backdrop that readily evokes rural life. It is an image that is meant as a visible measure of progress, a didactic illustration of the progress of the individual as a stand in for the progress of the race.

The book also contains more conventional pictorial descriptions of people at work. The advertisement for "Madame Ida Barber's Beauty Parlor" offering "hair dressing and massaging for ladies and gentlemen" is one particularly good example. The woman we can assume to be



Ida
Barber
sits at a
table
facing
away
from the
camera
as if
frozen in

Madame Ida Barber's Beauty Parlor from "Colored Charlotte"

contemplation. On the table before her is what appears to be an unfolded newspaper and a book. A framed certificate serves as the focal point of the photograph and along with the reading materials, suggests a studied professionalism. The rest of the room is filled with tables on which are stacked blurry but recognizable tools of her trade and, curiously, what appear to be more stacks of books. On the table to the right is a display case of some sort, its contents also unrecognizable. The case is neatly built, if seemingly more at home in a museum or classroom than a beauty parlor. Facing her, across the table and at a slight remove is an empty chair, angled just slightly so that it appears as if awaiting an interlocutor rather than simply a customer to be waited upon. The image seems crafted, calculated to elevate Ida Barber's profession above the station of service alone. In this way, the photographs of Hoke and Barber convey the importance of all kinds of work, and class status, for the success of "Colored Charlotte." This kind of didactic purpose is one that has many close contemporaneous rhetorical and visual analogs, none more so than the work of the early photographer Frances Benjamin Johnston. Johnston's work documenting the Hampton Institute at the turn of the twentieth-century likewise posed African American people in educative and industrious positions, visually positing the utility of work and education for progress. Her photographs of Hampton classrooms in particular bear a close relationship with the photo of Barber here. Take this chemistry classroom, photographed in 1899

or 1900, and showing a group of students at work.⁹¹



Hampton Students in a Chemistry Classroom, Frances Benjamin Johnston

Like Ida Barber's photograph, there is more the suggestion of possibility for work than a comprehensive or detailed depiction of work being done. The surroundings in Johnston's photographs are as important as the nominal subjects, the students, who populate the photographs with a studied busyness. The context of the classroom is in many ways the keys to their potential success, especially in their original context at the Paris Exposition of 1900 where they were used as evidence "that the US was successfully integrating African Americans into mainstream American culture."⁹² Fifteen years later, the portraits of Priscilla Hoke and especially Ida Barber build on that same impulse, showing progress in large part through the

⁹¹ Frances Benjamin Johnston, [*Chemistry classroom at Hampton Institute-African American male and female students, one Indian.*] Library of Congress.

⁹² Sarah Bassnett "From Public Relations to Art: Exhibiting Frances Benjamin Johnston's Hampton Institute Photographs", *History of Photography*, 32:2 (2008), 152-153.

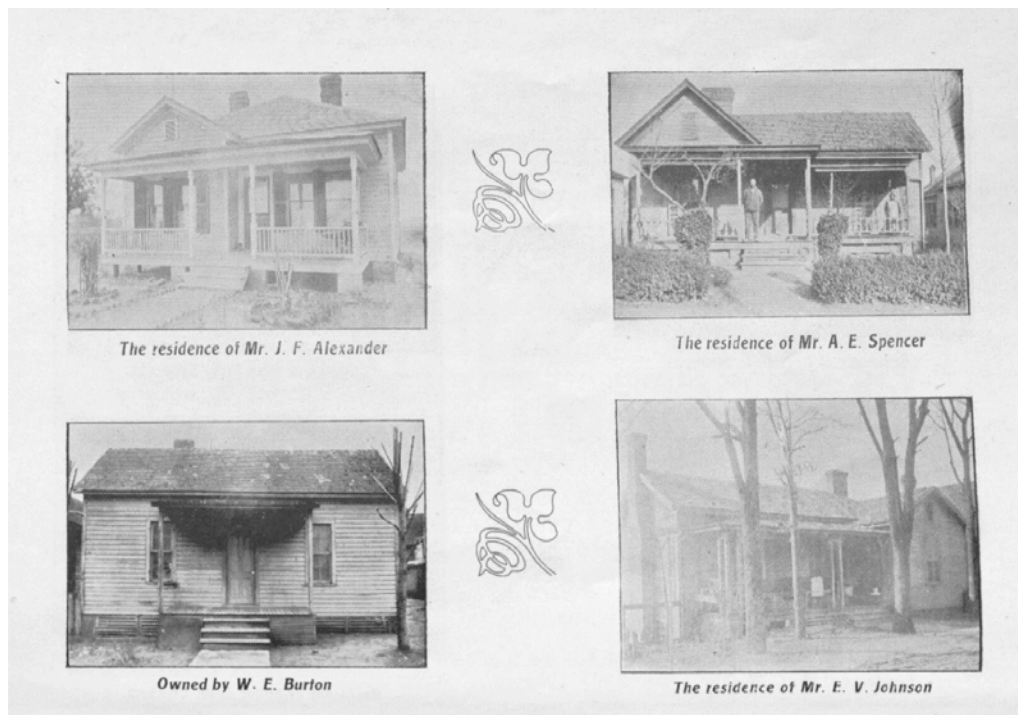
context and composition of photography. But they also prominently identify their subjects, centering Hoke and Barber in the photographs and affixing labels that make clear what professions they hold. These are advertisements of a sort, but they are integrated fully into the book and serve as the implicit rejoinder to the anonymous subjects of Johnston's photographs. These are women that have arrived and attained, and so deserve the credit of being named.

Slightly more ambiguous are the photographs of buildings, principally houses, which make up the majority of the book. While there are variations throughout, the general formula shows a very close shot of the building itself with little context for its immediate surroundings. Perhaps the most grand of these, the "Home Office of the Afro-American Mutual Life Insurance Company" is another advertisement masquerading as informational portrait.⁹³ The three story home office sits, seemingly isolated but buzzing with prospective business, on a city street whose distant background seems to hold at least the suggestion of trees. It appears almost solely out of context, a new and sleek office building plopped proudly on a suddenly busy street. The interior shot offered on the same page is likewise almost frantic in its busyness, showing an office packed full of clients and agents. The insurance company seems almost plopped into place, an automatic hub of activity and industry in a place where previously there was perhaps little else. Indeed, the map suggests that this was built in a place that was becoming a center of African American business in Charlotte, part of a neighborhood known as Brooklyn. Once one of the central Black business districts in the South, we see it here one of several such hubs in the city, a place bustling with more activity than any other photograph in the book.

The domestic scenes, which predominate in number, are more tranquil. They tend to provide even less context of landscape, and instead emerge as mostly static pictures of houses

⁹³ "Home Office of the Afro-American Mutual Life Insurance," *Colored Charlotte*.

with few markers of habitation. They are meant then to be showcases, an inventory of style and type for the city's African American residents. This is a crucial part of the pamphlet's work, which asks citizens, particularly young and Black ones, to project themselves into the enviable situations enjoyed by the city's successful, if not necessarily its elite. The photos of the houses did just that. Likely an unintended consequence of technological limitations, the very nature of the photographic reproduction emphasizes big picture and obscures finer grained details. Even in the domestic photographs that included people, they were minimized, appearing as little more than stand in figures that might actually invite viewers to imagine themselves in their places. The pictured houses, then, were wood and brick repositories for the specific dreams and aspirations of their viewers.



Residences featured in "Colored Charlotte"

This point is made ever clearer by the captions that appear underneath the photographs of houses in *Colored Charlotte*. Take, for instance, the home of W.E. Burton. It's perhaps the most modest house in the entire book. There are few of the suburban niceties we see in other dwellings



Owned by W.E. Burton

Owned by W.E. Burton from "Colored Charlotte"



The residence of Mr. A. E. Spencer

The Residence of Mr. A.E Spencer from "Colored Charlotte"

here: the house appears in real need of new paint, has little vegetation besides weeds and a closely trimmed tree, and appears slightly lopsided, perhaps on an uneven foundation. And yet, there's the proud caption: owned by W.E. Burton. For William Burton, an agent at the Afro-American Mutual Life Insurance Company, and his wife Louise, this house represented an entrance into the city *Colored Charlotte* envisions.⁹⁴ Unlike most African Americans in the South at the time, they were homeowners. However modest their house might be, they were counted as exemplars of that vision because of their possession of this chief marker of class status. On the same page, we see other houses named "the residence of." Perhaps the neatest of these is that of A.E. Spencer, at 509 East 2nd Street. ⁹⁵We see a figure that we assume to be Mr. Spencer standing proudly on the porch of the house with a female figure, probably his wife

⁹⁴ *Charlotte, North Carolina City Directory, 1916*, Asheville, NC: Piedmont Directory Company. Entry for Burton, William E., 148.

⁹⁵ *Charlotte, North Carolina City Directory, 1915*, Asheville, NC: Piedmont Directory Company. Entry for Spencer, Alfred E., 511.

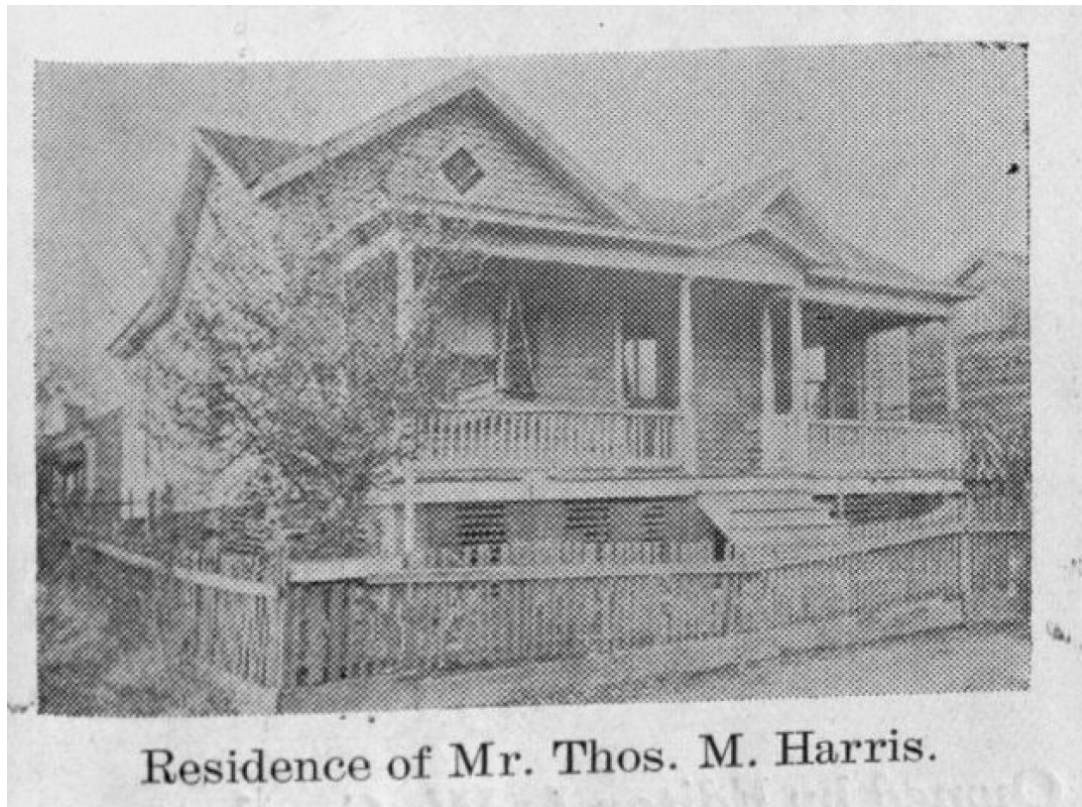
Mary. Their house has an established hedge and full porch, signs that seem to signify pride and ownership. The language of the caption for this photograph is slightly different, but represents the same sentiment: the residence of Mr. A.E. Spencer. Again, this suggests ownership and the attendant qualities of progress and belonging that owning a house means in this portrait of Black Charlotte. Ownership is a unifying principle here and the most tangible marker of class status, in part because of the conditions of life in southern cities like Charlotte. Increasing segregation and the erosion of Black political power made property ownership one of the few ways of continuing to capitalize on the promise of the city and resist the “entrenched laws and customs that positioned all propertyless laborers as dependent servants.”⁹⁶ In this period, after the failures of fusionist politics and the violent, revanchist white supremacy then coming to dominate social, political, and economic life in the southern city, home ownership became one of the sole remaining markers of success for Black, southern urbanites.

To emphasize this point and conclude its jagged procession throughout the city, the last pages of the pamphlet turned to an even more didactic illustration. Contrasted on the final page are two houses: one log cabin, with its sole inhabitant seated outside, and one of the most stylish houses featured in the book, the four-gabled and picket-fenced “residence of Mr. Thos. H. Harris.”⁹⁷ The image of Thomas Harris’s house is slightly different from many of the others featured in *Colored Charlotte* in both context and composition. Whereas other residences in the book are presented in sets, usually of four or eight spread over two pages, the Harris house is presented here along with the log cabin of Mrs. Sallie Davidson as bookends to an

⁹⁶ Laura F. Edwards “Captives of Wilmington: The Riot and Historical Memories of Political Conflict, 1865-1898,” in Cecelski, David S. and Tyson, Timothy B., editors, *Democracy Betrayed : the Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998: 125-126.

⁹⁷ “Residence of Mr. Thos. H. Harris,” *Colored Charlotte*.

advertisement, and indeed, to the whole project. The two images then are clearly intended as a matched pair, not based on geography or neighborhood, but rather contrast in type. And though



the Harris
house
appears
here
singly, the

Residence of Mr. Thomas H. Harris, "Colored Charlotte"

composition of the photograph is a bit more revealing than others. Perhaps because it was made in such a way as to include the picket fence surrounding the yard, the image encompasses slight glimpses of other houses nearby, giving a visual rather than descriptive sense of the neighborhood. It functions then as the “after” picture with the cabin of Mrs. Sallie Davidson.

Sited among other houses in what is clearly a densely populated urban neighborhood, Harris’s house is a sign of personal and group progress. It is the Davidson house though that the page is truly focused on. The image shows a woman seated in front of a log house with front door open. The dwelling is topped with a peaked, neatly wood-shingled roof, and bears a small shed addition in the rear. Its single chimney, open front door and loft window, along with a

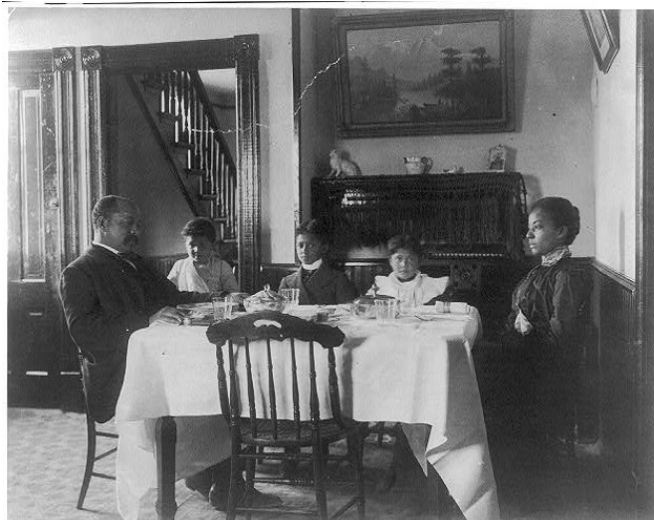
neatly swept yard suggest an essential tidiness and sense of industry that the book is eager to impart to prior generations of Black Charlotteans. Indeed her house is labelled here “the [original] type,” a designation that classifies the structure as part of the past. Her’s is also the only house in the book not captioned as “the residence of” or “owned by.” Instead, we are informed simply that this is “Mrs. Sallie Davidson’s home.”⁹⁸ It implies longevity, but not possession. The home does not belong to her, and in a sense she does not belong in this book. Mrs. Sallie Davidson is posed sitting in front of the house looking directly at the camera. There’s no illusion of industry or the air of detachment that we see in other portraiture in the volume. Instead, Davidson and her house seem almost frozen in time like ethnographic subjects, a documentable and verifiable portrait of a past the compilers of this book are eager to transcend. We can see another parallel in what is perhaps the most characteristic pairing of photographs from Frances Benjamin Johnston’s Hampton Institute series.



"Old Folks at Home," Frances Benjamin Johnston

⁹⁸ “Mrs. Sallie Davidson’s Home,” *Colored Charlotte*

The before photograph in this equally didactic pairing shows an older couple sitting down to a meal in what appears to be a small cabin.⁹⁹ Their surroundings are relatively modest with newspaper-lined walls and a few kitchen implements scattered around the house and on top of the one corner cabinet. They sit just inches away from the hearth, each with head bowed and dressed in clothes that seem well cared for, but clearly old fashioned. There are no children in evidence, and as with their clothing and surroundings, they seem a part of the past. A paired photograph of the Hampton graduate eating at home is effectively the inverse.¹⁰⁰ It shows the proud graduate in a well-appointed dining room, surrounded by fashionable decorations and with a stair to a second floor immediately behind. The table itself is covered with a cloth, and the suit clad father and mother sit at either end of the table with all three children gathered on one side so as to appear in the portrait. This contrast is doing much the same work that we can see with the pairing of the Davidson cabin and the Harris



The Hampton Graduate at Home, Frances Benjamin Johnston

house. Sallie Davidson and her house are being held up as a kind of exemplar of the good work

⁹⁹Frances Benjamin Johnston, [*Old African American couple eating at the table by fireplace, rural Virginia,*] 1899-1900, Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute series, Hampton, Virginia, Library of Congress.

¹⁰⁰ Frances Benjamin Johnston, [*Hampton Institute, Va. - a graduate (dining) at home,*] 1899-1900, Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute series, Hampton, Virginia, Library of Congress.


of prior generations, but the picture is composed so as to be inert and passive, not projecting the kind of energy and industry of other photographs in the book.



Mrs. Sallie Davidson's Home,
North Charlotte
The Original Type.

EDWARD WHITE, Merchant Tailor
Cutting, Fitting, Cleaning and Pressing, a Specialty.
Call and see him. Huntersville, N. C.
Restaurant Attached

H. H. Cardwell & Company
Real Estate & Insurance
Houses and Lots for Sale and for Rent. 220 E. Trade St.



Residence of Mr. Thos. M. Harris.

Temporal Procession, "Colored Charlotte"

Paired here with the Harris house, its inhabitants presumably off somewhere working and making their fortune, it functions as a visible sign of two generations of progress. As before and after photographs, these were intended as a visualization of the progress of a race and the potential of emancipation. This is the concluding image of the book for a reason. It signified the bookends of the temporal processional that organizes the volume. We see Mrs. Davidson's "original type" as an origin, a representation of the starting

place for previous generations of African Americans in Charlotte. The Harris house thus is its concluding point, the height of style and proud ownership. As before and after photographs,

these were intended as a visualization of the progress of a race and the potential of emancipation. But there is also in this pairing the tacit acknowledgment of the difficulties of life for Black Charlotteans. While Sallie Davidson and her house are part of “the original type,” it is her enduring presence in the present that allows her to be photographed here. These are aspirational before and after portraits of a sort, but in their pairing they represented an African American Charlotte focused on a way forward, but still restrained by backward facing forces outside of their control. The procession that the book represents, then, is itself an incomplete one, perhaps more symbolic than literal. It contains within it an implied geographic processional, but without a map, and an implied temporal processional with a beginning and end, but a collapse of the temporal space between. But like the parades from which it took its cue, *Colored Charlotte* would serve as an important model for African American life in the city.

Interestingly, the visual materials in *Colored Charlotte* themselves expressed something of a broader shift in visual representations of emancipation, freedom, and progress in Charlotte. In Charlotte and elsewhere, parades and processions were the most common and defining feature of Emancipation Day celebrations from their earliest days. Part of that emphasis certainly has to do with the mostly white newspapers writing about the celebration who tended toward an interest in the sensational. But given the reported numbers that attended this part of the celebrations, as with the reports from celebrants themselves above, this was clearly a central and important part of the observance of Emancipation Day, especially in its early years. By the opening years of the twentieth-century, that slowly began to change. In 1906, one Charlotte paper reported, “it has been the custom to make a demonstration but this year it was decided to simply meet at the court house where all might attend and hear the meaning of the occasion defined.”¹⁰¹ That year’s

¹⁰¹ Emancipation Day,” *Charlotte News* (NC), January 1, 1906.

ceremonies took on a decidedly high tone, with a performance from the city's "Hayden Choral Society" and a speech from a local attorney.¹⁰² This departure from tradition and the impressive, unbridled visual spectacle of a parade was one reflected in *Colored Charlotte* and one that would mark many of the future manifestations of public culture for African Americans in Charlotte, across North Carolina, and around the South. Public celebrations would become more recognizably performative and often restricted by a combination of legal mandates and white action, the most visible of which were the mob lynching celebrations that occurred in many of these same landscapes during this period.

White laws sometimes dictated the end of Black celebrations; white culture and custom often dictated its extent. Lynching then was a kind of shadow of emancipation celebrations, a festival that sought to mandate order of a particular kind and create a community around the blank cultural construction of whiteness. It was premised not on a celebration of whiteness, but on a condemnation of Blackness and its perceived excesses (of desire, of freedom.) Without belaboring the comparison, they were also both celebratory forms that relied on powerful visual symbols, particularly of assembled crowds, for their impact. The mass mobs of lynching then were certainly on the minds of African American celebrants as they gathered in mass on city streets or convened in county courthouses. And thought it might have served mostly as the unstated threat in the crowd, the shadow celebration against which their own was premised, sometimes the two did overlap if only rhetorically. In Raleigh, at least one year's resolutions called for "hostility to lynch law," a sentiment echoed in the resolutions of other cities too.¹⁰³ And in 1907, Charlotte's resolutions condemned Theodore Roosevelt's part in the Brownsville

¹⁰² Emancipation Day," *Charlotte News* (NC), January 1, 1906.

¹⁰³ "Jim Young Eats Dirt," *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), January 3, 1896.

Affair as “an executive lynching...which shocks the moral sense of the country.”¹⁰⁴ This metaphor surely had more potency in an era when public lynching was an even more visible threat than in our own. These mentions, both metaphorical and actual, suggest the weight of lynching’s impact on even celebratory occasions, as Black southerners tried and failed to escape its hovering omnipresence. It was a threat that Emancipation Day committees and organizations tried to counteract with visual rhetoric designed to leave a lasting impact on white and Black audiences alike. This highly visual presence would continue to be the hallmark of Black celebratory culture in the South for many years following, but celebrations too would always be planned and executed with constant knowledge of the threat of white violence and the peculiar pleasures seemingly afforded by Black suffering.

Lynching as White Festival

Lynching, in Jacqueline Goldsby’s words, was “a networked, systemic phenomenon.”¹⁰⁵ Goldsby’s language suggests the possibilities of understanding lynching as a recognizable and translatable form, one whose participants across region and nation were connected by a routinized vocabulary and a distinct set of practices. The effect of this system, as Amy Louise Wood suggests, was to create “an idealized community” of white citizens whose sense of racial superiority was enforced and emboldened by the act of lynching.¹⁰⁶ In short, lynchings functioned in part as a way of building white community and white commonality through a celebration of the supposed virtues of whiteness and the supposed deficiencies of

¹⁰⁴ “Negroes Celebrate,” *Charlotte Observer* (NC), January 2, 1907.

¹⁰⁵ Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006): 5.

¹⁰⁶ Amy Louise Wood *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 189-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009): 14

Blackness. Indeed, anti-lynching advocates like Ida B. Wells understood lynching less as a perversion of justice, but rather as an outgrowth of social and economic success and visibility. Reflecting on her career exposing lynchings, Wells wrote that lynching was “an excuse to get rid of Negroes who were acquiring wealth and property and thus keep the race terrorized and ‘keep the nigger down.’”¹⁰⁷ Stewart Tolnay and E.M. Beck, whose book title memorably refers to lynchings as “a festival of violence,” themselves suggest that lynching was something of a unifying force, the result of a white community feeling “threatened in some way, economically, politically, or socially.”¹⁰⁸ Rasul Mowatt takes the supposition of their title further, suggesting that we can read “lynching as leisure.” To do so, is to see the importance of social interaction in a lynching, both before and after its commission. Lynching was a “theater of the fantastic and a manifestation of the spectacular,” an occasion for both performing and experiencing a sociality built along racial lines.¹⁰⁹ Each individual lynching was an event whose immediate impact on both the white and African American communities was hardly lessened by the passage of time or of geographic spread. These were spectacles calculated to enter into both white and Black memory, events that one newspaper editor remarked, “carries with it a grewsomeness which Negroes for fifty miles around do not forget for a generation.”¹¹⁰ Though little research has been on “people’s lived experiences of this violence scattered across archival holdings,” it seems

¹⁰⁷ Wells-Barnett, Ida B. *Crusade for Justice : the Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.

¹⁰⁸ Stewart Emory Tolnay and E.M.Beck, *A Festival of Violence : an Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995:)3.

¹⁰⁹ Rasul Mowatt, “The King of the Damned: reading lynching as leisure,” *Policy Futures in Education* Volume 7, no. 2 (2009):191.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Michael A. Trotti, “The Scaffold’s Revival: Race and Public Execution in the South,” *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 1 (September 1, 2011), 108.

doubtless that each individual lynching was intended to be broadcast and remembered across both space and time.¹¹¹

Each lynching was one calculated to have both an immediate and long-term impact on the communal memory of both white and Black populations. There are closer analogs in twentieth-century white culture, each themselves part of the white southern nationalism then emergent in the region. Confederate Memorial Days or even Independence Days were each sites of celebration that would admit overtly white supremacist sentiment. I have chosen to contextualize the spectacle of lynching within the framework of celebratory culture in large part because of its intentional excess of meaning. Lynchings sought to assert, paradoxically, a sense of control that we can read as both order and disorder. And as I mentioned above, lynchings were both premised on accusations of Black excess and were themselves excessive, obliterative of all other contexts. I choose to remark on lynching here then not because it undoes the rhetorical violence of the act, but because it likewise looks to the margins of the ongoing construction of whiteness and puts the savage, disorderly impulse of the lynch mob at the center of the cultures of whiteness in the South.¹¹² It speaks to the ways in which white people in the South were both inventing whiteness and Blackness, constructing a binary based solely on their own perceptions and definitions. I have written above about the countervailing measures of self-defined Blackness: lynchings then reveal the construction of an imagined Blackness that southern whites used to justify the creation of a society based on white supremacy.

¹¹¹ Kidada E. Williams, "Regarding the Aftermaths of Lynching," *The Journal of American History* 101, no. 3 (December 2014): 857.

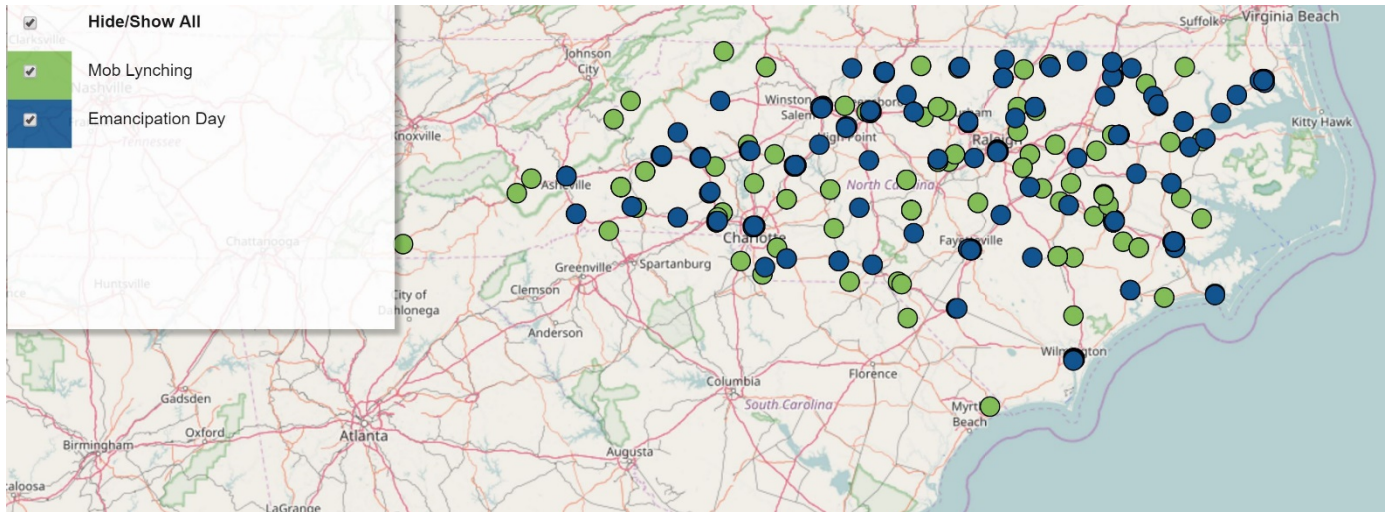
¹¹² This is a rearticulation of Grace Elizabeth Hale's *Making Whiteness*, particularly her chapter on lynchings. See Grace Hale "Deadly Amusements: Spectacle Lynchings and the Contradictions of Segregation as Culture" in *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. (New York: Random House, 1998:)199-240.

The language of excess came to characterize African American people in the discourse around lynching. We see troubling characterizations of Black pleasure amid hints of the abject terror that these events inspired in entire African American communities. Black pleasure, as these white-controlled sources wrote about it, was animalistic and bodily, based on deriving enjoyment from the suffering of white people, especially young women. Indeed, the same characterizations of excess and lack of control define other portrayals of African American culture in this time period. Kyla Wazana Tompkins, in her book about the racial politics of food and ingestion in the nineteenth-century, writes about the way that this stereotypical characterization of Black people enjoying everything in a kind of uncontrollable excess also led to forms of bodily resistance that capitalized on those racist presumptions. Tompkins suggests that “Black subjects often resist through the trope of excess...in many of these moments when racism appears to produce its most abject representations...Black characters and subjects inhabit the limits of language and aesthetic form, performing moments of spectacular visibility.”¹¹³ From abjection arose a creativity that repurposed the very forms of spectacle and celebration that formed the basis of racist assumption.

Understanding the racist and sensationalist portrayals of Black pleasure, of which lynching was the most extreme, offers insight into the dominant cultures against which African American public cultures of celebration and pleasure arose. We can see, in the temporal and geographic space of North Carolina and the broader South, an overlap between two public cultures. As I have suggested above, much of the relationship between the two came from their

¹¹³ Tompkins, Kyla Wazana. *Racial Indigestion : Eating Bodies in the Nineteenth-century*. (New York: New York University Press, 2012 :) 9.

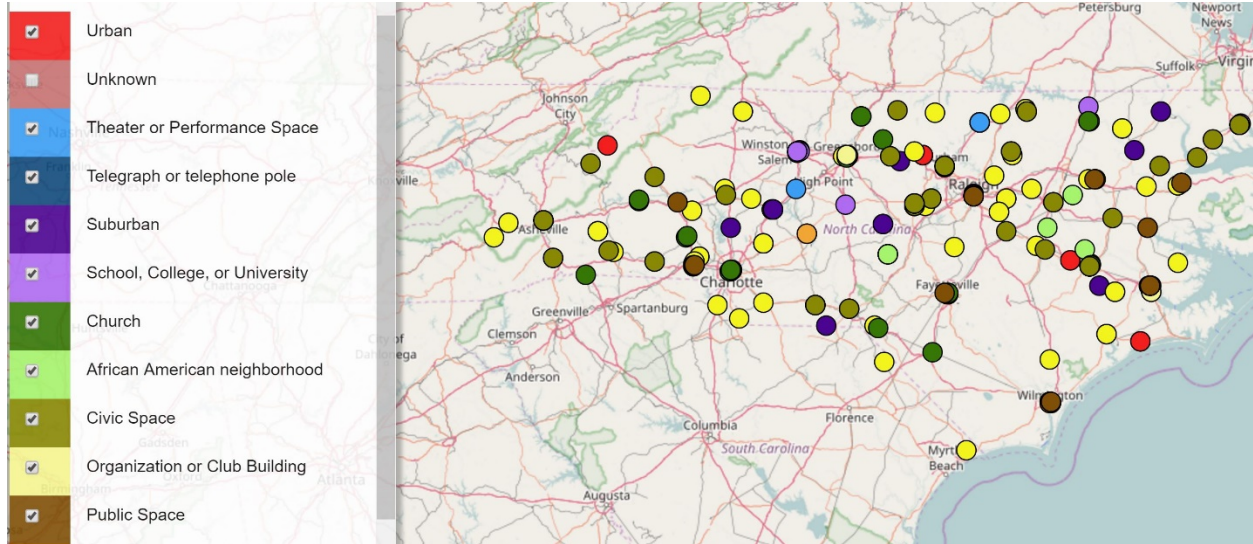
functioning as representations of competing cultures, and the ways that each was materialized in the places of their enactment. We can see, in the map linked here (<http://elijahgaddis.com/dhp-projects/emancipation-day-in-nc/>) the way that Emancipation Day celebrations and lynchings were each part of the landscape of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century North Carolina.



Spatial Overlap, Emancipation Day Celebrations and Mob Lynchings

Not directly correlative in a temporal sense, the memories of lynchings and Emancipation Days nonetheless lived alongside one another in the landscapes of North Carolina. In this map, I have attempted to compare the overlaps in the types of spaces in which both of these events occurred. The illustrations below suggest both the proximity of many of these events, and the overlapping spatial categorizations into which they fall. While there is no single overwhelming type of space in which both of these events occurred, a large percentage were undertaken in both civic and

public spaces.



Types of Space

I use civic space here to refer to the specific localities of governmental and political life, the courthouses, courthouse yards, schools, and other places owned in common by all citizens of a town or county. Public space, as I have defined it is broader, the kinds of places (theaters, clubhouses, streets,) that rely on the participation of a large number of people for their existence. That Emancipation Days would take place primarily in these places is unsurprising, given the importance of broadcasting their particular message. That lynchings likewise occurred in many of these same spaces confirms their fundamentally public aim, and the way they likewise relied on both public and civic authority as a form of legitimation.

To really understand the impact of these events, though, is to extend them beyond the particular day of their occurrence and into the months and years that followed. If the newspaper editor cited above was correct, lynchings were calculated to impact at least two generations, to become a part of the sense of place of particular communities. Certainly that was the case for white people, who continued to revel in the details of individual lynchings, sometimes for generations. Accordingly, I want to conclude by tracing the memory of one particular lynching in

North Carolina, that of Tom Johnson and Joe Kizer in May 1898. Following Saidya Hartman's lead, I have chosen not to reproduce the grisly details of this lynching, ones that "reinforce the spectacular character of Black suffering."¹¹⁴ Instead, I examine this lynching and its aftermath as a form of communal celebration, and think about the ways in which its intergenerational persistence speaks to the nature of white communal memory.

The point of a mob is to assemble together individuals with different personal motivations toward a common goal.¹¹⁵ And while the actual work of death is certainly an integral part of lynching, the act of witnessing and the spectacle of hundreds or thousands in attendance constituted a main part of the event as well. Amy Wood has suggested as much, writing that individual lynchings "succeeded in creating and maintaining white domination not only because African Americans were its targets but also because white southerners were its spectators."¹¹⁶ The line between participation and observation was blurred and the lynching became an exercise in creating a unified white community.

The lynching of Joe Kizer and Tom Johnson brought massive crowds to the rural outskirts of Concord, North Carolina. Newspaper accounts in a variety of local papers took their cue from the initial, lengthy profile published in the *Daily Concord Standard* on May 31, 1898. The same day that the initial article in the *Standard* came out, crowds of people descended

¹¹⁴ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection : Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997:) 3.

¹¹⁵ On the psychology of crowds and the distinction between mob and crowd in historical context, I am relying on Stephen Reicher and Clifford Stott, "Becoming the Subjects of History: An Outline of the Psychology of Crowds," in *The Street as Stage : Protest Marches and Public Rallies since the Nineteenth-century*, ed. Matthias Reiss (Oxford ;New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 25–40 and E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth-century," *Past and Present* 50.1, (1971):76-136.

¹¹⁶ Amy Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle : Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009),2.

on the site of the lynching. Undoubtedly many of them came there after having been in the mob themselves or having heard firsthand accounts. Even with a widely circulated daily newspaper, this news was far more likely to spread from person to person, especially in a town where perhaps fully twenty percent of the population was in attendance the night of the lynching. The motivations of the people who came to the lynching site the day after were undoubtedly complex. The lynching provided the context, but its aftermath became a festive occasion, a holiday in the middle of the workweek.¹¹⁷ Certainly it was commonplace for lynchings like this one to serve as outlets for community fun. Walter White, an anti-lynching advocate and longtime head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), mentions a young white girl in Florida who fondly recalled a lynching “as though the memory were of Christmas morning or the circus.”¹¹⁸ The accounts from Concord are not quite so explicit or so numerous, perhaps because of the expectation that so many people in the reading area had visited the site. The *Daily Concord Standard* reported “souvenirs of different kinds were taken by the crowd, such as pieces of the ropes, limbs, parts of the clothing, etc.”¹¹⁹ The next day the paper reported additional details: someone had made off with Tom Johnson’s brand new pair of suspenders as a souvenir.¹²⁰ And almost two weeks after the lynching, the obsession with their

¹¹⁷ Crucially important to understanding this and many others lynchings is the tension between industrialization and rural life. The strict regulations of the mill or store did not easily allow workers to take time to go and view the site of a lynching, while the rhythms of farming and other like jobs more easily accommodated these sorts of interruptions. This suggests, in part, the symbolic importance of exceeding the limits of the township, and of making the lynching a rural event. To make it a part of rural life was to stress its anti-modern properties even though, as Amy Louise Wood notes, lynchings were a demonstrably modern activity.

¹¹⁸ White, Walter. *Rope & Faggot: a Biography of Judge Lynch*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001, 3.

¹¹⁹ “A Day of Tragedy,” *Daily Concord Standard* (NC), May 30, 1898

¹²⁰ “It’s All Over,” *Daily Concord Standard* (NC), May 31, 1898.

clothes remained newsworthy enough for the discovery of “Joe Kizer’s overalls and Tom Johnson’s pants” to make the third page of the *Standard* and for the farmer who found them to be advised to hold on to them as a valuable commodity.¹²¹ The next week, the *Concord Times* reported that Zeb Walter “took one cap, a piece of rope, and a rag of the garments” from Kizer and Johnson. He had put them under lock in his corn granary, the site of some past thefts, both as an apparently secure place and seemingly as a kind of talisman against more stolen grain.¹²² Clearly, for Walter and other Cabarrus residents, these objects had purpose beyond mere exchange potential.

The value of these objects, as opposed to the many other things that people collected from the lynching site, was their clear proximity to the victims. Even the bodies themselves were turned into mementos of a sort, though there were no explicit reports of people taking body parts as souvenirs as in some other southern lynchings. Though perhaps no one in the crowds at the lynching site was bold enough to obtain a toe, ear, or another of the most grisly of souvenirs, they were clearly content to take for themselves anything intimately associated with Kizer or Johnson. The caps on their heads, rope against their neck, clothes on their body, all potentially held some remnants of blood or sweat, stand-ins for some kind of essential essence that could not otherwise be named. Harvey Young is among the few scholars to address the topic of lynching souvenirs and the only to deal with the theft of body parts as a particularly intimate form of memory making. He suggests that the souvenir, and particularly the souvenir related to the lynched body, not only fixes the past as a representation in the present, “it also creates the possibility of historical revision in that the narrative itself determines the meaning of the

¹²¹ “Joe Kizer’s Overalls and Tom Johnson’s Pants Found,” *Daily Concord Standard* (NC), June 9, 1898

¹²² “A No. 5 Citizen Insane--Other Items from That Township,” *The Concord Times* (NC), June 16, 1898.

keepsake.”¹²³ Young reflects only minimally on the particular significance of the bodily or bodily-associated lynching souvenir and its particular practice and performance as a memory object. We could speculate, as Young does, about their various uses as souvenir, fetish, or performance remain, or perhaps even give the objects the reliquary status that seems befitting given the mania and fervor over their acquisition and preservation. I am interested though in how these mementos were used in bodily practice, and how they came to accumulate differing value and meaning after they were collected and as they were *used*. Susan Stewart, writing about the souvenir, suggests that these are objects that function “metonymically, as object to event/experience.”¹²⁴ In her formulation then, souvenirs represent not just a particular instance but a “whole other set of referents,” that range from the very particular to the nearly universal. Stewart locates the souvenir in registers of lack and desire, a “context of origin through a language of longing...an object arising not out of need or use value,” but from a place of the irreplaceable and unrepeatable: nostalgia.¹²⁵

But nostalgia alone does not necessarily account entirely for the processes of memory. Young writes of the potential for historical revisionism in these individual objects, a process that we might define even more simply as “use.”¹²⁶ Take, for instance, an object that emerged from

¹²³ Harvey Young, “The Black Body as Souvenir in American Lynching,” *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 642.

¹²⁴ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, 1st paperback ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993):136.

¹²⁵ Stewart uses the example of a corsage, kept as a souvenir, which can remind one of the dress one wore, the dance one attended in the dress, the summer that dance occurred in, and ever less specific things ranging into abstractions like love, or, romance. Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, 135.

¹²⁶ This is similar to Igor Kopytoff’s argument about the lifecycle of an object, though not so easily defined through the market forces that are his chief concern. See Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64–94.

the Tom Johnson and Joe Kizer lynchings. Ten months after the lynching, a brief story in the *Daily Concord Standard* related that the dogwood tree that had been used to hang the two men had been cut down. While the newspaper does not specify why the tree was felled, the news that “several persons have limbs of the tree” suggested that it was another casualty of souvenir hunters still looking for remnants. The limbs were less important than the body of the tree, out of which an unnamed man was considering “making some walking canes.”¹²⁷ Even the potential existence of these canes, at once utilitarian and showy, suggests the evolution in the process of memory and the ways in which specific objects came to be overlaid with both particular and larger symbolic meanings. Their association with the lynching might give way to the symbolic associations with dogwood trees or with the wood’s use as a cane, but this and a range of other objects helped preserve the furious pleasure of the Kizer and Johnson lynching.

The longest-lived memory of the lynching, and perhaps the most public, was a ballad composed not long after the murders. “Death of Emma Hartsell” spread throughout the North Carolina piedmont and at least as far as Virginia, and was still being sung well into the middle of the twentieth-century. The ballad, its title notwithstanding, is a sentimental and savage telling not of Emma Hartsell’s life or death, but of the subsequent murder of Tom Johnson and Joe Kizer. In eleven verses, we hear a fairly straightforward recounting of the apprehension of “Tom and Joe” which adheres quite closely to the *Standard* article of May 30. The ballad is mostly a zoomed-out account that looks at the event through a lens of melodrama. Preserved amid a story that mostly substitutes emotion for narrative, there are a few details of time and place that reveal the ballad’s origins in newspaper accounts, and a moral about the perils of African American men that suggests the most enduring memory of the lynching.

¹²⁷ “The Dogwood Tree Is Demolished,” *Daily Concord Standard* (NC), March 2, 1899

Bruce E. Baker, in his scholarship on lynching ballads, has pointed out that Joe Kizer's request for a drink in the penultimate stanza of the ballad is probably a preservation of the name of the place the men were lynched, Coldwater.¹²⁸ Small details like this persist throughout the ballad. In the fifth stanza, just midway through the ballad, the mob had "hung them to a dogwood tree." This is the most explicit evocation of the setting in the ballad, and suggests how long-lived and integral to the story the dogwood tree was. Even as broader details were lost, the dogwood tree persisted, doubtlessly because it was so full of association and symbolic value. Even still, these specific details about the lynching itself are far less integral to the ballad than the message that it aims to impart to the listener. From stanza five on, the ballad is effectively a retroactive assessment of the lynching and its lessons for the vice and evil allegedly inherent in Black people. It's certainly likely that these were stanzas added onto the ballad as it was spread far from its geographic and temporal origins. In that case, it's telling that the things deemed most worthy of preservation and clarification were not the details of the murder the title references or the murders of Kizer and Johnson, but the general atmosphere in the days after the lynching and the putative moral that observers were meant to take from it. This is a case of a white characterization of Black pleasure, a condemnation of what the song's narrator reads as a particular kind of excess that his listeners will understand as part of their own stereotypical construction of Blackness.

In this reading, the most important lines are the final ones of the ballad. The last stanza reads, in full:

And one thing more my song does lack:

¹²⁸ Bruce Baker "North Carolina Lynching Ballads," *Under Sentence of Death : Lynching in the South*, W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997:219-246.

I forgot to say the men were black;
Her friends and neighbors will say the same.
And Emma Hartsell was her name.¹²⁹

We can probably assume, as Baker does, that these lines were added on sometime after the song had been performed enough to be far-removed in time from the lynching. This indicates that the memory of this lynching was increasingly being instilled into a message that stressed the inhumanity and evil (not even criminality) in Black people. The structure here suggests as much, with the first three lines all acting as separate clauses of one sentence. The final of these three lines brings in the entire community, “her friends and neighbors,” as participants in this identification. By extension, the theoretically white listening audience would have found identity within this community and with its condemnation of both these two men specifically and, increasingly as the ballad was divorced from its original context, with Blackness more generally.¹³⁰ Hearing, and singing, the song was a way of performing memory and evoking emotion, bringing about the pleasure of melancholy that is the hallmark of the ballad. Though it was without the savage ritual murder that was at the center of the lynching, the performance of the ballad thus sought much of the same sociality of racial solidarity, an implicit celebration of whiteness through a condemnation of Blackness.

The ballad resurfaced in the 1960s when it was published and recorded as part of a career retrospective from the old time fiddler J.E. Mainer. Bruce Baker has written about this release and points out that its translation to the 1960s reveals both its persistence and an ongoing desire

¹²⁹ “The Death of Emma Hartsell,” *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*, Volume 2 (Durham:Duke University Press:) 658.

¹³⁰ I am relying here on recent research on the affective experience of listening to music, particularly Lila Ellen Gray’s work on “structures of listening” which reformulates Arjun Appadurai’s theory of the performative articulation of Raymond Williams’s “structures of feeling,” to account for the means by which people hear, enjoy, and make emotional meaning from listening to music. Gray, Lila Ellen. *Fado Resounding : Affective Politics and Urban Life*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013, 43-45.

for ballads that celebrated African American death. Baker writes that “Mainer had been a professional musician too long to misapprehend the tastes of his audience” and the re-emergence of “Emma Hartsell” in 1967 signified a public hatred of the provisions of the Civil Rights and Voting Acts and the increasing number of legal and civil rights at least nominally afforded to African American people. That there would be a positive, or even indifferent response to this sort of material in the 1960s, shows “Mainer and his audience [reaching] for a familiar cultural form to address a contemporary issue.”¹³¹ Baker is right, but he does fail in at least one way to account for the audience about which Mainer was so savvy. By 1967 the sort of old time stringband music that Mainer and his bands played had long since given way in popularity to commercial country music. While Mainer may well have had maintained some portion of the fan base he had gained playing in the mill villages around Cabarrus County, his most ready audience at the time were the young revivalists interested in tracing the roots of old time music from the industrial mill centers of the region back to their mountain roots. Mainer, true to Baker’s assessment of his professional savvy, knew this and sought to capitalize on it in the late 1960s by producing new recordings and selling a songbook that acted as a retrospective of his long career. John Cohen, who would become one of the most prominent members of this generation as both a musician and scholar, provided the brief opening introduction for Mainer’s songbook collection, *Songs as Sung by J.E. Mainer and his Mountaineers*. While Cohen and others of his generation surely did not endorse Mainer’s preservation and co-optation of the old ballad, they did not condemn it either.

¹³¹ Bruce E. Baker, “Up Beat Down South: ‘The Death of Emma Hartsell,’” *Southern Cultures* 9, no. 1 (2003): 90.

Aside from his flowery prose, evoking familiar tropes of authenticity in praise of Mainer's old time sound, Cohen also writes practically about the sale of his records. Apparently included as a special add-on to each order was "another 45 rpm, with 'The Murder of Emma Hartsell' on it." That record was particularly valuable, in Cohen's words, because with it "you will receive a picture of the hanging of Tom and Joe, the two negroes who killed her."¹³² That same picture is included later in Mainer's songbook on the page before a reprint of his, slightly modified, version of "Emma Hartsell." The photograph, like others of its type, is almost unbearably difficult to look at. Its caption is accompanied by Mainer's claim to writing credit for the folk song and quick commentary on the situation with the words "crime doesn't pay."¹³³ The lynching picture was never published but probably circulated in the community for years afterward as a postcard or other easily reproduced commodity. Mainer himself was not born until three months after Emma Hartsell's death and only moved to Concord in the 1920s, so clearly both the ballad and the photograph were still in circulation a generation after the lynching. Here then we see reprinted two forms of memory—the one a public, almost moralistic recounting of the lynching of Tom Johnson and Joe Kizer, the other a semi-private glorification that suggests the fury and fun the event represented apart from its publicly-stated purpose and meaning.

Together, they suggest that while the history of this lynching and its meaning were not preserved intact, they persisted as forms of entertainment and interest, however prurient or out of step with the times. Mainer's repurposing of memories of the lynching here suggests that it continued to hold relevance for him and for his audience. That his audience now included not

¹³² J.E. Mainer, *Songs as Sung by J.E. Mainer and His Mountaineers* (Concord, NC: Self-published, 1967):1.

¹³³ J.E. Mainer, *Songs as Sung by J.E. Mainer*, 29.

only fellow workers and townspeople but also young fans from far-flung locales outside the region, suggests a universality for both his music and the message of “The Murder of Emma Hartsell.”¹³⁴ So while members of this new audience certainly did not hear in the ballad the same message it broadcast a generation or two earlier, they did embrace Mainer as a symbol of authenticity. If part of that embrace meant overlooking his celebration of racial violence then we can see this as an excellent example of historical silencing and complicity at work.

Embedded in all of these sources then is the specter, but not the presence, of African American people. After the lynching of Joe Kizer and Tom Johnson, one local paper reported that “the colored people, both in town and country, with one or two exceptions, agree with all the white people that the punishment was deserved.”¹³⁵ This is an invocation of the Black community as a whole, an implied consensus for the entire African American population just as powerful as the one likewise created for the white community.¹³⁶ There’s a way in which the visibility, and implied commonality of purpose, of lynching obscures other forms of communal organization. The culture of lynching for African Americans, at least the majority of African Americans who were not actively or famously campaigning against lynching, was a reactive one. Often created rhetorically through newspaper accounts that saw African American consensus or disapprobation of a lynching as proof of its necessity, the perception of a lynching became an

¹³⁴ In addition to the introduction to the book written by Cohen, there is a 2 page afterword by Chris Strachwitz, the German-born promoter and record executive already famous in 1967 for founding Arhoolie Records. This might prompt a broader discussion about the ways in which folkloric authenticity allowed what were nominally progressive young people involved in the 1960s folk revival to adopt retrograde politics, though that’s not my purpose her

¹³⁵ A Horrible Crime! One of the Most Revolting in the History of Black Deeds!,” *Concord Times* (NC), June 2, 1898.

¹³⁶ I use both of these terms advisedly and as a relic of a still all too common perception that African American people all somehow fall into a category called “the Black community.” Here and throughout, I am interested in interrogating that and other pieces of rhetoric which imply a commonality of purpose, regardless of gender or class, across an entire race.

important marker of community consensus in both white and African American populations. This kind of public culture of response was prominent enough that it masked the emergence of other public cultures. Very often scholarship on African American public cultures has focused on the entwined struggles for respectability, agency, and recognition. While these remain integral parts of the development of African American culture, especially in the period roughly from the end of Reconstruction to World War II, they also foreclose understanding of the many other and varied public cultures emerging in this period. Lynching as a form sought—and still seeks—to obliterate and eradicate, to function as an erasure of all but its own immediate context. Even still, it existed within a broader constellation of celebratory forms that served as functional counterpoints to its ghastly obliteration of social context. Emancipation Day was perhaps chief among these celebratory counterpoints, but it was only the most spectacular manifestation of public cultures that saw African Americans moving into and around the spaces of the emergent African American South.

Chapter 2. Jonkonnu: Processional Culture and Black Mobility in Maggie Washington's Wilmington

In the early hours of December 27, 1911, Maggie Washington went to jail still dressed in her parading costume. She was officially charged with illegally processing through the streets of Wilmington, North Carolina. The details of her arrest, though, were peculiar. Police picked her up at an intersection that did not appear on any maps, the next morning's newspaper reported that she was "masquerading in men's attire," and she was arrested for an unspecific violation of city law.¹³⁷ With uncharacteristic detail, the article described Maggie Washington as "colored, of unsavory reputation" and went on to explain her arrest as a result of being "so far from her base of operations" and with "no permit to masquerade."¹³⁸ Maggie Washington was arrested and convicted for a violation of civic and spatial order.

Five years earlier, twelve-year-old Henry McKoy likewise took to the streets at Christmas time dressed in outrageous garb. McKoy was white, the son of a local attorney. He was not arrested but celebrated for his masquerade, one that saw him don the blackface caricature of a Mammy. In costume, he paraded from house to house across Wilmington, giggling and laughing with his friends as they filled themselves on rich food and drink. He ended

¹³⁷ "Woman Was Masquerading," *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), December 28, 1911.

¹³⁸ "Woman Was Masquerading."

his night safely back at home on 3rd Street, a half mile away from the prison where Maggie Washington would spend her holiday evening five years later.¹³⁹

Both Maggie Washington and Henry McKoy were on the streets of Wilmington, North Carolina to take part in a holiday processional tradition called Jonkonnu. Jonkonnu began as a carnivalesque practice during the period of slavery and transitioned to the streets of Wilmington and other North Carolina cities in the postbellum era. By the early twentieth-century the practice was appropriated by white men and boys. That act of appropriation was one in a long line of actions, both sudden and gradual, that attempted to reconfigure Wilmington as a place hostile to African American people. The life of Maggie Washington, and particularly her performance of Jonkonnu, is a story of the way that Black people navigated a city increasingly defined by spatial and infrastructural white supremacy. In the following pages, I tell one small part of Maggie Washington's life, centered around the way she moved through the streets of Wilmington in celebration. This chapter is structured around the procession she made on the night of her arrest, putting her movement into the context of a generation of social, cultural, and spatial upheaval in Wilmington, and revealing the status of African American mobility in the Southern city. In the overlaps between the spectacular mobility of procession and the more quotidian mobility of walking, we can see African American people both enlivened by the promises of the city and coping with its structures of exclusion and discrimination. This is a story told in the literal and metaphorical space between Henry McKoy and Maggie Washington, hewing toward people and places made marginal in an attempt to explain the material and spatial manifestations of power in early twentieth-century North Carolina.

¹³⁹ *Wilmington, N.C. Directory, 1905*, (Richmond, VA: Hill Directory Co., 1905), 211, 239.

Origins and Migration

The headline in the *Morning Star* the day after Maggie Washington's arrest was immediately comprehensible to its readers: "Woman Was Masquerading." To residents of early twentieth-century Wilmington, and of much of North Carolina, this was a clear reference to the performance of Jonkonnu. For Maggie Washington, as for other Black Wilmingtonians, Jonkonnu was an ancestral holiday tradition. This was almost certainly not the first time she marched through the streets of Wilmington, but because of her arrest she is one of the few performers whose name survives from what was once one of the most prominent holiday celebrations in North Carolina.

Jonkonnu was an annual masked procession that revolved around the Christmas holidays. Its origins in the colonial spaces of the Caribbean are well documented.¹⁴⁰ Less clear is how it arrived in North America, or why it appeared almost exclusively in North Carolina. Though the practice was observed by writers in North Carolina by the 1820s, the most complete accountings of the performance come from the late 1840s and early 1850s.¹⁴¹ Around the same time that Harriet Jacobs recalled seeing the yearly tradition in coastal Edenton, North Carolina, the white physician Edward Warren left a detailed description of the festival at a Washington County plantation. During his sojourn at Somerset plantation in the late 1840s, Warren remembered seeing two stock figures—the Fancy Man and the Ragman—dressed in elaborate

¹⁴⁰ See, for instance, Frederic Cassidy, *Jamaica Talk : Three Hundred Years of the English Language in Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2007,) who reviews much of the historical literature on Jonkonnu, particularly the origins of the practice and its linguistic meaning.

¹⁴¹ Elizabeth A. Fenn "A Perfect Equality Seemed to Reign: Slave Society and Jonkonnu" *The North Carolina Historical Review* LXV, number 2 (April 1988,) 132.

costume and leading “a motley crowd of all ages, dressed in their ordinary working clothes.”¹⁴² This crowd of people sang and danced in procession to the beat of drums. They moved about the plantation, going from the front door of the enslaver’s house to “the young gentlemen’s colony, the tutor’s rooms, the parson’s study, the overseer’s house,” demanding and receiving monetary tribute at each stop.¹⁴³ Here, as elsewhere, this performance was repeated every year, usually on the second day of Christmas, December 26, and typically to a white audience. These were audiences appreciative of Jonkonnu (or John O’Cooner as it was often called¹⁴⁴,) but largely ignorant of its meaning. Jonkonnu in the antebellum South was a celebration to be sure, but it was also a mocking performance of mannered white mastery. The characters adopted by enslaved people poked fun at the airs put on by slaveholders pretending to patriarchal control and cultured manners. They satirized those performed selves even as they extracted money, food, and drink from these men. This was the carnivalesque enacted: a single night of inverted power that represented a vision of a more equal world.

By Maggie Washington’s time, Jonkonnu had transitioned, along with a significant portion of the African American population, to the growing urban centers of North Carolina. As was the case with other African American celebrations, it took on new valences in the postbellum South. It often came to serve as a celebration of freedom and the new licenses of post-Emancipation life, as Winslow Homer’s unnamed figure in *Dressing for the Carnival*

¹⁴² Edward Warren, *A Doctor’s Experiences in Three Continents* (Baltimore, Md.: Cushings & Bailey, 1885), 201.

¹⁴³ Warren, *A Doctor’s Experiences in Three Continents*, 202-203.

¹⁴⁴ “Anne Cameron to Paul Cameron,” January 8, 1848, Cameron Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

suggests. In Homer's paintings we see a rare depiction of postbellum Jonkonnu costume, clearly pieced together with immense pride and judging by the flag-toting children trailing, part of a freedom celebration.¹⁴⁵ Newspaper accounts throughout North Carolina—mostly on the coast and coastal plain but also as far west as Chatham County, 160 miles inland from Wilmington—also reported performances of Jonkonnu in their cities.¹⁴⁶ Apart from the spatial context of the



Winslow Homer "Dressing for the Carnival"

plantation, Jonkonnu became an act of processional culture. In Wilmington, it emerged as part of a rich culture of public celebration practiced by African Americans. As a parade, it became a practice of spatial navigation, a once-yearly chance to move through the city streets apart from the strictures of everyday life. Though the specific context of Jonkonnu and other processional movements throughout Wilmington was rooted in the specifics of African American life there, it

¹⁴⁵ Winslow Homer, *Dressing for the Carnival*, Oil on canvas, 1877, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <http://library.artstor.org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/library/secure/ViewImages?id=%2FDFMaiMuOztdLS04ezl4R3koWg%3D%3D&userId=gDNHeDw%3D&zoomparams=&fs=true>.

¹⁴⁶ "Christmas Items," *The Chatham Record* (Pittsboro, NC), December 28, 1882.

also built on a long history of city planning and design and vernacular forms of navigation through those spaces.

The Origins of Processual Movement in Urban Space

Processional culture and the development of the modern city go hand-in-hand. Rooted in some of the very earliest conceptions of cities and city design were structures designed to order and control, to manipulate both movement and perception. This process is what Michel de Certeau calls “the transformation of the urban fact into the concept of a city.”¹⁴⁷ Translated into an American idiom across many centuries, these conceptual ideas had become spatial realities in the early twentieth-century American city. Nowhere was this spatial order, its exclusions and segregations, more prominent than in the urban South. Indeed, the Southern city was one undergoing a transformation into strict, racialized segregation.¹⁴⁸ Wilmington had already arrived at that status by force: the 1898 reactionary coup there led to the direct expulsion of thousands of Black citizens, displacement of many more to other parts of the city, and a severe erosion of its chief Black neighborhood.¹⁴⁹ So African Americans proceeding through the city, whether in celebratory parade or everyday tasks, were constantly moving across color lines and established racist order.

¹⁴⁷Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 94.

¹⁴⁸ See Thomas Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City : Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), for an accounting of the way that Southern urbanization reified structural inequalities and introduced strict segregation to cities that had been racially mixed.

¹⁴⁹ LeRae Umfleet, *1898 Wilmington Race Riot Report, Draft* (Raleigh, N.C.: Research Branch, Office of Archives and History, N.C. Dept. of Cultural Resources, 2005),33

In concert with even the earliest conception of the city came an understanding and illustrations of how to move through it. This concept of city space and directed movement was born in the ancient Greek concept of the agora and fully realized in the Renaissance design of Rome where lines of sight and movement were carefully directed down avenues toward a series of obelisks.¹⁵⁰ This forced perspectival shift emphasized visibility as the key tool in directing and enforcing proper movement through the city. These principles found their way into the design and fabric of cities throughout the world in the succeeding centuries. In their own way every bit as pernicious as the panoptic viewpoint, this on-the-ground perspective easily allowed for the policing of bodily movement and the suppression of difference. This designed segregation was heightened further by infrastructural developments in the modern city: Better roads, more lights, earlier access to water, sewer, and transit systems. The manifestation of these designed systems in the southern city was one that capitalized on the visual differences of race to make even walking through the city an act of constant surveillance and supervision for Black people.

The watchful eye of the carefully planned city was heightened by the perceived visual distinctions of race and made literal the notion of “passing.” To pass implied that one’s racial phenotype and public presentation were adherent enough to white ideals to avoid scrutiny under all but the most careful inspections. At its simplest, passing was the ability to walk past someone and appear as white. To fail to pass was to arouse scrutiny and judgment even while walking by. This kind of everyday movement was one encoded into the city and parades and civic festivals were its highest expression. During festivals and other seasonal celebrations, grand movement

¹⁵⁰ Edmund Bacon, *Design of Cities*, Rev. ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 136; Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1961), 148-149.

was even more didactically displayed and proscribed through official procession.¹⁵¹ This supreme importance and symbolic significance changed when adapted to an American vernacular. In America, processional cultures and parades became “a varied and popular means of communication,” rather than solely official civic and religious expressions.¹⁵² The experience of participating in a parade could be significantly different from the outward symbolic representation of the parade as a whole. This accounts for personal experience and, crucially, the meaning and perception of parades like these to bystanders and participants for whom the parade’s spectacle and message of consensus was not intended or rang hollow.¹⁵³

Parades and processions are important because they give us a specific context for understanding movement. Though we cannot be entirely certain of the intention of every member of a crowd, we can know the design behind their collective participation. In this sense then,

¹⁵¹ The literature on processional movement in historical perspective is important, though relatively brief. For a review of the origins and importance of parades and processions in ancient Rome see: Jonas Bjørnebye, Simon Malmberg, and Ida Östenberg, eds., *The Moving City : Processions, Passages and Promenades in Ancient Rome* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015). Robert Darnton’s important essay, “A Bourgeois Puts His World in Order,” situates procession at the center of conceptions of the early modern world and introduces the importance of these celebrations as sophisticated expressions of societal order that melded secular and spiritual order in the relationship between the body and the fabric of the city. Robert Darnton, “A Bourgeois Puts His World in Order: The City as Text,” in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 107–44.

¹⁵² Susan Davis, *Parades and Power : Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 3.

¹⁵³ Many scholars have situated parades and processions in the context of early American life. The most important of these works is Susan Davis, *Parades and Power : Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986). See Simon Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street : Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) for an explication of the ways in which these forms of movement became part of political culture. Newman’s work tends to the narrowly political realm of political parties, and lacks any extended discussion of Black political culture. For a discussion of Black political culture and processions in the North, see Shane White, “‘It Was a Proud Day’: African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834,” *The Journal of American History* 81, no. 1 (1994): 13–50. White charts the course of African American parades in the North and New England from the eighteenth-century, and suggests that they were displays intended to broadcast the vision of African Americans as citizens of the New Republic, both to themselves and to white observers. White compares these celebrations to their analogous performances in the plantation South, which he regards as principally aimed at appeasing enslavers.

processions allow us a window into both movement and intention. Jonkonnu, as a performance tradition, helps us to understand in part the way that African American people performed movement in Wilmington. Its performance is a window into the way that both spectacular and quotidian movement was perceived by African Americans and received and regulated by the power structure of the city. Its once yearly occurrence opens up an interpretation of the way Black people traversed the city on foot the rest of the year. Parading highlighted the overlaps and disjunctures between celebration and the everyday, between the quotidian mobility of walking and the spectacular mobility of procession.¹⁵⁴

Movement throughout most of the year in Wilmington was principally through walking. Historians of the walking city recount both the way that people moved through cities, and the infrastructural and planning changes that redirected their movement and necessitated its intensification as the fabric of cities grew and changed.¹⁵⁵ For working people then, these technological and geographic shifts simply meant more time spent on foot and fewer

¹⁵⁴ On quotidian versus spectacular movement, see Evrick Brown and Timothy Shortell, "Introduction: Walking in the European City," in *Walking in the European City: Quotidian Mobility and Urban Ethnography* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 1–20.

¹⁵⁵ As with processions, the scholarly study of walking is itself an entire genre of scholarly literature. The majority of this work deals with walking not as a form of quotidian movement, but rather as a kind of ontological exercise. This literature is heir to the Romantic conceptualization of strolling and as such foregrounds the elite, Western subject, even as it begins to account for other people and places. See

Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Viking, 2000) for a long history of walking, as well as a review of much of this literature. Americanist historians and urbanists have also expressed a particular interest in "the walking city," using that concept as a way to help reconstruct both historical urban spaces and their residents. See Sam Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900*. (Harvard University Press, 1962,) for the origins of this school of thought. The influence of Warner and other urbanists like Jane Jacobs and Herbert Gans prompted social historians like Billy G. Smith (Billy Smith, *The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990) and Christine Stansell (Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1986) to explore the way that gender and class inflected movement through the early American city. Neither deal with regionalism, or with African American subjects, though the former was anticipated by W.E.B DuBois's early work *The Philadelphia Negro* (W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: Published for the University, 1899.)

opportunities for the type of community that the layout of the walking city compelled. This anticipates the disjuncture between experience and discourse that was even more prominent in Wilmington and other Southern cities. The city's combination of freedom and licentiousness made a woman's walking a powerful act. If there was a gap between the discourse of rampant and unreserved female sexuality and the actuality of often modest pushing at the boundaries of sexual propriety, the scale and intensity of scrutiny dictated that the discursive predominated. This was even truer of Black women, who certainly could not fail to arouse both official and familial attention while engaged in any sort of movement throughout the streets of a city.¹⁵⁶

Sources that deal with African American mobility, particularly at the level of the individual, are relatively few. In recent years, historians have drawn attention to the larger scales of movement of African Americans, first in fleeing from enslavement during the Civil War and its aftermath in the immediate years that followed.¹⁵⁷ These were the first mass movements in an intergenerational and transtemporal route that saw its greatest manifestation in the "Great Migration" of the twentieth-century. The routes that these migrants took are important, but their study often obscures the means of travel by which hundreds of thousands of Black people made their way in every direction and toward every region in the country. This, as Leslie Schwalm argues, was a significant transformation of the meaning of movement generally and of walking in particular. The idea of the movement of Black bodies¹⁵⁸ during enslavement is one that calls to

¹⁵⁶ Tera W. Hunter, *To "Joy My Freedom": Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 44-73.

¹⁵⁷ For a fairly comprehensive review of much of this historical literature see Nicole Etcheson, "Microhistory and Movement: African American Mobility in the Nineteenth-century," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 3, no. 3 (2013), 392-404.

¹⁵⁸ Though this is a term I generally avoid because it dehumanizes and commodifies, I use it here precisely to evoke the movement of people claimed as possessions.

mind coffles and chains, shambling processions of people bound for sale or for the repurposing of their enforced labor in a new locale and under new conditions. Certainly enslaved people did walk from place to place within cities—we need look no further than Frederick Douglass’ perambulations around Baltimore for evidence of this—but this kind of compelled movement was by far the more frequently documented. In the years immediately following mass emancipations, African Americans “[transformed] movement from an inescapable aspect of oppression to an avenue for liberation.”¹⁵⁹ The liberatory potential of mass movement and migration was recognized then by huge portions of the African American population. But what of the many other hundreds of thousands, who could not or choose not to immediately relocate to cities in places not as recently touched by the polluting hand of slavery? We know, from examining the immediate postbellum demographic shifts in cities like Wilmington, that freed African Americans made their way to nearby cities in droves. We can see these as simply stopping points on the multi-generational movement out of the South as a whole, or zoom in a bit to examine the promise that these cities held even as they were being overtaken again by reactionary white supremacist control. But even this slightly more focused view precludes the view of the city on the ground. How Black people navigated a place once they were there and subject to both its strict dividing lines and distances perhaps greater than those they had experienced, is another question altogether. The obvious answer: walking. But clearly this was an act that required an attendant politics that had to be learned and adhered to, lest the walker end up in dead or in prison.

¹⁵⁹ Leslie Schwalm, *Emancipation’s Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 46.

Michel De Certeau writes that “the ordinary practitioners of the city” are those walking among it, their bodies unconsciously “[following] the thick and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write.”¹⁶⁰ The act of walking, and the paths that walkers trod create “a *migrational* or metaphorical city” amid the carefully planned and constructed physical landscape.¹⁶¹ Walking thus creates a kind of shadow city, populated by the remnants of experience, pathways that evoke and structure memory. These are a kind of spatial practice that cannot be represented on maps. More abstract than walking, mobility and its enacted counterpart, movement, encompass the process of dynamism that spatializes time and temporalizes space.¹⁶² Movement, reduced to its most elemental, is a form of bodily psychics, the flows that begin with the rhythms of blood circling through the body and expand ever outward first to gesture, then to walking, and then to ever more involved mechanical interactions between body and material that end, maybe, in the galactic scale: a human-driven rocket traversing between planets, or a planet full of humans slowly rotating its sun.¹⁶³

But these kind of experiential abstractions are meaningless without grounding in an everyday politics. Tim Cresswell, following Norman Bryson, proposes an historical consideration of movement grounded in “social kinetics,” a history that accounts for “mobility... operating with fields of power and meaning.”¹⁶⁴ Social kinetics then can act as a kind of praxis to aid in understanding the movement of historical people. It places them within a larger theoretical

¹⁶⁰ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 93.

¹⁶¹ Ibid 94.

¹⁶² Tim Cresswell, *On the Move : Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 4.

¹⁶³ Cresswell, *On The Move*, 4-10.

¹⁶⁴ Cresswell, *On The Move*, 10.

context which acknowledges both the discursive elements of movement itself, and the way that discourse shapes any understanding that we might have of people in the past. Indeed, you need look no further than the outline of a general cartographic representation to see the both the limits and the ubiquity of this kind of representation. Maps most frequently represent a space from above, and thereby are limited to a display only of possible routes and paths. This linearity—a form of rigidity and proscription—is the product of a process of understanding that is just the opposite: a convoluted and complex understanding on the ground.¹⁶⁵

My review above of the literature on walking and procession in urban spaces suggests a lack of middle ground. Scholars have detailed the pageantry of parades and other processional movements, and have at least attempted to document the various meanings (and sometimes the various paths) of working people moving through the city on foot. But what none of these works do is tend to the wide variety of meanings and purposes inherent in movement, and especially to those overlaps between the quotidian and the spectacular. Much of the logic of these earlier studies relies on an almost mathematical certainty and precision applied to human action. If a person begins at one place and ends in another, we generally assume that the route they took to get there is the most direct point from A to B. This fails to account for the sometimes-unruly nature of human movement. Processional accounts have a similar problem. We know their endpoints and route, but our focus on the collective fails to account for the individual experience and purpose. Here I combine these two approaches. Thinking more broadly about both the mechanics and purpose of movement, I borrow from both of these interpretive schools in order to think about the ways in which the performative and the everyday overlap and inform one

¹⁶⁵ On the relationship between lines and linearity and the process of experience and understanding see Tim Ingold, *Lines : A Brief History* (London ;New York: Routledge, 2007),1-4.

another. The performative vocabulary of Jonkonnu—one marked by scattered, freewheeling movement—meets with everyday mobility and the act of traversing a city structurally aligned in a white supremacist spatial array. For the remainder of this chapter, I focus on Maggie Washington’s story and the way that it can offer a lens into the transformation of Jonkonnu specifically and Black mobility generally in turn of the twentieth-century Wilmington.

African American Community and Family in Post-Reconstruction Wilmington

Maggie Washington was born in February 1887 to Sarah Brewington Washington (born 1865) and Stephen Washington Jr (born 1859.) Both of her parents were born in the waning years of slavery and were among the first generations of African Americans to grow to maturity in the post-slavery South. They grew up in and lived in Wilmington, a city whose networks of mutual aid and communal solidarity saw the brief flowering of African American political, social, and cultural power. It was the fate of Maggie Washington’s generation to see that power systematically and brutally suppressed.

Stephen Washington, Sr, Maggie Washington’s grandfather, was a carpenter who worked alongside his brother and at least one other man in postbellum Wilmington.¹⁶⁶ Like most working class people (and particularly African Americans) during this period, there is a relative paucity of information about Stephen Washington Sr.’s life. In the kind of official data that remains about his life, we can only understand him as little more than another of the thousands of African Americans who inhabited Wilmington in the years after the Civil War. It seems likely that he was among those migrants to the city, perhaps during or immediately after the war.

¹⁶⁶ 1870 U.S. Census, New Hanover County, North Carolina, Wilmington, p. 50, family 391, Stephen and Phoebe Washington; digital image, Ancestry.com.

Regardless of when he arrived, he was an important part of his community. By the late 1870s, he had established himself as a local political figure, and a prominent member of the temperance and mutual aid organization the Independent Order of Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samaria.¹⁶⁷

One of his fellow members in that organization was Henry Brewington. Brewington (sometimes-spelled Bruington,) was saddled with the anonymous label of “laborer” in Wilmington’s first post-emancipation census.¹⁶⁸ By 1874 his status, though not necessarily his economic well-being, had changed substantially. In that year he was both elected to the North Carolina House of Representatives and served as one of the founding members of the Good Samaritans.¹⁶⁹ Henry Brewington was thus one of the more prominent members of a large African American community that was quickly founding its own institutions, electing its own officials, and becoming an integral part of a city whose Black population continued to swell in the 1870s and 1880s.¹⁷⁰ These families and others like them demand a new definition of the emerging “middle class” of African Americans. If we look past the educated elite and the emergent varieties of respectability politics, we can see another group of leaders whose political power came not necessarily from wealth or the holding of elected office but from status within

¹⁶⁷ “Fight Among the Samaritans,” *The Daily Review* (Wilmington, NC), November 17, 1879; “Election of Officers,” *The Daily Review* (Wilmington, NC), July 9, 1879.

¹⁶⁸ 1870 U.S. Census, New Hanover County, North Carolina, Wilmington, p. 96, dwelling 592, family 795, Henry Brewington; digital image, Ancestry.com.

¹⁶⁹ Monroe N. Work et al., “Some Negro Members of Reconstruction Conventions and Legislatures and of Congress,” *The Journal of Negro History* 5, no. 1 (1920): 78; “I.O. of G.S. and D. of S. in America,” *Wilmington Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), September 16, 1874; “Fight Among the Samaritans,” *The Daily Review* (Wilmington, NC), November 17, 1879.

¹⁷⁰ LeRae Umfleet, *1898 Wilmington Race Riot Report, Draft* (Raleigh, N.C.: Research Branch, Office of Archives and History, N.C. Dept. of Cultural Resources, 2005), 33.

communities.¹⁷¹ And amid this atmosphere of growth, people like Henry Brewington and Stephen Washington, and organizations like the Good Samaritans, increasingly began to take their message to the streets in a series of parades and processions that marked nearly every imaginable occasion.

Soon after the founding of the first Wilmington chapter of the Good Samaritans in late 1874, they staged their first parade. These parades were not solely about establishing a wholly symbolic claim to public space. The banners and flags that festooned the principal streets of the city for a parade in honor of the assembly of multiple Good Samaritan chapters in 1878 represented a significant exercise of established political and social power that extended well outside of the African American community.¹⁷² That is, this was both symbolic and material power, a way of marking their organization's claim to the city's streets. Outside of the spatial array of the city, we can see this power manifested in the election of Brewington to the NC House of Representatives, or Stephen Washington's service as a monitor for one of Wilmington's wards. But beyond simply serving as an exercise in local power and community building, these processions were important indicators of an emerging African American cultural ethos across the state and region. These parades often incorporated Black people visiting Wilmington on holiday excursions or for club business. We can see then the particular and early

¹⁷¹ As Laura Edwards has argued, there is little incongruity between the economic status of the Brewington and Washington families and their role as social leaders. Unlike Charles Chesnut's fictional reading of Wilmington in the same period, Edwards claims that we can clearly see the emergence of a radical and sophisticated strain of political leadership emerge immediately after emancipation. These politics and "this struggle has remained largely hidden because historians have tended to define politics narrowly." Laura F. Edwards, "Captives of Wilmington: The Riot and Historical Memories of Political Conflict, 1865-1898," in *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy*, ed. David Cecelski and Timothy B. Tyson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 117.

¹⁷² "The Good Samaritans," *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), May 16, 1878.

manifestations of processional culture as an index of the ways in which Black people moved through the space of the city in celebration and festivity.

Processions and the Politics of Passing

Newspapers of the 1870s and 1880s are filled with news of excursions undertaken by African Americans. Often organized by clubs and organizations, they brought together people who for the first time had both expendable income and the promise of free mobility. Sometimes these outings erupted in long held intergroup tensions—as when the *Wilmington Semi-Weekly Messenger* condescendingly blamed an argument among a group of Good Samaritans on an excursion to Raleigh on “too much corn juice.”¹⁷³ More often, these two or three day trips brought Black populations of multiple cities together in ceremonies of a shared public culture. Much more ornate than these relatively ordinary expressions of hospitality, brotherhood (and to a lesser extent sisterhood,) were the elaborate parades reserved for intra-lodge meetings that took place with increasing frequency in the 1870s and 1880s. The first such meeting occurred in Wilmington in 1878. The streets were festooned with lodge flags and many of the main streets full of parading lodge members, clad in full regalia. One of the local papers described the day in great detail on its first page:

The different lodges in attendance...paraded through the streets yesterday afternoon in full force, headed by the Excelsior Rose Bud Band, the Orators of the Day, Chaplain &c being in a carriage drawn by four horses. The members were nearly all arrayed in the regalia of the Order and made a very good appearance. The procession marched to St. Stephen's A.M.E. Church, [heard] appropriate services and ceremonies... the procession then reformed and marched through our principal streets and thence to the Lodge Room, where it was disbanded. During the day flags were suspended from a line connecting with the Lodge building, at the corner of Second and Princess streets and the house opposite. At night there as a

¹⁷³“Fight Among the Samaritans,” *The Daily Review* (Wilmington, NC), November 17, 1879.

festival at the City Hall. There were quite a number of colored visitors here from Newbern, Raleigh, Goldsboro, and other places.¹⁷⁴

Other parades like this one followed over the next few years. In 1883, the combined lodges of North Carolina again met in Wilmington, this time with an equally elaborate and somewhat larger parade. By that year the number of lodges in North Carolina had grown to 125, with 250 delegates visiting and parading through Wilmington.¹⁷⁵ And the institution both in Wilmington and throughout the state only continued to grow in number throughout the decade: the 1886 statewide meeting brought 190 lodges and a full 380 representatives to the streets of Wilmington.¹⁷⁶ These parades, held at uncertain intervals but with fairly predictable routes, were undoubtedly an annoyance to many city officials. But they proved difficult to regulate for a number of reasons. One was certainly the fact that increasing numbers of African Americans connected to the lodge were gaining political power and taking office in Wilmington. But even the growing political revolution did not lead to anything like full control of the city. Instead, it was the very nature of the procession that allowed them to continue to occur and to grow. This was a parade that was utterly predictable in its route, and generally unpredictable in its timing. Unlike many parades which were (and are) pegged to some kind of religious or civic holiday, these processions were both far more regular and much more unpredictable. They could occur as infrequently as the annual meeting, or as often as visiting lodges or dignitaries were in town.

Though temporally wild, these Good Samaritan parades were geographically predictable and thus capable of surveillance and implicit regulation. The same was not true for Jonkonnu. Its

¹⁷⁴ "The Good Samaritans," *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), May 16, 1878.

¹⁷⁵ "The Good Samaritans," *Wilmington Post* (Wilmington, NC), October 12, 1883.

¹⁷⁶ "Good Samaritans," *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), September 9, 1886.

free roaming route coupled with demands for monetary, alcoholic, or culinary tribute was a threat to propriety and to neatly ordered space. It was impossible for police or other authorities to know where Jonkonnu performers were going as they roamed the city, and so their presence was a significant threat to spatial order. And because it only occurred one day a year, it was far easier to attempt to legislate Jonkonnu out of existence. So, in the very same years that African American lodges like the Good Samaritans were taking to the streets in frequent procession, mayors in Wilmington levelled a series of restrictions at Jonkonnu. Their series of permits and rules hearkened back to slavery's regulations of mobility and invite a new understanding of the complicated nature of racial passing.

In the post-Civil War period, Jonkonnu in Wilmington invited a public discourse that was both nostalgic for plantation slavery and dismissive of the celebratory cultures of free African Americans. 1868 saw multiple newspapers mention the practice as other Christmas festivities began to be seen and heard throughout the postbellum city. The editors of the *Post* hoped that the firecrackers and other signs of festivity “were not harbingers of ‘Johnny Kooners’ and the absurd gift beggars that we have seen here on other Christmas days.”¹⁷⁷ This language, and the vocabulary of Jonkonnu, circulated widely. Later in the year, the *Morning Star* took a shot at what they perceived as a provincial newspaper editor's poor taste in the dramatic arts by mockingly suggesting that he had “never seen any performance before except a ‘kooner’ dance.”¹⁷⁸ Jonkonnu was a common part of the Wilmingtonian's (and North Carolinian's) vernacular and experience and its reappearance each year was expected, sometimes even welcomed. For the most part though, Jonkonnu went largely unremarked. Its very absence in many contemporary accounts speaks to the

¹⁷⁷ “Christmas,” *Wilmington Post* (Wilmington, NC), December 24, 1868.

¹⁷⁸ “Black Crook in Newbern,” *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), June 9, 1868.

ubiquity of the performance, and its acceptability to most of the city's population. Jonkonnu was part of Christmas celebrations, and a fixed feature in the holiday calendar and on the Wilmington landscape.

In 1875, however, the mayor of Wilmington took the first of several strong steps intended to obliterate the practice altogether. A front page, Christmas day headline declared that there would be "No More Kooners." Anticipating the performance which traditionally took place on the 2nd day of Christmas, Mayor William Canaday asked the city's main newspapers to spread the word that "no 'John Kooners' will be allowed on the streets to-day nor at any time during the holidays." The banning was accompanied with a strong, specific threat that any performers "will be arrested by the police."¹⁷⁹ There's no real indication of how this information was circulated to the African American population of the city, if it was at all. It assumes a kind of regulatory power and in-person enforcement that they certainly would have been familiar with after generations of similarly arbitrary regulation of both performative practice and more quotidian forms of kinesthetic movement. These particular regulations though were reflective of a particularly complicated political situation, where both formal political structures and everyday social policing were brought to bear. In this first year of the ban, at least one newspaper communicated shock at the mayor's decision to "suppress such displays" as Jonkonnu. The same article goes on to claim "some of the colored churches also... have resolved against it."¹⁸⁰ If we can believe this report, it suggests an emerging strain of propriety that viewed an old tradition removed from its former context as improper. This same criticism is inherent in views from the other side of the color line, which were glad to be rid of a "time-honored institution of Christmas which had degenerated into

¹⁷⁹ "No More Kooners," *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), December 25, 1875.

¹⁸⁰ "No John Kooners," *Daily Review* (Wilmington, NC), December 27, 1875.

the greatest kind of public nuisance.”¹⁸¹ Both critiques are premised on an argument about the proper place of African American celebratory culture. And both assume that the still newly freed have no claim on a tradition that emerged from and critiqued enslavement. Though they were at cross-purposes—racial uplift versus racial exploitation—this moment of cohesion suggests the increasingly complicated nature of everyday existence for ordinary Black people in this city.

To that complexity, we can add that the mayor banning Jonkonnu in 1875-1877, William P. Canaday, was a Republican who exhorted “colored men” to “see that your names are properly registered,” so that they could vote for him in a failed 1876 bid for Congress.¹⁸² Hemmed in by an emerging middle class propriety, Jonkonnu was seemingly threatened on two sides of the color line. A generation earlier, it had been seen as a liberatory celebration of community in the face of enslavement. Now it was seemingly viewed as regressive, a nuisance to white residents of the city who could no longer expect carnivalesque inversion to subside into normative white supremacy after a single day. And Black people were already starting to see the coalitions they had formed fail. Whether or not prominent African American churches did oppose Jonkonnu, their would-be Republican partner had banned their practice from the streets. In the process Canaday revealed both an emerging discourse on the “proper” forms of African American celebration, and the paternalistic underpinnings of cross-racial political solidarity.

Jonkonnu Nostalgia and Cultural White Supremacy

Though Canaday and some of Wilmington’s Black churches were opposed to Jonkonnu on grounds of propriety, it found unlikely champions of a sort after Democrats again took political

¹⁸¹“Christmas in the City,” *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), December 28, 1875.

¹⁸² “[W.P. Canaday],” *Wilmington Post* (Wilmington, NC), November 1, 1876.

control of the city in 1878. They did so with the election of a full ticket of Democratic alderman and of Mayor Solomon Fishblate, a staunch Democrat and the first Jewish elected official in the state.¹⁸³ Under his tenure, the ban on Jonkonnu was lifted and its return accompanied by a nostalgic hue and cry from many corners of the white population. As the holiday season of 1878 approached, the first of several commenters decried the ban on Jonkonnu that had stretched back for the past few years. The criticism was founded on not being able to have Christmas “such as we had in the primitive days.” Christmas at present was “merely a dull holiday, no kooners, can’t fire crackers....”¹⁸⁴ This was only the first of several such commentaries in subsequent years that sought to paint Jonkonnu as a kind of Black primitivism and as a performance tradition undertaken primarily for the interest and entertainment of young, white boys. Much of this was surely related to the age and gender of the writers, all men who had grown up in the late antebellum period and often on plantations where yearly Jonkonnu processions were part of the fabric of holiday celebration. But it was clearly also an attempt to rob Jonkonnu of its very real symbolic power. If Jonkonnu became little more than a diversion for bored children, its performance of Black cultural power lost any efficacy. 1878 and subsequent years then mark a shift in perception that saw white observers move away from simple repudiation and toward a deeply uncritical nostalgia that reduced African American people from political actors to mere Black bodies in performance.

We can see the emergence of this perception clearly in many of the following years. A description of holiday celebrations in the city in 1878-1879 maintain, “the only thing creating any stir at all was a band of about a dozen Kooners.” They “paraded the streets, followed by a large

¹⁸³ “Wilmington: Historical Overview,” *Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities* (Jackson, Mississippi: Goldring-Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, 2014.) <http://www.isjl.org/north-carolina-wilmington-encyclopedia.html>.

¹⁸⁴ “An Appeal for the Boys,” *The Daily Review* (Wilmington, NC), November 15, 1878.

crowd of negro [sic] men and boys. Just before dusk they assembled in front of the Market House, and the leader delivered a brief address on matters and things in general, which created much amusement.”¹⁸⁵ This last feature of the performance, a humorous speech in front of Wilmington’s Market House, became a yearly feature of the tradition. It’s clear even from these relatively brief sketches that these speeches were intended to mock the overblown political rhetoric that played an increasingly large role in the life of the growing city. Since at least 1865, African Americans living in Wilmington had been subjected to lectures on their civic responsibilities. Among the earliest of these speeches, from the Confederate veteran and architect of Wilmington’s 1898 terrorist plot, Alfred Moore Waddell, put the blame for slavery on the English colonial system even as it preached about “the great advantage which your race enjoys here...contact and daily interaction with the white race.”¹⁸⁶ Among Waddell’s similarly racist and ahistorical comments, he also explicitly addresses the urban African American crowd as characterizing the intelligent and worldly, not the “ignorant and misguided colored people, more particularly in the country.”¹⁸⁷ This kind of knowing condescension disguised as faint praise was precisely the sort of speech that African Americans could expect to hear around election time, or read in the half dozen newspapers regularly published in their city. So while Jonkonnu had previously had an easy target in the white male enslaver, its satirical object in the late years of the nineteenth-century was changing as societal divisions became increasingly more complicated than Black and white, enslaved and free.

¹⁸⁵ “January 1st, 1879,” *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), January 2, 1879.

¹⁸⁶ Alfred M. Waddell “An Address Delivered to the Colored People By Their Request, at the Wilmington Theatre, July 26th, 1865” Wilmington, NC: Printed at the Daily Wilmington Herald Office, 1865. North Carolina Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁸⁷ Waddell, “An Address Delivered to the Colored People By Their Request.”

Jonkonnu after the Wilmington Coup

Maggie Washington grew up in this version of Wilmington. A generation removed from slavery, in 1887 Sarah and Stephen Jr. were well on their way to a kind of prosperity and security that had never been possible before, even for the population of free Blacks who had lived in Wilmington before the war. When Maggie was born, she was christened with the name of her maternal grandmother, the kind of intergenerational tribute that must have meant all the more since in Maggie were embodied so many firsts. She was the first grandchild of her generation, the first child of Stephen Jr. and Sarah, who had married the year before, and the first child born to the family entirely clear from the bonds of enslavement. And her parents, despite having only the income of Stephen Jr., had purchased a house on North Fifth Street, squarely in the center of the thriving Black neighborhood of Brooklyn. Itself an aspirational name, the neighborhood signified much of the promise of Maggie Washington's life at its inception. It is not an irony so much as the sad inevitability of African American history that all this promise and potential would eventually be shattered by the brute force of racist extremism.

Maggie Washington undoubtedly grew up among the parades of the Good Samaritans, and it was probably from members of her family or others in that same group that she first learned about and participated in Jonkonnu. But as much as these processions of celebratory movement marked the experience of her early life, it was the deathly procession following Election Day in 1898 that cast a pallor over her life and over the city of Wilmington. That day was a similarly free-roaming procession through the city, albeit one that resulted in the murders of several people and the destruction of property. Perhaps even greater than the number of lives lost in this first and most visibly bloody battle in the renewed war against African Americans was its symbolic power. After the completion of the coup that started on November 10, African Americans in Wilmington were

left to live under the new, illegitimate government and to cope with memories of the roving bands of angry white men who had stormed through their city streets. Those memories of the experience of November 1898 reaffirmed to residents the very real consequences that could inhere in what was often characterized as little more than harmless procession.

On November 10, 1898 Maggie Washington was 3 months shy of her twelfth birthday. On that morning, precisely when she usually would have been setting off for school, a mob was forming a few blocks away at the Wilmington Light Infantry armory. Right at 9:00, they marched to the offices of the Black-owned *Record* and burned it the ground. Numbering perhaps as many as 2,000, this massive group, along with other angry and armed white men, spread throughout the city in the next minutes and hours. One particularly large group headed toward north toward Brooklyn, almost certainly passing by Peabody school that Maggie attended with her younger sister Sarah¹⁸⁸ When the mob got to Brooklyn, they encountered an armed group of African Americans at the corner of Fourth and Harnett. Almost immediately, the groups opened fire on each other. They were just yards away from the Washington family home, situated between the 4th and 5th avenue blocks and immediately adjacent to Harnett Street.¹⁸⁹ Ordinarily Stephen Jr. would have been at work at the Cape Fear Lumber Company, just a block away from their house at Fourth and Harnett. In the weeks leading up to the riots, his had been a voice of conciliation. As part of the county's Republican Committee, he had signed a widely circulating letter that denounced controversial words written in the *Post* that served as the immediate spark for the November coup

¹⁸⁸ 1900 U.S. Census, New Hanover County, North Carolina, Wilmington, Enumeration District 64, p. 17, dwelling 291, family 458, Maggie Washington; digital image, Ancestry.com; *Directory of Wilmington, NC [1897]* (Richmond, VA: J.L. Hill's Printing Company, 1897), 12, 247.

¹⁸⁹ My accounting of the day's events are based on LeRae Umfleet, *1898 Wilmington Race Riot Report* (Raleigh, N.C.: Research Branch, Office of Archives and History, N.C. Dept. of Cultural Resources, 2006), 121-155.

in Wilmington.¹⁹⁰ It seems likely though that his moderation had turned to action by November 10 when shots were exchanged practically at the doorstep of his family home. If he was among the men defending Brooklyn from white marauders that day, it was never recorded or perhaps purposefully obscured. Part of the aim of the day's violence, like many acts of terrorism, was to obliterate institutions of memory making, a symbolic action made literal with the burning of the *Record*. For someone like Maggie Washington, growing up amid a family and a community where carnivalesque processions marked frequent and fleeting inversions of political power, this sudden and permanent coup must have likewise been literally unsettling. Each yearly Jonkonnu performance marked an ever-diminishing promise of a permanent reversal of the social order. The tentative, hard won struggles of a generation—struggles whose gains had been eroding nearly as quickly as they were gained—were decimated in a matter of a few hours. This was itself a kind of inversion, an inauguration of the permanently regressive politics of white supremacy.

After 1898, Wilmington became a city of both continued possibility and real danger. For many African American families, the takeover of their city compelled them into a kind of forced diaspora, either outside the neighborhoods that had become Black communities or out of the city and region altogether.¹⁹¹ These forced migrations were part of the larger flow of movement into, out of, and around the city. Before the coup, Wilmington had become North Carolina's Black metropolis.¹⁹² Afterward, it became both bigger and more white, a city where African Americans lived on and navigated through the margins. This is made particularly evident through an examination of the spread of infrastructure and the increasingly detailed mapping practices that

¹⁹⁰ "Mischief Making Simpleton," *Semi-Weekly Messenger* (Wilmington, NC), August 26, 1898.

¹⁹¹ Umfleet 1898 *Wilmington Race Riot Report*, 157-170.

¹⁹² Umfleet 1898 *Wilmington Race Riot Report*, 47

sought to define the city's boundaries through economic valuation. In concert with these physical changes to the landscape of Wilmington, Maggie Washington's is a story that suggests the ways in which we can understand how Jonkonnu increasingly came to serve as a heightened performance of the everyday, a mode of celebration and resistance that highlighted the changed city with both unexpected pleasures and the very real, omnipresent danger to the lives of Black people.

Regardless of the trauma inflicted on the Washington family in 1898, they stayed in their house and apparently, largely continued their life as it had been. As before, traces of their lives appear in public records, newspaper accounts, and city directories. In 1900, the family--now expanded by two more sons and Sarah's sister and nephew--lived in the house, which they owned free of any mortgage.¹⁹³ Even amid their relative economic comfort, there were systemic changes afoot. The Good Samaritans, whose rise was linked to those of the Washington and Brewington families, found it difficult to function in post-coup Wilmington. Newly formalized rules required old customs to be codified. This effectively put an end to the exuberant Good Samaritan processions that had popped up multiple times each year. And it took the organization's longstanding mutual aid practices and made them into a far less effective insurance organization whose charter was eventually revoked by the insurance commissioner of the state.¹⁹⁴ Whatever its stated intention, these laws functioned as an attack on the community institutions that had time to grow and flourish in the first generation born out of enslavement. In Wilmington and elsewhere, these systemic attacks continued for several years after the opening salvo of the 1898 coup.

¹⁹³ 1900 U.S. Census, New Hanover County, North Carolina, Wilmington, Enumeration District 64, p. 17, dwelling 291, family 458, Maggie Washington; digital image, Ancestry.com

¹⁹⁴ "Spirits Turpentine," *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), January 25, 1906;

"Meeting of Colored Order," *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), July 15, 1909; "[Insurance Commissioner Young]," *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), January 19, 1906.

Perhaps the most enduring front on which this war was fought was cultural. The increasing prohibition and regulation of Jonkonnu was accompanied by cultural appropriation as well. This was an attempt to erode the rising influence of both Black political and cultural power, and to reinsert cultures of whiteness in every societal institution, no matter how insignificant. If the events of November 1898 represented a spectacular form of dominant power enacted, it was these smaller, quotidian enactments that even more surely changed the face of an entire city.

The most immediate of these changes was to naming. Prior to 1898, Jonkonnu appeared in newspaper articles and other archival records under a variety of different monikers. “John Kuner” was the most prevalent of these identifiers, though an almost infinite variation of plays on the words “Kuner” and “John” appeared in an account at some point. In 1898 and subsequent years, there was a remarkably consistent shift toward identifying paraders as “cooners.” This was clearly racialized language and a term intended to modify the longstanding spelling and use of “Kuner” with a word whose pejorative use was part of an emergent vocabulary of Jim Crow.¹⁹⁵ This abrupt, and systematic, shift toward explicitly racist language announced the arrival of new regimes of discrimination and regulation, as well as a characterization of the performance as one explicitly related to the performance of race. That is, starting in 1898, “cooning” was a practice not just *by*

¹⁹⁵ The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites the first instances of the slang “coon” as offensive terms for African American people occur in 1837 and 1862, as an adjective and noun, respectively. The first of these, from 1837’s *Nick of Woods* is a fairly generalized insult that equates Black people with both snakes and raccoons. I read this as a new variation on an old theme: the portrayal of African American subjects as animals and animalistic. Snakes and raccoons suggest a characterization that is wily and duplicitous, but other attempts to find similar usage from the period suggest that this meaning (or this broader characterization) was not yet numerous. An 1862 reference, listed in the March 15, 1862 edition of *Vanity Fair*, is a more explicit racial characterization: that is, it seems to refer not back to the animalistic referent (the raccoon,) but to a broadening usage of the word “coon” as a racial epithet. Still, this meaning of the word was clearly nascent at the time, as evidenced by its much more frequent occurrences in the postbellum period. It’s also worth noting that it was in the two generations between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the twentieth-century that “coon” transitioned toward usage as an explicitly racist term, rather than its former meaning (“a sly, knowing fellow,”) which seems to have tended to be a reading based on class.

racialized minorities but *of* them as well. This was in contrast even to previous attempts to regulate Jonkonnu performances, which focused on the raucous nature of the festivity and which were clearly predicated on its spatial and temporal wildness. This new language capitalized on those old fears and combined them with newly heightened threats of racial disorder. Coming just weeks after the regressive coup in November, the Jonkonnu performances in December were completely outlawed for the first time in twenty years. Apparently the board of alderman, most of whom had usurped their seats only a month or so before, “thought it best not to allow the masquerading as a safeguard against lawlessness, in view of the serious straits through which the city had passed during the past weeks.” This then was “the first Christmas night in a number of years...during which not a ‘cooner’ was to be seen anywhere.”¹⁹⁶ Just as crucially though, 1898 also marked the year when Jonkonnu became instantiated as an imitative, cross-racial practice. White men and boys increasingly began donning blackface and ragged clothes in a poor imitation of the practice’s elaborate costuming. Theirs was a kind of parody of a satirical form, a carnivalesque robbed of any meaning or purpose. This was a break with tradition, albeit one characteristic of the early years of the twentieth-century South, whose pretensions to modernity were stifled by the looming presence of the racial and sectional strife of the nineteenth. And so Jonkonnu became an increasingly hybrid form and an increasingly dangerous one for Black people to practice. The 1898 coup was the culmination of at least two decades of regulation in Wilmington aimed at policing African American bodies. And just as with Jonkonnu, much of its impact trailed in the wake of its enactment. In the years that followed, the legacy of the Wilmington coup was solidified both in the political sphere and in the kind of cultural appropriation and obliteration practiced in Wilmington. In ways both material and deeply symbolic, the celebratory space of Wilmington was transformed

¹⁹⁶ “No Masks Were Allowed,” *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), December 27, 1898.

into the province of white men and boys, and African Americans were pushed further to the peripheries and past borders.

Remembering “Cooning”

Writing well into the mid-twentieth-century, multiple Wilmington men of prominent families recalled their turn of the century participation in what they most frequently called “cooning.”¹⁹⁷ Henry McKoy, one of the nostalgic mid-twentieth-century writers, recalled his own attempts at “cooning” in his 1957 book: “Well, I did it because my older brother had done it. My father had gone ‘Coonering’ before me and they appeared to have been pleased with it and had fun.”¹⁹⁸ McKoy is remembering the days of his own childhood “around the turn of the century,” though his claim that his father also participated as a youth put the origins of white male cooning in the 1870s or 1880s.¹⁹⁹ In McKoy’s telling, this is a tradition for young, elite, white boys: “a group of from five to ten boys ranging in age from nine to sixteen would with great preparation gather together after supper, when the dark had fallen, and each would don whatever costume or garment he had been able to get.” All of the clothes “had to be old and ill fitting” in imitation not of the bright, vibrant costumes of Jonkonnu, but of the everyday working clothes of the African American men whose own masquerades they were imitating.²⁰⁰ Likewise, they failed to actually adopt the performative forms of Jonkonnu, instead gaining entrance to the parlors of elite houses only to stuff their pockets with candy and fruit and sit there, giggling as their hosts asked them

¹⁹⁷As I have suggested above, the first references to this practice came much earlier. An 1887 article takes for granted that its readers would be familiar with “grand masquerade on Christmas day by young men of the city.” “Local Dots,” *The Wilmington Morning Star*, December 13, 1887.

¹⁹⁸ Henry McKoy, *Wilmington, N. C.; Do You Remember When?* (Greenville, S.C.: Keys Print. Co., 1957), 143.

¹⁹⁹ McKoy, *Wilmington, N. C.; Do You Remember When?*, 141.

²⁰⁰ McKoy, *Wilmington, N. C.; Do You Remember When?*, 141.

questions. “We did not sing and we had no particular program to follow. We did not try to say or do anything funny, but just fitted ourselves into the mood of the home we were in.”²⁰¹ Theirs then was a kind of shallow racial caricature, a poor attempt to imitate Black people while still maintaining the rights and privileges of their years and racial and class status.



Four Young Boys “Coonering” in Wilmington, 1905²⁰²

Looking at the hazy picture of McKoy and his friends taken in 1905, it’s clear that they are attempting to inhabit other personages. Henry McKoy stands to the far left, wearing what appears to be his interpretation of the stereotypical “mammy” character. He is in blackface, with the wide grin that is the chief characteristic of the racist figure. The rest of his get up—a kerchief tied over

²⁰¹ McKoy, *Wilmington, N. C.; Do You Remember When?*, 143.

²⁰² McKoy, *Wilmington, N. C.; Do You Remember When?*, 142.

his head, a slightly oversized white blouse, and a floor length skirt—complete his transformation. In the broader context of Jonkonnu’s appropriative transformation, this is a telling image. McKoy is not imitating a Black women outright: he makes very clear throughout his reminiscence that he and his family understood the “John Kuner” as a stock figure that was itself an imitation. So his costume consisted of a young, wealthy, white boy attempting to embody the persona of a Black, male Jonkonnu performer who was himself dressed in women’s clothes. It’s not quite that neat of course, since in reality McKoy’s costume is a kind of racist assemblage, an appropriation of two figures who undoubtedly represented a significant portion of his understanding of race. By the early twentieth-century then, Jonkonnu in Wilmington had become “cooning,” a white performance of stereotyped Blackness. This kind of celebration was not limited to McKoy’s circles, but nearly ubiquitous in Wilmington at the holidays. The 1904 “merry masqueraders” consisted of “about a dozen cooner parties” and the 1908 parades were referred to as “throngs.”²⁰³ They were numerous then, and this was already a widely practiced tradition among white Wilmingtonians. Another of the mid-twentieth-century accounts of Jonkonnu, that of Louis Moore, is even more explicit about the assumptions underlying the early twentieth-century history of Jonkonnu.

Moore’s narrative begins conventionally enough with a nostalgic evocation of the “quaint, characteristic, and attractive customs” of an unspecified bygone era, the “most interesting and romantic” of which were the “parades, dances, and songs of the John Kuners.”²⁰⁴ His accounting then gets more specific as he attempts to not just characterize, but also to embody the African

²⁰³ “Local Dots,” *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), December 27, 1904; “The Masqueraders,” *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), December 30, 1908.

²⁰⁴ Louis Moore, *Stories Old and New of the Cape Fear Region*. (Wilmington, N.C.: Wilmington Printing Company, 1956), 74.

American performers of Jonkonnu. Moore writes that “the Negro race is fortunate in possessing characteristics which cause music to be a part of their inner and real being, and in enjoying a spirit of gait, fun, and levity particularly their own.” He then begins to narrate his perception of the experience of the African American Jonkonnu performers. “It was these attributes that caused the Negroes of ‘ye olden times’ to derive an even greater degree of pleasure from their portrayal of John Kuners than came to their white friends as interested spectators.”²⁰⁵

As I have suggested earlier, this is hardly unprecedented speech. As with narratives around lynchings, around food, around all kinds of celebrations, white observers were quick to find forms of embodied pleasure in the Black bodies that they observed. Novel in Moore’s account is the way his words seek to inhabit the feelings of the spectators and relate them to the performers. For him, as for other commentators and would be historians of Jonkonnu, the appropriate audience was also young, white children, particularly boys. Perhaps remembering scenes from his own childhood, Moore describes the way that children “would go into ecstasies” as they heard the sounds of Jonkonnu approaching. Their senses aroused by the sounds of the parade approaching, these same boys “in awe, astonishment, and fear would run and hide behind their mothers or those of the household slaves who were not participating in the revels.”²⁰⁶ Clearly this account blends imagination and experience. Its setting in the antebellum period suggests more of the practiced nostalgia for that period that we see evoked constantly and nearly unconsciously in narratives from the middle of the nineteenth-century onward. But this also seems to be an account largely dictated by memory. Our narrator can place himself outside of the scene by setting it well before his birth, or in using “children” in place of the personal pronoun, but it’s clear that he remembers at least the

²⁰⁵ Moore, *Stories Old and New of the Cape Fear Region*, 75.

²⁰⁶ Moore, *Stories Old and New of the Cape Fear Region*, 75.

remnants of Jonkonnu from his own childhood. His is a kind of misplaced and mistimed longing for a form that he perceived as already dying during the early years of his life. And for him, its death was a failure of white masculinity. We can see this in his description of the retreat to the dual maternal influences in the previous passage. But he makes this point explicit toward the end of his essay.

For a few years after The War Between the States the young white men of Wilmington, social leaders, attempted to preserve and perpetuate the former Christmas season celebrations which were featured with the 'John Kuner' costumes, parades, and chants. However, the romance and glamour given the customs in the olden days by the slaves, with their happy, laughing, joking mannerisms and ways were lacking. That long lost spirit of former days could not be restored by the white race.²⁰⁷

Moore is communicating a perceived lack, an inability on the part of white men in particular to adequately perform or have the affective experience of Jonkonnu. These histories both use the early years of the twentieth-century as their turning point without acknowledging the role that their families and neighbors had played in bringing Jonkonnu to a perceived point of extinction. And both suggest, forthrightly and openly, the specific characteristics that the form was expected to take. Moore and McKoy each write as old men reflecting back on the history of their town through the prism of their youth. Each then reflect the teachings and prejudices of their childhood, which caused them to conceive of "coonin'" as a practice of entertainment, one where white men and boys were at the center, either as an audience to entertain or the performers themselves. These overlapping views then left Maggie Washington as a particularly outside of their simplistic understandings of race and gender. She was both Black and a woman, not a symbol of matronly comfort, but a vivid and subversive figure. Undoubtedly it was these characteristics in part which led to her arrest and her profile in the newspapers as part of a

²⁰⁷ Moore, *Stories Old and New of the Cape Fear Region*, 78.

notorious criminal element, a uniquely sexualized criminality associated with any Black woman not adherent to both the actual and extrajudicial laws governing the use of space. For Maggie Washington, those laws were not abstractions, but a large part of the governing force of her life.

Maggie Washington's Wilmington

Maggie Washington was twenty years old when she married William H. Merrick in 1907, the year after her father drowned while navigating logs into the lumberyard from the Cape Fear.²⁰⁸ It seems likely that she and William also met through the lingering connections formed in the Good Samaritans—his father had been a member too.²⁰⁹ After her marriage, Maggie Merrick is difficult to trace for a few years. Her change of name, compounded by the fact that there were at least two other William Merricks in Wilmington at the time (one of whom was married to a woman sometimes also called Maggie) means that even the incidental mentions of her life go largely unreported. Her ability to elude this sort of attention is telling. She darts in and out of notice, seemingly deigning to appear only in the most comprehensive and official sources. This was certainly part of the draw of a city like Wilmington and perhaps contributed to Maggie Washington Merrick's continued presence there.²¹⁰ It was a place that allowed and even invited some anonymity from official scrutiny. It was dense enough to allow institutions of community to form, and still small enough that cross-generational connections continued to matter. Compare

²⁰⁸“Negro Was Drowned,” *Messenger* (Wilmington, NC), August 23, 1906; New Hanover County, North Carolina. Marriage register, p 154-e, Merrick-Washington, 1907.

²⁰⁹ “He Will Probably Die,” *Messenger* (Wilmington, NC), September 4, 1890.

²¹⁰ See Lisa Goff, *Shantytown, USA: Forgotten Landscapes of the Working Poor* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016), on the appeal of these marginal places within cities to African Americans and other new migrants.

this to the countryside and the level of interaction between white landowners and Black tenants and sharecroppers. Even on larger plantations with plots of land at a significant remove from the owner's house, surveillance was embedded into the work process itself, which necessarily limited spatial mobility because of the farmer's stake in the crop. Wilmington and other cities allowed African Americans to avoid this particular form of individual scrutiny. If this was part of the appeal of the city, certainly Maggie Washington and others also recognized the way in which this very anonymity invited stereotypical characterizations.²¹¹

The reports of Maggie Washington's arrest are littered with misinformation and innuendo. If we take the summary of her arrest report as it appeared in the newspapers at face value, she was a "resident of the notorious alley across the street" from the city's chief market.²¹² Her arresting officer, Frank George was "of the opinion that she was... dressed up for no good purpose," and perhaps warranted a more substantive charge than the simple citation for "being disguised on the street without a permit."²¹³ George's implication was clear: he suspected Maggie Washington of prostitution. Even given all evidence to the contrary—her "men's attire," the long tradition of Jonkonnu on this particular day—George jumped immediately to a gendered, sexualized criminality.²¹⁴ Certainly part of this was a general belief in Black female licentiousness, akin to the myths about rampant Black male sexuality that circulated in Southern

²¹¹ Simone Brown writes about the "cumulative white gaze that functioned as totalizing surveillance," born out of slavery and continued in the years since. Simone Brown, *Dark Matters: on the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 21. We might see the city as both a continuation of that all-encompassing kind of surveillance and, paradoxically, an attempt to retreat from it.

²¹² "Woman Was Masquerading," *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), December 28, 1911.

²¹³ "The Recorder's Court," *The Dispatch* (Wilmington, NC), December 28, 1911; "Woman Was Masquerading," *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), December 28, 1911.

²¹⁴ "Woman Was Masquerading," *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), December 28, 1911.

white communities. But the particular history of this characterization in Wilmington stretched back more than a decade and spoke to the emergence and regulation of African American leisure spaces.

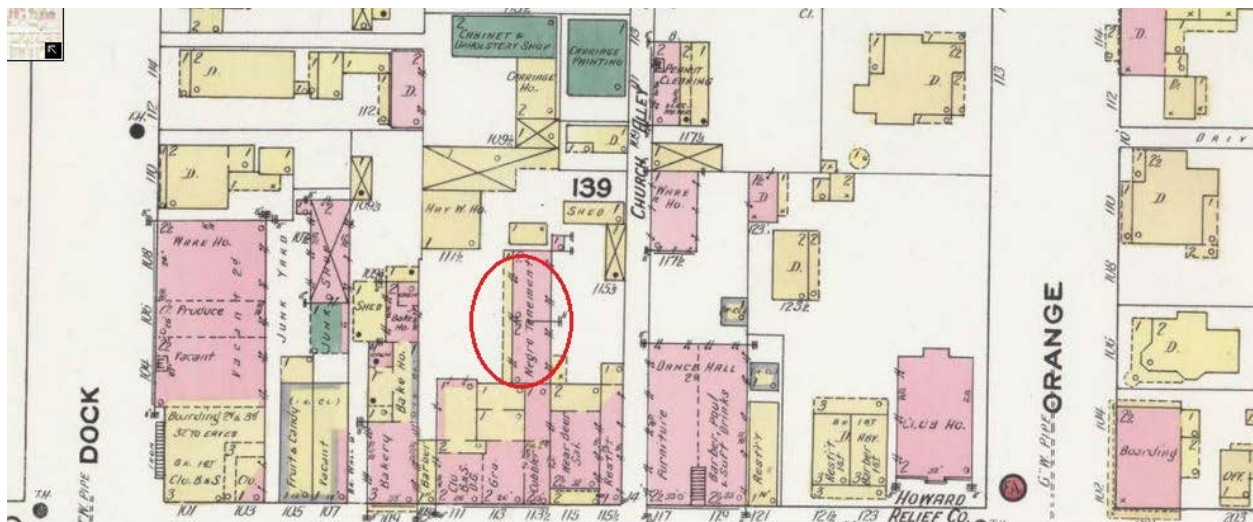
What Paul George referred to as “the notorious alley” was colloquially known as “Racket alley” after an old store that had been there, or, officially as “Church Alley.” Around the turn of the twentieth-century Racket alley became a central focus of police and other officials who viewed it as a “den of infamy” that contributed to “rowdyism on the streets.”²¹⁵ And though authorities were concerned with illegal drinking and gambling here, their principal focus was on prostitution. Prostitution (or more precisely the threat of prostitution,) was a roving act, a species of crime that moved and could presumably spread into parts of the city away from its origin point. Policing Black women, automatically perceived as prostitutes, then became a crucial part of reinforcing white spatial hegemony. This sort of control was heightened in the wake of the 1898 coup. Among the first results of this newly intensified police attention was the arrest of Tillie Taylor in early 1899. She was “charged with keeping a disorderly house in ‘Racket’ alley.” Fittingly, given her alleged crime and its spatial impact, her punishment was banishment from the city. In the court of the new mayor “she was given until Monday to leave town.”²¹⁶ Certainly Tillie Taylor’s was an extreme example brought on in part by heightened paranoia and regulation. But we could say the same of Maggie Washington’s arrest a dozen years later. Clearly, the instruments of official power in Wilmington were directed toward the regulation of

²¹⁵ “In the Mayor’s Court,” *Messenger* (Wilmington, NC), August 9, 1904; “Will Abate the Nuisance,” (Wilmington, NC), *Messenger*, May 10, 1900.

²¹⁶ “Local Dots,” *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), March 22, 1899.

Black women's movement. And the vocabulary and justification that they formed for enacting those actions of surveillance and policing was one that both sexualized and criminalized Black female bodies. Racket alley, that "notorious alley" became a localized symbol of crime in the city. In this way it acted as an origin point, which police could continuously raid and for which they could blame for crime spreading throughout the city.

So, it may well have been that Maggie Washington did not in fact set out from Racket Alley on the night of December 26, 1911. Her supposed residence there could have been an assumption on part of the police and the newspapers that owed to their associations of the area with the only kind of Black female criminality they understood. Regardless of her living situation, by 1911, her marriage to Merrick had ended, either in divorce or death. While there are no records of either, Maggie Washington was arrested under her maiden name, and remarried a few years later. It is entirely possible that after her marriage to Merrick ended, she found herself living in the "Negro tenement" that was in the rear of a cobbler shop on Racket alley.



Detail of 1910 Sanborn Fire Insurance map of Wilmington showing a "Negro Tenement" situated on

Church Alley

Standing just steps away from the Cape Fear River and in an industrial part of town, this residence was a conspicuous exception to the character of the area. With no official address and an entrance likely through the narrow cobbler shop of Cohn Hyman at 113 ½ Front Street, this was undoubtedly a place that would have given the perception of transience and impermanence, a likely landing place for people moving into and out of the city or otherwise seeking to avoid the scrutiny and attention that was more likely to fall on their heads.

So if indeed Maggie Washington did live here, and did set out from here on the night that she was ultimately arrested, she may have gone one of several different ways. The most direct route would have taken her north on Front Street, to a crossing over Market Street that marked an unofficial boundary between the industrial district she lived in and the better part of town that held hotels, the Masonic lodge, and many of the larger houses in town. Proceeding past the fine buildings lining this northern corridor of Front street, Washington must have turned east on Princess street past boarding houses, pool halls, the offices of the *Wilmington Morning Star*, and the seats of power: the courthouse and jail where her night ended. Even if she had opted to avoid these main avenues and traverse less populated roads her options were limited. Central Wilmington was a fairly tightly gridded city, hemmed in by the Cape Fear on two sides and limited in size and scope by both its surroundings and by planned patterns of development. These designs both limited Maggie Washington's mobility to a number of proscribed options and foreclose our ability to entirely reconstruct her procession on the night of December 26, 1911. Faced with a paucity of interpretive options, we resort to the most direct route, knowing that this is a contradiction of the free roaming nature of Jonkonnu, whatever her own understanding and interpretation of it. Recorded in contemporary maps and other sources are a few possibilities for Maggie Washington's route the night of her arrest. But more telling are the absences, the factors

that limit our understanding of Maggie Washington either as an historical figure or in the context of her own time.

Wilmington and the Development of Infrastructural White Supremacy

As Maggie Washington walked, whatever route she took led her through a landscape marred by the symbols of white power. That symbolic power, however potent, was also overlaid with the omnipresent threat of surveillance and bodily violence. 1911 acts as a perfect encapsulation of transformations in the landscape of the city that saw its emergence as a thoroughly “modern” Southern city. The first of these were physical infrastructural improvements and a kind of quantifiable economic boosterism that we can see in texts like Sanborn Fire Insurance maps and chamber of commerce pamphlets. These changes were coincident with other modifications to the landscape of the city, principally the construction of monuments to the Confederate past. Together, these changes constituted what I call infrastructural white supremacy. These infrastructures of white supremacy, including uneven distribution of city services and the construction of memorials to the Lost Cause, transformed Wilmington into a city hospitable principally to its white citizens.

This movement—the erection of monuments to the Confederate cause and political figures of the exclusive past—was one that began particularly early in Wilmington. Whereas elsewhere the emergence of Lost Cause mentality was tied more closely to the final decade of the nineteenth-century and the first two of the twentieth, the first Confederate monument went up in Wilmington in 1872, sponsored by a group that evolved into the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC.)²¹⁷ This earliest monument was relatively obscure. Though

²¹⁷ “Confederate Soldier’s Monument, Oakdale Cemetery,” *Commemorative Landscapes of North Carolina*, March 19, 2010, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/commland/monument/291/>.

massive in scale (at least a dozen feet high and serving as the marker for a mass grave,) it was (and remains) situated within Oakdale Cemetery, far out of the city's center and intentionally set apart from the everyday routes of most of its citizens. But earlier in 1911, the enlarged and official UDC had dedicated a new 8-foot high statue to George Davis, the Wilmington resident who had been the Attorney General of the Confederacy. This new monument was in the middle of town. Situated at 3rd and Market, the figure of Davis watched over passersby, almost certainly including Maggie Washington in his far-reaching gaze on the night of December 26. When the statue was dedicated on April 20, 1911, it was with a long, ponderous, and nostalgic speech by the North Carolina jurist, Henry Connor. In a speech representative of the racist politics of the day, Connor looked "backward over the days of reconstruction, military rule, and negro [sic] supremacy" to find the "clear white light" of white, male southern loyalty.²¹⁸ Arguing against the depiction of Confederates as disloyal, Connor instead insisted that it was a steadfast commitment to their own moral principles that led to "these days of restored nationality."²¹⁹ White female participation in this process was implicit, though in service to a masculine ideal of city, region, and nation. This statue was one of many that cast in granite, marble, and bronze, a vision of an ordered and exclusionary landscape. With Davis perched high above one of the central intersections in the city, this artistic rendering of an historicized racism seemed to hold court over the spatial functions of the central city. As an omnipresent symbol, it matched the reality of police presence and normalized surveillance. This was one part of a new system of spatial

²¹⁸ Henry G. Connor, *George Davis* (Wilmington, N.C., 1911), 29. North Carolina Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

²¹⁹ Connor, *George Davis*, 30.

control that arose in early twentieth-century Wilmington. While it was still overt, no longer did it mean forcible and official exile for African Americans.

This was likewise true of physical infrastructural developments, as the advent of official segregation was manifested in the geographic patterns of urban planning. It is not only on the level of the homes and neighborhoods that he writes, but on the more localized level of street lights and sewer service that we might see these prohibitions and structures made literal. But, crucially, it is also in the representations of cities that we can find a new vision made real. As with other elements of social control, there was both a very real set of priorities that created segregated districts without the amenities of city life, and a symbolic register in which the city was represented as a place absent Black life.

In the early twentieth-century, in a move that anticipated later proto-neoliberal claims that business-focused cities were “too busy to hate,” leaders in Wilmington produced several texts extolling the virtue of their growing city. These pamphlets and books are civic boosterism at its most overt. The earliest of these, William Lord De Rosset Jr’s *Wilmington, North Carolina and Vicinity*, extols the virtues of a city populated by “remarkably quiet, law-abiding, and hospitable people.”²²⁰ Further, Wilmington was the termination point for five railroads and in his telling, its “industries are multiplying, its business is widening, exports and imports are increasing, and its manufactures are now rapidly developing.”²²¹ De Rosset also brags about the power and water systems recently constructed in the city. And he sums up his argument for investment in Wilmington by promising “an abundance of cheap labor...sufficient inducement to

²²⁰ William Lord Jr. De Rosset, *Wilmington, North Carolina, and Vicinity*. (Wilmington, N.C.: W.L. DeRosset, Jr., 1910), North Carolina Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

²²¹ De Rosset, *Wilmington, North Carolina, and Vicinity*.

settlers and capitalists to come to Wilmington to live.”²²² The illustrations in the book contrast diligent Black workers at the cotton compresses and fertilizer companies with pictures of “surf-bathing and ocean pleasures” and the shaded grove holding the Confederate monument in Oakdale.²²³ Even more effusive and specific in its praise is I.J. Isaac’s chamber of commerce sponsored booklet *The City of Wilmington, the Metropolis and Port of North Carolina*. In Isaac’s telling, “Wilmington is the metropolis, gateway, and port of North Carolina.”²²⁴ This was slight hyperbole in 1912. Other cities in North Carolina, particularly Charlotte, had already begun to eclipse Wilmington as economic and social centers, and were perhaps more worthy of consideration as metropolis. But he also goes a long way toward establishing Wilmington’s bonafides as an important and modern city. As of his writing, Wilmington was soon to install a sewer system, had a paid fire department, and was requiring all sidewalks to be paved. And in recent years, the water system had been expanded to such an extent that “water is practically now laid on to all the parts of the city.”²²⁵

Through the eyes of its businesses and political leaders, Wilmington was a model city with schools of all grades” for both white and Black students, and a movie theater and entertainment complex where “all classes meet on equal footing.”²²⁶ Besides the largely implicit

²²² De Rosset, *Wilmington, North Carolina, and Vicinity*.

²²³ De Rosset, *Wilmington, North Carolina, and Vicinity*.

²²⁴ Wilmington Chamber of Commerce (N.C.) and I. J. Isaacs, *The City of Wilmington, the Metropolis and Port of North Carolina : Its Advantages and Interests, Also a Series of Sketches of Representative Business Houses* (Wilmington, N.C.: (Wilmington Stamp & Printing Co.), 1912), 3, North Carolina Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

²²⁵ *The City of Wilmington, the Metropolis and Port of North Carolina*, 3.

²²⁶ *The City of Wilmington, the Metropolis and Port of North Carolina*, 3. *The City of Wilmington, the Metropolis and Port of North Carolina*, 25.

mentions of African Americans (public schools and cheap, abundant labor being the twentieth-century version of “happy darkies,”) these developments were closely linked to the infrastructure of white supremacy simultaneously taking shape in Wilmington. A company then called Tidewater Power was established in 1907 and started making improvements to streetcars and gas and electric service. Tidewater Power was a consolidation of previous companies and its intent was to transform Wilmington more efficiently and with greater speed than many companies working toward common if sometimes competing goals.²²⁷ This kind of compelled transformation recalls the similar one enacted in 1898, particularly since they share one principal architect: Hugh MacRae. It’s clear that MacRae was invested in remaking the city toward a vision expressed in both the spectacular violence of November 1898 and the slow violence of environmental change unevenly applied.²²⁸ The former drew more attention and perhaps had a more immediate impact, but it was the latter that cities increasingly adopted in the decades to come. In twentieth-century Wilmington then we see a dual legacy of official violence. Each of these forms were adopted and modified in turn in the coming century, inaugurating a cycle of extreme violence tempered by years of relative calm. It was during those years of calm that basic rights and privileges were revoked.

Along with these textual representations of the city, there were an increasing number of maps that laid claim to representing the city. The Sanborn Company Fire Insurance Maps in particular rendered the city exactly. Long a staple for academic researchers due to their precise level of detail, Sanborn maps served as both spatial and economic encapsulations of a

²²⁷ *The City of Wilmington, the Metropolis and Port of North Carolina*, 29.

²²⁸ On slow violence and the politics of environmental change, see Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011).

city. They defined what was of value and what was not worth insuring. In this way, they are like other maps, albeit without any illusion of objectivity. Still, they can prove useful to help animate a place whose contours have changed significantly. Returning to Maggie Washington's journey on December 26, 1911, we can surmise a good bit more about her probable route. As she moved past the courthouse and jail, Maggie Washington entered into an almost exclusively residential section. As represented on the map, these are larger, single family homes set back from the road on large lots with expansive porches.²²⁹ These houses held families principally of the middle class, not the city's elite who would have been the target of Jonkonnu parades wandering the streets. As she moved past these houses, if she moved past these houses, she arrived at a boundary of sorts. After Princess crossed 10th street, the houses got smaller. Still made out of wood, many of them were duplexes housing multiple families. The others might charitably be called modest, the small houses of painters and carpenters, and other working professionals. This was mostly a Black neighborhood, but with many white homes interspersed throughout. Likely many of these were newcomers, brought to the city by its periodic construction booms and industrial jobs. One block more and she was in a solidly African American neighborhood, anchored by the Eastern Star lodge and populated with the wooden-framed houses of domestics, cooks, and laundresses. Clearly this was a marginal neighborhood. That marginalization was made actual on the Sanborn maps. The one piece of geographic information we do have about the night of Maggie Washington's arrest is her location when she was picked up by the police.

²²⁹ "Insurance Maps of Wilmington, N.C., June 1910 : North Carolina Maps," Fire insurance (New York: Sanborn Map Company, June 1910), sheet 2.
<http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/ncmaps/id/2542/rec/6>.

She was arrested at “12th and Princess Streets.”²³⁰ But, in a piece of symbolism so potent as to be overdetermined, this intersection does not exist. That is, it is not represented on the map. This is the height of symbolic representation: to erase the existence of a place. Infrastructural improvements and the representation of that infrastructure do that work implicitly, but in this absence, we see an active erasure taking place. This is one befitting Jonkonnu and the space of Wilmington at the turn of the century. We often think of this kind of erasure as symbolic form of violence, one that we can easily acknowledge and just as frequently ignore. Here, it has an unexpected weight and speaks to the realities of not just rhetoric, but African American experience. In her life, Maggie Washington used bodily movement—in celebration and in daily routine—to assert her presence at a time in a place where both were under threat. Now her story asserts itself from the margins of the archives, a moment that likewise defies the colonization of space represented in textual and cartographic archives.

Postscript

When Maggie Washington appeared before the mayor’s court for her supposed offense, she “was given suspended judgment upon the payment of the costs.”²³¹ Her encounters with public records were increasingly few in the wake of this brief moment in time. In 1913 she married James Robert Allen.²³² Soon thereafter, they moved north, becoming early pioneers in what would become a great wave of immigration by African Americans out of the South. It was this form and scale of movement, characterized by an insistence on personal rights, which

²³⁰ “Woman Was Masquerading,” *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), December 28, 1911.

²³¹ “The Recorder’s Court,” *The Dispatch* (Wilmington, NC), December 28, 1911.

²³² Marriage certificate, Maggie Merrick and James Robert Allen, Wilmington, New Hanover County North Carolina, 1913.

marked the next generation of African Americans from the South. When the free movement of excursions, parades, and processions no longer sufficed, many of them packed up their possessions and left. They were in search of work certainly, but Maggie Washington and others like her were also clearly in search of the freedoms of which they had been robbed. They did not necessarily seek the North, but refuge from the South and the meager promises of its cities, unfulfilled.

When Maggie Washington died, it was in Philadelphia. On December 26, 1933, she passed away after a month-long struggle with pneumonia. Her youngest brother, Preston, born in the aftermath of the 1898 coup, was with her. Her death was twenty-two years to the day after her arrest in Wilmington. She was sent back home and buried in Wilmington two days later. Just twenty years later, the city was already a vastly different place. As she went to her final resting places, the streets were quiet, missing the parades and song that had marked the celebration of Christmas for so long. There were no Jonkonnu processions that year, and there hadn't been any for a long time.

Chapter 3. The June German: Celebratory Space and the Roving Black Metropolis

The dance started at 10:00 p.m. and by 7:30 there was a crowd waiting to get in. Not so much an orderly line as a pulsing mass of bodies, they were attired in a range of clothing from formal tails and evening gowns to overalls and other work clothes. Already “hastily erected street stalls” along Falls Road and Goldleaf Street were set up, with barkers playfully trying to outdo one another for customers.²³³ Nearby stores and restaurants were preparing to be open all night, doubly stocking their shelves and making food to last until dawn when the dance finally ended. And at Planter’s tobacco warehouse—the center around which this whole crowd gathered—workers were inside, sprucing up the wilted flowers and fallen streamers that had already endured one dance on Friday and two intervening nights of June-in-North-Carolina-humidity.

The occasion that brought everyone here was the annual June German. Dubbed the “World’s Largest Negro Dance,” it brought thousands of people from across the east coast to the tobacco town of Rocky Mount every year.²³⁴ This yearly dance emanated outward from massive tobacco warehouses, repurposed into dance floors and stages for some of the most popular big band acts in the country. Somewhere amid the “...thousands of feet of floor space transformed

²³³ “Plan ‘Greatest’ June German at Rocky Mount,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 5, 1948.

²³⁴ “World’s Largest Negro Dance,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 7, 1947.

into a fairy land for the all night dance,” was Count Basie, the star attraction and partial cause of all the fuss.²³⁵ This was his second appearance at the dance here, the bookend to a virtually unprecedented wave of national popularity. Basie first played to an adoring crowd of several thousand here in Rocky Mount in 1940. Now, in 1948, the decline of big band jazz was well underway. But Basie was still riding the high of his postwar popularity, including his number one from the year before, “Open the Door, Richard!” He would play for nearly forty more years, but would never be this popular again.

The dance started in a kind of controlled chaos when Basie and his band began their first set promptly at 10:00. When neither of the bands scheduled for relief showed up, they played on, stretching out their sets as thousands jitterbugged on the crowded dance floor. As in other years, the dance floor was ringed by bleachers filled with mostly white spectators. A few thousand additional celebrants heard Basie’s first set on speakers broadcast to the crowd outside until 1:00 a.m. Those not lucky enough—or solvent enough—to pay the \$3.00 admission fee and be inside still could enjoy the party outside the venue. At least one enterprising man had set up a “fountain of ‘moonshine’” that he used to dispense fifty-cent drinks to an eager audience throughout the night.²³⁶ Other parties spread out around the tobacco warehouse district and throughout much of the city. When the dance finally ended at 5:00 a.m., tired revelers strolled toward home or the train station with rumpled suits, untucked shirts, “shoes in their hands and the beautiful long

²³⁵ “Top Musical Entertainment Announced for June German,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), May 24, 1947.

²³⁶ A.A. Morisey, “June German Post Mortem,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 26, 1948, sec. A.

flowing dress of the night before, partly tucked in the other hand.”²³⁷ For many, the workday would begin soon.

It took days afterward to estimate the magnitude of the crowd. Revelers had come from all over. A busload made the trek down from Norfolk, cars carried dancers from nearly every city and town in the state, and as in years past, many more came from Baltimore, Atlanta, Philadelphia, and other distant cities.²³⁸ The *Chicago Defender* reported the attendance as a precise 24,287 people. The same number was repeated in the *Kansas City Plain Dealer* and the *Baltimore Afro American*.²³⁹ This was by all accounts the largest such dance in Rocky Mount, and the best attended of the dance that was universally referred to as “the South’s largest Negro dance.”

That dance, the June German, had started some three decades prior. In its initial phase, it was a wholesale appropriation of an identically named and white-sponsored dance. The white dance—a cotillion event that served as the highlight of the season for elite Eastern North Carolinians—got started in 1885 when Rocky Mount was still a fledgling town with a nascent tobacco market.²⁴⁰ Around the time the “Colored June German” was founded, either in 1917 or

²³⁷ R.D. “Navy” Armstrong, “Count Basie to Play for June German,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 8, 1940.

²³⁸ “Club Activities,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 12, 1948, sec. E.

²³⁹ “Basie at June German,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), June 19, 1948, sec. First News Section;

“Basie Returns To Strand Stage,” *Defender* (Chicago, IL), June 19, 1948, sec. Theatrical;

“Basie Sets a New June German B.O.: N.C. Dance Draws 24,287 for Record,” *Afro-American*, June 26, 1948, sec. First News Section; “Jump King of Swing in Return Engagement,” *Plain Dealer* (Kansas City, KS), June 25, 1948.

²⁴⁰ “Cotillion Club Organizers Tell of First German Here,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 22, 1928.

1918, Rocky Mount had 12,000 residents, more than a third of whom were African American.²⁴¹ Residentially segregated and largely devoid of sustaining work opportunities for African Americans, Black people in Rocky Mount created an important sense of community and a variety of institutions which helped make it one of the most welcoming places for Black life in early twentieth-century North Carolina. The June German served as an institution in much the same way that more permanent built structures did. Even more crucially, it helped African Americans in Rocky Mount understand their relationship to their city, to their broader region, and to the hundreds of thousands of Black migrants streaming northward even as the June German became one of the most important signifiers of Black cultural life in the South. In this chapter, I reckon with the tension between stasis and movement. Using the June German as my anchor, I examine the space of Rocky Mount as one that foreclosed African American economic success, but became an important cultural center for Black life. Through an examination of the space of the tobacco warehouse, the method and modes of travel for the June German, the way in which news of the June German was broadcast and advertised, and the politics of spatial segregation, I build a case for an early twentieth-century transformation of Black celebratory culture. In the June German we see forms of entertainment and celebration increasingly directed outward, both toward enlarging African American populations outside the South and toward white audiences. In a sense then, the June German was the culmination of the Black celebratory cultures that had emerged in the decades since the end of the Civil War and the highest expression of a culture where celebration was based on the promise of mobility. With the June German, Black southerners expressed a sense of place that was roving and impermanent, a

²⁴¹ Hill Directory Company, *Hill's Rocky Mount, North Carolina City Directory [1930]* (Hill Directory Co., 1930), 13.

southern, Black, sense of place comprised of the constant tension between the promise and perils of the region. Organizers and attendees of the June German were using the dance as a way of situating themselves within a rapidly changing region. As the South was being remade again by exclusionary infrastructural and industrial changes and a massive demographic shift, the June German established Rocky Mount as a kind of temporary Black metropolis. We can see in this place an impermanent but important center of cultural pride and transregional community. With the June German, African Americans insisted on a place for themselves and their celebrations.

The Origins of the “Colored June German”

The June German was founded in 1885 as the premier social event for the white elite of Rocky Mount. The “German” in the title referred to an elaborate dance figure well known in the late nineteenth-century. But the idea for a June German held in the early summer was not unique to Rocky Mount, at least not initially. Then in the period of transition from cotton town to tobacco city, Rocky Mount borrowed the idea from cities and towns across the eastern half of North Carolina. The most clear precedent for Rocky Mount’s German came from Henderson, North Carolina, which established itself as a major tobacco market earlier than Rocky Mount. Seemingly inspired by a rivalry with their neighboring town, Rocky Mount began its own German in 1885, right around the same time that the first tobacco warehouse was built there.²⁴²

The tobacco warehouse quickly became the defining feature of the burgeoning city and of the June German. Its perceived rustic simplicity was transformed by decorations and served as “a

²⁴² See *Rocky Mount: One of the Best, Most Progressive and Fastest Growing Cities in N. Carolina*. (Rocky Mount, N.C.: Rocky Mount Record, 1906), 52 for an accounting of the rivalry between these two towns.

Mecca for main fair debutantes and social queens of the community and distant cities.”²⁴³ The dance was always held on a Friday night in June. Beginning in the evening, bands, and dancers kept on throughout the night, even as sprawling intermission parties sprang up at the homes of wealthy people throughout town. Initially supported by the Battle family, the dance grew to become perhaps the central event of the Eastern North Carolina society calendar under the direction of the Carolina Cotillion Club (CCC,) founded in 1889. ²⁴⁴

It was under the direction of this club too that the June German began to seek both notoriety and profitability. The CCC “realized that money was to be made by turning scenery and properties of their dance over to Negroes for a Colored June German.”²⁴⁵ They did just that, leasing their warehouse space and decorations from the all night Friday dance for a Monday evening affair in the Black community. The African American Elks lodge of Rocky Mount first took charge of the dance before turning it over to Frank Lewis, one of their members. Lewis was a phenomenal promoter and turned the dance into “a commercialized edition of the white invitational affair” by eschewing local talent to bring in nationally known “name bands.”²⁴⁶ In just a few years a band’s selection to play the June German became a marker of particular prestige. It signaled, as newspaper articles reported every year, that the performers in question were the most popular band of the year.²⁴⁷ Annual visitors to the dance numbered in the

²⁴³“Cotillion Club Organizers Tell of First German Here,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 22, 1928, 8.

²⁴⁴ Emily Joyner Thigpen, “Historical June German Affords Favorable Study in Contrast,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 24, 1933.

²⁴⁵ C.L. Spellman, “That June German Is Here Again-It Gets in the Blood,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 10, 1939.

²⁴⁶ “June German Is Rocky Mount’s Institution,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), July 9, 1949.

²⁴⁷ “Buddy Johnson To Play June German,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 11, 1949.

thousands, and came from places increasingly remote to Rocky Mount. Initially the dance was attended mostly by other people in communities both large and small throughout Eastern North Carolina. As it grew in both size and prestige, those outsiders visiting the dance came from cities all along the eastern half of the United States. The June German became, in the words of the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* “not just an ordinary dance but also a reunion of thousands of friends.”²⁴⁸

The success of Frank Lewis’s dance inevitably spawned imitators. In 1938, a small group fronted by valet and gas station operator Mack Riggsbee, started a rival June German.²⁴⁹ Over the next two years, the men’s public rivalry intensified. Each began planning ever more elaborate dances with bigger musical acts. Allegations that Lewis’s dance was fronted by “white capital” probably originated with Riggsbee’s sophisticated marketing plan.²⁵⁰ Regardless of the efficacy of their publicity battle, it was Riggsbee’s coup in bringing Count Basie, a new kind of star whose appeal was solidly interracial, that ended Lewis’s ten-year run as promoter of the June German. Riggsbee managed the dance alone from around the advent of World War II through the early 1950s. These years were the height of the German’s popularity and influence, and saw towns across North Carolina and Virginia themselves try to copy the Rocky Mount June

²⁴⁸ “Andy Kirk To Play June German Dance, June 21,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 5, 1943, 16

²⁴⁹ “It Was Swingtime in Ol’ Rocky Mount During Two Germans,” *Journal and Guide*, June 25, 1938, 15.

²⁵⁰ “Basie Swings at N. C. German: 14,000 Dancers Jam Warehouse for June Prom,” *Afro-American*, June 29, 1940. In addition to changing the structure of advertisements for the June German, as I discuss later in this chapter, Riggsbee also employed at least one journalist, Navy Armstrong, as the “director of publicity” for the “Rhythm Club” operation that put on the June German.

German.²⁵¹ Despite this widespread influence, it was still Rocky Mount whose dance was the most successful and that continued to serve as a potent symbol of African American cultural life.

Tobacco Work and the Creation of a Black Working Class

Rocky Mount's importance as a hub of African American culture began with the explosive growth of the tobacco business. Jealous of the money being made in the older tobacco towns of Oxford and Henderson, Rocky Mount businessman began a campaign to bring the tobacco industry to their town. "In the year 1887 a movement was set on foot...which resulted in the building of the first warehouse in Rocky Mount," a massive 50 by 100 foot building which inspired many, larger imitators.²⁵² Another warehouse was built in 1900, and several more followed in the next few years.²⁵³ They were built in or near the center of the town and in close proximity to its many converging railroad lines. Together, these two industries became the governing force of the city. Still, the trains were there largely in service of tobacco and the millions of pounds that filtered through the city's warehouses, stemmeries, and factories. Here, tobacco was king, and African American people were again compelled to the service of a lucrative cash crop with little potential profit for themselves.

It was principally in the warehouses and stemmeries that African Americans worked in Rocky Mount. In the warehouses farmers, usually from the immediately proximate counties, would drop off their crop of cured tobacco for sale. Often lured in by large signs proclaiming the time of the next sale, the farmer pulled to the edge of the warehouse and was met there by a team

²⁵¹ "Durham's Own June German," *The Carolina Times* (Durham, NC), June 10, 1950; "Martinsville June German," *The Carolina Times* (Durham, NC), May 29, 1954.

²⁵² *Rocky Mount : One of the Best, Most Progressive and Fastest Growing Cities in N. Carolina.* (Rocky Mount, N.C.: Rocky Mount Record, 1906), 52

²⁵³ *Rocky Mount : One of the Best, Most Progressive and Fastest Growing Cities in N. Carolina*, 52.

of African American workers. Their job, day or night, was to unload the sheaves of tobacco and arrange them for sale on the floor of the warehouse, “under the watchful eyes of the white warehousemen.”²⁵⁴ A description from the 1930s describes the quickly unfolding process: “From the head-high stacks of baskets at one side of the warehouse—shallow, round-cornered baskets, a yard square, of tough oak strips—the Negroes bring half a dozen. The tobacco is in sheaves of twenty or thirty leaves, wrapped with a leaf at the stem end, and hung on a four foot stick, about twenty-five sheaves to the stick.”²⁵⁵ Eventually, these individual piles of tobacco covered nearly every square foot of the warehouse floor, leaving just enough room for auctioneers and their trailing customers to navigate the floor as the tobacco was sold in minute-long bursts. After the auction, the same Black men who had unloaded and arranged the tobacco transported it from the warehouse to nearby “stemmeries” or “prizeries.”²⁵⁶

Each of these stemmeries was staffed almost exclusively by African American women, a division of labor that was entirely by design. Men were not allowed to do the stemming work because they could generally do it even more quickly and thereby earn far more than the usual subsistence wage. Instead, they were likely to be employed at any of a variety of jobs where they were designed to be replaceable. Stemming was piecework, paid by the pound. It required swift, powerful motions, splitting each leaf almost in two but leaving “the little part of the stem in the

²⁵⁴ Roger Biles, “Tobacco Towns : Urban Growth and Economic Development in Eastern North Carolina,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* LXXXIV, no. 2 (2007): 171.

²⁵⁵ “Tobacco Market--Durham” in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

²⁵⁶ In Rocky Mount, this meant transporting the purchased tobacco to one of several located nearby and often associated with particular companies or warehouses. Thorpe and Ricks prizery served nearby Watkins and Tobacco Planter's warehouses, while just up the street, Fenner's tobacco likely made it's way to the prizery of Braswell, Level, and Gravelly. “Insurance Maps of Rocky Mount, Nash & Edgecombe Counties, North Carolina, Aug. 1917,” Fire insurance (New York: Sanborn Map Company, August 1917), North Carolina Digital Maps, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/ncmaps/id/5598/rec/8>.

leaf.”²⁵⁷ Women would pile up stems on table, working next to two or three others, and stack their finished tobacco into big bundles to be picked up by men employed for this purpose.²⁵⁸ The pay here was scarce: anywhere from eight to twelve cents per pound of the lightweight, desiccated stems.²⁵⁹ This was a miserable wage, exacerbated by the horrendous working conditions of these factories. Motivated by a prevailing belief “that sunlight and fresh air would dry out the tobacco, white supervisors in stemmeries closed and covered windows.”²⁶⁰ Like other industrial work in North Carolina, stemmeries were hot, dusty, and cramped, without even the promise of year round work to make it seem worthwhile.²⁶¹

Next in the chain of custody of the prized tobacco was usually redrying, where Black men took the leaves through a process designed to suck more moisture out and to better prepare it for aging. Machinery invented in the late nineteenth-century made this work possible, though not easy.²⁶² Other essential tasks these men performed was the packing and sometimes manufacture of hogsheads, the large barrels used at least since early colonial days to age, package, and ship tobacco. Rocky Mount had a few cooperages designed to make these large

²⁵⁷ Estelle Hodges, interviewed by Glenn Hinson, May 23, 1979, Southern Oral History Program, <http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/sohp/id/11617>.

²⁵⁸ Hallie Caesar, interviewed by Glenn Hinson, May 21, 1979, Southern Oral History Program, <http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/sohp/id/11795>.

²⁵⁹ I base this figure on the price paid for stems in the prizeries of Durham, NC during the same period where evidence in the form of oral testimony is readily available. Despite being a larger city, the tobacco industry (outside of manufacturing) in each was fairly comparable in size.

²⁶⁰ Biles “Tobacco Towns,” 185.

²⁶¹ Some particularly efficient workers could make a good wage from piecework. Estelle Hodges remembered that “they weighed up three times a week [and] if you was a good stemmer, they’d put you on day work if you made over that much a day.” In other words, wages were kept intentionally low and the award for efficiency was the move to a lower, daily wage. Estelle Hodges, interview by Glenn Hinson, May 23, 1979, Southern Oral History Program, <http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/sohp/id/11617>.

²⁶² Joseph C. Robert, *The Story of Tobacco in America*. [1st ed.] (New York, 1949), 135.

barrels, and at least two redrying plants (W.E. Fenner's and the in-house shop at the Imperial.)²⁶³ Here, packed hogsheads could age to gain more flavor or to wait out the vagaries of the international market and attendant price fluctuations. Eventually, these hogsheads were loaded for shipment, usually to Durham or Winston Salem, for processing into cigarettes and chewing tobacco.²⁶⁴ Rocky Mount grew as a tobacco town in part because of the complicated network of rail lines that met in the city and enabled transport both interregional and national. Underlying this infrastructure though was the labor of African American men and women. All of the industrial tasks of the tobacco industry were designed to function without the benefit of "skilled labor" and to be replaceable at a moment's notice. And because the work was largely seasonal, it meant that African American people in Rocky Mount were often without work for much of the year. Piecing together off-season labor in a town with only two major employers was a virtual impossibility.

This meant that some Black workers, especially men, were mobile. "Men often went north for the spring and early summer in search of construction work or other manual labor, then returned for the tobacco season and stayed on in Rocky Mount until the northern frost broke."²⁶⁵ This helped deepen ties between this small Southern city and the industrial North, where increasing numbers of family members and friends were settling semi-permanently. Never a one way street, the Great Migration saw cultural *and* geographic ties to Southern homelands persist

²⁶³"Insurance Maps of Rocky Mount, Nash & Edgecombe Counties, North Carolina," August 1917. New York: Sanborn Map Company.

²⁶⁴ Biles "Tobacco Towns," 179.

²⁶⁵ Lisa Hazirjian, *Negotiating Poverty : Economic Insecurity and the Politics of Working-Class Life in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, 1929-1969*, PhD Dissertation, Duke University, 2003, 48.

amid supposedly permanent moves.²⁶⁶ This sense of flux and mobility was the motive force underlying these migrations and remigrations. At home in the south, African Americans found other ways to negotiate and even appropriate spaces marked as white. The tobacco warehouse was one of such space. The tobacco warehouse, as the most visible symbol of the tobacco industry, represented a class and working culture altogether closed to African American men and women. Whites were certainly also subject to selectively low wages and often were among the tenant farmers who suffered tremendously when prices fell or crops failed. But tobacco was also a powerful economic force that transformed a moribund agricultural region of former plantations and smallholdings into a profitable center of commodity agriculture. It was the rise of tobacco, more than anything else that created a large, southern, white middle class for the first time. And it simultaneously cast both Black farmers and Black urban laborers as a kind of permanent economic underclass, forever subject to whims both human and environmental.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ James Gregory, in particular, writes about the social and cultural exchange between South and North, suggesting that northward migration brought with it a kind of “southernization” that could translate to new places outside the region. He does not, however, talk about the continued influence of Black southerners on the South, both from within the region and afar. James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

²⁶⁷ I base this claim on the large body of literature on African American labor and its place both regionally and nationally. In the context of the former, J. Bruce Nelson writes about the ways in which white labor in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries came to be classified as “working class” while African American labor was singularly defined apart from these larger definitions. This classificatory and rhetorical difference mattered in large part because it helped solidify the restrictions on hiring and promotion that were already a part of the emergent Jim Crow system of social controls during this period. See Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001,) or Steven Reich *A Working People: a History of African American Workers Since Emancipation*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013. The latter considers the history and development of a separate African American working class in the century after Emancipation. Though in a slightly later period than the one I write about here, Robert Korstad’s work on Black tobacco workers is indispensable for my argument here and for contextualizing black industrial labor struggles in a southern context. Robert Rodgers Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-twentieth-century South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

The tobacco warehouse was the functional symbol of this transformation. These massive buildings were typically timber-framed constructions with tin roofs.²⁶⁸ Brick facades on many buildings usually gave way to corrugated siding that clad the sides of buildings often a hundred yards wide or more.²⁶⁹ Somewhat hastily built with little regard for ornamentation, they were nonetheless monumental in scale and invariably the most impressive building in the modest downtowns that they populated. Fenner's Warehouse, the site of several June Germans, is a fairly typical example of the form. Constructed sometime between 1907 and 1912, it was part of the first wave of warehouse expansion in the early twentieth-century boom. By 1917 the building had been expanded to two bays separated by an interior, covered driveway, effectively an industrial sized dogtrot enclosure. The ceilings of the main bays went from fifteen to seventeen feet high and were "full of skylights."²⁷⁰ More than seventy feet wide and longer than one hundred and fifty feet on its longest side, the Fenner warehouse, and others in the downtown district effectively obliterated any conception of city blocks or any other kind of planning with their span and scope. Though perhaps not intentional, this created a downtown and a city spatially dominated by industry.

As a symbol, the tobacco warehouse represented the foreclosure of a middle class existence to African Americans. As a built structure, it likewise removed much of the possibility

²⁶⁸ "National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Greenville, NC Tobacco Warehouse District" 2005, <http://www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/nr/PT0623.pdf>.

²⁶⁹ "Architectural Blueprint of Smith's Warehouse," Rocky Mount, North Carolina, 1939 in the D. J. Rose and Son Architectural Drawings and Project Files 1907-1975, North Carolina State University Special Collections.

²⁷⁰ "Insurance Maps of Rocky Mount, Nash & Edgecombe Counties, North Carolina," August 1917. New York: Sanborn Map Company.

of creating African American spaces for anything other than menial work. Because tobacco warehouses were both so ubiquitous and so monumental, they were the central secular buildings of Rocky Mount and other tobacco towns like it. The pride that groups like Rocky Mount's Carolina Cotillion Club took in decorating what were in effect overgrown barns nods to their understanding of the centrality of these structures to their livelihoods. Their repurposing of these structures for a formal dance was done with both a wink at the absurdity of the "city [that] sheds her working garb to dispense hospitality," but also a genuine pride in the utilitarian structures that represented so much accumulating capital.²⁷¹ For African Americans, this kind of repurposing had a far different meaning. It spoke to a long history of making do, of transforming someone else's materials and buildings into objects, celebrations, and spaces all their own. But it also directly addressed an industry, city, and region that was pushing African Americans more and more marginal economic and spatial existences. By repurposing these working spaces as sites of leisure and celebration, African Americans in Rocky Mount were claiming a place for themselves in a city with increasingly little promise for them. This spatial manipulation was part of a larger network of geographic connectivity. Through connections to other friends and relatives—manifested in the June German and its attendant broadcast and travel arrangements—Black people in Rocky Mount were creating and maintaining a Black sense of place that flourished amid the Jim Crow South.²⁷² The tobacco warehouses, themselves repositories for

²⁷¹ "June German," *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 13, 1941, 4.

²⁷² A Black sense of place, as the geographers Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods have argued, is one that should rely on an understanding of Blackness as socially produced and constantly shifting to meet present needs, rather than transhistorical and unchanging. As they suggest, "a Black sense of place and Black geographic knowledges are both undermined by hegemonic spatial practices...and seemingly unavailable as a world view." Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, "No One Knows the Mysteries at the Bottom of the Ocean," in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Toronto, Ont.: Between the Lines, 2007), 7. In my own recounting of the construction of a Black sense of place in Rocky Mount, I rely on

white capital and literally representing a sense of enclosure for African American workers, become the instrument of this liberatory sense of place.

Travel and Connectivity

That sense of place, and indeed that sense of the Black South, was a mobile one. One of the hallmarks of the June German was the distances people travelled to be there. Rocky Mount was the hub of celebration for a single Monday evening in June, but the many thousands of visitors represented any number of different cities drawn to this place. As the dance grew larger, and outmigration intensified, more and more of these celebrants were former North Carolinians who had moved northward and came back for this single Monday evening. In the days after each year's dance, newspapers would proudly enumerate the number of dancers from small, relatively local communities and faraway cities. In 1943 for instance, the Norfolk *Journal and Guide* listed attendees to the June German in social calendars for the towns of Hobgood, Salemburg, and Washington, NC.²⁷³ These small cities, spread throughout Eastern North Carolina, sent a dozen or so dancers to Rocky Mount each. That journey—thirty miles from Hobgood, ninety from Salemburg, four hundred from Philadelphia—was an integral part of the experience of attending the dance. As occupants of cars, buses, and trains descended on Rocky Mount, they did so in defiance of the restrictions placed on their mobility. To travel to the June German, through the anonymous interstates or the more intimate byways and small towns, was to freely traverse a

these narratives that marginalize and make a Black sense of place a static entity, even as I introduce counter narratives and actions that show the way Black people combatted those limiting assumptions.

²⁷³ "Washington," *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), July 3, 1943; "Salemburg," *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), July 3, 1943; "Hobgood," *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), July 3, 1943.

region whose fecund promise in early summer was in high contrast to many of the realities of life under Jim Crow. But travelling in groups, particularly with the communal celebration of the June German as destination, delivered temporarily on the promises of freedom inherent in open mobility.

In that same year, 1943, one account details the hours long process of the town filling with cars from miles around. “Long before dark they began moving in,” the article reports, with “every city and several states represented on the license plates of the many automobiles.”²⁷⁴ This form of transportation was seemingly the most common one for African Americans travelling to the June German. The automobile clearly represented a form of independence and at least a minimum of material wealth. It made travel, not to mention the promise of romantic courtship that underlay the entire function of the June German, that much more possible. Indeed, as cultural historian Cotten Seiler observes “automobility’s promise was one of escape from Jim Crow: upward through socioeconomic strata and onward across geographical space.”²⁷⁵ The very process of driving and owning a car was one that allowed African American people to resist the indignities of public travel with its persistent structures of unequal access. Even during World War II, when rubber and gas rations restricted most non-essential vehicle travel, many people continued to make the drive to Rocky Mount, even from distant cities. In one 1942 newspaper article, “Mack Riggsbee, president of the Rhythm Club” reported “that ‘pleasure’ drivers are already storing their cars in order to have ample supplies of gas on hand the night of June 15 to

²⁷⁴ A.A. Morisey, “It Was the June German...” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 27, 1942.

²⁷⁵ Cotten Seiler, “‘So That We as a Race Might Have Something Authentic to Travel By:’ African American Automobility and Cold War Liberalism,” *American Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (December 2006): 1094.

travel to the city for the event.”²⁷⁶ Riggsbee’s emphasis on pleasure suggests that part of the importance of driving an automobile to an event like the June German was itself a leisurely, even celebratory act. What often gets lost in discussions of the difficulties of automobile travel for African Americans under the reign of Jim Crow is this liberatory potential. As Paul Gilroy suggests, “for African American populations seeking ways out of the lingering shadows of slavery, owning and using automobiles supplied one significant means to measure the distance travelled toward political freedoms and public respect.”²⁷⁷ Those narratives largely ignore the *fun* of car travel, particularly on occasions like this one. And they fail to account for the automobile as a unique manifestation of mobility, a vehicle that both moved across space and was itself a frequent place of refuge or even romance.

Some accounts of the dance even suggest the ways in which automobiles served as the venue of choice (or necessity) for some June German attendees. A 1935 recounting of the space outside of Mangum warehouse during the dance described a situation “for those who aren’t fortunate to accumulate the required door fee,” where automobiles and chairs brought from home serve as a resting place until the early morning hours.”²⁷⁸ These kind of impromptu parties not only suggest the importance of cars for revelers, but also the ways in which people took advantage of automotive transport to the June German. This and other accounts detail by inference the system of shared rides that represented both a form of sociality and practicality. In one instance, recorded in 1938 because of a fatal accident en route to the German, we know that

²⁷⁶ “Gas, Tire Shortage Won’t Affect Attendance at June German,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), May 23, 1942.

²⁷⁷ Paul Gilroy, “Driving While Black,” in *Car Cultures*, ed. Daniel Miller (Oxford: Berg, 2001):94.

²⁷⁸ R.D. Armstrong, “ROCKY MOUNT ALL A-FLUTTER IN ANTICIPATION OF ANNUAL JUNE GERMAN DANCE ON THE 24th,” *Journal and Guide*, June 15, 1935, 6.

a small coupe with a “rumble seat” crammed in four dancegoers: Ernest Barnes, Same Wilkes, Lonzo Cooper, and Laura Cooper.²⁷⁹ We only know about their journey because of its abbreviated conclusion, but it seems certain that this configuration of sharing rides and partaking in unofficially sanctioned parties out of cars was commonplace. A 1929 arrest of “one Negro youth...with liquor in a car” near the dance suggests the centrality of the car as both a mode of transport, and a central piece of expressive functionality of the June German.²⁸⁰ Cars were both a primary mode of transport and a refuge against the potential denial of basic services necessary for revelry. A key feature of the white German was the numerous parties held at elite houses across the city, as well as the possibility of taking advantage of the increasing number of hotels, clubs, and restaurants for white patrons. While versions of each of these existed for African Americans, they were necessarily unsuited to the scale of an evening where the Black population of Rocky Mount exploded by an order of magnitude. Cars could hold food and alcohol, or serve as a place to rest. These were conditions that extended in part from the temporal segregation of the evening and its occasion being on a Monday, rather than weekend evening. Cars were increasingly a necessity for the celebration not only because of the purpose they could serve before and during the celebration, but because they then also allowed their owners and occupants to leave, heading back to their own cities and jobs without the necessity of adhering to anyone else’s schedule.

Of course, automobiles were only the most recent innovation in travel for twentieth-century African Americans. As discussed above in my chapter on Jonkonnu, Maggie Washington, and Wilmington, cross-state recreational travel was relatively commonplace for

²⁷⁹ “Negro Is Killed as Car Overtakes,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 14, 1938.

²⁸⁰ “One Arrest at Annual German,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC) June 22, 1930.

African Americans in the years immediately after the Civil War. These organized pleasure outings were the precursor of the large groups of travelers that made it to the June German by any transportative means necessary. In 1946, as in other years, the crowds “came by chartered bus, some by truck, and every type of auto from the 1920 flivver to the present day limousine.”²⁸¹ So while the emphasis was most frequently on the automobile because of its usefulness as a sign of status and a kind of encapsulation of the night’s “criteria for beauty, prestige, and style,” it was often more utilitarian travel that got many people to Rocky Mount.²⁸²

Founded in part as a hub for railroad travel, Rocky Mount’s train and bus station saw increased travel on regularly scheduled routes. Visitors started streaming into the city on “railroads and bus lines” with “schedules scattered throughout the day.”²⁸³ In addition to the usual scheduled buses and trains serving Rocky Mount, for the 1930 dance at least there was a “special train from Norfolk for the occasion.”²⁸⁴ And in the post-World War II easing of travel restrictions, the “city’s bus, train, and airplane facilities” were “expected to feel the rush of the June German’s traffic.”²⁸⁵ This specially arranged travel was commonplace for the June German, with chartered buses from Fort Bragg during the war years and private buses from groups in other cities at different points throughout the dance’s history.²⁸⁶ These arrangements spoke to the

²⁸¹ “Seething Crowd of 15,000 Attend June German Dance,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 22, 1946, 13.

²⁸² Gilroy, “Driving While Black,” 82.

²⁸³ “‘Fatha’ Hines, Sweethearts Will Play at 25th Annual June German,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), May 16, 1942.

²⁸⁴ “Regular Original June German,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 14, 1930.

²⁸⁵ “June German Features Two Popular Bands,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 15, 1946.

²⁸⁶ Walter C. Bryant Jr., “Rocky Mount News,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 28, 1941.

necessities of travel that could both accommodate large groups travelling together and mitigate the impacts of segregated public transportation. As Paul Gilroy suggests, trains and even buses can be “a noisy, visible, and powerful symbol” that “invert the imperial potency of the industrial technologies to which white supremacy and its signature unfreedoms were articulated.”²⁸⁷ There’s no small irony that it was these same vehicles, eating up the miles between North and South that often provided some small measure of liberation, both in their relative availability and sometimes in the employment they provided. To return south, or to otherwise travel to this place by these means, was a small expression of that liberatory potential and one of the ways in which Rocky Mount functioned as a space of possibility during the June German.

ROCKY MOUNT (N.C.) ADVERTISEMENTS

<p>When in Rocky Mount VISIT THE TONSORIAL SHAVING PARLOR J. A. HANSON, Prop.</p>	<p>WHILE ATTENDING THE JUNE GERMAN RIDE WITH WILLIE GRAY Reasonable Rates Phone 1130</p>
<p>Have Your Clothes Cleaned and Pressed for the JUNE GERMAN at the Ward Robe Cleaners Goldleaf St. Phone 594</p>	<p>For a Good TAXI While Attending the JUNE GERMAN Call Hubert Tyson Careful and Polite Service Phones 1130 and 1686-31</p>
<p>WHILE ATTENDING THE JUNE GERMAN Ride in Howard Davis' Chevrolet Radio Cab Fast Service Phone 1130</p>	<p>WIMBERLY BROS. "The House of Cleaners" 206 E. Thomas St. Phone 113</p>
<p>COMPLIMENTS OF H. S. SORRELL FUNERAL HOME H. T. SANDERS, Mgr and Mortician 221 N. MAIN STREET PHONES 486-654-M-1600-886-J</p>	<p>MANHATTAN THEATRE MONDAY AND TUESDAY "Father Brown Detective" featuring Walter Connolly and Gertrude Michael WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY "Case of Howling Dog" Starring WARREN WILLIAM FRIDAY AND SATURDAY "Home on the Range" and Chapter 9 of "The Red Rider" Starring Buck Jones Extra Added Attractions at all Shows W. H. HUNTER, Mgr.</p>
<p>Douglas - Armstrong Drug Store Corner Main and Thomas Sts. JUNE GERMAN Headquarters</p>	
<p>When In Rocky Mount Use BELLAMY'S RADIO CABS</p>	

Advertisements, June German 1935

Once visitors were in town, they relied on a variety of means to shuttle back and forth between the houses of friends, restaurants, and shops, and the tobacco warehouse whose confines had been designated as the center of the event for that year. In a curiously worded description of this mode of transportation from 1942, an observer recounts that the “taxis put in a full night of work transporting the mobs around the city to and from the bus and train stations, and generally meeting the transportation needs of the visitors.”²⁸⁸ The small businessmen who ran those taxis eagerly courted this business. As we can see in this 1935 advertisement, Willie Gray, Hubert Tyson, and Howard Davis all

²⁸⁷ Gilroy, “Driving While Black,” 88.

²⁸⁸ “Rocky Mount City Gets Ready To Greet June German Throng,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), May 30, 1942, 16.

offered their cars for visitors on the night of the June German. Willie Gray ran a taxi operation throughout the year, while Howard Davis and Hubert Tyson generally worked as private chauffeurs.²⁸⁹ To repurpose their cars, perhaps ones even owned by their regular employers, for this evening's work suggested the pomp and circumstance of the June German. To have a private driver—even one shared with others—for the evening was a marker of the licensed excess and splendor of the June German. Still, the majority of June German traffic was almost certainly on foot.

As revelers arrived to Rocky Mount by train, bus, or car, they quickly moved toward Douglas Block. Taxis may have shuttled people to the multiple African American residential neighborhoods around town to visit family and friends, but the terminus point for every year's June German was within two blocks of the center around which African American life in Rocky Mount, and indeed much of Eastern North Carolina, revolved. Douglas Block was a geographic marker for Black people looking to orient themselves in Rocky Mount. In the early years advertising the June German, when it was still growing beyond a regional event, the location of the dance was marked as "opposite Douglas Corner" so that prospective visitors had a landmark to find their way to an unfamiliar structure.²⁹⁰ These locations were not selected by the promoters of the dances, but rather the all-white Carolina Cotillion Club. For this committee, the tobacco warehouses represented a kind of studied contrast with the splendor of the decorations for the June German and the strictly formal dress code. But for African Americans, it meant that the center of the social calendar of North Carolina was squarely within the most visible Black neighborhood in the city.

²⁸⁹ *Hill's Rocky Mount (Edgecombe County, N.C.) City Directory*, volume 9 [1934,] 103, 130, 256.

²⁹⁰ "Frank Lewis Presents Jimmie Lunceford," *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 9, 1938.

Indeed, some promotions for the June German emphasize the fact of this centrality and visibility. One 1935 advertisement calls the Douglas-Armstrong Drug Store (“corner, main and Thomas sts.”) the “June German Headquarters.”²⁹¹ Indeed, Douglas-Armstrong was an anchor not only of the block but of the June German experience. It was one of the businesses that stayed open throughout the evening, a place where you could “enjoy Gar-O-Ler ice cream” or a sandwich to fuel a night of dancing and drinking.²⁹² It was also a place, along with the Center Theater Smoke Shop (located a little over a quarter of a mile away in the heart of downtown,) that people could buy tickets for the June German.²⁹³ The theater was not in Douglas Block and its location as a destination for ticket sales seems intentional. The advertisements for these tickets appeared in the white run *Evening Telegram* and clearly spoke to both white and Black consumers. The latter would purchase their tickets in Douglas Block, the former downtown. There was certainly a difference between attending to business at a place adjacent to Douglas Block, where many of the town’s biggest tobacco warehouses were. In fact, every one of the warehouses used for a June German was within a block or two of this central Black business district. For African American dancers, this must have seemed like a serendipity that heightened their own sense of celebration on a night when the town became decidedly and definitively Black. For white people—either as spectators at the “Colored June German” or as dancers at Friday night’s white German—being in this part of town and celebrating in the warehouses was a step removed from their usual inhabitation of the city. As I have argued here previously, Rocky Mount was in a category of cities set up to control and police the singular racial other of the early

²⁹¹ “[Classified Ads],” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 15, 1935.

²⁹² “[Classified Ads],” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 15, 1935.

²⁹³ “The Original Colored June German,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 9, 1938, 5.

twentieth-century south.²⁹⁴ Still, these spatial and social boundaries were transgressed frequently, motivated alike by a white investment in Black bodily pleasure and the geographic necessities of small town life. These kinds of proximate intimacies created a challenge to the easy contours of spatial segregation and informed a performance of the June German that increasingly represented the celebration of everyday Black pleasure.

Broadcast and Promotion

For the first decade of its existence, the June German was operated by the local Elks club.²⁹⁵ Very little evidence of these first years was recorded, in part because regional Black newspapers had not yet reached their peak. More directly though, Rocky Mount just did not yet matter enough to warrant mention in anything other than the most local contexts. But, as both media and the population of Black Rocky Mount swelled, so too did its regional and national profile.

Through the advertising and newspaper coverage of the June German, African American businessmen were at once promoting their town to a growing Black audience, and promoting themselves to white townspeople. The June German then represented a shift in both African American celebratory culture and the way that culture was represented. Through a series of advertisements and a growing number of national connections, the promotional network of the June German broadcast a vision of celebration and festivity that established Rocky Mount as a

²⁹⁴ The singularity I refer to here is of course a manifestation of the Black/white binary, which was a discursive, if not necessarily actual, reality on the ground.

²⁹⁵ "The Carolinas: Rocky Mount, NC," *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), June 27, 1924.

cultural hub for Black life. The importance then of the June German lay in part in its ability to make Rocky Mount matter nationally, and to make Black culture matter locally.

In the absence of broad coverage by regional African American papers, it was a white point of view on African American life that was most often circulated in Rocky Mount. That remained true even as the June German became a prominent regional dance attended by hundreds, and then thousands, of white spectators. In the late 1920s, as the German was increasingly covered in national Black newspapers, the *Evening Telegram* of Rocky Mount ignored the dance altogether. In 1926 for instance on the day after the German, the local newspaper proudly announced a gathering of “Klansmen from all over Eastern Carolina” planning to host a “mammoth parade and public session” in Rocky Mount the next month.²⁹⁶ The meeting of every chapter in the eastern part of the state would end the day with an assembly at “two local warehouses,” before embarking on a procession of “several thousand Klansmen.”²⁹⁷ This kind of mass entertainment, as I suggested in an earlier chapter, was precisely the sort of event that emerging African American celebratory culture was responding to. Likewise, it is during this period that Black performances transitioned away from an emphasis either on minstrelsy and an exaggerated caricature of Blackness, or performances intended solely for African Americans. Indeed, most of the few notifications and advertisements about African American led performances in Rocky Mount during these years were related to travelling shows like the Silas Green Minstrel show whose band was led by John Ivey of Rocky Mount.²⁹⁸ The

²⁹⁶ “Klan Meeting Is Slated for City, Monday July 5,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 22, 1926.

²⁹⁷ “Klan Meeting Is Slated for City, Monday July 5.”

²⁹⁸ “Rocky Mount Negro Found Dead at Goldsboro Today,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), May 17, 1926.

interest in both of these specific events suggests a white populace invested in the performance of Black bodies in ways that confirmed or amplified racial prejudice. Even the Klan rally, absent of any African American attendees, was evoking the specter of a kind of caricatured Blackness. At the same time, its presence in the news both symbolically and literally obliterated news of the Black June German even as its coincident celebration with the town's Independence Day celebration legitimated the threat of racial terror as white celebration. The early promotional efforts of the June German had to reckon with the racist legacy of entertainment and celebration, and the persistent threat of harm.

The promotion of the June German represented a two-pronged change in distribution and broadcast. Its prominence in the Southeast and nationally stemmed from the rise of Black newspapers aimed at African American consumers. In a sense, both the dance itself and the news of it are examples of a transregional sense of community being formed outside of the old geographic borders of Black life. But the June German also represents a change in white perception of African American celebratory culture. Promoters of the dance consciously cultivated audiences of white spectators. They did so partially to legitimate their dance and ensure their own profitability. Approval by white audiences effectively constituted tacit approval by authorities who were less likely to direct scrutiny, violence, and disruption at the celebration if it included hundreds of whites as nominal participants. Already, the majority of white newspaper coverage of the June German focused on public order—judging the crowds' conduct or enumerating the number and type of arrests.²⁹⁹ But beyond the simple preservation of the

²⁹⁹ See for instance: "Most Orderly Crowd Yet At German, Officers Say," *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 18, 1927.; "Local Police Department to Keep Order In City Tonight," *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 23, ; "German Crowds Are Orderly," *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC),

event and its profitability, the June German capitalized on the interest in Black bodies as spectacle to normalize African American people. The allure of famous national bands was part of the German's draw, but white audiences also came to see the elaborate and massive dance moves undertaken by African American dancers, many of them their own neighbors from Rocky Mount. The simultaneous rise of these two different audiences suggests the increasingly complex changes in African American celebratory culture in the years before and immediately after the Second World War. Both through technologies of distribution, and the recasting of spectacle and spectatorship, the June German emerged as an important example of the potential of such celebrations to redefine the meaning of Black life in the urbanizing South.

More than a decade into its existence, the June German finally started receiving consistent coverage in the African American press. The *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, one of the most important African American newspapers in the South and Mid Atlantic, was entering its most prominent phase at this moment. Its content expanded to include community news and information from far outside of Norfolk.³⁰⁰ As it did so, it became the default newspaper for African Americans in a variety of communities who otherwise failed to see their own names in print. Through this kind of recognition and legitimation, entire populations of Black people saw themselves as drawn into regional and national community. And in Rocky Mount, as elsewhere, this kind of detailed coverage legitimated their own forms of celebration, entertainment, and community. This capitalized on the past several generations of meaning making in Southern

June 22, 1929.; "Dances Pass Off With No Disorder," *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 28, 1932.

³⁰⁰ Henry Suggs, *P.B. Young, Newspaperman: Race, Politics, and Journalism in the New South, 1910-1962* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988).

cities. The potential of these places—which had drawn Black travelers and residents to them in increasing numbers since Emancipation—was finally being felt in newspaper accounts that validated their own sense of place. It simultaneously made places seem exceptional and equal: bigger cities like Norfolk and Richmond might have gotten more attention, but they shared the pages of the paper with Rocky Mount and even smaller communities like Hobgood and Chocowinity. Anywhere there were African American people within the reading area, their news was covered. If it did not make each of these cities exactly equivalent, it at least placed them in the same order. The urbanizing Black South then consisted of far more than the large cities that are most often the subject of scholarly work. Instead it was characterized by a kind of roving metropolitanism whose center could shift and expand from day to day. This kind of roaming sense of place resulted from a constant search for belonging and the entanglements between a South that was both homeplace and foreign country. Frequently and increasingly, the cultural center of the Black South was outside the region, in Baltimore or Philadelphia or Detroit. But these possibilities also meant that Rocky Mount could become, for one night, the center of Black Southern cultural life. There were no bigger dances, and for ten hours each year, Rocky Mount was the center of the Black Southern universe.

Of course, it took several years of development and a smartly crafted public discourse to achieve these heights. In this early press, the June German was represented principally as a commercial activity. After the Elks stopped being responsible for the planning and promotion of the dance, Frank Lewis took it over. A longtime and devoted member of both the local Elks chapter and the national organization, Lewis was a dance promoter. Frank Lewis's life also represents a kind of disjuncture between different kinds of official representation. In Black-published newspapers, he is identified as a dance promoter, even when he is mentioned in social

articles outside the context of that profession. Clearly this is an identity that was both recognized and made to project. Likewise, when he was in white newspapers, almost always in advertisements that he himself placed, he was listed as a promoter. This was a kind of image crafting, a creation whose symbolic weight was also backed by the reality of his work arranging dances and other mass entertainments in Rocky Mount. Besides the yearly June German, which he promoted after 1930, Frank Lewis also sponsored several other entertainments throughout the year. His events were large affairs, hosting the likes of Cab Calloway and Fletcher Henderson in late summer tobacco warehouse dances.³⁰¹ In 1932, when Cab Calloway and his band played Lewis's end of summer dance in Rocky Mount, it was one of the very few single night engagements the band took that year. At nearly the height of their popularity, Calloway and his band spent most of the year at their residency in Harlem's Cotton Club and the remainder of their time in week long stints in Pittsburgh, Washington, Boston, Chicago, and other large cities.³⁰² Lewis was clearly a nationally recognized promoter and Rocky Mount an important destination. But beyond his own self-image, Lewis also appeared in more official records with a considerably more modest profile. Between 1930 and 1934, after he was already firmly established as a dance promoter, Lewis lived as a lodger in the home of Mabel and James Bailey. In 1930 he worked as a porter at the railroad station, while by 1934 he was employed as a janitor at the People's Bank

³⁰¹ "Cab Calloway to Play," *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), July 16, 1932; "The Last Big Dance of the Season," *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), August 4, 1934.

³⁰² Alyn Shipton, *Hi-de-Ho: The Life of Cab Calloway* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 69-70.

and Trust Company in downtown Rocky Mount.³⁰³ When he died in 1969, just a few houses up from his longtime rental at 418 Atlantic Avenue, he was still working as a janitor at the bank.³⁰⁴

There was a significant disjuncture then between the roles Lewis played for a variety of publics. During His life suggests a growing change in the possibilities for African American people in Rocky Mount. While to some extent he remained tied to a job of low status and wages, he also clearly transcended that position both economically and socially. Neither was the ability to make money and cultivate status above one's own station new to African American men like Frank Lewis. There is significant and direct precedent among the practices of minstrelsy, not to mention a whole host of other occupations during the colonial and particularly antebellum periods. What is new here though is the kind of connoisseurship that Lewis is cultivating among both white and African American audiences. His advertisements increasingly sold the idea of spectatorship to white audiences. In virtually each of the ads he sponsors after taking over the dance in 1930, and all of the Rocky Mount newspaper coverage, great care is dedicated to the white-friendly environment of the event. A 1932 article in the *Evening Telegram* is characteristically explicit, stating "ample provisions will be made for white people to see the

³⁰³ 1930 U.S. Census, Edgecombe County North Carolina , Rocky Mount, dwelling 400, family number 420, James T. Bailey. 1940 U.S. Census, Edgecombe County North Carolina, Rocky Mount, dwelling 418, Benjamin F. Raulins. *Hill's Rocky Mount (Edgecombe County, N.C.) City Directory*, volume 9. (Richmond, VA: Hill Directory Company, 1934): 172.

³⁰⁴ North Carolina district 6490, certificate of death number 21574, Frank Lewis. June 24, 1969. North Carolina State Board of Health, Office of Vital Statistics.

dance.” This announcement seemingly was designed to assure that “as in previous years...a larger number of white spectators will be present.”³⁰⁵

I suspect that this was calculated less to help the June German succeed, and more to assure white readers that their presence at a Black event was socially appropriate. Frank Lewis continued along this same line in his advertising, emphasizing each year the number of seats for white spectators (eventually some 3,000) and the reduced cost for those choosing to view rather than dance (typically half the fee for dancers.) Around the June German then, there grew a culture of spectatorship that we cannot easily liken to historical precedents.³⁰⁶

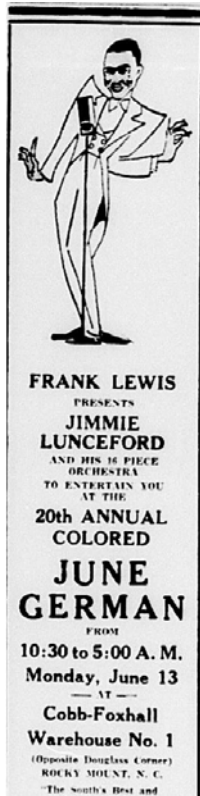


1933 Advertisement for the Frank Lewis promoted 14th Annual Colored June German

³⁰⁵ “Negro June German Planned for Monday June 27,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 15, 1932.

³⁰⁶ Perhaps the closest historical precedent would be blackface minstrelsy, a form that Eric Lott argues was “based on an investiture in black bodies,” and stemming from a “desire to try on the accents of ‘blackness’.” Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, twentieth-anniversary edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6. Other, early cross racial performances like those documented by Marvin MacAllister likewise fail to account for the peculiarity of the June German, or its manifestation as a regionally specific form of popular culture that was increasingly becoming dominated by African American culture. Marvin McAllister, *White People Do Not Know How to Behave at Entertainments Designed for Ladies & Gentlemen of Colour: William Brown’s African & American Theater* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003)

Early American forms of Black performance are the immediate historical antecedents to the June German, but they fail to account for the particular forms of spectatorship that we encounter in twentieth-century Rocky Mount. While the nominal draw of the dance was the ability to see increasingly important big band acts, newspaper accounts, advertisements, and other historical sources make clear that the musicians were not the sole and perhaps not even the



Frank Lewis as June German attraction

primary attraction. Lewis was clearly a master salesman. His early advertisements were dominated by bold figure drawings, usually of the band set to play. His ads were unlike any others in the newspapers they appeared in. Even in Black and white newsprint they jump off the page. On at least one occasion, one of his advertisements featured a solitary drawn figure, whose identity was uncertain. I suspect that this was designed confusion for viewers who were expected to wonder if the anonymous figure dancing at a microphone was Jimmie Lunceford of Frank Lewis. The latter included his name first, in text as bold as that of the performer's. Clearly, he was staking his claim as the primary figure behind the June German, and perhaps even one of its attractions. He was also an early adopter of photographic representations of the artists he brought to town, and his June German

advertisements continued to be eye catching and attention grabbing. And

though his success was unprecedented in Rocky Mount, it was not unmatched.

In 1938, a second "Colored June German" sprung up. The promoter was Mack Riggsbee, the famous bandleader Kay Kyser's "oldest friend" and chauffeur.³⁰⁷ In its first year this rival

³⁰⁷ "10th Anniversary Poster, Kollege of Musical Knowledge", 1948 in the Kay Kyser and Georgia Carroll Kyser Papers #5289, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

You Can't Afford To Miss
The Original Colored
JUNE GERMAN
MONDAY NIGHT, JUNE 13
AT THE GORGEOUSLY DECORATED
Mangum's Warehouse — N. Church St.
Where the "Clown Prince of Rhythm"
WILLIE BRYANT AND HIS ORCHESTRA
With Belle Powell, Vocalist Will Entertain You
From 10 P. M. Until 5 A. M.

Willie Bryant's Music is guaranteed to fascinate and hypnotize you into a fancy, fantastic mood that bids farewell to all cares for a full night, leaving you footloose and fancy free to glide your way to paradise in the glamorous setting of the most renowned Negro dance of the Southland.

THE WAREHOUSE WILL BE OPEN TO PUBLIC INSPECTION
MONDAY FROM NOON UNTIL SIX O'CLOCK

Admission: Dancers \$1.10—Spectators 50c

THIS IS P-O-S-I-T-I-V-E-L-Y THE ORIGINAL NEGRO GERMAN

Early Mack Riggsbee June German advertisement

June German managed to also book one of the nation's top acts. To compete with Lewis's coup in hiring Jimmie Lunceford, Riggsbee brought in Willie Bryant, another of the country's top bandleaders. Whereas Lewis's ads were highly idiosyncratic and relied upon his reputation to sell his acts, Riggsbee used far more conventional styles. His early ads have plain block lettering, little illustration, and no mention of his name or other personal details. This was an

attempt to cut down on the bravado and verve of Lewis and adhere more closely to the usual (white) standard of advertising for the paper. Riggsbee was clearly a canny advertiser. Whether through his experience working with Kay Kyser, or through his own observations of their shared hometown, he understood that an understated image was more likely to appeal to the many thousands of white spectators who could make his event a particular success. His ads very clearly resembled others in the local newspapers, and made a point to emphasize white spectatorship. Riggsbee's early ads, like the 1938 one reproduced below, were often wordy almost to the point of being pedantic. But, as in this ad, they also played to white interests and white perceptions of African American culture. The advertisement suggests "Willie Bryant's Music [will] fascinate

and hypnotise you into a fancy, fantastic mood.” The dancefloor—a “glamorous setting—” is one that urges you to “bid farewell to all cares for a full night.”³⁰⁸ “Fascinate” and “hypnotise” read here as markers of exoticism. And this was clearly language directed at spectators, since both have a strongly observational quality. These words seem intended to distance Willie Bryant and the event more broadly from the everyday social interactions that marked Black and white contact in Rocky Mount. Instead, we have here a vaguely exoticized sense of participation by observation, a sense that mere act of being in the room was somehow transportative. But perhaps the more interesting ad copy here is the implied promise of the effects of the evening’s entertainment. The “fancy, fantastic mood” that causes you to bid “farewell to all cares for a full night,” is a clear invocation of oft-repeated tropes of Black life. Popular opinion, repeated often in a variety of popular media, held that African Americans were lazy, and pleasure seeking. The ubiquity of these images was such that in 1938, one of the aforementioned Frank Lewis ads actually appeared on the same page of the Rocky Mount *Evening Telegram* as the nationally syndicated comic strip “Sunflower Street.” Apparently intended principally for Southern audiences, the comic played on racist tropes for laughs.³⁰⁹ This is just one example then of a much broader culture of casual racism that pervaded virtually every facet of southern life. The irony of course, particularly in Rocky Mount, was that it was Black labor propping up local economies. In Riggsbee’s ad though, we see a very clever use of these stereotypes, and particularly the unwarranted perceptions of laziness and leisure. His invocation to leave behind one’s cares for an evening is clearly meant to recall these tropes of Blackness and cast them in a

³⁰⁸“You Can’t Afford to Miss the Colored June German,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 11, 1938.

³⁰⁹ “Ask the Archivist: Sunflower Street,” *Comics Kingdom*, <http://comicskingdom.com/blog/2013/02/13/ask-the-archivist-sunflower-street>.

positive light. In effect then, the promise of the June German here is an adoption of all of the stereotypically positive aspects of being on the other side of the color line, without any mention of its negatives. Riggsbee launched his career as a promoter by carefully selling this image of carefree nights and a form of Black leisure distanced from the everyday by an exoticized and stereotyped presentation.

The rivalry between Lewis and Riggsbee continued for the next few years as each man strove to bring bigger and better acts to Rocky Mount for the June German. In a sign of Lewis's particular reach and importance, it was the Pittsburgh *Courier* that most closely detailed the struggle between the two promoters. A 1939 article there claimed that "Frank Lewis is facing the promotional fight of his long and illustrious career" and was "meeting it with fists clinched and his flags waving high." Lewis met the challenge of his rival who had "stepped out to bring in two famous name bands" by booking Andy Kirk to compete with Riggsbee's duo of Jimmie Lunceford and Claude Hopkins.³¹⁰ This escalated their promotional efforts; 1938 and 1939 were the high water mark for the number of June German advertisements in papers both local and regional. But the rivalry ended soon thereafter. In 1940, Riggsbee managed to bring Count Basie to town for the Rocky Mount. In all probability he had played there before as a member of Benie Moten's orchestra in 1934, but he had since eclipsed virtually every other bandleader in the country in popularity and skill.³¹¹

³¹⁰ "ANDY KIRK TO PLAY ORIGINAL JUNE GERMAN DANCE: AFFAIR HAS BEEN BACKED BY YEARS OF FINE TRADITION" *Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), June 3, 1939; C.L. Spellman, "That June German Is Here Again-It Gets in the Blood," *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 10, 1939.

³¹¹ "15th Annual June German," *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 16, 1934.

The show was a massive success. The Norfolk *Journal and Guide* reported that 10,000 dancers and spectators came to the dance.³¹² The Baltimore *Afro-American* reported 14,000. Whatever the truth of these numbers, inaccurate as they probably were, their legend only grew in coming years. In 1942, the Atlanta *Daily World* reported on the 1940 June German and inflated the numbers to a full 26,000: “on another occasion, the Count played for a dance at Rocky Mount, NC and packed a huge warehouse with 16,000 people. The National Guard had to be called out to keep order when 10,000 more” attempted to storm the entrance.³¹³ Regardless of the veracity of any of the legends, it was clearly a record-breaking night. And for Frank Lewis, the end of his career promoting June Germans.

Riggsbee followed up his success with several crafty moves. He had apparently brought a team of friends and colleagues in to help plan. They went under the name of “the Rhythm Club,” and featured, among others, Navy Armstrong, as the “director of publicity.”³¹⁴ Armstrong went on to write several highly praiseworthy and incredibly detailed accounts of the June German under his byline in the Norfolk *Journal and Guide*. It might also have been Armstrong who planted the story that Frank Lewis had been “allegedly backed by white capital” throughout his ten year run as promoter.³¹⁵ It seemed an unlikely accusation, especially given Riggsbee’s own association with Kay Kyser and his nationwide promotional machine. Regardless of its truth, it certainly damaged Lewis’s reputation among the Black press who were no longer as friendly to

³¹² A.A. Morrissey, “10,000 Hear Count Basie at Historic N.C. June German Dance,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 29, 1940.

³¹³ “Whole Town Talking About Coming Of Count On June 1,” *Daily World*, (Atlanta, GA), May 24, 1942.

³¹⁴ “Basie Swings at N. C. German 14,000 Dancers: 14,000 Dancers Jam Warehouse for June Prom,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), June 29, 1940.

³¹⁵ “Basie Swings at N. C. German 14,000 Dancers.”

his interests as they had been in previous years. Perhaps the most cunning of Riggsbee's moves though was an advertisement that he placed in the Rocky Mount *Evening Telegram*. Taking a cue from Lewis's playbook, he took out a quarter-page ad, dominated by a large photograph. Rather than feature one of the performers, it was a close up profile picture of Riggsbee himself. He used the space to thank the many citizens of Rocky Mount who "took part in making the 23rd annual COLORED JUNE GERMAN the success that it was."³¹⁶ This was a stunning move, not least because this advertisement meant that the mostly white readers of the *Telegram* would be confronted prominently with a Black face in a paper that otherwise had virtually none. By 1940, the only pictures of African Americans that had appeared in the paper with any frequency were the June German performers themselves. With his photograph and with this advertisement, Riggsbee was clearly trying to associate himself with the June German in the eyes of the people of his town. Only broadly like his predecessor's attention grabbing copy—"Frank Lewis Presents"—Riggsbee was nonetheless seizing the spotlight. His gesture though was perhaps more respectable by contemporary standards. Rather than presenting himself as a figure of entertainment and leisure, Riggsbee was clearly performing as a community-minded businessman. In his side profile photograph, he is clad in a suit and tie. Staring off center in the manner of professional portraiture, Riggsbee is meant to be not an imposing or impressive figure but an utterly everyday one. The advertisement concludes with an emphasis of this community-minded message, promising that part of "the proceeds of the dance" were used to make "a fine donation to Colored Scout Troop No. 61."³¹⁷ Riggsbee both moved the focus of the June German away from Frank Lewis and toward himself, and helped inaugurate a shift in interest and

³¹⁶ "In Appreciation..." *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC) June 19, 1940.

³¹⁷ "In Appreciation..."

spectatorship that carried over into the next several years, the most successful in its four-decade run.

Intimacies of Proximity and the Politics of Spectatorship

Part of the draw of a city, even a small one like Rocky Mount, was its density. Though this may have heightened the intensity of scrutiny for Black people, cities also held the potential for the kind of cultural community demonstrated most fully in the thousands of June German attendees each year. This was born in part out of intimacies of proximity. Spatial nearness, especially when coupled with other forms of commonality like employment or ethnicity, can create a sense of community. But geographic overlap alone can also create particular forms of commonality or even intimacy. Indeed, it was the specter of interracial intimacies that governed much of the stringent policing of the color line. African American women were welcome to engage in the peculiar intimacies (implied in the very name) of working as “domestics” for white families. African American men on the other hand were categorically excluded from contact with white women, and in places like Rocky Mount, interacted mostly with white employers. Still, there was an inevitability to cross-racial contact. Segregation was a practice enacted principally in space and in response to the necessary intimacies of small city life where contact and interaction was an inevitability that white hegemony sought to regulate. Much of that was motivated by the exigencies of business in a city where African American labor powered each of its major industries, albeit in ways sometimes largely invisible. As I established above, the work of tobacco—both in fields and factories—was one dependent on this labor. The same was true of the railroads, or indeed of work at the town’s textile mills, still two decades away from

integration.³¹⁸ Fellow workers connected across race, however tentatively. But in the June German we see an encapsulation of these same intimacies. The June German was an event to both perform and resist the kind of relationships, and indeed the kind of longing, born out of both frequent interaction and the prohibitions against interracial mingling. In its yearly appeals to white spectators, the June German represented itself as a safe place to observe and appreciate Black performance. But as some contemporary commentators suggested, it was also a way to undermine the ills of spatial segregation and employ celebratory space as a liberatory practice.

Starting as early as the late 1920s, the so-called Colored June German was designed as an attraction for white spectators. A 1932 article, the first mention of the event in any Rocky Mount newspaper, was centered on “ample provisions...made for white people to see the dance.” The article suggests that this was a fairly common practice and that “as in previous years, it is expected that a large number of white spectators will be present.”³¹⁹ In fact, it was through these ads targeted at white spectators that the Colored June German finally started to receive some inconsistent coverage in white newspapers. The paper reported a few days later, in what was otherwise a condescendingly brief article on the lack of disorder at the dance, that “a large number of white people attended the dances as spectators.”³²⁰ The number of spectators continued to grow so that eventually the “Special Section for White Spectators,” held seats numbering in the thousands.³²¹ The newspapers sometimes seemed to echo the hyperbolic prose of the promoters in reporting these numbers. Different accounts claimed that there would be

³¹⁸ Nelson Moody interviewed by Elijah Gaddis, November 20, 2016.

³¹⁹ “Negro June German Planned for Monday June 27,” *Evening Telegram*, (Rocky Mount, NC), June 15, 1932, 9.

³²⁰ “Dances Pass off With No Disorder,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 28, 1932.

³²¹ “McKinney’s ‘Original’ Cotton Pickers,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 26, 1933.

“seats for three thousand spectators” all “running along side the picket fence bordering the dance floor” when Willie Bryant played the German in 1938.³²² By 1940, that number had been inflated to “approximately 8,000 seats for spectators.”³²³ Regardless of the actual numbers, the space for white spectators was an increasingly prominent part of promotional materials for the German. In equally large letters one year were the sponsoring organization’s name and a promise of a special section for the white audience: “Sponsored by the Rhythm Club Reserved Seats for White Spectators.”³²⁴ And presumably in response to crowded conditions in years past, a 1942 ad promised “More Seats, More Room, More Comfort for Spectators.”³²⁵

In effect, these were advertisements for a segregated experience, one that allowed whites to view the bands and dancers without actually interacting in any meaningful way. It promised a voyeurism of a sort. Some memories from the time though recall a slightly different reality. The saxophonist Maceo Parker grew up in nearby Kinston and recalls the means by which June Germans and other shows held in tobacco were segregated:

But they would have a rope, like a big, thick rope like maybe from a ship or something [laughs], and have it in the center of the stage, down the thing, and then all the way to the back. They’d have Black people on one side, white people on the other side.

And I, you know, remember as a kid saying, “I don’t understand this. What’s the difference in the rope? I don’t understand.” And then, you know, like this. [Demonstrates] This is the stage, and the rope is like this, all the way back, and then you’ve got white people over here, Black people over here. ... You know what I mean? And you’re listening at the same time.³²⁶

³²² Navy Armstrong, “Bryant to Play for June German,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 4, 1938.

³²³ “To Swing at Rocky Mount June German,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), May 25, 1940.

³²⁴ “World’s Largest Negro Dance,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), 1947.

³²⁵ “Folks, It’s Here! Tonight’s The Night!,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 15, 1942.

³²⁶ Sarah Bryan, Interview with Maceo Parker, May 17, 2007, North Carolina Arts Council, African American Music Trails Oral History Project.

Parker here is commenting on the absurdity of this particular form of discrimination, what we might call a form of sonic segregation. He calls attention to the mechanics of the situation, suggesting that the attempts to regulate and differentiate the way spectators heard the music was as absurd as pretending that there was any sort of fixity in the more common forms of spatial segregation. People were clearly hearing the same music, but had a markedly different experience of the event. Though the move toward accommodation for white spectators was largely advertised as an attraction, it ended up functioning as a performative critique of the *means* of segregation, if not necessarily its ideology.

It was largely under Mack Riggsbee's management that the June German increasingly served white spectators as a way of observing the activities of their fellow, Black townspeople. This kind of spectatorship, rather than appealing entirely on the grounds of an exoticized and distant observation, was one premised more closely on something like a shared geographic commonality. No longer emphasizing only the long-travelling bands, the June German under Riggsbee increasingly focused on the dancers themselves. This was a move that redirected white scrutiny, perhaps paradoxically given the long history of white spectatorship of Black people, particularly in the southern United States.³²⁷ Regardless of that fraught history, by the height of the June German's three decade run in Rocky Mount, white spectators were coming in large part to view not just popular national bands, but the dancers themselves. Theirs then became a kind of

³²⁷ There is a vast literature on Black performance and Blackness as a kind of performance, particularly under the institutional control of enslavement. The pioneering work in this field is Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.) Threads of her important work have been picked up by scholars working in a variety of fields, including the literary and performance scholar Michael Chaney whose 2005 dissertation tends to the literary and visual representations of the spectacle of enslaved, Black people: Michael Chaney, "Picturing Slavery: Hybridity, Illustration, and Spectacle in the Antebellum Slave Narrative" (Dissertation, Indiana University, 2005). And Joseph Roach most explicitly situates the performances of enslaved people in his article Roach, Joseph, "Slave Spectacles and Tragic Octoroons: A Cultural Genealogy of Antebellum Performance," *Theatre Survey* 33, no. 2 (1992): 167–87.

spectatorship of everyday celebratory culture. The performers of this yearly drama became the dancers themselves, Black people from both the immediate area and far-flung locales. In a sense this was a culmination of centuries of voyeuristic interest in even the most mundane details of daily actions of Black bodies. But it also reoriented this attention in ways that subtly undermined its intention.

This kind of interracial collaboration, even if unwitting, was a part of the June German from the beginning. This is evident most clearly in the repurposing of decorations from the white June German. Each year, “the same decorations and accommodations for spectators” were used from the Friday night dance.³²⁸ The yearly descriptions of these decorations sometimes undercut white involvement, and suggested that news of and interest in the white German did not necessarily cross-racial lines in the same way as its counterpoint. A report about the decorations for the 1946 dance suggested it would “follow its customary practice of featuring the magnificent decorations which are put up each year by the Carolina Cotillion club, white,” but had to mention that they also held “a popular dance called the June German.”³²⁹ Just as often though, the white June German seemingly undercut its Monday night doppelganger with decorations that subtly reinforced the Anglo-Saxon plantation nostalgia underlying the white June German.

Descriptions by Black newspapers tended to highlight the almost otherworldly characteristics of the transformed tobacco warehouse. By far the most utilized descriptor was “fairyland” or “fairy-like.” The *Telegram* used these words too, but they tended to be more specific in describing the individual themes of the decorations. One year’s decoration had “the

³²⁸ “Negro June German Planned for Monday June 27,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 15, 1932.

³²⁹ “Andy Kirk, Sweethearts to Play June German in Rocky Mount,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 8, 1946.

general effect...of an English garden.”³³⁰ Other years recreated “a peach orchard in blossom time”³³¹ or festooned the warehouse with “thousands of miles of white streamers” with a massive white canopy overhead and “side walls treated in replica of out of door cafes, such as one sees in European countries.”³³² Another recurrent motif saw the English garden theme of ivy, laurels, and picket fencing made more local by a row of “North Carolina’s long leaf pines...to wall off the dance floor.”³³³ These decorations all evoked a particular kind of nostalgia, one that pulled from a romanticized past and foregrounded the translation of European cultures to American landscapes. It is perhaps going too far to say that these were conscious evocations of the plantation era, though they meet the spirit if not the full letter of that time period. Certainly the scenes they envisioned for these balls were ones that represented an exclusionary past, however vaguely figured that was. Reinforcing this interpretation is the relationship between the two dances, with one article describing the Black June German as “intimately tied up with the destiny of the White June German.”³³⁴ The intimacy invoked here is key: it was the very perception of both intimacy and difference that informed the continued development of the June German as a space for white spectatorship and Black celebration.

³³⁰ “Workers Putting Warehouse Into Shape for June German,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 15, 1931.

³³¹ “List of Chaperones Announced for 48th annual dance at Cotillion Club,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 19, 1928.

³³² Emily J. Thigpen, “Another June German Adds to Cotillion Club Laurels,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), June 12, 1937.

³³³ “Thousands of Visitors Praise Cotillion Club Entertainment,” *Evening Telegram*, June 20, 1931.

³³⁴ A.A. Morisey, “Annual June German Attracts Crowd at Rocky Mount,” *Journal and Guide*, June 21, 1947.

By 1947, A.A. Morisey of the *Journal and Guide* observed, “the annual phenomena” of the June German “cannot be explained on the theory that the love of music played by name bands brings devotees from hundreds of miles around into the city for the one night event.” His many years’ attendance at the dance suggested that “many hundreds of white and colored come as spectators” to the dance each year to “sit hours on the uncomfortable bleachers watching the surging mass of dancers.”³³⁵ Morisey, the longtime bureau manager for the *Journal and Guide*, was an unusually incisive and thoughtful journalist.³³⁶ After the 1948 June German, he again wrote a long reflection on the dance where he tried to account for its meaning and significance to both white and Black audiences. The June German, Morisey opined, lets a “daytime oppressed human throw restrictions to the wind and easily lose himself under the various influences which are bountifully supplied.” Those influences “music, mobs of others in his same category, and even the admiring sanction of the crowds of white spectators” were ones that encouraged a single night of “reckless abandon.”³³⁷ He is invoking the carnivalesque, an understanding of the night’s events that is rooted in an inversion of societal order. Refining his thesis from the year before, Morisey suggests that the appeal to white spectators lies partially in a mostly uncritical spectatorship of Black celebratory life. Still, the “influences of the white spectators” was an important determining factor in the nights’ events. For Morisey, at least part of the importance of the June German was precisely because of its ability to force white spectators to adopt a temporary position of inequality.

³³⁵ A.A. Morisey, “Annual June German Attracts Crowd at Rocky Mount,” *Journal and Guide*, June 21, 1947.

³³⁶ “Morisey Joins Staff of Winston-Salem Daily,” in *Shaw University Bulletin and Catalogue*, vol. XXIX (Raleigh, N.C., 1949), 5.

³³⁷ A.A. Morisey, “June German Is More than A Dance; 'Tis An Institution,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 26, 1948, sec. E.

These persons of the other race are temporarily relegated to a subordinate place behind the ropes where they must sit and watch while Negroes enjoy the complete freedom granted them by purchase of ticket which cannot be had for any price by the white spectator. Thus the self-styled 'superior race' suffers under an 'inferior' status and Negroes enjoy the experience of 'separate but equal' fantasy from the position of those who normally usurp the superior facilities and privileged American democracy allegedly insures.³³⁸

Morisey's scope is incredibly wide reaching. This brief passage contains both a condemnation of the persistent "fantasy" of equally provisioned segregation, and, implicitly, of the myth of equality through economic gain and respectability. Morisey's description of a dance ticket "which cannot be had for any price by the white spectator," clearly suggests a form of celebration incapable of commodification. This is a fascinating example since it is both symbolic and literal (Jim Crow segregation meaning that white spectators could not be on the same dance floor with Black dancers.) This is perhaps one of the few instances, as Morisey points out, where the rules of segregation actually work in the favor of African Americans. Perhaps ironically then, it is in this form of celebration that we can see the lie of segregation most clearly exposed, and something like the seeds of its destruction sown. The June German, whether through Riggsbee's influence or its own natural evolution, evolved to the point where its continued existence functioned as a radical critique of the dominant white society in which it flourished.

Morisey's critique is all the more important for its having been included in a newspaper whose success relied in part on its fairly moderate tone.³³⁹ It also encapsulates much of the

³³⁸ A.A. Morisey, "June German Is More than A Dance."

³³⁹ See Henry Suggs, *P.B. Young, Newspaperman: Race, Politics, and Journalism in the New South, 1910-1962* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988), 92-95. Young, the editor of the Norfolk Journal and Guide, had some reputation for liberalism. Famous anti-southern firebrand H.L. Mencken once accused Young's paper of "fast becoming communist." But his own politics were significantly more moderate than Mencken's hyperbole would suggest. Aside his advocacy of equal rights legislation, Young ran "news reports and features designed to advance interracial goodwill." His paper fought the status quo, but did so in a way that hardly risked the wrath of its advertisers or of the many white newspapers which frequently reprinted Young's editorials.

importance of the June German in this period. As it changed promoters in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the dance manifested the competing visions of Lewis and Riggsbee. Lewis's dance—characterized by forthright self-promotion and an emphasis on wild abandon—never really ceased. Instead, Riggsbee's own promotional machine took over and made the dance's public face one of orderly fun and service to community. This helped mask the almost riotous celebratory fun that occurred each June German evening, as the many thousands of dancers descended on Rocky Mount, keeping its streets alive with dancing, drinking, and music. Perhaps more importantly, as Morisey points out, the June German re-ordered white spectatorship. By separating white spectators from Black dancers, the dance's segregation forced at least some unconscious awareness of the ills of Jim Crow onto its white spectators. It functioned as a kind of immersive commentary for local whites, though its efficacy is questionable. Perhaps most importantly, this change in spectatorship put attention more squarely on the dancers themselves. We have here again the disjuncture between rhetoric and reality: the big bands were pitched as the attraction, but it was seemingly the spectacle of the dancers that drew the most attention. Over a period years, the June German helped establish different forms of white spectatorship that both emerged from and helped alter everyday life in Rocky Mount. A simultaneous embrace and repulsion from African American celebratory culture, the June German brought white spectators toward a kind of identification with and longing for Black bodies dancing. We might see in these forms of spectatorship a longing for the imagined freedoms of Black life, with a simultaneous grounding in the physical structures of segregation. The audience then functioned as a kind of

performance of spatial segregation. Whites could prominently observe African American people dancing and long for their perceived freedom of movement, worry from cares, and other stereotypically racist formations. At the same time, white people were subject to, as Morisey writes, some small simulation of the spatial segregation that governed southern cities like their own. The experience and meaning of the city then was one subject to frequent changes. With frequently shifting rates and types of employment, and increasing levels of migration and remigration, a particular place could become a hub for Black life for a matter of a few hours. As African Americans began rejecting the staled promises of the southern city in large groups, they dealt still with the tensions between home and away, between making a place for themselves in the South and rejecting outright a place whose white culture had sought to obliterate Blackness. That it would be, in part, the appeal of Black culture to white consumers that helped point out the absurdities of structures of racial inequality is perhaps expected, given the previous seventy-five years of cultural appreciation and appropriation that I have outlined here. But ultimately the June German, along with other forms of celebratory mobility, is important because it represents a full expression of southern, Black, cultural power. June German celebrants were remaking Rocky Mount into one of the hubs of southern life for an evening, and in so doing, reordered the urban space they had sought to change since Emancipation.

Conclusion: Black History and Memory on North Carolina's Streets

The four horseman rode down Main Street in single file. Their horses walked steadily through the abandoned streets, moving calmly past abandoned storefronts and empty sidewalks. When they reached an intersection, all four riders stopped at the red light, lining up by twos. No cars passed through the intersection while they waited. As the light turned green, their horses ambled through the intersection and the riders glanced briefly at me, the only other person in sight, before they rode slowly by, further into the heart of the city.

That apocalypse-invoking scene took place in downtown Rocky Mount on a Saturday in January 2015. I was there visiting the local library and in the hopes of finding June German ephemera. I came downtown looking for what turned out to be a closed antiques store that nonetheless occupies almost an entire city block. The store is situated on Main Street, amid what used to be a bustling commercial center for eastern North Carolina. Two generations ago, these streets would have been filled with weekend shoppers; farmers come to town and industrial workers just finished with their shifts. As if mocking its surroundings or evoking the potential of another time, one display window of the storefront held an oversized sign declaring Rocky Mount an “All America City.” The sign, from 1969, is a full eight feet high and only lightly faded even after years outdoors and in a light filled shop window. In a carefully curated display, it is surrounded by pamphlets, ribbons, and other memorabilia from Rocky Mount. In 1969, this was a bustling if declining city, recognized for its “significant achievements emphasizing the

areas of human relations, education, housing, recreation, and job placement.”³⁴⁰ Absent are similar materials from 1999, the second year Rocky Mount received this designation. Perhaps those were materials that did not fit the category of antiquity, particularly in a shop assembled over many years and lying mostly dormant for another long period. Or maybe those signs and ribbons from 1999 evoked a too painful recent past. That contemporary history was one marked alike by the potential of plans like the Carolinas Gateway Partnership or the Rocky Mount-Edgecombe-Nash Education Cooperative, the closure of the town’s major textile mill and many of its tobacco warehouses and factories, and the devastation wrought by Hurricanes Floyd and Fran.

I evoke this urban landscape not to revel in its peculiar, shambling former grandeur, but rather to suggest the tension between failure and potential that the city represents. The recent past of Rocky Mount, as represented in both local and national media is a grim one. Frequent sensationalist reports on the city’s high murder rate are countered elsewhere by even more numerous positive messages about policing initiatives and recent reductions in the crime rate.³⁴¹ That positive attention is not repeated in national stories, as exemplified in Robert Draper’s 2010 *GQ* profile, “The Lost Girls of Rocky Mount.” Here, Draper writes about a string of murders dating back more than a decade, and evokes Rocky Mount not so much as a place but as a

³⁴⁰“Rocky Mount Named All America City,” *The City of Rocky Mount*.

http://www.rockymountnc.gov/government/information/rocky_mount_named_all-america_city

³⁴¹ “3 NC counties make list of top 30 ‘murder capitals’ in the U.S.” *My Fox 8* (High Point, NC), February 29, 2016

<http://myfox8.com/2016/02/29/the-30-murder-capitals-in-the-u-s/>. “Good News: Crime in Rocky Mount, NC is at a 35 Year Low,” *Rocky Mount Review*, April 30, 2015, <http://www.rockymountreview.com/Home/entryid/116/good-news-crime-in-rocky-mount-nc-is-at-a-35-year-low>. “Rocky Mount, NC Crime: Lowest Since the 1980s,” *Rocky Mount Review*, July 22, 2014. <http://www.rockymountreview.com/Home/entryid/27/rocky-mount-nc-crime-lowest-rates-since-the-1980s>

generic stand in for the vanished potential of urban, Black America. It is “raggedy and faded” like a newspaper clipping of one of the early murders, filled with “drab streets” a “once proud [city] gone utterly to seed” and in the poverty of its current situation, lacking “something else in the community's soul that economists are at a loss to quantify.”³⁴² For all of its purple prose, Draper’s profile is one of the few that even begins to represent the city’s structural problems. Those result from a combination of factors, many rooted in the historical exclusion of African Americans from access to city services and infrastructure, and to many of the jobs that created a white middle class there. As those industries began failing or moving away from Rocky Mount, African Americans too increasingly vacated the city. That tension between building cultural and social infrastructure and leaving Rocky Mount and the South for the surer promise of employment and community in the northern industrial states is precisely the context that I analyze in my chapter on the June German.

I revisit the forms and spaces of my earlier case studies in order to recontextualize the existing spatial and cultural context for African American public celebratory cultures in North Carolina and the South. I began with a survey of the freedom festival of Juneteenth, which has recently replaced more localized traditions of emancipation celebrations. This displacement, I suggest, is born of a growing interest in the traces of African American celebratory culture in the urban South and influenced by the erasure of much of the material or social memory of these events. In the following section, I examine the memory of Jonkonnu in a twenty-first century context. Through an ethnographic study of Jonkonnu’s reinvention and revival in a North Carolina tourist enclave, I suggest the ways in which celebratory culture has been commodified

³⁴² Robert Draper, “The Lost Girls of Rocky Mount,” *Gentleman’s Quarterly*, June 9, 2010. <http://www.gq.com/story/serial-killer-girls-rocky-mount-north-carolina>

for the aims of tourist and service economies. Jonkonnu's reinvention in New Bern, North Carolina can serve as an example of Black history repurposed, and of the ways in which contemporary development commodifies local history and memory. Taken together, these contemporary updates suggest an uneven memory of the African American celebratory past. Marked by a tension between erasure and often uncritical revival, these studies characterize a sense of place that largely omits space for Black celebration and pleasure. In this, I suggest, there is a concretization of old patterns turned into structural omissions and exclusions. As ever, the place of African American celebration in the southern city is one marked by the tension between local opportunity and abandonment.

Juneteenth, North Carolina, and the Radical Politics of Festivity

On June 15, 2013 Bob Zellner headlined the Juneteenth celebration in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. The veteran civil rights activist came as a last minute addition to the program and at the recommendation of its cancelled keynote speaker, Reverend William Barber, the vocal activist-leader at the helm of North Carolina's NAACP. Zellner launched into his speech, an invective against the regressive politics of the North Carolina Republican party, from an historical, secular framework. Gone were the softening scriptural references, rhythmic cadence, and other familiar appeals to religious authority that marked Barber's own attacks on the G.O.P governor and legislature. Zellner's frame of reference was the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s and true to form, he blasted statewide leaders with that vernacular, dubbing North Carolina's governor "George Wallace McCrory" after the notorious segregationist

Alabama governor of the Civil Rights era.³⁴³ Then state budget director Art Pope and the state legislature also received Zellner's scorn. He dubbed them generally as "'Ku Klux Klan minded.'" ³⁴⁴ The reaction to Zellner's speech was predictable, with the local *Daily Advance* reporting an apology from the head of the nonprofit that organized the event³⁴⁵ and making an editorial comment on the usefulness of good preparation in choosing an invited speaker for an event.³⁴⁶

The event did not, as it perhaps might have, become fodder for conservative news media or get much play outside the city of 18,000 people. Indeed, it is exceptional mostly as a pointed example of an increasingly similar pattern of celebration across the country. In the past fifteen years, Juneteenth has become a nationwide celebration of freedom, appearing in the wake of the multiple generations of absence of Emancipation Day and other celebrations of freedom, and building on a renewed interest in the potential of Black history to aid in community development and progress. These newly remade celebrations are seeking to capitalize on the same promises inherent in the emergence of African American celebratory culture more than a century and a half ago. They do so now in a broadened regional context, understanding that issues for African American southerners are, increasingly, issues for Black people throughout the country. There is an acknowledgement of the importance of the history that undergirds this celebration, but it is

³⁴³"Juneteenth Celebration: Activist Blasts Policies of GOP," *Daily Advance* (Elizabeth City, NC), June 15, 2013.

³⁴⁴ "Juneteenth Celebration: Activist Blasts Policies of GOP," *Daily Advance*.

³⁴⁵"Nonprofit Head Apologizes for Activist's Juneteenth Remarks," *Daily Advance* (Elizabeth City, NC), June 17, 2013,

³⁴⁶"Our View: Better Planning Needed to Avoid Juneteenth Speaker Surprise," *Daily Advance* (Elizabeth City, NC), July 1, 2013,

overshadowed by the continuing necessity of a date to openly celebrate freedom and call for full legal and social equality.

Juneteenth emerged as one of several iterations of Emancipation Day celebrations in the years immediately following the Civil War. As two scholars studying the recent spread of Juneteenth celebrations suggest, “at least fifteen dates have been used to celebrate the end of slavery” in the United States.³⁴⁷ William Wiggins, the principle scholar of Juneteenth celebrations in their original geographic context, identifies the four most prominent of these dates being commemorated. The dates—May 9, 1862; September 22, 1862; January 1, 1863; June 19, 1865—are, respectively, the announcement of freedom for all people in South Carolina, Georgia and Florida; the announcement of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation; the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation; and the reading of General Order Three to those still enslaved in and around Galveston, Texas.³⁴⁸ We could add to these April 16, the officially recognized holiday that commemorates the end of slavery in Washington, D.C.³⁴⁹ But it was from the last of the dates Wiggins identifies, the reading of General Order 3 in the remote port of Galveston, that Juneteenth was born.

In its earliest iteration, Juneteenth was a Texas celebration, though it quickly spread to nearby states, particularly Arkansas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.³⁵⁰ Both permanent and temporary migratory flows between these states allowed for its easy spread in the immediate

³⁴⁷Janice Hume and Noah Arcenau, “Public Memory, Cultural Legacy, and Press Coverage of the Juneteenth Revival,” *Journalism History* 34, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 156.

³⁴⁸Wiggins, “Juneteenth: A Red Spot Day on the Texas Calendar,” in *Juneteenth Texas : Essays in African American Folklore*, ed. Francis Abernethy, 1st ed. (Denton, Tex: University of North Texas Press, 1996): 238.

³⁴⁹Wiggins, “Juneteenth: A Red Spot Day,” 238.

³⁵⁰Hume and Arcenau 155.

region. This early spread saw many of Juneteenth's seemingly foundational traditions cemented. The orthodox celebration of Juneteenth was a relatively broad one: well-dressed people serving and eating massive, communal spreads of barbecue, fried fish, and other seasonal bounty always accompanied by red soda and some form of athletic or musical performance. According to Wiggins, many of the earliest of these celebrations were rooted in African American churches who sponsored and ran the events as a complex mixture of celebration, charity, and official piety³⁵¹ As time went on though, a secular tradition emerged and began to predominate and Juneteenth became, in the words of one of Wiggins's interviewees, "'a goodtime thing.'"³⁵² This differs somewhat from the development of Emancipation Day that I charted earlier in both its more seemingly linear development into a secular celebration and in its longevity and persistence. Wiggins, Kachun, and others who write about Juneteenth do not speculate about why this might be, or why Juneteenth has so recently slipped its regional bounds and become a nationwide celebratory festival. Absent too are reflections on the difference between celebrating freedom and emancipation. Emancipation was hardly an abstract concept, especially not for the first two generations of African Americans that spread its celebration throughout the South and beyond. It was rooted in very recent histories of enslavement, and continually expressed in the various states of unfreedom which characterized a significant portion of Black life in the period. The end of these celebrations, at least in the data I have collected about North Carolina, seems to stem largely from demographic changes. Many accounts of these celebrations invoke large crowds, composed of celebrants hailing "from the rural districts as well as those in town."³⁵³

³⁵¹ Wiggins, "Juneteenth: A Red Spot Day," 244.

³⁵² Wiggins, "Juneteenth: A Red Spot Day," 245.

³⁵³ "Negroes Celebrate Emancipation Day," *Observer* (Charlotte, NC), January 3, 1917.

Emancipation Days, and the towns and cities that held them, served as centers of celebratory life for a community that came together infrequently and stretched across the boundaries of individual towns and into the surrounding counties.³⁵⁴ I suspect that the broader loss in population led to the downscaling and cessation of many Emancipation Day celebrations. It's likely too that the temporal distance from enslavement made the celebrations less potent, particularly for younger people who understood the depths of its importance only through community memory. Regardless of the reasons for its end in twentieth-century North Carolina, its revival in the twenty-first speaks to the changing nature of that community memory and of interest in more abstract expressions of freedom, as opposed to the living memory of emancipation.³⁵⁵

Unlike the most common date for Emancipation Days in the nineteenth century (January 1), Juneteenth occurs during the summer, which allows for all sorts of outdoor events and recreation to be part of the celebration. And, perhaps more importantly, it is only a few short weeks away from July 4th, the similarly colloquial (though perhaps less creative) name given to Independence Day in the United States. This has meant that Juneteenth is often interpreted in the context of July 4th and held up as a celebration of the fulfillment of the promise of freedom for African Americans. As Hume and Arcenaux report, Juneteenth is often posited not as a

³⁵⁴ See, for instance, a newspaper account of the 1905 Goldsboro Emancipation Day, which notes "there were fully three thousand negroes in the city besides those who live here" ("Celebrate Emancipation Day," *Messenger* (Wilmington, NC), January 1, 1905. Other accounts likewise refer to the wide geographic swath from which its attendees came, as with the 1888 celebration in Elizabeth City that saw speakers from Pasquotank, Bertie, and Gates county ("Emancipation Day"], *North Carolinian* (Elizabeth City, NC) January 4, 1888,) or the "ten thousand negroes of Lenoir and surrounding counties" who participated in celebrations in Kinston in 1919 ("Emancipation Day at Kinston Celebrated in Great Style," *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), January 3, 1919.

³⁵⁵ It is worth mentioning too that some Emancipation Day celebrations did certainly occur well into the twentieth-century. I only collected news of them to the 1920s in large part because of copyright law, which made the retrieval of pre-1923 newspapers much simpler. Still, there was a clear downward trend in the last years of my study, owing I think to both of the factors described above.

replacement for Independence Day but as “‘America’s second Independence Day.’”³⁵⁶ The roots of searching for a replacement for the ironies and indignities of July 4th for African Americans go back at least as far as Frederick Douglass’s early articulation of that idea,³⁵⁷ but Juneteenth is not a direct corollary to Independence Day. Indeed, despite the occasional appeal to or valorization of the ideals of independence in the discourse around Juneteenth, the holiday has transitioned away from celebrating both emancipation and independence, focusing instead the creative energy of organizers and celebrants on freedom. If the distinction between these three abstractions seems arbitrary, the weight of evidence in the many newspaper accounts about Juneteenth practices suggests otherwise. Rather than commemorating a single moment—either of emancipation or of independence—these events focus on freedom as an ideal applied at multiple levels and continually sought after. By using the framework of a temporally bound, recurring event, the organizers and participants in Juneteenth celebrations explode the notion that a single event can have the kind of unitary or fixed meaning that older celebrations of emancipation (and present-day celebrations of independence) have.

This theme of freedom as a kind of addition or even corrective to independence and emancipation is omnipresent in the accounts of local Juneteenth celebrations. Antonia Scott, the Juneteenth committee secretary for Jacksonville North Carolina, summarized the importance of the event she planned for that year as pushing for “awareness and knowledge of progressing freedom.”³⁵⁸ Erlinda Dobson, the minister of St. Julia AME Zion Church who was also

³⁵⁶ Hume and Arcenaux 158.

³⁵⁷ Frederick Douglass, *Oration Delivered in Corinthian Hall by Frederick Douglass, July 5th, 1852*. Rochester, NY: Lee, Mann & Co., 1852.

³⁵⁸ Christopher Thomas, “Annual Juneteenth Celebration Set for This Month,” *Daily News* (Jacksonville, NC), June 6, 2013,

interviewed for the story elaborated on Scott's meditations on freedom. Dobson suggested that the celebration would "drive home the idea of freedom in all areas in one's life" and that she and other female participants in leadership roles for the ceremony would serve as examples for women still disadvantaged with unequal pay and opportunities in both the workplace and in society more broadly.³⁵⁹ This is an expansive, even activist version of freedom that utilizes the occasion of celebration not for reinforcement but for the enactment of change. Other celebrations emphasizing freedom, and the links between freedom and Independence Day, abound throughout the state. One need only examine the frequent occurrences of "freedom" in the newspaper articles reporting on the events to see the connection being made repeatedly. Articles in the *Chapel Hill News* reported that local celebrations were "celebrating freedom," while attendees in Durham were "honoring freedom."³⁶⁰ And those who attended the celebration at the Stagville Plantation historic site were part of a Juneteenth event subtitled "Forever Free."³⁶¹

But the most telling of any of these accounts is the one from Durham, North Carolina's 2010 Juneteenth. The journalist writing about the festival, Cliff Bellamy, recounted the Unity March that began the event and that explicitly repurposed the language and performative forms of the Civil Rights movement. Bellamy writes that the marchers "made their way from N.C. Mutual Life Insurance and down Chapel Hill Street to West Main and finally to CCB Plaza on Corcoran Street, where the day's main Juneteenth events were held." As they walked, some of the marchers began a chant of defiance taken directly from the civil rights playbook: "'ain't

³⁵⁹ Christopher Thomas, "Annual Juneteenth Celebration Set for This Month."

³⁶⁰ Leslie Barbour, "Celebrating Freedom," *Chapel Hill News* (NC), June 18, 2008, Final edition.; "Honoring Freedom - 'We Celebrate Juneteenth Because We Didn't Know'," *News & Observer*, (Raleigh, NC), June 19, 2011, 1st edition.; "Juneteenth Celebrates Freedom at Waterfront Park Saturday," *Daily Advance* (Elizabeth City, NC), June 12, 2014,

³⁶¹ "Juneteenth Celebrations," *News & Observer* (Raleigh, NC), June 14, 2008, Final edition.

gonna let nobody turn me around.’’ And, as they reached the Plaza and the throng of people already enjoying the festivities, the leader of the march led everyone in a chant of his own devising, intoning repeatedly ‘‘Juneteenth, we’re here to stay. Juneteenth, Independence Day.’’³⁶² Like the comments of Antonio Scott and Erlinda Dobson, the chant uses the vocabulary of civil rights, and seeks not just to repeat generic messages but instead to advance new ones. Indeed, these interactions between celebratory and protest cultures suggest not just a sense of overlap, but also of mutual influence. The Juneteenth celebrants here are able to absorb the influence of Civil Rights that undoubtedly played a huge influence in many of their lives. We might see these celebrations as one example of the way that memory of the Civil Rights movement has come to serve as one of the principal forms of secular African American culture, filling in the gaps left by a variety of socialities that I have discussed here.

Implicit here is a more specific critique of African American society and the tendency of many of its movements to exclude or marginalize women.³⁶³ And though none of the articles mention this pattern explicitly, anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that the vast majority of planners and initiators of Juneteenth events are women. In addition to the women briefly profiled above, there have been a couple of articles every year for the past dozen years about Phyllis Coley, the longtime organizer of Durham’s main Juneteenth celebration. Though exceptional in her longevity and coverage, Coley is typical of most Juneteenth organizers. Juneteenths in Greensboro, Winston-Salem, Jacksonville, Rocky Mount, Asheville, and Wilmington are all

³⁶²Cliff Bellamy, ‘‘Juneteenth Celebrants Call for State Nod,’’ *Herald-Sun*, (Durham, NC), June 20, 2010, FINAL edition.

³⁶³There is a considerable body of scholarship on this subject in the literature on the Civil Rights movement in particular. See, for instance: Steve Estes, *I Am a Man! : Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

planned by women. This suggests that women are using Juneteenth to carve out new forms of leadership for themselves. By capitalizing on both the default gendering of cultural work as well as the potential of culture to do radical work, these organizers are expanding both the purview of Juneteenth and its potential for individuals and communities. That it would be pegged to a performative vocabulary of civil rights protest suggests both the longevity of those forms, and the absence of other secular forms of public culture to borrow from. In part then, this new celebratory culture speaks powerfully to the absence of a localized usable past of African American public celebratory culture. This absence exists in part because of outmigration, but those moves, as well as the erosion of Black communities in southern cities, are inextricable from the planned destruction of African American neighborhoods as part of urban renewal.

Freedom then has become the organizing principle of the form of celebration that has largely replaced Emancipation Day. The way that broader principle is articulated suggests a celebratory form seeking to adapt to the realities of Black life and health in southern cities. In my survey of Juneteenth accounts from the past two decades, there were several common elements repeated frequently: food vendors, song or dance performances, contests of various sorts, sermons, or talks, the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation, pageants, and 3-on-3 basketball tournaments. But by far the most predominant element of Juneteenths was a community health clinic or lecture on health care education. From makeshift clinics for disease testing, to talks and literature on forms of disease that commonly afflict medically and economically underserved communities, almost every single event emphasized improvements to physical health and well-being and access to medical care for underserved populations. A far cry from the overlaid feasts chronicled in many earlier celebrations, this community medical focus serves as a direct counterpoint to the sort of simple festivity that we associate with excessive consumption of food

and drink. In this way then, the organizers of Juneteenth festivals are both actively responding to stereotypical perceptions of festivity and to persistent health crises among many African American populations.

The clearest example of this emphasis on well-being comes from Phyllis Coley, the founder and long-time organizer of Durham, North Carolina's Juneteenth celebrations. Durham's 2008 celebration was one given additional energy by the candidacy of Barack Obama for the presidency, but the most enduring image of the day was the long lines streaming from the area where medical practitioners were on hand to screen for high blood pressure, glaucoma, HIV, diabetes, and other illnesses. The newspaper articles make the connection between cultural heritage and physical health explicitly: "For Phyllis Coley, the organizer and founder of the event, health testing and learning about one's heritage is what Juneteenth is all about. 'I am happy if one person finds out they don't have glaucoma or 20 people find out they don't have HIV.'"³⁶⁴ Accounts of other Juneteenth health fairs and clinics are less vociferous but no less central in importance to the celebrations. Clear across the state, in the largely white, tourist enclave of Asheville, the Juneteenth celebration was likewise rooted in a community health model. Springing from a Healthy Living Program started by the event's sponsor, the Women's Wellbeing and Development Foundation, the event sought to recapture the spirit of former community celebrations in the largely African American public housing project, Hillcrest.³⁶⁵ Like so many of the other Juneteenths, the one in Asheville was doing a very particular kind of memory work that involved a callback to mostly-vanished community events from the past. It

³⁶⁴Vicki Lee Parker, "Juneteenth Fete Takes on a Political Flavor," *News & Observer* (Raleigh, NC), June 15, 2008, Final edition.

³⁶⁵Chris King, "Juneteenth," *Mountain Xpress* (Asheville, NC), June 15, 2011, 2.

updated those events with a new focus on healthy living and through the almost infinitely adaptable framework of Juneteenth. The instrumental function of Juneteenth then is to allow for adaptation and betterment in the guise of celebration and festivity, or put more generously, the redefinition of what constitutes a celebration. And while health was the most prevalent theme at these events it was certainly not the only explicit example of an event designed with the improvement of the African American community in mind. One early article about Juneteenth in North Carolina suggests as much, with an account of a group of “black businessmen in Greensboro” who thought of the idea of holding a Juneteenth celebration in 1995 to “give back to their community.”³⁶⁶ While also profiling other early contemporaneous Juneteenths in Wilmington and Charlotte, the author of the newspaper article suggests “today’s Juneteenth events are as likely to be sponsored by a business group, a church, or a museum as a family or neighborhood, the way it once was in Texas.” And because of (or perhaps sometimes in spite of this public organizational effort,) “they often focus on self-improvement or youth empowerment, including job fairs or health information tables.”³⁶⁷ In the more than fifteen years since that article—the first to report Juneteenth celebrations in North Carolina—was published, this focus on multiple kinds of community health has only increased. To illustrate that point, we can return again to Phyllis Coley, still plugging away at the planning and execution of her yearly event. In the most recent of what has become a yearly profile, Coley dubbed the Durham event ““a party with a purpose.””³⁶⁸ Elaborating on that theme, she talked about her own upbringing in Southside

³⁶⁶Christina Nifong, “Juneteenth , Not Just a Texas Holiday Anymore,” *News & Observer* (Raleigh, NC), June 16, 1998, Final edition.

³⁶⁷ Christina Nifong, “Juneteenth , Not Just “a Texas Holiday Anymore”

³⁶⁸Lauren Horsch, “Juneteenth,” *Herald-Sun* (Durham, NC), June 21, 2014,

(one of Durham's poorest neighborhoods and an area that Coley dubs "'the ghetto'") and her ability to use Juneteenth "'to be able to give this back to [her] community.'" ³⁶⁹ In some ways we could read this as a reiteration of the familiar bootstrap narrative, but it bears further scrutiny because this is coming from a woman who has served as a grassroots organizer for this celebration. What we can see in Juneteenth's arrival and spread then is a new iteration of old narratives, a celebration adapted to the perceived needs of Black communities today. In this way then the universalized tradition of Juneteenth has been adapted to local needs, regardless of its origins or the concerted campaign to make it an official holiday. In a sense, we can see this as stemming from the erosion of some regional manifestations of Black culture, celebratory forms like Juneteenth or Jonkonnu that fell victim to white pressure and Black migration.

Jonkonnu's Revival and the Business of History

After Jonkonnu's obliteration in Maggie Washington's Wilmington, the procession went unperformed for decades, becoming a subject for mid twentieth-century slavery nostalgia among some white elites. Included in that number were a group in 1938 New Bern who briefly talked of reviving a whitewashed version of the practice, with every member of the procession coming from one of the city's elite white families. ³⁷⁰ Though that performance was a one off, best understood as part of a long fascination with and appropriation of African American performative culture, it nonetheless set a precedent for re-creation of Jonkonnu that would be built upon sixty years later. In the intervening decades New Bern became a tourist capital. Relying upon its past as the first permanent colonial capital of North Carolina, New Bern remade

³⁶⁹ Horsch, "Juneteenth."

³⁷⁰ "New Bernians to Revive Ancient Christmas Custom," *Daily News* (Greensboro, NC), December 25, 1938.

itself as an early heritage tourism destination. Rebuilt and opened to the public in 1959, Tryon Palace serves as a centerpiece of both the twentieth-century colonial nostalgia embedded in places like Colonial Williamsburg, and of New Bern's own remaking of itself to comply with that impulse toward commodification and celebration of an exclusive past. This has turned New Bern into a paradoxical place. On one hand, the town openly celebrates a moneyed colonial past, with dozens of buildings restored to eighteenth-century standards by the staff of Tryon Palace, and many more serving as private homes for wealthy residents. It is a town of bed and breakfasts, cozy shops and restaurants, and lots of people employed to cater to tourists. New Bern's shift to a tourist hub then is also a shift to a service economy, one that benefits enormously from the confluence of low wage labor and tourist dollars.

The boom in colonial interpretation made Tryon Palace a success for several decades. By the 1990s though, they were looking to expand their interpretation beyond the lives of the colonial elite. In what I would characterize as a plan that would both broaden their interpretation and attract more, diverse visitors, Tryon Palace administrators began tasking their employees with research and interpretation of African American history.³⁷¹ This came as part of a larger transformation of both Tryon Palace and other historic sites who were placing a new "emphasis on targeted marketing towards African American audiences, a group that has historically been under-represented as visitors at Tryon Palace."³⁷² The suggestion to re-create and interpret Jonkonnu in particular came from Simon Spalding, a white staff member deeply versed in early

³⁷¹ *Tryon Palace Commission Meeting Minutes* Vol. 29 (2000), Tryon Palace Archives, Gertrude S. Carraway Library, New Bern, North Carolina. Accessed, April 11, 2014.

³⁷² "Jonkonnu: Tradition of North Carolina," grant proposal to the North Carolina Humanities Council, May 2001, Tryon Palace Archives, Gertrude S. Carraway Library, New Bern, North Carolina. Accessed, April 11, 2014.

American music, but not specifically African American culture. According to grant proposals and other materials I viewed in the archives at Tryon Palace as well as an interview with Spalding, he researched Jonkonnu from the few antebellum sources available and then based his script for the event on those accounts. None of the history he researched found tangible links between New Bern or Tryon Palace and the performance of Jonkonnu. Accordingly, Spalding and others used the descriptions of the most complete antebellum source, Edward Warren's *A Doctor's Experience in Three Continents*, to make costumes and a program for the celebration. Spalding also "researched African American songs collected in New Bern...in the 1860s, elsewhere in North Carolina during the Civil War, and from sailors during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."³⁷³ The program he created relied heavily on those songs whose melodies he had repurposed to "compose verses...similar in style and content to the songs sung in modern Jamaican celebrations."³⁷⁴ In other words, the program devised for Jonkonnu's debut performance at Tryon Palace was one cobbled together from a variety of sources, many of them historically and geographically anachronistic.

To complicate matters further, the first time Jonkonnu was performed at Tryon Palace, in 2000, it was with Spalding wearing the costume of the "ragman," a stock figure in some versions of Jonkonnu who is elaborately costumed. Spalding's face was covered over with a mask, but the performance felt uncomfortably like blackface performance to Spalding and other participants.³⁷⁵ Perhaps conscious of the incongruity of a largely and historically white

³⁷³ "Jonkonnu: Tradition of North Carolina," grant proposal to the North Carolina Humanities Council, May 2001.

³⁷⁴ "Jonkonnu: Tradition of North Carolina," grant proposal to the North Carolina Humanities Council, May 2001.

³⁷⁵ Simon Spalding interviewed by Elijah Gaddis, April 12, 2014.

institution representing African American culture in a largely Black town, administrators turned the event over to Sharon Bryant, then a newly hired administrative assistant.³⁷⁶ Under Bryant's leadership, Jonkonnu has become a crucial part of Tryon Palace's public identity, and a hallmark of its annual Christmas celebrations. Tryon Palace Christmas events draw thousands of people to New Bern to enjoy the hushed splendor of a candlelit Christmas, one that purports to represent the holiday celebrations of a distant past. Candlelit tours of the governor's mansion transport visitors to "1781, a year caught in the middle of the Revolutionary War."³⁷⁷ The celebration focuses on the promise of independence for colonial North Carolina, with costumed interpreters, hot cider, and carols for every paying visitor to the past.

In marked, and conscious contrast to this fairly sedate affair is Jonkonnu. Each year there are two performances of it in the context of the Christmas celebration. These performances consist of the whole troupe of performers, sometimes stretching to a couple of dozen with the many children trained for the occasion during summer sessions at the site. The main group though is constituted two or three terms during the year and consists both of long-term Tryon Palace employees and a wide variety of volunteers who sometimes receive a small stipend for taking multiple days off of work to participate. They show up in the late afternoon to get in costume and do last minute practice. Sharon Bryant wrangles children and parents while preparing herself for her central role in the performance. As it starts to get dark, a crowd stakes out the street corners outside the imposing wrought iron gates that lead to the palace itself. I am told multiple times by employees I interview that Jonkonnu is confined to the boundaries of the

³⁷⁶ Sharon Bryant interviewed by Elijah Gaddis, April 11, 2014.

³⁷⁷ *Candlelight Colonial Christmas Celebration*, Tryon Palace, 2016.
http://www.tryonpalace.org/sites/default/files/tryon_palace_candlelight_web.pdf

park itself because it does not fit with the time period being interpreted. Regardless of motive or intent, this decision has the function of pushing Jonkonnu to the margins of the celebration. But it does allow a crowd, initially comprised of many friends and family members of the performers, to gather without paying the special admission price for the event. The performance itself begins at 6:00 with the town crier, a position foreign to historical Jonkonnu but serving as an important framing device here. From her shouted introduction, the whole group emerges from a nearby Tryon Palace property, marching and dancing in procession to the beat of four drums and behind the leadership of the rag man and the fancy man. These two characters are a concession to historical figures, as is the brief exchange with a man in colonial garb standing on the front porch of the restored George W. Dixon house on Pollock Street. After he hands over a few coins, the troupe performs half a dozen numbers, some with the crowd participating by dancing, giving money, or singing along. After their final number, the group recesses back into a nearby house for an hour's break before their next performance. They keep up this schedule of two successive performances over two weekends and the next, before hanging up their costumes and drums until the next year. A reduced version of the troupe usually performs a handful of times over the intervening year, but the full performances are limited to these few nights. Performances concluded, the celebrants return to their day jobs as gardeners, cooks, and museum administrators.

These performers are eager to talk about Jonkonnu and its meaning to them. Lee Teal, one longtime volunteer, spoke to me about having to go to Tryon Palace (or "the palace" as many locals and employees refer to it,) every year as a student, to walk through the grand house and see the same costumed interpreters with the same carefully-rehearsed stories. And he's conscious that Jonkonnu is a similar recreation and not an unproblematic one. Lee said that when

he first started, he “was kind of embarrassed, wondering why was I jumping up and down, acting foolish.”³⁷⁸ But while he’s still skeptical of many of the performative elements, likening them to a sort of minstrelsy, Lee now thinks that Jonkonnu is important, a way to connect in place to a broader history of African American celebration, defiance, and liberation. Others likewise express its personal and communal importance, while downplaying the measure of historic realism that serves as the metric of quality at historic sites like Tryon Palace. Keith McClease, one of the founders of the Jonkonnu troupe, reflected on this issue immediately before he was due to go out and perform Jonkonnu for his fourteenth year:

People come into the thing because it’s a family
oral tradition
that they don’t want to stop

It’s
a thing like Kwanzaa
where somebody thought of or created something.
But this was real.
Dealing with real people in a real time and real pain.³⁷⁹

McClease is acknowledging at once the constructed nature of their current Jonkonnu performance, and its very real precedents, both historically and in terms of more recent invented traditions that serve important community functions. Sharon Bryant too affirms the importance of Jonkonnu for people in New Bern, and it serves as perhaps the central piece of her role as African American outreach coordinator for the historic site. She works with schools, churches, community colleges, clubs, and virtually every other institution of social and cultural life in New Bern to recruit performers and audiences for Jonkonnu every year. Bryant then is repositioning

³⁷⁸ Lee Teal interviewed by Elijah Gaddis, December 13, 2014.

³⁷⁹ Keith McClease interviewed by Elijah Gaddis, December 13, 2014.

(or perhaps positioning for the first time) Jonkonnu as one of the centers of Black cultural life in New Bern. It's a conscious re-creation and invention of tradition, and one that we might see as serving many of the chief purposes of community building that the historical practice of Jonkonnu enacted.

Perhaps the most historically accurate part of the present day Jonkonnu performance is its expression of place. The yearly performance takes place outside the gates of the palace, intentionally marginalizing it from the usual operations of the site. It's easy to see the parallels between this designed marginality and the regulations that saw Jonkonnu in turn of the twentieth-century Wilmington likewise confined to a particular date, time, and area. At Tryon Palace, it suggests the way in which narratives of the African American past have been appended to their interpretive plan but made, literally, marginal. There are broader implications for the city of New Bern as well. In its remaking of itself as a heritage oriented tourist city, much of the historic downtown has been preserved or remade to appeal to those visitors. But in the carefully crafted city, there are still vestiges of the poverty and inequality that is equally a part of the experience of contemporary New Bern. If you drive into the city on Pollock Street, the first marker of downtown New Bern is Trent Court, a public housing community built in the 1940s and 1950s.³⁸⁰ Just beyond the end of the housing community, behind a tall hedge on one side and the aforementioned wrought iron gate on the other, is Tryon Palace. Separated by fewer than fifty yards, these two sites suggest the reality of opportunity and progress in New Bern. In some ways they are both manifestations of the same changes, a city that relies more and more on tourist dollars to fuel an economy based primarily in service. Whether that work is at the restaurants downtown, the less fancy chain restaurants along highway 70, or at the gift shops and historic

³⁸⁰ *New Bern Housing Authority*, <http://www.newbernha.com/>.

houses of Tryon Palace, it is in service of a vision of a past that is dominated by whiteness. The power of this Jonkonnu performance comes in part then from its performance in this interstitial space, directly on the strip of land that unites these two competing built representations of New Bern as a city.

Both are entangled in the economies of service and tourism. Each also each represent a piece of the city's present and future filtered through different understandings of its past. Tryon Palace serves as the symbol of the city as it is now, a palatial representation of an exclusive past commodified for tourist dollars. Trent Court is more complicated. The complex was built in the same years as the palace. As one portion of New Bern was looking to a version of its past for a way forward, the building of this public housing implicitly acknowledged the deep racial and class inequalities that are at least as fundamental a part of the history of this place. They are two versions of the city's future wrought in the 1940s and 1950s, and they have coalesced into a contemporary city obsessed with the idea of its own past. That fundamental obsession also gave rise to Jonkonnu in its present iteration. This new form uses the same vocabulary and ideology of New Bern's history soaked landscape, one that celebrates history that is partially invented and full of omissions. But it uses that history in service of animating communal memories of struggle and celebration, an important function in a city, region, and nation where erasure of the African American past is exceeded only by active indifference to the needs of contemporary Black communities.

Black History and White Development in Rocky Mount

Rocky Mount was a place born at the intersection of agricultural and industrial labor and bearing little resemblance to the urban forms it preceded. In the years since the June German ceased, Rocky Mount has more closely hewed to national trends, becoming both Blacker and

poorer as a city. The past twenty years in particular have seen the city go from one of Eastern North Carolina's major cultural and economic centers to a city whose core, as I suggested above, can seem lifeless and abandoned on any given day. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the city, and particularly its downtown, are now in the throes of a redevelopment campaign, aimed at capitalizing on growing interest in urban living and on a built environment that invokes urban life two generations ago. Perhaps surprisingly, the centerpiece of this new redevelopment is Douglas Block, the one-time hub of African American economic and social life. The paradox of this revitalization, and many others like it, is that it manages to valorize elements of the Black past while largely ignoring contemporary African American people. In this instance, an historic Black place is celebrated, while nearby Black owned businesses and Black residents seemingly play little role in the vision of the city's future.

Douglas Block sits on the periphery of downtown Rocky Mount, a legacy of the spatial segregation that necessitated two downtown shopping and entertainment districts. That spatial marginality is now touted as a benefit by the Rocky Mount-Edgecombe Community Development Corporation and the City of Rocky Mount, partners in the area's recent reinvention. They stress that its location is "in close proximity to major cultural and educational facilities" and "easily accessible from all parts of Rocky Mount and its surrounding communities."³⁸¹ I read this as a way of materializing the separation of what had previously been the center of the city, the Main Street corridor described above, from this section of town. City leaders are invested in describing the revitalizing Douglas Block as full of growth, and convenient for those already coming to the area for other reasons (class at the community college, the use of the public library, a visit to the children's museum.) It's a separation of only a

³⁸¹ "Location," *Douglas Block*. <http://www.douglasblock.org/location.html>

couple of blocks, but one that emphasizes the separation between an area that is noticeably on a path toward economic progress, and one that is still plagued by abandoned storefronts and businesses that do not fit the narrative of upward mobility that redevelopment is premised on. Douglas Block today has a city-run events space in the former Booker T Theater, an upscale barbecue restaurant in a former row of stores, and a variety of other small businesses and offices. Main Street has two furniture stores, a mostly shuttered antiques store, and a store that consigns high-end sneakers. This separation does not amount to a reversal of the historical segregation here, but does speak to the ironies of redevelopment. That this enclave, once a refuge and home base for Black people throughout eastern North Carolina, would be similarly a retreat from the perceived erosion of social and economic life in downtown Rocky Mount suggests the way in which spatial histories can become a convenient repository for nearly any purpose.

As in New Bern, some sense of history is evoked throughout much of Douglas Block. At the head of the block is a marker commemorating the birth of Thelonious Monk. Monk, born a few blocks away the same year that the “Colored June German” began and the Confederate memorial was erected on the Nash County side of the city, is invoked frequently as a muse for the city’s vision of itself. Though he lived in Rocky Mount only a scant five years, it is in part his presence that the area seeks to evoke, a kind of ephemeral importance evidently absorbed by the streets of his early childhood. A block away at an area designated nearly two decades ago as Harambee Square, a mural representing Monk’s life dominates the street corner. It’s a fascinating mix of the cosmic and the quotidian, juxtaposing three linked pathways winding through a starscape, with representations of modest wooden houses meant to typify African American residential structures in Monk’s lifetime. In plans for downtown redevelopment, silk screened onto banners adorning surfaces throughout downtown’s vacant storefronts, is a mockup

of a massive mural of Monk's face covering the side of a building. And at Douglas Block, Monk is an integral part of cultural heritage celebrations (including Juneteenth,) that seek to marry the generalized Pan African unity represented by Harambee Square with a local connection, albeit a somewhat tenuous one.³⁸² Taken together, these represent a development plan that would draw on Rocky Mount's African American past in a way that commodifies its exceptional residents and the *idea* of Black life in the city, while admitting the city's struggles only in a triumphalist narrative of progress. There is tentative hope here, the potential for a city's revitalization that acknowledges the historical importance of Black culture. But, as with Juneteenth celebrations or Jonkonnu's revival, this historicizing cannot come at the expense of Black people living in Rocky Mount now. The successes of Rocky Mount's past are worth highlighting, but not at the expense of a story that excludes the struggles and uneasy triumphs of Black life in this city, the tenuous and still incomplete work of making Rocky Mount a welcome home for Black cultural life.

Postscript

In Rocky Mount, in Wilmington, Charlotte, New Bern, Durham, Asheville, Elizabeth City, across North Carolina, around the South and throughout the country, Black public culture remains under threat. In the process of writing this dissertation, the landscapes of the South were host to the deaths of dozens of people of color, some of them high profile cases that got national attention, others mostly already forgotten. Cities like Charlotte, where Keith Lamont Scott was killed waiting to pick his children up from school, built on structures and histories of white supremacy and violence and played their role in an epidemic of state violence that news media

³⁸²"Cultural Development," *Rocky Mount/Edgecombe Community Development Corporation*, 2013. <http://www.rmecdc.org/CulturalDevelopment.html>

and much of the white public has finally begun to pay attention to. Massive protests and uprisings—like the ones in Charlotte and Baltimore—have made ignorance of the violence against Black people a near impossibility. I recognize in these forms the impulses toward visibility and presence that emerged more than one hundred and fifty years ago in the celebratory cultures of Emancipation Day and other festivals. The vocabulary has changed to one that we might think of as explicit protest, a function of both the passage of time and the urgent necessities of our present moment. The importance of celebration suggests a broader purpose. It was always intended to assert presence, to represent the nuances of life and experience in the vain hope of equality. The quiet demands of celebratory culture were simple: the rights, ability, and space for expressions of celebration and pleasure. In these emergent celebratory cultures, Black people sought to reorder southern landscapes marked by centuries of enslavement and exclusion. More recent articulations of Black public culture pick up from these forebears, creating a usable past that admits people, performances, and places largely forgotten. Now, as then, African American people are taking to the streets and demanding their place in the American South.

Appendix 1: Bibliographic Essay

Any historical work necessarily relies on the presence of absence. Throughout the course of this dissertation, I have discussed in detail the means by which I have tried to cope with the silences of the archival record and its potential to obscure movements and reify inequalities. In this brief essay, I will build on those earlier mentions as a way of both acknowledging the depth of primary source research that remains absent in the works cited here, and conceptualizing the epistemological (not to mention citational) shifts necessitated by the undertaking of historical research in a digital age. This reflects what I think is an essential commitment to transparency and accessibility, one which is paradoxically easier met with digital tools, and more frequently omitted in the absence of shifts in the understanding of the distribution of digital knowledge. Here, I will discuss my own omitted source material by way of arguing for a reconceptualization of scholarly knowledge in the space of the digital archive.

Oddly absent from many discussions about the digital turn in historical studies is sustained consideration of this epistemic shift, a fundamental recalibration not just of the presentation of knowledge, but of its structure and comprehension as well. Digital work requires particular attention to the nature of archival materials and the way we use them. In this instance, I am attempting to make visible the stitches of my own digital patchwork.

My first chapter, on Emancipation Day celebrations, is built in large part on a number of data visualizations. Themselves a substantial part of the text of the chapter, these compilations and exhibitions of data also informed my interpretations throughout the chapter and served as a

principal part of my evidentiary basis. The Emancipation Day visualization itself chronicles three hundred individual celebrations in North Carolina, ranging from 1865 to the first three decades of the twentieth century. To compile this data, I combed through approximately one thousand three hundred newspaper articles, reading and classifying each one. Ultimately, I used some three hundred fifty articles as the basis for my visualization, each of which is linked from the individual mapped records. In order to locate parade origin and other points of celebration, I turned to historic city directories and maps. The end product necessarily hides that labor, as it would with any form of textual representation. More importantly, in this instance that labor and the ensuing insights are represented visually and graphically, rather than textually. In this instance then, the textual metaphor fails. These are not sources to be read, but rather viewed, manipulated, and otherwise analyzed. Including them as part of the structure of the visualizations here is a gesture toward transparency and an acknowledgment of the democratization of access to previously restricted knowledge wrought by mass scale digitization. This suggests a citational methodology informed by the topic of this dissertation. Building from the impulse toward an active role for historical knowledge as part of everyday life manifest in Emancipation Day celebrations, we might think further about the potential to build upon and expand the access offered by digitized and digital resources in scholarly work.

The basis for such a bibliographic strategy extends beyond work explicitly labelled as “digital humanities.” Applying the open source ethos and imperative for transparency that I have outlined above to more conventional textual scholarly output requires an additional processual accounting. Indeed, in this instance there is a larger imperative for citational opacity because of the works consulted but not fully represented by a conventional bibliographic structure. In the chapters on Jonkonnu and the June German, I relied heavily on hundreds of articles,

advertisements, city directories, maps, and plans. The items of this type that are cited, particularly repeatedly, are the exceptional materials that offered particularly keen insights for me to marshal as part of my argument. I am able to make an argument though only because of the many other articles that informed my understanding of the broader world in which these sources were published and circulated. For the chapter on Jonkonnu, I read and categorized every instance of its performance (and the many variants in labelling and spelling used to refer to the practice,) in North Carolina. Totalling more than a thousand sources, they gave me knowledge of the extent of the practice, as well as the discursive and material worlds from which it arose. Additional research into the processional practices of the Good Samaritans in Wilmington likewise added to that knowledge.

The extent of this kind of research into world building was even more intensive for my study of the June German. Itself the subject of much newspaper scrutiny in the African American press, the dance had never been studied by a scholar in the intervening years. I read through decades of newspaper accounts--from Rocky Mount and Norfolk particularly--which are reflected in the chapter to some extent. What does not appear in my writing, save for a few scarce mentions, are the many resources that aided me in some reconstruction of the larger worlds these dances occurred in. Detailed accounts from the white June Germans helped me understand the decoration and spatial layouts of the events, while the few advertisements targeted at African American consumers gave me a sense of the carefully crafted absence of a Black presence in the ways white people spoke, thought, and wrote about Rocky Mount in the weeks and months leading up to the big summer dance. Not fully an archive of experience, it nonetheless gave me a window into the worlds in around which dance participants moved.

My assembly of this digital archive of sources was one made possible largely by the mechanistic process of repeated and sometimes creative searches of digitized material. The different variations of search terms, narrowing and widening of filters, and other such strategies are themselves an adaptation to these new kinds of sources. Optical character recognition is not yet perfect, but it is efficient enough to largely replace the longstanding tradition of slogging through microfilm. It can also lead to information isolated from its own context. Sharply defined search terms can sometimes preclude serendipitous discovery, and highlighted search terms can rob the researcher of the valuable context derived from scanning a page in search of useful information. This is valuable contextual information that I have tried to replace by creating a larger context in which to view the digital archival materials that I have employed here. What we lose in more technologically advanced forms of research, we can make up for by expanding the scale of scholarly inquiry. My own attempts at that are modest, though influenced by the advent of big data in humanistic inquiry. As with the transformation of textuality through the use of digital sources, big data serves as the exemplar of this epistemic shift, a reminder of the widening boundaries of the scale of our research possibilities. In the instance of this dissertation, that has meant consultation and contextualization from around four thousand primary sources, a relatively modest total. But even those smaller numbers represent a widening gulf. The challenge to citational accuracy and accountability will be one dictated by presently unknowable forms of technology and research. We often fail to account for digital sources fully because they seem so commonplace, a more efficient version of the way scholars have read textual sources for hundreds of years. But these digitized sources have a kind of fractured materiality that requires a fuller interpretation, and obscures conventional understanding. More problematically, regarding

such sources as equivalent to archives written in paper and ink fails to anticipate the necessity to develop a scholarly apparatus to deal with further advances in technology and accessibility.

This is a gesture toward a full accounting, an interim step toward a time when the tools of digital humanities are more fully integrated into the structures of universities, particularly in graduate education and scholarly output. As an acknowledgement of influence and indebtedness, these brief comments are inadequate, but serve, as an initial step toward what I hope will be a new standard of citational practice. This new standard should be one where scholars attempt to make available as many of our sources as possible, not in the abstracted form of Turabian citation but through hyperlinks, images, visualizations and exhibits. The end result then should perhaps be not solely about the conclusions an author has reached, but about the various resources marshaled toward that end. Some digital tools that help facilitate this process exist, but my point here is less about tool building than about widespread adaptation. We might find in this attention to process a form of scholarship that is more responsive and fuller, that helps better account for the debts we owe and the ideas we form as part of the process of writing and research.

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