

Red and Brick and Stone: Atlanta's Pragmatic Civil Rights and the Auburn Avenue Library, 1899-1950

By

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The System We Must Tear Down

The disenfranchisement and segregation of African Americans following the Civil War, particularly in the South, shaped the way communities developed across the region. Immediately following Georgia's re-admission into the Union, black representatives were voted into the General Assembly, but by the end of Northern reconstruction efforts, blacks were fleeing a system of oppressive laws and codes that came to be known as Jim Crow. The failure of the Confederacy and the slave system caused many white supremacists to suppress the rights of African Americans in other ways: between the 1865 and 1968, 531 lynchings were reported in Georgia, a record that exceeded most other Southern states.¹ Newly freed Southern blacks were left to navigate the social and political systems that silenced their dissent against violence, economic immobility, and political oppression.

The segregation of black communities by both overt and polite racism created powerful centers of black autonomy, resistance, and self-reliance. This study focuses on one such institution, the Auburn Avenue Branch of the Atlanta Public Library, as a demonstration of the evolution of power within Atlanta. Focusing on the years between the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision in 1896 and the beginning of direct action Civil Rights protests in the 1950s, this work aims to highlight the impact community organizations, like the library, had on the political momentum of the 1930s and 40s. Tracing Atlanta's path from the turn of the century through the construction of the Auburn Avenue Branch in 1921 shines a spotlight on the library as the intersection of codified segregation, American progressivism, and the paternalism of Atlanta's

1. Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 34. The only state to exceed Georgia was Mississippi, with 581.

white leaders. The evolution of the library's programming and role throughout through the 1930s highlights the rise of the black middle class and the push for power within the ironhanded racism of Jim Crow. The increase in African American political power that occurred during the 1940s takes root in the growth of the black voting bloc and the role of community organizations like the Auburn Avenue Branch. Situating the library within the early momentum of the civil rights movement of the 1930s and '40s secures librarians and middle class African American women as central to Atlanta's Civil Rights narrative.

The more traditional narrative of Atlanta's Civil Rights highlights a coalition between the white male civic leaders and the black male leaders of African American churches and community organizations. That coalition's commitment to economic stability has been given most of the credit for maintaining relatively peaceful race relations throughout the 1930s and '40s.² Women, too, played a pivotal role: black leadership would not have received support from the community without the powerful voice of Atlanta churchwomen. While this study does not ignore their influences, it looks more closely at the less valorized grassroots efforts by the Auburn Avenue librarians and their programming. This study traces the narrative of the library from early demands for library service from the black intelligentsia to the eventual funding of the Auburn Avenue Branch; through the Adult Education programming boom of the 1930s and the construction of an additional library branch in the late 1940s. Like many other community organizations attempting to support black life in Atlanta, those at the library adapted the programming as they could, but ultimately their work was not financially supported by the city,

2. Ronald H. Bayor *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent*, Kevin Michael Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005)

and thus the library closed. The librarians and their efforts impacted the identity formation of Atlanta and created a legacy that long outlived the Auburn Branch's physical structure.

Literature and Sources

This study draws on historical writings from three major areas of study: the history of the American public library, African American history, and the history of the American South. If Atlanta is the setting, African Americans are the players and the Library is the stage. Looking closely at the context surrounding the founding of the Auburn Avenue Branch, as well as library programming, an image of the library as a test kitchen for autonomy begins to emerge. An examination of the evolution of the library prior to 1950 furthers Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's assertion that the Civil Rights movement extends to include the decades preceding the 1950s and forward into the present day struggle for equality.³

This temporal extension of the struggle for civil rights allows for an exploration of the subversive and overt acts of autonomy within the confines of Jim Crow. In many cases, the extreme segregation of blacks by whites resulted in powerful African American economic, business, religious, and social centers. Eric Lott, Howard Rabinowitz, and C. Vann Woodward have written extensively on the paradox of Jim Crow in the South.⁴ In *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, Ronald Bayor provides a close analysis of the development of the

3. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91.4 (2005): 1233.

4. See Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), Howard N. Rabinowitz, "More Than the Woodward Thesis: Assessing the Strange Career of Jim Crow," *The Journal of American History* 75.3 (1988): 842–856. and C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1965).

city of Atlanta during Jim Crow and uses the lens of race to emphasize the relationship between white policy makers and the disenfranchisement of the black community. An illustration of the struggle for black economic power and educational resources in light of the white community's fear of black progress cements the library's central role in the paradox of Jim Crow.

Black autonomy was also supported through legislation and political strategies throughout the 1920s, '30s and '40s. In *Courage to Dissent : Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement*, Tomiko Brown-Nagin provides a contemporary analysis of the effects of racial discrimination in Atlanta at the intersection between the law and the changing landscape of the city. By examining the differences between the Atlanta black community leaders and the nationwide NAACP, Brown-Nagin re-centers the civil rights struggle on local, grassroots efforts. This analysis gives focus to interracial conflict, highlights the tensions between the middle and working classes, and documents changes in strategy within the black community. Just as black leaders adapted their strategies of political negotiation, working and middle class whites tactically maneuvered in order to protect segregation. Kevin Kruse's *White Flight* uncovers the segregationist ideology in the streets and explores the immediate relationship between evolving black municipal power and the segregationist's rhetoric of individual rights. The perspectives of local, community-driven efforts both in favor of and against integration give structure to the exploration of the power of the Auburn Avenue Branch.

During the long Civil Rights movement, power relations evolved not only between whites and blacks, but between men and women and the public and private spaces associated with masculine and feminine spheres. By the time the Auburn Avenue Branch was built, librarianship had experienced a revolution of female workers. While the majority of African American women were employed in households as domestic servants, many became teachers

and librarians for black communities. As more black women became employed outside the homes of white employers, an African American middle class emerged. Evelyn Higginbotham's *Righteous Discontent: the Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* and Paula Giddings' *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* provide notable studies on the impact of class distinctions on the evolution of African American women in the public sphere. Kathryn Nasstrom's *Women, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Historical Memory in Atlanta, 1946-1973* broadens the scope of this work to include notable Atlanta women of both races who crossed gender and racial lines in the pursuit of equality. These studies emphasize the power of white and black female library workers and the impact their library advocacy had on their respective communities.

The revolution of female librarians occurred in part due to an increase in libraries, many of which were built with grants from the Carnegie Corporation. Andrew Carnegie donated more than \$40 million for the creation of public libraries in the United States and many studies exist on his life, philanthropy, and the libraries he funded.⁵ George Bobinski's *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development* sets the stage for understanding the bureaucracy of the Carnegie grant program. Through his research, he provides the first compilation of numbers from the records of the Carnegie Corporation: how many libraries were funded, where they were built, and how many are still in operation. This seminal work and valuable resource shows the extent of applications, as well as those who filed them, and provides a comparison of the Auburn Avenue Branch in terms of its success relative to the rest of the nation. In *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920*,

5. George Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries; Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development*, (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969), 3.

architectural historian Abigail Van Slyk speaks to the physical structures of the Carnegie Libraries and the evolution of their designs. This work highlights the differences among communities and how despite being a part of a nationwide program, each library evolved quite differently depending on location, size, and community support.⁶ By considering the differences of each library and the community they reflect, Van Slyk ignores the more traditional gilded nostalgia associated with the Carnegie program and leaves room to witness each library as a contributor to social change. This social change is closely tied to the growth of women's influence on Carnegie libraries as they raised funds for building maintenance and gained employment within these newly gendered spaces. In *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920*, Dee Garrison further investigates the feminization of the profession by coupling the history of libraries with the advancement of women from private to public space and arguing that the two cannot be separated.⁷

While these sources provide guidance for understanding Carnegie's influence on the evolution of the public library, none pay particularly careful attention to library service to African Americans. For this perspective, one must turn to the works of David Battles, Michael Fultz, E.J. Josey, and Dan Lee. Battles' *The History of Public Library Access for African Americans in the South, Or, Leaving Behind the Plow*, which presents a comprehensive view of library service in the South, contextualizing the public library movement in relation to Jim Crow. Fultz's "Black Public Libraries in the South in the Era of De Jure Segregation" places the evolution of library service within the history of education, a coupling that highlights the lack of

6. Abigail Ayres Van Slyck, *Free to All : Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

7. Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920*, (New York: Free Press, 1979), xiii.

state-funded support for black schooling within status quo racial segregation. Josey's *The Black Librarian in America Revisited* and Lee's "Faith Cabin Libraries: A Study of an Alternative Library Service in the Segregated South, 1932-1960," focus on alternative library services that allowed African American communities to advance their education and invest in local community centers outside the political machinery of white power.

More recent studies throw light on Carnegie-funded libraries within African American communities. Julia Hersberger, Lou Sua, and Adam Murray's study, "The Fruit and Root of the Community: The Greensboro Carnegie Negro Library, 1904-1964," looks at library service to blacks in North Carolina, but lacks thorough investigation into sources outside those produced by the library. Cheryl Knott Malone's dissertation, "Accommodating Access: 'Colored' Carnegie Libraries, 1905-1925," provides a more exhaustive study of African American Carnegie-funded libraries in three Southern cities and compares them with the 135th Street branch in Harlem. By examining library service in three different areas of the South, Malone's study disrupts any sense of a typical evolution of service. And unlike the Hersberger et al. study, Malone's work brings to light white library boards and trustees' paternalistic commitment to black library establishments and the continued segregation that this social programming perpetuated. Perhaps more importantly, her study calls attention to the collaboration between white librarians and black community leaders, and between black librarians and white policy makers.⁸ While neither study touches on the Auburn Avenue Branch in Atlanta, their methods prove useful in the context of library service. There are also clear limitations: due to the scarcity of resources from African

8. Cheryl Knott Malone, "Accommodating Access: 'Colored' Carnegie Libraries, 1905-1925," (Ph.D. diss: The University of Texas at Austin, 1996), 250-65.

American branch libraries, as well as the general practice for librarians to discard circulation data after use, records in all cases are sparse.

Making use of records and archives that have been intentionally preserved, Rachel Helton looks at the evolution of African American special collections and the contributions these materials made to the authorship of black identity in her unpublished dissertation, "Remaking the Past: Collecting, Collectivity, and the Emergence of Black Archival Publics, 1915-1950." This work considers librarians as creators of a black experience that made the Civil Rights movement possible. While her work references collections in Chicago, New York City, and Washington, D.C., her research opens the door for the possibility of collecting archives as artifacts of social revolution.

Invaluable resources for the study of the Auburn Avenue Branch include the 1988 publication *Library Service in Black and White : Some Personal Recollections, 1921-1980*, by Annie McPheeters, librarian at the Auburn Avenue Branch from 1934-1949. Additionally, Barbara Adkins' 1951 thesis, "A History of Public Library Service to Negroes in Atlanta, GA," based on interviews with librarians who worked at the Auburn Avenue Branch, provides analysis of the Atlanta laws that governed library segregation before the passage of *Brown vs. Board of Education*. These sources are the first intellectual treatment of library service in Atlanta by African American women and the last publications addressing comprehensive library service to African Americans in Atlanta.

The history of library service in Atlanta is worth another look. Libraries exist as both a place to educate and recreate; they occupy an ambiguous and feminized space; and they are not compulsory destinations. The collections and spaces are open to the interpretation of whoever uses them. A clear examination of the impact of the Auburn Avenue Branch requires studies in

Southern history, African American history, and the history of public library service in America. An extension of the Civil Rights movement to include the decades prior to 1950 situates a grassroots organization — like the library—as a central place for community, performance, and resistance.

The Barren Prospect in the Southern States

In order to understand the roots of white attitudes towards African Americans, as they pertain to library usage, one must identify the economic and political forces that enabled the establishment of Jim Crow and chart the progress African Americans made within this oppressive system. Legal limitations were in effect, but laws alone “are not an adequate index to the extent and prevalence of segregation and discriminatory practices in the South.”⁹ In Atlanta, growth after the Civil War led to a concentration of African American communities, and progressive reform within the white community contributed to segregation of the city.¹⁰ An exploration of the disfranchisement and economic slavery of Atlanta's blacks during the turn of the 20th century provides insight into the investments black leaders made in the 1930s to forward voter registration and education.

As a center for railway transportation for Southern goods, Atlanta became a major target of Union forces during the Civil War. The city was seized and burned in 1864, shortly prior to the fall of Confederacy. Newly freed slaves, Northern investors and carpetbaggers, and those seeing to make their fortune through politics flocked to the urban center. These migrants spurred

9. Howard N. Rabinowitz, “More Than the Woodward Thesis: Assessing the Strange Career of Jim Crow,” *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 3 (December 1, 1988): 846.

10. John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920*, (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1977), xi.

Georgia's readmission to the Union with many African Americans taking part in the state's 1868 constitutional convention.¹¹ However, Republican control of the state and the newly established rights of African Americans dissolved with the end of Federal Reconstruction and by 1870 Democrats had control of the General Assembly. Many blacks found themselves a part of the convict lease system, a state-sanctioned operation that leased state prisoners to private citizens.¹² This redefined slavery was codified in the 1877 state constitution, which included other statutes for state control over black life, including a mandatory poll tax. The white primary, or the practice of excluding voters from participating in party primary elections based on race, had been in effect for many years, but was put into law in 1900. By 1908, with the installation of literacy tests, black Georgia voters had been effectively disenfranchised.

Another consequence of Democratic rule was the installation of a county-unit system. Counties were classified by population into three categories: urban, town, and rural. Candidates were required to obtain the plurality of votes for each county, after which they would be awarded the total units allocated for each: 6 units for urban counties, 4 for town counties, and 2 for rural counties. A candidate needed 206 of the 410 unit votes to win the nomination, regardless of the popular vote. Therefore, if a candidate won three rural counties, those combined units would be worth the units of the most populated urban county in the state. As a result, candidates ignored urban voters and wooed the more rural and racially regressive electorate. Even as voter restrictions changed over the course of the 20th century, urban areas were still subject to a statewide bias towards rural politics.

11. William Harris Bragg, "Reconstruction in Georgia".

12. William Andrew Todd, "Convict Lease System," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, December 12, 2005, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/convict-lease-system>.

Rural blacks and whites were beholden to sharecropping, the immediate economic structure that replaced slavery in the Southern states, and many racist whites' fears stemmed from their economic competition with blacks. This fear was often rooted in the social stratification instilled by wealthy antebellum planters, who in an effort to maintain political control, played into the fear of their poor, white tenant farmers and pitted them against African Americans.¹³ Black sharecroppers, often illiterate, were limited by the loans from whites and their honesty regarding the amount the sharecroppers owed and produced.¹⁴ If black sharecroppers attempted to oppose the system through organizing protests or voting, not only did they run the risk of violence, but they also jeopardized their ability to receive future loans or support from white farmers.

Support from white investors arrived in the South through other channels. Educational ventures by missionary societies resulted in the establishment of Atlanta University in 1865 and the Atlanta Baptist College, later Morehouse College, in 1867. In 1881, two more institutions followed: Spelman College, an all-female school, and Morris Brown, the only black-operated college.¹⁵ At the turn of the century, these institutions represented the progressive mindset that was growing within the Northern, white, middle class. Progressive reforms addressed social, economic, and moral issues across the country and led to investments in education in the South

13. Russell Korobkin, "The Politics of Disfranchisement in Georgia," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (1990): 20.

14. *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow*, directed by James Anderson, et al., (San Francisco, Calif: California Newsreel, 2004), DVD.

15. Sarah Mercer Judson, "Building the New South City: African-American and White Clubwomen in Atlanta, 1895-1930," (Ph.D. dissertation: New York University, 1997), 53.

by businessman Julius Rosenwald and industrialist John D. Rockefeller.¹⁶ As urban centers like Atlanta hoped to lure investment, the stability of the city's growing economy depended on control of social order. In an attempt to maintain peace, Southern progressive reforms supported segregation of the races, where in turn black men and women struggled to invent their own institutions.¹⁷ Northern progressives invested in libraries as places for recent immigrants to become Americanized, while Southern states were slower to invest in both education and libraries.

Libraries as American Institutions

Early public libraries were born out of large donations by wealthy men like Walter Newberry in Chicago and Enoch Pratt in Baltimore. By providing funds for the buildings and influencing what patrons were reading, the wealthy aristocracy could control the values of future generations and maintain a measure of cultural influence.¹⁸ This progressive spirit led to settlement houses, parks, and the development of other public institutions created to aid in the Americanization of immigrants, particularly children, in the early part of the twentieth century.¹⁹

16. For more on the Progressive era in African American communities, see Hazel Carby, "Policing the Black Woman's Body in an Urban Context," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (1992): 738–55 and Khalil Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010).

17. Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era*, xi.

18. Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 7.

19. John Mark Tucker, *Untold Stories: Civil Rights, Libraries, and Black Librarianship*, (Champaign, IL: Publications Office, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, 1998), 66.

During the late nineteenth century, men were the primary leaders in the growing field of library study. This was due in part to the masculinity and business acumen that men associated with the establishment of libraries, but was also influenced by societal expectations that middle and upper class women should remain relegated to the private sphere.²⁰ The male dominion of librarianship began to decline with the emergence of the first wave of female college graduates in the early 20th century, a time when women also began to populate the ranks of nursing, teaching, and social work. “Why,” thought many wealthy, white, male-dominated library boards, “should we pay men to work in libraries when we can hire women for a fraction of the cost?” By 1910, the profession saw a complete overhaul of its workforce: almost 80% of library workers were female.²¹

By 1910, these “reverent hands” were tending books in libraries across the country, the majority of them built with funds donated by Andrew Carnegie.²² A Pittsburgh steel magnate by way of Scotland, Carnegie donated most of his fortune to philanthropic outreach. His grant program for the construction of libraries was in part an attempt to move philanthropy away from paternalistic, indiscriminate giving and towards a corporate approach. Communities were able to apply for the grant under the pretense that they purchase the land and maintain at least 10% of the donation for the operating budget.²³ His grant program changed the American public library

20. Ibid., 163

21. Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*, 148.

22. Ibid., 148

23. Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 43.

experience and the grand columns and domes reminiscent of great European architecture made Carnegie libraries around the country easily identifiable.²⁴

In fact, despite outward similarities, the differences between Carnegie libraries, fostered by their community stewards, demonstrated local peculiarities that Carnegie sought to promote. One aspect of the application process required a letter from the mayor or the city council explaining from where the funds for maintenance would come. In many cases, women's clubs or male community members approached city councils to encourage the application for funding. In these instances, men were more likely to highlight the future investment opportunities the library might inspire, while women focused their proposals on community betterment.²⁵ Carnegie took a local-law-rules-all attitude that brought the democracy associated with twentieth century library growth to many small, Midwestern communities. Yet, because he refused to take a stand against local law that limited civil freedoms, his policy reinforced the status quo segregation of the South.

In 1899, when the African American community in Atlanta discovered that Carnegie had awarded the city a large sum for the construction of a central library, educated blacks requested access to the space.²⁶ Carrie Young, an alumna of Atlanta University, noted "what a help such a

24. Van Slyck, *Free to All*, 125.

25. *Ibid.*, 126

26. The Records of the Carnegie Corporation held at Columbia University's Rare Book Room demonstrate the extent to which the black community organized to gain access to the City of Atlanta Carnegie Library, versus how much was negotiated by Barker and the rest of the Library Board. The records indicate the amount of time that passed between the white branch's construction and the approval for the Auburn Avenue branch, as well as who from the African American community was interested in gaining access to the library, and what tactics they used to justify this integration. The records also include letters from the Savannah Colored Branch,

library will be to all classes of people especially to the colored people of whom are hungering and thirsting after knowledge.”²⁷ Just as progressive values influenced upper class whites to invest in public library spaces, much of the black middle class adopted similar politics of respectability. Young's letter indicates the growth of an urban black middle class that took root in the South during this period.

In many cases, the evolution of the politics of respectability within the African American community was based less on paternalism and more on survival instincts. During slavery, black women were constantly defending themselves against accusations of lasciviousness, while their male partners were regularly accused of the rape of white women.²⁸ These stereotypes continued throughout Jim Crow and by adopting white middle class habits and dress, African American women sought to avoid the stigma of promiscuity by completely unsexing themselves.²⁹ The politics of respectability gained momentum within groups of churchwomen and the club movement in the 1880s, continuing throughout the twentieth century.³⁰

which yield a point of comparison for how the two cities differed in their relationships between the white library board, the Carnegie Corporation, and their own communities.

27. Carrie E. Young to Andrew Carnegie, February 23, 1899. Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Carnegie Corporation of New York Records, 1900-2004*. Microfilm reel 2. Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

28. These stereotypes existed well into the 20th century with the issues surrounding the integration of buses, in part because black men might sit near white women. See Kevin Michael Kruse, *White Flight*.

29. Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter : The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, (New York: W. Morrow, 1984), 6.

30. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent : The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 186.

While middle class African American women who adopted these ideals may have garnered more respect from the white community, they often alienated their working class counterparts. Many black working class women and men could not afford the luxury of education, even if it was available. The state of Georgia did not establish a public school system for African Americans until 1930, and the early childhood education at the private, all-black Atlanta University required tuition.³¹ Another letter to the Carnegie Corporation, from J.W. Bowen, professor at Gammon Theological Seminary, highlights the fact that blacks were often shunned for being unintelligent and that “if our white friends in this city, who will no doubt accept your generous offer, will make equitable provision that the race may use that library upon the same terms with the whites, that it will be an untold blessing to them.”³² Bowen’s suggestion implies an awareness of the hypocrisy taking place within the state’s General Assembly and their unwillingness to allocate funds for the education of blacks. Yet there were no laws that required whites to maintain separate library facilities. *Plessy v. Ferguson* gave many whites the justification they needed to deny privileges to blacks, while also putting forward a circular logic: “since they’re all illiterate, what would they use a library for?”³³ Blacks in Atlanta had to develop pragmatic approaches to breaking down these stereotypes associated with Jim Crow in venues from education to transportation and library integration.

31 Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, 205.

32. Letter from J.W. Bowen to Andrew Carnegie, March 8, 1899. Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Carnegie Corporation of New York Records, 1900-2004*. Microfilm reel 2. Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

33. David M. Battles, *The History of Public Library Access for African Americans in the South, Or, Leaving behind the Plow*, (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 20.

The middle class citizens who advocated for integrated use of the library assured the whites in power of the black patronage they should expect in the library. Young's letter goes on to explain that "we are not all bad, low and vicious and with proper surroundings the rightly inclined among us will be in the majority. Sir help us in this mighty effort which the good-disposed of us are making to lift up others as we climb..."³⁴ Young sets her and her middle class colleagues apart from uneducated blacks and aligns her behavior closely to the "properly behaved" white community. This letter was a precursor to the general middle class ideals seen in the life of the Auburn Avenue Branch: the location, staff, and programming all shared the general class values of uplift that dominated the civil rights rhetoric of Atlanta community leaders of the 1930s and '40s.

"Will this city prove itself broad enough and just enough?"

The Auburn Avenue Branch of the Atlanta Public Library

When the Atlanta Carnegie Library was opened in 1902, a committee of the black community members, including W.E.B. Dubois, appeared at the inaugural ceremony to protest the Board's decision to maintain a segregated space. When denied access to the all-white Carnegie Library, Dubois wrote to the Library Board:

Every argument which can be adduced to show the need of libraries for whites applies with redoubled force to the Negroes; more than any other part of the population they need instruction, inspiration and proper diversion... and they need a growing acquaintance with what the best of the world's souls have thought and said... You know even better than we...as to the color line in Atlanta: while the city has not room in her school houses

34. Carrie E. Young to Andrew Carnegie, February 23, 1899. Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Carnegie Corporation of New York Records, 1900-2004*. Microfilm reel 2. Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

for half the black children entitled to sit there, she has plenty of room for them in her jails.³⁵

The ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Auburn Avenue Branch took place almost twenty years later, on July 24, 1921, and for many members of the black community, the library represented the paradox of Jim Crow: simultaneously a victory in autonomous spaces and a reminder of the deeply segregated South.

In the years between Dubois' letter and the opening of the separate Auburn Avenue Branch, the city saw a major increase in segregated space. At the turn of the century, due in part to lack of zoning restrictions, most of the city featured tenement houses next to classic Queen Anne style homes near businesses and factories.³⁶ A race riot in 1906, incited by several false reports of black male rapes of white women, inspired a white-led "pogrom" against black bodies and businesses. Four days of rioting and violence resulted in 25 African American deaths, damages to black businesses, and public outcry from the black community.³⁷ This incident is often cited as an outlier of racial violence in the history of the city; however, the event marks the increasing effort of white policy makers and white citizens to limit neighborhoods by race and class.³⁸ The violence and Jim Crow politics that incited the riot further limited black men in

35. W. E. B. Du Bois, "Petition of Negroes to Use the Carnegie Library, Ca. 1903," Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries MS 312, accessed March 22, 2016, <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b001-i121>.

36. LeeAnn Lands, *The Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 6.

37. Khalil Muhammed, "How Numbers Lie: Intersectional Violence and the Quantification of Race," (presentation, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, February 26, 2016).

38. Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent*, 34.

securing employment, and many blacks moved their businesses away from downtown to protect themselves from whites.

Black Atlantans sought refuge in the intellectual center on the Westside, and while the neighborhood continued to grow, segregationist ideology among urban whites began to spread. In 1915, with the release of *Birth of a Nation*, Atlanta became home to the revival of the Ku Klux Klan. Members of the Klan infiltrated the police force, general assembly, and (potentially) library boards.³⁹ As a result, the growing black intelligentsia was forced to step lightly during negotiations with whites, all while dealing with harassments ranging from physical violence to arrests for “stealing” customers from white business owners.⁴⁰

While the 1906 race riot shattered the progressive image created by the black middle class, African American club women made small strides at the local level by emphasizing the Victorian and middle class ideals taught at the universities.⁴¹ Because they presented their issues as *women's* issues, African American women were often perceived as less threatening to white leaders of the city, and were therefore better able to advocate for black's rights.⁴² Women like Alice Cary rose through the ranks at Morris Brown to educate a growing number of blacks

39. Kruse, *White Flight*, 14.

40. Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent*. 85

41. By the turn of the century, African American women established clubs to encourage comradery against stereotypes of sexuality. Many of these clubs grew out of anti-lynching campaigns, and often displaced promiscuity onto working class African American women. For more, see Carol Batker, “‘Love Me like I like to Be’: The Sexual Politics of Hurston's ‘Their Eyes Were Watching God,’ the Classic Blues and the Black Women's Club Movement,” *African American Review* 32, no. 2 (1998): 199-213.

42. Sarah Mercer Judson, “Building the New South City: African-American and White Clubwomen in Atlanta, 1895-1930” (Ph.D. dissertation: New York University, 1997), 11.

seeking professional paths.⁴³ Before the growth of national chapters of the NAACP and the Urban League, local organizations like the Atlanta Women Welfare Club and the Junior Charity Club of Beulah Church attempted to guide racial uplift.⁴⁴ In the era of Jim Crow, many Atlanta club women saw their public personas as their strongest asset and most powerful political tool.

With the increased institutional racism and segregation of black communities, a strong black economic center nicknamed 'Sweet Auburn' emerged. Reese Cleghorn, a journalist who extensively covered Atlanta's Civil Rights movement, describes Sweet Auburn:

For as long as anyone can remember, it has been a boulevard of segregated dreams, a stopping place for the Negro migrant coming in from some small Georgia town hoping to make it in Atlanta and a success place for those who already have. It is at once an unpretentious street, by sight, and a totally pretentious street by inner vision... And it is 'Sweet Auburn' because this once was a place where Negroes could stand on the sidewalk hooting and ridiculing robed Ku Klux Klansmen marching by in ill-begotten efforts to resurrect old fears that the Negroes had left behind in old cotton fields.⁴⁵

The area, part of the Fourth Ward located to the east of downtown, was avoided by whites who dominated the ridges of the hilly city.⁴⁶ The businesses on Auburn Avenue included the Standard Life Insurance Company and Atlanta Mutual Life Insurance Company. Because whites would not insure assets or loan money to blacks, these institutions functioned more like fraternal lodges, taking on the needs of black families.⁴⁷ Atlanta's oldest African American newspaper, the *Atlanta Daily World*, had its offices on the street, where it published daily in opposition to

43. Ibid., 134.

44. "Locals and Personals," *Atlanta Independent* August 4, 1921.

45. Reese Cleghorn, "Notes on a Native Son," *Atlanta Magazine* (June 1968), 70.

46. See Appendix A.

47. Judson, "Building the New South City," 49.

lynchings and Jim Crow laws. Atlanta's predominant ministers, which included William Holmes Borders and Martin Luther King, Sr., spoke from the pulpits of the three largest African American churches in the city, all of which made Auburn Avenue their home. The street, which also housed bars and restaurants, and stretched across the city to the west where it joined with the community surrounding Atlanta University. In 1920, the Atlanta Library Board of Trustees secured a lot at the corner of Auburn Avenue and Hilliard Street to break ground on the Auburn Avenue Branch.⁴⁸

The Black Bourgeoisie and Library Control

When Tommie D. Barker, the librarian of the Carnegie Library, wrote to the Carnegie Corporation to ask for funding for a Negro branch in 1916, she attributed the delay in appropriating funds to the interruption caused by World War I.⁴⁹ In his report to the 35th annual meeting of the American Library Association, William F. Yust, director of the Louisville, Kentucky public library system, blamed the delay of funds in Atlanta on disagreements between the blacks' request for representation and the white trustees failure to comply.⁵⁰ Because the

48. Letter from Tommie D. Barker to James Bertram, November 20, 1915. Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Carnegie Corporation of New York Records, 1900-2004*. Microfilm reel 2. Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York. Barker was instrumental in the construction of the Auburn Avenue Branch, became involved in the Carnegie-funded library school at Emory University, and worked as a Field Reporter for the American Library Association. Her correspondence and newspaper clippings, held at the Manuscript and Rare Books Library at Emory University, give evidence to the relationship between the American Library Association and the Rosenwald Foundation, the major benefactor of the Adult Education program at the Auburn Avenue Branch.

49. Ibid.

50. William Yust, "What of the Black and Yellow Races?," *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 7, no. 4 (1913), 164.

trustees delayed in constructing the library, the \$25,000 Carnegie originally granted was not enough to move forward with the project. The Library Board reached out to wealthy white Atlantans and secured a donation from the city in order to double Carnegie's grant. The board was proud of their work, stating that "from an architectural standpoint, the building is considered beautiful, and its plans and equipment come as nearly being perfectly adapted to its purpose as a building could be."⁵¹ The structure was built of red brick and stone, and included a 250-person auditorium on the ground floor and the main reading room on the second.⁵² The board applauded themselves for a job well done, maintaining the status quo and segregated spaces. Between 1906 and 1916, while the grant for the Auburn Avenue Branch depreciated in value, two additional all-white branches of the Atlanta Public Library system were finished, as well as a whites-only library school at Emory University. Library branches for African American communities were established in Louisville, Kentucky; Charlotte, North Carolina; Savannah, Georgia; Nashville, Tennessee; and Houston, Texas.

When they finally proceeded with the Auburn Avenue Branch, the Library Board established a Negro Advisory Board to aid in accumulating appropriate circulation materials prior to the opening of the branch. While some material was donated by community members, the majority was purchased using funds allocated from the city. After establishing the initial collection of 2,000 books by and about African Americans, the Advisory Board was dissolved

51. Barbara Mamie Adkins, "A History of Public Library Service to Negroes in Atlanta, GA," (master's thesis: Atlanta University School of Library Service, 1951), 11.

52. Annie McPheeters, "Auburn Branch Library: 'A Cherished Legacy,'" *Atlanta Daily World*, June 18, 1976.

shortly after the library was opened.⁵³ While a collection inventory for the library no longer exists, former librarians testify that the holdings included copies of *Crisis* magazine, the weekly journal produced by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).⁵⁴

The first librarian appointed to the Auburn Avenue Branch was Alice Dugged Cary, a former teacher at Morris Brown College. Cary was a respected club woman and the founder of Atlanta's first kindergarten for African Americans. A believer in the progressive ideals of uplift, Cary encouraged the city to "give the Negro population a better chance along all lines of endeavor and in general abolish disease-breeding tenement houses, provide schools for all children and have fewer arrests for minor offenses."⁵⁵ President of the Georgia State Federation of Colored Women, Cary was also a graduate of a 6-week summer program that was created in 1910 as the first opportunity for women of color to obtain training in technical library upkeep.⁵⁶ The program operated out of the Western Colored Branch in Louisville, Kentucky, which opened in 1905 with funds from a Carnegie grant. The early success of the branch in Louisville, a city right at the fold between the North and the South, was due in part to a largely literate black population. The white population of Louisville encouraged the establishment of the Negro Library under a guise of humanitarianism and polite racism. By supervising a separate library branch for African Americans, white leaders felt as though they were making a difference in

53. Battles, *The History of Public Library Access for African Americans in the South*, 55.

54. Annie L. McPheeters, *Library Service in Black and White: Some Personal Recollections, 1921-1980* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1988).

55. Adkins, "A History of Public Library Service to Negroes in Atlanta, GA," 13.

56. Yust, "What of the Black and Yellow Races?", 163.

black lives, when in actuality they were maintaining control over the status quo and segregated spaces.⁵⁷ Arguably, Atlanta whites performed in a similar fashion. Tommie Barker's insistent representation for the needs of black Atlantans prevented the Auburn Avenue Branch's being postponed for another 20 years. However, dissolving the leadership of the Negro Advisory Board limited black control of the library.

Despite middle class blacks' inability to completely oversee the operations, the target audience for the Auburn Avenue Branch reflected black bourgeois attempts at cultural hegemony. The library was built in the economic center of Black Atlanta, and users were required to be registered in the city directory in order to obtain a library card.⁵⁸ Both the location and the registration requirements may have been exclusionary for transient or poor blacks, the downtrodden members of the race for whom Dubois, Young, and Bowen advocated. The black middle class may have been leveraging the poor and working class as foils to their own acceptable "white" behavior in order to expedite the allocation of city resources. It is possible that this tactic was the only possible resource within a social system that experienced the revival of the Klan, white control of intellectual resources, and a lack of any concrete voting rights.

The Experiment in Adult Education

By 1930, Georgia was still primarily rural, and throughout the 1930s and 1940s the South dominated the agricultural sphere of the nation: of all agricultural workers in 1930, 53% lived in

57. *Ibid.*, 101.

58. "Locals and Personals," *Atlanta Independent* (Atlanta, GA), August 4, 1921.

the South.⁵⁹ With the collapse of the economy, New Deal reforms required the approval of Southern Democrats, who were not likely to support aspects that would undermine Jim Crow. This left blacks at the center of a trifecta of brutal poverty. First, in part due to the inability of the Roosevelt Administration to take on Jim Crow, New Deal reforms primarily served white citizens: occupations that were largely filled by blacks, such as farming and domestic work, did not qualify for Social Security benefits. Second, money was allocated directly to state and local organizations under the control of whites who did their best to maintain power over black employment and economic progress. Finally, technical and clerical positions, which saw the greatest growth, were not open to blacks, due to segregation policies that did not allow blacks to be employed in white offices.

With the cards more than stacked against them, the black community in Atlanta still managed to experience some relief. Agencies like the Neighborhood Union, a women-led organization founded to serve the underprivileged, provided temporary housing and meals for the many blacks who migrated to the city between 1930 and 1937.⁶⁰ The poorest lived near train yards and warehouses and for many being out of the sight of whites provided a safe environment with community support that embraced Booker T. Washington's ideas of racial uplift. However, for the growing middle class, full citizenship meant adopting middle class behaviors to obtain public services like schools, parks, and hospitals. Even with this adopted moral code, blacks received less federal relief than whites and continued to form relief programs through the

59. Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*, (New York: W.W.Norton, 2005), 30.

60. Julia Kirk Blackwelder, "Quiet Suffering: Atlanta Women in the 1930s." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 61, no.2 (Summer 1977), 119.

concentration of universities on the Westside, which consolidated into Atlanta University Center in 1929.

These relief organizations along with the NAACP and the Negro Business Alliance incubated a sense of black citizenship. The president of the Atlanta chapter of the NAACP, A.T. Walden, became legendary for his pragmatic approach to black advancement, focusing less on litigation and more on politics. His methods, which often caused tension between fellow members and the national chapter, practiced discretion when choosing institutions to integrate. He argued, like DuBois, that the social capital indigenous to the African American communities should be preserved. This type of thinking ultimately led to the end of DuBois' career with *The Crisis*, while Walden's approach caused black elites to ostracize many poor blacks in order to align themselves closer to white reform policies and protect middle class economic interests.⁶¹

The library fostered this growing sense of citizenship through programming that encouraged teaching middle class uplift. In 1931, the library became the host for the first experiment in adult education to take place in the South. The program was funded by the American Adult Education Association and Julius Rosenwald, a wealthy Northern philanthropist who invested in many educational programs for African Americans across the South. The adult education program funded lectures and a bookmobile, while also encouraging the creation of discussion groups to foster life-long learning. With the increase in black residents moving from rural places, the program hoped to fill the gap in education, cultivate the arts, and create a more informed black electorate.

The funding for the program, which was administered by the Atlanta Carnegie Library, provided funds for a program director and an additional librarian. Mae C. Hawes was brought in

61. Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent*, 32-33.

to administer the program in 1930. May Z. Marshall was hired as librarian, and Annie McPheeters as assistant librarian. Both Marshall and McPheeters were recent graduates of the Hampton Library Institute, a library training program for African Americans, which operated in Virginia from 1925-1939, with support from both the Carnegie Corporation and the Rosenwald Foundation.⁶² The Hampton Institute represented the American Library Association's growing interest in the high demand for trained African American library professionals. When the school closed in 1939, a new program was created and operated out of Atlanta University from 1941-2005. The Hampton graduates at the Auburn Avenue Library warranted an extra \$25/month for their services, paid for by the American Association for Adult Education.⁶³

As a part of their first project with the adult education experiment, the women went into the community to survey how organizations were already pursuing adult education and how the library could become involved. Hawes' experiences in the first year of the program were documented in a report to the Rosenwald Foundation entitled "Snapshots of the Atlanta Experiment in Adult Education Among Negroes, October 1931 – August 1932." The program, she explained, "expresses itself in rather intangible terms – as a spirit or as an attitude helping to reinterpret the purpose of education as the understanding and enjoyment of life, and helping to direct the undercurrents of inward unrest in individuals of all levels of life toward an ever-

62. Robert Martin and Orvin Shiflett, "Hampton, Fisk, and Atlanta: The Foundations, the American Library Association, and Library Education for Blacks, 1925-1941," *Libraries & Culture* Vol 31, no.2 (April 1996), 306. The school was opened amid controversy from the NAACP, who thought beginning a program in an already segregated school went against their integration tactics, which focused primarily on higher education.

63. Mae C. Hawes "Snapshots of the Atlanta Experiment in Adult Education among Negroes, October 1931 – August 1932." Box C-30, file 3. Adult Education Project, Miscellaneous. Records of the Central Branch, APL.

continuous growth of the whole personality.”⁶⁴ Tangibly-speaking, the Adult Education program at the Auburn Avenue Branch organized discussion groups based on topics of interest fielded by Hawes. The groups were given space to meet at the library, along with funding for lectures and books.⁶⁵ The experiment also encouraged blacks to use their “leisure time in the library where the atmosphere is refining and cultural.” Based on circulation statistics, the program contributed to an increase in library use: between the inception of the program in 1931 and Hawes report in 1932, circulation of items rose by 25%.⁶⁶

The circulation reports generate zero data about *who* was checking out the material, but Hawes' report suggests the users exposed to the library through the adult education program were responsible for the uptick. The very first discussion group, addressing “Modern Problems as they Concern Women,” consisted of 67 women from various church organizations. Their discussions focused on family relations and the similarities between women of the Old Testament and their modern counterparts. The group eventually grew to include 103 women and their enthusiasm for the program contributed to the development of other discussion groups along with an increase use of the library.⁶⁷

It is likely that the churchwomen shared Hawes enthusiasm for uplifting the races, as this progressive spirit was common among African American middle-class society women. The “Personals, Local, Society and Church” section of the *Atlanta Independent*, a weekly black

64. Hawes, “Snapshots,” 1.

65. Financial Report- Adult Education Fund, March 15, 1933. Box C-30, file 3. Adult Education Project, Miscellaneous. Records of the Central Branch, APL.

66. Adkins, “A History of Public Library Service to Negroes in Atlanta, GA,” 17.

67. Hawes, “Snapshots,” 5.

newspaper published in Atlanta from 1903-1928, indicates the sheer number of clubs that met on a weekly basis. Groups with names such as, The Willing Workers Club of Mount Bethel Church, The Progressive Club, and The Women's Club of Central Avenue M.E. Church, listed their events in the publication. These announcements often included the amount of money raised at each meeting for community agencies and church tithes. With church life and biblical teaching central to middle class black life, it seems appropriate that these women would use the library to continue to engage with the concerns of a middle class lifestyle.

Just as African American women played a major role in religious culture in 1930s Atlanta, so too were black women engaged in the community as teachers. Since the turn of the century, teaching was one of the few areas of professional work open to African American women and women played a large role in its evolution. Teacher education was a major tenant of Atlanta University, and by 1910 nearly 50% of professional blacks were teachers.⁶⁸ By the time the Depression took hold in the 1930s, funding was pulled from projects for black communities to support whites and by 1934, the black student to teacher ratio was still almost triple that of whites.⁶⁹ Self-reliance continued to be the name of the game and in order to maintain educational programs, teachers negotiated for private funding from philanthropists and the community.

In line with the communal efforts of black education, a collection of teachers from local public schools established the second discussion group through the adult education experiment. This discussion group provided some relief for teachers, to share in "fellowship with each other,

68. Adam Fairclough, *Teaching Equality: Black Schools in the Age of Jim Crow*, (Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 5.

69. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, 199. 1934-35 blacks per teacher (82.7), whites per teacher (35.4)

especially for stimulation, inspiration, and information in their profession.”⁷⁰ The group grew to include school principals and in 1932, the group elected officers, becoming a permanent organization: “The Atlanta Association for the Study of Educational Problems.”

The group hosted lectures that engaged with education as essential to moral uplift, which included titles like “Trends in Modern Education,” “Education as Adjustment to Life,” and “Education and Social Problems.”⁷¹ In his 1932 lecture “Education as Adjustment to Life,” Dr. W.B. Nathan, a professor at Atlanta University, explained that teachers

[s]eem to forget in our educational process that moral process is exceedingly strong and must be worked for. It is not brought to us as a gift, but we must train and educate for moral and spiritual leadership. Our lower instincts are still to a large extent unharnessed. What have we done to harness crime? Material progress is not as all sufficient. In this economic age we have a tendency to neglect cultural and spiritual values.⁷²

Nathan references the economic turmoil of the Depression, and the moral work teachers can contribute. His subtext, “lower instincts,” comments on the work yet to be done to educate and morally train the lower classes. Without support from the state, this type of uplift was a high priority for African American teachers, who understood the possible political and economic gains of middle class moral behavior. The adult education program fostered this comradery among teachers and helped lead the Association to a permanent relationship with the state

70. Hawes, “Snapshots,” 5.

71. Minutes, The Atlanta Association for the Study of Educational Problems, October 25, 1932, Adult Education Project, Teachers Meeting, Box C-30, file 1, Records of the Central Branch, Atlanta Public Library.

72. Letter from Mae C. Hawes to Mr. J.O. Thomas (Field Secretary National Urban League), December 15, 1935, Adult Education Project, Teachers Meeting, Box C-30, file 1, Records of the Central Branch, Atlanta Public Library.

teacher association, a group that continued to challenge white school boards well into the 1980s.⁷³

By 1933, the adult education program had organized a multitude of discussion groups to fill the gaps in practical education. Members of the "Popular Science Round Table," sought to study everyday scientific applications such as reading electricity meters. During the 1930s, the city continued to ignore African American neighborhoods' municipal needs, such as streetlights and garbage disposal; therefore, the ability to read electrical meters was a means of self-improvement.⁷⁴ The "Civil Service Study Group," reviewed the exam required to advance within the civil service, including a six-week course helping those with interest prepare for the test.⁷⁵ J.B. Blayton, an instructor at Morehouse College, established a business group by recruiting 25 of his students to assist him in touring the city to lecture on Household and General Economics, with particular attention to the problems and the usefulness of leisure.⁷⁶

Many groups collaborated with other organizations in the city. The "India Study Group," studied Gandhi and was supported by a group of African American woman who called themselves the "Utopian Literary Club." Ministerial alliances requested discussion groups for their congregations, with topics ranging from "Some Advantages of Negro Youth Today" and

73. Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent*, 218.

74. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, 133.

75. John E. Bowen, "Adult Education Experiment Among Negroes, Auburn Branch Carnegie Library, A News Letter," March 1934, Adult Education Project, Miscellaneous, Box C-30, file 3, Records of the Central Branch, Atlanta Public Library.

76. Hawes, "Snapshots," 13.

“Some Phases of Adult Education;” while the “Little Theatre” collaborated with the Drama and English departments at Spelman and Morehouse.

Brought about by interest from the Cultivation Committee of the Atlanta Committee on Women's Interracial Activities, the Little Theatre group began with a biracial meeting whose attendees included the music critic for the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* and the Director of the Jewish Educational Alliance.⁷⁷ Questionnaires were distributed to assess the specific interests of each member. By the second meeting, the group had drawn up a manifesto, which began, “The Little Theatre is initiated to stimulate, organize and develop the Artistic, creative and executive ability of the Negro Adults of Atlanta through competent leadership; to aid the adult in living a full life by using his leisure, and the inculcate art appreciation.”⁷⁸ In order to increase the number of performers and production crew members, the group recruited participants by mailing personal invitations throughout the community. Their number grew to 37 and they used the auditorium space at the Auburn Avenue Branch to produce three one-act plays including *The No 'Count Boy* by Southern playwright Paul Green. Like many of the groups sponsored by the adult education program, a bibliography of sources was created to aid in the education of its members.⁷⁹

These bibliographies became crucial to the growth of the library's collections. Throughout the life of the adult education program, groups worked closely with the librarians to create bibliographies for their discussions. When groups needed a book that the library did not

77. Hawes “Snapshots,” 6.

78. “The Little Theater,” n.d., Adult Education Project, Little Theater, Box C-29, File 19, Records of the Central Branch, Atlanta Public Library.

79. *Ibid.*, While records from most discussion groups are sparse; multiple folders of files documenting the Little Theatre exist.

have, the librarians were often able to secure materials from the whites-only Carnegie Branch.⁸⁰ When the program began to wane in 1935, many discussion groups donated the literature they accumulated in support of their club to the library.⁸¹ Since many of the discussion groups were started based on community needs, the collection at the library became a reflection of the community's adult education pursuits throughout the 1930s.

This material was highlighted weekly in the *Atlanta Daily World*. The weekly columns were printed primarily to encourage use of the library, but they also contain some of the only evidence of the specific material held at the Auburn Branch. The column, entitled *Auburn Avenue Library Notes*, was written by McPheeters and began to sporadically appear towards the end of 1933. One of the first columns included the suggested reading for a lecture on "The Negro in America" to be given at the library by C.L. Monroe, an instructor at Morris Brown. The recommended texts included Jerome Dowd, *Negro in American Life* (1926), Edwin Embree, *Brown America: The Story of a New Race* (1931), and Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (1925).⁸² The column announced: "Knowledge is the key to appreciation. To appreciate the Negro is to know him." This lecture and these works in the library collection demonstrate the librarians' contribution to the preservation of resources and creation of a space for questioning and exploring black identity.

This type of identity exploration ran concurrent with a nationwide movement led by intellectuals like Carter G. Woodson. Woodson, a Harvard graduate, and publisher of the *Negro*

80. Hawes, "Snapshots," 11.

81. McPheeters, *Library Service in Black and White*, 42.

82. McPheeters, "Auburn Avenue Library Notes," *Atlanta Daily World* (Atlanta, GA), October 30, 1933.

History Journal, invested much of his career in the collection of primary source material relating to black life.⁸³ Despite initially receiving funding for this work from white philanthropists, most of Woodson's collection relied on donations from the black community. His work was influential on librarians, collectors, and scholars of the 1930s, including Arthur Schomburg, Vivian Harsh, Dorothy Porter, and L.D. Reddick.⁸⁴ These scholars are responsible for some of the most influential collections on black life in America, including the Schomburg Collection of Negro Literature and History in New York City and the Moorland-Springarn Research Collection at Howard University in Washington D.C. While Northern literary societies collected works throughout the nineteenth century, the majority of these major collections on black life were formed between 1915 and 1950 – at a time when black identity was being laid alongside the makings of a social revolution.⁸⁵

McPheeters saw the importance of having such a collection at the Auburn Avenue Branch. An announcement in the February 10, 1935 *Atlanta Daily World* requested patrons return all books by and about African Americans to the library in anticipation of Negro History Week, an annual celebration started by Woodson. The material collected, which included several Woodson publications, became a non-circulating collection called the "Negro History Collection".⁸⁶ The collection continued to grow due to donations from local citizens. Eventually,

83. Jacqueline Goggin, "Carter G. Woodson and the Collection of Source Materials for Afro-American History," *American Archivist* 48, no. 3 (1985): 262.

84. Laura Helton, "Remaking the Past: Collecting, Collectivity, and Emergence of Black Archival Publics, 1915-1959," (PhD. diss.: New York University, 2015), 12.

85. *Ibid.*, 36-37.

86. *Atlanta Daily World*, February 10, 1935. The Woodson publications included *The Negro in Our History*, *The Rural Negro*, and *The Negro Professional Man and the Community*.

the Library board allocated \$25 per year for the purchase of rare and out-of-print books to add to the collection.⁸⁷ The “Negro History Collection” represented more than the material, with many members of the community viewing the collection as “a priceless legacy of the black experience.”⁸⁸ The public manifestation of uplift in the form of adult education now grew to include the literature that gave blacks inspiration for shaping a public black identity. Part of this identity was tied to a unified effort that demanded voting rights and municipal services for black Atlantans. The Auburn Avenue librarians sought new and continued partnerships with community organizations to support the advancing mobility against Jim Crow in Atlanta.

The Vote and Momentum Towards Revolution

By 1940, the population of Atlanta was 35% black and rural politics still dominated the state. In the more moderate urban center of Atlanta, a coalition between black and white leaders took shape. White coalition leaders, including Mayor William Hartsfield and businessman and Coca Cola Company chief, Robert Woodruff, recognized the rising strength of the black electorate and sought to align black voters to serve their own interests. The black coalition included male figureheads of the black community, A.T. Walden and John Wesley Dobbs. Dobbs, a firm believer in the power of black suffrage, founded the Atlanta Civic and Political League and was often referred to as the unofficial mayor of Auburn Avenue.⁸⁹ The black members of the coalition were aware of the impact made by Northern black voters in the election

87. McPheeters, *Library Service in Black and White*, 42.

88. *Ibid.*, 43.

89. Matthew Bailey, “John Wesley Dobbs (1882-1961),” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, August 26, 2005.

of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and in the municipal and police reforms that took place in cities like Chicago, Detroit, and New York City.⁹⁰ As voting restrictions eroded, the black leaders prepared to motivate the masses into becoming a large and powerful political force.

While Atlanta blacks were still limited by the 1908 disenfranchisement law and the power of the Democratic primary, they could place votes in special elections. In a 1918 and 1919 school bond issue, registered blacks helped defeat a proposed property tax that would improve white school conditions and ignore black communities. By defeating the initial two proposals, black leaders were able to negotiate the consideration of taxes that benefited black schools in the next referendum. That referendum passed, thanks to black voter turnout, and the funds supported the 1924 construction of Booker T. Washington High School, the first secondary school built for the Atlanta black community.⁹¹ The success of the black voice in the special referendum inspired the NAACP to invest in citizenship education and voter registration efforts. Along with support from the Atlanta Urban League and the Adult Education program, the Atlanta Citizenship School was born.

The School was founded by the NAACP Citizenship Committee in 1933 to “not only create on the part of the Negro of Atlanta a desire to vote, but to participate in voting.”⁹² A 6-week course hoped to educate voters on registration techniques and instruct students on the fundamental workings of the government. Despite NAACP enthusiasm and sizable turnouts at

90. Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent*, 202-203.

91. *Ibid.*, 44.

92. Minutes, Citizenship Committee N.A.A.C.P, April 4, 1933. Box C-30, file 10. “Adult Education Program, NAACP”. Records of the Central Branch, APL

meetings, few students actually finished the course and registered to vote.⁹³ Voter registration lagged in part due to the still restrictive poll taxes: voters were required to pay taxes that accumulated from the time they came of voting age. Many blacks also felt apathetic towards the white leadership consistently represented on the ballot. Clarence Bacote, director of the Citizenship Schools, explained the rationale of many black Atlantans: “what was the need of getting registered if you did not have a voice in selecting the people who were to be voted on?”⁹⁴

In 1937, William B. Hartsfield was elected mayor. Hartsfield, a self-taught lawyer who claimed the Atlanta Public Library as his Alma Mater, kept the position, save one term, until 1962.⁹⁵ Hartsfield understood the black coalitions' strategies to leverage their power in referendums and special elections. He was also aware of the impact World War II had on NAACP rhetoric and the expectations of returning black veterans. Blacks were not particularly interested in U.S. involvement at the war's onset, due in part to inequality at home. Fresh in their minds were the promises of democracy touted during the World War I and the disparate reality of the Jim Crow society that still existed in its aftermath.⁹⁶ Blacks were also discriminated against in the realm of employment leading up to and during the war, save low-paying and menial positions. B. F. Ashe, the regional director of Information Service, War Manpower Commission, explained that blacks were not hired because:

93. Ibid.

94. Clarence Bacote, interview by E. Bernard West, Living Atlanta oral history recordings, Atlanta History Center, November 20, 1978.

95. Kruse, *White Flight*, 32.

96. Richard M. Dalfiume, “The ‘Forgotten Years’ of the Negro Revolution,” *The Journal of American History* 55, no. 1 (1968): 46

In nearly every case where Negroes are to be employed in the same place with whites, the employing of the Negroes would necessitate the duplication of locker rooms, toilets, and many other employee facilities, the cost of which double installation is prohibitive, or too serious a consideration to make the hiring of Negroes and attractive solution for labor shortage.⁹⁷

White employers used the realities of Jim Crow as justification for limiting employment opportunities for blacks, a self-fulfilling prophecy that contributed to the revolution of the 1950s and 60s against these practices. *Crisis* magazine apologized for the brutality and death in Europe, but could not feel the fire of democracy until it was present in “Alabama and Arkansas, in Mississippi and Michigan, in the District of Columbia – *in the Senate of the United States.*”⁹⁸

However, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, attitudes among blacks began to change and they took advantage of the U.S. involvement abroad to tie racial demands to the ideology of war. Between 1940 and 1946, the national chapter of the NAACP grew from 50,000 members to 450,000 members.⁹⁹ The increase in black activism was apparent in Atlanta as well. Just as Hartsfield predicted, the NAACP mobilized registration for the 1944 Democratic Primary. Led by Dobbs and Walden, local groups such as the Fulton County Citizen Democratic Club launched massive registration drives. By the day of the primary, 10,000 black voters had been registered, but blacks were turned away at the polls, forcing Walden to prepare a case against the state. Once heard at the district level, the courts ruled that preventing blacks from voting in Georgia indeed violated their constitutional rights.¹⁰⁰ This victory sparked a renewed initiative to

97. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*. 107.

98. “Lynching and Liberty,” *Crisis*, 47 (July 1940), 209.

99. Dalfiume, “The ‘Forgotten Years’ of the Negro Revolution,” 106.

100. Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent*. 49-50.

register voters, supported widely by black ministers, church and club women, and school teachers.

An opportunity arrived for newly registered black Atlanta voters to show their numbers. Before they could participate in an integrated primary, a special election was held in 1946 for a representative seat in the U.S. Congress. The newly formed League of Negro Women Voters canvassed throughout the community and registered large numbers of blacks. The Auburn Avenue Branch provided a space for the women's club to meet and these club women supervised a ballot box that was set up in the lobby of the Auburn Avenue Branch to educate voters on how to use the machine.¹⁰¹ During the voter registration drive of 1946, librarians collected information about the candidates to be distributed by canvassers, whose ranks grew to include school teachers and members of the ministerial alliance.¹⁰²

The African American community supported candidate Helen Douglas Mankin, because, as Bacote recalled, "She was willing to talk to us."¹⁰³ In the end, 7,000 newly registered blacks gave her a slim margin of victory and she was elected as the first white woman from Georgia to the U.S. House of Representatives.¹⁰⁴ Ultimately, the inequality of the county unit system prevented Mankin from taking her seat, yet the success of the black vote was a victory for the African American community. Throughout 1946, newly registered black voters participated in

101. Annie L. McPheeters, "Annie L. McPheeters Oral History Interview," Georgia State University: Georgia Government Documentation Project, June 8, 1992), 11.

102. *Ibid.*, 4

103. Kruse, *White Flight*, 33.

104. Kathryn Nasstrom, "Women, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Historical Memory in Atlanta, 1946-1973." (PhD diss.: University of North Carolina), 50. Mankin would go on to bring multiple suits against the county unit system, but would not live to see it overturned in 1963.

several referenda, one of which funded a second library branch on the Westside. Walden dubbed the occasion “the birthday of genuine democracy,” a moment which solidified the relationship with the white political coalition.

Woodsman Spare That Tree

By 1950, Atlanta blacks began to see a shift in their voting rights. With the moderate coalition's effort to keep things peaceful and business flowing, the African American community achieved representation on local school boards and ultimately in 1971, the mayoral office. The momentum of these victories led to an increased, albeit slow, investment of city-funded municipal services and education. Voting power was accompanied by the confidence to expand into more desirable, primarily white neighborhoods.¹⁰⁵ The migration of African American families to the Westside, already a mecca for black intellectual life, increased the need for more housing. City ordinances established in the 1920s limited the ability of whites and blacks to share neighborhoods and with ordinances in full support of status quo racism, white segregationists felt their autonomy being encroached upon as blacks moved into traditionally white neighborhoods. Black veterans returning from Europe who tried to buy houses in predominantly white neighborhoods found their porches bombed, their front doors riddled with shotgun shells, and their windows shattered by bricks.¹⁰⁶ Whites even terrorized other white neighbors who threatened to move out of the neighborhood; once the first white family sold their house to a black family, the rest of the neighborhood followed and the demographics swiftly turned from one homogeneity to another. Remaining whites used local schools while black students faced

105. Kruse, *White Flight*, 7.

106. *Ibid.*, 8.

extreme overcrowding in their institutions. The City of Atlanta school board admitted that if whites filled schools containing over 500 students and the county stopped operating schools with less than 500 students, the city would save more than \$90,000 per year.¹⁰⁷ The waste this dual system fostered, a system white segregationists fought to maintain, contributed to federal intervention in the South. White segregationists adopted a language of personal liberties and freedoms and sought to protect their right to keep their lives separate from African Americans. The mass exodus of the white working class from the Westside in the late 1940s created a more segregated city than the Atlanta of prior decades.¹⁰⁸

As whites fled the neighborhood, they also left their libraries, which, despite the influx of African American citizens, remained segregated. A bond referendum in 1946 allocated a sizable fund for the creation of an African American branch on the Westside, at the corner of Morris Brown Drive and West Hunter Street. Upon completion in 1949, the West Hunter Library Branch became the new headquarters for the Negro Division of the Public Library, as well as the home of the Negro History Collection.¹⁰⁹ The library fostered programs in adult education including a Heritage Group Discussion Program that carried the banner of educating the public on the workings of democracy. McPheeters, the newly installed head librarian at the West Hunter Branch, described the location of the library: "it was placed near the center of what was one of the newly opened residential sections where some of the city's affluent and intellectual black citizens lived."¹¹⁰

107. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, 209.

108. Kruse, *White Flight*, 7.

109. Adkins, "A History of Public Library Service to Negroes in Atlanta, GA," 36.

For McPheeters, the West Hunter Branch was ideally located due to its proximity to the nexus of the middle class blacks the library historically served. The success of the programs at the Auburn Avenue Branch throughout the 1930s depended on the relationship with the middle class, thus serving them became an engrained priority of library service throughout the 1940s and 50s. When the next generation of Atlanta civil rights leadership emerged from Atlanta University Center in the 1960s, the library offered them space to hold their meetings and guided them towards resources on black history.¹¹¹ As of 2016, the library still serves the community, and has been renamed the Washington Park/Annie L. McPheeters branch.

The move to the Westside to faithfully serve the migrating middle class also played a role in the decreased use of the Auburn Avenue Branch. With the City of Atlanta eyeing downtown expansion and the growth of primary and secondary public school libraries near Auburn Avenue, rumors began to circulate that the Auburn Branch was slated for destruction.¹¹² By 1956, registered users had dropped to 2,761, compared to 5,271 users at the West Hunter Branch. The Atlanta Public Library system was integrated in 1959 and with the Atlanta Carnegie Library now available to the black community, programming at the Auburn Branch dwindled. The building was torn down in 1960, less than a year after the county-wide integration.

Today, the lot at Auburn Avenue and Hilliard Street remains empty with two plaques have been erected on the sidewalk nearby to commemorate Alice Dugged Cary and Annie L. McPheeters. Four blocks to the west stands the Auburn Avenue Research Library, erected in 1993 to support the study and celebration of African American life in Atlanta and the South. The

110. McPheeters, *Library Service in Black and White*, 53.

111. McPheeters, "Oral History Interview," 22.

112. "Woodsman Spare That Tree," *Atlanta Daily World* (Atlanta, GA), July 17, 1960, 4.

collection at the heart of the library is none other than the Negro History Collection, which was transferred to the Atlanta Carnegie Library in 1971 and renamed in honor of the Atlanta Civil Rights leader Samuel W. Williams.¹¹³

While the lot stands empty, the impact the programs at the library made in the community resonate still. In her oral history, McPheeters attests that patrons were exposed to books and ideas that would change their lives. Among other young users of the library in the 1930s, an adolescent Martin Luther King, Jr. frequented the shelves and became interested in some of the holdings collected for the adult education programs. Being then too young to check out these books with his library card, King was encouraged by McPheeters to use his father's card. This stretching the rules for the preacher's son fostered the young King's exposure to works such as those of Mahatma Gandhi, an important influence on King's ideology. Such mythology might not apply to all patrons who experienced uplift from library use, but the programs and user data indicate that the library made an impact as one of many grassroots endeavors in the early fight for civil rights.

Much of this impact was made by aligning library programming with middle class ideology, generating patronship of the Auburn Avenue Branch and maintaining a supportive relationship with black community leaders. Despite neglecting the needs of the working class, the library accumulated a unique collection of African American history. This material contributed to black Atlanta's identity formation: The Citizenship Schools, the discussion groups, and the celebration of Negro History Week focused on the black experience as distinctly American. The topics of discussion coincided closely with the strategies employed by the local

113. "Dedication Is Slated For Negro Collection," *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 14, 1971.

NAACP, who assured whites that many blacks shared their moral codes, deserved a share of municipal funding, and could be respected as an electorate. Supporting this ideology, the adult education program fell short in the same way that the national NAACP criticized Walden's strategies: the uplift of the middle class ostracized the working class, which proved to be consequential in the following decades when integration was put into action.¹¹⁴

The adoption of white middle-class behavior was a contributing factor to the evolution of black life in Atlanta. The powerful black business enclave that emerged out of segregation created an autonomous socioeconomic center that black leaders sought to protect through biracial negotiations. This strategy ultimately helped pave the way for civil rights negotiations into the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. Churches and other community organizations on Auburn Avenue supported black leadership through collaborative programs intended to provide social and economic education with the library serving as an incubator for these relationships. The red brick and stone building may no longer exist as a landmark on Auburn Avenue, but the role it served in the evolution of the city should encourage the continued appreciation of librarians' place in shaping community identity and the broader narrative of American civil rights.

114. Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent*, 436-437. By the 1970s and 1980s, many working class blacks in Atlanta felt their fight for education taking a backseat to employment opportunities.

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