The thesis of Charles L. Lumpkins has been reviewed and approved* by the following:

Nan Elizabeth Woodruff
Professor of History
Thesis Adviser
Chair of Committee

Daniel L. Letwin
Associate Professor of History

Alan V. Derickson
Associate Professor of History

Robyn Spencer
Assistant Professor of African/African American Studies and History

Lovalerie King
Assistant Professor of English

Sally McMurry
Professor of History
Head of the Department of History

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.
This dissertation, covering from the 1860s to 1945, is the first study to center African Americans in the history of the politics and economy of the small industrial, majority white city of East St. Louis, Illinois. This investigation adds to the literature the border region concept, black people’s pivotal relation to real estate politician-businessmen whose politics and economic policies proved disastrous to city residents, and the importance of patronage and black machine politics. It examines the African American urban experience in context of continuous waves of black migrations, urbanization, industrialization, progressive era politics, the Great Depression, and the World Wars. Though black East St. Louisans, between the 1890s and the 1920s, encountered increasing segregation, discrimination, and racial violence, they experienced, not a nadir, but much ferment, building a rich institutional culture, entering the urban industrial economy in significant numbers, undergoing class differentiation, and engaging in a wide range of political and social actions, including electoral politics to secure patronage and win political seats in city and county governments. Black townspeople saw their nascent independent black political machine, but not their community, destroyed during the infamous 1917 “race riots,” which until this dissertation had been the sole topic of black history in pre-World War II East St. Louis. Black residents continued with their political and social actions after the riots, but in a more sharply
segregated environment. Black East St. Louisans reentered city affairs, but only as junior partners when shifts in the national economy and politics occurred during the Great Depression and the Second World War. Research employs primary source materials in local, regional, and national archives and libraries and, to a lesser extent, secondary literature and oral history. This study concludes that black politics became acceptable to local white power holders when it no longer advanced independence from white political machines.
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Introduction

Historians usually think of East St. Louis, Illinois, as the place where the first major wartime “race riot” occurred in July 1917 when mobs of white people invaded a black enclave in the downtown district and assaulted and murdered innocent people.¹

No one, however, has looked at this event within the larger context of the city’s history and the continuing history of African American politics that both preceded and followed the July massacre.² This dissertation, centering the actions of black people in the historical narrative, traces the history of black politics, particularly in the electoral arena, from mid-nineteenth century through World War II, revealing the institutional structures of that politics and the goals that African Americans sought to achieve in relation to local and national economic and political transformations.³

¹ Quotation marks enclosing “race riots” indicate the need to employ an appropriate term for a specific form of mass racial violence. H. Leon Prather, Sr., We Have Taken a City: Wilmington Racial Massacre and Coup of 1898 ([Canbury, N.J.] Associated University Presses, 1984), 11, 173, wants to replace the term “race riot.”
³ Since black East St. Louisan sources no longer exist, evidence for black politics comes mainly from white sources like the East St. Louis Daily Journal. Titles of black East St. Louisan newspapers whose issues no longer exist are Messenger (late 1890s), Southern Illinois Press (early 1920s), Advance Citizen (1920s), East St. Louis Globe (early 1930s), East St. Louis Citizen (1930s), Spotlight (1930s), East St. Louis Gazette (late 1930s), The
East St. Louis emerged as an industrial city across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, Missouri. Like Gary, Indiana, was to Chicago, East St. Louis became an industrial satellite of the commercial metropolis of St. Louis. Railroads sliced through neighborhoods, establishing large train yards and acres of repair shops and freight houses that made the city a national railroad hub second only to Chicago. By 1910, the city had become a center of heavy industrial manufacture that included meatpacking and food processing plants, iron and steel foundries, and glass factories. East St. Louis city had a highly diversified economy, making it different from other industrial satellites with one dominant industry, for example, Gary with steel or Camden, New Jersey, with shipbuilding.  

African Americans who had been residing in the area since the antebellum era, had their numbers augmented beginning in the late 1870s with the arrival of rural Southerners escaping the suppression of black political rights in the South. Once North, migrants joined black people who had been exercising the franchise, acting as powerbrokers in closely contested elections, and running for, and at times wining, political office. African Americans entered the working class in this industrializing city, toiling mainly as unskilled laborers in meatpacking, iron founding, and glass making factories and in railroad yards. During the latter decades of the nineteenth century, black

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Crusader (1940s). Titles briefly described in “East St. Louis Newspapers,” folder 14, Box 42, Negro in Illinois Papers, Illinois Writers’ Project, Chicago Public Library.  

East St. Louisans built a vibrant community rich in institutional culture. This community became a platform for political mobilization as African Americans lived through urbanization and industrialization, black migrations, trade unionism, progressive era reforms, segregation, two World Wars, the Great Depression, and the rise of a strong federal government.

This study of black politics in East St. Louis stresses that African Americans experienced not, as some historians claimed, a nadir, but, like black people elsewhere, much ferment in community building, class differentiation, and political action from the latter third of the nineteenth century into the twentieth century. This ferment proved more important in shaping black communities than the process of ghettoization—white hostility that forced black people to reside in specified areas. The study draws from an urban African American historiography that describes how through intra- or interclass unity black people sought to improve their neighborhoods, attain social and economic advancement, and achieve political power. It argues that black men and women workers, many arriving from the South before as well as during and after the First World War, contributed as much, if not more, than their middle class neighbors, in building communities diverse in institutional and political culture.

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This exploration of black politics in East St. Louis draws from the literature that describes how African Americans engaged in a wide range of political activities to overcome their position of social and economic disadvantage relative to white people. This study stresses how local people, as opposed to national leaders and organizations through community actions and formal politics attempted to improve their working and living conditions and achieve equality. But in contrast to scholarship that sees black northern freedom struggles beginning in the World War I era, this study shows such struggles occurring in the postbellum decades.

This study adds three themes to the historiography of the urban black experience of community building, class formation, and African American politics in small northern industrial cities. The first is the idea of a border region along the historical boundary between free and slave states where northern industrial and southern folkway cultures


overlapped. The border region paradigm explains the complexities that black people faced living in an area where public life was a patchwork of segregation and integration.\textsuperscript{11} The next theme is that African American interaction with real estate politician-businessmen proved pivotal in East St. Louis and perhaps, as further research might reveal, in other cities. This relationship goes beyond concerns of residential segregation and landlord-tenancy to include issues of landownership and land development in an urban context. This study posits the view that African American confrontations with real estate men, though often subtle when compared to labor disputes and mass racial violence, greatly influenced the extent of black politics in a jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{12}

The third theme is the importance of patronage and black political machines for black people in need of resources when occupational and residential opportunities had been severely restricted between the 1860s and 1945, the period covered by this study. Patronage must be seen as a form of wealth or income redistribution, though crude and extremely inefficient, and black political machines as vehicles for African American attainment of political power independent of white control.

The central narrative of Chapter One focuses on the foundation of nineteenth century black East St. Louis. Black people built their community, obtained factory jobs, and engaged in a wide range of political actions in a tough, wide-open town dominated by real estate politician-businessmen. These business leaders directed economic growth,


\textsuperscript{12} On importance of real estate interests in developing cities see, for example, John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch, \textit{Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
commanded City Hall, and derived revenues from the city’s saloons while tolerating, if not encouraging, a culture of gambling, prostitution, and criminal violence. But the growing black community placed additional demands upon white political and economic leaders who had structured the city to meet the needs of the business community and industrialists, not those of black, or even white, working people.

As narrated in Chapter Two, from the 1900 to 1915, black East St. Louisans expanded the scope of their political influence and increased their political strength in face of intensified segregation and discrimination. They turned their community into a vehicle to extract resources from white politician-businessmen. Black politicians continued to win patronage and appointive and elective office. Their incremental successes and skill at swinging elections forced white political machine bosses to rethink the extent of the patronage they awarded to black people in exchange for votes. African Americans connected their strengthening powerbroker status to demands for patronage and a share of political power. They skillfully played one set of machine politicians against another, but in the process bound themselves to a political machine mentality and mode of operation. As black politicians became more involved with the white machine, progressive reformers who aimed to end boss rule sought to diminish black influence in city governance. By 1910, some black politicians began building a black political machine independent of white bosses. Their actions worried both white city leaders, including real estate men, who feared an undermining of their rule and sources of wealth

13 On East St. Louis’s industrial and political development see Andrew J. Theising, Made in USA: East St. Louis, The Rise and Fall of an Industrial River Town (St. Louis, MO: Virginia Publishing, 2003).

Chapter Three explores the wartime Great Migration and its impact on East St. Louis from 1915 to 1917 and its connection to the May 1917 “race riot,” which laid the groundwork for the horrific mass violence in July of that year. Hundreds of thousands of black, mainly rural, Southerners migrated to Chicago, Detroit, East St. Louis, and other northern industrial cities as jobs opened up when the First World War ended European immigration. Migrants left the oppressive world of plantations, legalized segregation, disfranchisement, and terror, hoping to find a more hospitable environment that allowed them to exercise their civil rights and provide a better way of life for themselves and their families. Instead, they confronted obstacles such as segregated housing and other forms of de facto segregation, job discrimination, and racial violence. Migrants transformed the wartime migration into a form of everyday political activism that altered the political dynamics in northern cities.16 As did migrants in, for example, Milwaukee and Chicago, those in East St. Louis augmented the black vote and strengthened black political power.17 Black East St. Louisan politicians arrived in April 1917 at the threshold of achieving their dreams of an independent black political machine when they wielded the

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16 On everyday politics see Robin D.G. Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” Journal of American History, 80 (June 1993): 75-112.
black community as a powerbroker and swung the city election. But their election success did not bring about an independent black machine like the one that African Americans created in Chicago. Instead white machine bosses and their allies orchestrated a riot in May to weaken the black community politically. When riot schemers failed to achieve their desired result, they began to plan another round of anti-black violence.18

The narrative in Chapter Four begins with the second East St. Louis “race riot” that occurred on July 2 and 3, 1917. This episode constituted a continuation of the May riot. But unlike the earlier episode that resulted in no reported deaths, the July event was a mass, murderous affair that shocked contemporaries who never thought racial violence of that magnitude possible in a northern industrial city. Assailants, seeking to turn East St. Louis into a sundown, or all-white, town, beat and shot black victims, forcing at least seven thousand black people to seek haven across the Mississippi River in St. Louis, Missouri, and an unknown number to flee to surrounding towns in Illinois. But African Americans in black neighborhoods in the city’s South End did not join the exodus from the city; they instead responded to anti-black assaults with armed self-defense.19 Illinois and federal authorities moved to suppress the riot that halted wartime industrial

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production and interstate commerce for several days. By official accounts thirty-nine black men, women, and children and nine white men had been killed. But according to some observers, many more black and white people had perished.

The political restructuring of municipal government in the several months following the July “race riot” continues the narrative in Chapter Four. Tellingly, before the riot ended, white officials decapitated black political leadership by arresting and charging prominent black townspeople with organizing a black militia to provoke a riot. Authorities, within a few days after the violence, removed African American elected and appointed municipal and county politicians from office. Political retaliation against black politicos continued unabated for several months as a coalition of state prosecutors and local white progressive reformers brought accused black leaders to trial. Reformers, looking to end black political influence and machine boss rule, reconstructed city government by instituting a commission form of municipal government that replaced ward level-based elections with citywide voting.\textsuperscript{20} After the First World War African Americans continued to agitate for democratic rights, but within the limits of what white leaders deemed tolerable.

This study argues that the mass racial violence of July 1917 emerged from rapidly shifting political dynamics involving long-standing interactions between the African American community and white political and economic leaders, not from labor disputes.

\textsuperscript{20} On reformers controlling black political activism see, for example, John Dittmer, \textit{Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 129-130.
as commonly argued.\textsuperscript{21} Other “race riots” in 1917 also exploded from non-labor-related issues. For example, the Houston “race riot” in August 1917 erupted when black soldiers retaliated against the police for their habitual abuse of black civilians and military personnel. Another altercation occurred in Philadelphia in 1917 when a middle class black woman moved into an all white neighborhood.\textsuperscript{22} These outbreaks of mass racial violence conformed to decades-long pattern of pre-World War I “race riots,” like the one in Springfield, Illinois, in 1908, where politician-businessmen, not white workers and industrialists, planned and led, usually through proxies, mass violence to squelch black insistence upon equality. This study sees the East St. Louis “race riots” as another episode in the nation’s history of white violence in reaction to an assertive black politics that sought to realign political relations.\textsuperscript{23}


\textsuperscript{23} On political elements responsible for the East St. Louis “race riot” of July 1917, see Malcolm McLaughlin, “Reconsidering the East St. Louis Race Riot of 1917,” \textit{International Review of Social History} 47 (2002): 187-212. On a white coup d’état against a local democratic town government dominated by black citizens see David S.
Chapter Five shows African Americans engaged in a wide range of political activities from 1917 to 1929 as they recovered from the mass violence of July 1917 and other anti-black race riots. Many black people joined with returning African American veterans to pursue objectives such as the expansion of civil and political rights and the attainment of independence from white people.24 The postwar decade in East St. Louis began with various “New Negro” movement expressions that articulated the ideals of economic self-help, black independence, and racial solidarity.25 New Negro actions spanned the spectrum from working outside the electoral system independent of white people to asserting African American interests within the electoral arena. By the mid-1920s, black East St. Louisans increasingly concentrated on protests and electoral politics to improve their conditions and gain patronage. One significant sign that black people, at least in East St. Louis, had begun overcoming their fear of another outbreak of mass racial violence was their willingness to challenge white politician-businessmen, but within the white controlled framework of political parties and the precinct committee system.

As Chapter Six documents, African Americans built interracial coalitions to overcome economic deprivations of the Great Depression and to end segregation and

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discrimination at the workplace during the Second World War. African Americans saw their demands for relief and jobs being met by New Deal programs. Black workers became deeply involved in the labor movement, especially with organizing unions through the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Their campaign for equal access to industrial employment and democratic rights received a boost when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt agreed to demands advanced by the March on Washington Movement to end discrimination in war production industries. But coalition-building in East St. Louis and across the nation failed to dismantle segregation, eliminate discrimination, and secure civil rights.

This study of black politics in East St. Louis ends in 1945 on the eve of the post-World War II civil rights movement that came to galvanize the nation in the 1950s and 1960s. The movement proceeded in East St. Louis without mass racial violence largely because leading black and white townspeople reached an accord. At the same time white


city officials acknowledged that East St. Louis had failed to expand its industrial base not only during the interwar period, but also during the booming economy of the Second World War. White politician-businessmen included black residents in postwar planning and political life because they wanted to both avoid racial strife and attract the industry that ensured future economic growth. But new industry never came to the city, and existing industry left. City leaders remained wedded to the idea of a pre-World War I industrial economy and never jettisoned their machine politics, leaving these as a legacy to African Americans in post-1970 East St. Louis.
Chapter One. Historical Roots of an African American Community in a Small Industrial Border City, 1800-1900

As early as the late eighteenth century, black people, as slaves, had been living near the site of the future East St. Louis on the American Bottom, a fertile floodplain that stretches for miles along the Mississippi River in southern Illinois. With the end of slavery in Illinois in the 1820s, they and African Americans who later settled in the area forged a rich institutional culture. Black people proved determined to live as equals with their white neighbors in a region where southern and northern cultures overlapped along the Missouri and Illinois border and the Ohio River between Kentucky and her northern neighbors Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio.¹ Border region African Americans after the Civil War neither experienced the racial egalitarianism of black citizens in northerly locales like Cleveland, Ohio, nor the systematic repression of political rights of the Deep South.² In the last decade of the nineteenth century, African Americans in East St. Louis rapidly expanded their community as they entered industrial employment in noticeable numbers.

earlier than in many other urban areas, North or South. They agitated for social and economic advancement, political power, and equality while engaging in sometimes adversarial but at other times cooperative interactions with white working and middle class residents, industrialists, and politician-businessmen. Black townspeople through community institutions and political mobilization linked national issues to local concerns, making East St. Louis a historical microcosm of urban African American life.

Postbellum black people’s drive for freedom, citizenship, and equality has often been viewed in the historiography in context of the African American position within the labor market or involvement in the trade union movement. The literature shows that by the end of the nineteenth century black people encountered increasing discriminatory treatment from both white employers and coworkers. Black workers endured racial subordination and skill and wage disparities that employers structured into the workplace in order to segment the labor market, divide and control workers, and to weaken, if not destroy, unions. In addition, they experienced many, if not more, instances of white

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worker rejection than welcomes into the house of labor from union members and workmates.  

African American involvement in the labor movement, community building, and electoral politics have occupied a prominent position in the historiography. Black Southerners—and Northerners—fighting to win and maintain their civil rights, for example, figure significantly in the literature. Accounts abound of African Americans building churches, mutual aid societies, and other institutions, developing a viable community life and culture, and opposing myriad manifestations of racism. Narratives of black working men and women as political actors have increasingly been the subject of recent scholarship. Debates often pivot around the nature of political action across the spectrum from everyday actions to electoral politics and social movements. But as historians have shown, black (and white) working people relied upon their community networks of families, neighbors, and local organizations to support political and labor

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8 See for example, Robin D.G. Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *Journal of American History* (June 1993): 75-112.
actions that advanced their interests. The postbellum African American experience in East St. Louis reflects some of the findings of this historiography. But the history of African Americans in the city shows black people gaining strength in formal politics at a time when African Americans across the nation had been politically marginalized or disfranchised.

The story of African Americans in late nineteenth century East St. Louis adds to the historiography urban black people’s decades-long struggle to win a share of political power from a crucial, if not key, sector of the white population: politician-businessmen who derived their wealth from ownership or sale or rental of commercial or residential property and the development of urban infrastructure. Black people’s encounters with real estate politician-businessmen were often not as dramatic or direct as their interactions, for example, with white workers or employers. But their efforts to carve a place for themselves in urban America meant confronting a class of white people who wielded considerable power at the local level and who had a material stake in maintaining this power. African American interaction with real estate men involved more than

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landlord-tenant issues or even residential segregation. These land interest entrepreneurs, like their counterparts across the United States, made land a commodity and tied personal economic gain to city growth. African Americans often mobilized behind leading black politicians and political operatives to secure patronage from local white politicians. Black clients of patronage reaped most of the benefits and gained prestige within their communities, but if they wished to retain positions of leadership, they had to dispense favors and services to African American townspeople. Black people’s use of the patronage system and their community institutions and participation in city affairs challenged real estate men who to a great extent controlled the city through political machines. Black East St. Louisans during the last decade of the nineteenth century.

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century became an influential voice in municipal politics. Their progress toward economic and social advancement considerably depended upon how they negotiated their political relationship with real estate politician-businessmen.\textsuperscript{15}

Land Interests Shaping the City

Revolutionary War veteran and pioneer settler Captain James Piggott founded in the 1790s the village of Washington, a site of the future East St. Louis and established there a passenger and cargo ferry service. Piggott and other settlers built an economy that provided agricultural surpluses and other services to St. Louis, Missouri, a rapidly expanding city on the west bank of the Mississippi River.\textsuperscript{16} Early promoters of East St. Louis continued to think of their town as an economic provider to St. Louis. They, like boosters in many municipalities, encouraged the development of railroads to bolster economic growth.\textsuperscript{17} In 1837, Louis Boismenue and other local businessmen joined with former Illinois Governor John Reynolds to build a six-mile horse-drawn railroad to carry


\textsuperscript{17} Zane L. Miller, Patricia M. Melvin, \textit{The Urbanization of Modern America: A Brief History}, 2nd ed. (San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1987).
coal from mines on the nearby bluffs overlooking the American Bottom to Illinoistown, the new name for village of Washington, for shipment to St. Louis.¹⁸

The first generation of real estate politician-businessmen in the middle third of the nineteenth century, however, foresaw a town economically independent of St. Louis. They began a series of actions to turn East St. Louis into an industrial powerhouse in the Midwest. At the same time, through their control of City Hall, they converted land into profit and transformed the city into an economic growth machine.¹⁹ These entrepreneurs, not unlike enterprisers in Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and St. Louis, occupied a pivotal position in industrializing their town.²⁰ They pursued the dream of East St. Louis as an economic competitor of St. Louis, which had evolved from a French colonial trading post in the 1760s to, by mid-nineteenth century, a gateway to the trans-Mississippi West, a busy river port, vibrant commercial center, and thriving market for agricultural products.²¹ But East St. Louisan economic leaders first sought to end their town’s role as an economic appendage of St. Louis.

Real estate politician-businessmen who wanted a city economy independent of their Missourian neighbor took advantage of the St. Louis-Chicago rivalry with the

¹⁹ On the city as an economic growth machine see Logan, Molotch, Urban Fortunes.
²¹ “East St. Louis: Manifesting Determination to Hold Enviable Station Won Among Important Cities of the Union,” ESLDJ, 22 May 1901, 2.
objective of transforming East St. Louis into an industrial city to overshadow St. Louis. East St. Louisans became aware during the 1850s and 1860s of occurrences that proved salient in transferring the economic leadership of Midwestern cities from St. Louis to Chicago. First, one influential group of leading St. Louisans preferred river over railroad commerce, ignoring Chicago’s economic growth based on rail connections to populous, industrializing northeastern cities. Second, some eastern financiers moved their investments from St. Louis to Chicago in the 1850s when national politics over slavery destabilized the business climate in St. Louis. Finally, St. Louis’s leaders who favored rail over river transport saw their plans to build their city’s economy collapse when the southern states seceded. In addition, Chicago’s aggressive railroad expansion had taken productive hinterland of the upper Midwest away from St. Louis. St. Louis continued, however, to attract eastern financiers, capitalists, and railroaders like J.L. Pennifill of the Springfield, Jerseyville & St. Louis Railway, as they sought to tap that city’s still lucrative commercial markets.

Like many urban entrepreneurs in antebellum America, East St. Louisan boosters recognized the railroad’s importance in developing a modern industrial economy and encouraged railroads to locate in the area. Soon East St. Louis joined cities like Chicago and Atlanta in becoming railroad hubs for passenger and freight service. East St. Louis

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was the closest point on the east bank of the Mississippi River to St. Louis and thus a logical location for railroads to establish terminals. In 1852, city leaders welcomed the first steam railroad, the Ohio and Mississippi, to their town. Within a few decades, railroads laid tracks stretching as straight as arrows through miles of open country before East St. Louis expanded its population and territory. As the city grew around the rail lines, train yards and freight houses dominated along the river bank. In short time East St. Louis became a national railroad hub second only to that of Chicago.

Real estate men, envisioning a prosperous city, promoted East St. Louis to industrialists. These city boosters embarked on a program to obtain industrial investments by marketing the town’s geographical advantages, altering local governance, reshaping the topography, and improving the infrastructure. In 1861, they renamed Illinoistown, East St. Louis, hoping to increase their town’s attractiveness by profiting from St. Louis’s favorable image as a cultural center. Boosters advertised the availability of cheap southern Illinois coal, inexpensive flatland for factories, a dense rail network, and close proximity to St. Louis. Politician-businessman, landowner, real estate lawyer, agent for the Connecticut Land Company, and several times mayor John

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26 “High Lights,” in East St. Louis Centennial Program, 1861-1961 ([East St. Louis, IL.: Centennial Committee, 1961]). On railroads in Atlanta see, for example, Hunter, To ‘Joy My Freedom.
27 1912 City Directory, 1415. The Mobile & Ohio, Illinois Central, Louisville & Nashville, Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, and Great Northern numbered among the railroads that operated equipment repair facilities and freight houses in East St. Louis.
29 “Present Name of E. St. Louis Adopted Before Civil War,” ESLDJ, 15 June 1924, 1-C, 3-C. On renaming towns after culturally advanced cities, see Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier.
30 “About the New Bridge,” ESLDJ, 24 February 1901, 4.
Bowman, an aggressive economic growth advocate, pursued the goal of building an international reputation for East St. Louis as an industrial city. Bowman and attorneys William G. Kase and Mortimer Millard obtained in 1865 a charter from the state legislature authorizing a change in municipal organization from that of a town to a city. Prominent landowning families such as Abt, Kurrus, Lovingston, Sexton, Weiss, and Winstanley expanded East St. Louis beyond Illinoistown by absorbing Illinois City, St. Clair, New Brighton, and other villages. Thus land interests attracted industrialists with a city charter that guaranteed them less interference from state government and expanded territory under one rather than several local governments.

Real estate men, bankers, contractors, and land speculators knew that manufacturers required an infrastructure that was not vulnerable to annual flooding from the Mississippi River. Those most eager for industrial development realized that such an infrastructure called for a strong pro-industrialist City Hall willing to finance expensive flood control and terrain alteration projects. One initially controversial undertaking involved high grading, the elevating of principal streets and public buildings above the highest known flood level. Those favoring high grading expressed a willingness to implement massive public works programs to control flooding by creating levees and

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31 “A Cowardly Assassin,” *St Louis Globe Democrat*, 21 November 1885, 7; “City Celebrated When First Building Was Erected Above Level Reached by 1844 Flood,” *ESLDJ*, 24 August 1924, 1-C.
They initiated what became a two decade struggle for political control of the city. In 1866, Mayor Bowman and John B. Lovingston, lumber dealer, Workingmen’s Bank board member, and city councilman, signaled to railroaders and manufacturers an eagerness to commit the city to flood control projects, welcoming their participation in city government as advocates for high grading. In the 1870s, Patrick Vaughan, of the Indianapolis and St. Louis Railroad, and John Doyle, of the St. Louis Transfer Railway Company, were among several corporate representatives on the city council. High graders argued for approval to obtain bonds and loans for flood control and related infrastructure work, including the paving of streets and the installation of sewers, water lines, and sidewalks.

Anti-high graders charged that the high grading project had the potential to plunge the city into massive debt. Some feared that the high-grader dominated City Hall planned to confiscate property, including their own, that fronted streets to be elevated. Also, anti-high graders associated with the Wiggins Ferry Company, successor to Piggott’s ferry service, disapproved of the project because of a grudge they held against Bowman for his support of the construction of the Eads Bridge. The structure connecting East St. Louis and St. Louis that opened for business in 1874 had effectively ended Wiggins’s monopoly on transporting freight and passengers to and from the Missouri city.

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high graders within the Wiggins Ferry Company, angered by the political maneuvers of
the Bowman faction, rose to action, increasing the likelihood of conflict over the grading
issue.

The battle over grading culminated with those on each side of the debate
instituting their own city government in a display more of factionalism than dual power.
In 1876, Bowman won the mayoral election and, claiming a mandate, applied the state’s
“Cities, Towns and Villages Act” of 1872, known as the “General Law,” and
implemented high grading ordinances over his opponents’ objections. Calling Bowman’s
actions illegal, anti-high graders organized their own government, based upon a special
state legislative charter act that authorized metropolitan councils. Each government
maintained its own police force and city council. Each also had its own mayor: grocer
Maurice Joyce presided over the charter government while East St. Louis Bank board
member and Bowman protégée Thomas Winstanley headed the general law
government.37 In 1878, high graders and anti-high graders employed violence to achieve
political objectives as the two police departments sparked gun battles that sometimes
resulted in fatalities.38 The high-graders learned in 1880 that the state had declared their
government illegal, though the state Supreme Court latter found the metropolitan police
act unconstitutional. By that time, Bowman had left political office as his opponents
consolidated their power through illegal voting procedures. After “unnamed” policemen

37 “Semi-Centennial of East St. Louis,” ESLDJ, 11 April 1915, 4, 5; “‘English’
McCarthy Settled in East St. Louis in 1765, ESLDJ, 10 February 1929, 1-A, 2-A; “The
Great Charter Battle,” ESLJ, “Jubilee Edition,” 26 May 1940, 10-F; Williams et al.,
Gateway to the Past, 95-97; Theising, Made in USA, 72-75.
38 “Present Name of E. St. Louis Adopted Before Civil War,” ESLDJ, 15 June 1924, 1-C,
3-C.
assassinated Bowman in 1885, high-graders rallied around his protégée, former Ohio & Mississippi Railroad engineer Melbern M. Stephens, and continued to promote high grading as the key to city development.39

In the 1880s, high-graders pushed the city toward gross mismanagement of municipal governance. Melbern Stephens and local newspaper publisher and city booster James W. Kirk favored high grading and a reliance upon deficit spending to fuel economic growth. As a mayoral candidate in 1887, Stephens had promised to operate the city on a cash basis. But in the year following his election, Stephens and his allies convinced voters to approve the issuance of $650,000 in twenty year five percent bonds to settle an indebtedness of between $850,000 and $950,000. They argued that the money was needed to elevate and pave streets, install sewers, curbs, and electric streetlights, and make other public improvements.40 From 1889 into the 1890s, economic growth high graders gained support even from those initially opposed to high grading as property owners saw real estate values soar from $40 to $200 per front foot.41 Those who had been against high grading came to agree that the city make only interest payments on the bonds for high grading projects. Their agreement stretched the program

40 1912 City Directory, 1325, 1335; “Semi-Centennial of East St. Louis,” ESLDJ, 11 April 1915, 4-5; [“Malbern Stephens”], Betty Allen Papers, privately owned by Andrew Theising.
into the early decades of the twentieth century, leaving the debt principal untouched.  

In the meantime, landowning real estate boosters J.T. McCasland, H.D. Sexton, and J.W. Renshaw founded in 1889 a real estate association, to coordinate the actions and collective power of real estate men.  

Economic growth advocates, while building a national and international reputation for East St. Louis as a manufacturing center, unintentionally turned the city into an industrial satellite of St. Louis. Typical of many industrial suburbs located next to large cities, the Illinoisan municipality attracted both industry and a host of attendant social problems. East St. Louis joined the ranks of similar industrial suburbs located across state lines from their respective metropolises, for example, Camden and Trenton, New Jersey, neighbors of Philadelphia, and Gary and East Chicago, Indiana, adjacent to Chicago. East St. Louisan boosters used differences in state laws between Illinois and Missouri and municipal ordinances between East St. Louis and St. Louis to their advantage. They built a diverse industrial base that prevented East St. Louis from being dominated by a single industry as steel had lorded over Pittsburgh and Gary,

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42 Theising, Made in USA, 134-135; “Moving West Side Dirt to Raise Levels,” ESLDJ, 24 January 1926, 1-C.
Indiana. Like other industrial suburbs, East St. Louis became home to heavy polluting, noxious industries that damaged employees’ health and residents’ homes. Most of the companies recruited to East St. Louis and adjacent towns processed raw materials into components that other companies converted into products and had no control over commodity prices of either the raw materials or the finished products. The livestock and meatpacking, iron and steel, and other labor-intensive industrial firms that comprised East St. Louis’s diverse economic base constantly faced narrow profit margins, maintained low overhead and transportation costs and a high volume of production, and relied heavily on unskilled, low wage-earning laborers.

Livestock and meatpacking corporations numbered among East St. Louis’s chief industrial employers. In 1873, the St. Louis National Stockyards Company, a corporation of railroad men, livestock operators, meatpackers, and financiers that included John B.

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Dutcher of the New York Central Lines Railroad and meatpacker and financier Samuel Allerton of New York, purchased, for the purpose of siting a stockyard, four hundred acres from Bowman and his business partner. The St. Louis National Stockyards Company held, transferred, and sold livestock and became one of the world’s largest horse and mule markets. Meatpackers drew upon the National Stockyards for cattle, hogs, and sheep to process into meats and other products like fertilizer. The first meatpacker to locate in the city, Kent, Hutchinson & Company, began its operations in 1873 on Stockyards property, followed by what were to become the three largest national meatpackers, Nelson Morris and Company, Swift & Company, and Armour & Company. Morris arrived in 1889 employing around twelve hundred; Swift in 1893 with 1,650 workers, and Armour in 1902 building a plant with a capacity to employ three thousand.

Steel and iron firms comprised another important industry that employed significant numbers of workers making products for the national market. By 1902, the oldest iron works in the city, the Republic Iron and Steel Works, formerly the Tudor Iron Works, provided jobs for twelve hundred men manufacturing primarily railroad fishplates, rails, spikes, and bolts. A producer of railroad frog switches, the Elliott Frog

49 Nore, St. Louis National Stockyards Company, 4, 6-11, 14. An example of the Stockyards expanding capacity: in 1874 it handled 234,002 cattle, 498,840 hogs, 41,407 sheep, and 2,335 horses and mules, and in 1906 it processed 1,121,380 cattle, 1,923,209 hogs, 578,652 sheep, and 166,393 horses and mules.
50 “East St. Louis: A Short Review of Its History,” ESLDJ, 14 June 1902, 2-8; “Armour’s East St. Louis Packing Plant Now Ready for Business,” ESLDJ, 22 February 1903, 8; East St. Louis Retail Merchants Association Commercial Profile, 1907 ([S.I.: s.n., 1907), 11; 1912 City Directory, 1355-1356.
and Switch Company, which opened its East St. Louis facility in 1874 beginning with 350 laborers, employed by 1915 between seven and eight hundred workers. Missouri Malleable Iron Company had a workforce of initially eight hundred men producing railroad specialties and wagon skeins and carried on its payroll between one thousand and fifteen hundred workers. A cast steel plant, Leighton & Howard Steel Company employed fourteen hundred workers.\(^{51}\) Another cast steel plant, established by American Steel Foundries, had in its employ two thousand men and daily produced 150 tons of finished castings.\(^{52}\)

Miscellaneous companies of various sizes, including cotton compresses, foundries, lumberyards, food processors, bakeries, and manufacturers of office fixtures, agricultural implements, and roofing materials, further diversified the city’s economy and solidified its reputation as a national industrial center.\(^{53}\) The W.H. Hill Lime and Cement Company, founded by W.H. Hill, Sr., in 1872, employed from thirty to thirty-five men in the production of lime and cement products. In 1892, the Obear-Nester Glass Company sited a facility in East St. Louis that provided jobs for six hundred workers who produced mainly flint and green bottles. Southern Illinois Construction Company, founded by contractors C.L. Gray and William J. Edinger in 1898, planed lumber and cut

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stone. Established in 1902 by businessmen from Iowa, Indiana, and East St. Louis, the East St. Louis Walnut Lumber Company received walnut logs from primarily Tennessee, Missouri, and Kentucky and prepared the wood for the European market. An aluminum processor to gain international importance, the Pittsburgh Reduction Company, renamed Aluminum Company of America, later known as Alcoa, opened in 1903 its East St. Louis facility, the Aluminum Ore Company. The company became the sole bauxite ore refiner in North America to refine bauxite ore into alumina for other Alcoa plants to fabricate into aluminum wares.

African American Community Building

Black people’s community building underwent changes as East St. Louis and other towns in the border region transitioned from slave to free wage labor and from an agricultural to an industrial economy. African Americans struggled to build stable families and viable communities under slavery when Illinois, still a French colony, did not depend upon slave labor to the extent that plantation societies did. Still, enslaved

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55 Duncan C. Smith, “Know Your East St. Louis: Aluminum, an Interesting Story about an East St. Louis Industry,” East St. Louis Today, 4 (April 1936): 7-8; Aluminum Ore Co.: East St. Louis Works ([the Company, 1948]), [4-7].
56 Much of the literature on slavery in the Americas focuses on plantation societies. On slavery in colonial frontier societies see, for example, Daniel H. Usner, Jr., Indians, Settlers, & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Peter H. Wood, Black
black Illinoisans encountered slaveholders maintaining authority by disrupting slave families and communities. Slavery continued when the territory passed hands into the United States. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 banned the importation of slaves but permitted slavery north of the Ohio River. Enslaved Illinoisans found their lives more tightly controlled than ever after Illinois achieved statehood in 1818 and enacted in 1819 “Black Laws,” modeled after the slave codes of the American South.

Black Illinoisans experienced the first major shifts in the economy and politics of the border region when commercial and later industrial capitalism reshaped antebellum northern culture. These changes occurred as their quest to attain freedom bounded forward in 1823 when the state abolished slavery and granted gradual emancipation.

Border region African Americans experienced racial subordination in the slave states of Missouri and Kentucky and nominal freedom Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. Manumitted and fugitive slaves and newly arriving free black settlers had confirmed for them what they already suspected, that white Illinoisans did not accept them as equals when the state

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60 “Negroes, a Political Issue in Early Southern Illinois History,” Folder 7, Box 29, *Negro in Illinois Papers; Finkelman, Slavery and the Founders*. 
passed legislation banning African Americans from residing in Illinois. But black people ignored such laws, knowing that they had the opportunity to build stable families and communities in free labor Illinois. Still they knew freedom was not guaranteed as long as the American republic protected slavery, denied citizenship to free African Americans, and encouraged white citizens to return fugitives to their masters.

African Americans in the East St. Louis district of Saint Clair County chose to inhabit the American Bottom across the river from the slave labor state of Missouri. In 1850, nearly half of the black population in the district indicated Missouri as their place of birth. These former Missourians were either manumitted or fugitive slaves who had enslaved friends and relatives in St. Louis. The other half of the district’s black population had been born in Illinois. Many black residents earned a livelihood as farm laborers, steamboat hands, and unskilled laborers involved in activities that served the economy of St. Louis. In addition, proximity to Missouri made black American Bottom settlements, indeed black border region hamlets adjacent to slave states, serve as

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63 Tregillis, River Roads to Freedom, 2-13.
maroon communities and Underground Railroad stations for fugitive slaves who often were kith or kin of black Bottom residents. African American Illinoisans remained vigilant against slave catchers to prevent free blacks from being kidnapped and sold as slaves down river and fugitives from being captured and returned to their masters.65

Located a few miles northwest of East St. Louis, the all-black village of Brooklyn, Illinois, residence for many maroons emerged in the 1830s and became the first continuously all-black town in the United States. This village was the center of black life and culture on the American Bottom. Brooklynites maintained black political control of their local government. The display of black self-government showed free African Americans capable of engagement in formal politics.66

As the Civil War began in 1861, African Americans seized the opportunity to win freedom. Fugitive slaves and free black people forced the administration of President Abraham Lincoln in 1862 to make emancipation one of its major war objectives.67 In Illinois, African American men and women worked to transform the national conflict into a war for abolition.68 They contributed mightily as soldiers, sailors, laborers, nurses,

spies, guides, teamsters, laundresses, cooks, and in other capacities to bring about Union victory. For instance, in 1864, Henry Mitchell, from a “well-to-do” black family in Centreville just south of East St. Louis, enlisted in the Federal cavalry. With Federal victory and abolition in 1865, Mitchell moved to East St. Louis where he became active in community building and a statewide movement to secure citizenship rights for black people.  

Beginning in 1865, African Americans, especially those in the Reconstruction South, explored the freedoms that they won through warfare and reveled in the knowledge that their community institutions were free from white disruption. They established churches, the traditional and most important center of black community life and culture, and other organizations such as lodges and clubs. Black people in East St. Louis sometime between 1865 and 1870 built their first community institution, a Baptist church, on Brady Avenue. Civil War veterans founded Pennock Post No. 749 of the Grand Army of the Republic and the St. George Lodge No. 1524 of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows (GUOF) in the decade after the war. Fifty Odd Fellows


69 “Negro Veteran Dies,” _East St. Louis Journal_, 5 February 1934, 1.


conducted their first meetings in East St. Louis in 1876. Laborers Henry L. Jones and John Woods managed St. Paul Lodge No. 42, the city’s oldest black Masonic Lodge. Some women chartered a branch of the International Order of Twelve, Knights and Daughters of Tabor, a militant black abolitionist organization founded in the 1840s in St. Louis. Other women established clubs such as the Sunrise Council of the Daughters of Africa, the Mysterious Ten of the Court of Calanthians, the Daughters of the Tabernacle, and the Sisters of the Golden Gate.

Black Illinoisans also agitated for landownership and rights of citizenship after the repeal of the state’s Black Laws and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment. Fifty-six African Americans convened in 1866 the Illinois State Convention of Colored Men in Galesburg, evoking the memory of black loyalty to Illinois and the federal government during the Civil War as a claim to rights of citizenship. They passed resolutions, including those for equal education, voting rights, and acquisition of farmland for economic security. Though land reform was not the issue in Illinois that it

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75 “Convention Closed,” ESLDJ, 21 July 1901, 2.
76 “Mrs. Pyron’s Funeral,” ESLDJ, 27 August 1906, 4. In Population Schedules, 1900, Illinois, Maggie Pyron’s husband, Albert, was a machinist.
was in the South, convention goers’ call for farms reflected black people’s notion that their political liberty rested on economic security.\textsuperscript{78}

After African Americans became citizens under the Fourteenth Amendment in 1867, border region black people began exercising their rights of citizenship and sought to expand those rights into social arenas not protected by the federal government.\textsuperscript{79}

African Americans in East St. Louis, for example, voted, ran candidates for office, and commuted on integrated streetcars. But they struggled to gain equal access to employment and educational opportunities and to end anti-black violence. Black East St. Louisans often challenged white imposed social and economic limitations through participation in electoral politics in an effort to maintain their rights of citizenship and attain formal political power.


Black people in Illinois moved toward attaining a share of local and state governmental power after 1870 when black men won the right to vote under the Fifteenth Amendment. Though the amendment extended voting rights only to men, African American women continued to engage in the political forum because black men and women held the view that they shared the vote equally. Women also influenced men’s voting decisions through civic club activities and rallies.\(^{80}\) In 1873, political activists in the East St. Louis chapter of the Union League, a pro-Republican Party club, called upon black people to support the candidacies of equal rights politicians.

Like its sister chapters elsewhere, the East St. Louis Union League demanded full protection of citizenship rights, including the rights to sit on juries and send children to public schools.\(^{81}\) Led by African American state assemblyman John W.E. Thomas of Chicago, black East St. Louisans along with other black Illinoisans successfully pressured the General Assembly to ban segregation in public schools in 1874.\(^{82}\) The


Black people in the border region encompassing southern Illinois towns, including East St. Louis and Alton, had to maintain their rights of citizenship as they struggled to overcome racial subordination. Battles over public schooling quickly surfaced as one of many tests of equality for African Americans during Reconstruction.\footnote{Trotter, \textit{The River Jordan}. On battles over public schools in Alton, Illinois, see Shirley J. Portwood, “‘We Lifted Our Voices in Thunder Tones’: African American Race Men and Race Women and Community Agency in Southern Illinois, 1895-1910,” \textit{Journal of Urban History} 26 (2000): 740-758.} Their fight to obtain formal public schooling for their children became part of building and maintaining a community.\footnote{Adam Fairclough, “‘Being in the Field of Education and Also Being a Negro … Semes … Tragic’: Black Teachers in the Jim Crow South,” \textit{Journal of American History}, 87 (June 2000): 65.} Black East St. Louisans made access to public education a major concern.\footnote{Proceedings of the Illinois State Convention, 7.} First, they confronted exclusionism that denied African Americans access to public schools and other tax supported facilities.\footnote{On exclusionism see, for example, Howard N. Rabinowitz, \textit{Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980).} In 1867, upon gaining citizenship, black parents ended exclusionism by forcing the school board to provide a school for their children. The board furnished a segregated facility.\footnote{“Schools and Education in East St. Louis,” in Folder 27, “Notes on African Americans in East St. Louis schools, 1867-1940,” Box 14, \textit{Negro in Illinois Papers}.} Black East St. Louisans accepted segregated schools after white people, threatening violence,
rejected integration.\textsuperscript{89} They also witnessed the attempt of some white Illinoisans to reinstate de jure segregation.\textsuperscript{90} For example, in 1875, a Mr. Plater of the Illinois General Assembly filed a bill to allow voters of a school district to authorize segregated schools. Though the bill died in committee, black residents knew that segregation can exist without being embodied in law.\textsuperscript{91}

Black East St. Louisans forced the school board to improve their segregated black schools by threatening to attend white schools. In August 1875, black parents decided against sending their children to classes in a building in need of repair. At least eighteen black men and women met at the Brady Avenue Baptist Church to discuss public education. They formed an ad hoc group with the Reverend B. Saunders as president, laborer and minister Reverend Park Hutchinson as vice-president, and William Eagleson as secretary to petition the school board to provide an equal education to black children in


\textsuperscript{91} Illinois General Assembly, \textit{Journal of the House of Representatives of the Twenty-Ninth General Assembly of the State of Illinois} (Springfield: State Journal Steam Printer, 1875), 37, 119; “Schools and Education in East St. Louis.”
safe facilities. Led by ex-slave and Civil War veteran Captain John Robinson, two hundred black people demanded a new school for their children. On September 9, 1875, parents began sending their children to the all-white Douglas and Franklin schools. Five days later, twelve children and their mothers were barred from entering one of the schoolyards by white students and adults who threatened them with physical violence. The next day, Robinson led the twelve children, and presumably their mothers, into a white school, guarded them, and informed white parents that all children had a right to an education in decent schools.

Black East St. Louisans, realizing toward the end of the 1870s that school integration was a dead issue, decided to devote their efforts to improving the quality of segregated schools. Their educational facilities became community centers that offered black people divided by church affiliation and other social divisions a chance to share their recreational, cultural, and social interests. Segregated schools offered black

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92 “Notes on African-Americans in East St. Louis Schools, 1867-1940,” Folder 27, Box 14, *Negro in Illinois Papers*. Fifty-six year old Virginia born Hutchinson was also a laborer. Other ad hoc committee members were forty-six year old Mississippi born laborer John Browning, twenty-five year old Missouri born teamster John Campbell, thirty-three year old Missouri born teamster Henry Ellington, Jack Ferguson, Edwin Hayes, forty year old Virginia born laborer Edward Henry, John Henry, James Hightower, thirty-six year old Illinois born laborer Hagan Jarrett, Alexander Johnson, thirty-one year old Mississippi born laborer Eli Morrison, Elizabeth Pittman, Jake Scott, Joseph Smith, Sarah Stevenson, Charles Wilson, and Molly Wilson. Data for Edward Henry and Hutchinson in *Population Schedules, 1870, Illinois*; for Browning, Campbell, Ellington, Jarrett, and Morrison, in *Population Schedules, 1880, Illinois*. Author unable to find in the 1880 census which of the two men named Charles Wilson, the twenty-four year old Missouri born steamboat deck hand or thirty year old Mississippi born laborer, was on the committee.

93 “Schools and Education in East St. Louis,” Folder 27, “Notes on African-Americans in East St. Louis Schools, 1867-1940,” Box 14, *Negro in Illinois Papers*. According to local newspapers, Robinson’s title of Captain was an honorary one.
schoolchildren classrooms free of daily racist insults. In addition, they provided employment through the political patronage system for African American teachers. Black East Louisans understood that compared to black school educators in the South, their teachers enjoyed freedom in what they were able to teach. But black townspeople knew that ultimate control of their schools remained with the white school board.\footnote{James D. Anderson, \textit{The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); quoted passage in Adam Fairclough, \textit{Teaching Equality: Black Schools in the Age of Jim Crow} (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 5-10, 14-19.}

The black population in East St. Louis in the 1870s was small but diverse in terms of place of origin and occupation. The decade began with one hundred African Americans living among 5,644 white inhabitants. Black townspeople lived in small clusters in predominantly white neighborhoods throughout the city. Most had been born in Illinois or Missouri, and many of the rest had migrated primarily from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia. Most African American men worked as roustabouts and riverfront laborers, coal haulers, and farm workers.\footnote{Population Schedules of the Ninth United States Census, 1870, Illinois, M593, reel 279, “St. Clair County”; Population Schedules . . . Tenth United States Census, 1880, Illinois, T9, reel 246, “St. Clair County.” All tabulations are by the author.} Census manuscripts listed no occupations for most black women. But if Atlanta, Georgia, and other locales in the 1870s proved any indication, black women in East St. Louis labored as domestics, laundresses, and servants.\footnote{On Atlanta see, for example, Hunter, \textit{Joy to Freedom}.}

The number of black inhabitants increased slowly in the 1870s as African Americans migrated to East St. Louis. Most newcomers to the city had left the South in the waning years of Reconstruction as “redeemers,” white supremacists who abhorred the...
political rule of black and white Republicans, employed terrorism and other means to
regain control of local and state governments. Migrants also sought a better way of life
as the depression of the mid-1870s and an increasingly regressive sharecropping system
severely limited their opportunities for economic advancement.\textsuperscript{97} While many thought
of migration to escape political and economic oppression, others dreamed of migration as
a means to prosperity. Though some contemplated emigrating to the Caribbean or
Liberia, most, possessing few resources, decided to establish all-black towns in the
United States, first, primarily in Kansas, then later in Oklahoma. One migratory wave led
up to the Exodus of 1879 as black southerners, the Exodusters, headed to Kansas to attain
farmland.\textsuperscript{98} An unknown number of Exodusters, for a variety of reasons, never reached
their destination and settled in towns and cities on route to Kansas. For example, in
1876, a migrant agent left fifty Exodusters stranded in East St. Louis presumably because
either the agent was unscrupulous or the migrants had run out of money to continue their
journey.\textsuperscript{99}

Postbellum black migrants faced strong competition from white wage earners in
securing industrial employment even as common laborers. Few in number they were

\textsuperscript{97} On black Southerners’ politics in Reconstruction and Populist, and other social
movements see, for example, W.E.B. Du Bois, \textit{Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-
under Our Feet}, 163-313.

\textsuperscript{98} On postbellum black migrations to Kansas, Oklahoma, small black towns in various
states or overseas see, for example, Nell Irvin Painter, \textit{Exodusters: Black Migration to
Kansas after Reconstruction} (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1976). On migrations
to achieve prosperity see Kenneth M. Hamilton, \textit{Black Towns and Profit: Promotion and
Development in the Trans-Appalachian West, 1877-1915} (Urbana: University of Illinois

\textsuperscript{99} “The colored immigrants . . .,” \textit{East St. Louis Gazette}, 1 April 1876, in Folder 43,
“Notes on African-Americans in East St. Louis,” Box 10, \textit{Negro in Illinois Papers}. 
overwhelmed by a tidal wave of white working people scrambling for jobs as industry destroyed the artisan work system that had formed the livelihood of countless white Americans. African Americans frequently lost in competition to white workers who claimed a racial entitlement to factory jobs and who along with employers shut them out of many occupations. Still many black men, and a few women, successfully obtained industrial employment. Some, thinking to improve their chances for economic advancement joined the white dominated trade union movement.

White workers across the nation sought to reform the industrial order by building a trade union movement. Whereas black men and women entered the urban industrial economy without a tradition of control over their work, white working men and women generally possessed such a tradition.\textsuperscript{100} Large numbers of white workers, their artisan way of making a living no longer viable, streamed to large and small industrializing cities, including Chicago, Buffalo, Cleveland, Atlanta, Detroit, and East St. Louis, to obtain industrial jobs. They opposed industrialists’ efforts to control the work process and transform workers, especially those with specialized skills, into tightly controlled unskilled or deskill laborers or factory operatives.\textsuperscript{101} In East St. Louis, workers’ efforts to improve their conditions began in 1866 when union organizers demanded collective bargaining rights and an eight-hour working day. Railroad employees, a powerful bloc of industrial workers in the city, formed the core of the local labor movement. In 1873, railroad worker Thomas Calhoun led brakemen in forming the area’s first major union. Railroad engineer, real estate man, and future mayor of East St.

\textsuperscript{100} Trotter, \textit{Black Milwaukee}, xii.

\textsuperscript{101} Montgomery, \textit{The Fall of the House of Labor}. 
Louis, Melbern M. Stephens founded a Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen local in 1875. Soon thereafter, other railroad workers established a local of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers.\textsuperscript{102}

During the nationwide Great Railroad Strike of 1877, railroad workers in East St. Louis laid the foundation for a trade union movement that became a significant political force in city affairs. Railroad employees first pressed for a resolution of their grievances during an economic depression that lasted from 1873 into 1877 when corporations eliminated jobs, slashed wages, and crushed union organizing drives. The Great Railroad Strike, initiated by Ohio and Mississippi Railroad employees in Maryland and West Virginia on July 19, 1877, quickly swept westward to Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City, Missouri.\textsuperscript{103} On July 22, 1877, strikers and sympathetic non-railroad workers in St. Louis and East St. Louis established committees to coordinate a general strike with workers in both cities taking command of their respective municipal governments. In East St. Louis, strikers led by brakemen Alex Kissing of the Wabash Railroad, Jack McCarthy of the Vandalia Railroad, and Harry Eastman of the Narrow Gauge Railroad halted all rail traffic except passenger and mail trains and took control of the Eads Bridge and telegraph lines. Strike leaders enlisted the support of East St. Louis Mayor and real estate man John Bowman, who proved a useful ally. They accepted him as their arbitrator and even consulted with him on matters of municipal governance. Unlike in


\textsuperscript{103} “The ’77 Rail Strike,” \textit{ESLJ}, 26 May 1940, 9-D, 14-D; Williams et al., \textit{Gateway to the Past}, 118.
Pittsburgh and other locales where strikers destroyed railroad property, those in East St. Louis, through a special police force appointed by Bowman, remained peaceful. Refraining from militancy during the strike, organized labor gained stature with the business community and laid the foundation for labor’s future participation in governing East St. Louis.

The strike in East St. Louis differed from the one in St. Louis in terms of the extent of racism employed in attempts to break the strike and the political outlook of strike leaders. In St. Louis, businessmen and their allies blatantly employed racist language to divide black and white workers. Perhaps in East St. Louis black workers numbered too few for anti-strike elements to foment a racist backlash. Strike leaders in St. Louis tended to align more with the political left than those across the river. In St. Louis, socialist-oriented Workingmen’s Party strike leaders roused the anger of industrialists who feared an American version of the working people’s government that briefly appeared as the Paris Commune in Paris, France, in 1871. But the non-socialist strike committee in East St. Louis directed by Eastman and other leaders shunned the politics of their radical St. Louis colleagues so as not to alienate Bowman’s business constituents. Strikers in both cities ended their rule on July 28 when federal and state troops restored law and order without bloodshed and returned the reigns of government to elected officials.

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104 “The ’77 Rail Strike,” *ESLJ*, 26 May 1940, 9-D, 14-D.
Trade unionists and their supporters for a brief period of time after the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 sought to improve the political climate and working and living conditions in an atmosphere of interracial cooperation among working people in East St. Louis. White labor leaders Harry Eastman, Alex Kissinger, and others recruited black as well as white workers to found labor unions and campaign to elect labor candidates for city offices. Labor organizers’ message of equality among black and white workers resonated with black East St. Louisans. For example, black residents had voted in the municipal election of 1878 for white politician Mr. Wider who promised them city jobs and “equal privileges with the white laborers” and snubbed white politician Mr. Gustin who advocated municipal reforms and rejected patronage. Labor activists allied with the Knights of Labor, a national trade union affiliation that appealed to many Americans who thought the wage system and industrial production ruinous to workers’ sense of pride and accomplishment. The labor organization called for the abolition of the wage system and reform of working conditions. The Knights represented white and black workers in unskilled industrial and skilled craft occupations—and included small business owners—interested in building a moral society based on cooperation rather than capitalist competition.

106 “The ’77 Rail Strike,” ESLJ, 26 May 1940, 9-D, 14-D. Unfortunately, sources did not reveal names of black labor activists.
108 On the Knights see Leon Fink, Workingmen’s Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983). On interracial unity and the Knights, see Rachleff, Black Labor in the New South, 117-120, 169-176. Knights’ advocacy of interracial unity did not extend to Chinese American workers, see,
The Knights, interjecting their vision of moral improvement into the city’s political culture, railed against the corruption and violence that marked the municipal election of 1885. Their opponents, local Democratic Party operatives, won the election allegedly by stuffing the ballot box. Approximately 3,500 votes had been cast in a city of 1,500 registered voters. In addition, trade unionists lost their friend Mayor John Bowman that year when gunmen, presumably political enemies, shot him to death outside his residence.

Labor’s drive to improve the city came to an abrupt end in 1886 when, during a nationwide railroad strike, the Knights locally and nationally suffered a major setback at the hands of an alliance of corporations and the government determined to destroy unions. In East St. Louis, strikers and their sympathizers prevented strikebreakers from reporting to work. When deputy sheriffs, sent to protect strikebreakers, shot and killed seven workers, strikers retaliated by torching railroad property. Strikers returned to work after five hundred Illinois militiamen were deployed to the city. Anti-labor factions, in a continuing and often to be repeated theme, accused organized labor of promoting violence. The Knights began to experience a massive decline in membership across the

109 Jehu Baker, “To the Voters of the 18th Congressional District: Election Frauds That Endanger the Integrity of Elections in St. Clair county and in the 18th Congressional District: Hon. Jehu Baker’s Exposure of Ballot Corruption in East St. Louis, and Appeal to the Voters of the 18th Congressional District” ([S.L.: s.n., 1886?]).
111 “A New Concept for Labor,” *ESLJ*, 26 May 1940, 10-E; Williams et al., *Gateway to the Past*, 121.
country after losing the strike and being wrongly implicated in the violent Haymarket Affair in May 1886 in Chicago where police brutally attacked labor demonstrators.

Former Knights and other East St. Louis trade unionists, however, persevered in organizing unions, raising labor issues in city politics, and supporting pro-labor politicians in city elections. Some labor activists continued to stress the Knights’ calls for moral betterment and a cooperative society in their agitation against a corrupt City Hall. They and their allies, including the district’s United States Congressman Jehu Baker, saw the need for a new local political party to oppose political machine bosses in the election of 1887.112 The anti-corruption factions established the Citizens’ Party that year with the aim of conducting nonpartisan local elections and to bringing “sound business management and honest and efficient officers” to municipal government. Some of the former Knights of Labor also saw their ideas about racial and class cooperation become included in the Citizens’ Party platform.113

Throughout the 1890s, the Citizens’ Party promoted class harmony, industrial development, and a stable political culture. The party attracted white and black residents of all social classes.114 Its ranks included Republicans, Democrats, Populists, socialists, trade unionists, and others favoring progressive reform of urban life and politics.115 Citizens’ Party politicians came to control City Hall, sponsoring public works projects

112 Baker, “To the Voters of the 18th Congressional District.  
113 “East St. Louis Parties,” ESLDJ, 29 March 1900, 2.  
such as the installation of paved streets, sidewalks, streetlights, water supply lines, and the improvement of schools.\textsuperscript{116} The party modernized the police and fire departments, expanded municipal services, and improved the city’s infrastructure, for example, by constructing bridges and viaducts.\textsuperscript{117} It attracted working people who supported corruption free city government, economic growth, more jobs, higher wages, and an eight-hour workday.\textsuperscript{118}

Not all labor leaders and their supporters, including former members of the Knights of Labor, placed interracial working class solidarity among their highest priorities when in 1892 they formed the Central Trades and Labor Union of East St. Louis (CTLU). The new organization functioned to coordinate the activities of union locals and promote labor’s cause in city affairs.\textsuperscript{119} CTLU advanced the interests of labor in the political arena but without the Knights’ vision of a working people’s cooperative society. The CTLU affiliated itself with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), an association founded in 1886 and comprised mainly of craft workers. CTLU followed the AFL’s program of business unionism, which involved the winning of union recognition, higher wages, shorter hours, and better working conditions, ideally through arbitration rather than through strikes. Like the AFL, the CTLU concentrated its efforts on organizing skilled workers into crafts unions that retained a certain degree of control over the work process. The local affiliation included among its initial membership barrel

\textsuperscript{117} “What the Citizens’ Party Has Done,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 24 March 1901, 4.
\textsuperscript{119} “Trades and Labor Union,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 12 January 1892, 1.
makers, carpenters, bricklayers, barbers, and bartenders. The CTLU, like the AFL, in emphasizing business unionism and organizing skilled craft workers, showed little interest in unionizing unskilled workers, black or white, male or female. The CTLU’s position forced black working people to look for allies outside the labor movement.\textsuperscript{120}

Expanding Black East St. Louis

Black East St. Louis began experiencing accelerated population and institutional growth in the last decade of the nineteenth century after the city had launched its program of massive industrialization. The city became a magnet for black migrants because it had the largest African American population and served as a center of black political action and culture in Saint Clair County. The expanding, white dominated city attracted investors who avoided siting industry in Brooklyn, which had fallen from its position of prominence in the American Bottom for black people. Increasing numbers of black newcomers instead migrated to East St. Louis rather than Brooklyn in order to live closer to jobs. In 1890, the number of black people stood at 772 in a city of 15,169 white inhabitants. A significant number of black arrivals had migrated from Mississippi, followed by Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, and Louisiana. They, together with migrants from other southern states, comprised forty percent of the black population in East St. Louis. Black newcomers from the Deep South, like the Exodusters before them, sought

\textsuperscript{120} “A New Concept for Labor,” \textit{ESLJ}, 26 May 1940, 10-E.
economic advancement. They also wanted freedom from the intensification of racial subordination that occurred during the last decade of the nineteenth century in the South where black people endured lynching and other forms of terrorism and the enforcement of disfranchisement and legalized segregation. By 1900, 1,799 black and 29,655 white residents comprised the city’s population.121

A larger African American population began to have a noticeable spatial presence. For decades, black people lived in small clusters scattered throughout the city. Many resided in the city’s oldest districts bordering or near the Mississippi River, most notably “Bloody Island” and “the Valley,” both west of what is now Tenth Street, which before the 1890s formed the city’s eastern boundary. During the 1890s black townspeople established new neighborhoods in areas annexed by the city, mainly in the south end sections of Denverside and Rush City and in the north end section known as Goose Hill. Most low income African Americans lived in substandard housing nestled around railroad yards, factories, and open fields in the western half of the city. Some dwellings remained under elevation in manmade valleys, their owners too poor or indifferent about raising the structures to the level of high graded streets. By 1900, Rush City and parts of Denverside were evolving into African American ghettos.122

The city’s increasing African American population brought with it an expanding institutional culture. Black East St. Louisans continued to establish churches, civic and fraternal clubs, lodges, societies, and other organizations where they found camaraderie, affirmed their dignity as a people, and gained skills for political leadership and agitation. Black residents made the founding of churches their first priority, adding to the number previously organized, for example, St. Luke’s African Methodist Episcopal Church in the late 1880s and an African Methodist Episcopal Zion church in 1887. In 1895, Mississippi born laborer Timothy Peacock and his Missouri born wife Charity, John and Minerva Williams, Missouri born Mary Chism, and Arkansas born Zelphia Williams organized St. Paul’s Baptist Church, holding services in private homes before building a house of worship on Seventh Street in 1897. Jennie Thomas and others organized the Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church in 1901, conducting worship in Thomas’s home before constructing a church. Mississippi born Reverend James Lampley and his followers in 1910 formed the Truelight Baptist Church. Black Roman Catholics, like their Protestant brothers and sisters who withdrew from white Protestant churches in the

few decades after the Civil War, finally became independent of white Catholics in 1921 when they built their own house of worship.  

By 1890s, African Americans began gaining a foothold in the city’s industrial economy, primarily in meatpacking, iron and steel founding, railroading and glass, and building materials manufacturing. Most, mainly the men, obtained industrial jobs as common laborers. A few secured skilled positions such as butchers in meatpacking plants. Black men worked in a variety of jobs, non-industrial as well as industrial, laboring as brick masons, butchers, carpenters, cooks, coopers, foundry men, gardeners, hod carriers, janitors, machinists, painters, porters in hotels and other non-industrial workplaces, railroad car repairers, railroad foremen or gang bosses, servants, stationary firemen, teamsters, wagon drivers or express men, waiters, and whitewashers.  

African American women in East St. Louis began entering the wage-earning workforce in greater numbers than in previous decades. Some continued antebellum and postbellum patterns of making a living by selling garden produce, midwifing, lodging travelers, or laundering clothes. Slowly black women increased their presence in paid employment working as cooks, glass factory workers, janitors, laundry workers, sack-makers, seamstresses, and laborers, including one as a railroad laborer and one as a

126 “First Negro Catholic Church Recently Occupied Gets Name from African Bishop, A.D. 343,” ESLDJ, 4 January 1925, section four, 1-C, 6-C.  
stockyard worker. Some labored in meatpacking and in odd factory jobs.\textsuperscript{129} Most black East St. Louisan women in search of wages, however, had no choice but to toil as domestic service workers and laundresses. Many domestic workers preferred commuting to work rather than living in servants’ quarters in their employers’ homes, fulfilling an historic African American quest to achieve as much freedom as possible from white oversight of their work.\textsuperscript{130}

African Americans vigorously engaged in electoral politics in East St. Louis as their population increased during the 1890s. They realized that an expanding black voting bloc had the potential of yielding results favorable for their community. Black residents saw hopeful signs of white people’s acceptance of their participation in the 1886 election when the Knights of Labor included an African American worker among its seventeen nominees for various positions in city government. A majority of white voters swept fifteen Knights’ candidates into government seats but rejected the black office seeker.\textsuperscript{131} Still black residents continued their involvement in formal politics.

From the late 1880s into the early 1890s black East St. Louisans placed local concerns above national issues when casting their votes. They supported the local Democratic Party, known as the People’s Party of East St. Louis even though the national Democratic Party boldly proclaimed itself the party of white supremacy. Black residents

\textsuperscript{129} Population Schedules . . . 1900, Illinois; 1912 City Directory. All tabulations are by the author.

\textsuperscript{130} On urban black women in non-industrial occupations prior to 1915 see Hunter, To ‘Joy My Freedom. On domestics see, for example, Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, Living In, Living Out: African American Domestics in Washington, D.C., 1910-1940 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).

\textsuperscript{131} “A New Concept for Labor,” ESLJ, 26 May 1940, 10-E.
showed an interest in the People’s Party because it promised more patronage than the Republican-oriented Citizens’ Party. A majority of black voters had no problem pushing aside the party of Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation for patronage. In addition, leading black politicians secured an agreement with the People’s Party, guarantying them janitorial jobs in all public buildings if the party proved victorious in the 1893 municipal election.

Most African American residents, however, switched their allegiance to the Citizens’ Party when the People’s Party reneged on its promise of patronage after winning City Hall on the strength of the black vote. Some formed a political club in March 1894 to build support for the Citizens’ Party. Club officers, president Andrew J. Morgan and secretary B.F. Goff, organized political education meetings for black voters in the city’s seven wards. Morgan and Goff set about welding a black voting bloc for the 1894 presidential and the 1895 municipal elections with the objective of winning patronage from City Hall.\(^\text{132}\) In petitioning for patronage, club members found Citizens’ Party leader Mayor Melbern Stephens agreeable to black representation on the police, fire, and street departments. In August 1894, Captain John Robinson and Daniel Jenkins, president and secretary, respectively, of the pro-Citizens’ Party club, now the Murphy Republican League Club No. 1, continued to organize the black vote.\(^\text{133}\) During the election of 1895, they marshaled black voters for the Citizens’ Party that promised more

\(^\text{132}\) “At a Mass Meeting of Colored Voters,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 27 March 1894, 3.

patronage than the People’s Party. During a mass meeting in 1896, signaling a loss of confidence in the People’s Party, Citizens’ Party advocates Captain John Robinson and Morton Hawkins led the audience in denouncing a call by a Mr. King (first name not given) for a black People’s Party club.

African American residents, working through their clubs and ward committees, increasingly supported the Citizens’ Party as it met their expectations in terms of the share of resources and positions in city and county governments it awarded them. They valued patronage not only because it offered a steady income and increased social status within the black community but also because it afforded greater access to City Hall. Politicians among them used tactics such as bloc voting to win patronage from white political bosses eager for the African American vote. Black voters allied with the Citizens’ Party, which, besides dispensing patronage, funded improvement projects such as the extension of streetcar lines and the paving of streets in black neighborhoods. In 1897, most black residents supported Citizens’ Party candidates Melbern Stephens for mayor and black resident James Reese for county Assistant Supervisor. Though Reese lost his election, black voters remained loyal to a Citizens’ Party grateful to have

134 “Colored Mass Meeting,” ESLDJ, 18 July 1895, 3.
135 “The Colored Vote Changed,” ESLDJ, 5 March 1896, 2. Denouncing the People’s Party were H.T. Bowman, Isaac Bryant, Reverend W.G. Colby, A. Collier, C.B. Jones, Missouri born laborer John Reese, F.M. Smith, and Thomas Wiley. Population Schedules, 1900, Illinois, listed Missouri born Bowman as an editor. In the schedules, C.B. Jones was either Illinois born Charles Jones, a teamster, Mississippi born Clem Jones, a barber, or Missouri born Columbus Jones, a packinghouse hog scrapper. Bowman was editor of the Advance Citizen in “Cook Charges Negro Padded City Payroll,” ESLDJ, 24 September 1926, 1A, 10A.
136 “East St. Louis Politics,” ESLDJ, 27 March 1902, 2; “Unofficial Vote Cast in East St. Louis at Election, April 1, 1902,” ESLDJ, 2 April 1902, 2.
regained City Hall with the black vote.\textsuperscript{137} African American townspeople also supported the Citizens’ Party because of the efforts of the Afro-American Protective League of Illinois through its East St. Louis chapter.

The Afro-American Protective League of Illinois, coming into existence in 1895 when black Illinoisans became concerned about the erosion of their citizenship rights, gained much influence in local black politics. The Illinois league affiliated with the National Afro-American League, founded in 1890 by the militant black activist and newspaper editor Timothy Thomas Fortune. Combining aspects of self-help, self-defense, political agitation, and accommodation, the Illinois league had as its goal the elimination of racial inequality.\textsuperscript{138} According to Illinois League president John Chavis, the organization opposed rising anti-black prejudice, segregation, and racial discrimination that impeded “the rapid progress of the Negro.”\textsuperscript{139}

Both the National Afro-American League and the Afro-American Protective League of Illinois formed at a time when black people, especially those in the South, opposed a virulent, multifaceted assault upon their rights and persons. These organizations publicized black Southerners’ confrontation against white attempts to

\textsuperscript{137} “The Colored Voters Return to the Citizens’ Party,” ESLDJ, 28 March 1897, 4.
\textsuperscript{139} “The Afro-American League,” Illinois Record, 13 November 1897, 1.
control African American labor and social and economic advancement through legal and extralegal coercion, disfranchisement, and segregation.\footnote{William Cohen, \textit{At Freedom’s Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control, 1861-1915} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991).} By the 1890s, African Americans and a dwindling circle of white allies had failed to reverse the rise of anti-black hostility that led to violations of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments. In 1896, the United States Supreme Court legitimized this hostility in \textit{Plessy v. Ferguson}, which declared segregation constitutional under the doctrine of “separate but equal.”

African Americans debated over the strategies and tactics to employ to reverse the erosion of their civil and political rights. Journalist and militant activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett, for example, proposed a combination of self-help and assertive armed self-defense. Henry McNeal, an African Methodist Episcopal bishop and proponent of colonization, urged black emigration to Africa. Educator Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee Institute, recommended accommodation as a long term tool in the face of an uncompromising, murderous anti-black aggression. Washington argued against black political involvement and agitation for fear of massive, violent white retaliation. He promoted self-help based upon the acquisition of land and the development of occupational skills and businesses to sustain black social advancement. His chief critic, W.E.B. Du Bois, who at times favored accommodation as a short-term tactic, joined with radicals like William Monroe Trotter in advocating political struggle to restore citizenship rights.\footnote{Louis R. Harlan, \textit{Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915} (New York: Oxford University, 1985); Linda O. McMurry, \textit{To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); David Levering Lewis,
The founders and members of the East St. Louis chapter of the Afro-American Protective League of Illinois in 1897 did not see the strategies of Washington’s accommodation and his radical opponents’ political agitation as mutually exclusive. They sought patronage and political office as they accommodated to segregation.\(^{142}\) East St. Louisan realtor Pearl Abernathy, a member of Washington’s National Negro Business League that advanced self-help through black owned businesses and a Protective Leaguer, openly participated in local politics to attain patronage and political office.\(^{143}\) Other East St. Louis leaguers held meetings to denounce lynching as a barbaric “enemy of civilization” and called upon the federal government to enforce equal protection laws. In 1900, leaguers from across southern Illinois, meeting in East St. Louis, made the same demands.\(^{144}\) They, as African Americans generally, knew Washington had an inordinate amount of power to derail individuals and groups involved in political actions.

Washington and his allies, however, did not disrupt the Illinois league. Perhaps


\(^{143}\) On Washington and the radicals’ perspectives see, for example, Reed, *The Chicago NAACP*, 11.

\(^{144}\) National Negro Business League, *Twentieth Annual Meeting ... in Records of the National Negro Business League, Part I: Annual Conference.*

Abernathy and fellow Afro-American Protective Leaguers had been shielded from attacks by Washington’s followers because of Fortune’s friendship with Washington.145

The East St. Louis chapter of the Afro-American Protective League and other black political clubs allied with the Citizens’ Party to obtain political and economic benefits. The league endorsed the party in 1898, noting that within ten months of the party’s retaking of City Hall in 1897, black residents, employed by the city, were collectively drawing over $5,000 annually in salaries. It stressed that Citizens’ was “the only party in East St. Louis that ha[d] ever put a colored man on the ticket and then stood by him and seen that he got his office when the Democrats [i.e. the People’s Party] had counted him out.”146 The league calculated that African American participation in the Spanish-American War, including that of the nearly three hundred East St. Louis area men recruited into the army by Captain John Robinson had convinced white Illinoisans of the need for racial equality.147 The organization sought to increase black political strength and gain patronage and representation in local and state governments. In April 1898, it worked to unite the African American vote behind black candidates running for the Illinois General Assembly. In September, the league campaigned around the issues of fair treatment for black Spanish-American War veterans, patronage proportionate to the number of black residents in Illinois, union protection for black laborers, and open access to all public schools. Though black candidates failed to win seats in the state legislature,

146 “Politics in East St. Louis,” and “East St. Louis Politics,” Illinois Record, 3 September 1898, 1 and 2; “East St. Louis,” Illinois Record, 11 February 1899, 3.
the league welcomed the growing influence of the black vote in local politics. In 1899, the league urged black East St. Louisans to reelect Citizens’ Party’s Mayor Melbern Stephens who had “done much along the line of giving all nationalities representation in accordance with their numerical strength.”

Black townspeople enjoyed the patronage the Citizens’ Party bestowed. John Robinson won an appointment as Illinois State House superintendent of janitors in 1897 and Senate cloakroom superintendent in 1905; Morton Hawkins became a City Hall janitor in 1898, James Reese was appointed street commissioner in 1900, and Robinson and William Jackson served as Citizens’ Party precinct representatives in 1903.

Daniel Adams and others in the Negro Council Club who had worked to solidify ties between black voters and the Citizens’ Party were rewarded with ward representative appointments in 1900. Adams was also nominated for the position of Assistant Supervisor of St. Clair County. Black voters expected Adams, one of the party’s two candidates opposing Democrats for Assistant Supervisor, to win his election because white residents held the Citizens’ Party in high regard. But in the April election, Adams, losing by just fifty-two votes, was the only Citizens’ Party candidate to be defeated.

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Black activists concluded that even with the backing of the immensely popular Citizens’ Party the majority of white East St. Louisan voters, following white supremacist sensibilities, had cast their ballots for Adams’s white opponent.  

Conclusion

African Americans in East St. Louis from the Civil War to the turn of the century continually reshaped their communities in relation to Reconstruction, the expansion of the labor movement, industrialization, and legalized and customary segregation. They faced an intensification of racism as the nineteenth century came to a close. Though African Americans faced a nadir in their relations with white Americans, they experienced much ferment in terms of community building, class differentiation, and political and social actions within black America. But African Americans in East St. Louis did not descend into a nadir; they sustained a political vibrancy in their interactions with white people and in their community. Black East St. Louis, for example, began its rapid development in the 1890s as its churches, fraternal societies, and other institutions

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expanded in number and size and strengthened as small but steady waves of black southerners migrated to the city.

Established black residents and migrants seized the opportunity to improve their lives in rapidly industrializing East St. Louis. Significant numbers entered the city’s industrial working class, securing employment mainly in railroading, meatpacking, and iron, steel, and glass manufacturing. Black townspeople also engaged in electoral politics, some solely for personal gain and others for the benefit of their people as well. But as African Americans increased their influence in city politics, they encountered greater resistance from politician-businessmen and their allies who themselves were responding to social transformations bought about by urbanization, industrialization, and shifts in the national economy. The real estate faction that dominated East St. Louis struggled to retain control of the city as political contests over patronage and governance sharpened. By 1900, black East St. Louisans who had established a viable community that functioned as a base for political mobilization to advance their interests became more involved as powerbrokers in these contests.
From 1900 to 1915, African American men and women in East St. Louis continued to advance their political interests, engaging in a range of actions to win among other things patronage jobs from city leaders. Black people’s experience in a border region city ran counter to that of most African Americans across the nation. Those in the South particularly had been disfranchised and legally segregated. Black residents in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1898, for example, lost commanding positions in local government to armed white insurrectionists. Black East St. Louisans still received a limited degree of protection from a white police force and some consideration from city hall while African Americans in other locales, including New Orleans in 1900, Evansville, Indiana, in 1903, Atlanta in 1906, and Springfield, Illinois, in 1908, expected or experienced indifference or even violent treatment from police and municipal officials.¹ Black people in East St. Louis, however, carved out a position that allowed

them to project their influence in city politics even in opposition to increasing
segregation, discrimination, and anti-black assaults. They had been able to do what most
African Americans elsewhere had been prevented from doing during the nadir decades of
the African American quest for equality, amass political power and build a black political
machine independent of white political bosses.

African Americans, however, faced white groups in East St. Louis that
increasingly acted to impede or reverse their political, social, and economic gains. As
black people began attaining factory jobs, electing black politicians, asserting their
interests, and winning patronage and access to other resources, various white residents
moved with determination to keep them at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Black
laborers competed with white native-born and immigrant workers for jobs in an urban
industrial economy fraught with uncertainties caused by frequent cycles of economic
depression and unemployment. They opposed employers whose racism limited
occupational opportunities for African Americans and intensified antagonism between
black and white working people. Black East St. Louisans saw white urban machine
politicians increasingly refused to meet their demands for greater, more desirable, shares
of patronage. They confronted real estate politician-businessmen who viewed the
expansion of black aspirations and the African American community as a threat to their
economic policies and political power. Black residents also had to contend with white
progressive reformers who had attained enough influence during the first two decades of

Garland, 2000); David Fort Godshalk, *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and
the Reshaping of American Race Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina
Press, 2005).
the twentieth century to challenge the rule of machine politicians as well as curtail black aspirations. Black East St. Louisans found themselves at the center of reformers’ accusations of what went wrong when politician-businessmen pursued policies that mismanaged industrialization, urban growth, and municipal government. But black townspeople employed tactics such as using their votes to swing elections to divide white political factions in order to advance African American interests.

Real Estate Politician-Businessmen and Progressive Reformers

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, politicians among real estate men and their friends occupied positions of authority and gained greater control over the politics and direction of economic planning and growth of East St. Louis. These businessmen continued the city’s decades old program of reshaping the topography and speculating in land in order to attract industry and people. Thomas L. Fekete, Sr., led a real estate association, which in 1902 renamed itself the East St. Louis Real Estate Exchange, to command local planning.2 After a devastating flood in June 1903 that covered the western sections of the city under thirty-nine feet of water, exchange member Henry D. Sexton took the initiative in promoting a flood control agency to build and

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direct a system of levees, dikes, and drainage canals for East St. Louis and other
townships in the American Bottom area of St. Clair and Madison counties. In 1908,
Sexton, real estate man George Locke Tarlton, and land speculators organized a levee
board to manage flood control. They envisioned not only a city attractive to
manufacturers, but also increased opportunities to obtain personal wealth through real
estate transactions. In the following year, levee board members incorporated their
organization as a municipality, naming it the East Side Levee and Sanitary District.
Board members, though elected by citizens of bottom district towns, had succeeded in
operating independently of oversight from each municipality.3 These officials proceeded
to use district money to influence city and county elections and to drain swampland they
owned to sell as improved acreage to developers.4

Real estate men, including their partners in banking, law, contracting, and allied
pursuits, enhanced East St. Louis’s reputation as an industrial city by enacting laws and
extending tax breaks favorable to industry. For example, in 1911, Mayor Charles
Lambert offered corporations bonuses and other benefits, including a five-year tax
exemption for firms newly recruited to the city.5 East St. Louisan politician-

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5 1912 City Directory, 1339; “City’s Population Trebled since Realtors Formed Board,” ESLDJ, 30 January 1927, 2-E, 6-E, 10-E.
businessmen like many city boosters, machine politicians, and urban growth advocates in other locales operated city government often in opposition to the interests of residents.6

Corporations that economic growth advocates had eagerly recruited had an adverse impact upon the economy and politics of the city.7 Their success in lobbying for lower taxes forced the city to scramble for other sources of revenue.8 Railroad executives, for example, had long regarded East St. Louis merely as a site for economic exploitation, a terminus for St. Louis’s commercial markets. They, like their counterparts in such places as St. Louis or Atlanta, exhibited indifference toward the civic and cultural life of East St. Louis.9 Railroads covered extensive city acreage with rail yards, repair shops, and freight houses, limiting building sites for other constructions, including residential housing.10 Chicago-based railroad managers levied discriminatory freight

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6 Zane L. Miller, Patricia M. Melvin, The Urbanization of Modern America: A Brief History, 2nd ed. (San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1987); John R. Logan, Harvey L. Molotch, Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 20, 100-110; Theising, Made in USA.


fees that slowed the economic growth of the St. Louis-East St. Louis region. Much to the ire of area businessmen like National and Union Live Stock Yards chairman W.L. Tamblyn, railroads refused to equalize shipping fees between eastbound and westbound freight traffic crossing the Mississippi River.\textsuperscript{11}

Terminal Railroad Association of St. Louis, formed in 1889 to represent railroads in East St. Louis and St. Louis, pursued its own interests to the particular detriment of East St. Louis. Terminal had become by 1900 a major factor in the local economy. The railroad charged higher fees or “arbitraries” for westbound than for eastbound commodities, making westbound coal expensive. Its actions convinced investors to site heavy industry on the east side of the river where coal was cheaper. Terminal profited from renting its Illinois properties to manufacturers.\textsuperscript{12} The association monopolized interstate commerce across the Mississippi River, determining freight charges through the ownership of ferries and toll bridges and depriving East St. Louis and even St. Louis of needed revenues for decades.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11} National and Union Live Stock Yards, Joint Rate Committee, J.W. Midgeley, Commissioner, Southwestern Railway Association, September 13, 1886, and W.L. Tamblyn, Chairman, National and Union Live Stock Yards, Joint Rate Committee, October 12, 1886, to Charles E. Perkins, Director, CB&Q Rd, “Rates: Correspondence, Papers, Agreements, 1882-89,” 33 1880 7.3, Burlington Archives.
Manufacturers generally contributed to the financial weakness of the city, for example, by insisting on tax incentives and encouraging corruption. They secured lower taxes by donating money to election campaigns of real estate men who upon winning county and city offices helped companies save hundreds of thousands of dollars. In 1915, the St. Clair County Board of Review, whose members included the son and the friends of real estate agent and Republican Party boss Edward Miller, lowered tax assessments for a number of companies. In return for the lowered assessments, Edward Miller and other politician businessmen received gifts and donations from grateful industrialists while East St. Louis continued to experience deficits.\footnote{Paul Y. Anderson in \textit{House Transcripts}, 3798-3800, 3803-3806. Companies with lowered taxes included Aluminum Ore Company’s assessment which dropped from $699,999 to $200,000, Missouri Malleable’s from $465,000 to $132,000, Republic Iron and Steel’s from $21,330 to $16,788, Elliott Frog & Switch’s from $12,290 to $9,000, Swift’s & Company’s from $428,619 to $54,110, Morris & Company’s from $402,927 to $53,600, and Armour & Company’s from $420,057 to $55,100.}

City leaders compensated for lost revenues by annexing territory that included prime factory and residential sites. Their reasons for annexation—to secure more resources, principally land, and enlarge the population base for more taxes—were no different than those of city boosters in other municipalities, including Boston, St. Louis, New York City, and Atlanta.\footnote{On various cities’ annexation campaigns see, for example, Jackson, \textit{Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).} Real estate men led campaigns that annexed neighboring villages whose inhabitants initially welcomed the access to water and sewer systems, police and fire protection, and other city services that annexation provided. Mayor Stephens oversaw in 1902 East St. Louis’s absorption of Winstanley Park, Alta Sita,
Denverside, Rush City, and other locales hosting industrial enterprises such as Obear-Nester Glass Works and the Shickle, Harrison & Howard Iron Works.\textsuperscript{16} Real estate men, however, by 1906 ceased to consider annexation a viable option. They faced increasing opposition from residents and industrialists located in unincorporated territories they hoped to absorb.\textsuperscript{17} When, for example, city officials had secured enough votes for annexation mainly from white inhabitants of the villages of Klondyke and Tudorville, they encountered anti-annexation sentiment from many black villagers who hoped to incorporate into the village of Glendora, presumably to create a predominantly black town.\textsuperscript{18} Boosters suffered a severe setback when St. Louis National Stockyards and the three meatpacking giants: Armour, Swift, and Morris, initiated an anti-annexation movement. These companies, eager to avoid paying taxes to any town, invoked in 1907 Illinois village incorporation laws, to turn themselves into the village of National City.\textsuperscript{19} City leaders feared that the National City episode provided a model for other enterprises to establish their own towns. Their last annexations occurred in 1908 with Lansdowne and in 1909 with the village of Edgemont.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{16} “Greater East St. Louis,” ESLDJ, 18 March 1902, 2; “Annexation Questions,” ESLDJ, 20 March 1902, 2; “Annexation of Winstanley Park, Alta Sita and Denverside,” ESLDJ, 21 March 1902, 2; “Unofficial Vote Cast in East St. Louis,” ESLDJ, 2 April 1902, 2.
\textsuperscript{17} “East St. Louis,” [1918], [1], Papers of the National Urban League, Part I, Series VI, E:87, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
\textsuperscript{18} “Incorporation Causes Fight,” ESLDJ, 15 August 1906, 3; “25 Years Ago in East St. Louis,” ESLJ, 2 April 1902, 2.
\textsuperscript{19} Conway in House Transcripts; “National City, Population of 465,” ESLDJ, 16 January 1921, 3.
\textsuperscript{20} “25 Years Ago in East St. Louis,” ESLJ, 24 November 1933, 6; “25 Years Ago in East St. Louis,” ESLJ, 29 April 1934, 4.
City politicians found saloons to be a most reliable source of revenue for a debt-ridden municipal government. Their increasing reliance upon saloons proved in the short run to be a politically safe alternative to raising homeowners’ property taxes. Local officials avoided raising taxes by collecting licensing fees from an expanding number of saloons. They saw the possibility of covering revenue shortfalls caused by pro-industrial growth policies as long as city expenditures remained within manageable limits and as long as people continued to build patronize saloons. City Hall had no reason to curb the proliferation of such establishments popular with many wage earners.

By the early 1910s, East St. Louis had over three hundred licensed saloons—and an undetermined number of unlicensed ones. The city doubtlessly was no different from other locales in terms of the large number of saloons and the types of people who patronized them. A few bars were racially integrated, but most were not. Black and white mixing on a regular basis mostly occurred in neighboring all-black Brooklyn with its version of Chicago’s “Black and Tan” saloons, which often doubled as dance halls. Some saloons served a mixed middle and working class clientele, but most catered to mainly working class male saloon goers who enjoyed camaraderie and social drinking in what essentially were workingmen’s clubs. Bars blanketed working class neighborhoods, often situated across streets from factories where laborers stopped to relax, usually after their work shifts ended. These businesses, in addition to selling alcoholic beverages, also served as headquarters for ward and machine boss politicians and their political operatives, employment “offices” for jobseekers, a “bank” to cash workers’ checks, havens for trade unionists to organize workers, places to catch the latest news and gossip,
restaurants for male and female customers, and meeting halls for neighborhood residents.\(^{21}\)

Saloons in East St. Louis proved to be an irresistible source of revenue for city politicians to tap even if some of the bars allowed gambling or prostitution on the premises or served as headquarters for organized crime. Each of the 376 legal taverns paid an annual licensing fee—$500 in 1915—to City Hall. Officials considered saloons problematic and in some cases such establishment only if owners fail to pay the fee.\(^{22}\) In the politically charged atmosphere, the Mayor’s Office at times shut down illegal saloons whose owners had supported the mayor’s opponents during election campaigns. A number of drinking places contributed to a frontier-like atmosphere, especially those in the “Valley,” an industrial and racially mixed residential area centered along Third Street and adjacent alleys on the western edge of the downtown district from Broadway on the south to St. Clair Avenue on the north, and “Whiskey Chute,” along St. Clair Avenue across from National City. These bars often places of gambling and prostitution earned


\(^{22}\) Nulsen in *House Transcripts*, 1052.
for East St. Louis a reputation for social and criminal violence. But city officials tolerated such operations as brought money into the city treasury—and their pockets.

East St. Louis was not alone among American cities where City Hall reaped revenues and private citizens earned income from saloons, gambling, and prostitution. Authorities’ failure to enforce anti-gambling and anti-prostitution laws reinforced the city’s reputation as a “wide-open town.” East St. Louis—along with Brooklyn—definitely served as “sin” cities for St. Louisan fun seekers. Officials and others personally profited from the operation of gambling facilities and brothels. Some owned or rented quarters that catered to participants in the sex trade. Landlords collected monthly rents of $30 to $100 dollars from prostitutes for housing that ordinarily rented for $15. Some policemen supplemented their meager pay through dealings with saloonkeepers, prostitutes, and gamblers. By the early 1910s several police officers, including Assistant Chief of Detectives Frank Florence, even owned brothels.

23 On East St. Louis saloons as incubators of criminal violence and havens for criminals see McLaughlin, Power, Community and Racial Killing in East St. Louis, 78-82.
26 Anderson in House Transcripts, 4421-4422.
28 Towers, and W.A. Miller in House Transcripts, 2593, and 4064-4087.
29 Allison, and W.A. Miller in House Transcripts, 3554-3555, and 4079-4080.
Politician-businessmen, police officers, and others often ignored or broke anti-prostitution laws. They were no different than officials in other cities in tolerating prostitution as long as it occurred outside of affluent neighborhoods. Authorities allowed white and black prostitutes to ply their trade within a block of City Hall and in the “Valley.” Most, mainly white, prostitutes conducted business with clients of their own race, though some used saloons and other establishments to serve white and black men willing to engage in interracial sex.\(^{30}\) Officials knew that young women were sometimes coerced into sex work, but they often refused to punish those who used violence to force or keep women in prostitution. Law enforcers, for example, failed to arrest dance hall owners John Peters and his wife who impressed a fifteen-year old white woman into the sex trade or white saloonkeeper Steve Unk and his wife Lily who forced white nineteen-year old Myrtle Gardner into prostituting for Eastern European immigrant workers.\(^{31}\) More often than not, policemen, bondsmen, and court personnel through bribes or other transactions offered legal protection both to prostitutes and brothel owners and to those dance hall owners and saloonkeepers who permitted prostitution on their premises. Some police officers involved in prostitution usually counted upon friends among bailsmen, lawyers, judges, and even fellow members of the police department to extricate them from difficult situations.\(^{32}\) Policeman Florence, for instance, on trial for killing of police

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\(^{30}\) On interracial sex districts in other cities see, for example, Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).


\(^{32}\) Bevington in *House Transcripts*, 4388-4393; Chapter Four in Theising, *Made in USA.*
morality squad officer H.F. Trafton who had conducted a raid on Florence’s prostitution operation had his friends arrange for his acquittal despite damaging eyewitness testimony.\(^{33}\)

East St. Louisans who viewed saloons, gambling, and prostitution as socially unacceptable and symptomatic of problems that threatened the social order vigorously accused officials of perpetuating immorality and overseeing a deterioration of the quality of life in the city. Those sympathetic to reform challenged the rule of politician-businessmen and other economic growth advocates. Like reformers in other cities, East St. Louis progressives positioned to enact political change were middle and upper class white men and women, mainly clergy, newspaper publishers, professionals such as social workers and lawyers, corporate managers, and businessmen active in clubs and other civic associations.\(^{34}\) They criticized machine politicians, especially those with real estate interests, for economic growth policies that fueled municipal mismanagement. Some faulted political leaders who tolerated or personally profited from corruption, patronage, saloons, gambling, prostitution, and the criminal violence that formed a constant feature of city life.\(^{35}\) Reformers condemned politicians, police officers, and bondsmen who protected lawbreakers or recruited “thugs, pimps, loafers,” saloon “bums,” and gang

\(^{33}\) Allison in *House Transcripts*, 3554-3555.

\(^{34}\) Progressives in Atlanta see, for example, Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 57-58.

\(^{35}\) W.A. Miller in *House Transcripts*, 4080-4081.
members of clubs like the Cahokia Athletic Association to employ violence against political opponents.\textsuperscript{36}

Progressives in East St. Louis like those around the nation hoped to impose their vision of a moral and efficient social order upon a nation undergoing social and economic transformation.\textsuperscript{37} They viewed their work to establish order on an unruly city as a microcosm of what reformers hoped to accomplish nationwide, the use of the state to manage industrialization and urbanization that rendered social relationships they considered dangerously unstable to the republic. Reformers in East St. Louis also sought control of city government to solve various social problems that in their view related to white laborers, especially European immigrants, and African Americans.

The population of white residents in East St. Louis increased after the 1870s as European immigrants entered the city in significant numbers. White East St. Louis, comprised of native-born Americans, foreign-born “old” immigrants, and foreign-born “new” immigrants, expanded from 5,544 in 1870 to 52,646 in 1910. Unlike in Chicago and other northern industrial cities, the native born and old immigrants constituted a numerical majority among white residents in East St. Louis.\textsuperscript{38} Most native-born and old immigrant townspeople claimed English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, French, or German

\textsuperscript{36} Anderson, and Towers, and Allison, and Johns in \textit{House Transcripts}, 280-281, 3835, and 2589, 2592-2593, and 3500, and 4320-4321. During the Chicago race riot of July 1919, the Ragen Colts, an athletic club, was a group of anti-black assailants with political connections, see Tuttle, \textit{Race Riot}, 32-33. Miller, Melvin, \textit{The Urbanization of Modern America}, 54-55.


\textsuperscript{38} According to census figures, in 1900, white East St. Louis was 80.7\% native-born, 10.0\% foreign-born; in 1910, 73.9\% native-born, 13.2\% foreign-born.
The old immigrants refer to those who arrived mainly from Western and Northern Europe before the Civil War as well as those who emigrated from these same places after the war. New immigrants, refer those of Eastern and Southern European origins who came after the war. Most arrived from the Russian and Austria-Hungary empires with the rest originating from Greece, Italy, and other countries. In 1900, new immigrants comprised at least forty-five percent of East St. Louis’s population of 27,842 white persons. But by 1910, the number of foreign-born and children of foreign or mixed parentage had decreased to around thirty-eight percent of the city’s white population.

Overall, new immigrants, like most white and black newcomers to East St. Louis, settled in East St. Louis because its expanding economy offered good prospects of obtaining industrial employment.

Native-born white residents and old and new immigrants found employment in all industrial categories. Occasionally native-born and old immigrant workers prevented foreign born new immigrant laborers from obtaining even unskilled positions in factories considered desirable places of employment. For example, in April 1908, native-born white workers, joined in this instance by black laborers, fought and routed Eastern and Southern Europeans waiting to be hired at an Aluminum Ore Company factory gate. But in time new immigrants found jobs at Aluminum Ore and other firms. Most unskilled, foreign-born white workers at Missouri Malleable Iron Works, for example,

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39 “East St. Louis,” ESLDJ, 14 June 1902, 2-8. No published census tabulations correlating place of origin and occupation with gender and race or nationality exist.


41 “25 Years Ago in East St. Louis,” ESLDJ, 16 April 1933, 4.
were new immigrants from Turkey and Armenia. Native-born and old immigrant workers dominated the higher occupational levels in terms of wages and skills and generally shunned the less remunerative, unskilled jobs and semi-skilled positions, leaving such positions for new immigrants. In the packinghouses, for instance, many unskilled Irish American and English American workers moved into skilled jobs as new immigrants entered the ranks of common laborers.42

New immigrants comprised by 1910 a significant percentage of the unskilled industrial workforce largely because they were considered racially different. They often faced the racism of native-born white Americans and old immigrants who generally regarded them as “not white.” New immigrants concentrated in certain job categories because employers thought them “racially” fit to perform best under certain working conditions.43 Managers and others thought, for example, Ukrainians and other Slavic speaking people docile and capable of working most efficiently under strict supervision and dusty and smoky environments.44 But in practical terms, native-born white Americans constructed a racism that allowed new immigrants to become white like them,

42 John P. Pero, and Alois Towers in House Transcripts, 695, 703, and 2387.
43 John P. Pero, Philip Wolf, and Alois Towers in House Transcripts, 695, 703, and 2265, and 2387. Those who argue that certain groups of European immigrants were first seen as not white see, for example, Noel Ignatiev, How the Irish Became White (New York: Routledge, 1995); Matthew Frye Jacobson, Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigration and the Alchemy of Race (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).
an option closed, however, to people of non-European ancestry. New immigrants generally took advantage of the opportunity to become “white,” for example, by enrolling in Americanization programs sponsored by progressives.

White progressive reformers for various reasons worried that new immigrants had the potential to disrupt the social order. Some expressed concern that new immigrants had no desire to shed their old world ways. Social issues-oriented reformers, for instance, sought to banish saloons and dance halls that working people, including new immigrants, patronized. That many new immigrant laborers participated in strikes and in socialist organizations moved some progressives to Americanize them away from such activities. In East St. Louis progressives became troubled as new immigrants through the labor movement became involved in local politics. As Central Trades and Labor Union of East St. Louis (CTLU) gained the allegiance from new immigrant laborers, it threw support and votes to machine politicians in exchange for patronage and other favors. Reformers advocating an honest, corruption free city hall hoped to disrupt the bonds between new immigrants and politician-businessmen whose economic growth policies brought debt burdening public works projects and social and environmental problems. Political activists among the progressives soon learned that the path toward the elimination of the political machine lay with restructuring white people’s relationship with African Americans.

White progressives promised to solve the “Negro problem.” According to white social reformer Quincy Ewing, white Americans thought to disabuse black people from the notion that black and “white m[e]n stand on common human ground.” Reformers like East St. Louis newspaper publisher James Kirk argued that African Americans, like nonwhite people in the newly acquired American colonies of Puerto Rico and the Philippines, were unfit for democratic self-rule. Reformers also considered anti-black social violence and black agitation for equality equally disruptive, if not destructive, of ordered society. Most regarded black people as inferior to white people, dependent upon political machine patronage, and threatening to prosperity and social tranquility. Progressives viewed the state an appropriate tool to control African Americans. And while those in the South denied black participation in electoral politics through disfranchisement, those in the North minimized black political influence through residential segregation and elimination of ward-based representation in local government.

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Though a few white reformers, including Chicago’s famous settlement house activist Jane Addams, addressed the social problems that black people faced, most preferred to marginalize African Americans socially and politically. Some justified segregation, arguing that black people were socially maladjusted or inferior and that slavery had damaged the black family and psyche. Even racial egalitarians among them, including Addams, generally regarded black people as predisposed to corruption, squalor, gambling, prostitution, vice, and criminal violence. Most progressive reformers, like many white Americans influenced by scientific and cultural racism, thought black people greatly contributed to social disorder. They used racist imagery to build popular support for corruption-free government, the elimination of saloons and vice, and the segregation of African Americans. Progressive reformers pushed to lessen, if not eliminate, black political influence, arguing that black people preferred patronage and government largesse to hard work and were incapable of good citizenship.


Ascendancy, not Nadir, of Black East St. Louisan Political Strength

African Americans, especially those in the South, experienced a rapid reversal in the exercise of their political rights. Their day to day experience underwent aggressive anti-black assaults from white people generally and indifference, if not at times, hostility from government at all levels. Black people faced legal or customary restrictions. Rural black Southerners became increasingly tied to sharecropping, debt peonage, seasonal work patterns, a relatively dismal regional economy, and the oppressive rule of the plantation regime. African Americans commonly found white employers with the support of workers denying them factory employment. They were bombarded daily with indignities that reinforced their inferior status. For example, African Americans knew attempts to keep them at the bottom of the social hierarchy formed a key aspect of an ongoing search to find a white boxer to displace heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson, an African American, whose intimate affairs and marriages with white women infuriated numerous white—and black—Americans. Cultural works like the movie, “Birth of a Nation,” served a similar social function of reinforcing a national commitment to white domination. African Americans regardless of social class increasingly sought ways to end the segregation, disfranchisement, discrimination, and terrorism of rapes, lynching, and mass mob violence.

Black people forged various strategies to reverse the descent into what became known as the nadir of race relations in post-Reconstruction history. They counteracted racist assaults with such strategies as accommodation, migrations, electoral politics, and social and political movements. Many locales hosted, for example, clubwomen’s organizations that aimed among other things to improve the lives, status, and image of black women. Local black men and women formed political clubs that carried the message of national organizations like the Niagara Movement, established in 1905 to implement an aggressive program to achieve equality on all fronts for African Americans. Some looked to reshape national politics by working closely by either working closely with existing political parties or by establishing new ones. Others expended their energies to influence City Hall. Black people in East St. Louis like African Americans in other border region cities participated in the political arena at the local level. But black East St. Louisans made greater strides than their counterparts elsewhere toward black representation in local governance and began to build a political machine to gain independence from white politicians and to attain a share of political power.

Increasing numbers of black Southerners saw border cities like East St. Louis attractive. They moved steadily north, but in small numbers since access to industrial occupations remained limited. These migrants and other black workers encountered northern employers who preferred European immigrant laborers over them or who thought that African Americans were fit to perform the least remunerative tasks. Still a significant percentage of black workers, men more than women, secured factory
employment, albeit in mainly unskilled and menial positions.\textsuperscript{51} African Americans in East St. Louis found employment, mainly as common laborers, in iron and steel manufacturing and meatpacking companies. For example, men and women rural southern migrants with a familiarity of butchering hogs commonly obtained work in border region packinghouses.\textsuperscript{52} At least 215 out of 1,762 black East St. Louisans employed in 1912 toiled in packinghouses, eighty-seven at Armour & Company and ninety-nine at Swift’s & Company. Two hundred and fifty-three, perhaps more, black employees worked for the fifteen railroad companies, including Mobile & Ohio, Southern, Louisville & Nashville, Illinois Central, Baltimore & Ohio, and Terminal, that had the largest operations in the city.\textsuperscript{53} Black laborers composed by 1915 about forty percent of Missouri Malleable Iron Company’s unskilled workforce.\textsuperscript{54}

Most African Americans also obtained common laborer jobs because they worked in a labor market where managers, structuring anti-black racism into the workplace, left the most unskilled, dangerous or least remunerative positions for black men and women.\textsuperscript{55} At Illinois Central Railroad, for example, black workers held positions of firemen, shop laborers, and brakemen because chief manager James Clarke, a former slaveholder, thought black people biologically unfit for skilled tasks.\textsuperscript{56} Most black men

\textsuperscript{51} Earl Lewis, \textit{In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth Century Norfolk, Virginia} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Trotter, \textit{River Jordan}.


\textsuperscript{53} 1912 City Directory. All tabulations are by the author.

\textsuperscript{54} Alois Towers in \textit{House Transcripts}, 2372.

\textsuperscript{55} John P. Pero in \textit{House Transcripts}, 709-710.

and women packinghouse workers were considered by managers Frank Hunter of Swift & Company and Robert Conway of Armour & Company as better suited for work in hog processing rather than the far more lucrative and steady work in the cattle department.

Eighty percent of those assigned to hog killing at Armour & Company were black men. Black women frequently worked as low paid pork-trimmers while the men performed the most odious jobs in meatpacking fertilizer departments. Some companies, for instance, Aluminum Ore Company rarely hired black workers. Gordon Crook and Elijah Smith, for example, were among the only twelve black men, all in menial positions, at Aluminum Ore between 1902, when the plant opened for production, and late 1916, when large numbers of black southerners filled job vacancies during World War I.

Black workers had problematic relationships with white working people and trade unionists. Some confronted white workers who sometimes attacked them, denied them union membership, or restricted their access to various industrial occupations. They knew that the CTLU, as an organization within the American Federation of Labor, had no

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58 Charles B. Fox in *House Transcripts*, 1507, 1641, 1683-1690; “25 Years Ago in East St. Louis,” *ESLDJ*, 16 April 1933, 4; Gordon Crook in *1912 City Directory*; Elijah Smith, a laborer in “Chamber of Commerce Plans Forum Meeting in Honor of Late Inventor of Aluminum,” *ESLJ*, 24 February 1936, 2.

interest in building, let alone leading, an interracial movement for worker solidarity or equality inside, let alone outside, the workplace. Lowly paid black workers often lacked the necessary funds to apply for union charters or sustain payment of union dues. Their situation gave white labor organizers a convenient excuse to rationalize their lackluster efforts in unionizing them.\textsuperscript{60} Most importantly, African Americans realized that the CTLU refused to address racism within the labor movement and that white working people generally asserted the notion of white entitlement to industrial employment, especially to skilled, higher paying jobs. Such views had been fueled by transformations in work processes brought about by industrialization and employers’ embrace of the principles of scientific management. Skilled white workers faced a protracted, losing struggle with managers aiming to deskill the work process. The unskilled confronted managerial control that blocked them from winning collective bargaining rights. Black men and women entering the industrial workforce only increased the concern of white men and women workers who feared a loss in social status and standard of living laboring alongside black people. As more black East St. Louisans obtained manufacturing jobs, they faced white workers exerting greater efforts to bolster their racial identity in an unstable urban industrial economy by restricting black people’s access to industrial jobs.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{60} Harry Kerr, and Alois Towers in \textit{House Transcripts}, 1901, 1911, 1913, 2010-2011, and 2372, 2512-2522, and 3195.

\textsuperscript{61} On white working class Americans and “whiteness,” see, for example, David R. Roediger, \textit{The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class} (London: Verso, 1991).
African American workers formed alliances with white wage earners in certain locales, for example, in the coal mining region of Birmingham, Alabama, or occupations like meatpacking where they constituted a significant percentage of the industrial workforce. Black working people in such situations usually embraced trade unionism, either through integrated or segregated unions, to win collective bargaining rights, gain higher wages, and improve working conditions.62 Black men in East St. Louis joined integrated unions of teamsters, coal miners, and moulders. Others, like hod carriers and hotel and service porters barred from existing union locals formed all-black union locals.63 The service porters’ union within days of its founding in August 1903 boasted a membership of fifty-seven men with Tennessee born barbershop porter Edward Wilson as president and Tennessee born bootblack Ambrose Jones as treasurer. The porters’ union, affiliated with the CTLU, was honored in 1903 with a place in the CTLU’s annual Labor Day parade.64 Still black industrial workers did not yet comprise a significant enough percentage among either skilled or unskilled employees to press the labor organization to include their interests in trade union affairs. Black East St. Louisan

63 Towers, and Edward F. Mason in House Transcripts, 2515, and 3195.
64 “Organized Porters Union,” ESLDJ, 11 August 1903, 3; “Colored Porters Organize,” ESLDJ, 13 August 1903, 3; “Union Labor’s Big Day,” ESLDJ, 8 September 1903, 3; Wilson and Jones’s age and birthplace in Population Schedules, 1900, Illinois.
workers did not reject trade unionism, but they understood that white trade union
disinterest in ending racism in the house of labor generally meant looking elsewhere to
advance their political interests, allying with middle class black residents and white
machine politicians.

The existence of a black middle class signaled the appearance of significant social
divisions in African American communities. This class was not a reflection of the white
middle class in terms of economic power and structure largely because of the
intensification of racism in the latter third of the nineteenth century and in the first two
decades of the twentieth century. African Americans of or aspiring to middle class status
opposed the limitations imposed upon them by white Americans. At the same time they
gained a reputation among working class black people of being arrogant, self-appointed
leaders of the race. Such class antagonisms among African Americans stemmed in part
from the ideology of racial uplift that middle class people generally espoused.

The black middle class like its white counterpart included salaried and self-
employed professionals and owners of small businesses. Their numbers and influence
expanded in black communities largely because the white middle class generally
segregated or refused to service African Americans. The black middle class lacked
highly placed professionals and corporate managers; it did not command any sector of the
local, let alone national, economy. Barbers, dentists, grocers, hostlers, ice and coal
haulers, junk dealers, lawyers, ministers, morticians, newspaper editor-publishers,
physicians, poolroom owners, realtors, restaurateurs, saloonkeepers, and schoolteachers
formed the structural core of the African American middle class in East St. Louis. The town’s black middle class was occupationally similar to those in other border region cities. Business owners, entrepreneurs, and professionals heavily relied upon a black clientele for their livelihood. But a few individuals served both white and black people. For example, Leroy Bundy, a native of Cleveland, Ohio, and a dentist who owned a small automobile sales and repairs business, had African American and European immigrant patients. Missouri-born Pearl Abernathy, once a day laborer, became a realtor serving black and white homebuyers. Noah Parden, born a slave in Georgia and became the first black attorney to argue a case before the United States Supreme Court, settled in East St. Louis in 1906 and opened a legal practice that attracted white as well as black clients. And Captain John Robinson, a onetime laborer who became a community leader and saloonkeeper held a series of patronage jobs at City Hall and the State House, forming friendships with white politicians. But out of 3,100 black adult residents in East St. Louis in 1912, about 120 persons, or four percent, constituted the key structural

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65 *Population Schedules . . . 1900, Illinois; 1912 City Directory.*
68 *1912 City Directory; Labor Committee Report*, 69. All tabulations are by the author. 69 *Population Schedules . . . 1900, Illinois; 1912 City Directory*, 1484.
70 “Threats Fail to Halt Clarence Darrow of Negro Race,” *ESLDJ*, 4 July 1926, 3-A; “N.W. Parden Gets Appointment,” *ESLJ*, 6 January 1935, 3; “Champion of Negroes Dies at 80,” *ESLJ*, 2 March 1944, 1, 16. Parden’s mother was a slave; his father was a slaveholder. On Noah Parden and the U.S. Supreme Court see Mark Curriden and Leroy Phillips, Jr., *Contempt of Court: The Turn-of-the-Century Lynching That Launched 100 Years of Federalism* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1999).
elements of city’s black middle class.\textsuperscript{72} This number was small largely because African Americans needing specialized or a greater diversity of black owned businesses and professional services simply journeyed by streetcar across the river to St. Louis.

The black middle class, however, included more than those who held commonly regarded middle class occupations. Its existence had much to do with persons expressing a class or status consciousness of respectability. Such individuals saw themselves as members of the “better classes.” They advocated “middle-class ways—temperance, frugality, and hard work—as useful tools for living.”\textsuperscript{73} Those who labored in what the white community commonly considered working class jobs had middle class aspirations. As the self-described “better people,” middle class African Americans initiated a social movement to uplift their “race.” They volubly criticized, for example, black patronage of saloons and dance halls, rollicking church services, and other activities they perceived as violations of middle class sensibilities. They demonstrated that black people were capable of being good citizens. They sought to assimilate African Americans into the mainstream of white dominated America. The “respectable” people hoped to transform the less affluent among African Americans into persons capable of emulating their “betters.” Their efforts at uplifting the race constructed an African American version of progressive reformism. Racial uplift advocates especially hoped that through social work and other activities to change black working people’s lives white Americans would relent

\textsuperscript{72} \emph{1912 City Directory}.

in their racism and remove all impediments to African American economic, political, and social advancement.\textsuperscript{74}

Black middle class women through their clubs stood in the forefront of racial uplift politics, channeling their efforts to instill morals and improve conditions among the less affluent, concentrating on the concerns of children and women. They established women’s clubs to address racial and gender equality and solidarity and promote social and cultural interests. They joined national black women’s organizations such as the National Association of Colored Women, an affiliation of black women’s clubs that formed in 1896 from the merger of the National Federation of Afro-American Women and the National League of Colored Women.\textsuperscript{75}

The clubwomen’s movement in East St. Louis in the first two decades of the twentieth century represented one facet of black progressive thought advanced by state and national African American women’s associations. The local chapter of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs led by Sarah B. Jones, who from 1910 to 1912 served as first vice-president of the federation, under the slogan, “Loyalty to Women and Justice to Children,” worked to instill middle class respectability of frugality, industriousness, and sobriety among low black women and their families. Club members advocated sexual self control as one way to counteract racist imagery of black women as lewd and immoral. They also addressed working women’s concerns such as

employment, childcare, and housing in their racial uplift program.\textsuperscript{76} In 1910, in the black progressive framework, Mary Martin as founder and president, Mary Parris as vice-president, Alberta McKenzie as secretary, Mrs. Moore as treasurer, and Ruth Freeman, Annie McCraven, Mississippi born Sarah Flood, and Alabama born Rachel Ingram as club boosters formed an ad hoc committee to care for orphans and the elderly.\textsuperscript{77} They reorganized their committee in 1913, renaming it the Old Folks’ Home and Orphans’ Association that emerged as the city’s preeminent black social work agency.\textsuperscript{78}

Yet, African Americans, regardless of class, saw white America unrelenting in its resolve to keep them in positions of social, political, and economic disadvantage. They often subsumed their political or ideological differences to form interclass alliances to oppose acts of white intransigence to black social advancement and anti-black violence. Black East St. Louisans increasingly faced obstacles from politician-businessmen whose pro-industry policies had turned East St. Louis into a fiscally weakened city with a reputation for political corruption, crime, and violence.\textsuperscript{79}


\textsuperscript{77} Hamilton, \textit{The Ebony Tree}, 74-75; Davis, 24, 139. \textit{Population Schedules, 1900, Illinois} listed Sarah Flood with no job, her husband Richard, a laborer; Rachel Ingram with no occupation lived with brother-in-law B. Gates, a laborer. \textit{1912 City Directory} listed Mary Martin with no career, her husband Armstead, a stockyard worker; Alberta McKenzie with no job, husband Thomas, a laborer; Mary Paris with no occupation, husband Coleman, a laborer.


Black residents knew that African Americans were not safe when most white Americans had much contempt for black people. They witnessed white Illinoisan reaction to African American social, economic, and political advancement fueling an escalation of anti-black assaults. For instance, in 1902, African Americans in Eldorado, about 130 miles southeast of East St. Louis, confronted an angry white citizenry who feared that a newly opened black industrial training school in their town would attract more black people to settle there. A mob forced African American faculty, students and forty residents to leave town. Violence escalated to the point where African Methodist Episcopal pastor the Reverend Peter A. Green had to use his gun to fend off an attack upon his house. Governor Yates restored law and order by sending in the militia. Eldorado later became a sundown town, a place emptied of its black residents. In the following year, in Belleville, a white mob, estimated to number in the hundreds, stormed the county jail and captured Mr. Wyatt (no first name given), a black schoolteacher, accused of shooting a county school superintendent during a dispute over a job contract. The mob performed the lynching ritual, torturing and hanging Wyatt, riddling the corpse with bullets, burning the body, and afterward rushing to collect souvenirs of the victim’s remains. Mass violence occurred in Springfield, Illinois, in 1908 when a mob, failing to seize a black man jailed on charges of raping a white woman, killed at least two black men, burned black homes and businesses, and drove hundreds of black people out of

81 “The Negro Lynched,” ESLDJ, 8 June 1903, 3. On black Illinoisan response to lynchings in their state see Cha-Jua, “A Warlike Demonstration.”
In another episode of anti-black mass violence that occurred in 1909 in Belleville, a lynch posse formed after police jailed a black man accused of murdering a popular white streetcar operator. In this case, white county sheriff, Charles Cashel, prevented a lynching by knocking a mob leader to the ground and ordering his deputies to disperse the throng. Through lynchings and mass racial violence, white Illinoisan terrorists, often with the support of the police and the white community, sent the message to black people that they had no protection under the law.

Black East St. Louisans responded to such anti-black terrorism through organizations dedicated to oppose the rising violence. They established, following the Wyatt lynching in 1903, the Imperial Social Club to pressure city authorities to enforce equal protection laws. They also organized local chapters of existing national associations. In 1915, for instance, black East St. Louisans veterinarian Fred Halsey,.

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83 Alois Towers in *House Transcripts*, 2376. Towers said that the murder occurred six years before 1917, but he actually meant 1909.


physician William Baldwin, dentist H.T. Bolden, mortician Russell M.C. Green, and others formed a branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an interracial organization founded in 1909 in response to the anti-black mass racial violence in 1908 in Springfield, Illinois, to combat lynching and racial injustice and win rights of full citizenship for African Americans.\(^87\)

Some African Americans linked their opposition to anti-black violence and disfranchisement to American colonial adventures and suppression of national sovereignty of the people of the Caribbean and the Philippines. Anti-imperialists among them, especially veterans of the recent Spanish American War who saw the imposition of American style racism on the Filipinos and others, took the lead in interjecting black concerns into local as well as national politics. East St. Louisans, including William T. Scott, a Spanish American War veteran, and several Malleable Iron Works laborers formed in 1901 the General Maceo Club, which they named after Antonio Maceo, an anti-colonial freedom fighter of African-French-Venezuelan heritage and one of the chief leaders of Cuba’s movement for independence from Spain. Scott took pride that Maceo and other Cubans of African ancestry had been formidable fighters in their anti-colonial

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war against Spain. Maceo Club members participated with members of other local black clubs in organizing voters for city elections and furthering African American concerns in the political arena.\textsuperscript{88}

Scott was one of many African Americans working to force local politicians to meet black demands. He condemned Republicans for taking black support for granted and decided that black voters must be independent of the Republican Party. He and others in an attempt to break the Republican hold on African American voters sought an alliance with the Democratic Party, hoping to entice local Democratic politicians into courting the black vote. They must have been aware that black Chicagoans had been rewarded with patronage from Democratic mayors grateful for having been elected to office in 1885 and 1899 with the assistance of African American voters.\textsuperscript{89} In 1901, black Democrat Harvey T. Bowman formed the Third Ward Independent Club for the purpose of enlisting black political operatives to work closely with local Democrats.\textsuperscript{90}

William Scott and other black political hopefuls dismissed both the Democratic and Republican parties and decided to build a national black political party committed to equality. At a Negro National Democratic League meeting in 1900, Scott, as league vice-president, condemned the Republican Party for conducting imperialist ventures overseas.


\textsuperscript{89} Dilliard, “Civil Liberties of Negroes in Illinois since 1865,” 595.

\textsuperscript{90} “Colored Voters Club Reorganized,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 10 March 1901, 3.
and condoning segregation. In 1904, he convened with A.M.E. Zion Church bishop Alexander Walters of New Jersey and other black leaders in St. Louis to form the National Negro Liberty Party. Scott promoted the African American cause and at the same time advanced his own political fortune when the party nominated him as its candidate for President of the United States. But the National Negro Liberty Party made little headway, failing to attract a nationwide following of African American voters, in part because most African Americans already had been disfranchised.

Black participation in formal politics and increasing black influence made East St. Louis unusual at a time when African Americans in many locales had been locked out of the electoral arena. Black townspeople formed a voting bloc to mine opportunities after the local political scene had fragmented from a combination of economic downturns and continual mismanagement of the city. The economic depression that occurred from 1893 to 1897 had exacerbated the deleterious effects of the Citizens’ Party’s industrial growth policies. Townspeople’s doubts about the party prompted newspaper owner and Citizens’ Party insider James Kirk to remind voters that the Citizens’ Party had worked for economic growth and prosperity for everyone. But African Americans knew by

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91 “Address to the Public by the Negro National Democratic League,” Chicago Broad-Ax, 21 July 1900.
93 “East St. Louis Parties,” ESLDJ, 29 March 1900, 2.
1900 that the Citizens’ Party ceased to be a unifying force in local politics. Black residents sought to protect their own interest as the Citizens’ Party declined as competition for resources with other influential, but dissatisfied, constituencies intensified: white railroad employees, businessmen, and progressive reformers.

A substantial number of railroad workers initiated a major realignment in city politics in 1900 when they broke away from the Citizens’ Party. First, organized railroad employees, as members of craft unions, lacked interest in non-unionized, unskilled laborers, whose ranks included most black working people. In addition, dissident railroad workers claimed strong ties with the Democratic Party. They denounced both the Republican and Citizens’ parties as servants of capitalists and praised the Democratic Party as the friend of the wage earner. Anti-Republican railroad workers formed the East St. Louis Bryan and Stevenson Railroad Men’s Club to campaign for national Democratic Party candidates William Jennings Bryan for president and Adlai E. Stevenson for vice president. Their criticism of both political organizations only alienated most African Americans who still supported the national party and who thought they had been served well by Citizens’. Pro-Republican Party railroad employees, led by Illinois Central car repairer J.N. Luckett and yard master E.J. Payne and Mobile & Ohio Railroad yard master M.M. Walsh, organized an East St. Louis McKinley and Roosevelt Railway Men’s Club. They sought to prevent further worker defection from the Citizens’ and Republican parties.94 Though Republicans won in 1900 the district’s congressional

94 “Railroad Employees at East St. Louis,” *Times* (Washington, D.C.), 30 October 1900, clipping attached to letter of J.T. Harahan, Second Vice-President, to Stuyvesant Fish, President [Illinois Central], November 10, 1900, “Fish, Stuyvesant, In-Letters:
seat, many white workers in East St. Louis had voted for Bryan and Stevenson. Their vote reflected a nationwide shift in white worker allegiance from the Republican to the Democratic Party.95

These white railroad workers, like white working people across the nation, fashioned an anti-black racism as they built a labor-Democratic Party alliance nationally and locally. Railroad workers, especially skilled workers, in the brotherhoods, systematically excluded black laborers not only from certain unions, but also from various occupations. As white working people strengthened their ties with the national Democratic Party, they accepted the party’s embrace of segregation and disfranchisement of African Americans in the southern states. White workers in East St. Louis through their unions became more interested in the local Democratic Party, and their leaders viewed the party as a platform for the advancement of labor concerns in city hall. The CTLU to influence municipal affairs sponsored large annual Labor Day parades, ran political education campaigns, and fielded labor candidates for city government offices. White railroad workers through the CTLU and other organizations began to lay the foundation for labor as an important, albeit junior, partner of the real estate-led faction in city government.96

Retail business men comprised the core of the second major constituency to split from the Citizens’ Party. They formed in 1901 their own Republican Party club to

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95 1912 City Directory, 1526.
oppose the Citizens’ fiscal policies. Merchant J.B. Sikking of the Retail Merchants Association of East St. Louis led these businessmen in forming temporary coalition with the local Democratic Party to defeat the Citizens’ Party.\(^97\) Sikking’s faction anticipated further revenue shortfalls when city and county agencies lowered the assessment on industrial property from $5,359,000 to $4,500,000. They understood that any successor to the Citizens’ Party had to rescue the city from the twin policies of unfettered economic growth through service to corporations and dependency upon saloons and an underworld economy to cover fiscal shortfalls.\(^98\) The business community, in making City Hall less generous with public works projects and patronage, placed itself on a collision course with the black community that relied upon such largesse.

African Americans in East St. Louis continued to support the declining Citizens’ Party because of its previous offers of patronage and access to political resources. Given equal offers of patronage, black voters supported local Republican over local Democratic candidates because of the national Democratic Party’s advocacy of segregation and disfranchisement of black Southerners. In 1901, Georgia born teamster J.H. Burkhalter and Arkansas born delivery wagon driver Parnell Gibbs founded the Colored Men’s Progressive Club to work for the Citizens’ Party by backing Republican candidates for state and congressional seats.\(^99\) At a meeting of St. Clair County African American voters backing the Republican Party in 1902, the majority present denounced those who

\(^97\) “The So-Called Republican Ticket,” *ESLDJ*, 25 February 1901, 2. Background information on J.B. Sikking in *East St. Louis Retail Merchants Association Commercial Profile*, 2.

\(^98\) “Important to East St. Louis,” *ESLDJ*, 13 March 1901, 2.

favored the Democratic Party, forcibly ejecting one Democratic supporter, William T. Scott, from the hall. Activists appointed Daniel Adams of the Citizens’ Party to head an ad hoc committee to issue resolutions to condemn the Democratic Party for its disregard of black people’s rights and to reaffirm black support for the Republican Party.100

The municipal election campaign of 1903 saw many black East St. Louisans aligning with Democrats who had formed the Independent Municipal Party that promised African American representation in the police and fire departments.101 To prevent Democratic inroads into the black vote, Republicans Captain John Robinson and H.F. Bowman of the Rush City and Tudorville Citizens’ Club campaigned for the Citizens’ Party ticket headed by Mayor Stephens.102 A majority of black residents in the predominantly African Americans precincts in the second and third wards voted for Independent Municipal Party office seekers, including its candidate for Mayor, Silas Cook.103 In May, black politicians who had made the Independent Municipal Party victory possible, called upon party bosses to honor their promises of patronage.104

Black Republicans stepped up their organizing drive in 1906 to counter Democratic ascendancy among African Americans in East St. Louis. Saloonkeeper Richard Freeman as president and Tennessee born laborer Alex Lane as vice president of the newly formed Colored Lincoln-Roosevelt Republican League began rebuilding

100 “Colored Voters All Right,” *ESLDJ*, 27 October 1902, 3.
101 “Colored Recognition,” *ESLDJ*, 14 May 1903, 2.
103 “Unofficial Vote Cast in East St. Louis at Election April 7, 1903,” *ESLDJ*, 8 April 1903, 2.
104 “Colored Recognition,” *ESLDJ*, 14 May 1903, 2. No evidence was found to determine if the Independent Municipal Party awarded patronage to black voters.
Republican ties with black voters. Leaguers extracted from the Republican Party promises of patronage, an aldermanic seat for the majority black second ward, and judge and election clerk positions in an effort to prove to black East St. Louisans that the party valued their votes. But black residents received few rewards in 1908 when the party, on the strength of the black vote, won state and federal offices.

As black political operatives became more adept at managing the black vote, they earned the ire of party bosses whose sharp contests for control of the city left them with little patience for black political strategies. These operatives convinced black voters to cast their ballots for machine bosses like real estate men and city boosters Locke Tarlton and Thomas Canavan or their proxies. But black political workers often became targets for their bosses’ enemies. For example, black Citizens’ Party worker James Turley in 1907 received a severe beating by a police officer in the employ of one of Canavan’s opponents. In 1908, Joseph Suttles and bartender William Mosely, campaigning for white politician Mr. Tecklenburg, State’s Attorney of St. Clair County and a friend of Democrats Tarlton and Canavan, were arrested for selling liquor on the day of the Illinois primaries by black deputy sheriff George Brockman, who was acting on orders from his boss C.E. Chamberlin, a Republican trying to unseat Tecklenburg.

105 “Elect Officers,” ESLDJ, 2 September 1906, 8. Other major figures in the league were Missouri born laborer Henry Clay, Georgia born steamboat hand Stephen Craft, occupations and place of birth in Population Schedules, 1900, Illinois; laborers George Brockman and Gran A. Duncan, glass factory worker William Freeman, and hotel cook Fred Howard, occupations from the 1912 City Directory.

106 “Colored Voters to Demand Commensurate Recognition,” ESLDJ, 9 November 1908, 4.

107 “A Diabolical Deed,” ESLDJ, 7 April 1907, 5.

108 “State’s Attorney,” ESLDJ, 2 September 1908, 3.
Members of the Citizens’ Party’s third major constituency, progressive reformers, slowly broke away from the party to organize by 1910 an oppositional force, the Progressive Citizens’ Party, to challenge political machines bosses and win city elections.\(^{109}\) Progressive Citizens’ included former members of both the Progressive and Citizens’ parties.\(^{110}\) Not all members of the Progressive Citizens’ espoused the party’s reform agenda. Some, like real estate man Thomas Canavan, were simply opportunists who continued their involvement in machine politics. The Progressive Citizens’ Party, representing the tide of progressivism that swept across America, combined the politics of individual moral responsibility with the demand for honest government.\(^{111}\) Progressive Citizens’ allied in 1910 with former President Theodore Roosevelt’s wing of the national Republican Party in opposition to party regulars who supported Howard Taft. They accused the Administration Party, the successor to the Citizens’ Party, of rampant corruption and campaigned for controlled economic growth, sound management of city government, good citizenship, and the restoration of law and order.


African American townspeople took advantage of the sharpening divisions between machine politicians and reformers. During the municipal election of 1910, they aligned with either the machine’s Administration Party, the new name of the local Democratic Party, or the reformers’ Progressive Citizens’ Party. Black voters received overtures from white politicians of both organizations as they fought for control of the city.\footnote{“Progressive Citizens Candidates,” ESLDJ, 20 March 1910, 10. The Progressive Citizens’ Party arose after the demise of the Citizens’ Party, roughly approximating the split in the national Republican Party between the regulars who supported President William Howard Taft and the progressives who supported former President Theodore Roosevelt.} Noah Parden, for one, found Progressive Citizens’ attractive, connecting the party’s platform for prosperity and sound municipal government with racial uplift, sobriety, and respectability.\footnote{“To-morrow,” ESLDJ, 4 April 1910, 4.} But other political operatives, viewing patronage as a steppingstone to political power, backed the Administration Party. Residents had the choice of voting for two African American candidates, Progressive Citizens’ Parden and Administration’s Leroy Bundy, both competing for a seat on the Board of Assistant Supervisors of St. Clair County. Black East St. Louisans, however, knew that white organizations’ support of African American candidates on party tickets was not a common occurrence anywhere in the nation. They hoped that a Parden or Bundy victory opened the way for greater access for African Americans to City Hall. But Progressive Citizens’, winning the election, credited its success to white voters’ disgust with “vice, dishonesty, crime, and corruption,” and proclaimed it had delivered the most “crushing blow ever administered to boodle, graft, and vice.” Black residents expected little, if any, patronage when Progressive Citizens’ Parden won an Assistant Supervisor seat. In
addition their backing of Progressive Citizens’ did not end reformers’ use of racist imagery to blame black people for political corruption.114

From 1910 to 1912, black Republicans, concluded that Progressive Citizens’, like the local Democratic Party under any name, had no interest in serving black residents. They made tentative moves to claim decision-making control of their wards so as to be independent of white political machines. Their effort to win political power received much impetus after Progressive Citizens’ boss and Republican Congressman William A. Rodenberg refused to award black people patronage other than janitorial positions. In 1912, saloonkeeper Addison King and hod carrier Anderson B. Woods formed the Colored Progressive Republican League of East St. Louis to oppose Rodenberg. They weakened the congressman in the eyes of black voters by criticizing his failure to assist a congressional committee investigating an altercation that had occurred in 1906 between African American soldiers and white authorities in Brownsville, Texas. Leaguers organized anti-Rodenberg political clubs to exploit the rift within the local Republican

organization between President Howard Taft Republicans, including Rodenberg, and Theodore Roosevelt progressives.115

The East St. Louis chapter of the Afro American Protective League of Illinois emphasized to black townspeople that their vote illustrated the African American struggle for freedom and equality. The organization had a keen interest in promoting black political independence from white machine bosses. It used the annual commemoration of the day when Emancipation Proclamation was first announced to promote its program to support black political candidate for local and state governments. For example, the chapter sponsored in September 1912 the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation.116 Speakers contrasted the document’s promise of freedom with the curtailment of civil rights expected if Woodrow Wilson and his segregationist supporters won the White House in November. Leading black East St. Louisans, though their oration went unrecorded, spoke how African Americans intended to reshape the city’s political culture.117

116 On African American freedom festivals keeping alive the memory of milestones in African American history see, for example, Mitch Kachun, Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); Thavolia Glymph, “‘Liberty Dearly Bought’: The Making of Civil War Memory in Afro-American Communities in the South,” in Time Longer Than Rope, 111-139.
117 “Grand United Emancipation Day,” ESLDJ, 22 September 1912, section three, 3. Local black leaders at the celebration in 1912, included John Robinson, president of the Illinois Afro-American Protective League; Clara Bates, her husband a saloonkeeper; barber James E. Bland, secretary of the Progressive Citizens’ League; school administrator Benjamin Franklin Bowles; driver Henry Brown; schoolteacher J.M.D. Brown; laborer William M. Chambers; Reverend Sidney Cheers of Mt. Olive Baptist Church; cook General Cooper; Reverend John DeShields of St. Paul’s Baptist Church;
Independent-minded politicians and their friends had to extricate themselves from
William A. Rodenberg, whose machine exerted much control among black Republicans.
They did not wait long for Rodenberg to counterattack in 1912 by manipulating the
voting process and intimidating them. Anti-Rodenberg Republicans became targets when
the machine assigned black operatives Terminal Railroad employee John Jefferson and
driver John Green to import African Americans from southern Illinois into East St. Louis
for the purpose of padding voter registration rolls for the Republican Party.\textsuperscript{118}
Additional harassment ensued when Rodenberg’s black loyalists filed affidavits
questioning the qualifications of dissident black Republican voters.\textsuperscript{119}  Independent
African Americans realized that Rodenberg used such tactics to discipline them into
doing his bidding on election day.\textsuperscript{120}  Lincoln High School principal Benjamin F. Bowles
became the first major casualty of the Rodenberg offensive in 1913 when the machine
successfully pressured the school board not to rehire him. Bowles in 1914 accused
Rodenberg of recklessly taking advantage of East St. Louis for his own profit and riding
roughshod over black Republicans.\textsuperscript{121}  The Bowles episode did not alter the balance of

\begin{flushleft}
Dora Easterly, her husband grocer William M. Easterly, president of the Progressive
Citizens’ League; bartender William Garrett; Reverend M.L. Jackson; Illinois Central
Railroad employee Henry McGill; Ella Prince, her husband a Tudor Iron Works
employee; hod carrier Walter Rankins; laborer Samuel R. Wheat; and Morris &
Company packinghouse laborer Robert William. Their occupations listed in \textit{1912 City
Directory}.  
\textsuperscript{118} “Colonizing Voters,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 1 August 1912, 3.  
\textsuperscript{119} “A Rodenberg Trick,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 8 November 1912, 6.  
\textsuperscript{120} “The Public Pulse: Rodenberg Rush Colonizing Negroes for Voting Purposes,”
\textit{ESLDJ}, 18 September 1912, 2.  
\textsuperscript{121} “Board of Education Eliminates Supervisors,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 13 May 1913, 1, 4.  On
Bowles’ professional background see “Was Elected Vice-President,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 6 July
1905, 3; “B.F. Bowles Honored,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 31 July 1912, 8; Hamilton, \textit{The Ebony Tree},
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power, but it dramatized to those seeking a strong black political presence that machine politicians intended to squelch such a possibility.

White political machines wanted to secure the black vote largely because their opponents who espoused some form of progressive reform of city government and politics had been gaining influence. From 1913 to 1915, political bosses and progressive reformers in a dizzying dance of shifting alliances clashed for control of City Hall. Some politicians, including Canavan and Tarlton, played both sides, giving token support to reform in order to retain their grip in those areas of city affairs relating to economic development. In 1913, they backed progressive mayoral candidate John Chamberlin, who after becoming mayor, suppressed prostitution, gambling, and illegal saloons. His actions alienated Canavan, Tarlton, and their allies who benefited financially and in other ways from the operation of such enterprises. Republican political bosses Fred Gerold and Charles Lambert and their followers who also opposed Chamberlin’s moral cleansing program decided to take their revenge against Chamberlin in the upcoming municipal election of 1915 by backing Canavan and Tarlton’s Democratic candidate, Fred Mollman, for mayor.122

In election year 1915, Mayor John M. Chamberlin’s Administration Party, formerly the Progressive Citizens’, saw its reform agenda compromised by the actions of

34. Among the seven of the eleven board members not rehiring Bowles were S.J. Cashel, brother of county sheriff Charles Cashel who prevented a lynching in Belleville in 1909, and Canavan protégée Fred Mollman who ran for mayor in 1915. “The Public Pulse: A Plea for Statesmanship Instead of Politics,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 2 November 1914, section two, 1.

some of the party’s leading members who had profited from corruption and vice under
his tenure. For example, when Administration Party member Fred Gerold had served as
city treasurer and tax collector, he had stolen from City Hall by making duplicate
payments of interest on several transactions and retaining a two per cent commission on
nearly fifty thousand dollars. When Gerold later demanded payment for services
rendered, Mayor Chamberlin denied the request, thinking that by taking a stand against
corruption, he insured his own reelection. Instead, Chamberlin split his party into
factions, sending members whom he had angered over to the Greater East St. Louis Party
where they supported mayoral nominee lawyer Fred Mollman.123

Progressives within the Administration Party who remained loyal to Mayor
Chamberlin saw an opportunity to implement their agenda and to realign political power
to favor progressive reform. They regarded the April election of 1915 for mayor and city
council key in the battle against political bosses. The Chamberlin faction claimed that
Canavan, Tarlton, and their allies had shamelessly exploited East St. Louis and that that
Mollman tolerated “a ‘wide open city,’ in which ‘everything goes.’”124 Reformers
opposed unrestricted economic growth advocates Fred Gerold and Charles Lambert who
had joined forces with machine boss politicians Canavan and William Rodenberger.
They charged that Gerold, Lambert, Rodenberger, and Canavan had bankrupted the city
and controlled mayoral candidate Fred Mollman. They also accused the Canavan-
dominated Levee Board of extracting more revenue annually from townspeople than did

123 “Gerold’s Office Now Mollman Headquarters,” ESLDJ, 30 March 1915, 1.
124 “Their Double-Dealing Tactics,” and “The Muncipal Campaign,” ESLDJ, 2 April
City Hall. According to Canavan’s opponents, the Levee Board had channeled tax money to pay the interest, amounting to $370,000, on bonds issued for unnecessary construction work and funneled the payments into a local bank account for the purpose of funding Mollman’s campaign.125

As black East St. Louisans moved into a position to swing the 1915 municipal election to their benefit, they witnessed an upward spiraling in the use of racist imagery and rhetoric by machine politicians and reformers. Black political operative “Kid” Amos became the focus of a racial fear campaign initiated by progressive reformers who denounced him for working with the Canavan-Tarlton faction. Amos symbolized progressives’ nightmare of African American involvement in vice, corruption, and attempts to control the political life of East St. Louis. “Kid” Amos, who had left East St. Louis during one of Chamberlin’s moral cleansing campaigns, returned in 1915 to restart his brothel business in the Valley after Canavan and Tarlton promised him immunity from prosecution for running a brothel in exchange for his delivery of the black vote. African Americans knew that in going after Amos the machine signaled to white voters its ability to control both black voters and black undesirables like Amos.126 African American demands for patronage and power-sharing did not sit well with Chamberlin and the progressives who portrayed African Americans as seasoned practitioners of government corruption.


126 “Kid’ Amos Will Come Back If Mollman Wins,” ESLDJ, 2 April 1915, section one, 1; “Police Put Lid on Black Crook,” ESLDJ, 4 April 1915, section two, 1.
Black East St. Louisans had good reason to anticipate progress for their community after the election. Their influence had dramatically increased in 1913 as African American women entered the formal political arena after Illinoisan women gained the right to vote in local elections. The issue of black women voters had to be problematic issue for reformers who hoped to rally newly enfranchised women to the progressive cause. Black clubwomen’s message of racial uplift seemed to reinforce reformers’ moral appeals for eliminating prostitution and other perceived as social ills. But apparently enough black women voters, seeking to increase the political strength of their community, opted for patronage, rejecting reformers’ visions of honest government.127

Black voters saw in April 1915 the progressives win a majority of aldermanic seats. Chamberlin lost the mayoral election even though a majority of women, presumably those of the white middle class, supported the ticket’s moral progressive message. Chamberlin and his allies charged that the black vote had brought Mollman to victory. Chamberlin’s Administration Party won five out of eight aldermanic seats, but lost to Mollman by just twenty-seven votes. Progressives thinking that their message for honest government had garnered wide appeal, began preparing for the next city election.128 All factions now assumed that African American activists expected Mollman to respond favorably to black demands.

128 “Chamberlin Wins Most of Ticket,” ESLDJ, 7 April 1915, 4.
Conclusion

In 1915, during the first year of World War I, amidst a booming wartime economy and the Great Migration, African Americans in East St. Louis were poised to become powerbrokers in city politics. Like African Americans across the United States, black East St. Louisans maintained an activist tradition that through community institutions, labor unions, and political clubs opposed segregation and anti-black violence and sought to attain electoral political power. Black East St. Louisans devised a wide array of strategies and tactics as they related to various factions of white townspeople, including union leaders and organizers, workers, progressive reformers, boss politicians, and businessmen, each group with its own political agenda. A significant number of black residents channeled their energy into electoral politics. Slowly but steadily from 1900 into the 1910s, they gained a foothold in the urban industrial economy and secured greater access to city government by shaping the black community as a voting bloc to win a share of patronage and power. By 1915, black residents had become a source of white fears that the “[N]egro held the balance of political power.”129 The increasingly assertive black population that was reshaping the city’s political culture strengthened the resolve of political bosses and progressive reformers to reverse the expansion of black

129 Robert A. Conway in *House Transcripts*, 170.
political strength that they viewed as a threat to white entitlements. In 1917, agents of the state opted for violence to solve their “Negro problem.”

The urban industrial economy promised a better way of life for black Americans, especially for those escaping from the poverty, disfranchisement, and racial violence of the South.130 This economy became the milieu for the transformation of African Americans from predominantly rural to urban, mainly industrial working class, people.131 Whether or not the promise of a viable livelihood was fulfilled, black people found the social space in the urban industrial economy to build their communities and to shape relationships with organizations like trade unions and political parties. In time, urban industrial centers in the North and Midwest became a base for black Americans to gain political leverage at the national level to support their southern kin in their sustained challenge to Jim Crow.132

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130 On the South, see especially Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913, 107-395.
131 Trotter, Black Milwaukee.
Chapter Three. The Wartime Great Migration, Political Powerbrokers, Labor Conflicts, and Mass Anti-Black Violence of May 1917

World War I ushered in a period of major change for black Americans in northern industrial cities, including East St. Louis. It provided an unprecedented opportunity for hundreds of thousands of black Southerners to migrate north when national mobilization opened wide the urban industrial economy. Migrants obtained employment, sought social and economic advancement, and hoped to fulfill their aspirations for a better way of life. The war made race relations fluid, allowing African Americans the possibility to achieve equality and exercise their democratic rights. But it also created an environment where conflicts erupted as the arrival of black southern migrants heightened social problems in workplaces, public spaces, and neighborhoods. Black Southerners encountered hostility from white political leaders and white working and middle class people who wanted to return to rigid prewar race relations by imposing, at times through physical violence, limits on the extent of freedom that African Americans assumed was theirs to exercise.¹

Migrants arrived in East St. Louis to a mixed reception. Many black residents like physician Lyman Bluitt welcomed them for their contribution to the development of

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black community institutions, their patronization of African American businesses, and their support of black politicians. Anti-migrant sentiment, when it did exist among black townspeople was muted in East St. Louis as the majority of established African American residents were of southern origin unlike those in Chicago and other northerly cities. White East St. Louisans proved to be the chief source of vehement anti-migration sentiments. Former Mayor H.F. Bader and Justice of the peace Russell Townsend blamed migrants for crime, substandard housing, and other urban problems. Central Trades and Labor Union of East St. Louis (CTLU) secretary Edward Mason argued that black southern migrant laborers contributed to labor disputes as they displaced unskilled white factory workers. Others feared that the expanding number of voting age migrants increased the possibility of black politicians winning seats on the city council. As Armour & Company meatpacking manager Robert Conway noted, the “[N]egro [held] the balance of political power.” Conway voiced a fear common among white residents that the black migration had propelled the African American community into a force in city affairs. White townspeople debated how to maintain their position in the social

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3 Rudwick, *Race Riot at East St. Louis, July 2, 1917*, 4-6, 174-196.


5 Edward Mason in *House Transcripts*, 3122.

hierarchy without resorting to the legal segregation of the South. White East St. Louisans with a racist political agenda were first among white Northerners during the war years to use mass violence to preserve their power over black people.

Black Southern Migrants

Black southerners migrated north for economic advancement, opportunities for their children, political rights, and freedom from injustice and white domination. Many black people had left plantation districts, most notably the Mississippi Delta region, to escape the horrors of planter rule. In the South they had struggled to control their own institutions and cooperative movements, employing an array of strategies in face of planters’ efforts to decrease black landownership and coerce black churches, schools, and organizations to serve the interests of the plantation economy. African American Southerners forged a political sensibility honed from fighting oppression that reinforced

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an imposed racial inferiority and class exploitation.\textsuperscript{9} Black southern migrants shaped the Great Migration into a self-directed, seemingly leaderless grassroots social movement.\textsuperscript{10}

African Americans exploited the opportunities presented by World War I. They took advantage of manufacturers’ need to expand industrial output for the United States to supply Great Britain and France in the war against Germany. Black migrants filled job openings created as the war halted European immigration, sent many immigrant laborers back to fight for their homelands, and greatly expanded higher paying war production jobs for large numbers of native-born white and immigrant workers. Black migrants, as Leroy Bundy, one of the leading black politicians in East St. Louis, observed, considered the two dollars a day wage in the North superior to the uncertain employment and the one dollar a day wage in the South.\textsuperscript{11}

Many migrants became aware of available jobs in East St. Louis from a variety of sources. They heard about employment opportunities from relatives and friends who


\textsuperscript{11} Leroy Bundy in \textit{Labor Committee Report}, 74-75.
resided in the city. Some migrants read job ads placed by managers like Missouri Malleable Iron Company superintendent John Pero in newspapers in Nashville, Tennessee, Vicksburg, Mississippi, and other southern locales. Black southerners also found out about employment from labor recruiters for companies like Obear-Nestor Glass. Others received assistance in finding work in East St. Louis from their churches and other community institutions. After the initial wave of migrants established themselves in East St. Louis, they in turn became sources of information about employment opportunities for their friends and relatives.

Black men and women migrants comprised a diverse group in terms of work experience. Some had previously performed, though not necessarily fulltime, industrial or non-agricultural work prior to leaving the South. For example, Andrew Avery, a Kemper County, Mississippi, farmer, had worked in sawmills during the winter months. Alabama-born William Kings had also held a sawmill job for seven years in Laurel, Mississippi. Warren King, from Garvetson, Alabama, had labored as a steel mill worker in nearby Birmingham. But many migrants, mainly sharecroppers and agriculturalists,

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14 Carole Marks, *Farewell—We’re Good and Gone* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Gregg, *Sparks from the Anvil of Oppression*, 13-15. See Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, 414-425, for activities of black industrial laborers in trade unions or other workers’ organizations, including the Knights of Labor, in the South from the 1870s into the 1890s.
15 William Kings, and Warren King, and Andrew Avery in *Labor Committee Report*, 149-150, and 151-156, and 160-166.
had no prior urban industrial experience. Many women who migrated north had toiled as servants in white people’s homes.

By 1916, African American Southerners controlled and sustained the networks that facilitated the migration. Kin, friends, and neighbors mobilized through personal contacts to move information as well as people who needed to know about jobs, housing, and city life. For example, George Lewis and Sam Pettis, both from Oxford, Mississippi, and Alabaman William Kings received assistance from relatives and friends in obtaining jobs at the East St. Louis and Suburban Railroad Company. John Betts from Columbus, Mississippi, who had worked seasonally in sawmills, on farms, and for the Mobile & Ohio Railroad, got help from his wife’s brother-in-law Henry Billips in securing a job at American Steel Foundries. Betts in turn sent money home to his wife, Daisy, who later followed him to East St. Louis. She obtained a job as a laborer at Obear-Nester Glass Company, one of the few industries that employed significant numbers of black women.

Black southerners also relied upon community institutions, particularly their churches, for information about and leadership and organization of the migration. At times black

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ministers took a direct role in aiding migrants. The Reverend Thomas W. Wallace, pastor of St. John’s A.M.E. Church in East St. Louis, for example, traveled with an annual pass from meatpackers, to southern packinghouses, encouraging black laborers to migrate north.

To Build an Independent Black Political Machine

Black politicians in various northern cities welcomed the Great Migration as it expanded the size of the African American voting population and increased opportunities for patronage and access to political power. In East St. Louis black politicians molded a voting bloc to swing elections. Lyman Bluitt, for one, advised migrants when voting in local elections to vote not the party but the candidate, Republican or Democrat, promising patronage. Bluitt and his colleagues hoped to maneuver both white Democrats and Republicans toward a dependency on black voters, thus shaping the black community as a political powerbroker.

African Americans regarded the national election of 1916 as a critical test of black political success. Black people across the urban North saw their growing political strength affecting party alignments. They knew that the national Democratic Party aimed

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19 Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*; Gregg, *Sparks from the Anvil of Oppression.*
21 Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot*, 184-186.
22 Bluitt, and Kirk in *House Transcripts*, 1364, and 3213-3214, 3380.
to diminish the African American vote in the North where black people had voted overwhelmingly in previous contests for Republicans. Many registered black voters faced the possibility of disfranchisement as local Democratic Party leaders accused city Republicans of “colonizing” and illegally registering black migrants in northern cities.\textsuperscript{23} Generally black as well as white East St. Louisans dismissed the charge of colonization as groundless, agreeing that black southerners migrated on their own volition.\textsuperscript{24} But Democratic Party stalwarts, including CTLU labor organizer Earl Jimerson, accused Republicans of fraudulently registering at least four hundred migrant voters and won a motion from the district court to examine the voter rolls. As a result of the examination, at least two hundred black residents had their names expunged from the lists of registrants.\textsuperscript{25} The Democratic Party hoped to weaken not only the Republican’s traditional base of support, but also the on-going attempt by some African Americans to build a black political machine.


\textsuperscript{24} Roy Albertson, and Robert J. Boylan, and W. Green in \textit{House Transcripts}, 471, and 579, and 1127.

Some black politicians and community organizers decided to take an independent course to oppose both Democratic leaders who disfranchised African American voters and Republican bosses who took their African American constituency for granted. In 1916, Leroy Bundy, attorney Noah Parden, Bluitt, and others, took a bold step toward creating a strong independent black presence by forming the Lowden Club to reelect Republican Governor Frank O. Lowden. They planned to force local Republicans to reward loyal black voters with additional patronage. As Bundy stated, black people sought to be “independent of whites because . . . Negroes got no consideration [from Republicans] in the matter of division of office.”

Bundy had previously acted without consulting white bosses when he assisted in the local election of spring 1916 black laborer Sam Wheat in defeating a political machine candidate by three hundred votes to his opponent’s ninety-four votes in the predominantly black second ward, for the position of alderman. In October 1916, the Lowden Club, by this time renamed the St. Clair County (Colored) Republican League, moved against the Republican Party. Bundy, Lyman Bluitt, and other leading league members, such as mortician M.C. Green, a Reverend Duncan (first name not given), realtor Pearl Abernathy, newspaper editor and pastor of St. John’s A.M.E. Church Thomas W. Wallace, carpenter Tom Huddleston, John Eubanks, Mat Hayes, and attorney W.E. Lilly sent Republican bosses a list of demands that included black control of the election campaign in African American

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26 “Bundy Involves Mayor in Open Confession,” ESLDJ, 26 November 1917, 1, 5.
precincts and the awarding of the county offices of Deputy Coroner and Assistant State’s Attorney to black politicians.  

Leaguers turned to the Democratic Party after Republicans rejected their demands. They decided to drive a wedge between white political factions as black Southerners had done before the 1890s of massive disenfranchisement. Leaguers endorsed national and state Republican tickets but supported local Democrats Charles Webb for State’s Attorney of St. Clair County, C.P. Renner for county coroner, and real estate politician-businessman George Locke Tarlton and his associates for Levee Board.

In mid-1916, African American Republican and Democratic Party operatives united in order to raise funds to finance the building of an independent black political machine. St. Clair County (Colored) Republican Leaguers, having been rebuffed by Republican Party bosses, broke from the party and approached the Colored Democratic League in October, requesting that the Democratic League mediate negotiations with Democratic Party boss Tarlton. Black Republicans received $300 from Tarlton to cover office expenses and campaign workers’ salaries. They won additional support

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28 “Bundy Involves Mayor in Open Confession,” ESLDJ, 26 November 1917, 1, 5. The newspaper failed to list Reverend Duncan’s first name and misspelled Huddleston as Hutterson. See Huddleston in the 1912 City Directory. Occupations of Eubanks, Green, Hayes [or Matt Hays], Huddleston, and Lilly in the 1912 City Directory; Wallace’s occupation in “East St. Louisans Want Riot Inquiry by Judge Landis,” St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 8 July 1917, in Tuskegee Institute News Clippings File, 7:0146, hereafter cited as TINCF.


30 “Colored Voters Meet, Form Democratic League,” ESLDJ, 15 October 1916, section two, 2; “Negroes Hold Meeting,” ESLDJ, 26 October 1916, 1. Officers of the Colored Democratic League in October 1916 were laborer John Clark, president; first vice-president James Dickson; second vice-president Dallas Johnson; secretary Walter Demery; treasurer Joseph Wilson; sergeant-at-arms Gus Johnson.
from the Republican-oriented Afro-American Protective League, which approved of the St. Clair County Republican league’s endorsement of certain local white Democratic candidates. The Republican league had now positioned itself as a powerbroker in the November 1916 and April 1917 elections.

Black Republican and Democratic operatives during the political campaign of November 1916 decided to form a pressure group in order to deliver the black vote to local Democratic candidates. They assigned highest priority to increasing the black community’s share of patronage and forging an independent path for African Americans in local politics. But white city Democratic and county Republican machine bosses united to insure that leading African American politicians deliver the vote without forming a black political machine. Noah Parden who had continued to work with the Republican Party, anticipating an appointment as Assistant State’s Attorney for St. Clair County after the election, found himself under intense pressure to remain loyal to the party. His boss, State’s Attorney for St. Clair County and leader of the county Republicans, Hubert Schaumleffel, had angered city Republicans by siding with the Democratic machine that had allied with the St. Clair County (Colored) Republican League. Parden knew that his bosses expected him to deliver the black vote. Black politician Leroy Bundy endured attacks from Democratic Party bosses who alleged that he had committed voter registration fraud and colonized black migrant voters in both East

33 “Negro Lawyer Is Appointed Assistant State’s Attorney,” [title unavailable], 17 November 1916, in *TINCF*, 5:0712.
St. Louis and in Chicago. Bundy who had demonstrated a determination to build an independent black political machine around Sam Wheat’s election seemed too risky an ally for Democratic leaders. In addition, Bundy and black Baptist minister P.C. Parker became the center of progressive reformers’ charges that African Americans sold votes and wallowed in corruption. Again, Bundy topped the list of possible embarrassments for Democratic machine bosses who knew that their progressive opponents had no qualms about connecting African Americans to a corrupt, debt-ridden city government.

Black Republican and Democratic operatives calculated that the creation of a black political machine in East St. Louis was a real possibility if they skillfully exploited the fissures among white factions. They worked for the reelection of Democratic Mayor Fred Mollman, protégé of Tarlton and Canavan, during the municipal election campaign of April 1917 against Mollman’s challenger, John Domhoff. A progressive reformer, Domhoff called for honesty in government and the elimination of brothels, dance halls, gambling houses, and illegal saloons. In March 1917, under orders from Schaumleffel, Parden directed black Republican men and women ward politicians and saloonkeepers to deliver the vote for Mollman. Parden also informed his operatives, especially those who owned or operated saloons or who acted as bondsmen, that Tarlton and Canavan had promised them continued opportunities to make money after a Mollman victory. These patronage seekers now knew that Mollman, Tarlton, Canavan, and their white allies had no intention of threatening their livelihood and source of power by removing saloons and

34 “Negro Dentist Is Held in Chicago,” ESLDJ, 19 October 1916, 1; “Vote Fraud Inquiry Halts Dr. Bundy,” ESLDJ, 20 October 1916, 1.
35 “Record Vote Being Cast,” ESLDJ, 7 November 1916, 1.
other establishments that progressives deemed destructive to a moral social order. Parden
and his campaign workers understood that a Domhoff win meant not only a reform
government run by progressives, but also certain end to patronage.36

With Mollman’s victory, the St. Clair County (Colored) Republican, Colored Democratic, and Afro-American Protective leagues had succeeded in transforming the black community into a powerbroker. They now expected political rewards for securing Mollman’s reelection. Nearly four hundred black political activists, including Bundy, Bluitt, Parden, Russell M.C. Green, P.C. Parker, celebrated Mollman’s victory with a banquet attended by Mollman, ice and coal businessman John H. Drury, and other white politicians who had pledged to advance the interests of black residents.37 But many were angered that they had received less money for selling their votes to Tarlton than black people had in 1914 for selling their votes to Eddie Miller, a Republican boss, real estate and insurance agent, and former secretary to Congressman Rodenberg.38 Black women activists, including Vella Bundy, wife of Leroy Bundy, bitterly criticized Tarlton for failing to pay them anything for their votes.39 But black activists never contemplated that politician businessmen planned to end black political influence altogether.40

36 Paul Y. Anderson in House Transcripts, 3787-3789. On progressives’ obsession to rid cities of brothels, dance halls, and other adult entertainment establishments where intimate interracial exchanges frequently occurred see, for example, Kevin J. Mumford, Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
37 W. Green in House Transcripts, 1128-1132.
38 Anderson in House Transcripts, 3801-3802.
39 Allison in House Transcripts, 3747-3752, 3761.
40 The Real Cause of [East] St. Louis Riot,” Indianapolis [second word of title unreadable], 14 July 1917, in TINCF, 6:1022-1023.
Organized Labor Building an Anti-Migration Coalition

White labor leaders attributed labor problems to the upsurge in the number of black southern migrants entering the industrial workforce in northern and Midwestern cities even though far more white than black laborers had flooded the city in search of jobs. While union officials anticipated organizing white newcomers, they held the view that most African American workers, especially black Southerners, were not only anti-union, but also strikebreakers. They shared with white trade unionists elsewhere the thought that low wage black migrants disrupted a golden opportunity to unionize workers and win wage increases during the period of war induced labor shortages. Labor organizers feared that black migrants formed a ready pool of low wage workers for numerous companies like the East St. Louis branch of the American Steel Foundries.41

But white working people in East St. Louis in 1916 like white workers in other industrial cities gave little thought to the black migration. Instead they eagerly took advantage of labor shortages, engaging in strikes to win higher wages, reduced working hours, improved workplace conditions, and union recognition. Strikes at East St. Louis and Suburban Railroad Company, the meatpacking firms, and the Aluminum Ore Company became pivotal in the local labor movement because combined they involved several thousand employees. The strike wave simply caught the CTLU unprepared since its

41 Peter Ward in Labor Committee Report, 183.
focus had been on the possible impact of the Great Migration on the trade union movement.

The first significant strike that the CTLU connected to the migration, thereby raising issues of race, occurred in May 1916 at East St. Louis and Suburban Railroad Company, a mass transit authority. Workers organized initially without the involvement of the CTLU. The action restricted commerce in East St. Louis and surrounding towns in St. Clair and Madison counties, affecting area residents who depended upon streetcars to commute to jobs, shop downtown, or cross the Mississippi River to St. Louis, Missouri. Track workers demanded a pay increase from 17 and 1/2 cents to 20 cents an hour, a ten hour workday, and collective bargaining rights. In response, the company fired strike organizers and told laborers either to return to work or lose their jobs. Strikers ignored managers’ threats and continued the work stoppage, crippling public transportation and retail merchant operations in the region. Strikers who had affiliated their union with the AFL and the CTLU during the course of the labor dispute received support not only from CTLU leaders, but also from merchants, real estate men, and politicians from East St. Louis and other municipalities who pressured the company to agree to a settlement. In July, strikers won their demands for higher wages and collective bargaining rights. CTLU officials learned after negotiations had concluded that the company planned to destroy the new union by subletting work to contractors employing non-union black and white laborers at $2.25 a day for work that newly unionized workers performed for $1.75 to $2.00 a day. Managers, including company official Mr. Meyers, also considered using black southern migrants as a club to destroy the new union, especially since, for whatever
reason, no black workers were members even though they had participated in the work action.\textsuperscript{42}

The brief packinghouse workers’ strike in July represented the second major work stoppage in 1916 that CTLU officials quickly connected to the Great Migration. At least 1,800 black and white employees at Armour, Swift, Morris, and East Side Packing, downed their tools on July 22, demanding that management reinstate those dismissed for union organizing. In response, meatpackers, according to a CTLU estimate, most likely greatly exaggerated, brought in fifteen hundred black and white strikebreakers from packinghouses outside of East St. Louis.\textsuperscript{43} White strikers, according to CTLU, focused their fears upon black strikebreakers, even though African Americans, comprising a significant percentage of the packinghouse workforce, had gone on strike and at a few other worksites had acted as strike leaders. The strike ended on July 25 when managers, eager to resume production, agreed to rehire dismissed union organizers and to allow union presence on the shop floor. Trade unionist Earl Jimerson, however, warned Mayor Mollman to expect black migrants to be killed if companies used them to break future strikes.\textsuperscript{44}

Northern labor leaders and organizers expressed the opinion that the migration spelled impending disaster for trade unions. American Federation of Labor (AFL)

president Samuel Gompers in October 1916 requested AFL district organizer Harry Kerr to investigate and report on the black migration and its impact upon the labor movement in East St. Louis. Trade unionists assumed employers were poised to crush unions by ensuring that the number of black migrant laborers had risen above the number of available jobs. Earl Jimerson and other AFL and CTLU officials accused managers of flooding the labor market with migrants in order to drive down white workers’ wages and living standard and destroy unions. Unskilled black workers, according to trade unionist Alois Towers, posed a direct threat to unskilled white workers’ job security.

The Aluminum Ore Company strike in October 1916 had no connection to black migrants, but it set the stage for a second strike in April 1917 that the CTLU connected with the Great Migration. The first strike began on October 9 when employees, accusing managers of instituting an unfair payroll schedule, walked off the job. Five days later, strikers won their demands for a wage increase and an eight-hour workday. Managers had quickly settled the strike to avoid the possibility of workers coordinating their strike with one occurring at Aluminum Ore’s bauxite supplier, the Arkansas Works in Bauxite, Arkansas. In November, sixteen hundred men, nearly the entire workforce, decided to

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45 Frank E. Nulsen in *House Transcripts*, 1043-1046.
46 Harry Kerr, and Jimerson, and Alois Towers in *House Transcripts*, 1865, and 2068, 2089-2090, and 2414, 2432-2435.
protect their gains by forming the Aluminum Ore Employees Protective Association (AOEPA), unaffiliated with either the CTLU or the AFL.\(^{49}\)

Aluminum Ore Company immediately after the strike, in an abrupt turn around, began hiring black southern migrants to fill positions that had been either vacated by unskilled workers or opened after the company fired those active in the October strike. Since opening in 1902, Aluminum Ore had employed a total of twelve African Americans. But after the strike, depending upon production needs, the company carried on its payroll in November 280 black laborers, 410 in December, 470 in February, and 381 in April.\(^{50}\) Aluminum Ore clearly sought to discipline white workers by hiring low wage, presumably anti-union, black laborers.

The second strike at Aluminum Ore that began on April 19, 1917, and ended in late June, again had no relation to black migration or racism. But CTLU leaders and elements within the city’s political culture used the strike to further anti-migration rhetoric that created an atmosphere conducive to mass racial violence.\(^{51}\) Initially, workers demanded that managers rehire the nearly six hundred October strikers, many with years of seniority, who had been fired between October and April.\(^{52}\) Workers voted to strike when management refused to rehire former AOEPA members. The CTLU initially advised against the strike, pointing out that Aluminum Ore employees received the highest pay among industrial workers in the county—unskilled workers earned $2.50

\(^{49}\) Philip Wolf in *House Transcripts*, 2151.

\(^{50}\) Fox in *House Transcripts*, 1528-1529; Fox in *Labor Committee Report*, 26 [i.e. 33].


\(^{52}\) Fox, and R.F. Rucker, and Wolf in *House Transcripts*, 1519-1520; and 1812-1814, 1818-1819, and 2137-2142, 2151-2154, 2181-2182.
to $2.75 per day and mechanics, $4.25 per day.\textsuperscript{53} CTLU officials expressed grave concern about federal action against strikers, such as impressment into military service. They warned workers not to disrupt production at the only aluminum ore processing plant in North America.\textsuperscript{54} But when 1,700 black and white men called a strike on April 18 to stop further layoffs and save the AOEPA from further destruction, the CTLU had no choice but to support them.\textsuperscript{55}

Aluminum Ore managers resolved to crush the strike. Like their counterparts at other industrial plants, company officials had hired black laborers to fill low wage, unskilled positions not only to cut costs but also to play on white workers’ fears of interracial job competition and black strikebreakers. Additionally, they sought to prevent white employees from unionizing. Management understood that the key to breaking the strike involved bribery, coercion, and hostile propaganda, not white workers’ racial fears. R.F. Rucker hoping to discredit strike leader Philip Wolf, offered him a bribe. When Fox purchased rifles and hired a private security force purportedly to protect strikebreakers and company property, his critics thought that his aim was to intimidate strikers.\textsuperscript{56} In early May he secured a court injunction against strikers whom he claimed had damaged

\textsuperscript{53} Fox, and R.F. Rucker in \textit{House Transcripts}, 151, 1546, and 1831.
company property and injured his chauffeur and several other persons. Wolf implied that those responsible for the damages and injuries were provocateurs enlisted by management to make the strikers appear unruly.\textsuperscript{57} Finally, Aluminum Ore managers attempted to smear strikers by labeling them unpatriotic, saying that they had been influenced by German spies seeking to sabotage American war production.\textsuperscript{58}

According to some observers, CTLU officials created the impression that migrant competition for jobs underlay the strike at Aluminum Ore.\textsuperscript{59} Trade unionists, according to meatpacking manager Robert Conway, “manufactured a sentiment against [N]egroes because they were [N]egroes, and because they were taking the [jobs] of white men.”\textsuperscript{60} Employees never in their official strike pronouncements referred to black migrants, the migration, or racial competition.\textsuperscript{61} CTLU, not white Aluminum Ore strikers, formulated overt racist appeals. The labor affiliation needed the issue of race as a tool to organize white workers to build unions. No one doubted that white working people generally harbored strong anti-black sentiments, often discriminated against black workers, and embedded their racial identity in their construction of class consciousness. Alois Towers, like other labor organizers, thought anti-black racism was a difficult barrier to surmount,

\textsuperscript{57} Fox, and Rucker, and Wolf in \textit{House Transcripts}, 1558-1585, and 1818-1819, and 2197-2198, 2212; “Strike Called at Ore Company Plant,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 19 April 1917, 1; Chancery Case File 1218, “Aluminum Ore Company vs. G. Tebeau et al.”
\textsuperscript{59} Hunter in \textit{House Transcripts}, 73.
\textsuperscript{60} Conway in \textit{House Transcripts}, 154.
“even if all blacks were unionized.”

CTLU officials who talked incessantly about employers’ use of racism to divide workers, made no significant attempts to convince white workers to put racism aside and unite with black workers to win labor demands.

The CTLU unionize white workers around arguments that black migrants were strikebreakers and anti-union. Union leaders overlooked the fact that all of the black workers at Aluminum Ore had been hired between October and April, not as strikebreakers, but as replacements. Trade unionists were fully aware that black laborers broke strikes mainly in those industries that discriminated against African Americans and where labor unions barred them from union membership. CTLU organizers conveniently ignored the issue of white strikebreaking, preferring to dramatize black migrants as strikebreakers even though they knew of black laborers refusing to break strikes. Mississippian Andrew Avery, for instance, quit after his first night on the job at American Steel Foundries upon learning that workers there were on strike. CTLU also lacked interest when black and white workers united and went on strike in late April at American Steel. Neither did the organization support a predominantly black workforce at Cotton Seed Oil Company that went on strike. In condemning the black

62 Wolf, and Towers, and Mason in House Transcripts, 2316, and 2512-2513, and 3133-3135, quoted passage from Towers.
63 Patrick F. Gill, Conciliator, to William B. Wilson, Secretary of the Department of Labor, October 16, 1917, Case File #33-378, Dispute Case Files, 1913-48, Records of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, RG 280, Entry no. 14, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Md.
64 Bundy in Labor Committee Report, 82-83.
65 Kerr, and Wolf in House Transcripts, 1867-1868, and 2309-2320.
66 Andrew Avery in Labor Committee Report, 164.
67 Kerr in House Transcripts, 1864; McLaughlin, Power, Community, and Racial Killing in East St. Louis, 37, 97-98.
migration, CTLU made economic security for white workers, not unionizing black workers, their central concern. 68

White townspeople, particularly real estate men and business allies, landlords, and homeowners, generally were not moved to take up CTLU’s call for a ban on the migration until labor leaders linked the migration to issues like housing that affected white people of all social classes. 69 Some real estate men preferred selling properties to highly-paid skilled white workers or even low wage unskilled white workers capable of moving up the economic ladder rather than to black working people who had few prospects for economic advancement. In addition, land interest boosters, like their counterparts in other cities, operated in a volatile housing market characterized by high interest rates, large down payments, and short loan repayment periods. They, along with white homeowners, sought protection from the uncertainties and volatility of the real estate market by maintaining class and racial homogeneity of neighborhoods. 70 They especially blamed black southern migrants for declining property values.

Real estate men and white homeowners generally sought rigorous residential segregation but without the implementation of segregation laws, preferring instead to rely upon such devices as property rights laws, zoning, and mortgage covenants to prevent

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69 Jimerson, and Wolf in *House Transcripts*, 2078, and 2244-2245.

black people from moving into white districts. White homeowners, like those in other cities, threatened to terrorize African American homebuyers and renters for searching for housing in white districts. Three black families in September 1916 received warning from the white Alta Sita Improvement and Protective Association to move out of the Alta Sita district of East St. Louis or face violent consequences. White real estate man Nathaniel McLean discontinued renting or selling African Americans homes in white neighborhoods after some white residents telephoned death threats to him.

Many white East St. Louisans accepted segregation as a feasible solution in avoiding racial conflict and debated legalizing it. They had watched as voters in St. Louis approved in a special election in 1916 two segregation ordinances modeled after regulations enacted in Baltimore, Maryland, and other northern and border region cities. A local court in St. Louis, however, invalidated election results, ruling that such ordinances violated buyers and sellers’ constitutional rights. (Ironically, black East St.

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72 McQuillan in House Transcripts, 1709-1710. Evidence suggests that white East St. Louisans did not engage in bombing black residences in white neighborhoods whereas some white Chicagoans practiced such bombings. On Chicago, see Tuttle, Jr., Race Riot. See also Stephen Grant Meyer, As Long as They Don’t Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000).
73 “Citizens Would Keep Negroes from Alta Sita,” ESLDJ, 10 September 1916, 1. The newspaper never reported what happened to the three black families in Alta Sita.
74 Canavan, and Albert B. McQuillan, and Pope in House Transcripts, 1471-1478, and 1710, and 2751-2752.
75 “400 Men Debate on Negro Segregation,” ESLDJ, 27 February 1916, 1.
Louisan realtor Pearl Abernathy advertised to African Americans in St. Louis that East St. Louis welcomed them to live anywhere they chose in the city.\textsuperscript{77} Progressive social reformer Reverend George Allison, for one, thought segregation reduced the potential of racial violence. White people who favored integrated neighborhoods, according to Allison, played into the hands of unscrupulous real estate men who profited during periods of instability in the housing market by buying houses at below market value from white homeowners and then selling these residences at above market value to black homebuyers.\textsuperscript{78} The St. Louis court’s ruling squelched any effort in East St. Louis to establish segregation through ordinances. White residents generally concluded that customary segregation held the promise of keeping black people and the perceived social problems that they brought with them out of white neighborhoods.

Black residents, opposing legal and customary forms of residential segregation, desperately sought to expand the geographical range of available housing for African Americans. Black people still lived in many neighborhoods, but increasingly found themselves limited to residency in the city’s South End in Denverside and Rush City and in the North End in Goose Hill. Sections of Denverside and Rush City rapidly became predominantly black areas. African Americans found segregation beginning to take shape, placing East St. Louis in the same category as large northern cities with their expanding ghettos.\textsuperscript{79} Reverend Edgar Pope, pastor of St. Mark’s Baptist Church,

\textsuperscript{78} Allison in “Delivers Sermon on Race Problem,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 4 June 1917, 1, 2.
\textsuperscript{79} Author determined black housing patterns in East St. Louis from \textit{1912 City Directory} and 1880, 1900, and 1910 census manuscripts. On Denverside see also McLaughlin, \textit{Power, Community, and Racial Killing in East St. Louis}, 23-24. On black ghettos see, for
insisted that African Americans had the right to buy homes wherever they pleased. In May 1917, Pope proposed to the Real Estate Exchange that new homes be constructed for southern migrants in black neighborhoods. But Pope’s suggestion to defuse the volatile atmosphere over housing failed to elicit any response from the exchange.80

CTLU leaders found common ground with white people who blamed the migration for the housing shortage and the increase in substandard housing. They preferred to ignore the larger number of white migrants flooding into the city and living in housing unfit for human habitation. CTLU found racism in context of housing a convenient tool to mobilize support for their anti-migration campaign. Union officials blamed industry for creating a housing shortage by recruiting black migrants without concern about where to lodge them. Some trade unionists like Harry Kerr described black laborers’ housing as a breeding ground for communicable diseases.81 Kerr expressed a concern common among white urbanites that African Americans, especially the poor among them, formed a public health risk to white communities. For example, in Atlanta and other locales white homeowners worried that black domestics and laundresses brought diseases into white homes and neighborhoods.82

example, Allan Spear, Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920 (University of Chicago: 1967).
80 “Provide Settlement for Negro Influx,” ESLDJ, 22 May 1917, 4.
production diverted construction materials to other projects. In the meantime, CTLU urged the Chamber of Commerce of East St. Louis, City Hall, and corporate managers to resolve the housing problem.

The area’s largest firms explored the possibility of providing decent housing for black laborers. Street Railway, Light and Power Company general manager D.E. Parsons, Missouri Malleable Iron Company president Frank E. Nulsen, and Aluminum Ore Company superintendent Charles Fox advocated better living conditions for African Americans. They, like their labor opponents, viewed black occupancy of substandard housing as “menac[ing] the sanitary and moral conditions” of white citizens. Managers called upon local Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) Industrial Secretary Irwin Raut to discuss black workers’ housing conditions. Raut knew that housing problems in East St. Louis were no different than those in other large northern industrial centers like Chicago and Cincinnati and Toledo, Ohio. Raut considered hiring a Mr. Hamlin (no first name given), an official at the headquarters of the African American YMCA in Washington, D.C., to devise plans for improved housing for black migrants. But for reasons never disclosed to the public, managers tabled discussion about housing for black people.

CTLU officials also led white townspeople in blaming what they alleged was a sharp increase in crime on the Great Migration. When trade unionists, along with civic

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83 Canavan, and Albert B. McQuillan, and Pope in *House Transcripts*, 1471-1478, and 1710, and 2751-2752.
84 D.E. Parsons in *Labor Committee Report*, 29 [i.e. 36]; Frank E. Nulsen, and Fox in *House Transcripts*, 1043-1044, and 1509.
leaders, accused judges, policemen, bondsmen, saloonkeepers, and politicians of leniency toward black southern migrant involvement in crime and vice, they ignored the fact that white men committed most of the crime. CTLU and other social critics minimized the criminal activities of white migrants, transient workers, and habitués of the saloon culture. In actuality, East St. Louis faced no more of an increase in crime than other cities that had experienced a sharp rise in population resulting from widespread movements of migrants and immigrants.  

White townspeople framed discussion about crime in terms of race. For some the frequent references to black criminal behavior fueled a desire to end the migration and to practice customary segregation. St. Clair County Coroner C.P. Renner, for example, claimed that the immoral proclivities of African Americans underlay the wave of burglaries and homicides that had occurred from early 1916 to mid-1917. Trade unionist Kerr exaggeratedly claimed that black rapists created a “reign of terror” that made white women afraid to visit even their neighbors at night.  White East St. Louisans, like their urban counterparts elsewhere, viewed black people’s saloons or “jook joints” as incubators of crime, immorality, and violence, and not institutions of the urban black working class.  White progressive reformer and publisher James Kirk devoted much space in his newspaper to items about black men carrying guns. These articles only served to increase racist sentiment and provide police with an excuse to disarm African Americans. When authorities complained that many young black southern men had

86 Wolf, and Towers, and Mason, and Townsend, and Allison in House Transcripts, 2309, and 2376, and 3181-3182, and 3432, 3447-3449, and 3626, 3637-3638.
87 C.P. Renner, and Kerr in House Transcripts, 1276-1279, and 1869.
88 On jook joints see, for example, Hunter, To 'Joy My Freedom, 168-171.
purchased firearms upon arriving in East St. Louis, they showed indifference to the possibility that some obtained weapons to protect their persons and families in a city with a reputation for criminal violence.89 At least a few white city leaders had to have known that some migrants realized that their new urban home presented its own form of social violence that along with indifference or hostility from local government forced a reliance upon self-defense.

In context of World War I creating an environment of fluid race relations and challenges to legal or customary segregation, the streetcar became a highly contested public space in many locales, including East St. Louis. Black commuters, especially newly arrived migrants, enjoyed the freedom to sit wherever they wanted on trolleys as they proceeded about their daily business. Some had to know that the simple act of sitting in a seat of their choice, even next to white passengers—a forbidden action in the Jim Crow South—reinforced their sensibilities of being free citizens in the North. Most white residents, however, viewed such occurrences through a different lens, often complaining with much exaggeration that black passengers sat “down on white women’s laps,” crowded white people out of streetcars, made “a great deal of noise,” and rarely sat together in groups. Some white critics with preconceived notions of proper public behavior for women became incensed by what they considered “abusive and uncontrollable . . . language and actions” of black women.90

90 Canavan, and McQuillan in House Transcripts, 1476-1479, and 1710. Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy
Black townspeople criticized white labor, political, and business leaders for blaming the crime wave and other social ills upon migrants, arguing that the vast majority of them were hard-working and law-abiding. Black police detectives W.H. Mills and W. Green, who interviewed migrants in the course of their work, reported that the new arrivals only wanted decent jobs and a better way of life. Lyman Bluitt argued that the CTLU needed to “make an effort in good faith to unionize every laboring man” rather than expend energy on preventing migrants from obtaining jobs.  

CTLU officials remained vociferous about preventing migrants from entering the city. They argued that the migration had exacerbated the housing shortage, fueled a crime wave, increased job competition, inflamed the Aluminum Ore strike, and weakened the labor movement. CTLU men suggested that black migrants be meted out the same treatment that police gave to white vagabonds who were escorted to the city line, beaten, and told not to return. Labor leaders’ main concern pivoted on the strike at the crucial Aluminum Ore, the city’s largest employer, because a worker victory there had the potential of energizing the local labor movement. Hoping to force the Mayor and aldermen into taking action, the CTLU in an open letter that appeared in various

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91 W.H. Mills, and W. Green, and Bluitt in *House Transcripts*, 1118, and 1127, and 1363-1366.

publications blamed black southern migrants for intensifying labor disputes, crime, and white people’s race prejudice.93

But certain employers busily pursued their interests in opposition to those of the CTLU. Some prepared for another round of labor unrest in a city increasingly concerned about the migration. Those engaged in interstate commerce or production of materials for the war effort took advantage of federal protection. East St. Louis and Suburban Railroad Company, anticipating another strike upon the expiration of the labor contract signed in 1916, asked for and received assistance from a federalized unit of the state militia. One Suburban manager reportedly had stated that troops were necessary to intimidate workers from striking and to guard strikebreakers if work stoppages occurred.94 Other businessmen surreptitiously encouraged black southerners to migrate north. Chamber of Commerce members Aluminum Ore manager Charles Fox and E.M. Sorrell, the chamber’s secretary, without the chamber’s permission, using the organization’s letterhead advertised jobs available in southern newspapers.95

Mayor Fred Mollman and his political machine had to balance running the city as an economic growth machine, maintaining cordial relations with the CTLU and the business community, and responding to black people’s demands for an increased share of city resources. The Mayor and his faction continued to implement city boosters’ decades-long policy of favoring industrial development. They knew that the booming

94 Towers in House Transcripts, 2454-2456.
95 Jimerson in House Transcripts, 2061-2065.
war economy created additional opportunities for personal gain through recruiting more corporations to the city, buying, selling, and renting commercial and residential real estate, and collecting licensing fees from even more saloons. City Hall had to placate industrialists who welcomed black southern laborers. Mollman had indirectly encouraged black migrants to come to the city when he boasted in April 1917 about plentiful jobs in East St. Louis during a business trip to New Orleans. Since the Mayor also depended on labor’s vote, he signaled to the CTLU his interest in resolving the Aluminum Ore strike and the problems that the organization thought the migration had exacerbated. In addition, Mollman realized that the black community had become a powerbroker in the April election. He knew that African Americans did not support any move to halt the migration, in effect to prevent their relatives and friends from settling and working in East St. Louis. Mollman and his bosses also worried about losing control of the black vote to African American politicians, like Leroy Bundy who sought to institutionalize an independent black political machine. Mollman knew that to restrict the migration infringed upon black migrants’ rights, but he understood that in refusing to stop it, he angered another voting constituency, white labor.

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Organized Labor and the Mass Racial Violence of May 1917

CTLU officials calculated that by arranging to meet privately on Monday evening, May 28, with Mayor Mollman and city councilmen, they would pressure City Hall to resolve the Aluminum Ore strike and ban black migration to East St. Louis. On the night of the meeting, CTLU delegates, including women representatives from the laundry workers, retail clerks, and waitresses’ unions, arrived at what they thought was a private meeting. The trade unionists, with the men escorting the women, sent a signal that white women feared to traverse the streets after dark because of the presence of black migrants. CTLU leaders Edward Mason and Michael Whalen wondered, however, who had opened the meeting to the public when they entered a City Hall auditorium overflowing with nearly one thousand people, including an estimated two hundred women. They noticed that a significant number of those gathered were neither union members nor even residents of East St. Louis.97 Perhaps such individuals worked in the city or like nonunion attendee Ferdinand Schwartz, a white painter and paperhanger from Belleville, lived outside the city had come to the meeting curiously to “protest to the Mayor about the influx of the [N]egro,” and demand action.98

98 Ferdinand Schwartz in House Transcripts, 3885.
CTLU leaders gave the impression, observers later commented, that they had called the meeting to recruit shock troops to conduct the mass anti-black assaults of May 28 and 29. But the CTLU had actually lost control of the gathering to uninvited speakers who railed against black migrants, the companies that hired them, and other perceived problems related to the migration. While trade unionists considered peaceful solutions, some nonunion people in the audience advocated violent action. Brewery salesman Jerry Kane and others used the meeting as an organizing tool to launch an attack on African Americans. Alexander Flannigan, a popular attorney, orator, and politician from Belleville, arguing that black people had to be prevented from moving into white neighborhoods, called for vigilantism, saying, “[T]here was no law or rule or anything else to curb mob violence.” During the meeting two white city police detectives spread a story that patrolmen had just arrested a black man for shooting a white man. At about ten at night, as if on signal, people rushed from the auditorium and joined others waiting outside where the crowd swelled to twelve hundred persons. Jeering men stood in front of City Hall as policemen escorted the alleged black gunman into the jail. With shouts of “Lynch him,” some in the throng tried to seize the man, but city and CTLU leaders prevented them from doing so by blocking the entrance to the police station.

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100 Albertson, and Canavan, and James M. Kelly in House Transcripts, 473-475, and 1416, and 2861, 2875-2876.
101 Mason in House Transcripts, 3172-3173; “Union Laborers Start Race Riots,” St. Louis Argus, 1 June 1917, 1.
City and CTLU officials, fearing violence, tried to disperse the throng. Mayor Mollman faced the assemblage and implored hecklers to return to their homes, but people refused to leave. Many accused the Mayor of having bought the black vote during his reelection and yelled, “To Hell with Mollman; hang him.” Meanwhile CTLU men searched the gathering for union members whom they ordered to leave. But violence began to take shape and escalated. White attackers beat labor organizers Earl Jimerson and Philip Wolf as they assisted black passers-by. Mollman, learning of assaults on black commuters at nearby streetcar stops, telephoned Governor Lowden to request the National Guard for riot duty.

Only a small number of white men and a smaller number of white women among the hundreds on the streets perpetrated attacks upon African Americans. The vast majority congregated as cheerleaders and opportunists ready to reap the spoils from the destruction of black people’s property. The actual assailants knew what they were doing and operated with the acquiescence or passive support of the authorities. The attackers were primarily artisans, transient laborers, self-employed professionals, non-industrial workers, businessmen, and prostitutes. Revolver-carrying Ruby Nelson, a well known prostitute, along with several white teenage prostitutes and some furloughed

102 Boylan, and Canavan, and Jimerson in House Transcripts, 585-586, and 1417, and 2031.
103 Boylan, and Jimerson, and Wolf, and Kelly in House Transcripts, 586, and 2030, 2032, and 2215-2216, 2219, 2302-2303, and 2852.
105 Allison in House Transcripts, 3548-3552, 3578.
soldiers from Missouri and Illinois units led a few groups of street fighters. The authorities never determined the reason for the presence of women among the assailants. Prostitutes predominated among white women attackers perhaps because downtown brothels were adjacent to the center of the mass terrorism, because they wanted to eliminate their competition, black prostitutes, or because living in the violent world of the saloon culture, these women easily moved from one arena of violence to another. Contrary to what commentators claimed, industrial workers, especially those from Aluminum Ore or the meatpacking plants did not constitute a plurality, let alone a majority, of the assailants.

From Monday night well into Tuesday, white people assaulted African Americans whenever the former held the numerical advantage. White attackers first descended upon black people waiting for or disembarking from streetcars in the downtown district. Around midnight attackers split into two large groups with nearly one hundred men marching toward the southern end of town, destroying along the way barbershops and saloons that they claimed served as black politicians’ “headquarters.” They threw bricks

107 McLaughlin, Power, Community, and Racial Killing in East St. Louis, 152-159, discusses the involvement of white women, specifically prostitutes, in racial violence, presenting hypotheses on gender identities at the workplace, patriotic appeal in context of women as moral guardians of America, and increased social status through anti-black violence and white racial identity to win recognition from white society that white prostitutes, too, were decent white people. McLaughlin did not discuss the logic of white supremacy in everyday politics placing all white people above all African Americans. This author argues that white prostitutes had nothing psychological or cultural to prove or justify vis-à-vis black people. White prostitutes’ problem was not about white identity, but about other issues such as morality campaigns directed against them.
108 Wolf in House Transcripts, 2219.
through windows, ransacked buildings, shot into deserted homes, and set at least one
black dwelling ablaze. A second group, larger in number, headed north to the
meatpacking plants, beating black individuals they encountered. Ringleaders and their
followers intended to attack black Valley residents but were prevented from doing so by
several police officers. They instead continued on to the boundary between East St.
Louis and National City where, across from the packinghouses, they engaged in fisticuffs
with black workers as work shifts changed. Assailants avoided the predominantly
black neighborhoods in the city’s South End, fearing that “[N]egroes were arming
themselves and ‘hell’ would be to pay if they went down in the [N]egro settlement.”

The forty white patrolmen who comprised the East St. Louis police force
prevented black people from being killed, but they also provided opportunities for white
agitators to attack African Americans. The police generally sympathetic with the
white throngs, arrested and jailed more than seventy black men, and far fewer white men,
for possessing firearms, conveying the impression that black townspeople were out to kill

109 “Six Wounded in Street Demonstrations Tues. Night,” ESLDJ, 31 May 1917, 1;
“Union Laborers Start Race Riots,” St. Louis Argus, 1 June 1917, 1. On black owned
saloons and businesses as political headquarters see also Senechal, The Sociogenesis of a
Race Riot.
110 Albertson, and Allison in House Transcripts, 474, 476-477, and 3629-3630;
“Presence of Foreign and Lawless Negro Element Injures City,” ESLDJ, 29 May 1917, 1,
5. Police detectives Samuel Coppedge and Frank Wadley who deterred the mobs from
the Valley died facing armed black men on July 2 in an incident that sparked the
murderous massacre of July 2, 1917.
111 “Six Wounded in Street Demonstrations Tues. Night,” ESLDJ, 31 May 1917, 1;
Quote in “Union Laborers Start Race Riots,” St. Louis Argus, 1 June 1917, 1.
112 On police not acting fairly toward black people during episodes of mass racial
violence, see, for example, Tuttle, Jr., Race Riot.
white people. In one incident, the police stopped six black people in a red Hupmobile as they entered the city from St. Louis. The officers searched the car and arrested the six for smuggling ammunition and guns into East St. Louis. At that time the high priced Hupmobile signaled affluence as most Americans owned only the relatively inexpensive Model T Ford. A black owner of a Hupmobile or any car, and by extension, a black person exhibiting any other indicators of economic success, for example, homeownership, violated the common white view of humble and socially inferior black people. Any degree of black economic achievement signaled to white people that African Americans, by refusing to accept their ascribed place at the bottom of society, threatened the white dominated hierarchy.

The police in announcing Leroy Bundy as the owner of the Hupmobile gave credence to rumors that Bundy had been busily arming a black militia. Some white residents had talked about Leroy Bundy in command of a mysterious black militia that had been practicing military precision drills. The rumor mill exaggerated the African American St. George’s Lodge of the Odd Fellows’ drill practices. Lodge members since 1909 had been performing military style drills in uniforms with swords at a playground across from Bundy’s house and service station. Rumor also had spread that Bundy’s

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113 “Presence of Foreign and Lawless Negro Element Injures City,” *ESLDJ*, 29 May 1917, 1, 5.
garage was a recruiting office for the black militia, when in actuality it was just a popular place for young black men to repair and service cars and meet with friends.\textsuperscript{115}

State and local authorities organized their forces and, with the arrival of the Illinois National Guard Fourth Regiment on Tuesday evening around 7 o’clock, began to restore law and order.\textsuperscript{116} Lieutenant Colonel E.P. Clayton commanded guardsmen to man key intersections leading to black neighborhoods to prevent assailants from attacking African Americans. They deterred black retaliation against white people by arresting armed black residents. Soldiers cleared the downtown district, dispersing the throngs by threatening deadly force. Authorities had effectively suppressed white troublemakers by nighttime and declared the cessation of street violence.\textsuperscript{117} Policemen arrested a few leading agitators, including real estate salesman Steve Proney, on charges of inciting violence.\textsuperscript{118} If any initial reports had been taken of arrestees, they were never found. City officials did not charge Alexander Flannigan and a number of others who encouraged or led anti-black assaults presumably either because of their prominence or their connections to people of prominence in local government or business.

\textsuperscript{115} “The People of the State of Illinois v. Leroy Bundy et al., March Term, 1919,” 765, 796, 825-827.
\textsuperscript{118} “Riot Situation Is Now Under Control,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 31 May 1917, 1.
June 1917, the “Calm” before the July Storm

The anti-black violence of May 1917 did not destroy the city’s black community. It appeared benign when compared to other mass upheavals of urban racial violence that occurred in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America, for example, the attempt in 1908 to cleanse black people from Springfield, Illinois. In May in East St. Louis officially, seventy-five black people and three white men were injured with no deaths reported.\(^{119}\) Authorities estimated that more than six thousand African Americans had fled East St. Louis. An unknown number of refugees, however, returned once they thought the militia had secured the city.\(^{120}\) One observer commented that he thought agitators simply intended to intimidate African Americans into leaving East St. Louis.\(^{121}\)

Industrialists and trade unionists denied charges that they had been responsible for or had in any way benefited from the mayhem.\(^{122}\) Managers noted that their companies required low-wage black southern migrants to perform work that white laborers shunned. In addition, corporate officials lamented the loss of valuable production time during and immediately after the mass violence. They also observed that they had adjusted work


\(^{120}\) “Disorders Abate with Police and Militia in Full Control,” *ESLDJ*, 3 June 1917, 1.

\(^{121}\) Allison in *House Transcripts*, 3629-3630.

\(^{122}\) “Factories Must Close If Cannot Get Negro Help,” *St. Louis Argus*, 8 June 1917, 1; “Disorders Abate with Police and Militia in Full Control,” *ESLDJ*, 3 June 1917, 1; “Race Riot Aftermath,” *St. Louis Argus*, 8 June 1917, 4.
schedules to assure black laborers safe commute to and from their jobs. Likewise, CTLU officials stressed that neither they nor Aluminum Ore strikers ignited the mass violence. Labor organizer Philip Wolf said that white Aluminum Ore strikers were not anti-black, pointing out that after a strike meeting on Wednesday, the night of May 30, white strikers, concerned about the safety of their black colleagues, had escorted them home. CTLU leaders invited the Labor Committee of the Illinois State Council of Defense to East St. Louis to hold a hearing to determine the cause of the violence. They trusted the council, which worked with the federal Council of National Defense to insure harmonious worker-management relations for efficient war production. CTLU men expected Labor Committee chairman and president of the Illinois Federation of Labor John Walker to corroborate their contention that industrialists, and not the CTLU, were responsible for the migration and the violence.

In early June, the Labor Committee conducted hearings to determine if the black migration had caused the labor disputes that led to mass racial violence took testimony. The committee heard from migrants like John and Daisy Betts as well as from established black residents like Leroy Bundy. Both migrants and townspeople testified that black southerners made East St. Louis their destination because of jobs and the promise of a better way of life. The committee also listened to white people’s accounts. Labor

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123 C.B. Fox, and Peter Ward in *Labor Committee Report*, 27 [i.e. 34], and 186; Phillip W. Coyle in *House Transcripts*, 30.
124 Wolf in *House Transcripts*, 2216, 2218-2220, 2241.
organizer Harry Stanisic and CTLU president Michael Whalen argued that managers had encouraged the migration to drive down white workers’ wages and disrupt the labor movement. Speaking for industrialists, Charles Fox and American Steel Foundries foreman John Roche denied that corporations had dispatched labor agents to the South to entice black laborers to migrate North. Maurice Joyce, representing white residents, connected the crime wave to the migration.126

The labor committee released its report on June 30, and, admitting that it possessed only circumstantial evidence, charged that corporations had deliberately recruited more black laborers than they had job openings. The Labor Committee concluded that “an extensive campaign [existed] to induce [N]egroes in great numbers to come to East St. Louis . . . [that it] required considerable financing, and [that] its backers took pains to be unknown.” The committee absolved the CTLU of all wrongdoing. The labor committee considered black migrants pawns of industrialists and incapable of organizing, leading, and sustaining the migration on their own. Finally, the committee failed to establish responsibility for the May violence.127

In June, CTLU officials temporarily shifted their attention away from the migration to the unionization of black workers. They sent labor organizers to the all-black village of Brooklyn to discuss organizing black packinghouse workers. Bundy accompanied the CTLU men on these trips. CTLU thought that a strong union presence

126 Joyce, and Fox, and Harry Stanisic, and Whalen, and Bundy, and John and Daisy Betts, and Roche in Labor Committee Report, 17, and 24-25, and 36 [i.e. 43], and 56-57, 60-61, and 68-83, and 135-145, and 177-178; Towers in House Transcripts, 2369-2370, 2391, 2504-2505.
127 Labor Committee Report, 36-38 [i.e. 43-45].
in Brooklyn had the potential to spark mass unionization of black workers in surrounding towns. Trade unionists discontinued their organizing, however, when the Brooklyn police chief, for whatever reason, threatened to jail them for organizing workers in the village. Most likely village officials wanted to prevent union drives because they were beholden to meatpackers in National City for providing jobs for village residents.128

Bundy, Bluitt, and other black community leaders involved in talks with CTLU essentially called, though not publicly, the labor organization’s bluff about unionizing black workers. They knew that CTLU was playing politics in order to bolster its position in the labor movement and city affairs. Anyone familiar with the human geography of the East St. Louis district knew that the all-black village of Brooklyn lies adjacent to the meatpacking giants in National City. East St. Louisans knew black workers commuted to work just as easily from Brooklyn as from East St. Louis to the factories and stockyards in National City. Black residents must have thought that even if African Americans were driven out of East St. Louis, the labor affiliation still had to contend with Brooklyn’s black workers. The chief conclusion that black East St. Louisans had to have reached was that the CTLU used anti-black migrant rhetoric in order to regain its leadership among white workers who had initiated militant strikes that the labor affiliation had no choice but to support.

Several prominent African Americans thought that an alliance with CTLU and mass unionizing of black workers held the potential for improving black people’s

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128 Jimerson in *House Transcripts*, 2077. Brooklyn officials’ anti-unionism was similar to that of many black clergymen and National Urban League members in Chicago in 1919 as narrated in Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot*, 148-151.
position in city politics and defusing racial animosities that white working people held toward black laborers. They needed to convince CTLU to drop its anti-migration rhetoric and focus on building a labor movement to attract large numbers of unskilled white as well as black laborers. Pro-union black community activists Lyman Bluit, Leroy Bundy, Noah Parden, Sam Wheat, and lawyer William Lillie met with Harry Kerr, Earl Jimerson, and four other CTLU officials to discuss ways to unionize African American workers. The politically astute black leaders did not hold organized labor responsible for the May violence, but they thought CTLU lacked seriousness regarding organizing black workers. They noted, for example, that Jimerson wanted, as he said, to “find out who was the mysterious influence [that brought] about [the migration and the] conditions which existed here, which caused riots.” Bluitt and Bundy concluded that the CTLU blamed its failure to organize migrants particularly upon black southern migrants’ supposed anti-union attitudes and not organized labor’s general historic disinterest in accepting skilled and unskilled black workers into the labor movement.129 In addition, the black politicians had to wonder why the CTLU had tapped them for assistance in organizing black workers rather than any of the many black laborers who had not only joined white workers in strikes in 1916 and 1917 but had also, like Morris & Company packinghouse

worker William Bagley, led in the 1916 walkout.\textsuperscript{130} The CTLU’s actions reconfirmed for the African American community the organization’s lack of interest in unionizing black workers.

CTLU leaders experienced problems in building the labor movement because of their choice of rhetoric and lack of leadership and not because of the black migration. They held fast to the idea that managers practiced racial divide and conquer tactics at the workplace. Labor officials also knew that black workers accepted unions, went on strike, and were no more prone to strikebreaking than white laborers. Yet, the affiliation, blinded by anti-black racism, remained lethargic in organizing black workers. Its business union practices, partnership in city governance, and recent anti-black migrant rhetoric hamstrung the organization into reacting—and rather poorly at that—to rapidly changing events. The CTLU failed to take a militant stance or exercise a leadership during the strike waves that swept the city in 1916 and early 1917. The heads of the CTLU lacked the vision of their counterparts in the Chicago Stockyards Labor Council who boldly initiated a campaign to unionize black workers.

Interestingly, the role and reaction of city leaders, especially real estate politician businessmen, in relation to the immediate causes of the mass racial violence of May never underwent scrutiny from the labor committee investigation. How many city leaders had close personal or business connections with core agitators and perpetrators remained at best speculative. As a group that commanded city politics, however, their actions greatly contributed to the shaping of anti-black agitation. White politicians who

courted the black vote signaled to African Americans leaders like Bundy their intolerance of an independent black political machine that had the potential to undermine their power. The Mollman, Tarlton, and Canavan city Democratic machine had formed a partnership with county Republican Party leaders, including Alexander Flannigan, to prevent progressive minded Democratic and Republican stalwarts from winning City Hall. Reformer James Kirk, owner of the East St. Louis Daily Journal, continued to sensationalize black crime after the May episode and on several occasions predicted future race riots. His newspaper’s negative accounts of black Southerners swayed white voters away from the Mollman machine.

White business, civic, and labor leaders continued to blame black southern migrants for generating white people’s racial prejudice and aggression toward black people. These individuals echoed statements similar to those uttered by their counterparts in Springfield, Illinois, and other locales that had experienced mass racial violence in the previous two decades. They denied racism as a contributory factor in the making of anti-black assaults. Kirk did not ascribe the troubles to race because, as he said, white townspeople held no ill will “against the older, law-abiding” black residents. Aluminum Ore manager R.F. Rucker, for one, declared that the primary

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131 “Union Laborers Start Race Riots”; “Factories Must Close If Cannot Get Negro Help,” *St. Louis Argus*, 8 June 1917, 1; “Delivers Sermon on Race Problem,” *ESLDJ*, 4 June 1917, 1, 2.


133 “Presence of Foreign and Lawless Negro Element Injures City,” *ESLDJ*, 29 May 1917, 1, 5.
reason for the violence of May 28 and 29 centered on the threat black people posed to white residents’ standard of living and accustomed access to resources.\(^{134}\)

Black townspeople quickly realized as June progressed that the May event had whetted a thirst for more violence among certain elements in the city. Alone or in small groups, they braved physical assaults from white ruffians.\(^{135}\) African Americans in one neighborhood on June 11 witnessed three drunken white soldiers curse several black women, rob a few black men, and wreck a black-owned saloon. Fifty black men readied to lynch the three when police arrived and escorted the drunken soldiers to jail.\(^{136}\)

African American motorists returning from St. Louis encountered police checkpoints where law officers searched their vehicles for firearms. Lyman Bluitt, for one, protested when the police stopped and searched his car, telling the officers that they “most assuredly ought to search every man regardless of his color.”\(^{137}\)

African Americans experienced after the May violence some erosion in their formal political power and rights of equal protection under the law. Noah Parden fell victim to a white political backlash when the St. Clair County Board of Supervisors abolished his seat as county assistant state’s attorney. According to white assistant state’s attorney L.V. Walcott, the board expressed displeasure “with the arrangement whereby Parden handled the prosecution of all [N]egroes arrested for carrying concealed

\(^{134}\) Rucker in *House Transcripts*, 1829-1830.
\(^{136}\) “Policemen Held Up By Armed Soldiers,” *ESLDJ*, 11 June 1917, 1; “Serious Charges against Three Members of the Militia in E. St. Louis,” *The Forum*, 16 June 1917, 1, 3.
\(^{137}\) Bluitt in *House Transcripts*, 1350.
Parden’s dismissal represented a setback to black people’s access to legal redress.

City officials offered no assurances that mass racial violence had ended. Black townspeople heard rumors that white residents planned on July 4 to massacre them. White people, also hearing stories, feared that black people schemed to murder them on that same date. Black townspeople also read in the June 15 issue of the city’s main newspaper, *East St. Lewis Daily Journal*, a call for another “race riot” to bring an end to the black crime wave. Black leaders complained to city officials that police had been disarming black citizens and demanded that their firearms be returned. Mayor Mollman, still mindful of the black vote, ordered the police to return the confiscated guns. No one reported to if the police followed through on Mollman’s order.

Some people saw in the actions of the Mayor’s office, the police, the newspaper editor, and tentative preparations by authorities or their allies the potential for another round of mass racial violence. Black residents redoubled their efforts to obtain weapons after Mollman refused to guarantee African Americans full protection. Black mortician R.M.C. Green, for instance, directed one of his employees, a very light complexioned African American, to use a hearse to smuggle guns from St. Louis. Mistaken for a white person, the employee successfully passed through police

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138 “Parden Loses Job as Prosecutor,” ESLDJ, 15 June 1917, 1.
139 Kerr, and Allison in *House Transcripts*, 1971, and 3630-3631.
140 “Negroes in Hold-Up,” ESLDJ, 15 June 1917, 1.
141 Bluitt in *House Transcripts*, 1350.
142 “As the Journal Views It,” ESLDJ, 6 July 1917, 4, section two.
checkpoints. Black townspeople had concluded before the end of June that armed self defense was their only viable option to protect themselves from additional anti-black violence. Members of the local unit of the Afro-American Protective League must have also remembered that, about twenty years earlier, members of their sister chapter in Decatur, Illinois, had to resort to armed self-defense under circumstances similar to those of May. Black and white residents worried about a renewal of racial violence when the state withdrew the remaining regular National Guard units on June 25. Federalized militia units, however, remained to deter strikes at war production facilities. On June 27, as East St. Louisans saw the last of the Aluminum Ore strikers return to work without having won their demands, they thought that simmering violence was waiting to erupt.

Conclusion

The Great Migration of African American Southerners changed power relations between black and white people across the nation. Black migrants saw the opportunity to improve their lives in seeking factory jobs, better housing, and full access to political

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resources in the northern urban industrial economy. Some established black residents, especially businessmen and politicians, along with white employers welcomed migrants. Migrants also encountered white Northerners who accused them of creating or exacerbating social and economic tension. No doubt an increased population of black people, just as an increased population of white people in industrial cities, contributed to a lack of desirable jobs, even though the nation in 1917 was in the midst of a booming wartime economy. White as well as black migrants also flooded the housing market, straining a severe housing shortage that already had existed in part because the war demanded material that otherwise would have gone into home construction. But black migrants also had an impact on municipal politics for two reasons. First, the black community had more incentives to operate as a pressure group, and second, white East St. Louis was divided into factions. With additional black votes African American politicians saw their community on the threshold of having its own independent political machine. Most migrants and established black residents did not consciously understand the full political ramifications of the migration and the fluid social relations brought about by the First World War. But the wartime migration, occurring after two decades of political battles between progressive reformers and political machine bosses, upset the balance of power.

East St. Louis became a microcosm of white hostility toward migrants in particular and African Americans generally. White residents accused migrants of creating tension in the areas of employment, housing, and public spaces. They also accused them of buying and selling their votes to swing local elections in their favor and
to obtain more patronage. They feared the migration that gave black politicians the impetus to build an African American political machine independent from white political bosses. Labor leaders of the CTLU, and presumably most white workers, ignoring evidence to the contrary, feared that the arrival black southern laborers meant fewer jobs for white workers, more difficulties in organizing trade unions, and a lower standard of living for white working people. White homeowners and renters of all social classes did not want African Americans in their neighborhoods, if for no other reason than the belief that black people depressed property values. White political and business leaders worried about the possibility of black rule as more migrants settled in the city. They had to prevent the rising strength of the black community whose very presence supported the African American drive to acquire political resources and power.

The outbreak of mass racial violence on May 28, 1917, in East St. Louis signaled white intolerance of a strong, viable African American presence in city affairs. Though the CTLU, a most vociferous opponent of the migration, gained the lion’s share of the blame for causing the mayhem, a state investigation absolved the labor organization of all responsibility. Industrialists welcomed black southern migrants, but denied a role in both recruiting African American laborers and making the violence possible. But residents knew that racial conflict had been brewing. Various individuals with ties to certain elements among white real estate politician-businessmen sparked the street fighting, but for reasons not publicized these troublemakers remained unpunished. The May disturbance pointed to problems deeply embedded in the social, economic, and political structures of East St. Louis. The violence was neither unplanned nor spontaneous. It also
hinted that certain political elements were measured in their use of violence. Those who agitated for anti-black violence failed to achieve the desired result: the expulsion of all African Americans from the city. Agitators tried throughout June to spark another round of mass violence with random attacks on black people. The opportunity to launch a second massive anti-black attack presented itself in the early hours of Monday, July 2, when an incident occurred that led to an explosion of horrific physical violence far surpassing that of May.
Chapter Four. To Make East St. Louis a “White Man’s Town”:

Mass Anti-Black Violence of July 1917

The mass racial violence in East St. Louis in July 1917 occurred at the confluence of several historical factors: an expanding national economy within a global context, a continued intensification of racism, the First World War, mobilization for the nation’s war effort, and the wartime Great Migration. The July violence was the first of the major World War I era “race riots” involving mass destruction of property and numerous deaths.1 This outbreak of mass racial violence signaled a white American reaction to black American competition for jobs, housing, and access to resources through the political arena. White people considered the large numbers of black Southerners entering northern industrial cities the primary source of increased social problems.2 They refused to accept the African American proposition that black people’s role in national war mobilization, including work in war production, had connections to the restoration of their democratic rights. The July riot marked the opening salvo on the part of many white Northerners to maintain a rigid racial hierarchy, if necessary through violence.

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1 The July riot was the only major race riot during the First World War. Other major racial conflicts, occurred after the war from 1919 to 1922 in cities like Chicago and Washington, D.C. and rural locales like Elaine, Arkansas, and Rosewood, Florida.

2 Discussion of social tension abound in the literature pertaining World War I era and World War II race riots, see, for example, William M. Tuttle, Jr., Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919 (New York: Atheneum, 1970); Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., and Martha Wilkerson, Layered Violence: The Detroit Rioters of 1943 (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1991).
The July massacre shared with the May riot in East St. Louis the same causes, social strain, and participants—definitely the same black politicians and white business, civic, labor, and political leaders. According to numerous contemporaries and scholars, the July outrage had a direct relationship mainly to labor issues such as white workers’ fears of black strikebreakers and to factors like black involvement in crime, political corruption, and saloon culture. The argument has been that though deeply embedded social, political, and economic problems in the city coupled with an aggressive anti-black racism had provided the fuel, war mobilization and the Great Migration created or exacerbated social tensions that sparked the horrific mass beating and killing. Scholars focus on the social tensions that had developed in the few years preceding the mass racial violence of July 1917 and detail the participants in the mayhem.3 The main consideration herein is that the July massacre was a profoundly political event. By centering black Americans in the history of East St. Louis, the political dynamics cracking a rigid racial hierarchy emerge as the key cause for the July violence.

The mass racial violence of July completed what the May event had left unfinished: the elimination of the black community’s powerbroker status in local electoral politics. What is marginalized or ignored in arguments about social tensions and riot participants is that black East St. Louis had arrived at the threshold of creating its own independent political machine, an organization that white political bosses and progressive reformers deemed intolerable. The race riot represented a political solution

implemented by certain white real estate men and other politician-businessmen and their shock troops and carried to completion by reformers who instituted a commission form of municipal government with one of its main objectives the end of black influence independent of white control in city electoral politics and governance. The July massacre revealed white citizens eager to maintain their dominance in the racial hierarchy through the use of violence.

To Create a Sundown Town

Those who planned and led anti-black assaults on July 2 and 3 acted not on behalf of labor unions or out of concern about interracial competition for jobs and housing. They furthered the political agenda of machine boss politicians who wanted to rid the city of black people. White gunmen, including a few city policemen, involved in random anti-black terrorist attacks in June had connections to politician-businessmen, including real estate men Thomas Canavan and Locke Tarlton. Instigators carried out a series of ambushes against black residents while the police worked to disarm black residents. White assailants had no fear of being either arrested or convicted because police,

4 Patrick F. Gill, Conciliator, to William B. Wilson, Secretary of the Department of Labor, 16 October 1917, Case File #33-378, Dispute Case Files, 1913-48, Records of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, Record Group 280, Entry no. 14, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland; Anderson, and Charles B. Fox in House Transcripts, 281-284, 351, and 1652.
5 W.A. Miller in House Transcripts, 4089, 4101; “Town a Living Hell for Three Days,” Chicago Defender, 14 July 1917, in Tuskegee Institute Newspaper Clipping File, 6:1024, hereafter cited as TINCF.
bondsmen, and politicians protected them.⁶ On Sunday night, July 1, agitators escalated their terrorism, driving through black neighborhoods and firing shots at the homes of black inhabitants.⁷ Patrolman Harry L. Walker, former patrolman Gus Masserang, and “citizen” John Long were among those carrying out these terrorist attacks.⁸ At about the time these attacks occurred, a small group of white men killed two black laborers returning home from work.⁹ Another gang of white men, joined by a few uniformed army recruiters on furlough, broke into the downtown office of black dentist Leroy Bundy, intending to kill the community activist who had angered white politicians with his program for an independent black political machine.¹⁰ But Bundy was not in his office. He had been warned of impending trouble by a white business friend and had fled town before sunrise.¹¹

Within the first hour of Monday, July 2, the police received a phone call from a white grocer in the city’s South End district of Denverside who had observed black

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⁷ Calvin Cotton, and Thomas G. Hunter in House Transcripts, 673-676, and 1066-1067.
¹⁰ Roy Albertson in House Transcripts, 482-485; “Soldiers Arrive To Preserve Order, ESLDJ, 2 July 1917, 1. On politicians’ hatred of Bundy see “Bundy Involves Mayor in Open Confession,” ESLDJ, 26 November 1917, 1, 5.
¹¹ On Bundy’s whereabouts on Monday morning see “The People of the State of Illinois v. Leroy Bundy et al.”
residents with guns gathering in front of an African Methodist Episcopal Church. Black Denversiders had decided to defend themselves in the event of further terrorist attacks. Night Chief of Police Cornelius Hickey ordered plain clothes detectives, sergeant Samuel Coppedge and Frank Wadley, police chauffeur William Hutter, and two uniformed patrolmen to investigate. The five policemen, joined by reporter Roy Albertson, a frequent visitor to the police station, left in an unmarked Ford Model T police car for Denverside. Turning the corner east from Tenth Street onto Bond Avenue, Hutter, coming face to face with approximately 150 armed black men, abruptly stopped the vehicle. The men had been heading west toward the Free Bridge where they hoped to exact revenge upon several white men who had assaulted two black women earlier that night. Coppedge shouted, “What is doing here, boys?” The black men hollered, “None of your damned business.” Coppedge then said, “We are down here to protect you fellows as well as the whites.” The armed black men, perhaps thinking the six white men were trigger-happy joy riders masquerading as policemen, replied, “We don’t need any of your damned protection,” and told them to leave.\footnote{Albertson in \textit{House Transcripts}, 478-483, 498, 501-502. Albertson’s story is the only published eyewitness account. One dispute of his account appeared in “Riot a National Disgrace,” \textit{St. Louis Argus}, 6 July 1917, reporting that Albertson simply added Coppedge’s verbal exchange that occurred a month earlier. Congressional investigators also questioned Albertson’s investigative skills after establishing that he had not interviewed black residents for their version of the confrontation in Albertson in \textit{House Transcripts}, 499-503, 542-567.} When Coppedge ordered Hutter to drive forward, some of the black men reacted and fired shots, wounding the two uniformed patrolmen, fatally wounding Wadley, who later died on the night of July 3, and killing Coppedge outright. (Ironically, Coppedge and Wadley had protected black
residents in the Valley from white mobs during the May violence. Hutter and Albertson, escaping unharmed, sped the wounded and dying to nearby Deaconess Hospital.

The news that armed black people had killed white police officers provided the perfect excuse for agitators to unleash the violence that they had planned. The most aggressive white racist punishments, like lynchings, rapes, and attacks on black neighborhoods, often occurred after individual African Americans in self-defense had killed aggressive white police officers or other agents of the state. Anti-black schemers in East St. Louis now could draw upon the tradition of white communal violence to carry out their plans to destroy the city’s black community and in the process remind African Americans of the price to be paid for refusing to accept their status as social inferiors.

Instigators, intent on making a dramatic impact, parked Coppedge’s blood-soaked, bullet riddled car before sunrise in front of police headquarters. The spectacle attracted onlookers who learned about the recent events and planned their retaliation against

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13 “Presence of Foreign and Lawless Negro Element Injures City,” ESLDJ, 29 May 1917, 1, 5. See also Chapter Three.
15 Albert B. McQuillan, and Allison in House Transcripts, 1712-1713, and 3629-3630.
16 For an example of a white reaction to a black man killing a white police officer see William Ivy Hair, Carnival of Fury: Robert Charles and the New Orleans Race Riot of 1900 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976). Literature on the systematic, communal nature of lynching and other acts of mass anti-black violence see, for example, W. Fitzhugh Brundage, Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Philip Dray, At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America (New York: Random House, 2002).
African Americans. Those gathered counted on little, if any, official interference upon hearing policemen demanding vengeance and lawyers condoning anti-black violence.

Schemers used the morning hours to prepare for the cleansing of African Americans from East St. Louis. Some warned black townspeople “to get their women and children away as it was going to be bad in the city.” Lincoln High School director of music and drawing, Daisy Westbrook, receiving such a warning, sent her baby and mother to St. Louis. White strangers advised teaming businessmen Calvin Cotton and Mack Hearst, physician Thomas Hunter, and other black people to leave downtown before trouble began. A group of white men gathered by mid-morning at the Labor Temple and listened as former railway claims agent Richard Brockway and others directed them to get guns and “return at 3 p.m. to drive the [N]egroes out of town.” An unnamed man with a “pronounced Southern accent” instructed the crowd as to how white southerners “handled [N]egroes” and called upon the throng to “bring their guns.”

City authorities acted in ways that suggested either gross incompetence or an anticipation of another outbreak of mass racial violence similar in scale to the one that

18 “Grand Jury Returns Indictments for 103,” ESLDJ, 15 August 1917, 1.
20 Daisy [Westbrook] to Louise [Westbrook?], [n.d.], Folders 6, 7, Box 133, Sherman Papers.
21 Cotton in House Transcripts, 682-683.
22 Paul Y. Anderson in House Transcripts, 284; “Brockway Delivered Speeches,” ESLDJ, 14 November 1917, 1. The real estate firm Smith Brothers owned the Labor Temple and rented the hall to union locals and other groups to hold meetings. Why the newspaper did not identify the man with the southern accent, assuming that he was from the South, remains a mystery. The census manuscripts show that East St. Louis also attracted white southern migrants.
had occurred in May. Whatever their thoughts, their response left them inadequately prepared and encouraged those eager to mete out anti-black violence.23 Chief of Police Ransom Payne, for example, instead of ordering white patrolmen to round up suspected white vigilantes in the early morning hours sent his men home to rest.24 Payne told W.H. Mills and the department’s four other black police detectives not to report for duty, saying that they stood no chance in a confrontation with angry white men.25 Reporter Albertson had warned Mayor Mollman within two hours after the shooting of Coppedge and Wadley to prepare for the shedding of innocent black people’s blood, but the Mayor failed to take preemptive measures such as countermanding the police chief’s order to send policemen home. Mollman knew that police response had proved inadequate during the May violence and that the National Guard had been needed to suppress the civil disorder. The Mayor first contacted Major Kavanaugh, commander of the federalized Illinois National Guard units encamped in the city since April 1917, and requested the use of his units. When Kavanaugh, saying that his troops had been assigned only to protect war production industry from strikers, refused to oblige, Mollman called the National Guard.26 F.S. Dickson, Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard in Springfield, Illinois, sent the requested guardsmen to East. St. Louis.27

24 Popkess in House Transcripts, 405-406.
26 Robert J. Boylan in House Transcripts, 590.
27 “Soldiers Arrive To Preserve Order, ESLDJ, 2 July 1917, 1; “Military Authorities Are in Full Control,” ESLDJ, 3 July 1917, 1, 2, 5.
The Fourth Infantry of the Illinois National Guard entered the city Monday morning of July 2 over the course of several hours. Troops arrived inexplicably unprepared with a number of them not in uniform and without ammunition. Many of the guardsmen, hailing from southern Illinois sundown towns, needed a strong command to carry out their mission. Their officers did not enforce discipline, at least initially. They failed to take initiative to prevent disorder by dispersing crowds that gathered during the morning hours. On scene, Lieutenant Colonel E.P. Clayton who had provided resolute leadership during the May violence requested additional troops, but his superior, Colonel S.O. Tripp, Assistant Quartermaster General, overruled him. Tripp who had neither crowd control nor battlefield experience had taken command at 10 a.m., but delayed troop deployment for a few hours. Commenting on Tripp’s actions, newspaper owner and progressive reformer James Kirk, said that well led soldiers “could have stopped [the violence] in ten minutes.” Tripp, as the Governor’s representative, had a different set of priorities. He opposed, for example, Mollman’s demand to impose martial law, considering such an action an admission of a loss of control. Meanwhile, some of the soldiers fraternized with civilians, confiding to them that they carried little or no

28 “Proceedings before Board of Inquiry, East St. Louis, Illinois,” in “The East St. Louis Riot of 1917,” reel no. 6, 2-3. For example, on Monday, July 2, thirty troops arrived at 8:30 a.m., thirty-four at 10:20 a.m., forty-seven at 12:50 p.m., sixty-three at 4:00 p.m., sixty-nine at 7:00 p.m., and forty-four at 8:00 p.m.; on Tuesday, seventy troops entered the city at 1:45 a.m., sixty-three at 2:00 a.m., fifty-six at 3:00 a.m., and 113 at 4:15. Three additional units appeared on Tuesday, and two more, one numbering 573 troops on Wednesday.
29 Kirk in House Transcripts, 3386-3387.
30 Anderson, and Albertson, and Boylan, and S.O. Tripp, and Jimerson, and Dan McGlynn, and H.F. Bader in House Transcripts, 258-259, 264, and 486-487, 505, and 590-592, 598, and 758, 761, and 2049-2050, and 3059-3060, and 4449; “Military Authorities Are in Full Control,” ESLDJ, 3 July 1917, 1, 2, 5.
ammunition and had orders not to shoot or charge with fixed bayonets. A few militiamen willingly handed their guns to men organizing to assault black people. Over all, the National Guard’s unmilitary like behavior emboldened agitators to proceed with their attack against African Americans.31

Midday on Monday, July 2, 1917, according to plan, white assailants launched a second episode of mass racial violence in East St. Louis, brutally attacking black residents and nonresidents alike. The key difference between the May and July outbreaks of mass racial violence was that the July assailants were prepared for action, knowing they could literally get away with murder. The gathering multitudes clustered, especially at intersections of major thoroughfares, into various throngs. Within each grouping, most people watched as black people were beaten or killed, sometimes cheering on those conducting the attacks. A much small number within each group conducted the actual assaults. Sometimes those perpetrating the violence stepped back with the spectators only to resume their murderous deeds perhaps after a needed rest. Spectators and killers emotionally needed each to build and reinforce a sense of community that turned the violence into a bloodthirsty orgy that gave the East St. Louis massacre its reputation of unspeakable savagery.32

The thousands of white people who took to the streets represented a wide cross-section of the population. Those conducting the actual assaults included wage-earning and self-employed working people, professionals, small business owners, prostitutes, and the so-called ruffian or “rough element” of “loafers,” “saloon bums,” “saloon loungers.” Knowledgeable reporters and observers noted that union and non-union workers from Aluminum Ore, steel, meatpacking, and other large industrial firms—the ones considered most threatened by the black migration—were rarely seen, let alone involved in, meting out the violence. Many of those who led the assaults had occupations such as railroading known for either systematic discrimination or exclusion of black laborers.33 Witnesses identified among the ringleaders railroad claims agents Richard Brockway, railroad switchman Herbert Wood, and seventeen-year old messenger boy Leo Keane.34 Individuals associated with saloons and the violence that marked the city’s saloon culture

East St. Louis, 137-152. See also relevant sections in George Rudé, The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730-1848 (New York: Wiley, 1964); Brundage, Lynching in the New South; Dray, At the Hands of Persons Unknown.


figured prominently in the brutal, and at times sadistic, attacks.\textsuperscript{35} Whether the police either failed to record the names of arrestees or later destroyed arrest records, information about those who had participated in the violence had to be cobbled together from court testimony or government hearings.\textsuperscript{36} In addition, Mollman’s secretary Maurice Ahearn who ordered police and guardsmen to arrest photographers and destroy their cameras insured many assailants’ anonymity.\textsuperscript{37}

The men and women who engaged in the orgy of beatings and killings from the afternoon to well into the night of Monday, July 2, assaulted as many black people as possible.\textsuperscript{38} According to white newspaper reporter Jack Lait of the \textit{St. Louis Republic}, attackers acted upon a virulent form of racism that viewed “black skin a death warrant.”\textsuperscript{39} “Boys of 13, 14, 15 and 16,” according to Lait, appeared “in the forefront of every felonious butchery, [and] girls and women, wielding bloody knives and clawing at the eyes of dying victims, sprang from the ranks of the mad thousands [announcing that they

\textsuperscript{35} McLaughlin, \textit{Power, Community, and Racial Killing in East St. Louis}, 147-152, argues that men and women of the saloon culture formed a crucial element among the mass murderers.

\textsuperscript{36} Rudwick, \textit{Race Riot at East St. Louis}, 88. Like Rudwick and Mclaughlin, this author had no success in locating police records.


did] not tolerate a black man.” Journalist Carlos Hurd observed that white rampagers displayed “a horribly cool deliberateness and a spirit of fun.” Male assailants attacked not only black men, but also black women, and children mainly in “the Valley,” a district of primarily low income black and white working class dwellers. Ambushers waited near the meatpacking plants and stockyards to chase after and shoot at isolated black workers. In one incident several white men dragged two black men to an alley, shot them, returned to the street with both victims, and proceeded to hang them. When the rope broke as they hanged one of the helpless men, sending them falling on their backs, the hangmen laughed as several policemen and guardsmen watched. In another incident assailants caught Scott Clark, a fifty-two year old black teamster, in his house and “was about to lynch him, when someone said, ‘Let’s drag him around a little.’” Leo Keane and Herbert Wood led at least twelve men in pulling Clark through the streets while others stoned him. They were about to hang Clark from a telephone pole when Colonel Tripp and several guardsmen intervened and rushed Clark to a hospital where he

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41 Carlos F. Hurd in Ida B. Wells-Barnett, “The East St. Louis Massacre: The Greatest Outrage of the Century,” 11, *Correspondence of the Military Intelligence Division*, United States War Department, Record Group 165, Entry no. 65 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1440, roll 1, no. 10218-60), National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.
later died from his wounds.\textsuperscript{45} Black resident Josie Nixon witnessed another horrible scene of white men shooting a black woman’s tongue off and killing her son before entering a house and murdering a mother and her newborn baby.\textsuperscript{46}

White women, mostly teenage and adult prostitutes, also assaulted black men, but more frequently targeted black women and children.\textsuperscript{47} Survivors told Howard University Red Cross official Hallie Queen that the women “were far more vile . . . than were the men and far more inventive of cruelty.” Some informed Queen that they witnessed women killing their victims “with hatpins, sometimes picking out their eyes with them before they were quite dead.”\textsuperscript{48} In one episode two white teenage women after severely pummeling a black woman and staining themselves with her blood, walked away from the scene bragging about their deed.\textsuperscript{49} Women rioters often tore clothes off black women and beat them with fists, shoes, or beer faucets.\textsuperscript{50} Reverend George Allison tried to protect a black woman who was being chased by seven or eight white prostitutes and three or four drunken pimps. She escaped, but not before her pursuers had ripped her clothes off to her waist except for her corset.\textsuperscript{51} One refugee told Hallie Queen of a particularly heartbreaking incident where a black mother had wrapped her infant in a

\textsuperscript{45} Rudwick, 99-101.
\textsuperscript{48} Queen, “East St. Louis As I Saw It.” In the 1927 issue of \textit{Who’s Who In Colored America: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Living Persons of Negro Descent in America}, Hallie Elvera Queen served as chairperson of the Howard University chapter of the American Red Cross and was Holder of Service Cross for War Service.
\textsuperscript{49} “Race Rioters Fire East St. Louis,” \textit{TINCF}, 6:0989.
\textsuperscript{50} Wells Barnett, 6.
\textsuperscript{51} Allison in \textit{House Transcripts}, 3657.
towel and after fighting with several white women managed to break away, “[c]rossing the Bridge of Mercy [the Free Bridge] . . . crying ‘Thank God, I saved my baby.’ When she opened the towel, it was empty. In the fight the women had taken the baby and [upon realizing what had happened,] the mother lost her reason.”

White women participated in the July massacre in greater numbers and more conspicuously than they had during the May violence. The key difference between the two episodes in regards to the behavior of white women assailants was that in July white women assaulted black people. Observers were at a loss even to attempt an explanation as to why white women, including prostitutes, stepped outside of their gender role as cheerleaders or observers to take on murderous behavior ascribed to men. One is reasonable to presume that the reasons for attacking black people were same in July as they were in May. But prostitutes predominated among woman attackers and had no problem crossing the line to follow the men in committing violence because they had close connections to male killers associated with criminal violence that accompanied saloon culture.

Some local government officials, guardsmen, and policemen acquiesced to or participated in anti-black assaults. They refused either to protect African Americans or arrest rioters. State’s Attorney for St. Clair County Herbert Schaumleffel, for example, did nothing to prevent attackers from beating and killing black people. Schaumleffel

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52 Queen, “East St. Louis as I Saw It.”
53 See discussion of prostitutes in particular, and white women, generally in Chapter Three herein, and presentation of hypotheses in McLaughlin, Power, Community, and Racial Killing in East St. Louis, 152-159.
54 See discussion of saloon culture and criminal violence in Chapter Two.
55 Jimerson, and Stewart Campbell in House Transcripts 2049-2051, and 3978.
even released eighty-nine jailed assailants before police had a chance to book them.56

Some militiamen looted and then torched black dwellings and businesses and shot at fleeing black occupants, sometimes forcing them back into the flames.57 Several troops and policemen disarmed black men and handed them over to the mobs to be beaten or killed, or in some cases perpetuated the attacks themselves. Soldiers, escorting badly beaten black men, women, and children to the police station, often provided them with little protection from missile throwing crowds.58

African Americans faced assailants whose seemingly pathological racism moved them to be sadistic in the manner of participants in lynching parties who showed no mercy or remorse. Black residents in the Valley and on downtown streets generally became not only hunted prey, but also a source of entertainment as white people fulfilled their sense of social superiority. Black people’s lives had no value in the eyes of their attackers. Mattie House’s “husband was shot and hacked to pieces before her eyes.” A black man concealed himself in a box, but ruffians, upon discovering him, nailed the box shut and “threw it into the flames, remaining until it was burned to ashes.”59 Black clergyman James Taylor observed as one group of white men who after shooting and wounding a black shopkeeper and his family in their store, torched the shop and incinerated them. According to Josie Nixon, attackers eagerly killed black infants and

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56 Allison in *House Transcripts*, 3693.
58 Clarrissa Lockett, and Mr. Buchanan in Wells-Barnett, “The East St. Louis Massacre,” 6, and 16.
59 Queen, “East St. Louis As I Saw It.”
young children, sometimes throwing them alive into burning structures. Nixon told about one mother who with her baby in her arms ran from her burning house. The murders, she said, shot “the baby . . . through the head and threw the infant into the fire.” In another instance, a black woman and a child, while running from a burning building “were either killed or knocked unconscious . . . and the child was thrown back into the” fire. And in yet another act of cruelty, rioters stood around talking and joking until a black man appeared and someone screamed, “There’s a nigger.” Then they all ran after the man, killed him, left the corpse in the street, and resumed their conversation.

Attacks on African American nonresidents revealed perpetrators’ lack of concern about such issues as racial competition over jobs and housing. In one particularly outrageous incident, assailants surrounded a streetcar carrying the Cook family home to St. Louis from a fishing trip and dragged the parents and their two children from the vehicle. One of their children, a daughter, somehow escaped, eventually making her way safely across the river, but thugs proceeded to torture her parents and brother. As the mother, Lena Cook, shouted, “We’re not from East St. Louis and haven’t harmed anyone,” men tore off her clothes and pulled out her hair. While she pleaded for the lives of her husband and seventeen year old son, ringleader Charles Hanna shot and killed Mr. Cook (no first name given) while John Dow killed the couple’s son. Hanna then punched Lena Cook and threatened to kill her. She managed to crawl to a nearby drug store where

60 Josie Nixon in Wells-Barnett, “The East St. Louis Massacre,” 7, Nixon and her husband Samuel, a carpenter and contractor, and daughter Pearl, a packinghouse worker, lived in East St. Louis since 1904.
61 Wells-Barnett, 7.
62 House Transcripts, 384;
63 Kirk in House Transcripts, 3385.
“a white man interceded for her, telling the mob to ‘leave the woman alone.’” Enraged that a white man intervened to help a black woman, a few men clubbed her protector. Ambulance attendants rescued Cook, taking her and the corpses of her husband and son to a hospital.64

Ringleaders, for a variety of reasons, allowed some black individuals to pass unharmed. They did not, for example, molest barber Mose Lockett who enjoyed cordial relations with boss politicians.65 Assailants permitted long-time black Republican and ward politician Captain John Robinson, held in high esteem by white residents, to walk through the downtown district undisturbed.66 One group of killers spared a Mr. Williamson (no first name given), whom they mistook for his brother, a highly regarded janitor.67 Similarly, leaders of one group of attackers left the popular black saloonkeeper Will “Buddy” Bell untouched, perhaps because of his known connections with boss politicians.68 In another illustration a group of white men broke into a black family’s house intent upon killing its occupants. They did not locate the parents who had hidden in a closet but left their children in the front room of their home, “thinking that no one would harm a child.” The ice dealer leading the group demanded that the children reveal

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64 “Mollman Summoned to Rioters’ Defense,” ESLDJ, 18 October 1917, 1, 5.
66 “Captain Robinson Most Colorful Negro Character of City,” ESLDJ, 28 February 1926, 3-A.
67 Joe D. Williamson in House Transcripts, 1861-1862.
68 “Widely Known Negro Buried with All Pomp,” ESLDJ, 25 March 1924, 1, 8, stated in a laudatory manner that William Bell “became associated with the liquor industry, and for many years was in the saloon business. . . . One of the outstanding figures in the race riots in 1917 . . . Bell wielded an almost unbelievable power to calm the troubled waters. . . . Those who know say that he was more influential than any other man and did more to end the ruthless killing, than any other one man in East St. Louis.”
their parents’ whereabouts though the children repeatedly stated that their parents were not at home. When someone said, “Let’s kill the kids,” one of the children, a little girl, who recognized the ice dealer, “cried out ‘Mr. Ice-man, don’t kill me—please don’t.’” In an act of mercy, the iceman, moved by the child’s plea, led the attackers away.69

White assailants ransacked and destroyed black owned or occupied homes and owned businesses and other properties. Some vandals, resentful of African American material advancement, after looting black people’s homes, carried away furniture, clothing, and other household contents before setting the houses ablaze.70 Others targeted businesses unprotected by the federalized militia and torched or otherwise damaged firms that employed African Americans.71 Rampagers set afire railroad cars that happened to be filled with war munitions, railroad freight houses, the Bon-Ton Baking Company, Hill Thomas Lime and Cement Company, and other small firms. Arsonists torched the Broadway Theatre, incinerating several black people who had taken refuge inside.72 Assailants did not attack Armour, Swift, and other large employers of black workers because these companies either were protected by federalized Illinois

69 Untitled, signed by “K. Causer, Major, 4th Regt., July 3—12.”
70 Anderson in House Transcripts, 362; Daisy Westbrook to Louise Westbrook, Sherman Papers. In numerous anti-black clashes, many white assailants looted black people’s homes for valuables and other household contents.
National Guard units or employed their own security guards. Aluminum Ore, for example, had both a hired defense force and a rifle club that supplied guns to loyal white and black employees; the latter who along with their families had sought safety on company property.

Most African Americans untouched by assailants lived in black districts in the city’s South End where residents had resorted to armed self defense. Black people in those neighborhoods relied upon the tradition of using firearms to protect their persons and property. They must have heard about earlier anti-black clashes, for example, those in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1898 and in Atlanta in 1906 where African Americans had engaged in gun battles to keep white intruders from entering their neighborhoods. White attackers in East St. Louis either had the impression or remembered how during the May violence black people in the South End had used their weapons. On July 2, armed African Americans wounded or killed an unknown number

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73 E.M. Sorrells in *House Transcripts*, 3905-3971.
74 Black employees at Aluminum Ore in Mrs. Olga Wayne, interviewed by the author, 21 September 1999, tape recording, East St. Louis.
75 Rudwick, *Race Riot at East St. Louis*, 53-57, thought that black East St. Louisans use of firearms was at best sporadic. Malcolm McLaughlin, *Power, Community, and Racial Killing in East St. Louis*, 163-176, argues that in the South End black townspeople made widespread, effective use of armed self-defense. This author concurs with McLaughlin. This author also agrees with McLaughlin’s assessment of Rudwick’s minimizing armed self-defense was influenced “perhaps, in light of the effective use of nonviolent direct action being made in the Southern states in his own day, Rudwick sought to emphasize the moral supremacy of African Americans in the East St. Louis race riot,” see McLaughlin, 164.
of white people who ventured into black districts. At one location, according to Major K. Causer of the Fourth Company, Illinois National Guard, black homeowners, who observed a gang readying to attack their homes, fired “a fearful volley and [left] many white men . . . dead.” Survivors retrieved their dead comrades and “either buried them secretly or threw them into the Mississippi.” Some attackers clearly did not want news to spread that African Americans had organized an effective defense against white invaders, if for no other reason than white people would have a more difficult time in mounting future assaults against black communities. Black shooters, however, refrained from attacking white persons whom they knew to be friendly. One group of black gunmen, for example, spared Aluminum Ore Company staff physician Albert McQuillan and his wife from certain death when one of the gunmen recognized McQuillan as the company doctor who had been kind to him.

By late Monday afternoon, East St. Louis businessmen as well as Illinois and federal authorities concluded that the situation in the city had spiraled out of control. They expressed various concerns mostly having to do with restoring interstate commerce, resuming war production, reestablishing the legitimacy of City Hall, and protecting black workers who formed a crucial element in industries supporting federal war efforts. Assistant Attorney General of Illinois Sherman C.W. Middlekauff announced that

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77 Thomas Canavan, McQuillan, and Frank Weckermeyer in *House Transcripts*, 1424-1426, and 1691-1696, and 1785-1787.
78 K. Causer, Major, 4th Regt., July 3-12, Folders 6-7, Box 133, *Sherman Papers*.
79 McQuillan in *House Transcripts*, 1693.
lawlessness reigned in East St. Louis. According to white reporter Paul Anderson of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the “complete break-down of every [city] agency that preserve[d] order” had given people “a free and unrestricted opportunity to kill.” Hill-Thomas Lime and Cement Company secretary Robert Thomas described a police department in a state of mutiny. Kehlor Four Mills Company president Peyton Karr and other businessmen, fearing destruction of their property and a loss of black workers, contacted officials at the War Department in Washington, D.C., requesting armed federal intervention.

Local and state officials and those guardsmen and law enforcement officers, performing their duties, faced the daunting tasks of imposing law and order, disarming black and white street fighters, and protecting African Americans from mass murderers. Mayor Mollman finally convinced Governor Lowden, over Colonel Tripp’s objections, to declare martial law. Tripp, refusing to operate under martial law, handed over command late Monday afternoon to Lieutenant Colonel Clayton who deployed troops as the murderous orgy reached its height of intensity Monday evening. Clayton molded his

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83 Peyton T. Karr, President, Kehlor Flour Mills Co., East St. Louis, to Adjutant General, War Department, Washington, DC, 3 July 1917; J.R. Mathews, President, Corno Mills Co., East St. Louis, to Adjutant General, 3 July 1917, *Glasser File, ca. 1938, Internal Disturbance (geographical file), Records of the Department of Justice*, Record Group 60, Entry no. 126, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Md.
84 Anderson in *House Transcripts*, 322-323.
men into a disciplined force that dispersed the throngs, by firing shots into the air, charging with fixed bayonets, and arresting and jailing at least five hundred men and women assailants.86

The mass violence greatly subsided on Tuesday, July 3, as guardsmen regained control of the city, allowing East St. Louisans, many who had been on the streets on Monday either as observers or participants in mass anti-black violence, to tour the scenes of destruction and death. Some remarked that the charred cityscape reminded them of battle-ruined cities in war torn Europe. Others noted similarities between the places where killers had hanged black people from telephone poles or trees or incinerated the victims and lynching scenes. But even on Tuesday a few agitators, vengeful policemen, and rogue guardsmen continued their attacks, assaulting isolated groups of black people. In one outrageous incident in the city’s Bloody Island district, three police officers and six soldiers without provocation attacked John Avant and twenty-five black railroad workers as they broke for lunch at a restaurant, wounding several men, including Avant, and killing two others. One of the soldiers shot off the right arm of black bystander Mineola Magee.87 But for all practical purposes, by late Tuesday, Clayton had suppressed the riot.88

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88 “Military Authorities Are in Full Control,” ESLDJ, 3 July 1917, 1, 2, 5; “Mayor Mollman Issues Statement, ESLDJ, 8 July 1917, 1, 2.
Immediate Aftermath of the Massacre

In the aftermath of the July massacre officials and civilians assessed the effects of the mass violence. As they observed the destruction, tended to survivors, and buried the dead, they could only compare the July massacre to events that had occurred outside the North. Black, and many white people, thought such mass anti-black violence particular to the urban South, unthinkable in industrial city in the North. White invasions of urban black neighborhoods where significant numbers of African Americans had been displaced, wounded, and killed had occurred in the South, most notably in 1898 in Wilmington, North Carolina, and in 1906 in Atlanta. Observers searching for similar occurrences in the North had to reach back to the racist violence of 1908 in Springfield, Illinois, but thought that East St. Louis outdid even this mass anti-black assault. (Some scholars considered the East St. Louis massacre the worst episode of urban mass racial violence to occur in twentieth century America until the urban “race riots” of the 1960s. Recent scholarship shows that the racial violence in 1921 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, surpassed that of East St. Louis.) Assailants had terrorized at least seven thousand African Americans, many with only the clothes on their backs and small bundles in their arms, into seeking sanctuary in St. Louis.89 Nobody knew how many had fled to neighboring

89 “7,000 Blacks Flee East St. Louis as Troops Stop Riot,” New York City Call, 6 July 1917, in TINCF, 7:0014; “Military Authorities Are in Full Control,” ESLDJ, 3 July 1917, 1, 2, 5; “Several Hundred Negroes Brought Across the River,” TINCF, 6:1018; “Fear-
towns north, east, and south of East St. Louis. White attackers had wounded hundreds of African Americans, officially killing thirty-nine, but unofficially many more. Some observers said that as many as five hundred, black men, women, and children had been massacred.\textsuperscript{90} News of nine white men killed unsettled white people, especially as some reports hinted that black people in majority black neighborhoods had retaliated with firearms.\textsuperscript{91} Contradicting the official account of only nine white deaths, one black policeman told \textit{Chicago Defender} reporter J.M. Batchman that he personally had seen thirty-eight slain white people laying in one morgue.\textsuperscript{92} African Americans would have killed more white people if the police had not disarmed a number of black residents in June. But enough black townspeople did engage in armed self defense to have prevented agitators from turning East St. Louis into an all white, or sundown, town.


\textsuperscript{91} Allison in \textit{House Transcripts}, 3635-3636.

Some African Americans around the nation drew lessons about the value of armed self defense in holding down death tolls during mass assaults on black people, especially when government at all levels failed to protect them. Socialist and President of the Liberty League of Negro Americans Hubert H. Harrison, for one, urged black people to “supply themselves with rifles and fight, if necessary, to defend their property and lives.” Harrison argued that as long as white vigilantes murdered defenseless African Americans and authorities stood by indifferently, then black people must be ready to “kill rather than submit to be killed.”

Authorities and most news reports labeled the July massacre a race riot, preferring to minimize or ignore the political dimension of the event. Others described the July violence as a pogrom, a planned event that targeted a specific population with the intent of disrupting, if not destroying, a community. For instance, Superintendent of the Jewish Educational and Charitable Association of St. Louis, Oscar Leonard, for instance, called the July riot “a ‘pogrom,’ the name by which Russian massacres of Jews ha[d] become known.” Leonard quoted a Russian Jewish immigrant who said that “the Russian ‘Black Hundreds’ could take lessons in pogrom-making from the whites of East St. Louis.”

Such critics saw official involvement in the massacre and politics its chief cause. Later even some civic and business leaders openly agreed that “the source of the trouble was

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political.” They noted how local authorities had quickly apprehended leading black politicians on charges of initiating the mass racial violence and used the massacre as an excuse to remove black elected and appointed officials from various political positions. Dentist Leroy N. Bundy, physician Thomas Hunter, American Steel Foundries laborer Fayette Parker, and three others, for example, were dismissed from their seats on the St. Clair County Board of Supervisors. In addition, the board abolished the office of Negro county physician occupied by Bluitt at an annual salary of $1,100. African

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98 “Negro Members of County Board Fail to Attend,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 8 July 1917, in TINCF, 6:1021.
American journalist and activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett said that the killers had the support 
“of the civil authorities, the police and the state militia, in . . . murdering over two 
hundred Negroes and destroying three million dollars worth of property.”

In the meantime black East St. Louisans had to care for survivors, bury the dead, 
and rebuild their shattered lives. Some black townspeople concerned about future 
outbreaks of mass racial violence left the city permanently, but many remained to restore 
their communities. A local newspaper lamented the flight of “respectable” property-
owning black families. But some long-time black residents stayed. They included Afro 
American League activist and Republican politician Captain John Robinson, Democratic 
Party politician Harvey T. Bowman, sisters Lucy Mae and Fannie Turner, schoolteachers 
and descendants of Virginian slave revolt leader Nat Turner, rolling mill laborer 
Ephriam Thomas and his spouse Jennie Thomas, both founders of Mount Zion Baptist 
Church, and the community activist Hawkins, Eubanks, and De Shields families. Residents turned to the task of restoring their community. Mary Martin and her Old 
Folks’ Home Association supplied clothing and other items to those who had been

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100 “Negroes Leaving East Saint Louis,” St. Louis Argus, 20 July 1917, in TINCF; 
6:0992; “Red Cross Aid Will Be Given,” ESLDJ, 9 July 1917, 1; “St. Louis Gets 10,000 
Negroes As Riot Result,” ESLDJ, 10 July 1917, 3; 
101 “‘Cap’n’ Robinson, Most Colorful Negro Character of City,” ESLDJ, 28 February 
1926, 3-A; Bowman in “Cook Charges Negro Padded City Payroll,” ESLDJ, 24 
September 1926, 1, 10-A; Clementine R. Hamilton, The Ebony Tree ([East St. Louis: s.n., 
listed in 1912 City Directory.
rendered homeless.\textsuperscript{102} Black townspeople supplemented their meager resources with aid that came from individuals and private groups across the nation. They received immediate assistance from two Chicago-based organizations: the Negro Fellowship League and the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Ida B. Wells-Barnett led Chicagoans in successfully lobbying Governor Lowden to have Illinois relieve St. Louis of the burden of caring for refugees and provide for community and refugee aid.\textsuperscript{103}

Several hundred black people gathered in September to show that mass racial violence had not destroyed their community or dimmed the meaning of the fifty-fourth annual observance of the Emancipation Proclamation in commemoration of abolition and freedom.\textsuperscript{104} Emancipation Day ceremony attendees listened as Captain John Robinson and Fannie Jones, president and secretary, respectively, of the East St. Louis chapter of the Afro-American Protective League of Illinois, educators Martin V. Lucas and J.W. Hughes, and other black speakers linked the proclamation and African American patriotism to demands that the federal government make America safe for democracy. Black East St. Louisans expected the federal government to respond to their loyalty to the nation by bringing the leaders of the July violence to justice.\textsuperscript{105} But African Americans

\textsuperscript{104} “Negroes Will Observe Their Freedom’s Day,” \textit{East St. Louis Daily Journal}, 18 September 1917, 1, hereafter the \textit{East St. Louis Daily Journal} is cited as \textit{ESLDJ}.
\textsuperscript{105} “Negroes Celebrate Their Freedom,” \textit{ESLDJ} 23 September 1917, 7. The latter issue stated the fifty-first anniversary, but this author chose to count from the fifty-first anniversary as stated in “Negroes to Celebrate Emancipation Proclamation,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 20 September 1914, 3, section 2. Unfortunately, the speeches were not recorded.
generally lent patriotic support to the President and enlisted in military service hoping for a fulfillment of their constitutional rights by a grateful government.\textsuperscript{106} 

Some white East St. Louisans knew that the July massacre had an adverse effect on their lives. More than one hundred white housewives besieged the local state employment office demanding replacements when their black domestics and washerwomen stopped working during and immediately after the massacre. Business leaders painfully realized both their dependency upon black labor and the need to protect African American workers by maintaining an atmosphere free from racist violence.\textsuperscript{107} Corporate managers whose operations required low wage labor sought assistance from Illinois and federal agencies to entice black workers back to their jobs. Terminal Railroad Association and other local business associations cooperated with the federal National War Board to adopt measures to assure the safety of black workers, but they dropped their plans as African American laborers, oftentimes at the urging of black ministers like Reverend J.R. Tunstell, pastor of Beth-Eden Church, began returning to


\textsuperscript{107} “Complete Probe of Riot Begun,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 5 July 1917, 1, 2.
City politician-businessmen soon learned, however, that federal government war mobilization took precedence over local concerns. For the sake of profits and wartime economic production, industrialists and state and federal agencies were prepared to make the city safe for African Americans.

Nationwide, black and many white Americans, expressing shock, anger, and outrage upon learning about the July atrocities, labeled white East St. Louisans bloodthirsty and barbaric. Some had not thought such occurrences possible in a northern industrial culture. Others argued that the killings mocked notions of American democracy and citizenship rights. Black Howard University professor Kelly Miller denounced President Woodrow Wilson’s failure to condemn the massacre as he conducted a war to make the world safe for democracy. But not everyone condemned...
the violence. United States Senators Benjamin Tillman of South Carolina and James Kimble Vardaman of Mississippi, for example, praised white Northerners for taking a lesson from white Southerners in instructing black people to know their place.\textsuperscript{113}

Many Americans, protesting the lack of concern of East St. Louis political and business leaders in bringing to justice mob leaders and participants, demanded that the federal government intervene. The National Association of Colored Women’s Department for Suppression of Lynching and Mob Violence, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and other organizations pressured Congress and the White House to investigate the massacre.\textsuperscript{114} The NAACP publicized the horrors of the July massacre nationwide through its magazine, \textit{The Crisis}, held the “Silent March” demonstration in New York City to protest racial violence, and joined with black civic groups in raising funds for the relief of black refugees. The association also assisted investigators, submitting to them its findings on the causes of the July massacre.\textsuperscript{115}

\textit{Intelligence Division}, United States War Department, Record Group 165, Entry no. 65 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1440, roll 6, no. 10218-), National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.
\textsuperscript{113} 65th Cong., 1st sess., \textit{Congressional Record}, (16 July 1917), vol. 55, pt. 5, 5151, and, (16 August 1917), vol. 55, pt. 6, 6061-6067.
\textsuperscript{114} Letters from NAACP chapters between July 22 and August 5 to Senator Sherman, and Nannie H. Burroughs, National Association of Colored Women, to Lawrence Y. Sherman, July 25 and July 28, 1917, Folder 1, Box 133, \textit{Sherman Papers}.
Federal and state officials, deluged with letters from private citizens demanding that lawbreakers be brought to justice, moved to investigate the mass violence.\footnote{Chas. M. Thomas, to Lawrence Y. Sherman, January [i.e. July] 11, 1917, Folder 1, Box 133, \textit{Sherman Papers}; W.C. Thrasher to Lawrence Y. Sherman, July 14, 1917, Fred Hotes to Sherman, July 16, 1917, A.C. King, Manager, Heller and Livingston Clothing Co., to Sherman, July 17, 1917, and F.J. Klapp, Klapp’s Shoe and Hosiery House, to Sherman, July 17, 1917, Folder 6-7, Box 133, \textit{Sherman Papers}; “Compete Probe of Riot Begun,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 5 July 1917, 1, 2; “Riot Promises To Bring Reorganization,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 6 July 1917, 1; “Federal Probe, Re-Organization Urged for Police, \textit{ESLDJ}, 8 July 1917, 1, 6.} Officials quickly disproved rumors that German war saboteurs or political leftists of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) had instigated the July violence. They also debunked the story that unnamed white agitators had funded Leroy Bundy and other black leaders to build a black militia.\footnote{“Brundage Here,” and “Negroes Wait on Lowden,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 11 July 1917, 1; “Wants U.S. To Probe East St. Louis Riots,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 17 July 1917, 1; “Grand Jury Returns Indictments for 103,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 15 August 1917, 1.}

**Power Struggle for City Hall**

Politician-businessmen, especially progressive reformers among them, concluded that if African Americans had to remain in the city to perform labor shunned by white workers, then they needed to impose a rigorous segregation in order to minimize black voting strength. City officials considered punishing anti-black assailants too risky politically because of the dense networks connecting participants in the violence to political and business leaders. Instead they argued that African Americans, especially
black southern migrants, provoked white anger and retaliation and had brought the mass violence upon themselves.\footnote{\textit{Wants U.S. To Probe East St. Louis Riots}, \textit{ESLDJ}, 17 July 1917, 1; \textit{Negroes Started, but White Men Finished It}, \textit{St. Louis Globe Democrat}, 4 July 1917, in TINCF 6:0988.} County coroner C.P. Renner of Belleville, carrying the argument further, called for absolving the city of financial responsibility for the destruction of homes and businesses.\footnote{\textit{Blacks Organized}, \textit{ESLDJ}, 8 July 1917, 1.} Renner and his six man coroner’s jury, comprised mainly of real estate interests, lowered their estimates as to the amount of property damage and number of people killed.

Real estate men resumed their economic growth policies after Renner’s pronouncement signaled to industrialists and financiers that East St. Louis was again safe for capital investment.\footnote{C.P. Renner in \textit{House Transcripts}, 1256-1257, 1280. Members of the coroner’s jury included Mr. Keys, school board secretary and real estate; Joseph Keys, real estate; Theodore Smith, insurance and real estate; Charles House, hardware businessman; Alonzo Brichler, mortician; Charles Scherer, [office?] clerk and former member of the county board of supervisors; and C.R. Hisrich, building and loan association and real estate.} Thomas Canavan, Leo Scherrer, Fred Harding, Stephen D. Sexton, John Renshaw, and other members of the Real Estate Exchange of East St. Louis called upon employers to give preferential treatment to white workers in the hiring process. They took steps to attain racial peace by asking white landlords to make tenements available for white newcomers and ensure that white neighborhoods remained white.\footnote{\textit{Real Estate Exchange in Rousing Meet}, \textit{ESLDJ}, 18 July 1917, 7.} But the real estate politician-businessmen who ran City Hall knew they had to wage a political struggle against progressive reformers.
White faction leaders intensified their decades-long political battle for control of City Hall now that the nascent black political machine as a powerbroker had been removed from city politics. Broadly speaking, the political dynamics in the city before, during, and after the July mayhem paralleled, albeit on a much smaller scale, the power struggles of black and white populists against white Democratic Party leaders in the South during the late 1880s and 1890s. Similar to how southern white political factions eliminated African Americans from the democratic process, white city leaders in the East St. Louis stripped black residents of a decision making role in local government.\(^{122}\)

White businessmen, city officials, and their allies grouped around two poles, machine boss politicians at one end and a loose coalition of progressive reformers at the other. Boss politicians occupied a weaker position relative to reformers because most East St. Louisans now had come to associate the bosses with both the mass anti-black conflicts and the decades-long criminal violence.\(^{123}\) Reformers convinced many white townspeople that the July violence had resulted from years of rule by boss politicians who coddled black people, drove the city deeper into debt, and relied upon saloons and vice for city revenues.\(^{124}\) Progressives, especially those in the Chamber of Commerce of East St. Louis, blasted Mayor Mollman and his political bosses for lax law enforcement and social problems that for years had beset the city. They announced that the chamber

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\(^{122}\) On the South see Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, 431-451.


\(^{124}\) Conway, and Anderson, and Boylan, and Canavan, and Miller in *House Transcripts*, 188, and 368-372, and 630-632, and 1446-1449, and 4065-4080.
was ready “to assist the mayor in handling the reins of the government.” Chamber members gained support for their plans to reorganize municipal government from various anti-saloon individuals and organizations, including Assistant Illinois Attorney General C.W. Middlekauff, and the Women’s Christian Temperance Association. These supporters considered saloons the foundation of machine politicians’ power and denounced saloon owners and liquor companies along with county and city administrators and the police for allowing the massacre to occur.

Progressives in the Chamber of Commerce embarked upon reconstructing city government. They made the reorganization of the Board of Fire and Police Commissioners their top priority, planning to staff the board with loyalists. On July 6, chamber vice-president, attorney Maurice Joyce criticized the police for incompetence, and on the next day Reverend George Allison led more than three hundred white businessmen and professionals in demanding a reorganization of the police department. Chamber president and Director of Southern Illinois National Bank Conrad Reeb called

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127 “As the Journal Views It,” ESLDJ, 6 July 1917, 4, section two.
upon interested, reform minded white citizens to form a Committee of One Hundred to
guide the practical work of reorganizing the police.\footnote{Riot Promises To Bring Reorganization,” ESLDJ, 6 July 1917, 1, 2; “Federal Probe, Re-organization Urged for Police,” ESLDJ, 8 July 1917, 1, 6; “100-Committee Plans Lasting Organization,” ESLDJ, 9 July 1917, 1. All white men on the Committee of One Hundred referenced by Clarence Eugene Pope in House Transcripts, 2617.}

The Committee of One Hundred, formed three or four days after the July
massacre, had to improve conditions if for no other reason than to restore the confidence
of insurance and industrial firms that the city was safe for their investment.\footnote{See Bright Future for East St. Louis,” ESLDJ, 15 July 1917, 4, section four; “Committee of 100 Meet and Discuss Commission Gov’nt,” ESLDJ, 28 August 1917, 1; “E. St. Louis Closes Its Greatest Year,” ESLDJ, 30 December 1917, 1.} Reeb had consulted with lawyers Clarence Eugene Pope, Daniel McGlynn, Maurice Joyce, and a few others about selecting potential members of the committee. They agreed to select white men from a wide range of occupations and interest. Reeb initially appointed seventy-five white men representing real estate, industry, small business, and organized labor to the committee that was to work under the guidance of the Chamber of Commerce. Its first task involved finding ways to prevent future outbreaks of mass racial violence. Its second was to ferret out those responsible for beating and killing people.\footnote{Pope in House Transcripts, 2606-2607, 2610-2616.}

Progressives representing industry, civic organizations, and the local retail
business community mainly through the Chamber of Commerce and the Committee of
One Hundred called upon state and federal authorities to reconstruct the city. They
required the power of the state to diminish the influence of their opponents who held the reigns of local government. Reformers and state and federal authorities realized that their best interests lie in cooperating with one another and assigning the blame for the mass
violence onto boss politicians. The anti-political machine contingent sought the restoration of law and order. The state had spent precious time and money in suppressing two outbreaks of mayhem and wanted to break the will of entrenched anti-black elements keen on furthering a cycle of racist violence. The federal government made it clear that it was not about to tolerate further disruption of its industrial war production or another cessation of interstate commerce. Federal and state officials encouraged the support of reformers and their allies to assist in enforcing national priorities at the local level and bringing perpetrators of the July violence to justice. On July 11, forty-five individual and corporate members of the chamber received reimbursements from the Illinois General Assembly totaling $27,500 to cover expenses incurred in gathering data that state officials needed to bring mob participants to justice. The largest award recipients were Aluminum Ore Company receiving $2,500, Armour, Morris, Swift, and St. Louis National Stock Yards, each given $1,875, and Missouri Malleable Iron Company awarded $1,500. The chamber raised at least $100,000 and deposited the money in Conrad Reeb’s Southern Illinois National Bank in preparation for the campaign to reorganize the police department.

From mid-July into August, the Chamber of Commerce and the Committee of One Hundred and their allies battled with Mayor Mollman over the restructuring of the

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131 See, for example, “Further Inquiry to Be Held into East St. Louis Riots,” New York Age, [20 July?] 1918, in TINCF, 8:1027-1028.
133 Frank E. Nulsen, and Pope in House Transcripts, 1024, and 2625.
Board of Fire and Police Commissioners and other issues.\textsuperscript{134} They demanded that he dismiss his friends, real estate man Nelson Schein, Swift & Company employee and city school board president Wallace Watkins, and Heim Brewery manager William Schmidt from the board. The chamber further insisted that Mollman install its choices for new commissioners, horse dealer J.F. Reed, Southern Railway freight agent E.J. Coffey, and hardware businessman and Southern Illinois National Bank director Fred Giesing. Mollman, after consulting with Thomas Canavan and Locke Tarlton, agreed to the chamber’s choices for fire and police commissioners, but rejected the chamber’s demand to accept Watkins’s resignation.\textsuperscript{135} Mollman also refused to accept other chamber’s demands, including the one for his own resignation. He instead instructed Watkins to suspend Chief of Police Ransom Payne and Night Chief of Police Cornelius Hickey and promote two police sergeants to the chiefs’ positions.\textsuperscript{136} In August, the Ministerial Alliance of East St. Louis, a civic group comprised of leading white Protestant clergymen, exercising its moral authority and acting on the chamber’s behalf, criticized Mollman for failing to purge the city of corruption, vice, and crime and called for his resignation.\textsuperscript{137} Mollman under pressure, relented and installed the chamber’s choice,

\textsuperscript{134} Anderson in \textit{House Transcripts}, 375.
\textsuperscript{135} Pope in \textit{House Transcripts}, 2617-2619, 2624.
granitoid contractor Frank Keating, as the new Chief of Police, and agreed to wage an anti-prostitution campaign as well.  

The progressive coalition began unraveling from mid July into September as class interests split the Committee of One Hundred into labor and business factions. The committee agreed with the suggestion of one labor leader that it fund an East St. Louis United Labor Defense League, a home guard, to operate until a new police department began functioning, but disagreed as to the home guard’s duties. Businessmen in the chamber, arguing that the league should defend employers who hired strikebreakers, met with bitter objection from trade unionists on the committee. In response, the committee’s business faction, the majority of the assembly, voted to dissolve the committee. One union member noted that in dissolving the committee, businessmen had severely weakened organized labor’s forty year partnership with reformist elements in the business community.  

In the act of dissolving the committee, businessmen in effect assigned to labor primary responsibility for the mass violence because it had placed its own interests before that of the city.  

Many in the Chamber of Commerce and the Committee of One Hundred refused to take action against fellow members of either organization or friends charged with involvement in the July violence for fear of unraveling their political culture of dense and overlapping networks.  

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138 “Keating To Enforce the City Ordinances for Sunday Closing,” and “Police Backed by Uncle Sam; Begins War on Prostitutes,” ESLDJ, 19 August 1917, 1.  
139 John P. Pero, and Robert E. Johns in House Transcripts, 735-737, and 4333-4338.  
represented two friends, policemen Meehan and O’Brien, who on July 3 shot and killed two black railroad workers and wounded Mineola Magee. McGlynn welcomed the police raising funds to defray Meehan and O’Brien’s legal expenses. President of the State Bar Association of Illinois, E.C. Kramer, and other legal professionals ignored calls for the disbarment of Alexander Flannigan and other attorneys who had played a role in the violence. Corporation Counsel for the City of East St. Louis, Jerry Sullivan, typified local lawyers in his lack of interest in impeaching or disbarring St. Clair County State’s Attorney Herbert Schaumleffel who had allowed for the release of eighty-nine assailants before police had the opportunity to record their names. Maurice Ahearn retained his position as clerk of the Board of Fire and Police Commissioners until the state grand jury indicted him for ordering the police to arrest anyone taking photographs during the anti-black violence. One example particularly illustrative of the dense networks involved Ahearn and county Republicans Flannigan and Schaumleffel, all having strong ties to Mollman’s political machine headed by the Director of the East Side Levee and Sanitary District Locke Tarlton and political boss Thomas Canavan. In turn, Tarlton and Canavan controlled the district and its interests in the Southern Illinois National Bank managed by

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141 McGlynn in House Transcripts, 2986.
143 Allison in House Transcripts, 3690-3693; “Coroner Will Resume Hearing Wednesday,” ESLDJ, 10 July 1917, 1.
144 Pope in House Transcripts, 2619-2620.
Chamber of Commerce president Conrad Reeb who had called for the reorganization of the police department.\footnote{McGlynn in House Transcripts, 3067-3068, 3070-3071, 3077-3080. See chapter three herein for details on political alliances between Democrats and Republicans.}

In August, the state grand jury, investigating the July violence, took testimony from 540 black and white residents and nonresidents. Thirty-three black men, twenty-five white women, and 482 white men presented their accounts. Black witnesses giving testimony included Lyman Bluitt, druggist Mat Hayes, and Othaniel (or O’Faniel) Peoples, and others who had been arrested on charges ranging from organizing armed black resistance to murdering police officers Samuel Coppedge and Frank Wadley. Twenty-one of the black men who gave statements were laborers. The grand jury summoned white machine politicians Thomas Canavan, Locke Tarlton, Fred Mollman, and Maurice Aherns. Philip Wolf was the only prominent trade unionist called to take the stand.\footnote{“Participants in East St. Louis Race Riot,” in “The East St. Louis Riot of 1917,” reel no. 7.}

Other white testifiers included thirteen railroad workers, eleven National Stock Yards employees, ten laborers, eight policemen, seven carpenters, six clerks, six saloonkeepers, five lawyers, four meatpacking, four Aluminum Ore Company and three brewery employees, three streetcar motormen, two bartenders, two boilermakers, two drivers, two painters, two prostitutes, and two railroad switchmen.\footnote{The author used “Participants in East St. Louis Race Riot”; “Grand Jury Returns Indictments for 103,” ESLDJ, 15 August 1917, 1; and McCoy’s East St. Louis City Directory, 1916 (East St. Louis, IL: McCoy, 1916), to determine race and occupation of the summoned and the indicted. With these sources, of the 540 summoned to the grand jury, 318, for whatever reason, were not listed in the directory; 111 white and thirty-three black persons were positively identified while seventy-eight individuals had common names that made exact matches problematic.}
The state grand jury reported that the mass racial violence of July 2 had been “deliberately plotted” with encouragement or feigned indifference from city and county officials.148 Those white persons initially brought before the grand jury on accusations of involvement with the massacre did not include any leading city or county politicians or businessmen. On August 16, the grand jury indicted for inciting “strife and ill feeling”143 white persons, including eight policemen, two switchmen, a baker, blacksmith, coal dealer, stationary fireman, mechanic, saloonkeeper, timekeeper, newsboy, and a nonresident whose father was a wealthy Indiana farmer.149 In September, the grand jury indicted Mollman, Ahearn, and, according to the East St. Louis Daily Journal, “thirty-seven East St. Louisans, including many prominent business men” for their role in the July violence. But for reasons never made public, authorities dropped all charges that had been brought against these city leaders. No eminent white businessmen, managers, or politicians even faced trial or got convicted. Class bias in favor of city political and economic leaders became even more evident when the state took to trial 112 white men, fifteen black men, and five white women who were mainly working class people.150

By October, Illinois prosecutors had formulated “the doctrine that all persons, black and white, who participated in the race riots in any way [were] responsible for all

150 “Mollman and Secretary Are Indicted,” ESLDJ, 9 September 1917, 1; “Political Intriguing Responsible for My Indictment, Mollman,” ESLDJ, 11 September 1917, 1.
things that occurred in the outbreak."\textsuperscript{151} They officially obfuscated the blame for the violence, erased the boundaries between black targets and white perpetrators, and absolved the state and its agents of complicity in the mass racial violence. Officials knew that white people were reluctant to sit in judgment of accused white assailants, especially those with connections in state or federal government, fearing retribution from defendants or their friends and relatives. Prosecutors secured the cooperation of white residents by bringing to trial a greater proportion of black than white defendants. Government lawyers succeeded in selecting a jury comprised mainly of white non-residents to try the white accused.\textsuperscript{152} Defense attorneys did permit Edward Sims, an African American resident of Belleville, to sit on the jury because they thought the very light complexioned Sims would not upset white people.\textsuperscript{153}

The state clearly reinforced its argument that black people had sparked the violence by bringing to trial defendants like Noah Parden who had sought an independent political role for the black community.\textsuperscript{154} It had no difficulty winning the cooperation of local officials in arresting and indicting black men. Authorities sought to decapitate the leadership of the black community and to reinforce the impression that black laborers, not all of them recent migrants, provoked the massacre. State prosecutors charged Parden, Bundy, Pearl Abernathy, R.M.C. Green, Matt Hayes, Sam Wheat, politician-

\textsuperscript{151} "Riot Jurors Chosen from out in County," \textit{ESLDJ}, 16 October 1917, 1.
\textsuperscript{152} Anderson in \textit{House Transcripts}, 358-359; "Hard to Get Jurors to Try Two Whites," \textit{ESLDJ}, 9 October 1917, 1.
\textsuperscript{153} Riot Jurors Chosen from out in County," \textit{ESLDJ}, 16 October 1917, 1; "Riot Jury May Get Case Early To-Night," \textit{ESLDJ}, 21 November 1917, 1.
\textsuperscript{154} “State Case Against Negroes Weak,” \textit{St. Louis Argus}, 5 October 1917, 1; Rudwick, \textit{Race Riot at East St. Louis}, 111-120.
saloonkeepers “Buddy” Bell and George Kyle, and physician I.H. King with organizing a
black militia.155  Prosecutors charged Lester Fowler, Othaniel Peoples, Harry Robertson,
Bud Townsend, Herbert S. Wood; laborers Marshall Alexander, Charles Foster, William
Palmer, “Slim” Tackett; Missouri Malleable Iron Works laborer Albert Hughes; Kehlor
Flour Mills laborer Dee Smotherman; and American Steel Foundries laborers Guy
Moore, Fayette Parker, George Roberts, and Horace Thomas with the murder of
policemen Coppedge and Wadley. Later, Robertson and Wood were cleared of all
charges.156  On October 7, the state acquitted Fowler, Moore, and Tackett but convicted
the others of the murder of detective Wadley. On October 30, for reasons not made
public, Judge George Crow denied all of the convicted any appeals trials and sentenced
each to fourteen years at Southern Illinois Penitentiary in Menard.157  With this action
Judge Crow not only placated white townspeople, but also sent the message that black
people who engaged in armed self defense against white policemen and citizens had no
right to equal treatment before the law.158  Nationally famous black journalist and

155 “Complete Probe of Riot Begun,” ESLDJ, 5 July 1917, 1, 2.
156 12 Negroes on Trial for Riot Murders,” ESLDJ, 1 October 1917, 1; “Negroes Offer
Alibis for Accused Blacks,” ESLDJ, 5 October 1917. Occupations of Albert Hughes,
Guy Moore, George Roberts, Dee Smotherman, Slim Tackett, and Horace Thomas listed
in McCoy’s East St. Louis City Directory, 1916 (East St. Louis, IL: McCoy, 1916).
Occupations of Marshall Alexander, Charles Foster, and William Palmer noted in 1912
City Directory. Othaniel [O’Faniel] Peoples not listed in either city directory. Parker’s
membership on the Board of Supervisors in “2 Whites on Trial for Negro’s Murder,”
ESLDJ, 8 October 1917, 1.
157 “Jurors Finally Get First Riot Case,” ESLDJ, 7 October 1717, 1; “2 Whites on Trial
for Negro’s Murder,” 8 October 1917, 1; “Crow Gives Negroes 14 Years Each,” ESLDJ,
31 October 1917, 1.
158 On history of white people denying black people the right to self defense while
African Americans had built a tradition of armed self-defense, see, for example,
activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett succinctly described the situation, charging that state and federal officials had defined black armed self-defense as criminal and proceeded to punish black people accordingly.\(^{159}\)

Prosecutors worked desperately to bring Bundy to trial not only to punish him for allegedly provoking mass violence, but also to discredit him as a political leader.\(^{160}\) The state charged him with ordering the attack that killed white policemen Coppedge and Wadley. The state wanted Bundy in its custody because, according to Reverend Allison, as practically everyone knew city officials had an overriding political reason for apprehending Bundy before bringing him to trial. The black activist had much inside knowledge of the city’s white political machine culture and political bosses feared he was more than willing to share what he knew with state and federal investigators. As Allison explained to congressional investigators, other leading black politicians, along with Bundy, risked revealing their own involvement in dense political networks if they exposed the machine. The Reverend stressed that any of these leaders would have testified against white politicians but for the fear of machine retribution.\(^{161}\) When authorities learned in August that Bundy had left the city for his parents’ home in

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\(^{161}\) Allison in *House Transcripts*, 3761, 3761-3765; “As the Journal Views It,” *ESLDJ*, 6 July 1917, 4, section two; “Witnesses Declare Bundy Was Leader,” *ESLDJ*, 4 October 1917, 1, 5.
Cleveland, Ohio, they convinced Ohio Governor J.M. Cox to extradite him back to East St. Louis to stand trial.162

The NAACP conducted a vigorous defense of Bundy from 1917 until 1918 when its relations with him deteriorated.163 NAACP legal counsel, conducting his affairs, rose in anger when Bundy, against its advice, talked with state prosecutors about his previous dealings with boss politicians.164 In 1918, financial issues and personality differences reached a crescendo between the two parties. The dentist argued in a letter that he made public that he was not obligated to report his expenditures to the organization. Charging the NAACP with making false statements about him, Bundy declared that the association had failed him during his crisis and promised a full exposé when he settled his case.165 When Bundy refused to be held accountable for his receipt of NAACP funds, the association parted company with him.166

African Americans raising funds for Bundy’s defense independently of the NAACP immediately criticized the organization for severing its ties with the community.

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164 “Dr. Bundy Disclosing Fall Election Frauds,” *ESLDJ*, 19 November 1917, 1; “Bundy Involves Mayor in Open Confession,” *ESLDJ*, 26 November 1917, 1, 5; “Bundy Exposes Political Fraud in East St. Louis,” *St. Louis Argus*, 30 November 1917, 1; *Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, NAACP Papers*, 1:0578.
leader. The Chicago Defender stated that the NAACP blundered in not placing the “interests of the Race before personal views.” The St. Louis Argus said that the association “was not justified in dropping the interest of the people because of a personal difference as to methods in reaching the desired end.”167 The organization lost prestige with black residents who disapproved of its treatment of Bundy. The city’s NAACP chapter folded in early 1919, leaving the St. Louis branch to cover its neighbor.168

The circuit court gave Bundy a life sentence for the killing of Coppedge and Wadley. But Bundy’s private lawyers secured a review from the Illinois Supreme Court of his trial’s proceedings and found a technicality that led to a declaration of a mistrial.169 The former community leader, now a persona non grata among white townspeople, returned to Cleveland to rebuild his political life. Bundy became involved in Marcus Garvey’s mass organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which advocated a separatist black nationalism and black owned capitalist enterprises. In 1922, Bundy served as president of the Cleveland UNIA chapter, but quit the

168 The last news of the East St. Louis chapter found in the March 1919 issue of the NAACP The Branch Bulletin.
organization over a salary dispute in the late 1920s. Bundy later joined the Republican Party and was elected several times to the Cleveland city council.170

Reconstruction of City Government

Progressive reformers directly benefited in the aftermath of the July mass violence. For over several decades, they held the notion that African Americans were responsible for patronage, inefficient government, political machines, corruption, lawlessness, and vice. Progressives now seized the opportunity to establish their version of honest government by stripping the black community of its powerbroker status and ousting machine boss politicians from City Hall.171 Reformers campaigned for a commission form of municipal government as the key to achieving their objectives of greater accountability and efficiency. The commission with its citywide election scheme removed voting influence based on election wards where African Americans had concentrated their strength to vote for black candidates for city council.172 In addition,

171 Albertson in House Transcripts, 520-525
172 “Chamber Endorses Commission Form,” ESLDJ, 30 October 1917, 3; Pero in House Transcripts, 723; Andrew J. Theising, Made In USA: East St. Louis, The Rise and Fall of an Industrial River Town (St. Louis, MO: Virginia Publishing, 2003), 184. The commission plan called for electing the mayor, as commissioner of public relations, and
they charged that the machine had created the political conditions that made possible the anti-black violence of May and July.173 That reformers decided to reconstruct city government indicated that they had to address local political policy and structures that made mass racial violence possible.174 Progressives’ ballot initiative for a commission form of government won approval from voters in the election of November 1917.175

Reform-oriented business and political leaders, with wide support from white residents and private organizations, advocated housing segregation as a method to further their vision of racial harmony. Some real estate men claimed that segregation safeguarded the value of white homeowners’ property from black renters and homebuyers, stimulated the housing market, and guaranteed a prosperous future for the city.176 They stressed that because of Illinois civil rights laws white homeowners had to rely upon customary residential segregation. Real estate Exchange insisted that white owners renting out any houses abandoned by black tenants during the July massacre lease

four commissioners, each with an area of responsibility for police, streets, finance, and buildings and fire protection.


174 Similar claim made for the 1919 Chicago race riot in Tuttle, Jr., Race Riot, 64-66.


176 [Advertisement], ESLDJ, 8 July 1917, [8]; “See Bright Future for East St. Louis,” ESLDJ, 15 July 1917, 4, section two; “Factories on Way to East St. Louis,” ESLDJ, 15 July 1917, 1, section two; “Nothing Can Stop the Growth of Our City,” ESLDJ, 15 July 1917, 1, section three.
only to white tenants. They also demanded that black people residing in predominantly white neighborhoods move to black districts.\(^\text{177}\) The Central Park Improvement Association of East St. Louis and similar white residents’ organizations warned African Americans not to buy or rent homes in white areas.\(^\text{178}\) Fire insurance agents boosted the likelihood of segregated districts when they canceled coverage on property occupied by black people in primarily white or integrated neighborhoods.\(^\text{179}\) Armour & Company manager Robert Conway, for one, saw the containment of black people to segregated neighborhoods as a way to lessen the migration’s impact on white people. He viewed black districts as reservoirs of low wage black labor to tap during times of labor shortages.\(^\text{180}\) Missouri Malleable manager John Pero thought that segregation provided black people, clustered in their own wards, the opportunity to elect their own to city council. But his argument angered black listeners who saw citywide elections backed by residential segregation as a ploy to render them voiceless at City Hall.\(^\text{181}\)

Reformers gained in popularity with white residents as Mayor Mollman’s machine lost its political effectiveness. Their criticism of the Mayor’s inept and corrupt rule gained credence when the grand jury indicted him for his role in the July violence and congressional investigation revealed the extent of boss corruption, criminal activities,  

\(^{177}\) “Real Estate Exchange in Rousing Meet,” *ESLDJ*, 18 July 1917, 7.  
\(^{180}\) Conway in *House Transcripts*, 165-166, 177; “Zones for Negro Homes Proposed in East St. Louis,” *St. Louis Star*, 10 January 1918, in *TINCF*, 8:1015.  
\(^{181}\) Pero in *House Transcripts*, 722-723. Unfortunately Pero neither provided names of his African Americans conversationalists nor quoted them verbatim.
and social violence. The progressive claim that certain politician-businessmen had rendered East St. Louis insolvent resounded with townspeople when the already indebted city had to issue a bond in order to pay claims for damages resulting from the July violence. In January 1918, officials expected outstanding liabilities to climb to $1,000,000. Progressives’ objections to revenues derived mainly from licensing fees from saloons resonated more forcibly with residents when Mayor Mollman laid off city employees as the number of licensed saloons fell from 378 in mid-1917 to 251 in January 1918. Reformers savored victory when Mollman lost in the primary in 1919. Voters overwhelmingly rejected the Mayor whom they associated with rampant corruption and the mass racial violence of 1917. They also saw the new commission form of municipal government begin its first year of operation, bringing an end to the mayor-council form that had begun under Mayor John Bowman. But purists among the reformers had to wonder if newly elected commissioners Melbern Stephens as mayor and Maurice Joyce, John McLean, Richard McCarty, and Dan McGlynn were capable of achieving the progressive dream of clean, honest government because, these men, when they had presided over the city during the mayor-council years, tolerated, if not encouraged, the very problems that progressives railed against.

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182 “East St. Louis Is Sued for $700,000,” Chicago Defender, 12 January 1918, in TINCF, 8:1015.
184 Theising, Made in USA, 184, 186.
Conclusion

The East St. Louis race riot of July 1917 has been considered the first major race riot of the World War I era. It far overshadowed the smaller race riot that occurred without any reported deaths in the city in May and the ones that followed during the war in August in Houston, Texas, and in July 1918 in Philadelphia, where few individuals were killed. The riots in Houston and Philadelphia had little, if anything to do with the Great Migration itself, but much to do with East St. Louis terms of fluid race relations where African Americans refused to remain in their lowly position in the racial hierarchy.185 The next major outbreaks of World War I mass racial violence occurred after the war in 1919 in Chicago and other locales. The July event was the only race riot between Reconstruction and the 1943 race riot in Detroit during World War II to become the subject of a federal investigation. The July massacre simply riveted Americans’ attention with news reports of horrific mayhem and sadistic killings and its disruption of interstate commerce and war production. Until recent reconsiderations of other World

War I era race riots, the official death toll of thirty-nine black and nine white people made the East St. Louis July race riot the bloodiest of racial conflicts to have occurred in the first half of the twentieth century.\footnote{The death toll for the mass killing of African Americans in 1919 in Phillips County, Arkansas, and in 1921 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, ranked higher than the one for East St. Louis. For Arkansas see, for example, Nan Elizabeth Woodruff, \textit{American Congo: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Delta} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 86-103. For Tulsa see, for example, Scott Ellsworth, \textit{Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Alfred L. Brophy, \textit{Reconstructing the Dreamland: The Tulsa Riot of 1921, Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).}

The July “race riot” arose from the confluence of three historical phenomena that intersected with factors peculiar to East St. Louis. The phenomena consisted of fluid social relationships brought about by World War I, wartime production that triggered migrations of workers in search of available jobs, and African Americans’ effort to restore and extend their civil rights. Local political relations and structures provide the context for understanding the causes of the July massacre. African Americans were especially active as patronage seekers and powerbrokers in electoral politics.\footnote{“George B. Vashon,” 8:0446.}

As the immediate aftermath of the May riot made clear, black residents’ chief antagonists were not white workers and trade union leaders, but certain elements among real estate machine boss politicians and progressive reformers within business and civic organizations. Leading white citizens decided that black townspeople had to be disciplined or else driven out of town. The riot’s shock troops included white police officers and other individuals, mainly non-industrial workers, some associated with the world of crime and violence that characterized the saloon culture. But as the grand jury
reported, though the names of prominent people involved with the violence were
suppressed, city and county officials bore responsibility for planning, encouraging, and
executing the riot. One common thread uniting the two East St. Louis riots with the ones
that occurred in Houston and Philadelphia, both in 1917, and the numerous violent
outbreaks in 1919 was that local black social and economic advancement in context of
black people’s national demands for making American democracy safe for African
Americans threatened white entitlement to resources and social dominance. 188

188 W.E.B. Du Bois, “Returning Soldiers,” Crisis 13 (May 1919); Mark Robert
Schneider, “We Return Fighting”: The Civil Rights Movement in the Jazz Age (Boston:
Chapter Five. To Restore Black Political Power, 1917-1929

African Americans maintained a presence in East St. Louis after the racial massacre of July 1917, rebuilding, and then, throughout the 1920s, expanding their community institutions. They adjusted to life in a city where perpetrators of murderous violence, including people in prominent positions, had not been brought to justice or ever punished. Black residents realized that their enemies—and even their white friends—used the memory of the July violence as a cautionary lesson that African Americans had nothing to fear as long as they remained dependent upon white political factions and adhered to residential segregation.1 Black people, especially those from the South, continued to migrate to the city and obtain factory jobs in significant numbers after the First World War without facing another outbreak of mass racial violence.2 African Americans, mindful of the legacy of July 1917, pushed ahead with life but in a city more

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2 No worries of another racial conflict, see Mayor Fred H. Mollman to Adjutant General F.S. Dickson, September 5, 1918, no. 10218-60/10, Memorandum, Brigadier General Frank P. Wells, Illinois Reserve Militia to Adjutant General, Chief of Staff, Illinois, “Possible Race Riots in East St. Louis, Illinois,” September 9, 1918, no. 10218-60/11, *Correspondence of the Military Intelligence Division*, Microfilm M1440 (“Negro Subversion”) roll 4, Military Intelligence Division, War Department, RG165, Entry 65, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.
segregated after the war. They contended with white politicians who sought to control their vote and had to maneuver carefully around civic reformers who had marginalized black political influence. Like black urbanites in border region and northern cities, African Americans in East St. Louis focused on molding their segregated districts into a city within a city, developing a vibrant community culture in the process.³ Black East St. Louisans used segregation and the precinct system created by the commission form of government and modified their relations with white politician-businessmen to reassert their interests into city affairs.⁴

African Americans in East St. Louis made a dramatic political rebirth in the decade after the mass racial violence of July in part because of the continuing migration of black Southerners to the city and in part by developing new tactics as they pressed for access to City Hall. Black East St. Louisans like, for example, black Chicagoans remained involved with electoral politics after the mass racial violence of the World War I era. They never achieved what Chicagoans did during the 1920s: black representation at City Hall, the State House, and Congress. But many in black East St. Louis were recent migrants from the South where the lack of political rights stood in stark contrast to

the rights they had gained. In addition, Southern migrants constituted the peacetime waves of the Great Migration that continued until the eve of the Great Depression. Southern migrants, arriving with experience honed from struggles to restore their political rights, greatly boosted the influence of the black vote. Migrants and established residents resumed their collective status as a powerbroker in city elections, even running candidates for local office. They used the ballot box and actions such as protests to resurrect black influence in local politics and government. Like white machine politicians and their supporters, African Americans reentered electoral politics working in conjunction with major political parties marking a shift in East St. Louis away from nonpartisan governance of the prewar years to partisan politics after the First World War. But the black community in East St. Louis never returned to the pre-July 1917 level of influence that had put it on the threshold of having its own independent political machine.

Black East St. Louisans, mindful of the cautionary lesson of the July massacre, engaged in the ideological ferment that characterized African American intellectual and political thought during the postwar years. Some of this welter of ideas came with returning black World War I veterans who along with African American civilians connected the war to save the world for democracy to their own struggle to make American democracy work for them. The breadth and depth of such agitation rose as urban black enclaves expanded in population and became more diverse in terms of

\[5\] Articles appeared in 1917 and 1918 in East St. Louis newspapers reporting about black men not signing up for military service because of disruptions caused by mass racial violence of May and July 1917 or listing names of black (and white) men who were drafted. Though no sources had been found of returning black veterans in East St. Louis engaging in political actions, the author assumed that they did.
occupation and class. Those involved in various social actions sought ways to achieve independent control of their community institutions without incurring a violent response from white politician-businessmen and their allies. Most black residents gave short shrift to socialists and communists who proved incapable of delivering practical results to improve their lives.\textsuperscript{6} They acknowledged the presence of Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in the city, but had little involvement with the organization as it remained aloof from the local political culture. Many townspeople rejected the message of separatism advanced by the UNIA and similar organizations. Some worked within white dominated or interracial organizations, including labor unions, but they found that cooperation with white people often blunted black people’s collective interests in overcoming racial discrimination. Black workers made little progress, for example, when trade union leaders showed much reluctance to fight anti-black racism. In addition, unions suffered a massive decline in membership during the immediate postwar years of economic recession and strike waves that left most black working people searching for other avenues to social betterment. By the mid-1920s,

\textsuperscript{6} Federal agents concluded that socialist and communist activities involved mainly white Americans of Eastern European descent and had no influence with black East St. Louisans. “Memorandum, July 8, 1919, Director of Negro Economics to Secretary of Dept. of Labor,” Folder: “8/102-C,” Box 18, Field Reports of the Division of Negro Economics, 1918-1919, General Records, 1907-1942, Dept. of Labor, RG174, Entry 1, National Archives, College Park, Maryland; “18 Arrested in Raid on Reds Are Held by U.S. Authorities,” ESLDJ, 4 January 1920, 1, 3; “Members of Slovak Association No. 55 Surrenders,” ESLDJ, 8 January 1920, 1; “May Day Circulars Litter Down Town Sections,” ESLDJ, 2 May 1921, 1; Report by Emil A. Solanka, St. Louis, MO., “Radical Activities in the St. Louis District,” 28 February 1920, 10 April 1920, and 10 July 1920, no. OG229849, Microfilm M1085, General Investigative Records, Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Federal Bureau of Investigation, RG65, Entry 29, National Archives, College Park, Maryland; “Nine Foreigners Refused Citizen Papers; Two Were As Communists,” ESLDJ, 13 May 1921, 1.
African Americans in East St. Louis settled on a course of action that involved promoting community protests and reentering formal politics. Those committed to advancing their community’s interests had to work around black political operatives who used the patronage system solely for their own personal gain as well as white politician-businessmen, some as political machine bosses, who put their own interests above those of residents. Toward the end of the 1920s, a small group of African American activists won the allegiance of black East St. Louisans when they forged a new black organization that operated as a pressure group and a black Democratic political machine that restored to some degree the influence and powerbroker status that the black community had attained before July 1917.

Economic Reshaping of Post-WWI East St. Louis

White progressive reform businessmen emerged after the mass racial violence of July 1917 and the First World War years in control of East St. Louis. They reconstructed the city by installing a commission form of municipal government after defeating various political factions. Reformers successfully diminished—at least for several years—the political influence of boss machine politicians and blocked the Central Trades and Labor Union’s attempt to strengthen its hand in managing city affairs. They also put an end to the black community’s status as a powerbroker, segregating African Americans to specific residential enclaves. Businessmen progressives expected City Hall to be freed
from its decades-long dependency on revenues from saloon licensing fees starting in 1920 when Prohibition abolished drinking establishments. They thought the elimination of taverns also meant the eagerly awaited demise of gambling dens, dance halls, brothels, and the corruption and violence that accompanied such establishments. Progressive members of the business community anticipated governing with fiscal responsibility and managerial efficiency.

Real estate men continued directing economic development and recruiting industry to, as they liked to call East St. Louis, “The Central Industrial Center” of America. Business leaders, thinking that the new form of municipal government made the city politically stable, expected economic expansion to resume upon the end of the war.7 They directed the Chamber of Commerce to hire in 1918 nationally acclaimed urban planner Harland Bartholomew of St. Louis to develop a blueprint to transform East St. Louis into a “beautiful city, with model factories and . . . a live, strong community spirit.”8 In 1921, real estate man Nathaniel McLean and other economic growth advocates publicly acknowledged what Bartholomew had stated in his plan, namely that the railroads, especially Terminal Railroad Association, had adversely affected the local economy.9 City boosters’ problem became how to maintain the town’s reputation as

7 “East St. Louis Shows Most Remarkable Growth of Any American Municipality,” ESLDJ, 8 September 1918, section three, 1, 4; “City Approaches Expanding Period,” ESLDJ, 15 October 1919, 2.
8 “Bartholomew To Supervise City Plan Commission in Program Here,” ESLDJ, 31 December 1918, 1; Harland Bartholomew, A Comprehensive City Plan. . . 1920 ( );
9 “The Status of the Railroads,” ESLDJ, 6 April 1921, 4; “How Suggested Terminal’s Plan Affects East St. Louis, ESLDJ, 2 July 1922, 1-A, 2-A;
“the foremost industrial center of the world,” when the mainstays of the local economy, railroads and manufacturers, ceased to expand.¹⁰

Boosters noticed, as the 1920s progressed, that the city’s rate of economic growth had failed to reach pre-World War I levels, but they were unaware that the city had begun its long-term decline.¹¹ They slowly understood that the First World War I had ushered in a new economic order of mass consumerism and bureaucratic corporations tied to national and international markets vulnerable to fluctuating business cycles.¹² Those involved in real estate, housing construction, retail merchandizing, and other businesses fell upon hard times in a postwar recession as their customers, thousands of industrial workers, lost their jobs.¹³ Business owners’ outlook returned to one of optimism by mid-1922, however, when the postwar recession ended.¹⁴

Business leaders thought the city’s diversified economy provided the means to greater levels of prosperity.¹⁵ They gave little thought to abandoning generous tax breaks to industrial corporations and other pro-industry policies that over several decades had catapulted their small town into an industrial city of national importance. For

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¹⁰ “Our City’s Industrial Progress,” _ESLDJ_, 13 March 1921, 4.
example, in 1922, R. Vernon Clark of Clark Realty Company directed City Hall to give a
five year tax exemption to Missouri Car Company, an electric street car manufacturer that
planned to employ five hundred men within five years.\(^{16}\) The business community,
unconcerned about the city’s increasing debt, continued to enjoy the booming economy
that marked the rest of the 1920s.\(^{17}\)

Politician-businessmen knew that their economic growth policies had contributed
to the deepening of the city’s systemic problems and limited its ability to achieve fiscal
responsibility.\(^{18}\) City boosters, however, considered industrial output the true indicator
of prosperity.\(^{19}\) They celebrated the low per capita cost of municipal government and
continued to attract industry allowing it to avoid paying its fair share of municipal
taxes.\(^{20}\) For decades local officials had relied upon revenue sources such as bonds to

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\(^{16}\) “City Exempts Manufacturer from City Tax,” *ESLDJ*, 4 April 1922, 2.
\(^{17}\) “Prosperity in Employment Is Report Theme,” *ESLDJ*, 15 June 1923, 1-A, 6-A;
for July,” *ESLDJ*, 24 August 1924, 1-C, 2-C; “East St. Louis in Infancy as Factory
Center,” *ESLDJ*, 25 October 1925, 1-C, 2-C; “Business Leaders See City As Future Steel
Center,” *ESLDJ*, 13 December 1925, 1-D, 2-D; “City Prosperous,” *ESLDJ*, 24 January
1926, section three, 1; “East St. Louis on Threshold of Expansion,” *ESLDJ*, 7 March
1926, 1-C; “C. of C. Opens Drive for Greater City,” *ESLDJ* 21 February 1928, 1, 2,
“Come to East St. Louis,” *ESLDJ*, 3 February 1929, 4-A; “Industries Owe a Moral Debt,”
*ESLDJ*, 14 November 1929, 4.

\(^{18}\) Theising, *Made in USA*, 183-187. See also Chapter One in this study.

\(^{19}\) “Running Cost in E. St. Louis Shows Gains,” *ESLDJ*, 6 January 1928, 1, 2; “Factory
Output of Territory Is $400,000,000,” *ESLDJ*, 11 January 1928, 5.

\(^{20}\) “East St. Louis Expenses Below Other Illinois Cities,” *ESLDJ*, 27 November 1925, 1-
A, 3-A; “Per Capita Cost of Government Here Second Lowest in Nation,” *ESLDJ*, 31
October 1926, 1-C; “East St. Louis Has Favorable Rank in Governmental Cost,” *ESLDJ*,
12 November 1926, 1-A; “East St. Louis Has Low Living Cost,” *ESLDJ*, 15 January
1928, 1-C.
cover city expenses, driving the city deeper into debt. In 1926, they hoped to reallocate financial resources to furthering economic growth after city comptroller Walter Flannigen announced that the bonds which the city had procured to pay for damages resulting from the July violence had matured.

Business leaders disagreed on how to showcase East St. Louis as the industrial center with an attractive future. Wholesale produce merchant and landlord E.E. Jett and physician Conrad Vonnahane proposed enhancing East St. Louis’s reputation by changing the city’s name. Some local businessmen saw regional planning as a way to increase the rate of economic growth or at the very least manage disputes with St. Louis over issues such as the distribution of revenues collected from Free (or Municipal) and Eads bridge tolls and railroad freight fees. Leading members of the Chamber of Commerce and the Real Estate Exchange, including exchange president William H.

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22 “City under Debt Limit,” ESLDJ, 30 June 1926, 1.
23 “People Who Think City Is Suburb of St. Louis Are Wrong,” ESLDJ, 23 May 1928, 5.
24 “Launches Move To Change Name of East St. Louis,” ESLDJ, 30 November 1924, 1-C, 2-C; “Dr. Vonnahane Recites His 16 Reasons Favoring Move for Changing Name of City,” ESLDJ, 12 April 1928, 14; “Two Sides Heard on East St. Louis Change of Name, ESLDJ, 20 April 1928, 2. Vonnahane listed as Vonnahme in the 1924 and 1926 city directories.
25 “St Louisans Balk Swap of Eads and Free Bridges,” ESLDJ, 17 May 1926, 1; “Bridge Exchange Again Confronts City,” ESLDJ, 2 June 1926, 1, 2; “Miller Submits New Bridge Plan,” and “Miller’s Plan to Break Terminal R.R. Monopoly,” ESLDJ, 15 July 1926, 1, 2; “City Council Indorses St. Louis Bridge Plan,” ESLDJ, 20 July 1926, 1, 2; Organization Formed To Protect City in Bridge ‘Change Issue,” ESLDJ, 12 December 1926, 1, 2; “C of C Has No Funds to Fight RR Rate Case,” ESLDJ, 16 February 1928, 1, 2; “Terminal Held As Only Foe To Use of Bridge,” ESLDJ, 14 August 1928, 1, 2; “Railroad To Use Municipal Bridge,” ESLDJ, 20 November 1928, 1, 2; “East St. Louis Suffers from Unfair Tariff,” ESLDJ, 13 January 1929, 1-C.
Horner, advocated careful planning to solve interurban problems, direct future industrial
development, and bring prosperity to East St. Louis.26 Other members of the Real Estate
Exchange, fearful that the city might lose its competitiveness with St. Louis, opposed
regional planning. Downtown Business Men’s Association president Frank J. Klapp and
Louis Riechmann of the Retail Merchants’ Association, for example, balked at too close
a relationship with St. Louis, fearing that a proposed incorporation into a Saint Louis
Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area opened opportunities for the Missourian
metropolis to gain the lion’s share of industrial growth.27 But by the end of the 1920s,
political and business leaders simply tabled initiatives for regional planning.28

During the 1920s, civic-minded land interest politician-businessmen considered
how to improve the quality of life of city inhabitants, realizing that corporate managers
living outside of town had no interest in the lives of residents.29 Real estate men and
decided to encourage civic pride by improving residential dwellings. They bemoaned
that the high cost of building materials and labor during the war years had led to a
significant shortage and deterioration of housing stock. They decried the building trades’

26 “Local C. of C. to Decide on Industry Plan,” ESLDJ, 26 January 1927, 1; “C. of C.
Reconsiders ‘Metropolitan Area’ Stand,” ESLDJ, 7 December 1928, 1, 2.
27 “Realtors Would Exploit Industrial Advantages,” ESLDJ, 6 March 1927, 1-C, 2-C; “C.
of C. Denies Part to Enter ‘Metropolitan Area’,” ESLDJ, 11 November 1928, 2; “Trying
to Annex East St. Louis,” ESLDJ, 11 November 1928, 4-A; “B.M.A. Opposes
‘Metropolitan Area’,” ESLDJ, 25 November 1928, 1, 4; “Metropolitan Area Idea May
Jeopardize Prospects,” ESLDJ, 30 November 1928, 4-A; “Business Men Renew Fight on
Area Plan,” ESLDJ, 16 December 1928, 1-C; “St Louis Admits Its Mistakes,” ESLDJ, 29
January 1929, 6.
28 “First Necessity of Attractive City,” ESLDJ, 25 January 1921, 4; “More Vision
Needed,” ESLDJ, 29 July 1929, 4.
29 Emmett J. Scott, Negro Migration during the War (reprint 1969, New York: Arno
resistance to adjusting wages down in order to stimulate a home construction boom. The Real Estate Exchange and the construction industry worked closely to keep the construction of new houses in pace with population growth. But city building commissioner Charles E. Guenther admitted in 1929 that the supply of new houses actually continued to lag behind homebuyers’ demands.

Real estate interests took a consumerist approach to remedy the housing problem, arguing that East St. Louis had the potential to become a model city of homes attractive to both middle class and working class white families. Knowing that housing was a contested terrain, developers worried about the possibility of racial conflict as the city continued to attract both white Southerners, mainly from western Tennessee, Mississippi, Kentucky, and Georgia, and black Southerners primarily from Mississippi, Tennessee, and the Deep South. Though accommodating industry’s need for black labor, city leaders saw no need to construct housing for black people. They regarded residential segregation as a cornerstone of urban growth policy, a device to minimize racial violence and stabilize social relations in order to recruit industry.

30 “Building Costs Must Come Down,” ESLDJ, 18 September 1921, 4-A.
31 “Building in East St. Louis Keeps Pace with People,” ESLDJ, 27 September 1925, 1-D, 2-D.
32 “381 Residences Built Here in Eleven Months,” ESLDJ, 8 December 1929, 1-C.
33 “East St. Louis Fast Transforming Itself into Model City of Homes with Growing Residence Sections,” ESLDJ, 24 September 1922, 2-C.
Some black residents took initiative regarding the lack of adequate housing.\textsuperscript{35} A few black entrepreneurs built single family housing tracts, like the Kenwood subdivision. But not enough of these developments were built to satisfy black townspeople’s demand.\textsuperscript{36} Some African Americans, like the father of long-term black resident Jeanne Faulkner, had the means to construct their own homes, but most, lacking such means, continued to live in dilapidated houses.\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{The Structure of Post July 1917 Black East St. Louis}

The July massacre, as horrendous as it was, did not totally destroy black East St. Louis. Residents in predominantly black neighborhoods in the city’s South End escaped unscathed. Even the small black enclave in the North End district known as Goose Hill emerged in tact from the mayhem. Perhaps the hundreds of black laborers entering or leaving the meatpacking plants and stockyards of nearby National City during shift changes proved a more tempting target than the Goose Hill settlement. Untouched areas formed the nucleus of the post July massacre African American community. Like black urbanites elsewhere, black East St. Louisans seeing their population increasing and

\textsuperscript{35} Trotter, \textit{Black Milwaukee}, 66-71, and \textit{River Jordan}, 106-109. See also Spear, \textit{Black Chicago}.

\textsuperscript{36} “$500,000 Subdivision Being Opened Here for Negro Dwellers,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 4 November 1928, 1-C; “Negroes to Have Modern Conveniences in Kenwood Development Subdivision,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 11 November 1928, 1-C.

\textsuperscript{37} “Real Estate Deal Marks Negro Growth,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 9 September 1923, 2; Jeanne A. Faulkner, interviewed by author, 24 September 1999, East St. Louis.
becoming more diverse occupationally, more skillfully positioned their community as a base for social and political action.38

The number of African Americans living in the city on the eve of and in the years immediately following the July violence remained uncertain. The last reliable count, the 1910 federal census, enumerated 5,882 black townspeople out of a total population of 58,547 inhabitants. City boosters issued between the decennial censuses population figures, which they inflated as a ploy to attract business investments. No doubt the population of black East St. Louis dramatically increased during the wartime Great Migration. Local banker Conrad Reeb estimated the number of black residents around fifteen thousand on the eve of the massacre.39 Newspapers quoted St. Louis relief agencies’ statements that at least seven thousand African American refugees had streamed into the Missourian city, leaving observers to assume that East St. Louis’s black population had plummeted to about eight thousand individuals.40 But the July outrage did not deter new waves of black southern migrants from making East St. Louis with its still booming wartime economy a place to live and work. According to one report, the black community in 1919 had increased to an estimated eighteen thousand in a city of 100,000.41 But this figure supplied by city boosters represented not much better than a

38 On black residents facing sharpening segregation and using their communities as a base for political action see, for example, Trotter, River Jordan, 103-104, 109-111.
39 Conrad Reed [sic] in “The East St. Louis Riot of 1917,” reel no. 6 (University Publications of America, 1985), 38.
40 “7,000 Blacks Flee East St. Louis as Troops Stop Riot,” New York City Call, 6 July 1917, in Tuskegee Institute Newspaper Clipping File, 7:0014.
wild guess. That the population dropped in 1919 with cessation of war-related work and the start of a postwar recession was to be expected. The 1920 federal census listed 7,437 African Americans out of a total of 66,767 residents.\textsuperscript{42} The number of black townspeople would have been higher if the mass racial violence of 1917 had not taken place. But the legacy of the wartime migration, which the July violence did not reverse, was that the proportion of African Americans from former slave states had increased in black East St. Louis. At least fifty percent of black residents in the early 1920s had migrated principally from Mississippi, Tennessee, Missouri, Alabama, and Kentucky.\textsuperscript{43}

African American Southerners continued to find employment in the North, but had difficulties retaining industrial jobs when massive demobilization of military personnel occurred in 1919, and from 1919 to 1922 as a postwar recession gripped the nation. Significant numbers of black employees lost jobs during the economic slump in small industrial cities like East St. Louis as well as in large ones like Chicago.\textsuperscript{44} Black workers in East St. Louis generally toiled in railroading, meatpacking, iron and steel milling, and glass manufacturing, industries that contracted dramatically after a


\textsuperscript{44} Tuttle, Jr., \textit{Race Riot}, 130-132.
dizzingly rapid wartime expansion. Industrialists responded to the deepening recession by laying-off workers and cutting wages. Of the 17,435 white and black men and 1,869 white and black women employed in East St. Louis area industrial firms near the end of the war, only 7,895 white and black men and 1,106 black and white women remained on the payroll by June 1921.

But black workers did retain a presence in the urban industrial economy and after the recession increased their numbers in the workforce, securing mainly low paying unskilled factory jobs. Of the 1551 employed black East St. Louisan men in 1920, at least sixty-six percent were laborers. Apparently, African American workers held on to their jobs as employers did not sack them in large numbers as they had in the pre-war decades. African Americans constituted a crucial element in the postwar workforce.

45 Scott, *Negro Migration during the War*, 100.
47 “9,001 Employes in 52 Industries as Against 19,304 in Normal Periods,” *ESLDJ*, 23 June 1921, 1.
48 *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, 1920. All tabulations are by the author.
But employers continued to divide workers by race and sought to establish a permanent pool of low wage black laborers before immigration quotas scheduled to go into effect in 1924, drastically reduced the supply of European immigrants. By that year, of the 2,014 employed black male residents, 1,581 or seventy-eight percent classed themselves as laborers. The remaining twenty-two percent included thirty butchers, twenty porters, nineteen ironworkers, seventeen carpenters, and janitors, sixteen barbers and teamsters, fifteen chauffeurs, and eleven chippers.50


seventy-two worked as laborers. By 1924, black women had gained a firm foothold in laundering, glass manufacturing, and meatpacking.

African American women preferred industrial employment that offered higher wages and a greater sense of freedom over the more oppressive domestic labor that many wage earning black women had no choice but to accept. They abhorred not only the low wages, but also the long days, constant supervision, and vulnerability to sexual abuse from male employers that they endured in white people’s homes. Black women generally washed and ironed clients’ clothes in their own homes or at laundries, toiled as servants in white people’s houses, or worked as dishwashers, cooks, and waitresses in restaurants. A few found jobs as farm laborers on the outskirts of the city. Of the 398 wage earning black women in 1920, 147 or thirty-seven percent worked as laundresses or washerwomen for white families, and fifty-three or thirteen percent labored as servants in white homes.

The number of African American business owners and professionals remained static for several years in post-July 1917 East St. Louis, never climbing above the 120

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53 Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, all tabulations by the author.
56 Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, all tabulations are by the author; “Colored Girls Want Farm Work,” ESLDJ, 2 July 1920, 8.
listed in the 1912 city directory.\textsuperscript{57} No one knew how many entrepreneurs had left town after the July massacre destroyed their businesses or dispersed their clients. Those remaining, like Charles Nash, whose mortuary had been reduced to ashes, rebuilt their establishments and customer base.\textsuperscript{58} In 1920, ministers, physicians, schoolteachers, retailers, restaurateurs, and hairdressers were among the city’s 111 self-employed professionals and businessmen.\textsuperscript{59} The number of such individuals stood at 110 in 1924, but their ranks included grocers and drink shop owners, a euphemism for saloonkeepers during Prohibition.\textsuperscript{60} Black business owners and service providers in East St. Louis relied more than ever on an African American clientele that faced an uncertain welcome from white establishments as segregation tightened its grip.

By the early 1920s black urban dwellers across the North increasingly lived in segregated environments that white people rigorously maintained through zoning laws, ordinances, and custom. Long term black townspeople in East St. Louis like their counterparts in other border region cities had tolerated a haphazard pattern of segregation.\textsuperscript{61} Residents who had been sending their children to segregated public schools since the 1870s began to experience widespread segregation after the mass racial

\begin{footnotesize}

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    \item[57] City Directory of East St. Louis . . . 1912 (East St. Louis, IL: East St. Louis Publishing Company, 1912), all tabulations by the author.
    \item[58] Charles Nash in “In the District Court of the United States for the Eastern District of Illinois: Transcript of Testimony and Proceedings Before the Grand Jury, September 22, 1942 to and including September 29, 1942,” p. 441, Folder: “146-10-2 Sec. 22, Class no. 146-10,” Classified Subject Files, Records of the Department of Justice, Record Group 60, Entry no. 114BD, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Md.; Mrs. Frances Nash Terrell and Mrs. Claudia Nash Thomas, interviewed by author, September 24, 1999, East St. Louis, Illinois.
    \item[59] Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, all tabulations by the author.
    \item[60] 1924 City Directory, all tabulations by the author.
    \item[61] Trotter, River Jordan, 73-74, 77-78, 82.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
violence of July 1917 when white people extended the practice to include housing, theaters, and public accommodations. Black Southern migrants had lived under systematic, legalized segregation from the 1890s to the eve of the wartime Great Migration. But after arriving in the North, they had to adjust to the northern version of segregation with its zoning laws, for example, that in some ways operated as effectively as that of the South.62

African Americans nurtured an institutional culture that lessened the adverse impact of residential segregation that turned their neighborhoods into ghettos. Black townspeople utilized their resources to aid one another and newly arriving rural black Southerners adjusting to the rigors of life in an industrial city. They continued to make segregated public schools serve their children’s needs and provide employment for black teachers, administrators, and nonprofessional staff.63 Members of the Young Men’s Christian Association and the Young Women’s Christian Association redirected their respective segregated local branches to run training programs to inform black southern migrants about healthcare practices and the rhythms of factory work.64 Residents made use of their segregated institutions to celebrate themes and events in their history without

63 “Two Colored Schools Point With Pride to Good Records,” *ESLDJ*, 19 October 1924, 10; “Board Defers Move in School Redistricting Dispute in North End,” *ESLDJ*, 15 June 1928, 1; “First of New Schools,” *ESLDJ*, 1 September 1929, 1-C.
undo interference from white people. They continued, for example, to observe Emancipation Proclamation Day, a celebration of the abolition of slavery.\textsuperscript{65} Newspapers did not reveal participants’ interpretations of such events, but black celebrants’ thoughts had to include the hope of making American democracy serve African Americans.

African Americans connected black involvement in the First World War to the meaning of freedom and democracy to make the ideas raised by the Emancipation Proclamation commemorations a daily reality. For example, fifteen hundred black East St. Louisans gathered in April 1919 to celebrate the return African American army veterans from the battlefields in France. Local black educators Martin Lucas and Benjamin Bowles praised black veterans and civilians for their unwavering trust and service to the nation to be repaid by government concessions to the demand for equality.\textsuperscript{66} As the demand remained unanswered, African Americans increased their political agitation for social and economic advancement. For black East St. Louisans, their community became more than just a city within a city; it became a springboard that residents used to mobilize for various actions to reassert their interests.


\textsuperscript{66} On welcoming returning veterans see “1,500 Colored Citizens Hear Stories of War,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 6 April 1919, 10.
Actions Outside of Electoral Politics

In the few years following the July massacre that crushed the independent black political machine, African Americans gave voice to their concerns by working with black political movements, white organizations, and their own community institutions. As they strove to regain a position of influence in city politics, they continued to rely upon the support of the black community. Those advocating paths to black social and economic advancement that did not rely upon electoral politics had little competition within the black community largely because the July violence and subsequent trials of alleged black assailants had either removed from office, discredited, imprisoned, or driven from town community leaders and activists who sought to establish an independent black presence.

One way that black people tried to regain their voice after July 1917 was through participation in black political movements, primarily the multifaceted “New Negro” movement. The “New Negro” dominated intellectual thought among African Americans after the war and throughout the 1920s. The movement came into prominence as African Americans underwent complex shifts, for example, migration and urbanization, during the postwar repression that slowed their advancement toward democratic rights. It emphasized militant self-defense, racial pride and solidarity, and celebration of African American cultural expressions. New Negro advocates, however, divided over strategies
and tactics in the fight against segregation and injustice.\textsuperscript{67} Political orientation of the New Negro ethos ran the gamut from conservative organizations like the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) to the revolutionary Marxist African Blood Brotherhood. Those within the movement who called upon African Americans to look outside of, if not overthrow, the American political system became targets of federal repression.\textsuperscript{68}

Black separatist notions dominated the New Negro movement. Of all the separatist expressions, the UNIA was the most controversial and most massive in terms of adherents. The organization, founded in 1916 and led by Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican, called for black separatism and stronger ties between Africans and people of African descent in the Americas. Its strident anti-colonialism irritated Great Britain and France, both with colonial possessions in Africa and staunch allies of the United States, prompting increased federal surveillance of the organization. Garvey became a victim of

\textsuperscript{67} African American philosopher Alain Locke articulated the “New Negro” as a member of “the race,” who emerged with the demise of the Old Negro during World War I, the Great Migration, and the “Red Summer” of 1919 militantly ready to fight for full citizenship rights through political activism and economic self-help, racial solidarity and pride, and new cultural and aesthetic expressions. The New Negro manifested in many forms, for example, the Harlem Renaissance and the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Alain Locke, ed., \textit{The New Negro: An Interpretation} (New York: Macmillan, 1925); Stanley B. Norvell, William M. Tuttle, Jr., “Views of a Negro During ‘The Red Summer’ of 1919,” \textit{Journal of Negro History} 51 (July 1966): 210-211.

federal harassment and was convicted and imprisoned on charges of mail fraud, and later deported. In the late 1920s, the UNIA rapidly declined.69

The UNIA chapter in East St. Louis maintained a low profile and did not attract the mass following as did its sister chapters elsewhere, for example, New York City, the headquarters of the UNIA. The East St. Louis chapter may have recruited its members from among black southern migrants, especially those from the Mississippi Delta, who already had some familiarity with the UNIA before migrating north.70 The chapter expended its energy primarily on fundraising for the national UNIA and sponsoring lectures about potential opportunities in Africa for entrepreneurial black Americans.71 Perhaps the lackluster nature of the East St. Louis chapter had something to do with a determined anti-UNIA coalition of anti-separatist black people and local and federal government.

Anti-separatist black factions, at times with the assistance of white authorities, marginalized or suppressed separatists in East St. Louis. For example, the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, an organization of black East St. Louisian clergymen, opposed Dr. M.M. Madden, a separatist who came to town in 1920 in hopes of raising funds for a proposed independent black nation-state to straddle the Rio Grande River between Mexico and the United States. Alliance leaders Reverends A.F. Avant, C.W. Thompson, and Arthur Randall accused Madden of being an agitator and confidence man or huckster soliciting money from unsuspecting black people. In 1921,

clergymen told Madden to leave town before they had the police arrest him. Madden, heeding the warning, left town.  In another example of separatist suppression in the city, black residents did not protest in 1925 when police, for reasons not publicized, disrupted a meeting of the APA (its initials not identified in the local newspaper), a local separatist organization that reportedly planned pilgrimages to Africa, and arrested thirty-five APA members on charges of disturbing the peace. The reception given organizations like the APA and UNIA showed that separatists made little headway among African Americans in East St. Louis.

Other New Negro activists gravitated to the NAACP with its program for integration and equality. The organization operated without much harassment, except in some locations in the South where white supremacists banned NAACP chapters. After a hiatus of several years, the NAACP revived its East St. Louis chapter in 1924. The chapter reflecting the anti-Garveyism of the national NAACP, along with the National Urban League and other black organizations assisted local and federal government in suppressing the UNIA and other separatist groups.

Another way that African Americans asserted their political voice to achieve social and economic advancement was by working under the direction of or in conjunction with white organizations. Some black people in East St. Louis chose this

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72 “Work of Agitator Traced by Local Colored Ministers,” ESLDJ, 20 January 1920, 1; “Colored ‘Moses’ Tells of Scheme to Lead Fellows to Promised Land,” ESLDJ, 1 February 1920, 10; “Lecturer Would Populate Liberia,” ESLDJ, 12 May 1920, 7; “Negro Colonizer To Speak at City Hall,” ESLDJ, 1 July 1921, section two, 3. Author unable to establish if Reverent Avant was related to railroad worker John Avant who was wounded in a police attack on July 3, 1917, (see Chapter Four).

73 “Negro Meeting Raided by Cops,” ESLDJ, 16 January 1925, 1.

74 Trotter, River Jordan, 119 120.
route when African American politics was in disarray in the immediate aftermath of the July massacre. They had to work with white or white directed organizations like the War Civics Committee that seized the opportunity to impose their program of reorienting African Americans to life in a majority white city during the hiatus of independent black political action.

African American workers often with support the black community participated in the labor movement in yet another way to agitate for economic advancement outside the electoral political arena. They were aware that their increase in numbers had forced some white trade unionists to recognize the urgency to unionize black workers. Leaders of the packinghouse workers’ union in East St. Louis and Chicago, for example, had announced a nondiscrimination policy toward black laborers in hopes of organizing them. In 1919, three hundred black packinghouse, laborers pledged to unionize. In sharp contrast to black Chicagoan packinghouse workers whose interest in unions met stiff opposition from other members of their community, including clergymen, black East St. Louisan meatpacking laborers received encouragement from their community. Black East St. Louisan ministers, for example, exhorted African American packinghouse workers to “cooperate with their white working brethren” and join unions. This

display of union interest among black East St. Louisans showed that the memories of the July massacre had not caused them to reject trade unions. One black packinghouse worker favoring unionization, Philip Weightman, who had learned the butchering trade in his native Vicksburg, Mississippi, arrived in East St. Louis in 1917 after the July massacre and found work as a butcher in the hog-killing department at Armour where he thought black and white workers enjoyed some degree of camaraderie.78

Black workers’ increasing interest in trade unions, however, met up against two major factors that stalled their mass unionization: organized labor’s reluctance to attack racism within the labor movement and corporations’ determination to destroy unions. The massive strike wave of 1919 that shut down steel, meatpacking, coal mining, and other industries ended in defeat partly because of industrialist and government repression and partly because of divisions between black and white workers. The packinghouse workers’ strike in summer 1919 in Chicago, for example, represented the confluence of organized labor’s haphazard efforts in addressing racism and employers’ union busting activities that occurred around the time of the worst mass racial violence in that city’s

78 Philip Weightman interview, 7 October 1986, tape 284, Illinois Labor History Society, United Packinghouse Workers of America Interviews, 1979-1983 (SC 452), State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin. The local labor movement lost a valuable activist in 1920 when Weightman moved to Chicago. Weightman soured on unionism after the defeat of the packinghouse workers’ strike in 1921-1922 and became a company man during the 1920s. He rekindled his interest in union organizing during the Great Depression, becoming a member of the Communist Party and a union organizer for the Congress of Industrial Organizations. See also Rick Halpern, Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago’s Packinghouses, 1904-54 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).
history. The animosities that the “race riot” generated spilled over into the strike, further dividing workers, and hastening the defeat of the labor movement.\textsuperscript{79}

Central Trades and Labor Union of East St. Louis accepted discriminatory practices at the workplace, failing to condemn, for example, segregated locker rooms, lunchrooms, and restrooms at the Aluminum Ore Company and other factories.\textsuperscript{80} Labor leaders lacked interest in resolving racial disputes among workers such as the one that occurred in 1920 in neighboring Fairmont City at the Granby Mining and Milling Company where Mexican and Mexican American strikers shot at five black laborers who they claimed were strikebreakers.\textsuperscript{81} Mexican and Mexican American workers had migrated during the war and postwar years to the Midwest and other regions where industrialists wanted additional sources of low wage labor. The CTLU failed to mediate in another racial incident in 1921 when three white custodians, a man and two women, quit their positions rather than work under the supervision of a new boss, head janitor Lawrence Edward, a black man.\textsuperscript{82}

Some trade unionists pursued racist policies at the workplace as well as in the community. When CTLU raised the issue of equal pay for equal work among black and white workers, they did so not in the name of racial equality, but as a ploy to a decrease the number of black industrial workers. They thought that if managers were forced to

\textsuperscript{79} Tuttle, \textit{Race Riot}.
\textsuperscript{81} “Mexicans Being Questioned after Attempt to Beat Negro Laborers,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 9 August 1920, 1.
hire black people at the same wages they paid white employees, then managers would stop hiring and begin firing black laborers. In 1918, in a display of promoting segregation in the community, CTLU president and city commissioner of public safety, Michael J. Whalen, joined with the city parks department to install a segregated neighborhood park for black working people living in Denverside.83

The CTLU did not address racial disparities during the post-World War I recession when black laborers faced a higher rate of unemployment than white workers. In 1921, CTLU joined with United Charities and the East St. Louis Overseer of the Poor in calling upon employers to hire local white help.84 The labor affiliation did little to dispel the fear of racial discord that the July violence had engendered when they urged black migrants to avoid East St. Louis or risk attacks by jobless, presumably white, townspeople.85 In July 1924, the CTLU, through the Mayor’s Office, once again raised the issue of more migrants than jobs available. In language reminiscent to that of spring 1917, union leaders accused labor agents of enticing black Southerners to the city. CTLU claimed that the presence of unemployed black southern laborers held the potential of causing great suffering in the coming winter months. With labor’s backing, Mayor Melbern Stephens in a terse communiqué urged the East St. Louis NAACP chapter to

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83 “Labor Men Plan Purchase of Park Site for Negroes,” *ESLDJ*, 13 September 1918, 1. Whalen’s position as city commissioner listed in 1924 and 1926 city directories.
84 “Labor Union Heads Say Many Facing Want Minus Jobs,” *ESLDJ*, 16 August 1921, 4; “Figures on Unemployment Believed High,” *ESLDJ*, 9 September 1921, 1; “C. of C. Asked for Support of Jobless Plans,” *ESLDJ*, 9 October 1921, 2; “Unemployment Decreased in Last 30 Days,” *ESLDJ*, 14 October 1921, 1, 7; “Industry Here Over Fifty Per Cent Normal,” *ESLDJ*, 13 November 1921, 1, 7;
85 “Urged Jobless To Avoid City,” *ESLDJ*, 30 January 1921, 2; “County Overseer Would Give Work to People Living in East St. Louis,” *ESLDJ*, 11 May 1921, 1, 2.
announce in black southern newspapers that East St. Louis did not want migrants. The chapter at the mayor’s behest urged migrants, perhaps those without kith or kin in the city, to continue to other destinations but not before providing unemployed migrants some form of assistance.86

Labor leaders’ poor relationship with black workers became evident during the 1921-1922 packinghouse workers’ strike that occurred in Chicago, East St. Louis, Kansas City, Missouri, and other cities. The Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen union, hoping to reverse wage cuts, had entered into intense negotiations with meatpackers that lasted several months.87 In December 1921, workers went on strike after employers withdrew from arbitration. In East St. Louis, at least two thousand black and white packinghouse employees downed their tools.88 Managers H.W. Waddell of Armour and Frank A. Hunter of Swift hired black and white men and women strikebreakers. The police maintained a presence around the factories to protect strikebreakers and prevent fisticuffs between strikers and strikebreakers from disrupting industrial production. Either some white strikers or their supporters shot at black

86 “Resolution, Mayor’s Office, East St. Louis, July 14, 1924,” M.M. Stephens, Mayor, to C.J. McLinn, President, and Bessie King, Secretary, East St. Louis NAACP, July 16, 1924, East St. Louis Branch to Mayor, July 21, 1924, East St. Louis Branch to J. Weldon Johnson, July 21, 1924, Folder: East St. Louis, Box G-56, Branch Files, Group I, 1909-1939, NAACP Papers.

87 Halpern, Down on the Killing Floor, 70-71.

88 “Strike Vote on New Wage Scale Called,” ESLDJ 15 March 1921, 1, 2; “Packing House Employes Will Strike,” ESLDJ, 11 October 1921, 1; “Plant Boards Meet to Talk Wage Decrease,” ESLDJ, 10 November 1921, 1; “Over 2,000 Packer Employes Strike in Local Yards,” ESLDJ, 5 December 1921, 1, 2.
strikebreakers, killing a woman and a man.\textsuperscript{89} During the 1921-1922 strike, in contrast to 1917, the police remained disciplined, preventing further trouble from erupting, suggesting that actions of agents of the state are key in determining whether violence occurs. Employers held firm and broke the strike nationwide in February 1922 in part because trade unionists had failed to build a viable interracial strike campaign.\textsuperscript{90} With the meatpacking industry centered in Chicago, the strike collapsed there because workers in that city had not overcome the legacy of the Chicago 1919 race riot that led to the demise of the workers’ Stockyards Labor Council and a racially torn labor movement.\textsuperscript{91} In October, CTLU officials admitted that their inability to develop and maintain interracial unity proved to be the chief reason for loosing the strike.\textsuperscript{92} In the absence of viable trade unions, black workers concerned about improving their conditions had to look for other avenues for economic and social advancement.

Another way that African Americans sought to reassert their voice in city affairs was through working under the direction of or in conjunction with white led or white dominated organizations. For example, in 1918, the federal government instituted the War Civics Committee program to improve living conditions of defense industry workers

\textsuperscript{89} “Packers Hiring Men,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 6 December 1921, 1, 2; “Packers Pay Off Men on Strike,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 8 December 1921, 1, 2; “11 Held After Negro Is Shot at Stock Yards,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 14 December 1921, 1, 2; “Striker Held for Assault on Sol. Tartt.,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 16 December 1921, 10; “Bullet Fired From a Group Strikes Negro,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 4 January 1922, 1, 2; “2 Negro Women Shot in Fight in Strike Zone,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 6 January 1922, 1, 2. One cannot discount either managers or third party provocateurs intent on sparking racial violence.

\textsuperscript{90} “Strikers to Vote on Return to Work,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 25 January 1922, 1, 2; “Strikers Want Old Jobs Back,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 1 February 1922, 1, 2. For Chicago, see Halpern, \textit{Down on the Killing Floor}, 72.

\textsuperscript{91} Halpern, \textit{Down on the Killing Floor}, 72.

\textsuperscript{92} “New Attempt to Form Union in Packing Houses,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 15 October 1922, 1, 2.
and their families in selected industrial cities, including East St. Louis. Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, tasked with administering the committee, reasoned that higher worker morale translated into increased industrial productivity for the war effort. Upon the abrupt end of the war, Baker redirected the committee to integrate veterans into civilian life and peacetime employment and to render limited assistance to African Americans. The East St. Louis committee worked with J.W. Hughes and other “respectable” black citizens who served as committee liaisons to an estimated eighteen thousand black residents. The organization founded the War Camp Community Service of East St. Louis, enabling black residents to establish a club that functioned as a social work agency, employment office, and recreational facility for black veterans.

Some African American organizations reoriented black interests to fit within a white dominate framework. For example, the National Urban League, working closely with the War Civics Committee, sought to assimilate black southern migrants into an urban industrial culture, bringing to fulfillment local progressives and employers’ dream of shaping black people into responsible citizens and workers. Founded in 1910, the league emphasized the expansion of job opportunities, the improvement of living

conditions for low income African Americans, and the provision of professional social
work services to migrants. The organization cultivated cordial relations with
industrialists in order that black workers identify their interests with those of managers.96
The league’s efforts in East St. Louis represented a response not only to the July
massacre and its aftermath, but also to recent trends in industrial relations that valued
cordial relations between employees and paternalistic employers.

The National Urban League formed in 1918 a chapter in East St. Louis with the
aim of fostering a working partnership between the black community and industrialists.97
It emphasized job training, job mediation between black workers and white employers,
and healthcare, housing, and education for black residents.98 Reverend G.H. Haines,
who had arrived from California in mid-1917 to serve as pastor at St. John’s African
Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, became an enthusiastic organizer for the league.99
Black Executive Secretary Eugene Hinckle Jones visited East St. Louis in March 1918 to
seek support for the league from white businessmen willing to assist black professionals
in organizing a chapter.100 In July 1918, black and white civic members elected as
chairman a white Baptist minister and as vice-chairman a white Missouri Malleable Iron

University Press, 1974); Jesse Thomas Moore, Jr., *A Search for Equality: The National
97 William J. Harrison, *The First 75 Years, 1918-1993* (St. Louis: Urban League of
Metropolitan St. Louis, 1993), 10-11.
98 “East St. Louis Urban League,” 1, no. 2 (February 1919), 1-6, Folder: “Chicago
Commission on Race Relations, 1919-1920, Press Notices, Pamphlets, Miscellaneous,”
*Frank Orren Lowden Correspondence, 1917-1921*, RG 101.027, Illinois State Archives,
Springfield, Illinois.
99 “Negroes to Plan Their Betterment,” *ESLDJ*, 9 November 1917, 3.
100 “Urban League for St. Louis, Mo. and E. St. Louis,” *St. Louis Argus*, 22 March 1918,
1.
Company official. African Americans staffing other positions in the league chapter included J.W. Hughes as second vice-chairman, Minnie G. Scott as secretary, and St. Louisan league member George W. Buckner as executive secretary. Black women chapter members, Louise White, Maggie Freeman, Maude Haynes, social worker Mary Martin, and schoolteachers Fanny and Lucy Turner and Gertrude Creath, directed membership campaigns.

The East St. Louis Urban League ran programs that encouraged, not integration, but black accommodation to segregation. It sponsored a Women’s Department to work to ameliorate living conditions in low income neighborhoods and conduct noonday meetings for black workers where they learned the virtues of “regularity, sobriety, punctuality, and thrift.”

With assistance from the War Civics Committee, the league ran programs that encouraged, not integration, but black accommodation to segregation. It sponsored a Women’s Department to work to ameliorate living conditions in low income neighborhoods and conduct noonday meetings for black workers where they learned the virtues of “regularity, sobriety, punctuality, and thrift.”

101 “Committee Named for Urban League, ESLDJ, 4 July 1918, 8; “Urban League Branch in East St. Louis,” St. Louis Argus, 26 July 1918, 1.
102 “The East St. Louis Urban League,” St. Louis Argus, 19 March 1920, 3. African American officers included J.W. Hughes as second vice-chairman, Minnie G. Scott as secretary, and St. Louisan league member George W. Buckner as executive secretary. Louise White, Maggie Freeman, Maude Haynes, social worker Mary Martin, and schoolteachers Fanny and Lucy Turner and Gertrude Creath, directed membership campaigns. From the 1924 City Directory Lucy Turner’s husband, Charles, was listed as a laborer; Maude Haynes’s husband, William, a druggist. Creath’s occupation in Clementine Hamilton, The Ebony Tree ([privately published], East St. Louis, Ill.: Publication Committee, 1971 or 1972), 23.
aided black people by forming a food canning center for women, offering free adult night schools, and organizing other community oriented activities.104

In 1920, black East St. Louisans disbanded their Urban League chapter, transferring its work to the Urban League chapter in St. Louis. The reasons for the chapter’s demise remained unclear, but perhaps the chapter’s black members saw no possibility of striking a path independent from white progressive members who wanted to assist them, but within a segregated context.105 Some black East St. Louisans sought the league’s direct engagement in electoral politics, perhaps even an endorsement of Illinois Governor Len Small and other politicians who pledged support for black economic and social advancement.106 Perhaps these former members wanted the league more involved in politics than it wanted to be.

Some African Americans in an attempt to give voice to black concerns preferred working through their own clubs, churches, and other community-based institutions that allowed them to exercise high levels of control and independence of action. Black people in East St. Louis, like their counterparts in other cities, at times, and, depending upon the issue, acted as a community in advancing their interests. In East St. Louis some black people expressed New Negro sensibilities when they extricated themselves from

106 “Small Ticket Lauded at Meet,” ESLDJ, 23 August 1920, 4.
organizations like the War Civics Committee and the local chapter of the National Urban League that sought to make the black community responsive to various groups of white people, for example, employers.

African American townspeople greatly increased the likelihood of achieving their objectives by working through their community institutions rather than under the direction of white or biracial organizations. Residents mobilized their clubs, churches, and other establishments to gain access to goods and services otherwise denied them because of segregation. One such community group, the Colored Welfare Association, founded in 1920, did social work among less affluent black families. Reverend John DeShields, pastor of St. Paul’s Baptist Church, and former members of the disbanded East St. Louis chapter of the National Urban League, tasked the association to continue the work of the chapter.\(^\text{107}\) Matt Hayes and other African American businessmen and businesswomen formed the Gold Bank Boosters’ Club, a black equivalent of the East St. Louis Chamber of Commerce, to assist black businesses and provide charity to needy residents.\(^\text{108}\) Black residents set up facilities and conducted programs for entertainment and cultural events when the city or white organizations prohibited them from accessing those offered to white citizens. For example, some black townspeople became involved in the local black YWCA and worked with the meatpacking companies to offer recreational services for African American women packinghouse employees in the

\(^{107}\) “Small Ticket Lauded at Meet,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 23 August 1920, 4.  

Progressive Girls Club of Morris and Company, the Wohelo Club of Swift and Company, and the O.T.C. of Armour and Company. Black women employees made use of the very corporate welfare programs that large businesses had originally implemented to thwart workers’ efforts at unionizing and collective bargaining.\(^{109}\) Other black East St. Louisans, knowing that black girls and mothers had been denied city social services, created the Girls’ Reserves in 1924 and the Colored Mothers’ Craft club in 1928 that sponsored social events for children and women.\(^{110}\)

Black women continued the clubwomen tradition as key grassroots organizers and leaders in community activism. They, as black women elsewhere, used their segregated institutions to improve conditions for African Americans.\(^{111}\) Women predominated in their community’s affairs largely because social problems such as those relating to public health had a direct impact on the well-being of women and their families, and children, and by extension neighborhoods. They used their clubs and other organizations as pressure groups to obtain resources from white citizens who preferred to assist black people without integrating them into citywide institutions and services. Mary Martin and other women officers at the Colored Old Folks’ Home and Orphans’ Association turned that institution into the most important African American social work agency servicing


\(^{111}\) Trotter, \textit{River Jordan}, 117-118.
black orphans and the elderly. Martin and her colleagues consistently received funding for their work from black organizations and, more significantly, from City Hall and the Community Chest, a coordinating body for mainly white community groups.

African American women frequently organized and led campaigns to improve the health and living conditions mainly of low income black East St. Louisans. They argued that overcrowded substandard housing, improperly enforced housing codes, and lack of proper sewerage disposal exacerbated public health problems in certain districts. The women won material assistance from City Hall, the Real Estate Exchange, and other white organizations hoping to contain, if not eliminate, public health problems in black areas before they affected white residents.

Like urban black women elsewhere, those in East St. Louis pushed public healthcare to the forefront of community concerns. Black people had access to professional healthcare in a segregated ward at St. Mary’s Hospital, situated between the


116 Smith, Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired.
downtown district and the black ghetto in Denverside. But some chose to be treated at a segregated hospital that employed black healthcare providers in St. Louis. Black women led protests to demand African American control of medical services in their districts. Social worker Annette Officer and other women organized the Colored Citizens’ Community Committee of the Bond Avenue YMCA and black Parent-Teacher Association clubs to promote public healthcare. They also assisted health practitioners in distributing smallpox vaccinations to children, sometimes administering the medicine. In 1928, during an annual Health Day program, black townspeople debated the need for black control of health care services. Annette Officer’s husband, mortician William Officer, demanded that the Visiting Nurses Association replace departing black nurse Minnie Yieges with another black nurse, rather than the white nurse who had taken Yieges’s place. The assembly also called for improved care for black people at St. Mary’s Hospital.

Black protesters also mobilized the community around non-healthcare issues to extract concessions from the authorities. They had the independence to assert their

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117 “Hospital Serves, Regardless of Patient’s Creed or Color,” and “26 Nationalities Are Admitted to Hospital in Year,” ESLDJ, 19 September 1926, 3-D and 9-D.
118 Jeanne A. Faulkner.
120 “Colored Children Being Vaccinated,” ESLDJ, 11 February 1921, 2; “Large Numbers of Negroes Are Arriving Daily,” ESLDJ, 7 August 1923, 1, 2; “Children Jam into City Hall in Drovers,” ESLDJ, 26 January 1925, 1, 2; “4 New Smallpox Cases Reported,” ESLDJ, 1 February 1925, 1.
121 “Officer Speaks at Negro Health Day Affair Here,” ESLDJ, 6 February 1928, 10.
demands without offending white sensibilities as long as they pursued their activities through all-black organizations. In 1924, political activists Harvey T. Bowman, Harry Dunlap, and Robert Miller led six hundred residents to form the East St. Louis Welfare League to raise funds to cover the legal expenses of Arnold Rupert, whom they thought had been wrongfully convicted and sentenced to hang for the murder of a white man. Rupert’s supporters celebrated the success of their protests when Governor Len Small granted Rupert a reprieve.122 In the same year, fifty African American men and women revived the East St. Louis chapter of the NAACP.123 Black people solely comprised chapter membership since the goals of integration and equality appeared too radical for white individuals in the segregated city. NAACP officers and rank and filers in East St. Louis like their counterparts in Chicago mobilized around New Negro sentiment that made the association at the chapter level appear to be a “moderately ‘nationalist’ institution.”124 They utilized protests and rallies, though the NAACP had a reputation for its use of court litigation and legislative lobbying. In 1925, Reverend Farley Fisher and Bessie King, both officers of the newly created East St. Louis chapter of the NAACP,

122 “Raising $350 Fund To Save Negro Slayer,” ESLDJ, 18 May 1924, 1.
123 “Application for Charter, February 3, 1924,” “Membership Reports, Illinois, Danville-Evanston,” Box C252, Group II, NAACP Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Occupations of the first fifty members: Barbers, 2; Butchers, 1; Contractors, 1; Editors, 1; Engineers, 1; Housekeepers, 1; Housewives, 6; Insurance agents, 2; Insurance collector, 1; Janitors, 5; Laborers, 7; Ministers, 2; Physicians 1; Policemen, 3; Porters, 1; Professors (i.e. schoolteachers), 3; Proprietors, 1; Realty agents, 1; Secretaries, 1; Salesmen, 1; Shipping clerks, 1; Teachers, 2; Upholsters, 1; Undertakers, 3; YWCA Secretaries, 1.
scored a victory when it pressured City Hall to reinstate a black police officer who had been dismissed for slapping a white man who had resisted arrest.\textsuperscript{125}

Black organizations also agitated around issues such as neighborhood improvement and patronage. In 1926 and 1928, the Denverside Improvement Association, an African American neighborhood group, convinced white city councilmen to improve streets in black areas.\textsuperscript{126} In 1927, the black Home Protective Association of East St. Louis organized to obtain city jobs for black residents. Home Protective Association chairman A.S. Moore and secretary Leroy King, demanding that black patronage appointees serve the community and not themselves, informed city councilmen that City Hall must consult the association before awarding patronage to black politicos.\textsuperscript{127} In 1928, neighborhood people successfully pressured Mayor Frank Doyle to construct a fire station to be staffed solely by black firefighters.\textsuperscript{128}


\textsuperscript{127} “Negroes Seek Parley with City Council,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 21 April 1927, 12.

\textsuperscript{128} “Improvements Are Planned in Negro Sections,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 28 March 1928, 1, 12. Evidence does not show whether the fire station was not built because Mayor Doyle either failed to keep his promise or the Great Depression forced the debt ridden city to reallocate its funds.
African American residents entered electoral politics to reestablish formal political influence upon, if not black representation in, city government. They shaped themselves into a voting bloc since residential segregation had concentrated the black vote in a few precincts. They used the precinct system as a springboard to influence machine boss politicians and win patronage and political office. The precinct system depended upon committeemen and committeewomen, as election and party organizers, workers, and captains, to control their precincts for their political bosses. African American committee workers projected their political influence largely because a significant proportion of black voters had recently arrived from the South of disfranchisement eager to exercise the right to vote.

When women won the right to vote under the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, black women as well projected political strength as they entered the electoral political arena. They formed political clubs that served women and the black community generally. Their organizations, separate from the Republican and the Democratic parties, educated women in the art of political organizing and leadership, encouraged women to

130 “City’s Voting Strength To Be Near 28,000,” *ESLDJ*, 24 August 1924, 1, 3.
seek political office, and provided campaign workers for political candidates. Laura Thomas, Ida Thornton, and Pinkie Reeves organized the influential Colored Women’s Republican Club in 1922. Melissa Basfield, Pinkie Reeves, Mary Martin, and others expanded the club in 1924 to include non-East St. Louisans and renamed it the Colored Women’s Republican Club of St. Clair County. Clubwomen, including Pinkie Reeves and Pearl Chatters, educated and mobilized black voters through the Central Colored Women’s Republican Club, the Hoover-Curtis Club, and other organizations. As a result of their efforts in 1928, Democrat Eliza Hart and Republican Nevada Hamilton became the first two black East St. Louisan women to be elected precinct committee leaders.


132 “Colored Women to Organize Clubs,” ESLDJ, 27 April 1922, 2.

133 “Colored G.O.P. Women Meet,” ESLDJ, 18 September 1924, 5. The 1924 City Directory listed Melissa Basfield’s husband as a minister.

134 “Colored Women’s Club Will Meet Wednesday,” ESLDJ, 22 January 1928, 2-C; “Hoover-Curtis Club Formed by Negroes,” ESLDJ, 30 September 1928, 2-C. The 1924 City Directory listed Pearl Chatters’ husband as a laborer.

135 Unfortunately the only sources are news blurbs that do not have quotes. “Negro Woman, a Democrat, Says She Was ‘First,’” ESLDJ, 12 April 1928, 14; “Negress Nominated in Precinct over Five Opponents,” ESLDJ, 15 April 1928, 3; “Republican
A dramatic postwar upswing in black voting began when African Americans once again started running for various city, county, and state government seats. In 1920, members of the Colored Welfare Association and other black civic and political organizations encouraged African Americans to vote. In September, soft drink parlor operator Charles Henderson ran in the Republican Party primary as the only black politician among six candidates for representative to the Illinois General Assembly. Henderson lost the election. In April 1922, Republicans William Hayes, Walter Nichols, and Douglas Howard campaigned for the positions of assistant county supervisor, and mortician Charles T. Nash ran for representative to the General Assembly. None of these men, however, won their elections. In 1924, black precinct committeepersons and civic and political club members, led by Matt Hayes, mortician William E. Officer, Jr., Noah Parden, and others, mobilized to reelect Republican Governor Len Small who had appointed African Americans to state offices and had supported civil rights legislation. Governor Small, mindful of the massive black vote

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Nevada Hamilton’s occupation as rooming house owner.

136 “Small Ticket Lauded at Meeting,” ESLDJ, 23 August 1920, 4; “Colored Man Enters Race for Assembly,” ESLDJ, 4 August 1920, 1.

137 [Election results], ESLDJ, 16 September 1920, 1. The 1924 City Directory listed Henderson’s occupation as janitor.

138 “Three Tickets in Field For Tuesday Voters,” ESLDJ, 2 April 1922, 4; “Three Negroes Lose in Attack by Democrats,” ESLDJ, 5 April 1922, 1, 2; “Rapid Voting in South End Making Record,” ESLDJ, 11 April 1922, 1, 2; “Schnipper, Messick, Miller Winners,” ESLDJ, 12 April 1922, 1, 2; “Prominent Negro Politician Is Buried with Honors,” ESLDJ, 26 April 1926, 2. The 1924 City Directory listed Douglas Howard as a tailor and Walter Nichols as a laborer.

139 “Colored Speaker Addresses Big Crowd,” ESLDJ, 16 March 1924, 4-B; “Small Has Aided Colored People,” ESLDJ, 7 April 1924, 2; “City’s Voting Strength To Be Near 28,000,” ESLDJ, 24 August 1924, 1, 3.
in Chicago and the vote in East St. Louis that had aided his reelection, granted clemency to seven black East St. Louisan men who had been convicted for their role in the July violence.\textsuperscript{140} Black East St. Louisans regarded Small’s gesture as a demonstration that their vote had gained significance.

African American candidates sometimes failed to win office in the early 1920s because of anti-black agitation by white racist groups, including the Ku Klux Klan. In 1925, African Americans Matt Hayes, C. Cotton, and Thomas Huddleston, Republican candidates for county assistant supervisors, and S. Smith, Republican candidate for constable protested, when the white racist Citizens’ Welfare Committee, race-baiting them, accused black people of controlling city politics. The candidates lost the election, but they successfully pressured city officials to arrest a Citizens’ Welfare Committee member for distributing anti-black handbills.\textsuperscript{141} Black people worried more about the East St. Louis klavern of the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan that had announced its establishment within two weeks of the July massacre.\textsuperscript{142} The chapter was

\textsuperscript{140} “Dinner Given To Pardoned Negroes,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 7 November 1924, 1-A. The men were Albert Hughes, William Palmer, Fayette Parker, Othaniel Peoples, George Roberts, Dee Smotherland, and Horace Thomas.

\textsuperscript{141} “Anti-Negro Circulars Bring Election Arrest at Polls,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 7 April 1925, 1; “East St. Louis Unofficial Vote by Precincts at Yesterday’s Election,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 8 April 1925, 3. Matching the street address in the newspaper to the \textit{1924 City Directory}, the directory listed S. Smith as Cortec Smith, a laborer. The 1926 City Directory listed C. Cotton as a minister.

part of a national manifestation of the Klan that emerged in Georgia in 1915. The Klan participated in the postwar repression against immigrants, Catholics, Jews, left-wing political activists, and African Americans. The Ku Klux Klan became an influential mass movement nationwide by the mid-1920s when it reached its height of popularity. The organization, drawing its members mainly from the business and professional classes, pledged to protect white Protestant middle class native born American men and women. The Klan promoted segregation, Protestant Christianity, Prohibition, and anti-vice and ran its own, or supported pro-Klan, candidates for political office.\textsuperscript{143} The Klan in the East St. Louis district estimated in 1922 a total membership of four thousand and in 1925, at its peak of strength, nearly eight thousand.\textsuperscript{144}

Black townspeople allied with white residents who detested the Klan to defeat that organization’s candidates in municipal elections.\textsuperscript{145} They opposed the Ku Klux Klan’s attempt to capture the reigns of government as had Klan chapters elsewhere,

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\textsuperscript{144} “Says Klan Has 4,000 Members in E. St. Louis,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 20 August 1922, 2; “Kounty Klan Gets Charter from Dragon,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 16 January 1925, 1.
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\textsuperscript{145} “Primary Vote Will Be Record,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 27 February 1923, 1, 2; “City Campaign To Open at Once,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 28 February 1923, 1, 2; “Negroes Attend Wake and Hear Mayor in Talk,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 30 March 1923, 1, 2; “Veach Repudiates Klan,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 1 April 1923, 1, 2; “Clouds Fail To Check Heavy Voting,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 3 April 1923, 1, 2.
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North and South. The biracial alliance defeated Klan and pro-Klan candidates in municipal elections, hastening the demise of Klan influence in East St. Louis. But the alliance did not mean that white residents were ready to vote black politicians into office. For example, in 1926, Republican African American mortician Julius L. Marshall, on the strength of the black vote, ran second among six G.O.P. candidates for state legislative representative. Marshall would have been on his way to the state legislature but for a handful of white votes.

African Americans who sought for their community its own political machine had to contend with two oppositional groups, the first consisting of white Democratic and Republican bosses who controlled much of the black vote through loyal black operatives, and the second, from within the black community, of the bosses’ African American loyalists who placed their own personal power above the needs of black townspeople. Politician saloonkeeper William ‘Buddy’ Bell represented this coterie of pro-white machine black politicians who kept control over black residents by acting as a philanthropist for the needy and bondsman for those who ran afoul of the law. Democratic Party operatives and street inspectors Joe Chunn and Harvey T. Bowman kept the fruits of patronage to themselves rather than distribute them when the two

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147 “Ku Klux Klan Defeated in E. St. Louis Election,” *St. Louis Argus*, 10 September 1926, 1.
padded the city payroll with the names of fictitious black laborers and shunted money allocated for hiring black residents into their own pockets.¹⁴⁹

Some black Republican and Democratic Party members realized the need to take steps to free their community from the hold of white machine boss politicians. They galvanized into action in 1925 when Commissioner of Health and Public Buildings John Connors fired Robert J. Miller, an African American janitor and Democratic ward boss since 1915, for improperly issuing a city license to a white carnival proprietor.¹⁵⁰ Upon learning of the Miller incident, black Republicans mobilized against party bosses, beginning with Fred Gerold who had boasted of having the black vote in his pocket. In 1926, William E. Officer, Jr., and other black Republicans founded political clubs, including the Republican Central Organization of St. Clair County, to counteract Gerold’s power. With assistance from the Methodist Minister’s Alliance and other black groups, the Republican Central Organization worked to elect friendly white precinct candidates, increase black representation in local and state offices, and bring an end to

¹⁴⁹ “City’s Voting Strength to Be Near 28,000,” ESLDJ 24 August 1924, 1, 3. Examples of local activism see “Widely Known Negro Buried With All Pomp at Command,” ESLDJ 25 March 1924, 1, 8; “Kills Negress As Revenge for Turning Him Up,” ESLDJ, 17 April 1924, 1; “Joe Hunt To Face Trial for Murder,” ESLDJ, 18 April 1924, 1; “Negro Carnival Going Full,” ESLDJ, 28 June 1923, 1; “Wife of Negro Politician,” ESLDJ, 6 January 1925, 1; “Cook Charges Negro Padded City Payroll,” ESLDJ, 24 September 1926, 1, 10-A.

Gerold’s reign. In 1928, after a two year long battle, black Republicans scored a victory when they and their allies dethroned Gerold.151

Black Democratic activists, operating from a weaker position than their Republican colleagues, learned from the municipal election of April 1926 the trouncing they had suffered at the hands of black Republicans. They had failed to win the African American vote when black Republicans had extolled their party as a friend of black people and attacked local Democrats, connecting them to national Democratic Party’s support of the disfranchisement of black Southerners.152 Black Democratic politicians saw their bargaining position strengthen after their party bosses had been weakened in the April election.153 In 1928, black Democratic Party workers increased their party’s presence in their community by informing voters that a Ku Klux Klan member held a prominent campaign position at the city’s Republican headquarters. Black Democratic candidates used the news of Klan-Republican Party relationship as a club over black Republicans and succeeded in making inroads into the traditionally Republican black vote in the 1928 election.154

151 “Gerold Is Routed from Payroll,” ESLDJ, 15 April 1928, 1, 4.
152 “Candidates Are Invited Before Negro Club,” ESLDJ, 1 April 1926, 2; “Negroes of 60th Precinct Form Campaign Club,” ESLDJ, 5 April 1926, 3; “Candidates Are Present at Rally of G.O.P. Negroes,” ESLDJ, 6 April 1926, 2, “Democratic Move Initiated To Ban City Hall Control of Party after G.O.P. Win,” ESLDJ, 8 April 1926, 1, 2.
153 “Negro Democrats To Hear Orator,” ESLDJ, 30 August 1926, 2; “Democrats To Get Out Vote for Election,” ESLDJ, 14 September 1926, 10; “Negro G.O.P. Rally Tonight,” ESLDJ, 27 October 1926, 2; “Negroes Urged To Vote G.O.P. Ticket Nov. 2,” ESLDJ, 29 October 1926, 1, 2; “Brennan Money Fails To Sway Local Negroes,” ESLDJ, 1 November 1926, 2.
154 “Results in Vote Here for Precinct Committee Posts,” ESLDJ, 11 April 1928, 1, 2; “400 Negroes at Thompson Meet They Sponsor,” ESLDJ, 9 September 1928, 1, 3; “Republicans To Get Going Full Blast at Once,” ESLDJ, 18 September 1928, 1; “Negro
Black Democratic success in increasing the black vote for the Party between 1926 and 1928 also had much to do with the Paramount Democratic Organization, an all-black political machine organizationally independent of Democratic Party bosses. Paramount Democratic Organization (PDO) proved pivotal in tilting the dynamics of black East St. Louis’s political culture toward the Democratic Party. The organization represented an African American political machine that combined party loyalty with independent operations within the black community. Horace Adams, founder and leader of the PDO, had migrated in 1920 from Corinth, Mississippi, to East St. Louis, switched his allegiance from the Republican to the Democratic Party, and embarked upon building a black Democratic organization. Adams criticized the local Republican Party for ignoring its black constituency and failing to fulfill its promises to black partisans. Adams saw an opening, perhaps when the Democratic Party took a trouncing in 1926, to increase black political strength by working with local Democratic bosses willing to exchange patronage for black votes. Adams, a staunch advocate of racial equality, working with friends shaped the PDO into a black political machine that retained its organizational independence even as it allied with the Democratic Party to end Republican Party dominance among black voters. The PDO also expanded its terrain of operation from its

Orator Is Speaker Here for Hoover and G.O.P.,” *ESLDJ*, 18 September 1928, 12; “3,000 Attend Emancipation Day Ceremony,” *ESLDJ*, 23 September 1928, 1, 3; “G.O.P. in City and County To Work Together,” *ESLDJ*, 21 October 1928, 1, 2; “Negroes Won to G.O.P. at Night Rally,” *ESLDJ*, 25 October 1928, 1, 7; “Robinson Appeals To Negroes,” *ESLDJ*, 31 October 1928, 1, 2.
base in East St. Louis to across southern Illinois welding black people into a voting bloc in statewide elections.155

In the national election of 1928, African Americans in several northern cities, including East St. Louis, moved noticeably in the direction of the Democratic Party, laying the foundation for what became in 1936 a “farewell to the party of Lincoln” on the part of black voters.156 The PDO facilitated in this change, proving instrumental in directing the black vote toward the Democratic Party.157 The organization received an unexpected boost when the detested Republican boss Fred Gerold strode through black precincts, demanding that residents vote Republican. Black Republicans voted Democratic as a rebuke to Gerold, bringing his political career to an abrupt end in 1929.158

The PDO faced retribution from Republican bosses who saw an opportunity to disrupt the organization by ensnaring its founder Horace Adams in scandals that hinted of illegal activities. Adams, found guilty of perjury, was sentenced to a year at the federal penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kansas. Convinced that the Republicans had framed him,

155 Lee Annie Bonner, and Lillian Parks, interviewed by author, 22 September 1999, East St. Louis. Bonner and Parks are daughters of Horace Adams.
158 “G.O.P. Leaders Point Out Need for Party Reorganization Here,” ESLDJ, 8 November 1928, 1, 2; “Gerold Deserted by 75 of 77 Members of G.O.P. Committee,” ESLDJ, 4 April 1929, 1, 2.
Adams, upon early release from prison, returned to East St. Louis in 1930, determined to reduce the Republican Party to insignificance among black voters.\textsuperscript{159}

Conclusion

African Americans in East St. Louis and indeed in numerous locales where outbreaks of mass racial violence had occurred between 1917 and 1922 struggled to overcome a fear that was the legacy of murderous anti-black assaults. They responded to such repression through various manifestations of the New Negro movement, including the conservative Universal Negro Improvement Association with its separatist vision, the racial egalitarian National Association for the Advancement of Colored People with its aggressive program of integration, and the black Marxist groups with their call for militant action and armed self-defense of black people against mass anti-black attacks. African Americans formed civic and political organizations and engaged in numerous projects that reflected differences of class, gender, and other social identities within their communities. In the political realm, black Americans stressed New Negro movement ideals such as control and a degree of independence in their relationships with

\textsuperscript{159} “U.S. Indicts 4 Local Negroes in Bail Perjury,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 17 May 1929, 1, the article claimed Adams worked not an insurance and real estate agent but as an embalmer for Charles T. Nash, also one of the accused; “Bondsmen to Serve 2 Years in U.S. Prison,” \textit{ESLDJ}, 24 June 1929, 1; “Democrats Win 9 of 13 Posts in Board Election,” \textit{ESLJ}, 2 April 1930, 1, 2; “Adams Funeral Date Not Set,” \textit{ESLJ}, 19 April 1935, 2.
sympathetic organizations that were dominated or directed by white people or operated in a framework that do not solely emphasize black people’s special interests.

African Americans in East St. Louis engaged in various forms of New Negro political expressions, for example, the UNIA, NAACP, and community groups. They showed a determination after the July massacre to rebuild their organizations. Black East St. Louisans had limited options. Workers were unable to advance after the collapse of the labor movement by 1922, and residents, cut off by segregation, remained isolated from white townspeople who shared similar interests in improving community life. Black people had to use protests, political clubs, and the precinct committee system to extract concessions and patronage from city leaders. They minimized, if not rejected, white attempts directly or through loyal African American operatives to dominate or channel black actions while taking care not to provide white townspeople an excuse to renew mass anti-black social violence. Black East St. Louisans succeeded in overcoming the fear and repression brought about by the mass racial violence of July 1917 by using New Negro notions of militant independence in reasserting black interests in electoral politics and through a new black political machine, the Paramount Democratic Organization, reorienting the black community from supporting the Republican Party to the Democratic Party. As the 1920s drew to a close, black residents realized that further social and political advancement and avoidance of possible outbreaks of racial violence depended upon forming interracial coalitions with labor unions and sympathetic white townspeople.
African American politics in East St. Louis fragmented during the national crises of the Great Depression and World War II. Black townspeople during the 1920s had undergone further social differentiation and had engaged in a range of political actions. Nevertheless, they maintained a degree of unity in the face of segregation by using their community institutions and the local Republican and Democratic parties as vehicles to obtain a share of city resources. Black townspeople through adroit use of the precinct committee system broke the restraints that the commission form of municipal government had imposed upon the scope of their activities. African American Democratic operatives significantly advanced black interests in city affairs after establishing the Paramount Democratic Organization (PDO), a black political machine that maintained a high level of institutional freedom within black precincts by adhering to the objectives set by the Democratic Party. Black East St. Louisans remained, however, aware of the legacy of the massacre of July 1917 that reminded them to avoid any semblance of political independence, a restriction that, with the notable exception of Chicago, was common in black urban areas around the nation.1 But African Americans in East St. Louis, regardless of political perspective, reached an impasse in local politics;

they could be active in city affairs to improve their living conditions within the confines of segregation and white dominance.

The Great Depression, an unprecedented national, indeed international, economic catastrophe, that brought untold misery to millions of Americans paradoxically created the conditions that allowed African Americans to break the impasse in urban settings, including East St. Louis. The depression forced many Americans to look beyond the local and even the state level to the federal government for resources to end the depression. Black East St. Louisans turned to the federal government not only for their economic survival, but also to lessen the influence of local white politician-businessmen, especially those in the real estate faction, who used segregation to control the city.

Black East St. Louisans, like African Americans elsewhere, engaged in a wide range of social and political actions around issues such as employment and housing, in an effort to mitigate the harshness of segregation. African Americans more than ever before connected their protests to notions of equality. They formed alliances with regional and national organizations that offered at least the possibility of restoring economic prosperity. Some worked with the political left. Workers allied with unions, particularly those in the Congress of Industrial Organizations, to establish new integrated locals. Many participated in federal New Deal programs. Whatever the outcome of their various actions, black residents realized that by allying with forces outside the city, like the Democratic New Deal coalition and national labor unions, they sometimes succeeded in winning concessions they had been unable to secure from local officials.
Black East St. Louisans, however, were not alone among African Americans in knowing that their alliances with white dominated institutions and the federal government brought mixed results. Black people across the country, while expressing gratitude that the New Deal had saved them from total deprivation, simultaneously protested against the same New Deal programs that reinforced patterns of segregation and discrimination. Black workers found inclusion in labor unions, but they still confronted workplace segregation and discrimination and organized labor’s general reluctance to challenge racism aggressively.

African Americans, backed by white allies, entered the Second World War years determined in the name of equality and democracy to dismantle the white dominated racial hierarchy. They connected grassroots struggles against segregation and discrimination to the national agenda of protecting democracy worldwide from fascism. But black East St. Louisans’ battles to circumvent segregation or efforts to mount direct challenges to local white power during World War II were not met with mass racial violence that African Americans experienced in other cities, most notably Detroit in 1943. Like other industrial cities East St. Louis absorbed the crush of black and white migrants, many coming from the South. Black civilians and military personnel chafed at the injustices they experienced in East St. Louis. The city’s black workers tenaciously

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3 Black military men and women served in segregated units at Scott Field, located twenty miles east of East St. Louis. See, for example, “First Negro Squadron at Scott Field,” *ESLJ*, 11 August 1942, 5; “Negroes Training at Scott Field,” *ESLJ*, 25 January 1943, 3; “Negro WACs Assist in Recruiting Drive,” *ESLJ*, 12 November 1944, 3. Though the author assumed otherwise, the evidence is silent about black military personnel fighting
pressed forth with anti-racist grievances. By all indications people expected East St. Louis to explode in racial violence, but that did not happen.

East St. Louis, well known for one of the most horrific racial massacres during the World War I era, did not descend into violence largely because of changes, ongoing since the July massacre, in the outlook of black and white leaders in political, business, labor, and civic organizations. They knew that their city totally depended upon outside entities like the federal government that were intolerant of mass racial violence. City officials realized that their town would not survive as a functioning municipality if racial conflict occurred. Black and white citizens hammered out an accord, an unintended blueprint for East St. Louis as had other cities in similar circumstances, for example, border region cities along the Ohio River, which maintained white domination and allowed white-guided black participation in city management. Some African American citizens benefited from this accord, but most, knowing that the bargain did not bring about equality, proceeded to build what was to become known as the postwar civil rights movement.


Millions of wage earners and their families sought ways to survive after losing their jobs as industrial production plummeted during the Great Depression. Many workers whose livelihoods depended upon railroads and industry endured economic hard times. As the Great Depression worsened in 1931, working people in Illinois turned to state agencies for economic assistance after city, county, and private agencies had depleted their resources for the unemployed and the destitute. Laid-off workers increasingly relied upon the Illinois Relief Commission’s work programs for the unemployed. At least 700,000 Illinoisans on state food assistance in September 1932 hoping to avoid starvation looked to the General Assembly for new sources of relief.

African Americans, some having lived under depression like conditions before the Great Depression, saw their already limited chances of earning a livelihood under systemic discrimination and segregation made even bleaker by the economic calamity.

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5 Unfortunately, research through several subgroups of the Works Progress Administration papers at the National Archives, did not yield letters by black and white East St. Louisans describing their hardships during the Great Depression.

6 Duncan C. Smith, Aluminum Ore Company, to Colonel Horatio B. Hackett, Public Works Administration, Housing Division, December 6, 1934, Folder: “Project File H-4800,” boxes 311-312, _Project Files (1933-1937), Records of the Public Housing Administration_, RG 196, Entry 2, National Archives at College Park, Md.

7 “City Must Raise About $18,000 for Relief of Paupers,” _East St. Louis Journal_, 12 July 1931, 1, 2, hereafter cited as _ESLJ_; “$20,000,000 Bond Issue Drive on as Part of Emergency Relief Program,” _ESLJ_, June 23, 1932, 1, 10; “1,000 to Work for ‘Dole’ to Help Beautify Parks,” _ESLJ_, September 1, 1932, 1; “Governor Fears Fate of 700,000 Illinoisans,” _ESLJ_, 6 September 1932, 1.
African Americans, who formed sixteen percent of East St. Louis’s population in 1930, suffered disproportionately more than did white residents.\textsuperscript{8} Black city dwellers saw job opportunities diminish in the face of worsening employment discrimination that privileged white wage earners. Their efforts to secure jobs dwindled as African American Southerners, escaping from rural areas in hopes of finding employment, continued to move into the city. In 1932, eleven thousand out of sixteen thousand black residents, comprising twenty percent of the city’s population, sought state relief.\textsuperscript{9} A high school graduate, black East St. Louisan Mattie Malone tersely described the depression as an extremely difficult, precarious time when her family’s ability to survive depended solely upon public relief.\textsuperscript{10} An African American teenager, William Nash, who became a packinghouse worker upon leaving high school, recalled that black workers had greater difficulty finding jobs than did white residents, even in the iron, steel, and meatpacking industries that had traditionally hired African Americans.\textsuperscript{11} The jobless continued to expand the city’s relief rolls in 1933 even though the federal government, under the newly installed administration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, provided massive economic assistance.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{8} Total population was 74,347. United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, \textit{Fifteenth Census of the United States} (Washington, DC: GPO, 1930).

\textsuperscript{9} “7,909 St. Clair County Families Receiving Aid from State Fund,” \textit{ESLJ}, October 2, 1932, 4.

\textsuperscript{10} Mattie Malone, interviewed by author, September 21, 1999, East St. Louis.


\textsuperscript{12} Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, \textit{Annual Report, 1933-1934; Horner Papers}; Illinois State Historical Society Library, Springfield, Illinois; Elizabeth A. Hughes,
As the Great Depression deepened, people across the nation tapped into new sources of relief when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt committed the federal government to an active role in solving the economic crisis. Working people, preferring jobs to the dole, welcomed Roosevelt’s New Deal programs. In 1933, a few thousand unemployed black and white people of East St. Louis and St. Clair County obtained public works jobs sponsored by the Civil Works Administration (CWA), one of the first of Roosevelt’s New Deal relief agencies. In November, 2,205 men gained full-time employment with the CWA in the city and county, performing mostly road and levee maintenance. In 1934, jobless black men and women formed at least thirty percent of the area’s public welfare cases. The anticipated number of unemployed workers seeking CWA jobs increased to four thousand even after eligibility requirements restricted applicants to those who qualified as “relief cases” based upon the needs of their families. In April, the number of city and county men on work relief increased to seven thousand persons who supported their families on the average CWA wage of $23 a month. In January 1935, nearly thirty-five percent of the city’s population required

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14 “Army of 2,205 Starts Work Here as Nation Opens Big Job Drive,” *ESLJ*, November 20, 1933, 1; “Jobs for 5,585 Are Provided in New CWA Quota,” *ESLJ*, December 10, 1933, 1; “Only Actually Needy to Be Given Jobs on New Work Relief Projects,” *ESLJ*, March 14, 1934, 1.

15 “Work Relief Plan Will Furnish Jobs for 7,000 Men from List of Needy,” *ESLJ*, April 8, 1934, 1.
economic assistance. The unemployed rushed to secure positions in work projects administered directly by the Works Projects Administration (WPA), established in 1935, to continue the work of the CWA.

WPA proved to be a beacon of hope for African Americans on the edge of starvation and desperate for work. Black men formed part of the initial seven thousand-man workforce in the local WPA district who obtained jobs, digging ditches, grading and paving streets, improving sidewalks and parks, and maintaining levees and drainage canals. In 1936, eight hundred black women sewing comforters and remodeling old clothes constituted the East St. Louis WPA project as the nation’s second largest program for black women after the one in New Orleans that involved one thousand black women workers. The WPA remained a major source of relief for black people in the East St. Louis district. In 1936, for example, 852 out of a total of 1,992 families on public relief were African American. The number of unemployed men and women who found work through the WPA in the East St. Louis district increased to a new high in 1938, the year known as the Roosevelt recession, with 11,575 persons laboring in a variety of projects in

17 “235 Families Are Rejected,” ESLJ, 9 October 1936, 1.
19 “City Asking Five WPA Projects To Furnish Jobs for 7,000 Men,” ESLJ, 6 September 1935, 1; “Sewing Project To Employ 696,” ESLJ, 7 January 1936, 1; “City Has Second Largest Project for Negro Women,” ESLJ, 9 February 1936, 3. The East St. Louis WPA included black people from Brooklyn and Fireworks Station, an unincorporated suburban village of East St. Louis.
20 “235 Families Are Rejected,” ESLJ, 9 October 1936, 1.
the WPA district, which encompassed the counties of St. Clair, Madison, and Macoupin.  

The nation’s youth also had been hit hard by the depression, and many feared that their future careers had been jeopardized by the economic catastrophe. Tens of thousands of American youth, especially young black people, found in the federal National Youth Administration (NYA), established in 1935, their only opportunity for obtaining jobs. NYA trained women and men in “traditional” gender jobs, such as needlework and sewing for the women, and woodcarving and handicrafts for the men. Black teenagers, however, experienced a higher rate of unemployment than their white counterparts largely because of discrimination and segregation. At times more black youth than white were enrolled in NYA programs. For example, in August 1937, 150 of the 294 NYA workers were African Americans. In 1941, in anticipation of America’s entry into the Second World War, the NYA expanded its program for black high school students to include more skills training, for example, power sewing for women and cabinet making, sheet metal work, machine shop practice, welding, and forging for men.


The New Deal gave millions a chance to survive and retain a sense of dignity. Black resident Mattie Malone said that many families expressed gratitude after receiving federal relief in the form of jobs and welfare assistance.\textsuperscript{25} Black East St. Louisan, Lee Annie (Adams) Bonner, daughter of Horace Adams, the founder and leader of the mass-based Paramount Democratic Organization, remembered how families saw New Deal programs as offering hope for ordinary working people, restoring their faith in the possibility of making an honest living.\textsuperscript{26} WPA bricklayer Joe Ragland, for example, expressed renewed dignity in his work in 1937 when he set a new one day record, laying nearly 3,500 bricks an hour as he repaved a section of a street nine feet wide and seven hundred feet long.\textsuperscript{27}

African Americans, however, disapproved of the New Deal’s reinforcing patterns of discrimination and segregation, often organizing protests against local administrators. In 1936, black people criticized the WPA and NYA for maintaining segregated programs such as the one that employed 565 black and 131 white women, working on the same sewing projects, but in separate facilities.\textsuperscript{28} In 1938, black WPA workers protested when a local white WPA official proposed that they take private sector jobs that paid less than WPA jobs, considering the implementation of such a proposal the end of African

\textsuperscript{25} Mattie Malone, interviewed by author, 21 September 1999, East St. Louis.  
\textsuperscript{26} Lee Annie Bonner, interviewed by author, 22 September 1999, East St. Louis.  
\textsuperscript{27} “Negro WPA Worker sets 27,778 Bricks in a Day for Record,” \textit{ESLJ}, 14 March 1937, 1.  
American economic advancement. In 1939, black WPA laborers demanded that an administrator protect their jobs from white politicians who saw a chance to place their friends in WPA positions. Black youth protested segregation within the NYA. From 1937 to 1941, they also made charges that their white counterparts received better training and job placement opportunities. They pressured the agency to convince employers to hire them for skilled industrial and clerical work and not the unskilled jobs that were offered to them. Black youth continued protesting against NYA segregated facilities in 1942.

29 “WPA Director Would Abolish Relief Set-up,” ESLJ, 20 January 1938, 1, 2.
Upsurge in Community Protests

African Americans knew that they had to mobilize community protests against seemingly intractable issues, including unemployment, substandard housing, inadequate education, and discriminatory healthcare. They agitated for a variety of reasons, mostly for the chance to make life better in their communities, but sometimes to build political awareness and hone leadership skills to challenge segregation. Black people involved in community protests in East St. Louis rarely found common ground with white residents either as individuals or members of sympathetic organizations. Those who used community institutions as a vehicle for change contemplated black independence from white control.

Community actions included “Don’t buy where you can’t work or shop in dignity” campaigns to force small business owners, particularly white entrepreneurs who operated within black communities, to hire unemployed African Americans. In September 1932, black East St. Louisans launched a boycott similar to those conducted in Baltimore, Harlem, and other cities. One of the actions they engaged in involved picketing white storekeeper Harry Soffer who had beaten a black man who allegedly had stolen green butter beans. Soffer ignored the pressure to hire black people.34 Such

34 “Negro Boycott Closes Store,” ESLJ, 19 September 1932, 2; “Grocer Says He Used Fists,” ESLJ, 20 September 1932, 10. On “Don’t Buy” campaigns elsewhere, see, for example, Andor Skotnes, “‘Buy Where You Can Work’: Boycotting for Jobs in African-
campaigns continued sporadically. For example, in 1940, social worker Annette Officer and other NAACP members led black residents in a “Don’t buy where you can’t work” boycott, picketing white storeowners who refused to hire black people. Weldon Phillips, founder and leader of the Young Men’s Civic Club, joined the NAACP in demanding that white store owners hire black youth, boycotting one establishment that rejected protesters’ demands. Activists did succeed in getting employers to hire qualified black job seekers in five white owned stores. But according to long-term black resident Olga Wayne, most “don’t buy” boycotts failed.

Many African Americans in the politically charged 1930s connected their protests to improve life in black neighborhoods to notions of making American democracy work for black people. In 1933 some black Illinoisan women founded the Original Illinois Housewives Association, a non-profit entity headquartered in Chicago, to equip black housewives of all social classes with better household skills to “serve as power for an increased economic independence that makes for better living.” They declared their faith “in the democratic form of society” and regarded “equality of opportunity as the sacred guarantee of the democratic society to each and all of its members.” Pinkie B. Reeves, state central committeewoman for black Republicans in the Twenty-second

37 “The Original Illinois Housewives Association,” Box 038, Negro in Illinois Papers, Illinois Writers’ Project, Chicago Public Library, Chicago, Illinois. Statewide, the association had a peak membership of 50,000 in 1942.
Congressional District, in 1934, led a group of women in establishing an East St. Louis chapter of the Original Illinois Housewives. The association pursued primarily social work and philanthropic activities, sponsoring, for example, lectures by representatives of the YWCA, the Red Cross, and other groups. The Original Illinois Housewives Association effected little social change in the economic arena as the Great Depression forced many members into unemployment but the organization provided the means for women to become political activists and community leaders.

East St. Louisan black women allied with black healthcare professionals and others to reverse the rapid decline in the quality of healthcare as the depression depleted city funds for public health programs. Women activists made “their struggle for improved health conditions . . . part of a political agenda for black rights, especially the right to equal access to government resources.” They related health concerns to issues of housing, education, and employment and worked to secure moral, and ideally

38 Using city directories and the list of East St. Louis chapter officers for 1940 and 1942, the author identified the occupations of either the women or their husbands: Pinkie (“Pinksey”) Reeves’s husband a laborer; president Maude Logan, husband an Illinois Central Railroad employee; assistant secretary Lillie Hunter, husband a packinghouse laborer; treasurer Carrie Brown, husband a carpenter; parliamentarian Irene Yancey, husband a factory fireman; member committee chair Katie McGinis, husband a porter; adult education committee chair Rose Hoard, husband a public school attendance officer; youth and environment committee chair Luaco Gladden, husband a teacher; community welfare committee chair Cora Hughes, husband Lincoln High School principal; courtesy committee chair Iota (J.R.) Connard [i.e. Conard], husband school janitor; music committee chair Altha Caldwell, a teacher; finance committee chair Lavader (Joseph A.) Marley, a teacher; national and international relations committee chair Maggie Woods, husband grocery and meats storekeeper.

39 “The Original Illinois Housewives Association.”


financial, commitments from local, state, and federal officials. Concerned black women assisted the East St. Louis health department to contain outbreaks of smallpox and meningitis that closed schools and that threatened white residents. They concentrated on lowering mortality and morbidity rates in those black neighborhoods where a CWA survey revealed a high correlation between contagious diseases and substandard, unsanitary housing. In 1934, Elizabeth T. Nash, spouse of mortician Charles Nash, and others in the Colored Women’s Welfare League started a free medical examination campaign for black children. Leaguers sponsored their first “Better Babies” conference, similar to those held in other locales across the nation, to promote improved healthcare for infants and young children. In addition, the Colored Women’s Welfare League along with the Visiting Nurse Association administered on-going vaccination programs for black children. In 1935, African Americans in the Visiting Nurse Association organized weekly clinics dispensing nutritional advice to black mothers and children. In September 1936, women activists convinced the school board to appoint an African American physician to serve black schools. Mary Martin and her Old Folks Home Association began in 1937 providing educational programs on health,

42 See generally Smith, *Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired*.
44 “Death Rate in Slum District Higher Than in Better Areas,” *ESLJ*, 14 March 1934, 1.
45 “Negro Health Drive Opened,” *ESLJ*, 14 August 1934, 2.
48 “Negro Doctor To Be Named by School Board,” *ESLJ*, 4 September 1936, 3.
communicable diseases, and sanitation to parents and children.⁴⁹ In 1938, educator Maude Haynes and dietitian Annie Mae DeShields and others from various black civic and church groups, with the assistance of the WPA, offered free health clinics for children.⁵⁰

While women worked to bring healthcare to neighborhoods, local African American physicians, all men, pushed to improve access for black residents to medical services in white hospitals. Doctors knew of the indignities that expectant black mothers faced in having to travel to St. Louis for prenatal and postnatal care when the two East St. Louis hospitals, St. Mary’s and Christian Welfare, refused to serve black maternity patients.⁵¹ In 1937, black physician Robert H. Beverly, a Governor Horner appointee for St. Clair County, reported that black residents of St. Clair County suffered from a “prevalence of tuberculosis . . . [and a] lack of hospitalization and even adequate medical care.” Beverly noted that an estimated two-thirds of the county’s African Americans were on relief while political and medical officials remained “in the financial throes of extreme stringency,” making “ordinary hospitalization . . . a luxury to the St. Clair County Negro.”⁵² Beverly’s candid assessment galvanized black physicians to pressure local hospitals to provide comprehensive healthcare for African Americans.

Black physicians decided to position better health services as a political issue by pushing for nondiscrimination in providing quality healthcare. The doctors, however,

⁵¹ Jeanne A. Faulkner, interviewed by author, 24 September 1999, East St. Louis.
suffered a setback in 1939 when the St. Clair County Medical Society denied membership to Nathaniel G. Hagler, W.H.A. Barrett, H.H. Weathers, Silas S. Woods, Edgar F. Woodson, and three other African American physicians. The society based its decision on its constitution, which restricted membership to “persons of the white race residing in St. Clair County.”

The eight doctors wanted the society to amend its constitution to eliminate race as a membership requirement. They sought membership because, as physicians unaffiliated with the county medical society, they had been barred from “state or national societies of physicians” and from obtaining “many state and Federal jobs.”

In 1940 some African American medical professionals, including Nathaniel Hagler, responding to inadequate healthcare services that marked a common feature of segregation, formed an association “to support construction and maintenance of a hospital” for African Americans. In 1941, previously supportive city councilmen withdrew their backing of the hospital. Apparently physicians Barrett, Weathers, Wood, and Woodson had convinced councilmen and the mayor that the black hospital was unnecessary and did not meet “the standards maintained by St. Mary’s and Christian Welfare hospitals.” Hagler persevered with his plans and in 1944 opened within his home a fifteen-bed hospital to provide maternity care for African American women.

54 “Medics Fail to Admit Negroes,” *ESLJ*, 5 May 1939, 8.
55 “Negro Hospital Day Is Set Next Saturday,” *ESLJ*, 17 September 1940, 5.
56 “Negro Hospital Plan Rejected by City Council,” *ESLJ*, 14 February 1941, 3.
57 “Dr. Hagler to Open New Hospital,” *ESLJ*, 2 April 1944, 28; “Here Is a Man Who Refuses to Admit He Is Defeated,” *ESLJ*, 9 April 1944, 7; “Negro Hospital to Open,” *ESLJ*, 3 May 1944, 5.
The Hagler and Barrett feud over the feasibility of a black hospital reflected local and national debates in the 1930s about whether African Americans needed to carve separate institutions to serve their interests within a segregated system or fight for inclusion in mainstream American life.\textsuperscript{58} Hagler, in proposing a black owned hospital, advanced a separatist notion that black people needed to rely upon their own initiative in opposition to Barrett who took the integrationist view that African Americans received better care in white medical facilities. These healthcare debates represented the wider themes of politicized black medical care activism nationwide as black citizens struggled for their fair share of medical resources in face of segregation and scarce funding.\textsuperscript{59}

African Americans continued to agitate to improve living conditions within their segregated ghettoes. Black East St. Louisans, said white Township Relief Officer John Rogers, connected their need for medial care to their dilapidated residences. Black social worker John Clark of the St. Louis branch of the National Urban League in a common refrain said that a lack of adequate housing was a major issue for black East St. Louisans. According to white registered electrician and building inspector C.E. McCarns, black tenants lived in the city’s worst housing that happened to be owned by absentee landlords in St. Louis, Chicago, and Texas.\textsuperscript{60} A group of visiting European housing experts saw in East St. Louis “the worst living conditions . . . in [the United States] or abroad.”\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{58} An example of national level debates, much to the embarrassment and anger of the NAACP leadership, about using segregation to strengthen black institutions and communities is in a series of articles by W.E.B. Du Bois in \textit{The Crisis} in 1934.

\textsuperscript{59} Smith, \textit{Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired}.

\textsuperscript{60} John Clark, and John Rogers, and E.E. McCarns in ISCCUCP, “Transcripts: East St. Louis Proceedings,” 6, and 19, and 165, 167.

\textsuperscript{61} “Housing Here Called ‘Worst’,” \textit{ESLJ}, 14 September 1934, 1.
During the 1930s very few families had the means to make improvements to their dwellings, let alone construct new ones. In 1931, Cora Hughes, spouse of Lincoln High School principal John W. Hughes, led a local campaign of the Better Homes in America, a predominantly white national organization based in Washington, D.C., to beautify residences. As chairperson of the Better Homes department of the state association of clubs, Hughes enlisted civic minded black townspeople in beautifying their neighborhoods.\[^{62}\] Home improvement projects stalled as the Great Depression deepened.

Housing became a major political issue in 1934, when the East St. Louis Housing Board, the United States Public Housing Administration (PHA), and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), clearly intending to maintain residential segregation unveiled a proposal for the construction of two low rise housing projects, one for black and the other for white people.\[^{63}\] These agencies labeled many districts where many black residents resided as slums, planning to replace existing housing units, but not build additional residences.\[^{64}\] Their plan had the potential to reduce further already severely limited housing options for African Americans as long as segregation restricted them to certain areas. In October 1934, chairman of the East St. Louis Housing Board C.E. Jenks informed Director of Housing of FEA Colonel Horatio B. Hackett that the board opposed the black housing project. Jenks tried to persuade Hackett to drop plans

for the black project, arguing that such housing attracted more black southern migrants to
the city, rapidly boosted the black population, drained city and county relief funds, and
increased black political strength. Perhaps not wanting to alienate African Americans in
the New Deal coalition, Hackett rejected the board’s arguments.65

In 1935, East St. Louis NAACP chapter mobilized to pressure federal agencies to
continue with plans for constructing two housing projects.66 Though the NAACP stood
for integration, the organization thought new segregated housing preferable to no housing
for black people. Local black attorney for the chapter Louis Orr informed Director of the
Public Works Administration’s Housing Department Angelo R. Class that African
Americans faced special hardships in a racially segregated housing market. Orr had
heard that local planners, under the guise of slum clearance, wanted to build the white
housing project in a black district, displacing black homeowners without providing
alternative housing for them.67 The association persisted over five years in reminding
federal officials that they had a responsibility to provide housing for African Americans.

65 Jenks to Hackett, “Personal,” October 5, 1934, Jenks to Hackett, Federal Emergency
Administration, October 17, 1934, Folder: “Project File H-4800,” Project Files (1933-
1937), Records of the Public Housing Administration, RG 196, Entry 47.
66 Duncan Smith to Hackett, December 6, 1934, Hackett to Smith, December 13, 1934,
Smith to Hackett, January 10, 1935, G.E. Fischer to B.M. Pettit, May 4, 1935, Folder:
“Project File H-4800,” Boxes 311-312, Project Files (1933-1937), Records of the Public
Housing Administration, Records of the Public Housing Administration, RG 196, Entry
47.
67 Louie F. Orr of East St. Louis NAACP to A.R. Clas, PWA Housing Dept., September
of the Public Housing Administration, Records of the Public Housing Administration, RG
196, Entry 47.
Fortunately for black townspeople, the United States Housing Authority announced in 1940 that funding was available for the construction of both housing projects.68

Federally sponsored housing emerged as a racially contested affair, not only in East St. Louis, but also in other locales like Milwaukee, as black and white people bitterly debated the locations of the housing projects in segregated cities.69 Though politician-businessmen in the East St. Louis Real Estate Exchange must have known, residents did not realize the extent that the federal Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) reinforced segregation in the housing market. HOLC had written off large sections of the East St. Louis comprised mainly of low income black and white working class residences. The corporation refused to extend loans to improve homes in such districts.70 Since the agency rated housing in low income white districts slightly higher than that in black areas, white people became more vigilant in maintaining segregated neighborhoods. White residents feared lower property values and reacted negatively to possible plans for a black housing project in a white district. In early 1941, a committee comprised of white homeowners living next to the site of the proposed black housing project protested.71 City leaders rushed to calm committee members and white
townspeople generally. Unlike officials in Detroit and elsewhere, East St. Louis planners avoided racial violence by demanding that the government locate each housing project deep within its appropriate segregated zone. In 1943, after eight years of controversy and protests, 153 black and 264 white families moved into the John Robinson Homes and Samuel Gompers Homes for black and white residents respectively. But the federal government never committed itself to provide housing to all who needed it and assigned housing a low priority during the Second World War. For most black East St. Lousians and a significant number of white townspeople, segregated, overcrowded substandard housing remained the norm.

In another form of community action black East St. Louisans continued their long tradition of agitation around the issue of public schools, segregated since the 1870’s when black children were first permitted to attend public schools. Most did not challenge the segregated school system, considering black public schools community institutions that they used to celebrate African American culture and history and secure jobs for black people. Residents mobilized to force the school board to allocate resources and

73 “Housing Units Completed,” ESLJ, 11 March 1943, 1, 2.
funding equally between black and white schools and to correct problems such as overcrowding.\textsuperscript{76}

In 1931, parents and education professionals used an outside agency, the Illinois State Committee of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, as leverage in their protests to pressure the school board to address the inadequacies of the physical plant at the black Lincoln High School, in particular its library, laboratory, and instructional equipment. The committee had criticized the Board of Education for perpetuating substandard conditions at the high school and for threatening to revoke accreditation for Lincoln High that raised the possibility of leaving black students without a high school.\textsuperscript{77} In September, at least two hundred African American parents besieged the board during one of its meetings and denounced school officials’ proposal to save Lincoln by sending students to Lincoln School Annex that the board had established to circumvent state penalties. Protestors, calling the annex a firetrap, demanded physical improvements in all the city’s black schools.\textsuperscript{78} In 1936, black parents decided that even further action was needed to rectify the problems when they—and white townspeople—learned that the accrediting association in its April 1936 re-evaluation rated both black


\textsuperscript{78} “200 Negroes at Board Meet Issue Ultimatum, They’ll Not Sent Tots to Annex Building,” \textit{ESLJ}, September 4, 1931, 1, 3.
and white high schools dirty, crowded, and deficient. African American residents again demanded action, knowing the school board’s history of first serving the needs of its white constituency. In August, black parents rejected the board’s plans to send at least seventy-eight students to high school in neighboring Brooklyn because of the distance that schoolchildren had to travel and because Brooklyn High School lacked state accreditation.

Black residents by 1940 began debating the value of maintaining segregated schools where black students lacked access to vocational and technical training programs that led to job opportunities in industrial firms retooling for war production. Their assessment that the school board treated black people as second class citizens was confirmed when white school superintendent D. Walter Potts admitted that segregation prevented black students from enrolling in special courses offered only at the white schools. In addition, local administrators’ prioritization of National Defense Program funding to white schools offered proof that city officials maintained unequal education for black students through segregation, with federal acquiescence. Black townspeople decided that if they wanted better schools, they needed to agitate for educational equality through desegregation.

79 “High Schools Here Are Called ‘Dirty, Crowded’ by State Education Men,” ESLJ, 26 April 1936, 1, 2.
81 ISCCUCP, “Transcripts: East St. Louis Proceedings,” 6, 77, 84-86, 158.
Forging Alliances with the Political Left and Organized Labor

The national crisis created by the Great Depression opened up new possibilities to challenge the inequities brought about by segregation, if not segregation itself. African Americans knew that community protests alone did not ameliorate economic hard times and often simultaneously engaged in other forms of action. Some, for example, worked with the political left either because they thought that the Great Depression indicated a failed capitalist economy or because they agreed with Communists and socialists that economic relief, full employment, improved working and living conditions, and an end to racism were attainable. Perhaps some African Americans thought that the political left offered the possibility of independent black political action. Others, black workers, used the trade union movement not only to win job security, but also to advance their interests in the political arena, given labor’s historical voice in city affairs.

African Americans took notice of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), a predominantly white organization which viewed them, given their status as the most exploited and oppressed people within the American working class, most capable of advancing workers’ interests. Black people noted the CPUSA’s militant

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83 Various issues of the Communist Party’s newspaper, *The Daily Worker*, from 1930 to 1934.
anti-racist stance, particularly evident in its successful legal defense of the Scottsboro Boys, nine black Alabaman teenagers, accused of raping a white woman. 84 African Americans saw the party’s zeal for racial equality when the organization placed black members in the leadership of interracial unemployment councils. In 1934, for example, black laborer Walidad Wilson became a leader of unemployed councils in the industrial Tri-Cities area, comprising the small towns of Granite City, a sundown town where black people had been forbidden to remain overnight, Madison, and Venice, all located several miles north of East St. Louis. 85

Politician-businessmen and city authorities made clear their repugnance of the Communist Party, which they regarded as an enemy of industrial capitalism. City officials harassed Communists for distributing literature, holding rallies, and demanding that City Hall increase its relief program for laid-off workers. 86 Local leaders, worried by the Communist Party’s frequent calls for interracial working class solidarity and equality, seized every opportunity to disrupt Communist rallies and meetings where black and white people assembled. For example, in February 1931, police and park officials broke up an unemployment rally that had attracted a “large crowd of Negroes,

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interspersed with whites” at Lincoln Park located deep within the city’s main black
district. The police continued to arrest white Communists who delivered speeches in
black neighborhoods through November.87

City Hall’s harassment of Communists reached a crescendo in December 1931
when police arrestees included for the first time local black Communists. A police raid
on a private residence netted sixteen persons, including five black men and four black
women. The police, using tear gas for the first time in East St. Louis, received much
notoriety when several officers required medical attention after inhaling the gas and one
died from a heart attack during the raid.88 The event caught the attention of one national
publication, the Nation, which condemned the police for violating “the constitutional
right of . . . fellow-citizens peaceably to assemble.”89 Undeterred, Mayor Frank Doyle,
Police Chief James Leahy, and other officials vowed to end Communist agitation, with
violence if necessary. Policemen in a show of force armed with riot guns patrolled the
street in front of the courthouse where the sixteen arrestees stood trial. Authorities failed
to intimidate a crowd of primarily black people from holding rallies and packing the
courtroom in support of Communist Party members and supporters. Clearly city officials

87 “Police Prevent Communist Meet,” ESLJ, 26 February 1931, 1, 2; “Police Disperse
Communists Here at Evening Raid,” ESLJ, 8 November 1931, 1; “Four Communists
Seized As Police Break Up Meeting,” ESLJ, 29 November 1931, 4-C; “East Saint Louis,
Ill., Workers Are Released,” The Daily Worker, December 3, 1931, 2.
88 “Artery Ailment Cause of Detective Combs’ Fatal Collapse During ‘Red’ Raid,”
ESLJ, 13 December 1931, 1; “East St. Louis Police Kill Own Man in Raid on Jobless,”
The Daily Worker, December 17, 1931, 1, 3; “Police Used Poison Gas in Raid Friday,”
The Daily Worker, 19 December 1931, 5.
and the police wanted to prevent any “attempt to organize Communism among the Negro residents.”

African American laborers worked with Communists, accepting their support in labor disputes. For example, in May 1933, black women workers, who comprised the majority of the two hundred nut pickers at the East St. Louis branch of the Funsten Nut Company, welcomed Communist endorsement when they struck for higher wages. Twenty individuals, including nine Communists, marched outside the factory in support of the women strikers, calling upon the nut pickers to “strike against starvation wages.” The workers won a sixty per cent pay increase from two dollars to three dollars a week. Authorities worried about the possibility of a strong black worker-Communist alliance, which had developed at the Funsten factories in St. Louis, Missouri, taking root in East St. Louis, arrested nine demonstrators, including African American domestics Rose Palmer and Addie Carum and black laborer Mack Sheppard. In 1934, a black worker-Communist alliance emerged at the East St. Louis Funsten factory. Two hundred nut pickers, now members of the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL), a Communist organized labor union, struck over the issue of open shop versus union shop when

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90 “City Officials Determined To Curb Reds Here,” *ESLJ*, 13 December 1931, 1; “Communists in Mass Meet Threat at the City Hall,” *ESLJ*, 30 December 1931, 1; “15 Communists on Trial,” *ESLJ*, 22 December 1931, 1, 2; “14 Alleged Communist To Be Tried,” *ESLJ*, 23 December 1931, 2. Unfortunately, the sources did not name the black Communists.
91 For example, see Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*.
managers refused to collect money from several black TUUL members who for unknown reasons had not paid their union dues. The nut pickers remained on strike for two weeks before returning to work without a settlement. The workers lost their jobs when Funsten decided to close its East St. Louis operations in 1935. African Americans drew from the Funsten incident the lesson that a black worker-Communist Party alliance yielded few gains and concluded that they had better opportunities for success working with mainstream trade unions.

Black workers, at least to a certain extent in East St. Louis, had long regarded labor unions as a vehicle for improving their working conditions and, given labor’s participation in local government, for bolstering their political voice. They became interested, more than ever, in joining the labor movement under the impact of the Great Depression, the pro-union administration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and militantly aggressive unionizing campaigns. Black and white workers began unionizing in earnest in 1933 when the Roosevelt administration implemented the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), which through its Section 7(a) acknowledged workers’ right to bargain collectively to gain higher wages and improve working conditions. The administration calculated that a unionized workforce with the means of obtaining higher wages had the potential of reviving a lagging consumer based national economy. Union

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organizers in the East St. Louis district hoped to increase the number of unionized workers from five percent of the wage earning population to a much higher level.97 Employees remained undeterred that the NIRA lacked the provisions to enforce the right to collective bargaining. They realized that managers at Aluminum Ore (Aluminum Company of America or Alcoa), East St. Louis Casting Company, Southern Malleable Iron Company, Lewin Metals Company and other factories refused to recognize unions and fired employees who agitated for unions.98 Workers responded to managers’ intransigence in 1934 with waves of strikes that rocked Obear-Nestor Glass Company, Aluminum Ore Company, and other East St. Louis area industrial firms.99 In 1936, working people lost Section 7(a) as a support when the United States Supreme Court ruled the NIRA and NRA unconstitutional in that they delegated legislative power to the executive branch. But by then workers were committed to forming labor unions.

American workers in the mid to late 1930s unionized in large numbers, especially in the mass production industries. They received encouragement when President Roosevelt and his congressional allies passed the National Labor Relations Act of 1935


that established the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and provided for the protection of workers’ rights to unionize. From 1936 into 1940, East St. Louis area black and white workers struck for union recognition among other demands. The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) led unionizing drives in a number of occupations, most notably in steel manufacturing and meatpacking. Even the American Federation of Labor (AFL), which preferred organizing skilled craft workers, threw its energy into unionizing mass production industries. By 1941, trade unionists representing the AFL, CIO, and a few independent unions had organized at least forty-nine of the fifty-five major East St. Louis area industrial firms, including the Aluminum Ore Company, Armour and Company, Morris and Company, Obear-Nester Glass Company, and St. Louis National Stock Yards Company. The AFL unionized thirty-six of these companies and split jurisdiction with the CIO at three others. CIO unions became exclusive bargaining agents at seven plants, including the major meatpackers, except for Swift and Company, where the majority of workers had voted in the AFL. By 1944, the AFL through its local


affiliation, the Central Trades and Labor Union of East St. Louis, had 18,000 members in seventy-one locals. The CIO represented 6,000 workers organized through its local affiliate, the Industrial Union Council.  

Black wage earners proved instrumental in organizing CIO and AFL unions, participating in strikes as leaders as well as rank and file. They favored the CIO over the AFL because the former practiced industrial unionism, organizing all workers at a worksite, and called upon workers to overcome racial divisions.  

African American workers applauded the CIO’s special efforts to win their confidence.  Black workers often succeeded in organizing under the CIO where they formed a significant percentage of the workforce, for example, the United Packing House Workers union at Armour and Company and the United Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers union at Lewin-Mathes Company, a manufacturer of metal products and copper ingots and tubing. According to black packinghouse worker Rusha Durr, union representative of Local 42 of the CIO packinghouse workers union, African Americans comprised sixty percent of the Packinghouse Workers’ Organizing Committee membership. Black workers joined AFL unions in plants where they did not constitute a critical mass, for instance, the United

except in East St. Louis and Kansas City, Missouri, in Rick Halpern, Down on the Killing Floor, 183.


103 Nash interview.

Brick and Clay Workers of America at the Hill Brick Company of East St. Louis and Chemical Workers Union at Monsanto Chemical.105

Black wage earners realized, however, that their involvement with the labor movement delivered limited results. They gained opportunities for material advancement, won union protection, held leadership positions at interracial locals, increased their numbers within the mass production industries, and received strong commitments for civil rights from militant, particularly socialist and Communist, trade union organizers and officials. But in some union locals black workers faced antagonistic white workers who regarded their move toward racial equality at the workplace as a threat to white entitlement to better jobs and higher pay. Besides, some unions, especially AFL affiliates, still barred black workers from membership.106 Carpenters Joseph B. Preston and Ben Halpert, for example, had attempted several times to join an AFL union only to be rebuffed. In response, Preston, Halpert, and others founded the Illinois Craftsmen’s Association to protect their interests as skilled black workers.107


Joining the National Democratic Party Coalition

African Americans in the North through electoral politics forced both the Republican and Democratic parties to court their vote. Most black voters for historical reasons backed the Republican Party, especially in national elections. But urban black support for the Democratic Party slowly, but steadily increased, becoming significantly apparent by the late 1920s when African American voted Democratic in a number of cities, including New York City. African Americans showed greater interest in the Democratic alternative as the Republican Party proved incapable of ending the Great Depression. Both black Republican and Democratic politicos in East St. Louis saw the need to turn out the black vote in the contested presidential election of 1932 as President Herbert Hoover and Democratic challenger Franklin Roosevelt debated the extent of federal involvement in managing the national economy and providing work relief.

African Americans allied with the Republican Party reminded black voters that any support for the Democratic Party, which had a significant base among white southern segregationists, meant an endorsement of continued oppression of African Americans in the Jim Crow South.¹⁰⁸ Black Republicans often raised the specter of white southern Democrats, who had disproportionate influence in their party, to deflect African

American criticism of President Herbert Hoover’s dismal economic policy that impeded working people’s efforts to survive the depression.

But black Democratic operatives reminded potential voters that Hoover’s strategy to win white Southerners away from the Democratic Party meant that he did not have black people’s interests at heart. They cited the President’s glaring political insults toward African Americans in two symbolic incidents. The first involved Hoover’s insensitivity to black Gold Star Mothers who were segregated from white Gold Star Mothers when both groups traveled together on an ocean liner to France for commemorative events for their sons who had died in World War I battles. The second Hoover insult occurred when the President’s spouse, fearing to upset wives of white Southern congressional senators and representatives, did not invite the wife of Oscar De Priest, a black congressman from Chicago, to a White House function. Black Democrats used the events to claim that President Hoover took the traditionally Republican black vote for granted. They were confident of a majority of black East St. Louisans voting Democratic, especially as the black political machine, the Paramount Democratic Organization (PDO), had been patiently building a base for the Democratic Party since the mid-1920s. The PDO saw its efforts come to fruition when black people pushed Democrats to victory in all contested offices. The black organization won accolades from

party bosses who rewarded the PDO by appointing an African American, attorney Frank E. Summers, Assistant State’s Attorney.\textsuperscript{110}

The Paramount Democratic Organization’s expansion and solidification of its power in black precincts did not sit well with white politicians.\textsuperscript{111} The PDO showed its independence from Democratic Party bosses in the primary election in April 1934 by placing Aubrey H. Smith, an African American dentist and former member of the St. Clair County Board of Supervisors, on the ballot as one of the Democratic nominees for representative in the Illinois General Assembly. Smith won by a slim margin mostly because of a large black turnout.\textsuperscript{112} Smith’s victory upset some white politicos who sent a “message” to PDO leader Horace Adams through the city’s byzantine political network.

Adams was arrested, beaten, and briefly jailed for his involvement with a black gambling den operator. In July, the police board dropped all charges against Adams but warned him to stay out of trouble.\textsuperscript{113} Undeterred, Adams’s PDO scored a political triumph in the election of November 1934 when Smith became the first black politician and the first

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{111} “Negro Democrats Hear Kline and Other Speakers,” \textit{ESLJ}, 21 September 1933, 6; “Paramount Demos to Initiates 200 at Monday Meet,” \textit{ESLJ}, 19 November 1933, 3.
\end{itemize}
black Democrat to represent East St. Louis—a majority white city—in the Illinois General Assembly. But Smith served only one term because white political leaders united to defeat him in his bid for reelection in 1936. Perhaps had the energetic wheeler-dealer PDO leader Horace Adams not been killed in an auto accident, Smith might have seen a second term.

The PDO and its sister organization, the Paramount Negro Women’s Democratic Organization continued to strengthen their political positions within the black community while supporting the Democratic Party. Through the efforts of these two groups black East St. Louisans entered the national Democratic Party coalition several years before 1936 when African Americans nationwide made their historic swing to the Democratic Party. The African American-Democratic Party alliance made possible black influence on the national level through electoral politics. African Americans used the Democratic New Deal coalition to press for the restoration of civil rights, especially for black Southerners, and for the attainment of equality.

114 “Victory of Negro Dentist Is Surprise of Assembly Race,” ESLJ, 7 November 1934, 4; “Checker Reveal Too Many Votes Cast in Brooklyn,” ESLJ, 9 November 1934, 1.
115 “Adams Funeral Date Not Set,” ESLJ, 19 April 1935, 2; Richard and Wyvetter Younge, interviewed by author, 27 September 1999, East St. Louis.
116 To date, the only information on the Paramount Negro Women’s Democratic Organization is a membership list, Eliza Hart Thomas, Probation Officer, East St. Louis, to Crystal Bird Fauset, Democratic National Campaign Committee, October 14, 1936, Edna Adams, President, Paramount Negro Women’s Democratic Organization, to Eleanor Roosevelt [Mrs. Thomas F. McAllister, Director, Women’s Division], January 5, 1938, Folder: “Organizations, Colored Workers (cont’d), Box 315-Correspondence, 1937-44, Democratic National Committee, Women’s Division, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N.Y.
Beginning Challenges to Segregation and Inequality during World War II

By 1940, increasing numbers of black people realized that organized labor and the New Deal reinforced segregation in employment, housing, healthcare, education, and other areas. At the same time they had not recovered from the Great Depression as had many white Americans who had access to industry retooling for the war production. For example, African Americans comprised at least sixteen percent of East St. Louis’s population, but constituted sixty percent of the total caseload of federal and state government relief programs.118 Since the 1930s, black residents had engaged in a wide range of activities, including community protests, union-organizing drives, and other forms of grassroots politics to end racial discrimination.119 But they found equality elusive even with President Roosevelt’s rhetoric of saving democracy from fascism.120 Black people, more than ever, made a concerted effort to win state and federal commitment to racial equality as the nation prepared to enter the Second World War to

118 Bolen J. Carter, Assistant Principal, East St. Louis High School, to National Youth Administration, October 22, 1940, Letters and Reports Received by the Director from State Directors of Student Work, 1940-1941, Records of the Division of Student Work-Records of the Director, Records of the National Youth Administration, RG 119, Entry 176.
fight fascism. One community leader, the Reverend G.T. Allen, an employee in a machine operators’ training program, wrote to the National Labor Relations Board in 1944, asking, “How can we as leaders encourage our people to . . . go all out for victory while these [racist] practices . . . exist(ed)? . . . After all, winning Victory on the battlefronts [and losing] it [at] home, we ha[d] accomplish(ed) nothing.”

Black East St. Louisans endured after the racial massacre of July 1917 an expanded, rigorous adherence to customary segregation that violated long standing Illinois civil rights laws. Social worker Annette Officer, a city resident since 1917, assisting people in finding jobs in 1932 and 1934, said that “Sears, Roebuck . . . told [her] outright that they didn’t hire [N]egroes.” Officer also recalled that in 1938 when she “tried once or twice to go to the Majestic [Theatre] . . . the young lady at the window frankly told [her] she was sorry but could not sell [her] a ticket.” Officer and other black people could not eat purchased meals at lunch counters in many white owned establishments. Black attorney Louie Orr, aware of only six civil rights cases filed during his seven years of practicing law in the county, attributed black people’s reluctance to file complaints to the legacy of fear created by the July mass racial violence. Orr said that “if a [N]egro attempt[ed] to raise a question about his rights or . . . [was] sponsoring some progressive movement to tear down some prejudice . . . white people . . . [then accused] “[t]he young man [of] trying to start a race riot.”

121 G.T. Allen to NLRB, Nov. 13, 1944, [Boilermakers Union file]; Box 63, [United States Employment Service, East St. Louis file], Box 70, Active Case Records, 1941-1846, Region VI, Records of the Committee of Fair Employment Practice, RG 228, Entry 68, National Archives—Great Lakes Region.
By the end of the 1930s, African Americans hoped to enlist the state government in their fight against segregation. In 1940, the Illinois General Assembly created the Commission on the Condition of the Urban Colored Population to investigate the impact of segregation and discrimination on African Americans and to recommend legislation to correct social problems found in areas such as employment. State government planners, most likely remembering how World War I era migrations, labor disputes, and racial violence disrupted industrial production, hoped through the commission’s findings to prevent similar occurrences as the United States anticipated its entry into the Second World War. The commission held hearings in Chicago, Springfield, and East St. Louis to learn about the persistence of racial disparities.

Several white managers testifying before the commission denied that their companies had policies against hiring black people. They blamed trade unions, which the managers inferred had control over who applied for jobs, for keeping workplaces white. Illinois-Iowa Power Company District Manager F.R. Noack said that his enterprise had closed shop contracts with three AFL unions, the International Union of Operating Engineers, Gas Fitters and Helpers Union, and Hod Carriers and Common Laborers Union, whose business agents sent him only white job applicants. Manager at Union Electric Company G.W. Welsh claimed that his company had only one black employee, a

janitor-watchman, because it secured its employees through the business agent of the AFL International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Union that also only sent white job seekers. Noack and Welsh when asked why their companies did not hire black workers for positions not covered by union contracts simply reiterated that their companies did not have policies of discrimination. They agreed, however, with the commission that hiring African Americans had the potential of decreasing the number of black people on government relief rolls.124

African Americans testified before the commission about the nature of the segregation and discrimination. Unity Mutual Insurance Company District Manager W.K. Allen, a resident of East St. Louis for twenty-one years, said that, “Negroes . . . scarcely get any service at . . . white places, such as restaurants, cafeterias, lunch counters, theatres, and what not.” Allen informed the commissioners that white employers denied black people their civil rights “in the economic field.” He cited in particular Hormel Packing Company and Lubrite Refining Company for their blatant refusal to hire black workers. Industrial secretary of the National Urban League St. Louis chapter Sidney Williams thought that inclusion of black workers into the industrial workforce “had not increased in the past five years.” Williams blamed industry’s lack of progress on managers applying technological innovations that resulted in “[b]lack workers get[ting] hit harder than white workers ‘because of their unskilled ability.’” He also said that Hunter Packing Company, in reaction to packinghouse workers’ unionization, had begun to fire black employees and replace them with white workers. In

addition, Williams reported that several labor unions, mainly AFL affiliates in the building trades, impeded integration.\textsuperscript{125}

African Americans informed the commissioners that they wanted jobs, not relief, and they wanted equality not discrimination from the WPA. Some said that they had been forced to go on relief to become eligible to obtain WPA jobs. Pauline Lewis of the Original Illinois Housewives Association had worked for the city recreational department for several years before the WPA became the sole source of funding for that department in 1940. Lewis had to “declare [herself] a pauper to go through the Relief channel if [she] want[ed] to work for the department.” She also found that the WPA practiced wage discrimination. When the department “was tax-supported” by the city, said Lewis, “all [instructors] made an equal salary except the supervisor [but] now [as WPA funded employees, N]egro instructors [were] paid at the lowest white rate. They were paid,” said Lewis, “on average $68.00 a month and the white workers who [did] identically the same work . . . had the same experience and training in similar positions . . . ma[d]e as much as $20.00 more per month.”\textsuperscript{126}

Black people had no intention of setting aside their grievances on the eve of America’s entry into the Second World War as they had put them on hold during World War I.\textsuperscript{127} They planned campaigns to bring the fight for equality into the workplace as


well as into the political arena. In 1941, African Americans gained a federal commitment to civil rights after black trade union leader Philip A. Randolph’s proposed March on Washington convinced President Roosevelt to issue Executive Order 8802, establishing the Committee on Fair Employment Practice (FEPC) to end discrimination at companies holding federal defense contracts. Black people supported the “Double V” campaign, victory for democracy overseas and victory for democracy at home. “Double V” dramatized the irony that the government wanted African Americans to fight for democracy in Europe and Asia, but not in the United States.

Arguing for the notion of equal rights of citizenship, African Americans expected employers with defense contracts from the federal government to hire them for technical, skilled, managerial, and clerical positions. Black workers in East St. Louis saw job prospects improve slightly in 1941 at ten of the area’s fifty-five largest corporations involved in defense work where 2,850 out of a total of 3,199 black men and women in all fifty-five of the companies.128 But in 1942, African Americans reported cases of exclusion and underemployment at area corporations awarded defense contracts.129 They remained overwhelmingly restricted to unskilled jobs or excluded from defense jobs altogether, even though significant reserves of qualified black workers were

Black workers were well aware that some firms, ignoring the executive order, flatly refused to employ African Americans. A few black Americans concluded that they had no reason to support the government in a time of war when African Americans remained at best second class citizens in a nation hostile to their aspirations for equality. Many of these anti-war resisters—perhaps a few tens of thousands nationwide—belonged to pro-Japanese black organizations that advocated separatism. One such group, which gained notoriety for East St. Louis, the Pacific Movement of the Eastern World (PMEW), had several thousand members in chapters scattered mainly in the Mississippi River states from Illinois and Missouri to Mississippi and Louisiana. The PMEW, founded in 1933, drew most of its members and took many of its ideas from the defunct Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Pacific Movement advocated among other things, black pride, black owned enterprises, and a black nation-state, ideally to be carved from the United States. In addition, PMEW leaders advised African Americans to avoid military service. The organization looked to Japan, the sole nonwhite world power, to challenge global white supremacy, defeat the United States, Great Britain, and France through warfare, and reward black people by establishing an African American nation-

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PMEW, and apparently some white Americans, including novelist Pearl S. Buck and Secretary of War Henry Stimson, thought that the next conflict would be a race war between Japan and the Western powers. The organization’s fervent hope for an African American-Japanese alliance to defeat white supremacy blinded it to Japanese racism against Asians whom Japan had conquered. Such was the depth of desire among many PMEW members who hoped for Japanese victory over the United States.\textsuperscript{133}

Pacific Movement of the Eastern World, with its pro-Japanese stance and contacts with Japanese agents fell under surveillance of police departments and the Federal Bureau of Investigation that regarded the PMEW capable of igniting a race war or engaging in subversion across the nation in a future war against Japan.\textsuperscript{134} The organization moved its national headquarters from St. Louis to East St. Louis in 1940 largely because by that time most of its national leaders were East St. Louisans.


Originally comprised of former members of the local chapter of the UNIA, the East St. Louis chapter of the PMEW, which had as many as of 950 members sometime during the 1930s, only counted in 1941 a few dozen activists as members. PMEW abruptly ceased to exist after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor when federal agents, deciding that the pro-Japanese organization was a serious threat to national security, raided PMEW headquarters and arrested leaders David Erwin and General Lee Butler (“General” was Butler’s first name), both laborers, and others, later convicting them on charges of sedition. According to the authorities, Erwin’s former association with Marcus Garvey marked him as a dangerous man who hated white people and opposed the United States.

The significance of the Pacific Movement of the Eastern World and other antiwar black organizations such as the Nation of Islam rested with their potential to mobilize African Americans to protest the federal government’s slow pace in resolving issues of racial inequality and white American intransigence to treat black citizens as equals. The

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137 Hill, ed., The FBI’s RACON, 520.
Pacific Movement had sought to expand its presence as African Americans nationwide furiously debated the extent of black involvement with a federal government that showed more concern about America as an “arsenal for democracy” than about democracy for nonwhite Americans, particularly black Southerners. But across the nation, the PMEW and similar organizations faced strenuous opposition from most black people, even from those in accord with its view of the United States as a white supremacist nation.

According to residents Lee Annie (Adams) Bonner and Lillian (Adams) Parks, daughters of PDO leader Horace Adams, most black East St. Louisans viewed the PMEW as detrimental to the “Double V” campaign. Some black Americans, including the national leaders of the NAACP, actively assisted the government in suppressing the Pacific Movement of the Eastern World and other pro-Japanese black organizations in exchange for stronger federal support for civil rights.

The federal government was keenly aware of African American criticism about the nation’s lack of will to acknowledge black demands for equality. Some officials sought to blunt black criticism of America’s shortcomings by harassing African American newspaper editors, activists, and others whom they thought capable of turning

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138 Lee Annie Bonner; Lillian Parks.
black people against the war effort. But others, favoring civil rights, urged the Roosevelt administration to quiet African American criticism by promoting black social and economic advancement. United States Employment Service (USES) field director George A. Scott, for one, encouraged employers to hire more black workers so as to avoid mass racial violence capable of disrupting industrial war production. Scott informed USES Director for Illinois Chester Hepler that the most serious race problem in Illinois existed in East St. Louis. Noting that black Southerners and white “hillbillies” mainly from Tennessee and Arkansas were streaming into the city in search of jobs, Scott worried that mass racial violence loomed large if black and white migrants failed to obtain jobs. Scott praised corporations such as American Steel Foundries, Sterling Steel Castings Company, Armour & Company, and Aluminum Ore Company for hiring black workers. He faulted, however, companies like Socony Vacuum Oil Company, which refused to hire black laborers, and Hunter Packing Company, which specifically refused to hire black women, for contributing to racial tension.

African Americans neither waited for the federal government to resolve civil rights issues at the workplace nor slowed down their grassroots campaigns for employment equality after the March on Washington Movement in 1941. They turned the FEPC and other government agencies into useful tools to advance their “Double V” campaign, claiming that their contributions to the war effort entitled them to full

citizenship rights and freedom from segregation and discrimination.\textsuperscript{142} Black workers insisted upon equality of treatment and an end to discrimination at the workplace and used the FEPC as a battering ram against recalcitrant employers and local union officials.\textsuperscript{143} They demanded access to job training programs and war production jobs. Black laborers urged A.H.R. Atwood, East St. Louis district director of the Committee on Industrial Relations of the Illinois State Employment Service, to place additional trained field workers in “employer relations” to encourage managers to hire from an expanding pool of black workers who had completed job training programs.\textsuperscript{144} In 1942, the black Citizens Defense and Urban League Organizing Committee, an unofficial branch of the National Urban League in East St. Louis, led by its president, mortician William Officer,


\textsuperscript{143} Selected examples of FEPC cases: “Strike at Dixie Mills Company, June 24-28, 1943,” Folder: “Dixie Mills Company, East St. Louis, Illinois,” Box 1830, “Memorandum from J.E. Kuczma, March 29, 1944,” Folder: Monsanto Chemical Company,” Box 1826, \textit{Records Relating to Strikes, 1944-1945, Region VI, Records of the National War Labor Board}, RG 202, Entry 210, National Archives—Great Lakes Region, Chicago, Illinois; [Community War Service file], Box 106, \textit{General Correspondence, 1943-1946, Records of the Committee on Fair Employment Practice}, RG 228, Entry 82; [Aluminum Ore Company file], Box 72, [American Steel Foundries, East St. Louis file], Box 73, [Cargill, Inc. file], Box 75, [Monsanto Chemical Company file], Box 85, \textit{Closed Cases, 1941-1946, Region VI, Records of the Committee of Fair Employment Practice}, RG 228, Entry 70.

with assistance from government agencies and a local CIO union tiredly worked to convince managers to hire black workers.\(^{145}\)

Black workers in war production industries forced the federal government to address their grievances, if for no other reason than to keep production running. In 1944, African Americans filed with the FEPC numerous grievances regarding employment discrimination.\(^{146}\) Black Monsanto Chemical Company employees complained over a period of several months about wage discrimination and mistreatment from managers and white co-workers. For example, James Overton stated that he received 85 and 1/4 cents an hour while a white worker earned 91 and 1/4 cents an hour for performing the same work. In another instance, Carey Jones, a skilled rigger, said that he had been paid common laborer wages.\(^{147}\) Three hundred and eighty out of 386 black Monsanto workers struck in March 1944 in protest over a company ruling made in consultation with an officer of the AFL union local to revoke a twenty year customary right of black


\(^{147}\) Elmer W. Henderson, FEPC Regional Director, to P.M. Tompkins, General Manager, Monsanto, January 21, 1944, “Monsanto Chemical Company [file], Exhibit B, Elmer W. Henderson to P.M. Tompkins, April 10, 1944,” Box 91, \textit{Closed Cases, 1941-1946}, Records of the Region VI Office (Chicago), Records of the President’s Committee on Fair Employment Practice, RG 228, Entry 70, National Archives and Records Administration—Great Lakes Region, Chicago.
helpers to ride in the cab of trucks with white drivers. Their work stoppage suspended vital operations at the plant until the FEPC negotiated terms of agreement, and strikers returned to work on March 21.148 According to FEPC worker Harry H.C. Gibson, strikers had based their grievances on “the desire . . . to receive equal opportunities for upgrading along with the white employees.” Black workers won a moral victory when FEPC Regional director Elmer Henderson and other government and military officials directed the company and the union to resolve black workers’ grievances.149

Many black women in East St. Louis made the transition from non-industrial to industrial employment though a number continued to labor as domestic service workers.150 While war mobilization demanded full utilization of able-bodied workers, African American women continued encountering discrimination in 1942 as employers hired only white and black men and white women.151 By 1944, black women, working with the FEPC and other federal agencies, saw their job prospects improve, particularly at the feed mills, railroad freight depots, and newly established worksites like the Indian

149 Memorandum, Harry H.C. Gibson to Elmer W. Henderson, April 10, 1944, “Monsanto Chemical Company [file], Exhibit B, Elmer W. Henderson to P.M. Tompkins, April 10, 1944,” Box 91, Closed Cases, 1941-1946, Records of the Region VI Office (Chicago), Records of the President’s Committee on Fair Employment Practice, RG 228, Entry 70, National Archives and Records Administration—Great Lakes Region, Chicago.
Lake Egg Company. But black women remained underrepresented among industrial workers. They still relied upon black community organizations and the government to urge reluctant employers to hire and promote them.

Black working women and men realized that the FEPC and other state and federal agencies, lacking the means to enforce anti-discrimination rulings, were largely ineffective in resolving grievances of workplace segregation and discrimination. They saw the FEPC in particular dismissing many of their cases on grounds of insufficient evidence. For example, in 1943, the FEPC rejected a complaint filed by fifteen black women who charged that Walworth Company had refused to hire them. The company claimed that it preferred to hire women who lived close to the plant, and since the company was located in a white area, it hired only white women. The company also noted that it did not have separate restrooms for black women. Black workers flooded the regional FEPC office with grievances pertaining to issues of discrimination far surpassing the number of complaints filed by Jewish American and Mexican American workers, or even Japanese Americans who had been released from War Relocation


154 [Walworth Company file], Box 91, *Closed Cases, 1941-1946, Region VI, Records of the Committee of Fair Employment Practice*, RG 228, Entry 70.
Centers. But African Americans did see favorable results by 1944 as the office focused more on the problems of hiring black women and job upgrading of black men and women workers. They also recognized that the office agreed with them when it blamed employers, especially Western Cartridge Company, a munitions maker, in East Alton, Illinois, that refused to hire a single black worker in its workforce of fifteen thousand men, and certain labor unions, like the railroad brotherhoods, for perpetuating racial discrimination.\textsuperscript{155}

\textbf{Conclusion}

African Americans engaged in a range of grassroots and electoral politics in East St. Louis that paralleled and was foundational to black people’s actions on the national level. They agitated not only to increase their chances of surviving and remaining employed during the Great Depression, but also to gain a level of security and greater access to industrial jobs through membership in labor unions and participation in the New Deal coalition led by the Democratic Party. But black Americans acknowledged on the eve of America’s entry into World War I that their engagements in community actions, social movements, and political parties yielded mixed results. They earned a place as decision makers in local and national affairs but not as equal partners. As long as white

\textsuperscript{155} Memorandum, Elmer W. Henderson to Will Maslow, September 1, 1944, \textit{General Records, 1941-1946, Records of the Region VI Office (Chicago), Records of the Committee of Fair Employment Practice}, RG 228, Entry 81.
Americans maintained segregation, black people had to continue to push to attain their goal of equality.

A racial accord manifested itself in East St. Louis with a realization among white officials that they had to include African Americans in their plans for postwar modernization of the area’s industry, recruitment of more jobs, and improvement of housing stock.\textsuperscript{156} As early as 1943, economic boosters realized that East St. Louis’s expansion as an industrial city had ended during the interwar years. They learned the value of and became dependent upon federal economic assistance during the Great Depression and the war. White political and economic leaders looked forward to the continuance of federal support into the postwar years.\textsuperscript{157} They knew that any efforts, including mass racial violence, by white townspeople to prevent black residents’ social and economic advancement risked destroying the city’s economic future. East St. Louis was not an industrial giant like Chicago or Detroit that had the ability to absorb the shock of racial violence. The accord allowed the city to avoid the racial violence that marred segregated Detroit. East St. Louis Mayor John T. Connors, knowing his city’s vulnerability, praised residents for remaining united, regardless of race, in winning the war. Local officials hoped that peaceful race relations, within context of segregation, would pave the way for a prosperous postwar future.\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{156} “An Important Question to Consider,” \textit{ESLJ}, 17 October 1943, 7; “Job Heaven’ To Be Thing of the Past after the War,” \textit{ESLJ}, 31 October 1943, 7, 8.
\textsuperscript{158} “The Case of the City of East St. Louis,” \textit{ESLJ}, 2 May 1945, 6.
African American residents, however, demanded that they have an equal voice in the postwar era. Lincoln High School principal O.V. Quinn in describing black political assertiveness stated that black workers in particular had forged “a good strategic position” to demand inclusion in the city’s postwar planning. Quinn held high hopes for further cooperation between black labor and the CIO that had “given Negro workers greater opportunity.” According to Quinn, “[i]f Negro labor [was] ignored in post-war planning, [then] Negro labor can be expected to protest.”

Black East St. Louisans’ optimism for the postwar future was tempered, however, by the legacy of the mass violence of July 1917 that had demonstrated white intolerance of African American insistence to pursue their special interests and independence in city affairs. They had been curtly told by local AFL white representative Fred Olds to “[l]eave things alone, as they now are, and . . . [not] ask for trouble.” Black residents knew that Olds by his statement referred to the July massacre. But after fighting for twelve years for economic survival during the Great Depression and four years for democracy’s survival during the Second World War, black women and men decided to mobilize their institutions and interracial alliances to end segregation and discrimination in postwar East St. Louis.

161 For discussion of early years of the post-World War II civil rights movement, see, for example, August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 84, 92, 121; Aldon D. Morris, The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change (New York: Free Press, 1984); John Dittmer, Local People: The Struggle for
African Americans in East St. Louis launched campaigns to gain civil rights and dismantle segregated institutions immediately after the Second World War. Their determination had been fortified by federal wartime propaganda of democracy to defeat fascism, “Double V” rhetoric, battles won against workplace discrimination, World War II veterans’ resolve to fight for democracy at home, Illinois civil rights laws, and the support of organizations like the NAACP and the Illinois Human Rights Commission and white allies within labor unions and the federal government. Black residents first employed mass civil disobedience in 1949 to desegregate the public school system. East St. Louis became the harbinger of mass civil rights protests that occurred from the mid-1950s into the 1960s in Montgomery, Alabama, and other locations. By late 1949, black residents, ignoring segregationists’ threats of mass anti-black assaults, overcame the legacy of fear engendered by the July massacre and integrated the public school system.\[162\]

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\[162\] For a scholarly article, which includes a brief account on the school desegregation campaign, narrating the post-World War II struggle for equality, see Elliott Rudwick, “Fifty Years of Race Relations in East St. Louis: The Breaking Down of White Supremacy,” *Midcontinent American Studies Journal*, 6, no. 1 (Spring 1965): 3-15.
Black people anticipated a bright future in East St. Louis as the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s desegregated parks and recreational facilities, places of public accommodation, and other public spaces. Like the black population in cities such as Chicago and Detroit, the one in East St. Louis expanded significantly from a post-World War II migration of black Southerners larger than that of the Great Migration. Most migrants came from across the rural South to East St. Louis and other cities in the North, Midwest, and the Pacific West in search of employment and a better way of life. African Americans often repeated the saying, “if you cannot get a job in East St. Louis, then you cannot get one anywhere.” Black townspeople saw increasing numbers of African Americans, with approval of white political machine bosses, appointed and elected to political office. Black residents furthered their opportunities for patronage and power during the late 1960s when East St. Louis became a majority black city through black migration and white flight to the suburbs. In 1971, James Williams became the city’s first black major.  

By the time black political machines gained control in the early 1970s of a nearly all black city, East St. Louis had undergone massive deindustrialization that wrecked havoc on its economy. Machine politicians and reformers and their respective supporters, the men and women who ran the precinct committee system, divided over how to govern the municipality and respond to constituencies that expected services from a city that lacked a viable economy. East St. Louis found itself in the same situation as Gary,

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Indiana, and other deindustrialized cities experiencing a continual decline in population and per capita wealth and income. While some cities in such circumstances, Pittsburgh, for example, recovered from the loss of their major industries, East St. Louis, despite financial assistance from the state, never did.

Black East St. Louisan struggles for social advancement and political power must been seen within context of historical transformations such as urbanization, industrialization, progressive era reforms, black migrations, the Great Depression and the world wars. Further, their efforts have to be viewed in relation to the local white business community that ran this border region industrial city for many decades. Black East St. Louisan economic and social problems have their roots in the latter third of the nineteenth century when real estate politician businessmen fashioned a town designed to create profits for themselves and industrialists, not to provide a quality of life for residents. Municipal mismanagement became entrenched during the interwar years after several generations of economic boosters locked the city to the fate of railroads and other intermediary industries that impaired the ability of post-World War I politician-businessmen to apply regional planning or recruit industries based on new technologies. City leaders ignored the signs of economic decline that had been noticed as early as 1920 when an urban planner of national renown stated that railroads strangled East St. Louis and its chance for future economic growth. White politicians and businessmen, including those in the real estate faction, knew before the end of the Second World War that the economy of East St. Louis had ceased to expand. But post-World War II city boosters, wedded to a political machine culture did not see the need to change decades old
economic policies. Politician-businessmen failed to pull the city out of an economic
decline that became brutally apparent by the 1960s. Black city leaders inherited most of
the city’s problems from white politician-businessmen who had developed the economy
and commanded politics in East St. Louis for nearly a century. But they also inherited
from these white politician-businessmen a machine mentality and mode of operation. In
East St. Louis both white and black machine and reformist political leaders lacked the
vision, will, and leadership to recruit new industries and institute economic and political
innovations.
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Vita

Charles L. Lumpkins

Charles L. Lumpkins earned a Bachelor of Science in History and Sociology from Boston State College (records absorbed by the University of Massachusetts Boston), a Master of Library Science from Simmons College in Boston, and a Master of Arts in History from the University of Maine, Orono. He worked for twenty years as a professional librarian mainly in academic libraries in Massachusetts, Maine, and most recently on the faculty at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania until 1997 when he began fulltime study in the doctoral program in history at The Pennsylvania State University. He will be conferred in May 2006 the Ph.D. in History with research areas in African American, labor, and twentieth century United States history.