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# From the Ashes of Glory: The Rise and Fall of Jackson Ward

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# From the Ashes of Glory: The Rise and Fall of Jackson Ward

## **Abstract**

This paper uses primary and secondary research to analyze the political, economic, and social factors that created Jackson Ward as a separate, alternative space for black Richmonders. In addition, this paper analyzes the key institutions that made up Jackson Ward as well as the reasons surrounding its decline following desegregation.

## **Keywords**

Jackson Ward, Richmond, Virginia, Jim Crow

## **Disciplines**

African American Studies | Political History | Social History | United States History

## **Comments**

Written for History 350: Modern Black Freedom Struggle.

# FROM THE ASHES OF GLORY

The Rise and Fall of Jackson Ward

Jeffrey Lauck

History 350: Modern Black Freedom Struggle in America

October 24, 2016

I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my academic work and have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code.

The American Civil War brought about the greatest upheaval in the social order that the young United States had ever seen. In a matter of a few years, millions of African Americans went from living their lives in bondage to existing on equal legal footing with their former masters. Of course, this jubilee would be short lived. By the turn of the century, African Americans throughout the South and much of the North would be forced to live as second class citizens as de jure and de facto segregation ruled the land. Despite this reality, African Americans throughout the nation established their own communities that operated almost independently from the rest of white America. One of the most prevalent examples of this “alternative space” lies in Richmond, Virginia, in the historic Jackson Ward district. This paper seeks to explain three truths of Jackson Ward. First, that the African American community of Jackson Ward became an alternative community for black enterprise in Richmond due to the disenfranchisement of black Richmonders and the advent of Jim Crow. Second, that this separate space contributed to racial harmony within the city, but that racial tension still defined much of the district’s history. Third, and ironically, that while many in Jackson Ward fought to end segregation, much of the district’s prestige was undone following the Civil Rights Revolution.

Alternative spaces throughout the segregated South were adopted by African Americans in order to avoid facing the constant humiliation and dehumanization that came with segregation. This goal stemmed in part from the hopes of shielding children from the unfortunate reality of segregation. The strategy was also popular with black adults, who themselves relished in the idea of protesting segregation by boycotting it.<sup>1</sup> While alternative spaces could be personal—such as one’s own decision to walk to work rather than ride a segregated streetcar—they could also be communal, as with Jackson Ward. In the latter case, “a combination of black initiative and

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<sup>1</sup> Robert R. Weyeneth, “The Architecture of Racial Segregation: The Challenges of Preserving the Problematic Past,” *The Public Historian* 27, no. 4 (Fall 2005), 33.

innovation...created a range of private and public facilities that helped meet African American needs in a segregated world.” Alternative spaces both allowed black entrepreneurs to succeed in an otherwise hostile environment and provided for the needs of African Americans that were normally not met by the white-centric world. As a rule, black businesses in black business districts thrived during Jim Crow due to “the ability of merchants to provide goods and services denied blacks in white establishments.”<sup>2</sup> Public services like healthcare and education were also provided in alternative spaces like Jackson Ward.<sup>3</sup>

The growth of independent black communities like Jackson Ward also came about due to the patterns of urban segregation in the South. Southern cities were not usually residentially segregated like the North. Instead, blacks lived in “urban clusters” that occupied the outskirts of the city. This “cluster” pattern, combined with the exclusion of blacks from downtown spaces, created the perfect opportunity for black enterprise. Throughout the South, black entrepreneurs opened grocery stores, saloons, billiard halls, beauty parlors, barber shops, and funeral homes—all with almost exclusively black customers. Richmond’s Jackson Ward featured a number of these institutions, in addition to banks, insurance companies, real estate companies, retail stores, publications, and manufacturing sites. All of this contributed to community building and self-reliance. According to historian Gavin Wright, the city saw the most rapid growth of black business during the Jim Crow Era.<sup>4</sup>

Richmond is an interesting case study when analyzing segregated spaces in the American South. For one, the city was the capital of the slave-holding Confederacy. Black Richmonders had to carve out a space that served as the heart of a failed nation built on the idea of white

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>4</sup> Gavin Wright, *Sharing the Prize: The Economics of the Civil Rights Revolution in the American South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 224-225.

supremacy. Indeed, the Jackson Ward district lies only a few blocks from the city's Monument Avenue, which features several statues of Confederate leaders. Despite its position as the Confederacy's capital, Richmond was much unlike most Southern cities. While surrounded by farmland, the city itself was fairly industrial even before the war. As the South rebuilt itself after the war, Richmond already had a head start on economic transformation. The city became a haven for many African Americans due to its size and economic opportunity.

Many of these African Americans were part of a regional migration of blacks towards urban cities. According to historian Blair Kelley, "by the turn of the twentieth century, the urban South was home to a new generation of blacks raised with the belief that their success would lead to greater opportunities for the race." With a black population of nearly 50,000 (roughly 40% of the city), Richmond boasted the largest African American population in the upper South.<sup>5</sup> Understanding the politics of late nineteenth century Richmond is crucial to understanding the need for black Richmonders to create an alternative space to segregation.

April 1867 saw the first time in which African Americans participated in state politics in Virginia. At the 1867 state Republican Party convention, about two thirds of all delegates were black.<sup>6</sup> However, only a few years later in 1869, the Conservative Party—a short-lived coalition of liberal Republicans and moderate Democrats in Virginia—began curbing black political power in the name of white supremacy. The establishment of "secret ballots" allowed for votes to be counted by party hacks who tossed away black votes. "Black co-optation" occurred, where black political leadership was undermined by white hegemony within the party.<sup>7</sup> After the state elections of 1873 that saw a sweeping Conservative victory, a new wave of political sanctions

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<sup>5</sup> Blair L. M. Kelley, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 118

<sup>6</sup> Lewis A. Randolph and Gayle T. Tate, *Rights for a Season: The Politics of Race, Class, and Gender in Richmond, Virginia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 85.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

fell on black Richmonders. Poll taxes kept many from the ballot box. Petty larceny—a charge that befell many blacks often unjustly—also became a disqualifier for voting.<sup>8</sup>

State Republican Party leader and former Confederate general William Mahone attempted to harness the decreasing power of black votes for his “fusion” ticket that merged the dissident white Democrats’ Readjuster Party with the predominately African American Republican Party beginning in 1884.<sup>9</sup> The short-lived movement fell apart after a defeat in the 1889 gubernatorial election that was fraught with corruption.<sup>10</sup> By 1890, white supremacists had taken over the state government and Democrats had established one party rule in the state. The victors sought the “complete political and social subordination of blacks” in the state of Virginia.<sup>11</sup> Soon thereafter, white Republicans and the ephemeral Populist Party would also abandon blacks in Richmond and throughout the nation.<sup>12</sup>

Jackson Ward itself was created as a voting district in 1871 for Richmond’s black population with the intent of containing the political voice of black Richmond to only one district. Roughly half of the city’s black population lived in Jackson Ward. Eventually, what little power the district had would be eliminated by extreme gerrymandering that would earn the community the nickname “the shoestring district.”<sup>13</sup> By the turn of the century, many black Richmonders were heeding Booker T. Washington’s call to change the nature of how African Americans sought success in life. With hopes of political representation dashed, Washington called on blacks to abandon efforts to participate in political institutions dominated by white

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>9</sup> Harold S. Forsythe, “African American Churches, Fusion Politics in Virginia, and the Republican Gubernatorial Campaign in 1889” in John Saillant, ed., *Afro-Virginian History and Culture* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 211.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>11</sup> Randolph and Tate, *Rights for a Season*, 97.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 99-100, 106.

<sup>13</sup> Michael B. Chesson, *Richmond After the War, 1865-1890* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1981), 157; Kelley, *Right to Ride*, 141

supremacists. Instead, he called on them to focus their attention on education and economic advancement. While criticized by many for his defeatist attitude, the relatively conservative black population of Richmond adhered to his pragmatic approach.<sup>14</sup> The more radical W.E.B. DuBois also championed this idea with his “Nation Within a Nation” speech in 1934. In it, he proclaimed that

“With the use of their political power, their power as consumers, and their brainpower...Negroes can develop in the United States an economic nation within a nation, able to work through inner cooperation to found its own institutions, to educate its genius, and...keep in helpful touch and cooperate with the mass of the nation.”<sup>15</sup>

With the blessing of two of the most prominent black leaders in the nation, and with few remaining options to break into the white political establishment of the city, black Richmonders focused their resources and strength on their own community centered on Jackson Ward.<sup>16</sup>

Even though the creation of Jackson Ward was designed to eliminate black political participation, it did contribute to black community building. According to Richmond historian Michael Chesson, “the growth, after 1871, of organizations free from white control and led by blacks is one indication of the increasing independence of Richmond’s blacks.”<sup>17</sup> Even though Jackson Ward could be found on no map and ceased to exist as a political entity in 1871, it was still the symbolic, economic, and political heart of the city.<sup>18</sup> Out of the ashes of dashed political hopes, black Richmonders focused their attention inward instead.

Much of black Richmond’s organizing power centered on the black church. Indeed, many of the institutions that made Jackson Ward one of the most successful black districts in the

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<sup>14</sup> Randolph and Tate, *Rights for a Season*, 100.

<sup>15</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, “A Negro Nation Within the Nation,” *Current History* 42, no. 3, (June 1, 1935), 265.

<sup>16</sup> Wright, *Sharing the Prize*, 224.

<sup>17</sup> Chesson, *Richmond After the War*, 158.

<sup>18</sup> Kelley, *Right to Ride*, 141.



country were born out of black churches and religious organizations. Black churches, however, had a long history of helping African Americans in the long black freedom struggle. Richmond's black church tradition began in the 1840s when the integrated Baptist Church in the city expelled its black parishioners, who then created the First African Baptist Church. The church was renowned not only for its worship services but also its Bible classes, benevolent societies, choir, and "liberating atmosphere."<sup>19</sup> Before the Civil War, black churches helped blacks resist the institution of slavery by taking in runaway slaves, serving as a forum to critique the "peculiar institution," creating a mailing system to keep runaway slaves in contact with family, and even purchasing the freedom of some of its members. Black churches also created a network of financial support that predated and led to the economic systems that became Jackson Ward's "Black Wall Street."<sup>20</sup>

After the war, churches became instrumental in helping the black community in Richmond build its identity. According to historian Lewis A. Randolph, "by reconstructing and expanding their antebellum cultural institutions, black Richmonders were able to use their churches, fraternal organizations, mutual benevolent societies, and secret political unions to spearhead the political and social mobilization of the community."<sup>21</sup> Church communities grew in size after the war as freedmen flocked to the city to try and find a better life and search for lost family members. Churches and their related organizations became crucial to these new urbanites in helping them establish themselves in the city.<sup>22</sup> These churches became a network of communication and benevolence to African Americans in Richmond and throughout Virginia. When William Mahone attempted to launch his fusion party, he was advised that "freedpeople

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<sup>19</sup> Randolph and Tate, *Rights for a Season*, 69.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-71.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-79.

were most effectively reached through community organizations, particularly churches.”<sup>23</sup> It should come as no surprise, then, that much of Jackson Ward’s economic independence was rooted in religious organizations.

During the 1900 meeting of the National Negro Business League, prominent black Richmond lawyer Giles B. Jackson remarked that Richmond’s African American population “led the country in their development in real estate, banking, and insurance.” He was also proud to report that the entire state’s black business capital investment exceeded \$14 million.<sup>24</sup> Jackson Ward’s prominence as a black business district was spearheaded by the establishment of the Savings Bank of the Grand Fountain of the United Order of True Reformers in 1888. It eventually became a joint-stock company with one hundred thousand members. Soon after, the Southern Aid and Life Insurance Company was founded there as one of the first black insurance companies in the United States in 1893. In 1903, local leader Maggie Lena Walker founded the Saint Luke Penny Savings Bank, becoming the first black woman to serve as a bank president in the United States.<sup>25</sup> These banks and insurance companies—many of which had ties to churches—became the backbone of “Black Wall Street.”

Beyond these pillars of economic growth, Jackson Ward was also defined by organizations devoted to the wellbeing of its citizens. Unions of black workers represented a number of skilled and semi-skilled laborers. Unions for black waiters, printers, undertakers, stevedores, shoemakers, clerks, grocers, merchants, barbers, and mechanics all popped up in Richmond by the year 1880 with total membership that exceeded four hundred. Secret, fraternal, and benevolent organizations also sprung up in black Richmond. The Odd Fellows, Good Templars, Knights of Pythias, the Independent Order of Saint Luke, and the Grand Fountain of

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<sup>23</sup> Forsyth, “Fusion Politics in Virginia,” 218.

<sup>24</sup> Kelley, *Right to Ride*, 118.

<sup>25</sup> Randolph and Tate, *Rights for a Season*, 100; Chesson, *Richmond After the War*, 159.

the United Order of True Reformers all established chapters in the city in order to help the black community with their benevolent acts and charity.<sup>26</sup>

The Independent Order of Saint Luke was particularly important. Linked both to the network of black churches in the city and the Saint Luke Penny Savings Bank, the organization also expanded by opening the Saint Luke Emporium in 1905. The Emporium was key to Jackson Ward, as it allowed black Richmonders to shop in their own space, free from behavioral segregation practices that barred them from trying on clothes prior to buying them. Walker and the Order of Saint Luke also created the *Saint Luke Herald* in order to “disseminate information on the organization as well as community news.”<sup>27</sup> The *Herald* was joined by the *Richmond Planet*, Virginia’s largest black weekly, in keeping Jackson Ward connected via newspapers. *Richmond Planet* editor John Mitchell Jr. used his editorials to urge black Richmonders to stay the course that Booker T. Washington had laid out for them. In one such editorial, he called on his readers to “continue to save money and property...Any colored man who opposes race enterprises among the colored people is his own worst enemy.”<sup>28</sup> Led by Maggie Lena Walker, the Saint Luke-affiliated organizations relied heavily on women in their day to day workings, much unlike many black organizations during the Jim Crow and Civil Rights eras. All of these institutions made Jackson Ward the heart of the black community in Richmond and a space that could exist almost entirely independent of the rest of the white city.

The legacy of Richmond’s Jackson Ward district as a separate space lasted well into the 1950s. In the 1956 edition of Victor Green’s *the Negro Traveler’s Green Book*, several sites are listed as “black-friendly” in Richmond. The “Green Book” was created to help black travelers traverse the segregated world both south and north of the Mason-Dixon Line. It listed hotels,

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<sup>26</sup> Chesson, *Richmond After the War*, 159; Randolph and Tate, *Rights for a Season*, 100.

<sup>27</sup> Randolph and Tate, *Rights for a Season*, 100, 103; Chesson, *Richmond After the War*, 159.

<sup>28</sup> John T. Mitchell Jr., editorial in *Richmond Planet*, March 14, 1903.

restaurants, and other destinations that served blacks. Distributed by the Standard Oil Company to help promote black tourism during the 1950s, today they can paint a picture of the architecture of Jim Crow America. The 1956 edition lists four destinations for Richmond: the Slaughters Hotel at 529 N. 2<sup>nd</sup> St., the Harris Hotel at 200 E. Clay St., the Eggleston Hotel on the corner of 2<sup>nd</sup> and Leigh Streets, and a local branch of the Young Women's Christian Association at 515 N. 7<sup>th</sup> St.<sup>29</sup> All of these locations are clustered within a few blocks of each other in the Jackson Ward neighborhood. While the book only lists places to stay the night in Richmond, any black tourist in the city would need only be directed to Jackson Ward and they could find everything they needed while on their journey.

Jackson Ward is also a major part of the story of race relations in Richmond. Virginia's race relations in general were notable as being "perhaps the most harmonious in the South," according to political scientist V. O. Key.<sup>30</sup> Race relations in the city were defined by a paternalistic white ruling class that demanded cooperation and subversion of blacks in exchange for basic services, protection, and limited social mobility for blacks. This unspoken agreement helped avoid violence and physical coercion for much of Richmond's history during the Jim Crow Era.<sup>31</sup> While Richmond was deemed to have experienced relatively harmonious race relations throughout most of the pre-Civil Rights era, black and white Richmond were far from unified. Despite the political and legal equality that was supposed to have been ushered in by the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments, black Richmonders quickly found their newfound liberties trampled underfoot, a move that encouraged them to create their own unique space in Jackson Ward.

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<sup>29</sup> Victor H. Green, *The Negro Traveler's Green Book* (New York: Victor H. Green & Co., 1956), University of South Carolina South Caroliniana Library Digital Collections, 65.

<sup>30</sup> V. O. Key Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 32.

<sup>31</sup> J. Douglas Smith, *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 4.

The fragile peace between the paternalistic white elites and their black subjects would also be rocked at several points in the city's history. In 1904, the Virginia Passenger and Power Company—the company that provided the city's revolutionary streetcar service—passed a statute that segregated Richmond's streetcars. Jackson Ward residents already had to contend with inferior streetcar service as only one line of track rode through the neighborhood compared to the two lines of track in white districts. This resulted in wait times as long as four times the length of those at predominately white stops. Unlike elsewhere in the South, black Richmonders did not contest the ordinance in a court of law. Instead, they orchestrated a boycott of the streetcar system—half a century before the famous Montgomery Bus Boycott in Alabama. The boycott was led by Jackson Ward community leaders John Mitchell Jr. and Maggie Lena Walker. Mitchell and Walker organized meetings, wrote articles, and delivered speeches supporting and advocating for the boycott.<sup>32</sup> In one such speech, Maggie Walker spoke up: "Somebody must speak. Somebody must cry aloud. The afflictions and the persecutions of our people must be told. We must get together and reason together. Somebody must cry out."<sup>33</sup> Due to Walker's involvement, the boycott relied heavily on female activists. She even used the occasion as an opportunity to decry accusations that women of color were inherently "immoral."<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, the city of Richmond—void of black political voices due to gerrymandering—doubled down on the streetcar company policy, passing a city ordinance mandating segregation on streetcars two years later. While the boycott hurt the Virginia Passenger and Power Company economically, the movement lost energy and fizzled out soon after the ordinance was passed.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Kelley, *Right to Ride*, 120-126; Chesson, *Richmond After the War*, 176.

<sup>33</sup> Maggie Lena Walker, "An Address for Men Only," St. Luke Hall, March 1, 1906, Maggie Lena Walker Papers, Box 3, Folder 24, Maggie Lena Walker National Historic Site, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>34</sup> Kelley, *Right to Ride*, 126-130.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

The introduction of the radical Marcus Garvey into the equation of Richmond race relations also upset the racial harmony. Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in New York in 1917 as a “grassroots organization that emphasized racial pride, growth of black business enterprise, black education, and Pan-African identification.” He is considered an important part in the growth of a post-WWI black consciousness due to his focus on the assertions of black dignity. UNIA was the largest grassroots black movement of its time according to historian Barbara Blair. Virginia alone had 48 UNIA chapters, including a cluster near Norfolk and one very important chapter in Richmond. Virginia’s diverse mix of urban and rural populations also contributed to the dynamism of Garvey’s UNIA.<sup>36</sup>

By 1925, Garvey found himself imprisoned on mail fraud charges. Hoping to form an unholy alliance that could free him, the UNIA attempted to ally themselves with white supremacists with two additional shared goals of anti-miscegenation and repatriation of black lives to Africa.<sup>37</sup> This alliance is odd given the history of white supremacy and anti-miscegenation in Virginia. For much of Virginia’s history, white Virginians saw any move toward black social equality as an endorsement of miscegenation. They saw racial mixing itself as an “affront to white womanhood” and “an endangerment to the purity of the white race.” As a result, the state passed a number of anti-miscegenation statutes all predicated on the supremacy of a pure white race.<sup>38</sup> How exactly Garveyites and their own “racial pride” could stomach an alliance with these white supremacists is a mystery.

The oddity and downright absurdity of the proposition was not lost on many black Richmonders. The hopeful coalition met in September 1925 at the Sharon Baptist Church in

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<sup>36</sup> Barbara Blair, “Garveyism and Contested Political Tension in 1920s Virginia,” in John Saillant, ed., *Afro-Virginian History and Culture* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 227-228.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>38</sup> Arica L. Coleman, *That the Blood Stay Pure: African Americans, Native Americans, and the Predicament of Race and Identity in Virginia* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013) 88-89.

Jackson Ward. The keynote speaker was William Sherill, the head of the UNIA headquarters in New York. He was joined by members of the Anglo-Saxon Clubs of America, a splinter group of the Ku Klux Klan that was committed to maintaining the “absolute purity of the white race.”<sup>39</sup> When one member of the Anglo-Saxon club rose to speak, Reverend R.H. Johnson had had enough. He took to the pulpit to interrupt the meeting and decry that this unholy alliance was not part of the agreement in which he leased his church to the UNIA. He would not stand to let his church become a soapbox for white supremacy. By March of the following year, the alliance had been forged, but at high political costs. The Richmond chapter of the UNIA broke in two, undermining any potential gains of the new coalition.<sup>40</sup>

This episode highlights the fact that racial tension did not only exist between black and white Richmonders, but also among members of the black community in the city. Even before the unholy alliance, Marcus Garvey was already a controversial character, with many black Richmonders believing him to be too radical for their own conservative feelings.<sup>41</sup> Many black conservatives also opposed the streetcar boycott, believing the movement risked the fragile racial balance and could devolve into racial violence in the city.<sup>42</sup> The divide between the radical and conservative in black Richmond as well as the relative strength of the conservative wing of the community can likely be attributed to Jackson Ward’s success as an independent black space. Many blacks became quite wealthy and rose the social ladder within Jackson Ward. While still occupying a lower status than white Richmonders, they were extremely hesitant to risk their status by taking part in radical movements that could upset racial harmony.

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<sup>39</sup> Smith, *Managing White Supremacy*, 5; Blair, “Garveyism and Contested Political Tension,” 235.

<sup>40</sup> Blair, “Garveyism and Contested Political Tension,” 235, 241.

<sup>41</sup> Randolph and Tate, *Rights for a Season*, 117.

<sup>42</sup> Kelley, *Right to Ride*, 148.

The conservative-radical shift also lines up well with the middle class-working class split present in the black community in Richmond as well as much of the South. Ironically, one of black middle-class Richmonders' greatest grievances with Jim Crow was that white Richmonders lumped them together with working class blacks in their views of the black race.<sup>43</sup> The working poor made up the majority of the black population of Richmond as it did with the white population of the city. John Mitchell Jr., a member of the black middle class, was frustrated with the working poor on both sides of the racial divide. He believed himself to be above both in status and prestige, but found himself occupying the same rung on the social ladder as the poor of his community. In an editorial for his *Richmond Planet*, he wrote that “white jail birds, penitentiary convicts, dive keepers, and white women of questionable character” were certainly not entitled to a higher status than himself.<sup>44</sup> However, even though middle class blacks opposed to the ways in which poor blacks acted and spoke, they still hoped to advise them toward greater inclusion in the community with the goal of strengthening Jackson Ward.<sup>45</sup>

While Jackson Ward thrived as a community within Richmond for several decades, it fell victim to the plight of inner city decay following the Civil Rights Movement Revolution. In an ironic twist, while members of the Jackson Ward community fought hard with activists throughout the nation to successfully upend the Jim Crow South, their successes actually hurt the economies of black business districts—including Jackson Ward. During the Jim Crow Era, alternative spaces like Jackson Ward thrived due to a plethora of customers: tens of thousands of African Americans that were almost entirely shut out of the economy of white Richmond and therefore had nowhere else to spend their dollars but at black businesses. During Jim Crow, these

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>44</sup> John Mitchell Jr., “The Separate Cars and the Negro,” *Richmond Planet*, October 27, 1900.

<sup>45</sup> Kelley, *Right to Ride*, 119, 133.



districts were protected from competition and had a semi-captive customer base. When traditionally white spaces were opened to blacks following the Civil Rights Movement, a flood of competition cornered the market in black business districts.<sup>46</sup>

Business historian Robert Weems Jr. noted that “white owned businesses, rather than unfettered black consumers, were the primary beneficiaries of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.”<sup>47</sup> In many ways, this irony made sense when considering the methods in which civil rights activists attempted to achieve their goals. Boycotts, like the 1904-06 streetcar boycott in Richmond, were an integral way for black activists to protest segregation. The mode of thinking went that in order to have the white power structure change the system, African Americans must act to make the current Jim Crow system also hurt the white power structure. In aligning their own goals of desegregation with white elites’ desires to have their markets once again opened to black patrons, these activists were successful in achieving their goals. The downside, of course, was that black enterprises would have to compete with newly opened white spaces.

While many blacks relished in their new ability to partake in white businesses, few whites crossed the racial divide to make up for black losses in the market. Economic collapse visited black districts across the South. One resident of the historically black Ashley Street in Jacksonville, Florida remarked that “first we had segregation, and then integration. Then disintegration.”<sup>48</sup> The shift even caused a certain nostalgia for the Jim Crow Era among some Southern blacks, according to *New York Times* correspondent Peter Applebone. According to Applebone, the Civil Rights Revolution was “a mixed blessing for Southern blacks, who won a measure of integration into a white world at the expense of some of the enduring and nurturing

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<sup>46</sup> Wright, *Sharing the Prize*, 223.

<sup>47</sup> Robert E. Weems Jr., *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 69.

<sup>48</sup> Wright, *Sharing the Prize*, 226; Russ Rymer, *American Beach* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), 220.

institutions of the black one.”<sup>49</sup> The entire ordeal came to exemplify W.E.B. DuBois’ famous 1924 essay “The Dilemma of the Negro,” wherein he laments the inherent racial inferiority imposed on blacks under segregation, but fears the loss of black culture and prosperity that could occur with integration.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, as DuBois had predicted, integration and a move towards racial equality came at the expense of black enterprise.

While integration was indeed a large force behind the decay of black business districts, they were hardly the only factors at play. The increase in popularity of automobiles and suburbs after World War II had already begun the process of urban decay long before President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act. The advent of the suburban mall offered a more expansive alternative to city shops, further undermining the small, usually family owned black businesses of Jackson Ward and other black districts across the South. Corporate economics also enveloped smaller businesses—usually in white areas of cities—hurting small businesses owned by both whites and blacks. The outsourcing of manufacturing jobs combined with increased international competition and government regulation also led to the loss of capital flowing into cities, causing unemployment and infrastructure decay across racial lines. Finally, gentrification added to these problems that plagued Jackson Ward and many historically black districts in several Southern cities.<sup>51</sup>

From the ashes of black Richmonders’ dreams of inclusion in the former capital of the Confederacy, Jackson Ward rose as an independent space for the city’s African American population to thrive. The district provided for nearly every element of life needed to survive in the Jim Crow Era. While its existence likely alleviated much of the racial tension present

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<sup>49</sup> Peter Applebone, *Dixie Rising: How the South is Shaping American Values, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Random House Torchbooks, 1996), 17, 215.

<sup>50</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, “The Dilemma of the Negro,” *The American Mercury* (October 1924), 180.

<sup>51</sup> Wright, *Sharing the Prize*, 227.

elsewhere in the South, the community's history was marred by several examples of upheaval in the racial harmony. Finally, the community of Jackson Ward fell victim to the deterioration that befell so many other cities in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement. Luckily, this last point is not the epitaph of Jackson Ward. Indeed, the district has seen a resurgence in growth like many historically black communities throughout the nation. Black business ownership in the South has increased ten fold overall since 1972. One large reason for this is the increased economic and educational opportunities afforded to blacks since the Civil Rights Revolution. These improvements have provided for more start-up capital and economic know-how to help black entrepreneurs get started.<sup>52</sup> With these new opportunities, it appears as if the long legacy of the Civil Rights Movement will result in a revitalized black community within Richmond and the rest of the urban South. Hopefully, these gains after initial setbacks will propel Jackson Ward to a new golden age founded on inclusion and egalitarianism rather than segregation and white supremacy.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 228-230.

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