

THE KRUEGER-SCOTT AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER:
INDIVIDUAL NARRATIVES, COLLECTIVE IMPLICATIONS

by

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INTRODUCTION

In *Voices of the Fugitives: Runaway Slave Stories and Their Fictions of Self-Creation* Sterling Bland writes, “By developing out of the memory and recollection of a shared African-American experience, the slave narratives describe a reality that is simultaneously individual and collective.”¹ Oral histories provide a kind of all-of-the-above source that requires careful analysis before any sorts of conclusions can be drawn. Oral historians consequently disrupt, even as they restore. This study attempts to do both as well - to disrupt well entrenched tropes and restore missing histories - all towards the goal of continuing enlightenment with regard to African-American history, urban experience, Newark, New Jersey, and those who live there. But why Newark?

Newarkers find themselves beholden to others quite often, in the shadow of those wielding power. Whether it is corporations demanding tax emptions to relocate, or the Brooklyn Dodgers stealing away Eagles fans once they signed Jackie Robinson, Newark is often placed in a position of catch-up and compromise. Its geographical location, in Northern New Jersey yet just across the river from New York City, can be both a help and a hindrance in this process. Newark’s waterways made it one of the earliest thriving industrial cities, putting it “on the map” for everything from beer to patent leather. Its proximity to New York allowed for a vibrant jazz scene – and also some additional citizens who got off the train at Newark Penn Station believing they heard *New York* Penn Station. But it also loses out to its next-door-neighbor, New York, and remains an outcast to surrounding New Jersey towns. Newark is a complicated city with complicated relations. It is, most importantly, a city which has been left out of too many discussions

¹ Sterling Lecater Bland, *Voices of the Fugitives: Runaway Slave Stories and their Fictions of Self-Creation* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000) 30, 122.

on urban history, even as it promises to provide so very many insights on that subject. Here we will look at Newark through its historical preservation efforts and then through those preserved stories told by a group of its African-American citizens. In doing so we will consider these individual narratives and their collective implications.

Beginning with the story of the Krueger-Scott African-American Cultural Center, chapter one paints a picture of Newark during the 1980s and 1990s. While the Center itself never came to fruition, this is not so much a story of failure as one of collective effort. We witness in this chapter just how complicated historical preservation can be and ask what race and geographical location may have done to further complicate matters in this case. Lessons in Black history and government process arise among the never-ending details of funding a history project in a city working hard to start fresh. Here we witness a battle between ideologies surrounding economics, historical preservation and the value in commemorating Black life.

In chapter two we look at the oral history collection that was generated as part of the Cultural Center project. 107 African Americans who live in Newark were interviewed by their peers: fellow church members, friends, acquaintances and even family were tasked with conducting these interviews. This unique aspect of the collection makes for much discussion in terms of theory and methodology within the field of oral history. Looking at the questions asked, the interlocutors, and the answers, we come to some conclusions about where this particular collection falls within the contemporary practices of oral history. Furthermore we consider the ways that oral histories, in general, can be useful to the construction of history. How does memory, both collective and individual, inform these narratives? And oral history, after all being a dialogue, moves us to ask what

we can learn from listening to that which is said – as well as that which is not. What is it we are even in possession of anyway? What *is* oral history? These are some of the questions considered alongside the field’s evolutionary process and its accompanying literature.

In chapter three begins the foregrounding of the voices of the Krueger-Scott narrators as they tell us about church, fashion, food and leisure. In discussing their Sundays, the narrators speak also to issues of race, religious freedom, newcomers, and community support. The Black church as center of the Black community has been established, but what does that look like in the week-to-week experiences of the many churchgoers of the Krueger-Scott community? After highlighting some of the most prominent churches represented in the narratives, we look at how churches in general worked as social service outposts, even as we witness some examples of insular congregations and their members. And what else did these Newarkers do on Sundays? Well, they ate ice cream, listened to music, and went to Eagles baseball games. This chapter collects stories about Sundays, highlighting collective experiences while also noting the many individual, unique and sometimes contradictory stories that emerge alongside.

Chapter four concerns “work days,” days spent on the paying job as well as at work for the betterment of the community. African Americans were tasked with double duty quite often as they were forced to make inroads at work and within their civic spaces. Paths were blocked by racist, classist systems, and perceptions that slowed down the progress of many Black city residents nationwide. In Newark’s famously political space, activism was a hard thing to avoid. The Krueger-Scott narrators were shop

stewards and organizers, social service administrators, and publicly disgruntled employees; here they tell of these experiences in their own words. The majority of the narrators found some way to disrupt the old system even as they kept food on their tables. Domestics, nurses, shoe shiners, and ministers speak about their workplaces, as well as the streets, houses, clubs and churches where they also worked – attempting to equalize an unequal society. Newarkers today continue to be staunch activists; attend any lecture, meeting, or arts event and one will encounter outspoken audience members and tables full of political pamphlets. This chapter gives some examples of the many forms activism can take, offers inspiration to those forging new paths today, and reminds us that African Americans have long been standing up and speaking out.

In chapter five we get to the rebellion, as well as the centrality of fire in urban spaces. Much has been written about fires in crowded cities throughout history, and yet once again Newark is often left out of this discussion that intersects with issues of immigration, migration, race, culture, housing, and economics. In hearing stories of individual experiences with fire – as well as how fires affected the community more generally – we learn that the presence of fire itself is a complicated subject. Asking questions such as how it got there and why it erupted in that particular space helps us to understand the lived experiences of the underserved urban dwellers of the mid-20th century.

Fire, of course, figured prominently in the narrative of the “riots.” The rebellion alone does not make Newark unique, of course; in that summer of 1967 there were over 150 “race riots” in the United States. From the conversations on that period amongst the Krueger-Scott narrators it becomes clear that there are myriad ways to perceive what it

was that actually happened that July of 1967. The rebellion is seen as a boon for Black power and self-determination by some, and an example of people ruining what little they had by others. And what *really* caused the rioting, we might ask. Most know the story of the taxi driver pulled over by police officers, but do we know all that was happening for the decades prior that helped light the fuse after John Smith's arrest? Thanks to these valuable oral histories, we gain background knowledge of life in the city and thus have a clearer lens with which to view this uprising - and to ask why its story has been told in such a limited manner for so many years.

We can learn so much in considering the city of Newark and this assembly of African-American narratives. One goal of this study is to combat the apathy, or just plain antipathy, towards Newark and its people by providing knowledge of the city - a lens through which to view it anew. This study helps individualize the city and its African-American citizens, while illustrating the ways in which they can both be "metaphors" for larger communities. Oral historians Barbara Allen & William Montell write, "...local history serves as a microcosm of a nation's history. Trends in attitudes, thoughts, and economic concerns at the national level may first be discerned and documented at the local level."² We can learn many things about cities through the study of Newark, New Jersey.

This project attempts to draw the collective gaze of the country away from the tiny section of Newark's 350-year history called "the rebellion" and widen it out to make room for other chapters of the city's long life. Once this is accomplished we revisit that particular "riot" narrative, and destabilize some of the tropes surrounding it, by way of

² Barbara Allen Bogart and William Lynwood Montell, *From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research* (Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1981) 6.

the words of those who lived it - and have the opportunity to look back on it. The Krueger-Scott African-American Cultural Center was proposed to preserve history, both in the form of the built environment and in the words of those who lived their lives during the period of the Great Migration. This project is its own preservation venture, restoring sights and sounds heretofore shuttered from public view, opening doors to any visitor interested in learning more about Newark, African-American life, and the urban experience.

CHAPTER ONE

Narrative of the Krueger-Scott Mansion Project: Constructing Newark History

When there are buildings like this here, you are somewhere.

-Catherine Lenix Hooker, Executive Director, Krueger-Scott Cultural Center

Introduction

The history of the urban built environment includes more than that which exists; it must also take into account the spaces that no longer exist – and those that were proposed for construction but never appeared. The evolution of any one particular Black historical site, in this case Newark’s Krueger-Scott Mansion, can be used as a lens with which to regard a society’s relationship with history, commemoration, and economics.

While interrogating locations of African-American historical memory, it is useful to also consider their place-making stories. Utilizing this particular line of questioning can increase our historical understanding of a particular politics, people, and place. In this case, the Krueger-Scott Mansion project of the 1980s and 1990s offers us a view of Newark at a transitional moment, morphing into a city of renewed commerce and culture even as it simultaneously struggled with the mantle of gloom that had been placed upon it decades before. As glistening buildings arose and awards were proffered, the Newark experience remained for many yet one of continued poverty and racial inequality.

It was at this moment in Newark’s history that the idea was put forth to build a center in the primarily Black Central Ward that would pay homage to African-American history. After all, the North Ward had its own Center, housed in the historic Clark Mansion, a site dedicated to serving the primarily Italian-American population which had remained in Newark’s North Ward post-rebellion. It was now time for Black citizens to

have a center for themselves that provided for their needs and preserved their history. What better place than a Mansion last owned by a Black millionaire businesswoman and philanthropist? Economic mobility was certainly on the rise for African Americans as a whole and the Mansion's story aligned with the ongoing movement to create awareness and appreciation of Black history, culture, and its overarching potential. The Krueger-Scott African-American Cultural Center was envisioned as a project that would both reflect the important history and culture of Black Newarkers while also contributing - directly and indirectly - to continued economic progress. It was time to lay claim to the stories of the great contributions of African Americans in Newark history, and in American history writ large.

Newark, New Jersey's once proposed Krueger-Scott African-American Cultural Center had as its mission to tell stories of history, economy, race, and much more. The Cultural Center's location in Newark - a city known as one of renaissance or hopelessness depending upon whom one asks - adds to the evolving study of African-American cultural sites and of the cities within which they are housed. Beginning in the 1960s a boon of "grassroots" African-American museums "exclusively devoted to the collection, conservation, and display of black history and culture" began appearing throughout the country. The DuSable Museum of African American History, considered the first Black museum, began in 1961 in the basement of the Chicago home of Margaret and Charles Burroughs. Originally the Ebony Museum of Negro History and Art, the Burroughs sought to fill the gap of historical and cultural education through the curation of Black art and culture.¹

¹ Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building: Black Americans in the World of Fairs and Museums* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012) 2.

Charles H. Wright, a Black physician from Detroit, helped form the International Afro-American Museum (IAM) in 1965 which established numerous sites of Black historical commemoration within Detroit and eventually culminated in the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in 1998. The idea behind this museum was quite simply a “desire to dispel the myths about the legacy of black peoples in America.”² The 1970s brought more sites of Black historical commemoration such as Charlotte, North Carolina’s Afro-American Cultural Center. Now known as the Harvey B. Gantt Center, it was constructed specifically in response to the urban renewal movement that so often tended towards the removal of underserved communities as well as their histories.³ Looking back and in response to particular civil rights battles, historical centers such as Birmingham’s Civil Rights Institute (1992) and Memphis’ National Civil Rights Museum (1991) were constructed in order to commemorate the myriad efforts of African Americans and their allies throughout the long Civil Rights Movement.

In 1978, as African-American museums passed the one hundred mark, the African American Museums Association (AAMA) was created. The AAMA includes “educational institutions, research agencies and cultural centers” and works as an “advocate for the interests of institutions and individuals committed to the support of African and African derived cultures.”⁴ Beginning in 1988 Congressman and longtime Civil Rights activist John Lewis began lobbying for a national museum of African-

² Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building*, 247.

³ “History,” *Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture*, accessed April 18, 2017, <http://www.ganttcenter.org/about-the-center/history/>.

⁴ “History,” *Association of African American Museums*, accessed April 18, 2017, <http://www.blackmuseums.org/missionandhistory>

American history; twenty-five years later the National Museum of African American History and Cultural (NMAAHC) is now a reality.⁵ As with the Krueger-Scott Cultural Center the missions of these various museums include community outreach as well as educational programming.

One of the many complicating factors, however, surrounding Newark's Krueger-Scott African-American Cultural Center project - and Newark as a whole - is that the Mansion did not belong to just one group. In order to understand the long narrative of the Mansion project, the varied attitudes towards its completion, and the array of proposals put forward for its use, we must first understand the background of this Castle on the Hill."⁶

Gottfried Krueger

The Krueger-Scott story begins with Gottfried Krueger, a German immigrant who came to Newark a poor man. He soon opened his eponymous beer company and not too long thereafter became a very rich man. Among the Krueger brewery's claims to fame was its invention of the beer can.⁷ The brewery was a financial success. With all of his newfound wealth, in 1888 Mr. Krueger built himself an opulent Victorian home at 601 High Street.⁸ There were forty-three rooms, some with leather covered walls. The home

⁵ "Charter Member News," *National Museum of African American History and Culture*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 2016, print.

⁶ A wonderful documentary made by colleague Dr. Samantha Boardman showcases the mansion's physical attributes as well as its history. "Castle Newark: The Krueger-Scott Mansion," Clementine Productions, 2009, youtube.com.

⁷ Newark was known for its breweries, taking advantage of the city's proximity to what was then considered some of the best water available. Other famous Newark brewers included the Feigenspanns, the Ballantines, and the Henlsers. See John T. Cunningham, *Newark* (Newark: NJ Historical Society, 1988) for brief historical information and several photographs regarding the industry.

⁸ High Street's name was changed to Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard in 1983.

included a bowling alley, a Bavarian style tower, a copper roof, the first elevator in a Newark home, and a stable. He subsequently had homes built for his daughters on the same block and the family lived in stately luxury.

In 1914 beer baron Krueger returned to Germany for a visit and was caught behind enemy lines as World War I got underway. Unable to return to America until 1919, his family managed both business and home during his absence. In 1925 Herr Krueger, now 88 years old, and his invalid wife decided that the family would leave Newark and move permanently to their summer home in Allenhurst, New Jersey. The magnificent High Street mansion was sold to the Valley of the Scottish Rite Freemasons. Gottfried Krueger died the following year.⁹

The Masons

The Scottish Rite of Freemasonry is one of several rites - or series of degrees – conferred by the Freemasons fraternal organization. It was started in Charleston, South Carolina in 1801 and operates in the open, holding public events. The Newark Masons' literature promoted their new castle-like setting as reflective of their significant membership and noble endeavors. Meetings held at the Krueger-Scott Mansion lodge might have consisted of event coordination, new member inductions, and lectures on Freemasonry history.

⁹ James S. Allen, "Act 1: The Ocean Smell (1624-1938)," (Nov 2010).
http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=histcw_pp.

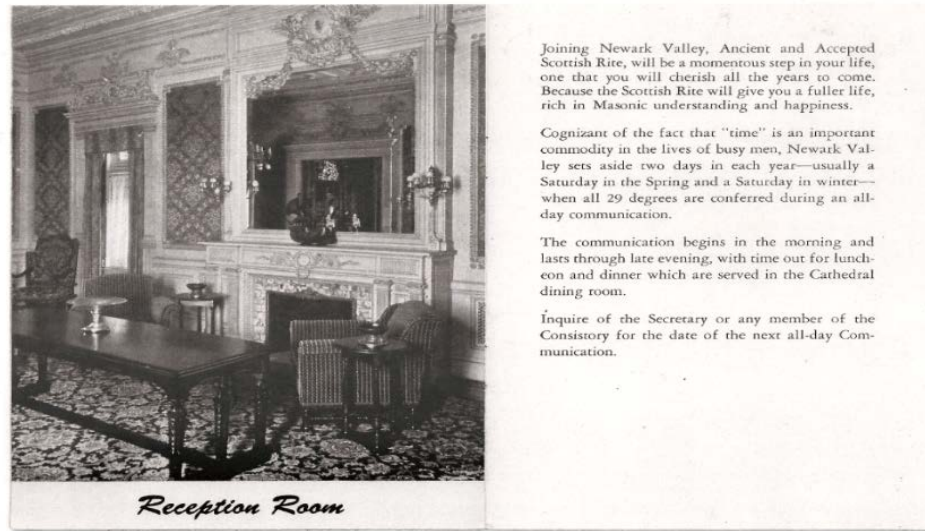


Figure 1. From Masons' "Newark Consistory," "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

In 1929 the Masons added a 580 seat auditorium, located between the Mansion and the stable, probably utilized for some of the traditionally larger gatherings such as the semiannual degree "communications."¹⁰

As the years went on, the heavy foot traffic of the Masons' numerous activities began to compromise the aging structure. Such a house was in constant need of repair, and it became increasingly challenging for the Masons to sustain the upkeep; the Krueger Mansion was no longer receiving attention commensurate with its usage. Meanwhile the Masons' membership was declining and the organization had begun eyeing property in the suburbs. Hopeful that with more acreage and a change of location outside the city walls that they could secure more members, the Masons relocated.¹¹

Whether leaving the old Third Ward in search of suburban foliage or to separate from the changing "complexion" of the city, White residents were slowly abandoning the

¹⁰ "Freemasonry," wikipedia.org and "History," scottishrite.org.

¹¹ "New Home for Northern New Jersey," *The Northern Light*, September 1977, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Project Mansion File.

High Street area and its neighborhoods. In their place came African Americans, most through the Great Migration. Others already resided in the area, doctors and funeral directors who could afford the homes and were willing to ignore the disapproving looks - or worse - by those who were not yet ready to live next door to someone who did not look like them. At this moment the Krueger Mansion becomes The Krueger-Scott Mansion.

Louise Scott

Enter Louise Scott, beauty culture entrepreneur and millionaire and Newark's own Madam C.J. Walker.¹² Mrs. Scott, born in 1905, was a part of the Great Migration, that stream of African-American migrants making their journey from the South to the North starting around the early 1900s and on through the 1960s. Scott left a small town in South Carolina in 1936 and, as with so many African-American women, began earning money in New York City doing "days' work as a domestic worker."¹³ By night Scott attended the Apex Beauty School from which she graduated in 1938. That same year she moved to Barclay Street in Newark.

¹² Madam C.J. Walker, born in 1867, was said to have been the first African-American female millionaire in the country and became an icon to many African Americans. Walker made her money in "beauty culture," a popular means of income for African-American women throughout the 20th century. Scott, as Walker, gained her wealth in the beauty business and was said to have been the first African-American female millionaire in Newark.

¹³ As opposed to being a live-in domestic, day-workers went home at the end of what was usually an exceptionally long day. The name of Scott's hometown has been reported differently depending upon the source. Most likely she was born in Florence, S.C.



Figure 2. *Crisis Magazine*, Jan. 1938.

Newark was suffering through the Depression along with the rest of America. Between 1925 and 1933 six hundred local factories had closed and the city's per capita income had halved. Communities organized "relief gardens" and "squatters farms" in order to pool their resources.¹⁴ By 1938, when Louise Scott arrived, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was firmly entrenched, creating jobs for many of those disemployed by the Depression. In Newark some of the WPA jobs included the extension of Branch Brook Park, the building of a swimming pool on Boylan Avenue and the construction of an administration building at Newark Airport.¹⁵ By this time almost one half of African Americans nationwide were either "on relief" or working for the WPA and not everyone viewed the latter as savior. African Americans were discriminated against within the system, rarely attaining the same level of employment as Whites. The "last hired, first fired" principle in effect rarely worked to benefit African Americans.¹⁶

¹⁴ Cunningham, *Newark*, 281.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ John P. Davis, *A Survey of the Problems of the Negro Under the New Deal* (Bureau of Educational Research: Howard University, 1936) ebscohost.com.

On the other hand, federally funded adult education programs for African Americans were proving beneficial. Participating in this self-actualization movement was the Newark chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) which launched a campaign to increase its membership. The lofty goal of adding 1500 names to its roster was spearheaded by field secretary Daisy E. Lampkin.¹⁷ Meanwhile the Urban League became a foundational resource for Newark's African-American residents under the leadership of William Ashby. Urban quality of life was improving, though more markedly for the White residents of Newark than the Black. The now majority African-American Third Ward, the location of the Krueger Mansion, had suffered the most neglect during the Depression and would be the last of the wards to recover a semblance of its former self.¹⁸

In 1944 Louise Scott opened her first business, the Scott Beauty Salon, on Barclay Street. She subsequently launched more salons and introduced training programs for the stylists. She also started her own line of beauty products, once again emulating Madam Walker. Over the next ten years Mrs. Scott added the Scott Hotel at 565 High Street and the Scott Restaurant to her business empire.¹⁹ Scott had already become a recognized leader in the Black community. "Madam" Scott as she liked to be called was feted at a 1957 gathering that took place at the popular Terrace Ballroom, a downtown establishment frequented by Newark's upwardly mobile African Americans. At the

¹⁷ *The Crisis*, January 1938, <https://books.google.com>.

¹⁸ Cunningham, *Newark*, 285.

¹⁹ Some information from *The Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center*, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File. Published by the City of Newark, this is a 1997 brochure giving a brief overview of the planned Mansion restoration.

testimonial dinner community leaders and politicians lauded her work as an advocate for the Black community, as well as her success in the business world.²⁰

Looking for an opportunity to centralize her business and community work, Mrs. Louise Scott purchased the Krueger Mansion from the Scottish Rite Masons in 1958 – with cash.²¹ A *Newark Evening News* article in September of that year reported that Scott planned to create a “neighborhood house” in the Mansion that would be “open to all persons, regardless of creed or color.” She also had plans “to organize a 200-member choir,” according to the article, transferring “the Sunday religious program she now conducts at her hotel to the 700-seat auditorium that adjoins the mansion.”²²

Within the Scott Cultural and Civic Center on High Street, Madam Scott established a beauty school, a day care facility for her students’ children, and a hotel.²³ From the auditorium live radio shows, such as Bernice Bass’ political *News and Views*, were aired in front of a studio audience. In 1961 Scott established the Good Neighbor Baptist Church on the Mansion grounds. Scott became a pillar of the African-American

²⁰ “Case Predicts Caste System Destruction in Newark Talk,” *Newark Evening News*, Oct. 8, 1957, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

Progressive New Jersey Republican Senator Clifford P. Case spoke that night of “racial progress” while also lamenting the weakness of the newly adopted Civil Rights Bill and the “caste system” still present in the U.S.

²¹ Much is made of the fact that a single woman was able to purchase such a large home with cash. Her daughter claims that the Masons did not want to sell the place to an African American and only acquiesced once cash was offered. Louise Scott-Rountree, phone conversation with author, March 28, 2016.

²² Robert W. Kirschbaum, “Turns Mansion Into Haven,” *Newark Evening News*, Sept. 23, 1958, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

²³ There are rumors that the hotel may have been used as a place of ill repute at times. Some interviews imply that there were illegal occurrences there but also mention that prostitution was the norm in hotels during this period of time. The police apparently regularly raided the Scott Hotel, overlooking - say some - the White-owned hotels that participated in the same business practices.

community, a continuing inspiration to Black residents of the city, as well as an advocate for those still in need - even as life in Newark seemed to be improving for its Black residents.

Part of the uptick in opportunity for African Americans was due in part to the departure of so many Whites. Between the 1950s until 1967, Newark's White population went from 363,000 to 158,000, while the Black population increased from 70,000 to 220,000.²⁴ There was a sense of shifting authority in a city that had for so long been run by, and mostly for, the White residents. Mayor Addonizio was still mayor, but he gave the perception at least of being open to the needs of his Black constituents. The 1950s had offered an economic boon - in part buoyed by the expansion of Prudential Insurance Company - which trickled down to African-American Newarkers. Even so, housing continued to deteriorate in the majority Black Central Ward and high rise "projects" were hastily constructed in response to the overwhelming needs for shelter.²⁵ It was a time of hope coupled with a continuation of problems.

Mary Roberts, a retired African-American school teacher and one-time district leader of the South Ward, claimed in an interview that when she arrived in Newark in 1961, "everybody was happy...it was so beautiful you could just go anyplace...everybody seemed so on one accord."²⁶ With hindsight we can imagine a kind of façade that existed during this decade, one that leaned against the city's past history as

²⁴ "Newark: A Brief History," *Street Fight*, POV, July 5, 2005, pbs.org.

²⁵ "The 81 city blocks that made up Newark's old Third Ward ceased to exist as a unique neighborhood of Newark in 1954 when the City of Newark erased the old Third Ward lines and made the neighborhood a part of a larger, current Central Ward." Nat Bodian, "Books About the Third Ward Written by Former Neighborhood Dwellers," *Old Newark Memories*, accessed April 18, 2017, <http://www.virtualnewarknj.com/memories/thirdward/bodianbooks.htm>

²⁶ Mary Roberts, interview by Glen Marie Brickus, *Krueger-Scott Oral History Collection*, Oct. 26, 1997.

a location of increased job opportunity and agency for African Americans. The city was indeed progressing, both economically and in status, but that did not mean the progress was benefiting all residents. Mary Roberts may not have been aware as of yet, but contempt and frustration in many of Newark's Black citizens was simmering as they continued to watch the promised equal opportunities pass them by.



Figure 3. "Krueger Mansion 11/12/79," Courtesy Newark Library. The sign above the entrance reads, "Scott's Cultural and Civic Center."

The Nation, Newark, and the 1960s

1961 was the start of what is generally called the Civil Rights Era, although Blacks and their allies had been fighting for equal justice since enslaved Africans first came to this country. In 1961 the NAACP and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating

Committee (SNCC) organized the Albany Movement in Georgia, the Mississippi voting rights campaign was initiated, and Ella Baker led a movement to “change the system.”²⁷

As noted earlier, this time of civil rights battles was also a period, not coincidentally, of Black museum development. This movement came in large part out of the protest and radicalism of the Civil Rights period. Chicago’s African American Museum was just one example of the “grassroots movement of citizens who founded museums in northern ghettos... [and] recast racial progress in terms of black pride and self-determination, themes central to the civil rights movement and black nationalism of the 1960s,” according to Mabel Wilson.²⁸ No longer willing to accept that the only historical commemoration of Blacks came in the narrative of their enslavement Black culturists, activists, artists and scholars were moved to tell the longer and more complicated history of Blacks in America, and they would now tell that story themselves. It would take Newark decades to attempt such an act of self-determination and historical preservation and the result would be a remarkable collection of oral histories alongside an abandoned cultural center.

Meanwhile, in 1966 the City of Newark initiated a tax action against the Krueger-Scott Mansion’s Scott Civic and Cultural Center and its owner, Louise Scott. That same year Madam Scott sold the auditorium to a religious organization called Range’s Temple, later to become Mount Olive Church of God. Scott sold the property to the Temple for one dollar.²⁹ This sale does not directly indicate that Scott was in any kind of dire

²⁷ Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) 2.

²⁸ Wilson, *Negro Building: Black Americans in the World of Fairs and Museums*, 12.

²⁹ Indenture, Louise Scott, Range’s Temple, May 31, 1966, Newark City Archives.

financial need as it may have simply been one more example of her philanthropy in the Black community. On the other hand, in selling the building Scott would no longer be financially responsible for its upkeep.

The City's motives behind the tax action coincided with the pressure that urban centers nationwide were receiving to build more "middle income housing." In Newark this was an imperative that began as far back as the old Third Ward urban renewal initiatives of the 1950s. In 1965 the Newark Redevelopment and Housing Authority (NRHA) attempted to purchase the Mansion in order to demolish it and build a "High Street project." Another building proposal put forth at the time came from the St. James AME Church, neighbor to the Krueger-Scott Mansion. Their recommendation was also for the construction of a high-rise apartment complex located directly upon the Mansion's property, which they would manage.

Absentee landlords in the primarily Black Central Ward did less and less to keep up their properties as they waited for a piece of the urban renewal pie; buyers were paying a lot more money than properties were worth and then selling for even more to those desiring to reap the financial benefits of urban redevelopment. Urban Renewal may as well have been called "Negro Removal," according to many Black residents of the time. African Americans bore the brunt of residential displacement due to the fact that their neighborhoods were those most targeted for development. This process began with an official "blighting" of the area, typically resulting in at best a lack of attention to rentals by landlords, and sometimes even the destruction of one's home by varying measures including fire. Because fewer Blacks owned their own properties, fewer had the power to improve their living conditions. Even the neighborhoods where Blacks did own

their own homes tended to become sites of development projects, in part because they carried so little power at City Hall. Newark was a microcosm of the national post-industrial urban experience, a reflection of the steps forward taken by so many in the cities and the requisite steps backward for so many others as a result of “progress.” This complicated time wound up creating some strange bedfellows; in Newark this meant the intermingling of preservationists, politicians, activists, and “ordinary people” who would spend the next forty years battling over the life of the Krueger-Scott Mansion, over the value of the High Street neighborhood, and over the right to the city itself.

African Americans were making demands, and this was not welcomed by all. The Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966 (aka Model Cities) was an attempt to reorganize urban programming, increase urban development, and restructure the administration of federal funds practiced under the aegis of President Johnson’s War on Poverty. There were concerns arising from municipal leaders nationwide regarding the fact that community organizations - often made up of Black or other underrepresented urban groups - had become direct recipients of certain federal funds, giving them in turn authority of allocation. The predominantly White politicians argued that they were the ones elected, after all, and so should be the directors of said funds.³⁰

Mayor Sharpe James writes in his memoir:

...the success of the UCC [United Community Corporation] in creating Black leadership led to a backlash among White city officials nationwide. They felt threatened by the Black community’s new sense of empowerment. The fact that federal money was going straight to community programs, run by community activists, meant that the ability to hand out patronage jobs was out of the control

³⁰ Mandi Isaacs Jackson, *Model City Blues: Urban Space and Organized Resistance in New Haven* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008) 7.

of local politicians. So, Washington was pressured to limit the power of community organizers within antipoverty agencies.³¹

Amidst all the wrangling, sub-standard housing remained ubiquitous. Poor Blacks were paying rents that in no way reflected the quality of their homes; unfair labor practices continued; the once highly praised public schools were declining; and still few people of color were able to secure positions of any real power in City Hall, even as Blacks were now the majority in the city. “Newark was a city waiting for an explosion” writes historian John Cunningham.³² Yet there was hope. While Mayor Hugh Addonizio did secure a second term in the recent mayoral election, Ken Gibson, an African-American engineer, had made a good showing. The first African American to run for mayor of Newark, Gibson would ultimately end up mayor, a symbol of the national racial shift in urban political power.

Black Americans were coming for what was theirs, demanding the same positions, pay scales, and living conditions as their White counterparts. Economic growth for all was the proclaimed goal of the leaders of post-industrial and post-rebellion cities and African Americans were holding those leaders to their word. Concurrently was a movement in effect whose mission was to reclaim the cultural and historical facets of Black America. Somewhere between these two factions, economics and culture, stood the Krueger-Scott Mansion.

Place and Power

³¹ Sharpe James, *Political Prisoner: You Can Be Indicted, Arrested, Convicted and Sent To Prison Without Committing a Crime: A Memoir* (Newark: Nutany Pub. Co., 2013) 69-70.

³² Cunningham, *Newark*, 312-313.

While the Mansion symbolized for some an outdated Newark, a point away from which the city was moving, others saw the house as a reflection of the long and solid history of a people who came to Newark and were in part responsible for what it was at that moment - a modern city of culture, trade, and learning. These dual identities would be at war for decades to come.

The Krueger-Scott Mansion was a “monstrosity” declared Lou Danzig, Newark Housing Authority (NHA) Director, at one particularly contentious public hearing. On November 2, 1966, J. Stewart Johnson, curator for the Newark Museum and president of the Victorian Society of America, argued for the protection of the Mansion simply out of respect for the city’s early history. “...we are destroying the 19th century here as fast as we possibly can,” he complained.³³

Meanwhile veteran Newarkers were once again seeing the writing on the housing development wall when it came to the High Street area. First the city would “blight” the area, then without any public discussion it would negotiate a development plan. Only afterwards would those in the affected area learn of said plan and by then it was usually too late.³⁴ Edna Thomas, secretary of the Scudder Homes Association - a housing project in the High Street area that was ultimately demolished in 1987 - attended the November hearing where the fate of the High Street neighborhood was hotly debated. She had

³³ Elizabeth McFadden, “Aesthetic vs. the Practical on Fate of Krueger House,” *Newark Evening News*, Nov. 3, 1966, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

³⁴ Consider the building of the New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry in the University Heights area of Newark in 1967. Residents of the neighborhood slated for demolition learned of the plan in a newspaper headline. There is much published about the battle that ensued and the resulting Newark Agreements. See for example a piece I wrote entitled “Over My Dead Body,” *The Newest Americans*, Newark: Rutgers University, Winter 2016. <http://newestamericans.com/over-my-dead-body/>.

already tried to warn her home-owning neighbors over on High Street about the city's plans to buy them out. In a 1996 interview Mrs. Thomas remembered:

They tried to steal it from them about thirty years ago...The Housing Authority. The Mandelbaum Associates wanted to buy it. I went and knocked on the doors to tell them who was going to sell it. They were going to take their property. So I told them don't say anything, come to a meeting tomorrow, and wear old clothes and just don't say anything. So they came. And they sat there at the Housing Authority right with me and listened to what was planned for their house. And they were utterly shocked. And they did not sell their property.³⁵

In 1967, Madam Scott became Mrs. Scott-Rountree, marrying the Rev. Malachi Rountree. According to Mrs. Scott's daughter, this was a union not everyone was in favor of. There were apparently those concerned that the younger man may have married more out of greed than love.³⁶ In fact Rev. Rountree and other family members would later be accused of "stripping and selling" valuable parts of the Mansion's interior, as well as stealing rent monies intended for tax payments.³⁷ No official complaint was ever lodged but Scott divorced Rountree in 1975.³⁸

³⁵ Edna Thomas, interview by E. Alma Flagg, *Krueger-Scott Oral History Project*, Oct. 7, 1996. Mrs. Thomas used "it" to refer to the property of one particular family she had mentioned earlier in the interview. Thomas probably directed the owners to dress down as they were well-off and might have given the impression that relocation would not be a hardship.

³⁶ Louise Scott-Rountree, phone interview with author, March 28, 2016.

³⁷ Douglas Eldridge, email message to Samantha Boardman, June 24, 2008, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File. Eldridge was executive director of the Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee. The suspicions surrounding the Rountree family were also expressed to me by Louise Scott's daughter in our phone conversation.

³⁸ It should be noted that after Madam Scott's death, Rountree and his family reappeared, presenting themselves as heirs to the property and the Mansion's contents. In 1984 a *Bergen Record* article reported that "Mrs. Scott's family sold many items, including stained-glass windows." This supports the suspicion that unknown vandals were not the only ones responsible for the disappearance of so many valuables housed inside the Mansion. Some information from Camilo J. Vergara, "Krueger's Mansion, Newark: Lost Cause," *American Ruins* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999) 170, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

1967 was also an important year in urban history, and not just because of the infamous summer rebellions. If one had to choose a single issue during this political period that brought together so very many people, it might have been that of housing and the urban built environment. Looking past the “riots” to the causes and effects of these rebellions provides a more detailed snapshot of the events themselves; inadequate housing was one major cause. The uprisings came at a transitional moment when multiple community activists showed up together - whether wearing dashikis or white gloves - bent on changing the quality of Black life in America. Of course, that in turn engendered some resistance.

Model Cities was but one of the attempts at limiting agency in these communities. The Green Amendment, named after Democratic Representative Edith Green from Oregon, shifted some power back to the municipalities with regard to Community Action Agencies (CAAs). Another restriction came in the form of the Quie Amendment, sponsored by Republican Representative Albert Quie of Minnesota. This specified the make-up of the CAA boards, requiring that a third of the board be comprised of those from the private sector and another third of elected officials.³⁹ This change of direction affected inner cities throughout the country. It was clear that the power structure was not quite ready to abide by the spirit of all federal programs.

Philanthropists such as Louise Scott continued to bear the burden of “making up the difference” in their communities. Since emancipation citizens of African descent have

³⁹ According to Public Administration scholar, G. David Garson, “The Green Amendment of 1967 stipulated that local elected officials had the authority to designate the official CAA for their areas. Only after such official recognition could the OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] fund a CAA. Although over 95% of existing CAA's were certified under the Green Amendment, there were major big-city exceptions in which community-based CAA's were replaced by mayor-controlled CAA's or public agencies,” prenhall.com.

been tasked with closing the gap that separates their opportunities from those of other Americans. The Black church, as we will read more later, was one of the first examples of Blacks taking it upon themselves to garner that which was not rightfully provided. In Newark there were many examples of this self-determination in the community. One example comes in the person of African-American physician John A. Kenney who opened Kenney Hospital in 1927. The hospital would come to be called the “Black Hospital” as it was the only health care facility in Newark where Black doctors could practice.⁴⁰ In keeping with this tradition of helping one’s own, in 1968 Madam Scott, under the aegis of the Scott College of Beauty Culture and the Good Neighbor Cathedral, announced a fundraiser to open “a free school of music and art for underprivileged Newark young people.” The school was to be housed at the Mansion. A lavish dinner was held at the Robert Treat Hotel Ballroom with approximately 1,000 people in attendance. There is no further evidence of that proposed school.⁴¹

In 1967 the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Act set out to reform both the physical and affective aspects of public housing. The buildings that had once been models of modernity in the 1940s had lost their luster; it had become obvious that the experiment had failed – or was at the least outdated. Studies showed that a new physical design was needed, that the distance between tenant and sidewalk created an emotional distance and lack of investment in one’s neighborhood. Discontent had been developing within the projects for some time and activist residents were decrying the quality of their

⁴⁰ “Kenney Memorial Hospital,” *Old Newark*, accessed March 16, 2017, newarkcarefacilities.com.

⁴¹ “Mrs. Scott to Be Feted,” *Newark Sunday News*, March 10, 1968, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File. It is somewhat surprising that such an event occurred at the Robert Treat at this time. According to a number of oral histories in the Krueger-Scott collection it was still a segregated hotel - if only unofficially - through the 1960s.

homes - and their lives. HUD put forth an initiative that would upgrade the urban built environment by way of tenant empowerment. The thinking went that if the residents felt they had a stake in their living circumstances then they would be more inclined to care for their apartments, the buildings, and the grounds in general. This was the idea behind the proposed Hill Manor project to be built next door to the Krueger-Scott Mansion.

As Rhonda Williams writes in *The Politics of Public Housing*, “Federal dictates, however, did not necessarily translate into local agency cooperation...” Once again, the law was not always executed at the local level. Rent strikes and threats thereof, led most often by African-American women, became a regularly wielded tool by tenant activists throughout the 1960s and 70s.⁴² Meanwhile Louise Scott was her own kind of activist, at the “forefront” of an urban preservation struggle. Along with a handful of others convinced of the historic, community, and aesthetic value of the house, Scott staved off buy-outs and generated funds for a house in constant need of repair. In 1972 the Krueger-Scott Mansion was finally placed on the National Register of Historic Places, the result of an application submitted by Scott and Newark Museum curator J. Stewart Johnson. Much of the publicity material and media coverage surrounding the Mansion restoration project credits Scott as saving the place from “certain ruin.”⁴³ Yet there was still division as to the best use of the historic home.

⁴² Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles Against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 171-175. In 1970 Newark public housing residents organized into the group, Poor and Dissatisfied Tenants (PDT). Their list of demands included a reduction in the maximum rent paid by welfare recipients, increased police protection, and drug rehabilitation services. See *Jet*, “Newark’s Public Housing Tenants in Rent Strike,” April 23, 1970, 4.

⁴³ Edna Bailey, “Once and Future Glory,” *Sunday Star-Ledger*, March 1, 1981, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

The urban preservation movement had yet to make its way very far into the general public's imagination. It would not be until 1973 that the Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee (NPLC) would form. Early meetings called by Donald T. Dust, journalist and member of the Chamber of Commerce, were motivated by the witnessing of the regular demolition of historically significant sites in the city. The "New Newark" era placed emphasis on just that while historic buildings such as the Old Essex County Prison sat empty and crumbling.⁴⁴ The rebellion had left a landscape of abandoned buildings, some of which were of great historic value as far as preservationists were concerned. Eighty-year-old synagogues emptied as Jews continued to leave the city for the suburbs. And the Krueger-Scott Mansion itself just barely avoided the wrecking ball in 1965. There was clearly work to be done in preserving the city's history. The first NPLC board of trustees, appointed by Mayor Gibson and the Chamber of Commerce, included two African Americans, William Ashby and E. Alma Flagg.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ This building is still preserved through memory as is witnessed in chapter 5 when Edward Kerr tells a story of guarding it during the rebellion.

⁴⁵ "History," *The Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee*, accessed March 16, 2017, newarklandmarks.org.



Figure 4. "The Krueger Mansion," Nov. 12, 1979, *New Jersey Newsphotos*.

In 1979 the Mansion was still in fair condition, although it had suffered a fire on the third floor which "damaged the structure's heating system" and "destroyed the dome's crystal skylight." The following year the City of Newark made its first investment in the structure's preservation, approving a \$50,000 grant for "emergency repairs." The Mansion had finally made its way into the conversation already surrounding other local historic preservation projects such as the Plume House and the famed Ballantine House - another Beer Baron's stately home. "Mrs. Scott is to be admired for holding onto the mansion for so long..." said Margaret Mandhart of the Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee in 1981.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Edna Bailey, "Once and Future Glory," *Sunday Star-Ledger*, March 1, 1981, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

This article also reported that the Scott Beauty School was "temporarily closed" at that point. The Ballantine House ended up faring much better than Krueger-Scott, ultimately taken under the wing of the Newark Museum. See <http://www.newarkmuseum.org/ballantine-house> for a brief history of the house.

On April 21, 1983, Madam Louise Scott passed away. Her funeral made the headline of the *New Jersey Afro-American*, displacing even the death of famed jazz pianist Earl “Fatha” Hines. Scott lay in state in the Great Hall of the Krueger-Scott Mansion where Gottfried Krueger’s body had been displayed some fifty-seven years before. “Hundreds of citizens” attended the viewing.⁴⁷

The City Takes Charge

Phase I

The ensuing year became one of logistical and financial chaos for the historic Krueger-Scott Mansion. 1984 brought the initially private negotiations regarding the Mansion’s financial responsibilities between family and the City out into the public arena. Newspaper articles and gossip abounded. Occupants remained at the Mansion’s Scott Hotel, which *The Star Ledger* now called an “unlicensed boarding home.” This rent was to have defrayed the property taxes, according to Louise Scott’s daughter. But payments had not reached City Hall for quite some time. In fact the City had officially foreclosed on the property in 1982, but citing respect for Madam Scott it delayed the foreclosure. Eventually twenty tenants were evicted from the High Street property and the City finally took ownership in March of 1984.⁴⁸ The Scott-Rountree family was still in possession of the property and the City allowed them access, based in part on some confusion as to who had “jurisdiction.” According to Scott’s daughter the family stripped

⁴⁷ Bob Queen, “Funeral Services for Louise Scott, a Legend,” *The New Jersey Afro-American*, April 30, 1983, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

⁴⁸ Frederick W. Byrd, “Newark Seizes Landmark Mansion, Ousts 20 Amid Family Feud,” *The Star Ledger*, March 29, 1984, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

the house and then abandoned it. Seven years later, said Louise Scott-Rountree, Mayor James finally said, “we’re gonna do something with that house.”⁴⁹

The Mansion was certainly relieved of its most valuable interior possessions by somebody but it was not the “neighborhood folk,” Rev. Scott-Rountree assured me.

Stained glass, mahogany finials, and whole fireplaces made their way out one way or another. Some items are said to have shown up later at Sotheby’s auction house.

Squatters began making their homes in the grand structure and the City of Newark was at first unresponsive. At the same time local historians, preservationists, and members of the community continued their calls for action. That year representatives of various interest groups toured the Mansion site with a photographer from *The Star Ledger* newspaper. Photos were published of the visitors stepping over piles of fallen concrete and eyeing stairways with missing bannisters.



Figure 5. “Krueger Mansion, Newark. June 17, 1984,” *Star-Ledger* Archives, Newark Public Library.
From left to right, Ulysses Grant Dietz, Elizabeth Del Tufo, Richard Grossklauss.

In the above photograph are three people who were very invested in the Krueger-Scott Mansion, for slightly different reasons. Ulysses Dietz had been the curator of Decorative Arts at the Newark Museum since 1980. As he looked through the door one

⁴⁹ Louise Scott-Rountree, phone interview with author, March 28, 2016.

could imagine his disappointment at the lack of anything that would have been considered decorative, or art. Dietz's predecessor, J. Stewart Johnson had been one of the proponents for preserving the Mansion, teaming with Madam Scott when it was threatened with demolition in 1965. Elizabeth Del Tufo, representing the NLPC, was intent on the restoration of this Mansion. Her name comes up quite often in news articles surrounding the project although not always in unison with the City's - or other community members' - plans. Richard Grossklaus was director of the substance abuse treatment center, Integrity House. His goal was to facilitate renovations on the Mansion through the clean-up work by residents of several recovery programs and juvenile detention centers. His concerns were more practical than cultural and some involved in the project would balk at the idea of unskilled youth working in or on the Mansion.

Frustration was setting in for those who wanted to save the place – as well as for those who were ready to see it torn down. If clean-up was actually going to begin then lights were needed but no one could seem to get the City to turn them on. Each time members of the community went to City Hall to enquire about the Mansion, and to offer help, they were shepherded from office to office. It was always somebody else's responsibility.⁵⁰ The City of Newark was more concerned with development than preservation at this point. Development was what people with money wanted to see in order to hand over more money. When one company or institution showed faith in a city's ability to sustain business, this signaled to others that it would be a fiscally sound decision to follow suit. This is what Newark was working towards and the restoration of a Victorian mansion did not fit within that model.

⁵⁰ Frederick W. Byrd, "Newark Red Tape Knots Historic Mansion Repair," *The Star Ledger*, July, 26, 1984, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

It was now Mayor Ken Gibson's fourth term in office and the honeymoon was over. Yes, Newark had its first Black mayor but the city was still far behind the vision set out by the Black and Puerto Rican Convention which had rallied to get Gibson in office in the first place. Robert Curvin writes in *Inside Newark*, "After winning his fourth election in 1982...Gibson seemed to be running on cruise control, set at a very slow speed." One response to this "leadership void" was the Newark Collaboration Group (NCG) initiated by executives at the Prudential Insurance Company. The NCG acted as a facilitator for various urban development projects, by fundraising and promoting. At one point the group secured a \$2 million loan from locally based Prudential for African-American developer Don Harris. Harris was then responsible for the construction of forty units of housing located in the University Heights section of the Central Ward. The development area would later become known as Society Hill, "the first market-rate housing construction in the Central Ward since the disturbances of 1967."⁵¹

Some progress towards the restoration of the Krueger-Scott Mansion was being made, if only in word. In February of 1985 *The Star Ledger* published a brief update on the project, including a number of proposals regarding use of the space. This appears to be the first time that the idea of a specifically African-American cultural center was put forward. Edna Thomas told the *Ledger* that she had submitted "a package" that proposed the site be devoted to Black history and culture. However, City Council President Ralph

⁵¹ Robert Curvin, *Inside Newark: Decline, Rebellion, and the Search for Transformation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014) 183, 306.

Grant said in the same article that he had seen no “hard data” on any proposed project. Things were moving at a glacial pace.⁵²

In fact, a plan had been written and the city was in receipt of it at some point. Entitled, “A Plan to Restore the Krueger-Scott Mansion into The Newark Library & Museum of Black Culture,” it was drafted in August of 1984 by The Central Ward Coalition of Youth Agencies, of which Edna Thomas was Chair. In the Coalition’s proposal the merits of Black cultural institutions as promoters of self-esteem in Black youth were argued. The theory put forth was that through the introduction to young people of the history and culture of African Americans - so often absent in the classroom and mainstream media - positive behavior and community responsibility would be fostered. In a city that was at this point 62% African American and whose population’s median age was 27, the Coalition argued that a Black cultural institution would make a powerful impact on the people and thus on the city as a whole.⁵³

We have here an ideological and cultural movement projected upon the Krueger-Scott Mansion project. Many African Americans in the city saw the Mansion as a symbol of something very different than those focused on the historical value of the structure itself. The former wanted to preserve a narrative, a piece of history illustrating the centrality of Black people to Newark’s history. Throughout the city statues and monuments of White historical actors were everywhere, but some of the only

⁵² Byrd, “Community Groups Still Work to Resurrect Dilapidated Krueger Mansion,” *The Star Ledger*, Feb. 4, 1985, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

⁵³ Central Ward Coalition of Youth Agencies, “A Plan to Restore the Krueger-Scott Mansion into The Newark Library & Museum of Black Culture,” August, 1984, Newark City Archives.

A copy of the original document shows a handwritten circle around the date with the annotation, “5 ½ years old.” It is difficult to ascertain when or if the proposal was seriously considered.

There is much research that supports the theory put forward in this proposal; see Joy DeGruy’s *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, e.g.

commemoration to Black historical actors were those tied to rebellion and riot. Louise Scott made her own money and took care of her own people, and a lot of Newark's citizens wanted that very particular narrative preserved. It is difficult to understand, unless one has lived it, a life spent without seeing one's own reflection. Edna Thomas would later say, in support of the restoration project as a symbol of self-determination, "We as black people...have no place to hang our pictures."⁵⁴ We need only think of the newly opened National Museum of African American History and Culture, and its long journey to fruition, all so that African Americans had someplace to hang their pictures – and store their artifacts and tell their stories.

Sharpe James, an outspoken proponent of Black business and culture, was now South Ward councilman and a supporter of the Mansion project. The next year he would become mayor. In the spring of 1985 an "emergency" City Council meeting regarding the Mansion was called by George Branch, West Ward councilman. At this "stormy" meeting business administrators, community leaders and politicians argued about who was doing what - and when. Reviewing the archives, it becomes painfully clear as to at least one reason why the Mansion project moved so slowly; every time an idea was put forward it seemed to meet with an immediate dead end. There were a lot of "I'm waiting to hear back from him" and "we never received that plan" within the correspondence and published quotes of those in positions of authority.

There was also continued ambiguity as to the mission of the Center. Business Administrator Elton Hill was to have said during this particular council meeting that "the

⁵⁴ Mary Jo Patterson, "Historical Headache: Mansion at Financial Crossroads," *The Star Ledger*, Dec. 15, 1997, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File. There is more discussion of the import of having a place to "hang one's pictures" in chapter three.

house could not be repaired until the city decided what community group would eventually use the structure and how it would be used.” George Branch responded that “...fixing the roof, the windows and securing it – and getting a program in there are two different things.”⁵⁵ This was a crux in the matter of the definition of the Mansion itself: was it simply a structure in need of repair or a site of political and cultural contestation? Branch was suggesting it be treated as the first and then afterwards could they consider the thorny issues of the second.

Much correspondence among the City’s Engineering Department, the City Council, and various architects surrounding the Mansion is without reference to Black culture or history. In a February 1985 *Star Ledger* article, Elizabeth Del Tufo, as president of the Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee, argued that the best use for the Mansion would be as a suite of offices. Del Tufo had been in the preservation business for some time and it may have been that she offered up this idea simply to attract the City’s attention. After all, there would be revenue from the rental of office space, while a museum would not be a money maker. The same news article had Edna Thomas expressing her continued hope that a Black museum be housed within the Mansion.⁵⁶

Inside the push and pull of larger urban issues of politics and economics was another tension that remained throughout this project’s history, the question of whose city, whose ward, or even whose block it was. Proponents of the Mansion as a Black

⁵⁵ Byrd, “Official Vows Fast Action on Repairs for Vandalized Krueger Mansion,” *The Star-Ledger*, May 22, 1985, 25, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

⁵⁶ Byrd, “Community Groups Still Work to Resurrect Dilapidated Krueger Mansion,” *The Star Ledger*, Feb. 4, 1985, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

cultural center were hoping to stake claim to particular stories before they disappeared completely, to be lost among so much else of their past. But a 1986 report on the Krueger-Scott Mansion, commissioned by the City and prepared by Grad Partnership architectural firm, makes no mention whatsoever of anything pertaining to the use of the Mansion as a Black Cultural Center.⁵⁷ People were apparently invested in the Mansion for a myriad of reasons.

Phase II

In 1986 Grad Partnership was officially employed as the project's architectural firm. The City Council voted to initially invest \$1 million in the Mansion's restoration and employed Grad to perform an exhaustive study of the entire structure. That year Grad published a full architectural analysis regarding the possibilities of restoration and renovation for the Krueger-Scott Mansion. The cost of the final report was \$105,600.⁵⁸ The estimate for all of the work and materials required to restore and renovate the Mansion came in at around \$5 million, far from the initial investment the City had so far committed to and even as previous studies performed estimated the total costs to be closer to \$8 million.⁵⁹

Reflecting the pattern of ineffective communications within City Hall, in May of 1986 a letter written by City Clerk Frank D'Ascensio to Newark's Business Administrator

⁵⁷ Grad Partnership, "Krueger Mansion," 1986, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File. In the report were historical details of Newark, narratives of the High Street area, and descriptions of the past owners. The firm even contacted Gottfried Krueger's grandson in Argentina, hoping to gather missing information on the original appearance of the Mansion.

⁵⁸ Catherine Lenix-Hooker, memorandum to William A. DuPont, Preservation Architect, August 16, 1991, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

⁵⁹ Byrd, "Hope is Crumbling for Victorian Castle," *The Star-Ledger*, Oct. 22, 1989, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

and Director of Engineering requested a “status report” on the Krueger-Scott project for the municipal council, “as soon as possible.” The council wanted “to know what work had been performed to date” since approval for “capital improvements” was given in June of the previous year.⁶⁰ No work had been performed on the Mansion since the City took ownership two years prior.

According to a news article from August of 1986, the first year of Sharpe James’ tenure as mayor, Edna Thomas’ Central Ward Coalition of Youth Agencies proposal had been reviewed by the City Council. Thomas told the journalist that she did not want to give any details but that she “had some pledges as relates to financing.” Thomas also expressed concern that Elizabeth Del Tufo and her Landmarks and Preservation Committee were trying to dictate the Mansion’s use. Del Tufo responded in the same article that she was simply concerned that whatever group ended up in the Mansion be able to afford the “financial responsibilities” involved.⁶¹ The idea of racial uplift and Black historical commemoration were not at the forefront of Del Tufo and other preservationists’ minds. Their mission was to get the Mansion preserved in such a way that it would not be lost to future generations. And then everything came to a standstill once again. The City put up a wire fence around the property to deter vandals and the Castle on the Hill appeared destined to remain an anonymous relic of Newark’s past.

⁶⁰ Frank D’Ascensio to Elton Hill, Alvin Zach, May 28, 1986, Newark City Archives.

⁶¹ Byrd, “Krueger Cleanup Continues...As Does Dispute Over Mansion’s Future,” *The Star-Ledger*, Aug. 23, 1986, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

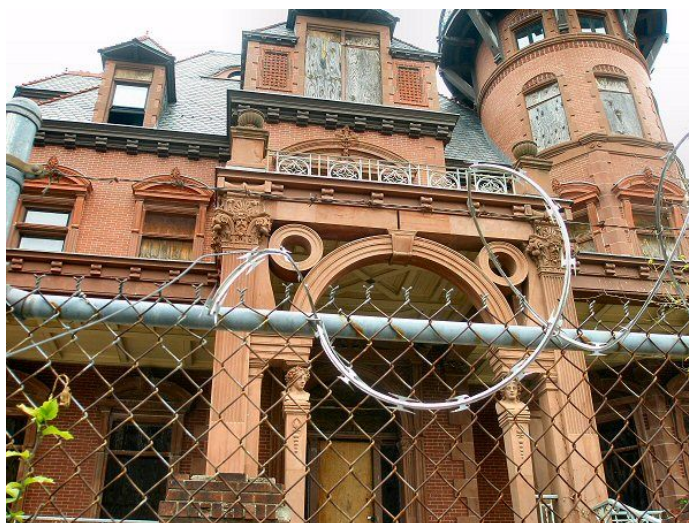


Figure 6. Krueger-Scott Mansion circa 1986, photo L. Craig Schoonmaker.

Two years later, in May of 1988, yet another proposal by the St. James A.M.E Church was put forward with regard to the use of the Krueger-Scott property. In a 77-page application the St. James Social Development Corporation laid out a plan to convert the Mansion into a “Restaurant, a Historical Black Museum, Senior Citizens Day Care, a Center for Performing Arts, Job Training Center, and Office Space...” The Corporation proposed to purchase the property with funding from “monies already allocated by the Newark City Council, as well as other public funding sources...” Included in the package was also a “Letter of Interest” with regard to possible subsidy by the Newark-based Whitney Houston Foundation. And in addition, St. James provided a letter of interest from one of Newark’s largest employers, Prudential Insurance, who was “favorably inclined toward financial support” of the project.⁶² There is no more mention of this particular proposal in subsequent communications or reports.

⁶² St. James Social Development Corporation, “Proposal for Renovation and Reuse of the Krueger Mansion,” May 1988, Newark City Archives.

The year 1989 was yet another tenuous one for the Mansion. Kastl Associates Architects of Jersey City put forward a report in February, “submitted in response to a request to evaluate the Krueger Mansion and the 1987 report on it and to suggest initial steps to be taken if the building merits saving.” The report concluded that the place was indeed worth “saving” and proposed a \$2 million budget to get the project off the ground.⁶³ It was as if there had not already ensued a good five years of discussion surrounding the Mansion; talk of this project seemed to play on a continuous loop. Councilman Branch reported in October of 1989 that the Council had solicited proposals for the Mansion but that none were deemed acceptable.



Figure 7. George Branch leading a tour through the Mansion. (A later structural report would warn that the stairs should not be accessed under any condition until rebuilt). *The Star Ledger*, 1989, Newark City Archives.

⁶³ Kastl Associates, PC, Architects, *Krueger Mansion Report*, Feb. 24, 1989, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File. It is assumed that the “1987 report” they are referring to is actually the 1986 Grad Partnership report.

Elizabeth Del Tufo railed at the Council that had the City acted sooner in favor of past proposals that the restoration costs would not presently be so astronomical.⁶⁴ During the period of these negotiations Newark's urban development was grinding forward, especially in the downtown area. The City Planning Board had just that year approved the construction of One Penn Center, a 33-story tower to house retail and office space as well as a hotel. A nearby "historic building from 1907" was slated to be refurbished and included in this project. Another approved venture was that of the twenty-seven story Gateway Center building, the fifth of its kind at the Gateway complex.⁶⁵ Renewal was certainly on the top of the city's to-do list, but perhaps only where it would enjoy the highest visibility - and reap the most profit. City business administrator Richard Monteilh told a *Star Ledger* reporter in 1989 that the City had "other priorities" when asked about the \$5 to \$8 million dollars that the Krueger-Scott Mansion project would require for completion. At that point they were simply trying to "contain further deterioration" and "prevent vandalism" of the Mansion, replied Monteilh. The rest would just have to wait.⁶⁶

Richard Monteilh was hired by Sharpe James to help transform the landscape of Newark. The city was in possession of "decent pieces to build around," said Monteilh referencing Newark Airport, Prudential Insurance, and Penn Station among others. But first on the agenda was the retrieval of monies that the City was owed, including "\$30

⁶⁴ Byrd, "Hope is Crumbling ..." *The Star-Ledger*, Oct. 22, 1989, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

⁶⁵ Richard D. Lyons, "Postings: Building Up Newark, 33-story Tower," *The New York Times*, April 2, 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/04/02/realestate/postings-building-up-newark-33-story-tower.html>.

⁶⁶ Byrd, "Hope is Crumbling ..."

million in unpaid water bills, \$5 million in parking tickets.” Mayor James, concurrently, was enduring some harsh criticism about the money being spent on a relatively small portion of the city. James explained that it was not always in the administration’s control which projects took priority. “You run with what you have, you run where the dollars are,” said James.”⁶⁷

While preservation of Newark’s history was not necessarily at the top of the agenda in “selling” the city of Newark to the nation, by Mayor Sharpe James’ second term in office it did appear that Newark was committed to building an African-American cultural center within the Mansion - even amidst the continuing downtown “renaissance.” However, it is safe to say that somewhere there was a lack of understanding in either how many dollars it would actually take to bring such a commitment to fruition or how that money should be disseminated. Catherine Lenix-Hooker would tell me later that the City most certainly was aware of the costs that such a project would entail. Alvin Zach, the Director of the Department of Engineering informed City Council right off that it would take approximately twelve million dollars to complete such a project. But, said Lenix-Hooker, the City “nickel and dimed” the whole way through.⁶⁸ Councilwoman Mildred Crump, who was on the Council throughout this period, said in passing at a Mansion stakeholders meeting in April 2017 that the people running the project simply did not know how to spend or use the money they had. “People weren’t serious,” said Crump.

⁶⁷ George E. Curry, “Newark Finally Gets Some Respect,” *The Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 30, 1991, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1991-10-30/news/9104070671_1_mayor-sharpe-james-national-civic-league-livability-award.

⁶⁸ Catherine Lenix-Hooker, interview with author, April 18, 2016.

Meanwhile that same year One Newark Center, at McCarter Highway and Raymond Boulevard, was designed by Krueger-Scott's own Grad Partnership. It included a 200,000-square-foot law school, a one million-square-foot corporate space, and a parking garage for one thousand cars.⁶⁹ Sharpe James was excited by all this development but also saw the Krueger-Scott project as symbolic of "what Newark can become if we all work together."⁷⁰ James was a race man - and a business man. The Mansion would be for the preservation of his people's past, the revitalization of downtown would be for the preservation of Newark's future. He was a man on a dual mission.

Phase III

In October of 1990, a *New York Times* article waxed dramatically of the near-fall and now potential rise of the Krueger-Scott Mansion project. Describing the High Street community as "raw-boned" and claiming that the home had fallen prey to roosting pigeons and "packs of wild dogs," Anthony DePalma reported that the site would indeed be one dedicated to Black culture – made possible by a state grant, monies from the City of Newark, and donations by "private interests." DePalma had attended a rededication ceremony the month before, receiving a tour of the house by Louise Scott's daughter. It was the first time that "Little Louise" had been back in her childhood home for seven years. It was a painful experience for her, she said, to see the house in shambles.⁷¹

⁶⁹ "Seton Hall University School of Law," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seton_Hall_University_School_of_Law#Campus

⁷⁰ Anthony DePalma, "About New Jersey," *The New York Times*, Oct. 28, 1990, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Project Media File.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

In the beginning of 1990 the City Council voted to apply for the New Jersey Historic Trust (NJHT) grant for renovations of the Mansion and pledged to match the grant for up to \$2 million. In June Kastl Associates published a “supplemental” report for the Mansion, its vision somewhat less lofty than the earlier report’s. It was noted as feasible, for example, to replace the fireplaces but now cautioned that the exterior stucco could not be removed within a reasonable budget. In the same vein, work on the roof would have to be delayed, as would construction on the auditorium. The report also recommended pushing aside plans for the neighboring Carrigan property that project managers had been hoping to develop for some time. All told the cost for this initial work would now come closer to \$3 million than their earlier estimated budget of \$2 million.⁷² The structural realities of this preservation project alongside particular economic priorities were only some of the obstacles blocking forward progress in the Mansion’s restoration.

The biggest news of 1990 was that Catherine Lenix-Hooker had been hired away from New York City’s famed Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture as executive director for the Krueger-Scott Mansion restoration project. According to the announcement in an arts newsletter, Lenix-Hooker’s mission in Newark would be to oversee “the transformation of the mansion into a major African-American educational and cultural facility.”⁷³ The press release from the Mayor’s office described Lenix-

⁷²Kastl Associates, PC, Architects, *Supplimental* [sic] *Report*, June 5, 1990, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Project File. That same year Hanscomb Associates, Inc. came in with yet another project estimate of approximately \$3½ million. It is not clear who solicited this particular report and how Hanscomb was associated, if at all, with past architectural groups such as Kastl and Grad.

⁷³ “Grandeur in the Central Ward,” *Newark Arts*, Vol. 1, No. 3, November/December 1990, 22, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Project File.

Hooker's specific duties to "oversee the restoration of the building, as well as its fundraising and development efforts. She will work with the advisory board in planning long-range activities and events."⁷⁴ It was not long before Lenix-Hooker would be asked to perform numerous tasks that seemed to her, as well as others, unwieldy. Was she a fundraiser, project director, liaison for the City, event planner, publicist? "I was juggling so much stuff," she explained years later.

Lenix-Hooker found herself regularly venturing back and forth between Trenton and City Hall in search of funding, while also investing time in the cultivation of relationships within Newark City Hall. Ill feelings existed amongst some council members and with Lenix-Hooker's office located within City Hall she studied their dynamics. For example, Ron Rice, the first African-American councilman to represent the West Ward is reported to have had a difficult relationship with Mayor James, Rice often "taking him on over matters including the budget and judicial appointments."⁷⁵ Of all the Council members, George Branch and Marie Villani were most supportive of the Mansion renovation project, says Lenix-Hooker. Branch had been behind it since the beginning, presumably in part because the Mansion was located in his Central Ward district. Villani, widow of late Mayor Ralph Villani, and the last White person to win a municipal election in Newark, may have been a supporter for any number of reasons. She could well have seen Lenix-Hooker as yet another woman in a man's world and simply

⁷⁴ Pam Goldstein, "Director Named for Krueger-Scott Mansion," *Office of the Mayor of the City of Newark*, Oct.24, 1990, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Project File.

⁷⁵ Damien Cave and Josh Benson, "Newark Mayoral Candidate Tries to Escape Shadows," *The New York Times*, May 5, 2006, nytimes.com.

wished to back her up. Unfortunately for the project, later that year Villani would “resign after pleading guilty to Federal charges that she misused city funds.”⁷⁶

There was constant pressure on City Council members from their constituents – many of whom lived outside the Central Ward and wanted improvements in their own back yards. Simply being African American was not necessarily indicative of support for the Krueger-Scott project either. Black politicians and citizens were looking to participate in the city’s economic improvements, and to garner more and better paying jobs as was regularly promised by the new businesses setting stakes downtown. A museum for Black culture was a nice idea but there were other priorities for some.

In November, Mayor James threw a grand party - as he was wont to do - at the Newark Public Library in order to celebrate Lenix-Hooker’s official arrival as executive director. James took every opportunity to publicly celebrate the “new” Newark; photographs of his time in the mayor’s office abound with galas, festivals, and receptions. In this case Newark had secured for itself someone associated with the eminent Schomburg Center and that was reason to celebrate.

Lenix-Hooker’s family was invited to the party as were many Newark dignitaries. But one guest, Amiri Baraka, began to complain about the number of “outsiders” (perhaps including Lenix-Hooker herself) and questioned whether they truly had a stake in his city. At the library gala Baraka became quite demonstrative, according to Lenix-Hooker, and finally had to be escorted out. She explained to me in a recent interview that later

⁷⁶ Clifford J. Levy, “Newark Council Head Among 3 Indicted,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 24, 1994, nytimes.com.

Baraka recognized her as an ally, “a solid person” who was there to truly “make a difference” and the two became friends.⁷⁷

Newark has a long history of suspicion of those not native to the city - or not yet recognized as truly committed supporters. Like parents chaperoning their child’s party, Newarkers want to know who their child’s “friends” are and if they are worthy of keeping company with. In Newark at this time so many new faces were appearing; contractors, investors, directors and lawyers were buzzing around the city with plans for constructing buildings and facilitating commerce. But Newark had been there before. As Councilwoman Marie Villani said to Harry Grant, a developer from Englewood Cliffs who was putting forth a myriad of building proposals in 1986, “Newark has been fooled so many times by people who come here with great plans, Mr. Grant. Please do not fool us again.”⁷⁸

A redevelopment plan for the Mansion was formally approved by the city’s planning board on December 17, 1990.⁷⁹ (The Mansion re-dedication ceremony had already occurred a few months prior and so it appears the approval was more a formality). In 1991 the New Jersey Historic Trust granted the Krueger-Scott organization over \$600,000 towards renovations.⁸⁰ Of course any funding from a historic agency carried with it specific guidelines in terms of materials and workmanship. In Mayor James’ words, no “artificial or cheap substitute materials” in the reconstruction of the

⁷⁷ Catherine Lenix-Hooker, interview with author, April 18, 2016.

⁷⁸ Cunningham, *Newark*, 365.

⁷⁹ City Architect, “Krueger/Scott Redevelopment Plan,” *City of Newark*, 1990, Newark City Archives.

⁸⁰ Carol DeSenne, “Newark High Street Mansion Receives Maximum Award from Historic Trust,” *Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center*, media release, 1996, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Project File.

Mansion would be allowed.⁸¹ This proved to be one of the most challenging facets of the Mansion project and what many point to as reason for its ultimate demise. Of those who launched this project, and solicited funding from various historical organizations, not all were aware of just how exacting these physical restoration requirements would become. Book parties, teas and grant proposals ensued in hopes of both raising money and encouraging community interest and good will towards the Krueger-Scott renovations.

There also continued contradictions surrounding the project plans as evidenced by a myriad of memos, applications and proposals. A 1991 report issued by the federal Committee on Appropriations recommended the city receive “special purpose grants” that would include “\$1,500,000 for a senior citizen employment and social services center connected to the Krueger Mansion in Newark, NJ.”⁸² In another document, created by Ms. Lenix-Hooker in February of that year, a space-use plan was laid out which specified a “Gottfried Krueger Memorial Room” and a “Hall of Fame dedicated to Louise Scott and the famous African-Americans from Newark and to include an oral history/video documentary screening facilities [sic].” The rest of the ground floor, according to this particular plan, was dedicated to rest rooms, a coat check and a kitchen. The proposal for the 2nd and 3rd floors included nothing pertaining to African-American history, art or culture. Nor did there seem to be any room for the aforementioned social services office space.⁸³ It seemed the federal government was willing to hand over some

⁸¹ Sharpe James, email with author, March 15, 2017.

⁸² Depts. of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies, *Appropriation Bill, 1991*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC: GPO, 1991), Newark City Archives.

⁸³ Catherine Lenix-Hooker, “Proposed Program for Space Use,” *Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center*, Feb., 1991. “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

money if the municipality was going to use it to support senior citizens, while the Krueger-Scott organization was apparently expanding their historical coverage to include other than African-American history. New territorial tensions within this project included the call for social services and the expansion of historical commemoration past that of African-American history. The Mansion became a Rorschach test for people's priorities.

Meanwhile, the physical realities of what it would take to reconstruct and repair the Mansion were becoming ever clearer although not everyone was in agreement about just what the realities were. A July 1991 report by Glenn Boornazian Architectural Conservators stated that removing the stucco surface (that was probably applied by the Masons) in a non-destructive manner from the brick was "unfeasible if not impossible." Handwritten next to that section in the report is the word, "shit," circled and with an exclamation mark.⁸⁴ However, an August report by Grad Partnership included a suggestion regarding "careful removal of a portion of the tower stucco..."⁸⁵ Both fiscal and physical contradictions swirled around the project.

In January of 1991 a contract was submitted by K. Hovnanian Companies, known as "New Jersey's largest home builder," to act as "construction coordinator" (CC) for the project. One clause seemed to be especially troublesome to the City's contract reviewer, presumably Alvin Zach from the Department of Engineering. Item #4 under "Miscellaneous" stated that the construction coordinator "shall not be liable to Owner [the City] or any third party for any reason directly or indirectly related to the breach by

⁸⁴ Glenn Boornazian Architectural Conservators, *Krueger-Scott Mansion: Brownstone Testing, Conditions Assessment and Recommendations*, July 27, 1991, Newark City Archives.

⁸⁵ Grad Associates, "Conference Report #6," Aug. 12, 1991, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

CC of its duties and obligations under this letter of agreement or for negligence.” Written next to this section is the word, “CRAZY.” Apparently the relationship between the City and the company did not go well after that. In April of the same year Hovnanian’s legal counsel wrote Alvin Zach informing him that the City needed to come get its things. In the short time that Hovnanian was apparently involved with the project the company secured a trailer in which to store “artifacts removed from the Krueger Mansion building.” Noting that it was “no longer involved in the Krueger Mansion project” the company’s lawyer insisted that the City “remove the contents of the trailer immediately.”⁸⁶ There were two spheres within which the project dwelled at this point, one containing large issues of preservation and economic feasibility and another sphere filled with logistical issues and miscommunications. The Mansion stood watching as her caretakers argued about her future.

In 1991 Newark was one of ten winners in the 42nd annual All-American City Award competition in San Antonio. The award, presented by the National Civic League, honors communities that illustrate both a sense of commitment and success in overcoming obstacles unique to city life. Newark had received the award once before, in 1954. The city was “on a roll” as Sharpe James writes in his memoir, “now in the national spotlight for its renaissance.”⁸⁷ Mayor James and his revitalization program were credited for having earned this award. Such projects as the upcoming New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC), the return of the Blue Cross/Blue Shield Company to Newark, and the recent construction of over 2,700 housing units were cited as some

⁸⁶ Robert M. Schwartz, letter to Alvin Zach, April 15, 1991, Newark City Archives.

⁸⁷ James, *Political Prisoner*, 137.

examples of the city's turnaround. The U.S. Conference of Mayors also selected Newark that year as one of the nation's most livable cities.⁸⁸

Along with this positive moment came a hopeful trend in urban historic preservation. New Jersey evidenced this through a Capital Needs Survey disseminated in 1987. The survey was in response to growing public concerns that the state's history had been disintegrating. A report based upon the survey was published in 1990 and soon thereafter the Chair of the New Jersey Historic Trust, Joan Berkey, announced that \$175 million would be dispensed for historic preservation and renovation throughout the state. In the New Jersey Conference of Mayors' publication, *Conference Quarterly*, Berkey listed the various projects that would benefit from the funding, including the Krueger-Scott Mansion. She explained that "the grant will fund stabilization of the deteriorated exterior envelope, structural repairs, and temporary building security for this seriously endangered structure..."⁸⁹

Things were looking up as money came in from both preservationists and others who simply wanted to see a cultural center grow in Newark. A *Star Ledger* article in November of 1991 reported on local radio station WNWK's contribution of \$15,000 to the Mansion project for the building of barrier-free restrooms. The same article also provided a brief narrative of the fits and starts of the Krueger-Scott project while explaining that the Mansion would "become a center emphasizing African-American culture." Lenix-Hooker was quoted as saying that the initial renovations - to the exterior and first floor only - would commence in approximately two months and that she foresaw

⁸⁸ Curry, "Newark Finally Gets Some Respect," *The Chicago Tribune*.

⁸⁹ Joan Berkey, "Preserving the Past," *NJCM Conference Quarterly*, First Quarter 1991, 8, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Mansion Project Media File.

the completion of the project to occur in the summer of 1993. Lenix-Hooker also acknowledged the delays in the project, citing the intense “scrutiny” required when accepting money from HUD.⁹⁰

Because the block grant received from HUD was for historic preservation, much as with the New Jersey Historical Trust grant, there were numerous stipulations. Krueger-Scott would have to offer evidence that it was either benefiting “low and moderate-income persons;” preventing or eliminating “slums or blight;” or was designed to “meet a community development need ...” And because the initial grant application would have included such things as “data collection” and “archeological surveys,” the information initially submitted would need to be resubmitted if that information changed – which it usually does when there are contractors involved.⁹¹

The next few years brought continued donations for the Mansion project, from individuals and private organizations, as well as from the city of Newark itself in the form of \$5 million in bonds. As well, the “efforts to purchase properties on the block site and to relocate the tenants” had been “nearly completed” by July of 1993. Things were moving forward positively for the project, and for the High Street community according to some. Lenix-Hooker would tell me later that most people on the block “relished” the idea of being bought out in order to make room for the subsidized housing. The payments were more than fair, she assured me. The City even allowed one man to remain an extra

⁹⁰ Steven T. Walker, “Barrier-Free Step to History,” *The Star Ledger*, Nov. 13, 1991, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

⁹¹ “Community Development Block Grant Program,” *US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development*, hud.gov.

year in order to tend to his garden that spring.⁹² Krueger-Scott was positioning itself as a community project, something that ordinary Newarkers could relate and contribute to. The message was that the Mansion project was different from those million dollar buildings sprouting up downtown, it was a project for the people. But as with any development plan, it still needed money.

This period also had its naysayers. In 1992, as separate plans for the rehabilitation of the Mansion's auditorium were being reviewed, Lenix-Hooker was once again forced to defend the project's timeline. "People ask me, 'Why is this project taking so long?' They don't realize the long process that goes into a project like this," she explained to a reporter, estimating at that point that the bulk of the work on the ground floor would be completed in October of 1993.⁹³

Lenix-Hooker asserts that there were those who assiduously worked against the Mansion project, including a female reporter for the *Star Ledger* who Lenix-Hooker would not name. She claims the reporter did research into her personal background attempting to discredit her, and the project as a whole. In fact, Lenix-Hooker believes that this hostility was some of why the project was ultimately scrapped; Sharpe James could just not afford to have a "street fight" in his administration.⁹⁴

In May of 1993 Lenix-Hooker received a memo from the NJHT requesting an "Application for Major Change," among other materials, before they could "process the reimbursement request." This application was required after the City asked for additional

⁹² Catherine Lenix-Hooker, interview with author, April 18, 2016.

⁹³ Towanda Underdue, "Krueger-Scott Restoration," *The Star-Ledger*, 1992 (n.d.) "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

⁹⁴ Lenix-Hooker, interview with author.

money in order to accomplish work that had not been identified in the initial grant application. Next to the request from the NJHT is written the word, “Help,” presumably by Ms. Lenix-Hooker.⁹⁵ She was in need of assistance. As executive director Lenix-Hooker had one assistant who was hired with grant funds, Carol DeSenne. DeSenne at the time was president of a local production and public relations company. According to Lenix-Hooker DeSenne helped coordinate some of the programs initiated to “expand the cultural awareness aspects of the project.” These included several Champagne Book Parties at the Robert Treat Hotel, Sunday Concerts at Bethany Baptist Church, and the Cujo Banquante Festival at the Krueger-Scott Mansion site in June 1995. She also had an assistant “on loan” from the library for “a short while” who performed light office duties.⁹⁶ When we consider all the different parties to whom she had to answer it does seem as if the Executive Director could have used a few more players on her team.

The amount of bureaucracy required on a regular basis to keep the project going is evident and every time a new application was required, or a date was being negotiated, all work would cease on the Mansion. And every time this work ceased, the Mansion’s fragile state became even more so. Time was of the essence, as it was in the downtown’s development as well. But the Mansion’s time was not equated so much with money as with a historical memory that was fast slipping away. A report that year stated, “The integrity of structural elements of Krueger Mansion has deteriorated due to lack of maintenance, abandonment and the effect of the elements, especially water intrusion. In

⁹⁵ William A. Dupont, letter to Catherine J. Lenix-Hooker, May 21, 1993, Newark City Archives.

⁹⁶ Catherine Lenix-Hooker, email to author, March 16, 2017.

addition, construction practices, which are no longer utilized, have also contributed to the degradation of the structural elements.”⁹⁷

In 1993 the New Jersey Preservation bond program granted the Krueger-Scott project over \$400,000 in funds that were to be matched by the City of Newark. Lenix-Hooker announced that thanks to this funding the first floor renovations of the Mansion would now be completed by the end of 1994, approximately a year later than most recently estimated.⁹⁸ By July of that year the project had suffered a nine month work delay for various reasons, including an extended quest for suitable bricks in keeping with the New Jersey Historical Trust’s restoration requirements. The materials specified for the renewal of this Victorian home were not only costly but also sometimes extremely difficult to locate.

Lenix-Hooker wrote in a memo to the City Business Administrator on July 22, “Although the initial restoration to the Mansion began on June 4, 1992 since late October 1992 the construction phase of this project has had a nine month hiatus... Key to the work stoppage was locating a brick that met the approval of the New Jersey Historic Trust, the Engineering Department...” and all of the architects and contractors as well. “Queries” were made to “105 vendors worldwide...” There were also “unforeseen conditions in the Mansion” that needed Municipal Council approval. She went on to report that “the project resumed on Monday, July 12, 1993...” and they had found the

⁹⁷ Herbert A. Wiener Consulting Engineers, *Review of Structural Elements: Krueger Mansion*, Jan. 20, 1993. 2, Newark City Archives.

⁹⁸ “Krueger Mansion Gets Funds for Renovation,” *The Star-Ledger*, Feb. 23, 1993, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

23,000 bricks which the City agreed to purchase and which would arrive that October.⁹⁹

There continued to be pressure from two basic viewpoints: the one that saw the Mansion as an architectural structure comprised of bits and pieces of building materials, and the other one which only wanted to know how much could get done, for how little and how soon.

Issues of vandalism were also addressed in the July memo. Lenix-Hooker would look to the Newark Police Department for more consistent surveillance of the property. Concerns surrounding theft were not only regarding the Mansion itself but also the contractor's onsite trailer - at one point phones, answering machines and an air conditioner had been stolen. There were also reportedly "roaming groups of young men" throwing rocks at the Mansion and harassing the workers. As well, dead animals were showing up on the front porch and garbage was constantly thrown over the fence, not only hindering the workers but giving an unappealing look to passers-by. Another issue to contend with was that of fair hiring; the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was working with the Mansion project to assure that a diverse labor pool was being considered.¹⁰⁰ Equitable hiring practices were a thorny issue in Newark, where multiple protests occurred around construction sites throughout the years as Black workers demanded jobs on projects in their own city.¹⁰¹ Newark was never known as a simple place to get things done and this one project was emblematic of the complexities

⁹⁹ Catherine Lenix-Hooker, memo to Glenn Grant, July 22, 1993, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Mansion Project File.

¹⁰⁰ Catherine Lenix-Hooker, memo to Glenn Grant, July 22, 1993.

¹⁰¹ Although decades earlier, the protests of Barringer High School's construction hiring practices in 1963 continue to be held up as an example of blatant discrimination in the building trades and a lesson in organization going forward. See riseupnewark.com for a piece on this event.

brought on by a city that was both trying to reinvent itself and make up for past mistakes at the same time.

Meanwhile back downtown, the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) had just reached completion at a cost of 180 million dollars. The concept of a performing arts center was proposed initially by the NCG and was a project that Mayor James had campaigned for tirelessly. Yet another large downtown construction project, One Newark Center - home to Seton Hall University's Law School and Penn Plaza East office buildings - was completed in 1992. Development in downtown Newark revved forward with a major renovation to Pennsylvania Station in 1993. Critics of NJPAC, and the upsurge in downtown development in general, argued that the city's resources were being exhausted all in one place. Funds were needed for other renewal projects, such as those proposed for surrounding neighborhoods and in wards other than the Central Ward.

Amiri Baraka was one of those Newarkers who spoke out against this concentration of money on the downtown, and the accompanying tax exemptions typically offered to companies willing to settle into these new buildings.¹⁰² Like it or not, the focus was clearly on downtown improvement and the refurbishment of the city's image more generally. Meanwhile the Krueger-Scott collaborative was requesting \$2 million to get the project back up on its feet in a Central Ward neighborhood that most visitors would never even see. At this particular historical moment in Newark some in the city were just not as concerned with lifting up their ancestral history as they were about

¹⁰² Amiri Baraka repeated his frustrations with the downtown-centricity of City Hall for decades, at most any public venue available. His views often elicited loud agreement from the crowd. Mageline Little, director of the KS oral history project, claimed that Baraka was supportive of the KS project but that it was hard to get him to stay in one place long enough to talk about it. Mageline Little, interview with author, May 31, 2016.

creating jobs and revising the city's tarnished reputation as "the stolen-car capital of the country."¹⁰³

The housing situation continued in a grand state of flux as subsidized high-rise projects were finally being destroyed to make room for the more livable affordable housing that had been proposed for so long. By 1995 Newark's low-income apartments, such as the Christopher Columbus Homes on 8th Avenue, would be razed in order to erect more attractive (read suburban-looking) subsidized housing. But these new projects did not have the tenant capacity that the high rises did and so inevitably that created a situation of homelessness. There were so very many issues vying for the gaze of the municipal leaders and, as is typical, everyone believed their concerns to be of the utmost urgency

The high rise Hill Manor projects located next door to the Krueger-Scott Mansion were on the chopping block. The residents had been relocated and the buildings were to be razed in order to build the proposed eight hundred townhouses on the lot.¹⁰⁴ The Mansion contractors could not remove the wooden boards covering the restored stained glass windows until Hill Manor had been imploded. The perception provided by those boarded-up windows gave passersby a sense of just one more burned-out home on a Newark city block. This image did not help the cause, giving a sense that nothing was getting accomplished even while money was clearly being spent. As far as those from the

¹⁰³ Evelin Nieves, "Joy Ride Turns Deadly in New Jersey," *The New York Times*, Sept. 21, 1993, nytimes.com.

¹⁰⁴ Clifford J. Levy, "4 High-Rises Torn Down by Newark," *The New York Times*, Mar 7, 1994, nytimes.com. "Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center Planning Meeting," June 30, 1998. Minutes, Newark City Archives.

outside could see, there was neither historical commemoration nor economic elevation going on at 601 Martin Luther King Boulevard.

1994 had Sharpe James running for mayor once again, promising to continue his work as executive cheerleader of Newark. One of his opponents was Ras Baraka, a high school principal, Amiri Baraka's son, and ultimately Mayor of the City of Newark in 2014. In national news President Clinton was handing out federal funds specifically for the reinforcement of urban police forces, part of his continuation of the "War on Drugs." Sharpe James accepted this money readily. "I never answered the question of how you pay for them once you run out of federal dollars" he would write later.¹⁰⁵ This is an illustration of how things ran in Newark: money would be offered, the City would accept it – and ramifications were not always considered. Money was desperately needed by the city of Newark, and sometimes it was questionably handled. In fact Mayor James' campaign itself had come under some suspicion in terms of fundraising practices. James' popularity as a make-it-happen kind of mayor in a city that was so hungry for progress kept those allegations at bay - temporarily.¹⁰⁶

Meanwhile Councilman-at-large Donald Tucker was calling on Black Newarkers to begin collecting their memorabilia to be displayed in the "museum."¹⁰⁷ Finally there would be a place to hang Black people's pictures. Lenix-Hooker herself was anticipating the Mansion's completion, reportedly already in possession of mementos from the Krueger and Scott families as well as "authentic" Victorian furniture from a local

¹⁰⁵ James, *Political Prisoner*, 143.

¹⁰⁶ Curvin, *Inside Newark*, 195-196.

¹⁰⁷ Reggie Garrett, "A Home for African-American History," *The Star Ledger*, May 9, 1994, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

merchant.” A May 1994 *Star Ledger* article carried a picture of a contractor working on the Krueger-Scott Mansion roof with the title, “A Home for African-American History.”¹⁰⁸

Phase IV

Then in September a *Star Ledger* headline reported, “Mansion Restoration Costs Called into Question.” On the 14th of the month Barry Carter sat in on a City Council meeting wherein the Council apparently expressed concerns regarding the ongoing financial requirements of the Mansion project. Lenix-Hooker was present and informed the Council it would now take from two to four years for the project to be completed. She also argued that it had never gone over budget and that “every dime was accounted for.” Councilman Tucker announced that he would no longer vote for funding the Mansion, that they had spent \$4 million on a project that he believed was going to cost closer to \$1 million. The \$1 million reference is in regard to the City Council’s 1986 vote to initially commit that amount of money to the Mansion’s renovation. There was then a call for a Council committee to form which would oversee the Mansion project specifically.

Something had changed over the summer of 1994. The level of trust and attention required to sustain the project had disappeared. This had more to do with politics and power than with the Mansion’s actual mission at this point. Mayor James’ popularity and control was frustrating municipal leaders even as he presented the City of Newark in a manner in which it had not been represented for so long. Councilman Tucker and Sharpe James had never been good friends and the tensions were growing. Since at least 1982, when Tucker denied James the council president’s seat, the two had been at odds, Tucker

¹⁰⁸ “The Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center,” *Black Caucus of ALA Newsletter*, June 1994, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

often challenging James' spending. The Mayor in turn would forward his own grievances right back to the Council.¹⁰⁹ The Mansion was caught in the middle of a family feud.

Disagreements among council members regarding the Mansion project escalated at the September 1994 meeting. Councilman Carrino of the North Ward explained that he thought it was to have been renovated and then "turned over" to a non-profit organization. "This could wind up being a black hole," said Carrino. Councilman Rice questioned the neighborhood that they were trying to revitalize, considering its high crime and lack of public transit. Rice also said he would not allow his West Ward to be ignored when it came to redevelopment. The City business manager Glenn Grant then reminded Rice that it took time to revitalize *any* neighborhood and that the Mansion could serve as an "anchor" for the restoration of the whole ward, a term more often used for large department stores than historical houses. Councilwoman Crump spoke up for Ms. Lenix-Hooker against the criticisms she was receiving, arguing that "she has been doing it herself." Councilman Branch, an early supporter of the project still underway in his ward, reminded the Council that the City had some culpability in the dramatically dire state of the place as they had never secured it appropriately once it was in their possession.¹¹⁰

The 15th and 16th of September 1994 were "scaffolding dismantling" days according to Lenix-Hooker's desk calendar. Perhaps these days were scheduled in order to prepare for the "gala" to be held on the 23rd according to the same calendar page,

¹⁰⁹ Curvin, *Inside Newark*, 212.

¹¹⁰ Barry Carter, "Mansion Restoration Costs Called Into Question," *The Star Ledger*, Sept. 14, 1994, "Castle Newark" Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

The Council Minutes on file for this special budget amendment meeting have no details about the funding in question nor any record of the conversation or presence of Lenix-Hooker.

although there is no evidence of this event taking place. On the 28th Lenix-Hooker apparently met with “Giles and Clem,” the organizers of an oral history project that will be described a bit later. In fact, reviewing the desktop calendar pages of Ms. Lenix-Hooker (which can be found at the Newark Public Library) one sees an overwhelming number of places, people, numbers and notes jotted down within the enumerated squares. It did appear, as Mildred Crump had implied at the Council Meeting, that the Executive Director of the Krueger-Scott Mansion Project had been asked to perform an unreasonable number and variation of tasks.

In March of 1995 *The Star Ledger* ran an article reporting on the \$1.1 million grant that the Mansion project would receive from the New Jersey Historic Trust, “the maximum grant award given to a landmark building.” This article also explained that the project was about more than just the Mansion, which would “become a premier African-American facility for the study and interpretation of the visual and performing arts.” It was reported that, “The City of Newark has demonstrated its intent to support the restoration of the mansion and *rehabilitation of the entire block* [emphasis added] through bond initiatives...”¹¹¹ Describing the Mansion project as more than just some historical sentimental journey, but as a greater urban renewal project that would benefit many, had become a talking point directed at those who may have been otherwise concerned with the amount of energy afforded the Victorian house. It is one of only a few moments where we see discourse surrounding the Mansion address its possibilities as both a site of historical memory as well as a catalyst for economic growth.

¹¹¹ “Newark Mansion the Recipient of \$1.1 Million Restoration Grant,” *The Star Ledger*, March 30, 1995, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

The next month *The Star Ledger* reported on a City Council meeting that heard complaints from residents of the University Heights area “who voiced concern over the method of land acquisition...” and the forcing out of residents due to several Central Ward development projects. The Mansion project was not named specifically. Virginia Morton, a community activist, spoke out at the meeting regarding the planned displacement of more residents as a result of the upcoming Science Park. The 50 acre, \$60 million project would eventually house the Public Health Research Institute and the National Tuberculosis Center of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), among other health facilities. To that end, people would have to be relocated. Mostly poor people. As Morton noted in an interview a few years later, “Now they’re in the second phase of this which is called Science Park and it looks as if the same thing will happen all over again. However, people have learned from that [1967 medical school expansion] and the remaining homeowners have incorporated and they don’t intend to suffer from the same mistakes again.”¹¹² As much as some who worked on the Krueger-Scott project insist that residents of that neighborhood had been paid fairly and were “happy” to leave, it was probably a bit more complicated in the actual lives of the people concerned.

By 1998 the Krueger-Scott Mansion project began to relapse from lack of care, even as a sign outside the edifice heralded it as a “Premier African-American Cultural

¹¹² Virginia Morton, interview by Kitty Taylor, *Krueger-Scott Oral History Project*, Aug. 8, 1995. Louise Epperson and the Committee Against Negro and Puerto Rican Removal battled the College of Medicine and Dentistry that was initially slated to develop 150 acres of mostly residential land in the city. Although the resulting agreement included much less land, in the process many people’s homes were still seized under eminent domain. See footnote #28, 14. Much like the Barringer protests, the battle against the Medical College was held up as symbol of what people can do when they fight back against injustice.

Center.”¹¹³ Essentially no construction had taken place during the last year and so the Mansion’s infrastructure continued its decline. Not surprisingly, costs had turned out to be even greater than anticipated, more than the \$7 million that had already been spent by 1995. The New Jersey Historical Trust was forced to withdraw their most recent grant because the City had neglected to spend the matching funds as stipulated. While “downtown boosters and officials were reclaiming resurgence” the monies anticipated from the recent spate of construction were not coming in at the rates they had promised.¹¹⁴

Continued political intrigue and ongoing land development diverted the attention of City Council members away from the Krueger-Scott Mansion project. Cory Booker was gunning for Mayor and decided to inch his way toward the office by first securing a seat on the City Council. Booker challenged long timer George Branch, advocate for the Krueger-Scott project, and won.¹¹⁵ Krueger-Scott lost yet another supporter in Branch, and the City Council as a whole was in flux. Victorian mansions were not high on their list of priorities at that moment but land development in the downtown area certainly was. 1998 saw the non-profit New Newark Foundation acquire the former S. Klein on the Square department store, as well as the former Hahne’s department store on Broad Street. The idea was to link the downtown to the University Heights area with the hope of eventually channeling the urban renewal into the city’s residential areas.

¹¹³ Vergara, *American Ruins*, 170.

¹¹⁴ Curvin, *Inside Newark*, 202.

¹¹⁵ James, *Political Prisoner*, 233-238.

A June 16, 1998 memo to Mayor Sharpe James had Catherine Lenix-Hooker expressing her disappointment at the imminent departure of Newark Housing Authority director Harold Lucas. The Mansion project had an ally in him, she wrote, and there had been a lack of forward progress since the Interim Director came on board. Lenix-Hooker also alluded to the persisting negative perceptions surrounding the present aesthetics of the Mansion. Those boarded up windows continued to cause unease for some; opinions in newspaper editorials and talk on the street was distracting from the importance of this historical preservation project. Lenix-Hooker reminded the Mayor that the boards were there to protect the newly installed windows from the continually delayed Hill Manor demolition project, at that point scheduled for the coming fall. As far as people asking when the Mansion would finally be opened for business, Lenix-Hooker informed the Mayor that with another three million dollars the site could be open to its first tenants in the next nine to twelve months. This had the opening scheduled for some point in 1999, now six years later than the initially proposal estimate.¹¹⁶

On June 30, two weeks after the aforementioned memo was written, the City Planning Committee met at the main library. Grad Associates representatives, city officials, and Lenix-Hooker were in attendance. On the agenda was a discussion of the creation of a center within the Mansion which would serve the proposed townhouse community to be built next door. The Newark Housing Authority (NHA) was now referenced as the official director of the Krueger-Scott project and Lenix-Hooker was Project Manager, charged with facilitating the “marriage between cultural center and now

¹¹⁶ Catherine J. Lenix-Hooker, memo to Mayor Sharpe James, June 16, 1998, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Project File. Lenix-Hooker also mentioned towards the end of the memo that the oral history project had conducted “over 102” interviews.

proposed community center.”¹¹⁷ Yet one more role for both Lenix-Hooker and the Mansion to take on in this juggling act of incongruent requests. Lenix-Hooker’s diminished position appeared to be a reflection of a continually decreasing focus on the Mansion as a free-standing project and central historical figure.

On July 9, Lenix-Hooker received a letter from the City of Newark’s Director of Modernization. Listing numerous questions regarding the Mansion renovations, his correspondence culminated with, “I feel that until a great deal of issues and [sic] are cleared up, the Ordinance for Council Approval should be placed ‘on hold’ until a number of actions are completed...” These issues included the “need to ascertain that \$4.0 million” was a “real number”; concerns about assigning liability due to the variety of contractors; and how selections were made for the present contractor.¹¹⁸ This fresh set of eyes saw new inconsistencies and contradictions in the project’s plans. Or perhaps this was the City’s way of backing away from something that was becoming less and less popular with its residents. While the notion of preserving history is usually acceptable to people, the costs involved often lead to questions of whether that particular history really needs preserving after all.

On the 17th of July, Lenix-Hooker wrote another memo to Mayor James stating that the Mansion would “open the doors” the following summer. The “grand opening” – of the first floor – would take place in September of 1999. As well, she reported, the Mansion project had finally been granted tax-exempt status which she explained “opens

¹¹⁷ Planning Meeting Minutes, June 30, 1998, Newark City Archives.

¹¹⁸ Donald E. Moore, letter to Catherine Lenix-Hooker, July 9, 1998, “Castle Newark” Krueger Scott Mansion Project File.

the doors” for corporations to contribute to the cause.¹¹⁹ The back and forth, up and down, and just plain contradictory nature of this decade-long project indicated heavy possibilities for failure. In his 1999 book *American Ruins* photographer Camilo Jose Vergara catalogued cityscapes in various forms of deterioration. Alongside photographs of the Krueger-Scott Mansion and a brief history of its last eighteen years, Vergara wrote, “At this point it makes sense to just forget the cultural center, forget historic preservation, and forget the seven million dollars.”¹²⁰ A somewhat summary conclusion after a relatively cursory look into the building’s life, yet it was most likely a conclusion that many in Newark had come to share at that point. The City had taken ownership of the Mansion twelve years prior; major amounts of money had been awarded and spent; residents and other supporters attended teas and book parties – as much for the free food as anything, said Lenix-Hooker; and yet the Mansion looked to be in just about the same state as it had when the tenants were evicted those many years ago. Meanwhile Newarkers still needed homes, a dramatic mayoral campaign was underway, and there were still abandoned buildings to attend to downtown. The window of opportunity for the Krueger-Scott Mansion project was stuck shut.

According to Lenix-Hooker, in March of 1999, she and James Scott - pastor of Newark’s Bethany Baptist Church and executive board member of the Cultural Center - appeared before the NHA. There was, the two were told, money to be had in the form of a Hope VI Grant, an initiative meant for the revitalization of housing projects and their surrounding areas. A few days later Lenix-Hooker and Scott met with Harold Lucas,

¹¹⁹ Catherine J. Lenix-Hooker, memo to Mayor Sharpe James, July 17, 1998, “Castle Newark” Krueger Scott Mansion Project File.

¹²⁰ Vergara, *American Ruins*, 171.

director of the NHA, at the Priory restaurant on West Market Street. There, says Lenix-Hooker, Lucas told them “we can stretch it and make it happen.” He made a commitment to forward the proposal at the upcoming board meeting in June. Then, as luck would have it Andrew Cuomo, U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development at the time, invited Lucas to come work for his department that May. Without Lucas as an advocate Krueger-Scott never made it onto the agenda. It was a difference of one month and \$4 million, said Lenix-Hooker.¹²¹

Ms. Lenix-Hooker received a note in August of 1999 from the New Jersey Historic Trust, a month before the most recently estimated Krueger-Scott opening. The correspondence concerned “easements” – the right to the use of the Krueger-Scott Mansion property. The tone was friendly and the executive director of the Trust signed off with, “good luck in your new career.” Apparently by the time of this correspondence it was made clear that the Krueger-Scott project had been completely transferred to the aegis of the Newark Housing Authority. It would not, however, be until the following year that Ms. Lenix-Hooker’s “new career” would be made official.¹²² In fact in our communications Lenix-Hooker characterizes the termination of the Mansion project as “abrupt.” This reflects a larger pattern of decision-making throughout the project wherein the very inner circle made decisions that those less near – and the public at large – had no knowledge of until later. It is quite possible that the Mansion project had already been

¹²¹ Lenix-Hooker, interview with author, April 18, 2016. Ms. Lenix-Hooker might have had the dates somewhat confused. Lucas left the position in 1998, and in 1999 the NHA acting executive director was Robert Graham. Also she had indicated in a memo the year before that she knew Lucas would be leaving but in her interview she described his departure as a badly timed surprise.

¹²² Dominique Hawkins, letter to Catherine Lenix-Hooker, August 17, 1999, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Project File.

dismissed by the powers that be even prior to Lenix-Hooker being “abruptly” asked to vacate her office space.

In March of 2000 new City Business Administrator JoAnne Y. Watson sent a memo to Robert P. Marasco, City Clerk, with a status report on the Krueger-Scott Mansion. After providing a short narrative of the project - including the many gaps and obstacles - Watson argued for the merits of continuing the project, stating that it could be completed with another \$4 million. “The plans for the interior are flexible and can address a variety of adapted reuse needs,” she wrote. Watson then proceeded to lay out where the City could secure said funds. At this point the concept of an African-American Cultural Center appeared to be off the table completely.¹²³

In June of 2000 *The Star-Ledger* reported, “Newark Trying Anew to Repair 1888 Mansion.” In a somber tone Mary Jo Patterson wrote of the demise of the Krueger-Scott project and yet a glimmer of hope for its future. Patterson listed numerous obstacles faced by the project along its path, such as the further destruction of the roof by the \$80,000 scaffolding erected to give passers-by the sense that work was actually being performed. Also noted in the article was the lengthy search for the elusive bricks as well as the ultimate termination of Lenix-Hooker’s position. “The money to complete the work just wasn’t there,” Lenix-Hooker was quoted as saying. The “hopeful” part of the article reported that the Newark Housing Authority was currently entertaining discussion with regard to the Mansion. Several Newark residents interviewed for the article expressed

¹²³ JoAnne Y. Watson, memo to Robert P. Marasco, March 9, 2000, Newark City Archives.

enthusiasm that the “restoration may get back on track.” But there was nothing concrete, if you will, within the article that indicated something specific was imminent.¹²⁴

Newark’s population at the 2000 census was 273, 546.¹²⁵ But the “daytime population” of Newark was estimated at over 330,000, including a workforce of 47,000 people within one half-mile of the downtown area.¹²⁶ The City’s primary goal was to continue renewing this valuable plot of urban land downtown in order to attract those who might not otherwise be willing to set foot on the sidewalks of Newark to remain in the city for a few extra hours. Maybe those in question would even choose to make the city their home. After all, Mayor James claimed that the crime rate had decreased by 52% since 1995 and *The Star Ledger* declared that Newark was “on a roll.”¹²⁷ Historic preservation would have to go to the end of the line when it came to funding. In a show of just how slowly the wheels of government can turn, the Hill Manor housing project was finally razed in the year 2000, approximately five years after demolition had originally been scheduled. The boards on the windows of the Krueger-Scott Mansion were finally ready to be removed, had anyone been around to do so.

¹²⁴ Mary Jo Patterson, “Newark Trying Anew to Repair 1888 Mansion,” *The Star-Ledger*, June 5, 2000, “Castle Newark” Krueger-Scott Mansion Media File.

Lenix-Hooker did go on to supervise the oral history project through the following year.

¹²⁵ “Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000,” Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data for Newark city, Essex County, New Jersey, United States Census Bureau, census.gov.

¹²⁶ City of Newark, “The Living Downtown Plan,” May 23, 2008, ci.newark.nj.us.

¹²⁷ James, *Political Prisoner*, 233.



Figure 8. Krueger-Scott Mansion in 2007, photo by Richard Perry of *The New York Times*.

Catherine Lenix-Hooker asserts that the Krueger-Scott African-American Cultural Center project was not a failure, that they “went the distance” with what they had. A dwindling tax base, concerns over struggling schools, and corruption in government are just some of the reasons she gives for the inability to finish what was started.¹²⁸ Mayor James tells me that cost came in as the number one issue surrounding the Mansion, that and who would control what went on in there when it was finally completed. “Cost and control ruled the day!!!” states James.¹²⁹ The simple conclusion is that economics vanquished the preservation of history. But it was a particular history in a particular city and both are particularly complicated entities. Lenix-Hooker and James are adamant that race played no part in the Mansion’s demise. But Dr. Price said in his documentary, *The Once and Future Newark*, “Race matters in America. Race matters in Newark.”¹³⁰ Race mattered in the story of Krueger-Scott.

¹²⁸ Catherine Lenix-Hooker, interview with author, April 8, 2016.

¹²⁹ James Sharpe, email to author, March 15, 1997.

¹³⁰ *The Once and Future Newark: With Clement Alexander Price*, Rutgers-Newark, New Jersey: Rutgers University-Newark Office of Communications, 2015, youtube.com.

This was a tale of economics, historic preservation - and race - that ended somewhat sadly. But not altogether so. During the early 1990s an oral history project that was to have been housed within the cultural center began germinating. While the intent was to complete the interviews by 1994, it was not until 1997 that the last recordings were made, with ultimately over one hundred African-American senior citizens interviewed. This particular preservation went forward due in large part to the fact that it cost very little money, relatively, and relied upon volunteers.

With hindsight one might determine that the idea of preserving the Mansion was frivolous and that all the history needed could be contained within the oral history project alone. But the history in question is African-American and there is an intense desire among many to reconstitute the missing stories of Black America - in as many forms as possible. That said, Newark was also a struggling city and struggling cities have an intense desire for money. So these cities "run where the dollars are," as Mayor James put it. The dollars were there on High Street/MLK Blvd. for a while. But there was only so much effort that the struggling African-American city could put into the preservation of a historical home of a Black millionaire when its people were at present out of work and homeless.

In an April 1995 City Council meeting it was voted unanimously to adopt a resolution entering "into a one year contract with Giles A. Wright...to provide services as a consultant to create an oral historical plan for Krueger Scott Mansion Cultural Center..." Councilman Tucker motioned for an amendment which required that "reports, memoranda and analysis" for the project be submitted to the Council and that amendment

was approved.¹³¹ A number of interviews had already been completed and a project meeting was held in March 1998 at the main library. The Project Coordinator, retired teacher Mageline Little, as well as Ms. Lenix-Hooker and various volunteer interviewers were in attendance. Among discussion topics were the continued collection of memorabilia and the procedure for submitting completed interview tapes.¹³²

On March 6 of that year the oral history committee convened once again. Six people, including the project director were in attendance. Lenix-Hooker was copied on the minutes. Suggested actions intended to increase the collection of oral histories included setting up interview stations at senior citizen communities and recruiting more volunteers. As a result of a \$5,000 grant from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, the Krueger-Scott organization was able to begin the transcription phase of the oral histories. In December of that year a letter of agreement was signed with a professional transcriber that identified the need for 70 hours' worth of transcription. The bulk of the work would be completed in 2000 wherein thirty-two interviews were ultimately transcribed at a cost of \$4,900.00.¹³³

Most interviewees of the oral history project were participants in the Great Migration, but some were lifelong residents of Newark. The questionnaire designed by Dr. Clement A. Price and historian Giles Wright tasked the peer interviewers with pursuing conversations on subjects ranging from travel, to food, to racism, to church. Pastors, senators, council members and factory workers shared their stories to create

¹³¹ Minutes of the Municipal Council of the City of Newark, April 19, 1995, 23, Newark City Archives.

¹³² City of Newark's African American Oral History Project Meeting agenda, March 4, 1998, courtesy Mageline Little.

¹³³ Oral History Project, Minutes of Volunteers Meeting, March 6, 1999 and Catherine Lenix-Hooker, Letter of Agreement with Margaret S. Montana, Dec. 1999, courtesy Mageline Little

hours of first-person historical and cultural narratives. These interviews were unique in that they were conducted by friends and acquaintances. The oral history collection has now become the center of much scholarly research and public programming, but for years prior the cassette tapes of these invaluable narratives remained in shoeboxes on a shelf in the public library, stored away as perhaps a painful reminder of what else could have been.¹³⁴

Thus we have the gift of the oral histories, a source of historical knowledge that has been preserved. The Krueger-Scott African-American Cultural Center lives on in these tape-recorded interviews which provide a home for Black history and culture. In the next chapter we will consider the oral history project more closely and the field of oral history writ large. How does one “use” an oral history and what are they anyway? And what of the fact that these particular oral histories are constructed between peers, bucking the traditional dynamic of historian and subject? We will learn in chapter two that this collection is a most invaluable and unique oral source that borrows from both traditional and contemporary methods theories to provide a unique and complicated kind of historical construction, one only fitting for a city itself so unique and complicated. The Krueger-Scott African-American Cultural Center was victorious in the end, and we are the lucky benefactors of this not-so-small victory.

¹³⁴ These oral histories have been the basis of much of my work for the last five years. The cassette tapes of the interviews were recovered by my colleague Dr. Samantha Boardman in 2010. Along with other members of the Rutgers community, I have helped with their annotation and summary in order to create a finding aid for research and public use. The collection has now been digitized and is available through Rutgers University Community Repository, <http://kruegerscott.libraries.rutgers.edu/>.

CHAPTER TWO

Krueger-Scott and Oral History

What, then, is the role of the historian in telling the historical tale of the unheralded ancestors of Afro-Americans? It is to insist on the historical centrality...the complexity of that contribution....to acknowledge those who surmounted oppression as well as to give voice to the majority who just survived, and to those who did not survive.

- Gertrude Fraser, Reginald Butler, *"Anatomy of a Disinterment: The Unmaking of Afro-American History"*

In 1982 historian Clement A. Price moderated an event at Rutgers University-Newark for Audrey Olsen Faulkner's book, *When I Was Comin' Up: An Oral History of Aged Blacks*. Ten years later Dr. Price, along with historian Giles Wright, would organize an oral history project around Newark's proposed Krueger-Scott African-American Cultural Center, recording the voices of Great Migration participants living in Newark. In the application for federal tax exemption for The Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center, the organization states as its purpose for the African-American Oral History Project one of "documenting the immeasurable contributions that people of African descent have made in Newark from 1910-1997."¹ Price and Wright were on a mission to "give voice" to as many stories as possible of those Newarkers who survived the Great Migration era, before those stories disappeared.

A unique facet of the Krueger-Scott project was the use of peer interviewers - friends and acquaintances of those to be interviewed. While methodologically this choice made for some complications, the outcome is an oral history collection very personal in

¹ Department of the Treasury, Internal Revenue Service, *Application for Recognition of Exemption* (Cincinnati, Ohio: 1998) 3, Newark City Archives.

nature yet historically revealing owing to the relationship between the people on both sides of the tape recorder. This chapter will locate the Krueger-Scott Oral History Project within oral history scholarship and illustrate the ways in which it is ultimately a model of modern era thinking while at the same time clinging to some of the more traditional theories and methodologies of earlier oral history practice.

A Brief History of Oral History

By the time the Krueger-Scott project was in its early phase, a myriad of African-American oral history collections had been created. Most of these were constructed by or through institutions of higher education, but there were also some coming directly out of historical local organizations. Funding was typically covered by the universities supporting the projects but also sometimes gleaned from local oral history organizations such as the Kentucky Oral History Commission's funding of the initial interviews of the University of Louisville's Oral History Center in the 1970s. This collection sought to document the African-American community of Louisville.² At this same time, Washington State University launched a project to interview African-American settlers of the Pacific Northwest as well as their relatives. From 1972 through 1974, with funding received by the Black Studies department, Quintard Taylor and others gathered fifty cassette tapes worth of narrative.³

Right around the same time that the Krueger-Scott project underway, the *Behind the Veil* project was launched out of Duke University. Looking to tell the stories of those

² "African American Oral History Collection," *The Oral History Center at the University of Louisville*, accessed April 201, 2017, <http://digital.library.louisville.edu/cdm/description/collection/afamoh/>.

³ "Black Oral History Collection," *Washington State University*, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://content.libraries.wsu.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/5985/>

who lived in the segregated South, from the end of the 19th century through the mid-20th century, beginning in 1993 the project collected over four hundred interviews of African Americans from the South. This particular project was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.⁴ Scholars were responding to the same call as museum curators in their efforts to preserve and unearth the stories of African-American life in the United States. Meanwhile the oral history field had gone through many iterations by the time the 1990s came along, and the Krueger-Scott Oral History Collection is a reflection of that process.

Rob Perks, lead curator of the Oral History Collections at the British Library, wrote an article in 2010 that considered the shifting attitudes towards oral history from the 1960s and on through the next fifty years. At the beginning of this time period, even as social history was increasing its presence, there remained the textual prejudice that came from hundreds of years of a particular historical practice. That which was written was simply more reliable than that which was said, went the thinking. Echoing Ron Grele's concerns years earlier, Perks explains the cycle of perpetuation; because "interview data have been regarded as strictly supplementary," past oral history sources were "subjected to little evident analysis."⁵

David Dunaway and Willa Baum, in their 1996 *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, divide the field of oral history into "generations." The first generation scholars were the "pioneering figures" such as Allan Nevins and Louis Starr,

⁴ "About Beyond the Veil," *Duke University Libraries Digital Collections*, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/behindtheveil/about/>

⁵ Rob Perks, "The Roots of Oral History: Exploring Contrasting Attitudes to Elite, Corporate, and Business Oral History in Britain and the U.S.," *The Oral History Review*, 37 (2010) 319-322, muse.jhu.edu.

both associated with the Oral History Research Office at Columbia University. The second generation came of age in the mid-60s the editors argue, in response to both political climate and the establishment of archives dedicated to oral sources. This second generation was a “younger group of social educators” whose intention was to expand those archives away from the elite focus that oral history had possessed for so many years. The third generation of oral historians was in effect by 1980 with the conservative 1950s long gone and the radical 1960s having morphed into a perhaps gentler social justice stance. At this point technology became an increasingly important component in the field. No longer something to be grappled with or relegated to the background as a kind of inconvenience, technology became one of the actors in oral history performance. “Process, public use, and interdisciplinary applications” became lenses for analysis and methods of practice in oral history. This third generation brought an increasingly self-reflexive eye and critical approach to both the study and collection of oral history.⁶

The Krueger-Scott Oral History Project emerged in this third generation wherein the field of oral history had undergone much growth and expansion - albeit in fits and starts. It was a period when the academy was finally inviting the oral history practitioners to join the club. Wright and Price, whose work consistently favored the voices and stories of “ordinary” people, could presume a place for their archive, valued as these kinds of narratives had finally become. This nexus of time, opportunity and experience allowed for the Krueger-Scott oral histories to ultimately become an invaluable historical source regarding the everyday life of a consistently marginalized people.

The Interviewer

⁶ *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 2nd ed., edited by David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (Walnut Creek: AltaMira) 1996, xiii.

Price and Wright's choice to employ people from the community was a progressive one methodologically. The Krueger-Scott interviewers were not there to gather up information that would then be taken elsewhere and analyzed. Instead, similar to activist-centered studies elsewhere, Newark's historical information was assembled by way of stories told by "everyday people" and those narratives were created by and remained within the community. Graham Smith argues in "Toward a Public Oral History" that the mission of public history is indeed to teach the public to perform its own historical inquiry. Certainly the peer interviewers gained experience as historical interrogators. Going forward, many in the Newark community have already researched and utilized the Krueger-Scott oral histories in a myriad of ways. All of this was probably exactly what Dr. Price - ardent public historian that he was - had in mind.

Conversely, Audrey Olsen Faulkner's collection of oral histories from elderly African Americans living in Newark came with a two-fold mission: to gain historical knowledge from the residents of the Friendly-Fuld Neighborhood House in the Central Ward of Newark - which Dr. Faulkner helped establish; and secondly, to ascertain what services might be useful for the seniors being interviewed. Faulkner's study asks the seniors themselves what they need, via oral histories, hoping to elicit more pertinent information than a typical survey or poll might do.⁷ This was not the first time such a model was used; oral historian Paul Thompson points out in his 1978 *The Voice of the Past* that the "life story approach" has been regularly employed to secure housing and services for seniors and others in need of such help, making "listening" a "professionally

⁷ *When I Was Comin' Up: An Oral History of Aged Blacks*, ed. Audrey Olsen Faulkner (Hamden: Archon Books, 1982).

useful” activity.⁸ In these two projects we see the varied possibilities of application when it comes to oral history.

In the 1970s, a time during which the Faulkner study was initiated, oral historians continued to concern themselves with the ways in which they might be affecting or manipulating the interview process. Whether concerned with negatively interrupting the otherwise “spontaneous” responses of their interviewees or attempting to consciously position themselves in a particular manner vis a vis the subject, it was now acknowledged that the historian played a role in the construction of history. This self-reflection was relatively new, but by the 1980s a handful of scholars and practitioners were regularly arguing that in fact oral history productions must be interrogated in part through the lens of the interviewer who is never without implicit - if not explicit - impact.

Alessandro Portelli, Michael Frisch and Ron Grele were some of the researchers who began to consider the dynamics formed with those whom they interviewed, not as obstacles or potential for power but simply as valuable lines of inquiry. Part of the new oral history scholarship became an analysis of the ways in which both interviewer and interviewee were affected by the moment of the interview. These considerations were invigorated by the increased focus on women’s and African Americans’ voices and the problematized positions of race and gender in American society.

Not exactly a political project, Krueger-Scott leaned more towards an academic initiative motivated by the mission of public scholarship to make historical knowledge available to all. Wright and Price surely considered the interviewer/narrator relationship

⁸ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) 186. Thompson notes two particular studies performed in 1979 and 1986 that follow this model. See p. 347 in “Further Reading and Notes,” # 14. This book was considered emblematic of the new front of historians, those making a case for oral history as a valuable and rigorous component of historical scholarship.

when deciding upon peer interviewers for their Great Migration project. The “insider” position of the interviewers and their “amateur” status greatly influenced the information gathered from this project, as well as the project’s overall character as a public historical source.

Most of the interviews in the Krueger-Scott collection are taken at the residences of the narrators, once in a while at places of employment. The interviewers, often friendly acquaintances, frequently announced that they were in the “lovely home of” Mr. or Mrs So-and-So without any note of street address or neighborhood location. (We quickly come across what appears to be one disadvantage of using peer interviewers). Towards the end of most of the Krueger-Scott interviews there was yet another chance to establish the geographical location of the interviewees when they were asked to reflect back on any changes in home life or neighborhood. Rarely does this question produce an address either. This is a frustrating omission for someone interested, for example, in how different neighborhoods experience urban crisis, and a moment when the “insider” interviewer model leaves the listener uninformed.

In fact, follow-up seems to be one of the more regularly missing pieces of the Krueger-Scott oral history interview process, a “price” one pays perhaps for peer interviewers. Of course, with the use of hindsight it is much easier to fault the interviewers for such omissions than any historian, in the moment, may also overlook. The peer interviewers in question were probably not thinking of these interviews in quite the same manner that a scholar would, in terms of how the information they were hearing could be elaborated upon in order to provide in depth sources for historical inquiry further down the line. Because they are peers interviewing each other, so often the stories

told are familiar in such a way that the interviewers do not even think to pursue certain questioning. Their background knowledge and experience often led them to believe that what was being shared was essentially common knowledge, and so the need for further questioning would not be there.

This is the case when Vivian Berry makes a passing reference, in her interview with Glen Marie Brickus, to the stabbing of her son. The final question on the questionnaire enquires as to whether, if they had their lives to live over again, the interviewees would choose to live in Newark. Mrs. Berry answers in the affirmative, explaining that in part it is because “people have been so nice to me.” She goes on to list a few of the struggles that she experienced and how people cared for her in those moments. “...when my son was stabbed the people at Sussex Avenue School, the principal – everybody – called, wanted to know – At the time he wasn’t a student there but people called... I don’t have no major complaints.”

“Well that’s good,” says Brickus, “that is the end of our interview...”

This is an unsatisfying moment for the average listener because we would like to know more. At the start of the interview we hear of Berry’s seven children, each enumerated by name and profession. None of them were referred to as deceased and so the best we can do is ascertain that the stabbing was not fatal. Even so, the story of the attack would have been useful for so many reasons and Mrs. Berry sounded as if she would have been comfortable expanding had that been requested of her. Perhaps Mrs. Brickus thought of stabbings as a common occurrence in Newark and thus the explanation for her lack of follow-up. We will never know.⁹

⁹ Vivian Berry, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, 1997 (no day or month recorded).

This kind of moment occurred in a number of the Krueger-Scott interviews, where what would seem to be an obvious opportunity for follow-up - to go “off-script” - is disregarded. Frank Hutchins was asked by his interviewer, Pauline Blount, if he had any memorabilia that he would be willing to donate to the Cultural Center.

“Unfortunately I don’t have ‘em because around 1966, um, my place – I was in a fire. And so I lost a lot of memorabilia that I had.” Pauline Blount replies, “Okay” and moves on to the next question, even though the questionnaire later asks about experiences with fire.¹⁰ For those of us who find ourselves simply listeners of a completed oral history collection, these gaps can prove trying; but they can also teach the importance of truly listening to an interviewee in order to construct the most fruitful dialogue.

As Allesandro Portelli discovered through his own experience interviewing residents of his hometown Terni, Italy, people who know things sometimes don’t think to ask things. This occurs even when they understand that the moment in question is one to be shared with those outside the community of knowledge. In Portelli’s *The Death of Luigi Trastulli* he writes of his interview with a man who was speaking of a particular historical event:

Other information in the interview allowed me to place the story in the late 1930s. But to the narrator’s immediate circle of friends (one of whom was present at the interview) the place and the superintendent’s name are enough to narrow down the temporal range to a significant degree, and evoke a whole wealth of shared stories from which I was excluded. So I had to ask, “When was this?” We are always asking people to be more explicit in their time references, reminding them that they are speaking to an audience which includes at least one outsider.¹¹

¹⁰ Frank Hutchins, interview with Pauline Blount, June 28, 1998.

¹¹ “What Makes Oral History Different,” *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) 68. Portelli’s book was published the same year that the Krueger-Scott Oral History Project was taking shape.

Giles Wright performed the first three of the Krueger-Scott interviews as a part of the training process for the peer-interviewers. This was an opportunity to teach the amateur oral historians through listening, imbuing them with the sensibilities of interviewing with the outside listener in mind. While there is scant information on the Krueger-Scott training sessions with regard to methodology I have been able to glean some information from speaking with the second project coordinator, Mageline Little. In her personal notes dated July 1995 it appears Mrs. Little met with Dr. Price and Mr. Wright, along with some of the potential interviewers.

Little's notations include, "What one should do before the interview" and "Do some research on the topic...Make contact – build a report [sic]...Know how to operate recorder..."

Regarding the interview process specifically, there is a handwritten two-column list of "should" and "should not." Mrs. Little noted that one should, "Listen! Listen! Listen! Ask why? Probe...Ask for clarification - 'saying' Descriptors [sic] are important...Use major events in the life of Int'ee to get facts (milestones)..." The opposite column included, "Don't impose your values...Don't start with Sensitive Issues...Don't be a slave to the questions..."¹²

After a few training sessions a handful of Newark residents were set out to perform the one hundred-plus interviews on their own. We will see throughout this study that some interviewers were better at integrating the instructions than others. The knowledge and experience of Wright and Price informed the methodology of these

¹² Mageline Little, meeting notes, July 1995, courtesy Mageline Little. Apparently Mrs. Little was brought on later in the process, replacing a person whose name she cannot recall.

community historians but the unique interactions between peers and the microphone manufactured the product that is the Krueger-Scott collection.

Insiders versus Outsiders

Much discussion occurs surrounding the positionality of interviewers in the oral history arena as defined through the binary of “insider” and “outsider.” Barbara Allen and William Lynwood Montell’s “Toward a Fuller Historical Record” in their 1981 book *From Memory to History* is a sample of the oral history scholarship that would have been available to the Krueger-Scott project directors early on. Allen and Montell address the various possible positions of interviewers and then go on to suggest that the insider location “can be both an advantage and a disadvantage.” As an insider, they argue, one has the intuition and understanding surrounding a situation or story or event that someone else outside the community does not. Theoretically this in turn allows for a deeper exchange of dialogue, and an added ability to follow up on particular moments that would otherwise be unavailable to someone who has simply a studied knowledge.¹³ Yet again, as we have already witnessed, the familiarity an insider interviewer possesses can cause frustration to the outside scholar listening to the oral histories for purposes of research.

We cannot be sure which scholarly productions of the time most influenced the Krueger-Scott project but will simply consider here the choices made by the directors through the lenses of said literature. For example, the phenomenon of “hidden transcripts” as introduced by James C. Scott in his 1990 *Domination and the Arts of*

¹³ Barbara Allen and William Lynwood Montell, “Toward a Fuller Historical Record,” *From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981) 11.

Resistance explains, according to Robin D. G. Kelley, that while marginalized groups may look as if they are consenting to particular systems and rules, they challenge the power structures in their own ways, albeit not necessarily overtly.¹⁴ Was the intention behind the choice to employ peer interviewers made in part to avoid that possibility of “hidden transcripts” or what Scott also calls “offstage” conversations? Much as W.E.B. Du Bois characterized the life of late 19th-century African-American Philadelphians as lived “behind the veil,” Scott argues that people in subservient roles - when in the presence of those in dominant roles - will say not only less but actually different than what they might divulge to their peers.¹⁵

Referring to the four “Listeners” as “Family Consultants” and the thirteen interviewees as the “Historians,” Audrey Faulkner’s *When I Was Comin’ Up* study sets out to record the stories of senior citizens under the auspices of Rutgers University’s Institute of Aging, of which Faulkner was director. Within the Graduate School of Social Work the questionnaire - or “guide” as they called it - was generated, as were the training sessions held for the Listeners. The Institute set up office in the public housing complex where the interviews would be conducted.

Faulkner explains in the book’s introduction that “Because of the necessity to create an open and accepting atmosphere for the interviews, the Listeners...were black, and sympathy and acceptance were two of the most important attributes a good Listener

¹⁴ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994) 8.

¹⁵ See James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* and W.E.B. Du Bois, *Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. A number of recent oral history publications have included Scott’s theory; See Daniel Kerr’s “Countering Corporate Narratives from the Street: The Cleveland Homeless Oral History Project,” in *Oral History and Public Memories*, 2009.

could possess.”¹⁶ Faulkner’s *When I Was Comin’ Up* can be considered an example of the oral history model in which someone of a particular social position interprets the information gathered from an “other.” The assumption that an eighty-year-old African-American woman, for example, would be more willing to share her personal histories with a young Black woman than perhaps an elderly White woman seems a bit assumptive, and if these race-based decisions were borne out of research Faulkner does not explain that. This problematic assumption that African Americans automatically understand experiences of other African Americans simply because of their shared race will show up several times in this study.

We also have the “sympathy” factor in Faulkner’s methodology which creates a scenario locating the interviewer in a paternalistic role, no matter race or gender. In turn this ascribes a particular dynamic to the interview relationship even before the microphone is turned on. This would have been an interesting facet for analysis of these interviews had Faulkner included such scholarship her in her study.¹⁷ Within the next ten years there would be fewer oral history projects published without analysis and context as scholars acknowledged that narratives without such supplemental material were an incomplete source.

One year after Faulkner’s study was published, Linda Shopes wrote on a community history project which she began in 1977, using local community activists as

¹⁶ “Collecting the Life Histories,” *When I Was Comin’ Up*, 16.

¹⁷ I would also have liked to consider what questions were asked during these interviews but unfortunately there is no inclusion of the interviewers’ voices nor the questionnaire used in the study. This was a methodological model that is said to have begun at Columbia’s Oral History Research Office in the 1950s; the Office tended to turn the tape recordings into transcripts with all questions deleted so that they read like autobiographies. See page 7 of Donald Ritchie’s introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History* for further explanation.

the interviewers. Her article, “Oral History and Community Involvement: The Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project” tells a story of the project’s methods, theories and end results. With the goal of encouraging the residents of the community to “take a more activist, critical stance with respect to their social and economic circumstances,” by connecting their own experiences with “broader social processes,” the results were less than optimal. While many “individual stories” were gathered in “warm encounters,” the sessions “were not consciousness-raising, at least for the interviewees...” (The project directors did gain some insight into their own preconceived notions of behavior). Shopes and other interviewers heard “stories about hard times” but these did not tend to conclude with any kind of connection by the narrators to broader social contexts. What surfaced most, Shopes observed, were themes of survival and oftentimes pride in the strength of one’s own fortitude. In the end, the “hard times” were generally reported as individual experiences and not ones that may have been the result of larger social, cultural or political systems in place at the time.¹⁸

Shopes observed that the use of “community historians” as opposed to “professional” interviewers created a “methodological tension”:

The community historians have a stake in maintaining good relations with their interviewees, and since they share the same social world and world view, are unlikely to challenge them in any case. As a result their interviews are uniformly polite and unchallenging, shaped by a reluctance or an inability to be critical of the collective neighborhood experience.

Yet, Shopes notes in this reflective piece that “...precisely because the oral historians lacked an in-depth knowledge of conventional categories of historical inquiry,

¹⁸ Linda Shopes “Oral History and Community Involvement: The Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project,” *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986) 250-254.

which generally focus on the more formal, public aspects of experience, their interviews are especially rich in details about the more private dimensions of daily life, such as family dynamics or coping with limited resources.”¹⁹

The contemporary movement toward amateur historians performing oral history interviews benefits from the honest analysis of past projects such as Shopes’ and the call for ever deeper self-reflection on the part of the oral historian and the interviewer. Michael Frisch’s concept of “shared authority,” based upon his 1990 collection of essays on oral and public history, reflects this trend that has scholars and practitioners still today taking on a more considered view of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee.²⁰

It seems that Wright and Price did indeed make the modern choice of peer interviewers based at least in part upon the theory that insiders get a particular kind of story. As well, I am certain there was a consciousness on their part surrounding the perpetuation of agency for Blacks in Newark; Krueger-Scott was not to be a traditional ethnographic study of a “people” but more a collective effort to further the understanding of one’s own history. Because of this choice we are gifted with a collection of personal narratives and historical facts wrapped up in an extremely transparent methodological package. This makes for a rich and complicated historical source, one ripe for continued analysis.

Souvenirs

¹⁹ Ibid, 257.

²⁰ Michael H Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

In 1980 Giles Wright interviewed Mrs. Mildred Arnold as part of the New Jersey Multi-Ethnic Oral History Project. The study was designed by Ronald Grele, then the New Jersey Historical Commission's research director. Mr. Wright was project coordinator. In her interview Mrs. Arnold speaks of her three daughters. "...that's my oldest girl right up there," the transcript reads. Apparently she is pointing to a photograph. Wright asks the name of the girl and soon thereafter Arnold is offering details about each daughter, her subsequent grandchildren and their many achievements, eventually making references to Presidents Carter and Nixon as well. This is all spurred on by a photograph.

Discussion surrounding a simple piece of material culture can reward a researcher with some profound cultural understanding. In Wright's interview with Mrs. Arnold she referred to her grandson - featured in one of the pictures - as having "the sugar." This is a term common in the African-American community for diabetes, a disease that disproportionately affects Blacks ahead of any other race or ethnic group. This is an important bit of cultural and social information that illustrates a particular attitude about a specific disease and comes by way of the interviewer engaging in the moment. Mr. Wright continued his query with Mrs. Arnold, apparently pointing to each person in the assorted other photographs, and asking who they were as well. Wright culled from Mrs. Arnold's rich stories the names, places, attitudes, and events of an African-American life because he was in the moment and then responded to that moment in a critically inquisitive fashion.²¹ Wright's attention to these images reminds us of Edna Thomas'

²¹ Mildred Arnold, interview by Giles Wright, *New Jersey Multi-Ethnic Oral History Project*, Aug. 19, 1980, For an interesting essay on the role of photography as a supplier of agency in the Black community read bell hooks' chapter, "In our Glory: Photography and Black Life" in *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*.

assertion that Blacks need somewhere to hang their pictures. They also then need someone to see those pictures and ask questions about them.

In most every Krueger-Scott interview the narrators are asked, “What materials (e.g. photographs, travel tickets, luggage, trunks) do you have that pertain to your migration to Newark?” They are further asked whether they would like to donate or lend these items to the planned cultural center. Many participants eagerly show their memorabilia to the interviewer as the tape is recording but unfortunately these items are not always acknowledged in quite the same manner that Wright acknowledged Mrs. Arnold’s photographs. Material culture offers many an opportunity to pursue conversation regarding a particular event or experience, but the general lack of engagement with these items by the Krueger-Scott interviewers negated many of those opportunities. This apathy may have been based upon the assumption that the items in question would eventually appear in the upcoming cultural center and thus deeper investigation would occur at that time. Or, as with other issues in these particular oral histories, the answer could lie in the fact that the peer interviewer had the same sorts of items in her own possession and so was not especially moved to further a discussion on some kind of “ordinary” item.

Glen Marie Brickus interviewed retired Police Director Edward Kerr and his wife for the Krueger-Scott project. Brickus says at one point as per the questionnaire, “Now, I just asked if you had any of those things that you kept over the years. So you do have some mementos?” Ed Kerr apparently held up a wedding photo and replied, “See, that's the day we got married. I blew that up myself.”

Brickus replied, “Yeah, how about that.” She then repeats, “Well, do you have some mementos from yesteryear?”²² Apparently a wedding photo was not what Mrs. Brickus envisioned as an answer to her query. If only she had asked a few questions about that photograph Mr. Kerr was so clearly proud of, Kerr and his wife might well have provided numerous historical pieces of information on everything from wedding traditions, to built environment, to food.

In her article in the *Journal of American History* Jaqueline Dowd Hall references Maurice Halbwachs’ 1925 book, *On Collective Memory*. Halbwachs was one of the first scholars to suggest that, as Hall puts it, memory is “filtered through social frames. Personal memories tend to disappear unless they are rekindled through repetition, and we repeat what is considered significant by the groups with which we identify.”²³ It was incumbent upon the Krueger-Scott interviewers to implicate some sense of significance to the items shared with them in order for any kind of historical expansion to take place.

There did not seem to be discussion in the Krueger-Scott training sessions of how one might sustain a conversation or “rekindle” a memory with regard to material culture, even as we know that Wright was cognizant of the value of this methodology. Had Mrs. Brickus pursued discussion about the Kerr’s wedding photo, had she probed, perhaps the Kerrs would have believed their wedding significant and thus offered historical details that would enrich the interview material. Brickus announced at the beginning of the interview that the three of them had “been friends for so long.” Perhaps they were such longtime friends that Mrs. Brickus had even attended their wedding, and leafed through

²² Edward Kerr, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Sept. 24 (year not recorded).

²³ Jaqueline Dowd Hall, “‘You Must Remember This’: Autobiography as Social Critique,” *The Journal of American History*, 9/1/1998, 440.

their photo album soon thereafter. What is clear is that this particular line of questioning did not hold the interviewer's interest for very long. A few minutes after the wedding photo was shared we hear Mrs. Kerr say in the background that she is in the process of finding an item to share as well. Brickus responds, "I wouldn't worry about it, Kat" and the interview moved on.²⁴

Glen Marie Brickus is one of the interviewers who tended to personalize the experience of oral history taking, consistently interjecting her own opinions and experiences throughout the interview. And if a discussion was not compelling to her she would move on to the next question. Thus a more complicated explanation of her lack of interest in the Kerr's souvenirs could be offered as well: the longtime devaluing of African-American images - and their material culture in general - moved the Kerrs and Brickus to readily dismiss the subject at hand. Lonnie Bunch, director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, tells the story of the many African Americans who sought him out once it was announced that the Museum would be built. They wanted to share their relics and memorabilia with him, with the Museum, with people who would actually want to see them. Bunch explained in a recent talk that the people were keeping these historical treasures underneath beds and stored away in attics simply because, up until that point, no one had ever suggested that they were worth anything.

Imagine if Brickus and the other Krueger-Scott interviewers had expressed more enthusiasm at these sorts of moments, pushing just a bit more for a "memory story" as Penny Summerfield calls them. "The process of the production of memory stories is

²⁴ Edward and Kat Kerr, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Sep. 24 (year not recorded).

always dialogic or inter-subjective in the sense that it is the product of a relationship between a narrator and a recipient subject, an audience.” There is a difference, Summerfield asserts - echoing other scholars - between what we are *able* to tell and what we think would actually be of interest.²⁵

The “product” of the relationships between the Krueger-Scott narrators and interviewers makes for a powerful oral history collection, and yet even more could have been mined. Had I been interviewing the Kerrs I would have expressed greater interest in their wedding, would have asked why and how Mr. Kerr enlarged the photograph, and so on. That would have been “better” for historical information gathering, for the construction of historical knowledge. Yet we can also learn from silence, from hypothesizing on those things left unsaid.

Individual Memory

Audrey Faulkner observes in her chapter “Collecting the Life Histories” that in her interviews with Newark seniors, “More material was offered about childhood and youth than about family life, middle or old age. This might be explained by the Historians’ reluctance to talk about highly personal aspects of family life as well as the older person’s tendency to recall better that which happened in the early stages of life.”²⁶

In Theodore Rosengarten’s preface to his 1974 *All God’s Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* the historian explains the process and experience of the lengthy interview he recorded with his subject. Rosengarten writes, “Shaw has the storyteller’s gift to suspend

²⁵ Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives, Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) 20.

²⁶ “Collecting the Life Histories,” *When I Was Comin' Up*, 16.

his age while reciting. Thus his childhood stories ring with an astonishment and romance of a boy discovering the universe. Similarly, stories of his old age are tinged by the bittersweet feelings of a passionate man who has lost his illusions.”²⁷

It seems that Cobb’s results conflict with Faulkner’s theory regarding the forgetting of recent events or the reluctance to avoid personal stories. Rosengarten acquired something from his elderly subject that Faulkner’s group was unable to gain from their narrators. Here is not the place to analyze Faulkner or Rosengarten’s study too closely but rather to continue the argument that oral histories benefit from close analysis first and only afterwards the theorizing of the results of that analysis. Memory can be one very useful analytical lens that should not be too hastily dismissed - or defined.

Memory is a central talking point in oral history methodology with regard to either side of the microphone. Rosengarten writes that after his initial interview with Cobb that Rosengarten himself “could remember the details of Nate’s stories but no reconstruction could capture the power of his performance.”²⁸ Oral historians must discern between that which they actually hear and that which they remember hearing, hence the need for recording, for transcribing perhaps, and certainly for continued analysis by varied sets of ears and eyes.

Had the Krueger-Scott project been constructed upon the notion that elderly people tended not to remember recent history - or would not want to discuss it - then the questionnaire would have looked quite different. The questionnaire, instead, encouraged the narrators to compare and contrast their early lives in Newark with more recent

²⁷ Theodore Rosengarten, “Preface to *All God’s Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw*,” *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 218. Ned Cobb is the actual name of Nate Shaw whose identity was changed at the time to protect him and his family from any retaliation his stories might have drawn.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 214.

experiences. For example question #83 asks, “What traditions/celebrations/events in Newark that you witnessed in the past no longer exist? What happened to them? How do you feel about their disappearance?” We can see in this line of questioning developed by Wright and Price an assumption that there would indeed be both short and long term memory available to the interviewees – and a suspension of judgment as to the value of those memories.

The power and temperament of memory is one facet of the oral source that actually commends its value as a historical research tool. In Allen and Montell’s chapter “Toward a Fuller Record” we read about a particular oral history project whose mission was to “reconstruct the architecture” of a Kentucky community that had been all but abandoned. The researcher, Charles Martin, explains that by the time he was conducting interviews most of the buildings existed “only in memory.” Yet Martin noted how “visual impressions of them permeated the minds of the informants and their parents,” much of that information passed down through family stories. The informants’ memories “...proved accurate when [they] could be checked against legal documents and other written sources,” writes Martin.²⁹

There were questions in the Krueger-Scott interviews that also encouraged the retrieval of architectural ghosts. Numerous reconstructions were created from memories provided by the Krueger-Scott narrators. Whole blocks of the city, often razed due to “blight” in order to build more modern edifices, came back to life through the stories told

²⁹ Charles Martin, letter to Lynwood Montell, quoted in Allen & Montell, “Toward a Fuller Record,” 16. Martin’s study was a part of his dissertation, *Hollybush: The Eclipse of the Traditional Building System in a Mountain Community. An Architectural and Oral Historical Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1980).

by the city's residents. Chapter five gives several examples of this as narrators piece together the neighborhood of Avon Avenue through stories of fire.

Oral history happens, writes Ron Grele, when "...the knowledge of the patterns of the past two hundred years is brought to bear upon the memory of the time under discussion."³⁰ This "knowledge of the patterns...brought to bear" is the analysis. Grele goes on to take exception with those who distinguish between memory and history, perhaps attempting to step back from that rigorous analysis by characterizing oral histories as simple recollections vulnerable to the vagaries of the human mind. Again we come to that vicious cycle: if oral historians do not hold their work up to deep analysis then the work will be dismissed as worth little analysis.

Grele takes his colleague, the beloved Studs Terkel, to task in an essay originally published in 1975 entitled "Movement Without Aim: Methodological & Theoretical Problems In Oral History." Citing certain "editing techniques" and some "cryptic questions" used in *Hard Times*, a collection of Great Depression oral histories taken by Terkel, Grele argues that Terkel's claim that his interviews are "not history but memory" raises "serious theoretical problems." Grele argues for a more rigorous and consistent practice in the field, including active interrogation of the role of memory as a lens with which to consider oral histories, not an obstacle to overcome or avoid.³¹

We can see why Grele felt the need to articulate his concerns when we review the oral history theory of this particular time period. The idea of memory was still more often a "but" instead of an "and" in the study of oral sources. Michael Frisch complicated the

³⁰ Ron Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History* (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1985) vii.

³¹ Ibid, 29.

idea of memory and oral history in his 1979 review of Terkel's *Hard Times*. Frisch cautioned the many reviewers of *Hard Times* against accepting the narratives in the book as concrete history, rather than understanding it as a "memory book" as Terkel himself defined it. While Grele challenged Terkel's classification of his own study, Frisch saw *Hard Times* "as outlining a way to transcend these categories ["as a source of historical information" or "as a way of bypassing historical interpretation"], and as a way to discover the role of oral history in modern society."³²

Ten years after Frisch's review Alessandro Portelli complicated memory matters even more:

But what is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings. Thus, the specific utility of oral sources for the historian lies, not so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes wrought by memory. These changes reveal the narrators' effort to make sense of the past and to give a form to their lives, and set the interview and the narrative in their historical context.³³

Portelli saw memory as a structure upon which to build historical knowledge, a help as opposed to a hindrance. The vigorous debate surrounding the dual tasks of gaining information via past historical narratives while still challenging those narratives with the hindsight of time is one that both enriches the oral history field and at other times obstructs deeper analytical work.

However we treat memory, we do know that we want to nurture it in our interviewees. Particular questions can help people "remember" things and/or encourage them to share those things remembered. In the Krueger-Scott interviews the narrators

³² Michael Frisch, "Oral History and *Hard Times*: A Review Essay," *Oral History Review* 7.1 (1979), 74, oxfordjournals.org.

³³ Portelli, "'What Makes Oral History Different,'" 52.

provide many details of their adulthood in Newark specific to themes such as shopping, education, tradition and so on. This particular storytelling is in response to very strongly detailed questions that offer useful verbal prompts, such as question #13:

If you migrated to Newark, when did you first decide to leave home? Why did you want to leave? Was your trip planned well in advance? How did you prepare to leave? What year did you leave? What time of the year did you leave? Were attempts made to prevent you from leaving? If so, by whom? Why? Was this your first trip of some distance?

The more adept interviewers would start at the beginning and then prompt their subjects with the follow-up questions offered. What was remembered by the narrators often blossomed as they considered affective as well as logistical responses to the series of questions provided. Imagine the alternative outcome that could have resulted had the question been worded more like, “Tell me about your travels to the North.”

Rev. Robert Woods recalled that he first left home at age thirteen, to work on a plantation, and how he later saved up his money to travel to Newark by running errands. “Nobody knew I was leaving - it was the spur of a moment...I don’t know if there was any search for me either, anything of that kind,” said Woods.³⁴

My research suggests that key words within particular questions can do much to set loose a memory. Which words are utilized in the interview process are of major consequence and so the oral historian must pay close attention to them. Faulkner states in her introduction that while the Listeners were to “encourage” the discussion of “childhood joys and sorrows; courtship and marriage; migration; and onset of old age” that the Historians were also to be allowed to “go at their own pace, talking about the

³⁴ Robert Woods, interview by Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 17, 1997.

subjects he or she recalled.”³⁵ This seems a less than precise manner in which to access the specific information that was sought and helps explain the lack of concrete detail in many of the seniors’ narratives in *When I Was Comin’ Up*:

Even when I was little, I had so many good friends. I remember playing with some neighbors, they used to live up the street from us. My mother didn’t like me to play with them too much because they was bad children. They was bad about fighting. And you see, my mother had a fence built around the house, and when I was little, she didn’t allow us out. But me – a little hard head – I always had to sneak out.³⁶

The journalistic, *who, what, why, where, when* words certainly made their way into the Krueger-Scott questionnaire. “Newark” is repeated often in the questions as well, a specific place that elicits specific feelings which beget particular memories and create informative responses. “Were you brought to Newark by others? Why did they come to Newark? Did you or your family know anyone in Newark before coming here?” And so on. Words matter.

Linda Shopes explained to me that confirming someone’s definition - or interpretation - of a particular word in a response can also be useful. Shopes used the example of a narrator referring to his family as “close.” The interviewer might ask, “What do you mean by close?” Not only will there likely be a more specific account offered of that family’s dynamic, but repeating a narrator’s words is effective in allowing that narrator the opportunity to hear what he has said – and perhaps to offer modifications to the original response.

³⁵ “Collecting the Life Histories,” *When I Was Comin’ Up*, 16. Again, what the actual interviewers did – and did not do – with those questions is not for us to know. This study and others similarly structured make an excellent argument for the need of inclusion of the interviewer’s words in oral history transcripts and studies.

³⁶ “They’re Hypocritic,” *When I Was Comin’ Up*, 105-106.

People tend to tell certain stories a certain way because that is how they have been told for so long, something that will be further explored in the next section on collective memory. There are many scripts in our heads, and whether created by collective memory or out of a desire for efficiency we are not necessarily conscious of our rote responses. What gets remembered and what gets said are not always one and the same; oral historians strive to draw memories from their narrators in a form meaningful to the narrators as well as to the outside listener.

The kind of critical work performed by the third generation oral history scholars such as Shopes, Grele, and Rosengarten clearly informed the methodology of the Krueger-Scott project. The attention towards affect, the evaluating of memory, and the consideration of relation between interviewer and interviewee reflect a consciousness of the most recent trends in the field, even as other facets of the Krueger-Scott project dip back towards a more traditional scholarly time.

Collective Memory

In 2007 Dr. Price published a piece entitled “Newark Remembers the Summer of 1967, So Should We All” wherein he touched upon the role of collective memory in the reporting of history. Price wrote that Newark was “...a city shaped by memories” and that “Newark’s collective memory is a local one.” He pointed to the 1967 Newark rebellion as an event that divided the city into two eras, and not necessarily in the ways one might think. Price characterized the post-rebellion era not as one of downward economic and moral spirals but rather one of a “...long climb out of the infamy of its contested memories.” Price went on to say that “...what is now known is not necessarily what is remembered about Newark’s summer of discontent.” Individual memories, Dr.

Price asserted, are based upon more private issues of home, personal identity and how one's own life was affected. "Their memories, though rich, are impoverished by what they could not have known at the time their lives were turned upside down."³⁷ Those memories are also affected by what has become the collective memory surrounding the "riots."

Private narratives solidify into a collective memory by consistent repetition. Because of all the ways in which that summer of '67 has been packaged and sold, Price lamented that those who lived through it "have largely fended for themselves, never really certain of all that contributed to the disorders and the nearly generation long aftermath of stark decline and racial and ethnic rage."³⁸ Price's article is a clear call for the remembering of the rebellion, something not everyone deems necessary. But it is also a call to analyze memories more deeply in order to learn what is actually known.

In 1991 Alessandro Portelli wrote on "collective error" in memory. One reason it exists he argues, such as in the stories of the death of Luigi Trastulli, is due to trauma. Portelli interviewed a number of people associated with the uprising in which union member Luigi Trastulli died and found them seeking explanation through their narratives for the seemingly meaningless death of this man. This is one way that people use history, he argues, to understand their own circumstances. Portelli observed that the numerous community discussions of this incident led to a kind of consensus of remembering regarding the series of events that led up to Trastulli's death. At the same time there were

³⁷ Clement Price, "Newark Remembers the Summer of 1967, So Should We All," July/August 2007, *The Positive Community*, 21.

³⁸ Ibid.

vast differences in some stories, for example the date upon which Trastulli died.³⁹ Dr. Price's piece on Newark's rebellion echoes Portelli's understanding that people have a need to understand things, often using history to explain those things they "could not have known."

Price and Wright appear to have worked under this theoretical guideline as they crafted the Krueger-Scott questionnaire and envisioned the oral history project as a whole. Especially if one is familiar with the history of Newark, along with its tropes and myths as they were, it is apparent that the Krueger-Scott questionnaire is created in part to complicate the city's entrenched historical narrative and even dismantle certain collective imaginings. Whether asking about "how well academically" Black students performed or "in what major ways" Newark had changed, the questions gave these Newarkers a chance to tell their contradicting stories of both the city and its people through their own understandings of particular situations. This consensus and contradiction helps paint a more nuanced picture of the city than is sometimes proffered and individualizes the Black urban experience writ large.

In 1989 Paul Connerton argued in *How Societies Remember* that community members form their communal memory through the interlocking of individual histories, "gossip" as he refers to it at one point. In his study of social memory, Connerton - in conversation with James C. Scott - also notes that oral histories by an oppressed group

³⁹ Portelli, "The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event," in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, 15.

This observation also supports Paul Connerton's claim that memory is constructed through performance, in this case a repeated performance of a handful of stories which were offered as description of the death of Luigi Trastulli. This performance, Connerton points out, is "bodily" and marks us with those memories. A new idea at the time of his writing, more memory scholars are now noting the connection between the physical/emotional and the intellectual when it comes to the construction of memory. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

yield a variant result from that of the dominant group narrative. “The oral history of subordinate groups will produce a kind of history that will not only have very different details, but in which the very construction of meaningful shapes will obey a different principle. Different details will emerge because they are inserted, as it were, into a different kind of narrative home.” One example Connerton offers is the way in which chronology is often favored by elites whereas marginalized groups tend to tell their stories not necessarily in order of time but more towards theme or affective relationship.⁴⁰

This theory is borne out somewhat in the Krueger-Scott collection, often occurring when the subject is race and/or racism. Franklin Banks tells a childhood story about his father’s employer believing him to be White. When his father’s race is finally discovered, he has accrued such a good work record that he simply could not be fired. From there Banks tells the story of a woman he knew as an adult who worked at City Hospital. She, too, was assumed to be White as they did not hire African Americans at the time. Similar to the story of his father, when the hospital discovered that indeed the nurse was not White Banks says her seniority status restricted them from firing her.⁴¹ While there are numerous examples of this non-linear, affective story telling within the Newark oral histories, the fairly consistent chronological order of the questionnaire did keep people “on track,” perhaps more than they would have on their own.

Faulkner explains that in her study the interviewers were asked to pursue “crisis situations, but it proved to be almost impossible to get much information about episodes

⁴⁰ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 17 & 19.

⁴¹ Franklin Banks, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 19, 1997.

that the Historian would recognize as a crisis.” If we accept the theory put forth by Connerton and Hall, then in order for crises to be defined as such there needs to be some kind of collective agreement surrounding the definition of a particular event. Faulkner is on the right track when she considers the possibility that those being interviewed might not have considered something a crisis that the interviewer would have. While she wonders if it is due in part to the fact that the interviewees went through so many crisis-level events - such that fewer would stand out as crises - it is probably more complicated than that.⁴²

In Hayden White’s 1986 article on historical pluralism, he argues that pluralists - or narrativists - do not categorize historic occasions as necessarily *funny* or *tragic* across the board because it all depends upon whose perceptions are being put forth. Classifications ascribed to historical events do not *describe* events, White argues, but rather anticipate a particular interpretation. Thus one of the roles of the interviewer, or oral history project coordinator, becomes that of interpreter when choosing the wording of a question. White notes, “It is more difficult to think that a given set of historical events might be variously but equally plausibly *emplotted*; yet this is exactly what we have to take account of when we encounter what appear to be mutually exclusive *narrative interpretations* [author’s italics] of the same historical phenomenon.”⁴³ We can only glean those “mutually exclusive” interpretations with careful wording of an interview question followed by the same careful analysis.

⁴² “Collecting the Life Histories, *When I Was Comin’ Up*, 17.

⁴³ Hayden White, “Historical Pluralism,” *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1986) 487, jstor.org.

In Faulkner's oral history collection we have the keyword *crisis* offered to the interviewee, the assumption being as White puts forth that certain events are "emplotted" as such along the historical timeline. But Faulkner does not allow for mutual exclusivity of interpretations. The category of *crisis* implies an expectation of drama, moving some interviewees perhaps to scan their brains for a "good story." If they cannot come up with one that matches a collectively agreed upon definition of *crisis*, then they may well respond that they have not actually experienced any crisis in their life. Their only "slightly good" story might have been a "great story" for the interviewer but - and this is what Faulkner touches upon - if they had lived through, say, three house fires in their life (something quite possible in a poor urban neighborhood) then they might not think to tell the tale of the time they had to run from their burning house as a child, carrying nothing but a frying pan that their mother gave them to save. Moreover, if the community in general has agreed that house fires are not a crisis then that, too, would impede the sharing of the story with an interviewer. I would suggest that if the word *crisis* was actually used - and once again we do not know because the interviewer's voice does not appear in the Faulkner study - that it became an obstacle to gaining particular tales of historical interest. The word choice would have hindered a story that may have otherwise emerged from an individual and in turn added collective historical knowledge to the archives.

In the Krueger-Scott collection this same kind of question is posed more broadly and then specific key words are offered as prompts. The interviewer asks about "major events" in the life of the narrator. This approach elicits numerous tales of varied historical situations thanks in part to the fact that *major* does not carry as defined a collective

connotation as *crisis*. The question suggests that what was *major* to that particular person will be an adequate answer, locating the discussion in a private modality. In addition, a listing of possible events comes after the question; prompt words such as *fires*, *riots*, *floods*, *hurricanes*, and *strikes* are offered. These are the kinds of specific words that can stimulate a person's memory - and destabilize preconceived notions of what might qualify as "major" - so that a collective experience may still get shared in a most individual manner.

Ed Crawford listed some of the major events in Newark as the rebellion in '67; the mayoral run-off between Gibson and Addonizo; a big fire on Avon Avenue; and a hurricane when he had to assume his outdoor post as a grade school safety officer.⁴⁴ Robert Woods said that the election of Mayor Ken Gibson was a major event and that another major event was the rebuilding of Newark's infrastructure. A third major event in Rev. Wood's opinion was when a new church was built "nearby the Hunt building." Woods then recounted the story of a snowstorm several years prior when no busses were running, his wife was stuck on Broad Street, and an "unknown gentleman" brought her and two other women home.⁴⁵ From stories such as these the listener gains vast historical knowledge from the varied responses, even as they are filtered through collective memory.

Dr. Price spent a lot of time in his work thinking about collective memory. African-American history, and Newark's history more specifically, called for this consideration as oft-told tales attempting to explain things persisted about his people and his adoptive city. Oral histories can challenge the collective imaginations of a community

⁴⁴ Ed Crawford, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 23, 1997.

⁴⁵ Robert Woods, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 17, 1997.

and a country, often showing these imaginings to have little foundation in actual experience. Dr. Price and Giles Wright hoped to at the least complicate some of those “memories” attached to Newark, New Jersey and its African-American community.

Respectability

Dr. Price truly had his finger on the pulse of Newark’s temperament. He was well aware that in 1991, as the oral history project got underway, the city was on a tear to rebuild its reputation. Newark had recently won a nationwide award for urban renewal and was developing the downtown in the hopes of attracting more visitors and new residents. The city was in the process of showing the country that it was worthy of attention and support. The Krueger-Scott Mansion reconstruction project was on the agenda of many confrontational City Council meetings. The oral history component on the other hand was not met with the same political interrogation, forwarded instead as simply a way to collect stories of African-American citizens. This project tended toward a more traditional celebratory collection of oral histories, a gathering of narratives from Newark’s history by a group of those who knew the city well. In this way the project eschewed the political and social activist bents of some other oral history projects, the mission being less to dig deep than to cast a wide net.

Some might suggest that respectability politics were at play in the Krueger-Scott oral history collection, especially considering the preponderance of participants from what was considered a pillar-of-the-community church, Bethany Baptist. “Respectability politics” sometimes implies a kind of pejorative directed at Blacks whose general sense of decorum is assumed to come from a self-consciousness of Blackness in a White world,

and a desire to demonstrate worth or value to that world. In this critical view it is perceived as a lack of agency.

Mahassen Mgadmi, in her 2009 article on Black women's identity, notes the long history of this conceptualization, especially when it comes to women. During the Progressive Era the "respectability discourse" was a strategy employed by African Americans to uplift themselves, and their standing in the view of White society. According to Mgadmi it did little to increase respect and actually quashed potential activism of the time, especially where women were concerned. The bourgeois (European) values of sexual restraint, cleanliness, and hard work were embraced by Black organizations such as the Urban League and the NAACP. Deemed responsible for their community's image of respectability and the teaching of these tenets to their children, African-American women were expected to shoulder the heaviest burden of this "passionless" existence.⁴⁶

The Krueger-Scott oral histories could be said to showcase perhaps an updated "respectability politics," although I do not want to suggest that we can know the motivations behind the particular behavior and attitudes of the narrators. Elma Bateman told Pauline Blount that she hoped she hadn't sounded "too negative" during her interview. Bateman's interview was actually quite concise and without much drama as she spoke of work, raising children, and commercial institutions. She did mention that as a child there were racially motivated fights at school; and there was the fact that Blacks were just not hired at the same pay scale - or for the same jobs - as the White factory

⁴⁶ Mahassen Mgadmi, "Black Women's Identity: Stereotypes, Respectability and Passionlessness (1890-1930)" *Revue Lisa* VII, no. 1 (2009) 7-8, lisa.revue.org.

workers. Bateman also reiterated what many others had said regarding the racist tenor and hiring practices of the A&P grocery store on South Orange Avenue.

Bateman persisted, “I hope I didn’t say anything negative – did I? Too negative?” “No, it was simply a beautiful interview,” responded Blount, clearly also familiar with the respectability politics camp. Bateman explained, “I want to express my opinion. If you ask me I’m gonna tell you. But...” “You were not negative at all,” countered Blount. “And it was a learning experience for me.”⁴⁷

Bateman was both apologetic and outspoken as she felt the need to acknowledge the possibility that she had gone too far, but the reality was that she was a truth teller in the end. Someone else, an “outsider” perhaps, might have simply applauded Bateman for her candor, dismissing the concerns she articulated of negativity. In fact I may well have done exactly that at one time and it would have been a mistake as an oral historian, projecting my socio-political values upon the narrator. Mrs. Blount on the other hand shared similar values, knew exactly what Mrs. Bateman’s concerns were, and offered her personal assurance that her peer had behaved appropriately. The researcher is the benefactor of this exchange.

The fact that some of the Krueger-Scott interviewees were told that in no uncertain terms their interviews would one day become publicly accessible must have made an impact upon their answers - at least initially. The ways in which the Krueger-Scott Cultural Center project was introduced or described varied among the interviewers. Mrs. Brickus began her interview with Franklin Banks by saying, “Thank you for letting

⁴⁷ Elma Bateman, interview with Pauline Blount, April 29, 1999.

me come to do this interview and for being willing to become a part of our Oral History Library down at the Scott-Krueger Mansion Cultural Center when it is opened.”⁴⁸

Geri Smith began with, “You are interviewed today for the Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center. I'd like to get right to the point, and I'd like to first ask you some personal information. Could you first please state your name?” Her interviewee, Pearl Beatty replies, “Well, first of all, it's my pleasure to participate in this interview - very worthwhile interview - because it's historical. My name is Pearl Beatty.”⁴⁹

Meanwhile the unidentified interviewer for Willie Bradwell, who might have been Bradwell's daughter, began by saying, “This is December 8, 1997. I'm at the home of Mrs. Willie Bradwell in Newark, New Jersey. Miss Bradwell, I just want to take a minute to let you - to introduce the project to you. This is going to be an oral history, and it will be in the archives of the Krueger-Scott Cultural Center on High Street. And I'd like to ask you a little bit about your history as a resident of Newark. And basically, we're covering the period of the Black migration into Newark, basically between 1910 and 1970. So - but you don't have to confine your comments to that, but that's pretty much what the project is about. So would you repeat your name for me?”⁵⁰

I would suggest that for many, once into their interview any self-consciousness surrounding the imminent possibility of friends and strangers alike being able to push a button and listen to their story began to recede. I argue this in part with what I hear in the

⁴⁸ Franklin Banks, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 19, 1997.

Many references are made to the Mansion as “Scott-Krueger,” consciously or not foregrounding the name of Louise Scott instead of Gottfried Krueger's.

⁴⁹ Pearl Beatty, interview with Geri Smith, Dec. 12, 1997.

⁵⁰ Willie Bradwell, interviewer not recorded, Dec. 8, 1997.

voices of the narrators. The beauty of oral history recordings is the ability at times to hear the minds of those speaking; during certain points in an interview it is possible to discern the comfort level of a particular speaker by the ease or spontaneity with which she responds. One could hear the loosening of self-consciousness at times in the Krueger-Scott interviews, even as typically polite conversation ensued.

In Dr. Price's 2014 article, "The Path to Big Mama's House" he wrote of the ways in which his grandmother's home represented so much more than simply shelter for the family. In describing lessons he had learned, such as how to treat women and the elderly, Price explained the ways that etiquette and respectability were so important to his grandmother and to the family in general.⁵¹

Price went on to quote Ann Valk and Leslie Brown, editors of an oral history collection of Southern Black women entitled *Living with Jim Crow*:

Respectability was not always about manners and morals, although this discourse was always present. Rather, respectability was a way for black women to reclaim themselves, for it required taking ownership and control of one's body and repelling unwanted advances. Forged out of a sense of self-preservation, respectability intended to build a sense of self-esteem and self-determination, self-respect in a setting that granted African American women and men very little.⁵²

While the writers of *Living with Jim Crow* do go on to echo Mgadmi in pointing out how institutions played a part in this instillation of respectability upon Black women, their treatment of respectability varies from Mgadmi's – and Price's as well. It may be that, used as a sort of tool at one time, respectability was a utilitarian device but Mgadmi

⁵¹ Clement Alexander Price, "The Path to Big Mama's House: Historic Preservation, Memory, and African-American History," *Forum Journal*, Spring 2014, 30. For an earlier conversation on the ways in which family traditions and public history mesh see Alex Haley's "Black History, Oral History, and Genealogy," in *The Oral History Review*, Issue 1.1, 1973.

⁵² Anne Valk and Leslie Brown, *Living with Jim Crow: African American Women and Memories of the Segregated South* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 8-9, quoted in Price, "The Path to Big Mama's House," 31.

may be arguing that after a certain historic period, that tool became antiquated and even destructive.

Valk and Brown certainly challenge the perception of Black respectability as a kind of compromise but instead understand it as a form of agency, especially when it comes to Black women. Perhaps the proposed Krueger-Scott African-American Cultural Center was perceived by the narrators as just that kind of institution that would invoke (or encourage) respectability, whatever that word meant to the individual. But if respectability politics was a factor in this oral history project, the interviews certainly encourage a continuing complication of the discourse surrounding it.

Who Gets to Speak

“Important” and established citizens were interviewed alongside “ordinary” citizens for the Krueger-Scott collection. There was a preponderance of middle-class participants, those with longtime careers in areas such as education, politics and religion – a cohort more common to older, traditional oral history studies and not necessarily demographically reflective of the city of Newark itself.⁵³

However, the project reflects contemporary oral history simply by the fact that middle and working class African Americans were present at all. During the first generation of the oral history field, the academy was still not interested in what African Americans - or most poor Whites for that matter - had to say. As well, as Paul Thompson writes, early historians had “no interest in the point of view of the labourer, unless he was specifically troublesome; nor - being men - would they have wished to inquire into the

⁵³ In 1990 Newark’s poverty rate was at 26.3% and the lowest socio economic level was at 33%. This is city-wide. It is understood that, as always, the African-American statistics if isolated would reflect a higher number of those in the poverty/lower socio economic position. Mara S. Sidney, *The Case of Newark, USA* (Newark: Rutgers University) n.d., ucl.ac.uk.

changing life experiences of women.”⁵⁴ The first half of the 20th century can be described as a time in our country when powerful White men told their stories and most everyone else was expected to receive them as the people’s history.

Albert S. Broussard writes that due to the “explosion” of social history in the 1970s and 1980s, “Ordinary people, Americans from working-class, as well as the middle and upper classes, suddenly became of interest to historians, who asked a new set of questions about how these individuals organized their lives and functioned within their communities.” This “converged,” writes Broussard, with the emergence of Black Studies programs and a heightened interest in African Americans and their role in America’s history.⁵⁵ Both museums of African-American history and academic programs of African-American culture were responses as well as catalysts to Black activism in America.

In *When I Was Comin' Up* Audrey Faulkner explains how her subjects were chosen. Her assistants began by going door to door to households where it was established someone over the age of sixty resided. Other potential interviewees were chosen from among those who received social services and lived in the Central Ward. Others still were recommended by the staff of the housing project who became familiar with the seniors during their daily activities. Faulkner’s associates then narrowed the group down through various other criteria, looking for “individuals who seemed to typify

⁵⁴ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 4.

⁵⁵ Albert S. Broussard, “Race and Oral History,” *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 191. Applicable to the Krueger-Scott collection Broussard writes, “These studies uncovered new community leaders and organizations that historians had overlooked, and oral histories helped reveal how they adapted to oppressive conditions in urban life.” Chapter Four will bear this out as stories are told by and of ordinary citizens who went out of their way to improve their city.

the elderly of the area, those who visited the project's offices, who used the services that were extended to them, who joined the clubs and the shopping tours, and who answered the questionnaires on life styles, interaction, self concept, etc." Faulkner admits that this process did not necessarily form "a representative sample in the statistical sense" but that it was a "cross section of the population..."⁵⁶

Paul Thompson might challenge Faulkner's notion that those chosen for the interviews formed even a cross section. And why would Faulkner be so willing to forego a "representative sample" in her quest to uncover the medical and social needs of the elderly community? Thompson writes in *The Voice of the Past* that a self-selected group - which I would deem Faulkner's cohort - "will rarely be fully representative of a community." He suggests that some candidates might be left out if the historian is selecting a group in the manner that Faulkner did and that among those excluded would be "the less confident especially among women..."⁵⁷ Consider the possibility that some residents of the senior community, perhaps because of introverted personality or physical disability, chose not to partake in the array of classes and opportunities made available to them. Their stories would not have been heard.

Thompson suggests the juxtaposing of various people for the most effective historical reconstruction - the rich with poor, the educated with the uneducated and so on. Otherwise one is in danger of simply creating "a re-enactment of community myth." However we must also be mindful, he cautions, not to exceptionalize the working class or the African American or the woman any more than those groups whom we argue

⁵⁶ "Collecting the Life Histories," *When I Was Comin' Up*, 15.

⁵⁷ Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 22.

perpetuate the “myth of upper-class wisdom.”⁵⁸ It is incumbent upon historians to select as well as analyze oral histories in a manner that best serves the most people, whether they be scholars or the public at large.

Linda Shopes explains one reason we tend to “exceptionalize” a certain group, in this case the working class. In her essay on the 1981 Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project Shopes recommends that if there exists within the project a mission of politicization and a desire to encourage a social and economic analysis of a particular community then looking to community activist organizations for participants is advisable. But, she cautions, as many of those taking the interviews in such a project will be of a different (typically higher) socio-economic class than that of the community activists, there must be a mindfulness in not promoting a celebration theme, thus obfuscating potentially important issues introduced by the interviews. Oral historians, Shopes reminds us, cannot forego their methodology when working with people of the community simply because “historians unfamiliar with working-class life who, anxious not to patronize, tend to celebrate the humanity of working-class people at the expense of social and political analysis.”⁵⁹ The third generation of oral historians encourages deep self-reflection, both in the interview process and in the analysis afterwards.

The Krueger-Scott project did not appear to be especially concerned with their selection methods within Newark’s African-American citizenry; Wright and Price seemed to play no role in that process. In my interview with former executive director of the Krueger-Scott African-American Cultural Center, Catherine Lenix Hooker, she

⁵⁸ Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 22.

⁵⁹ Shopes, “Oral History and Community Involvement: The Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project,” 260.

explained to me briefly how the project gathered the participants and why the members of Bethany Baptist Church were so prominent. Lenix-Hooker had only recently moved to Newark, newly hired away from New York City's Schomburg Center to work on the Krueger-Scott project. Looking to join a church she visited Bethany Baptist to which her neighbors across the street belonged. Admiring the preaching of Rev. Scott, she joined Bethany. When it came time to begin the process of soliciting volunteers for the oral history project Lenix-Hooker told me she made a plea to her fellow congregants, "Hey I need help you guys." She explained that people there had "time on their hands," as retired teachers, librarians and so on. The church also thought the project quite worthy, so much so that Rev. James Scott became president of the oral history project board. When I pushed Lenix-Hooker slightly regarding the possibility of skewed "results" she countered that the interviews were "open to anyone" and that many people outside of Bethany came on board by "word of mouth."⁶⁰

Who is chosen to be interviewed within a given population - and how - necessarily becomes one of the methodological questions of any serious oral history study. In 1994 Elaine Latzman Moon put together *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes: An Oral History of Detroit's African American Community, 1918-1967*. Moon writes that her goal was to provide a "panorama" of people from diverse social and economic positions. Her selection process, sounding initially similar to the Krueger-Scott methods, started with the interviewing of thirty-five people who she termed "well respected" Black citizens. Moon then asked that group to recommend more people who might be appropriate for the study. She also solicited the core group for suggestions of possible

⁶⁰ Catherine Lenix-Hooker, interview with author, April 18, 2016.

discussion topics for the upcoming interviews. Alongside her assistants Moon then narrowed the list of possible topics down to seventy. Right here I think we witness an obstacle to the panoramic intent as Moon's procedure reflects more the "snowball" method of candidate choice, each person closely connected in some way to the one before.

Moon goes on to explain that after this initial process, "through various recommendations," she crafted a two hundred-person mailing list. Under the aegis of the Detroit Urban League the project published a media release advertising a night of public discussion groups. More Detroit residents were added to the list from that event. With three hundred prospective interviewees available, Moon interviewed two hundred of them – some individually, others during group sessions. Ultimately 110 individuals' oral histories were used in her book.⁶¹ Moon spent much time and energy involved with the selection process and yet there are ways in which the group still ended up as one of self-selection.

I am reminded of the oral history project I recently conducted at my church for its 120th anniversary. It was assumed, and later directed, that I would interview the "elders" of the church first and then if there was time I would get to the "others." Without going into detail here as to my particular methodology, I made it clear that I did not want to choose participants based upon any kind of particular status at the church. My time spent in thinking about and listening to oral history has taught me that the question for the church anniversary project was how to best tell the story of First Baptist Church of Madison. I imagined researchers years from now listening to the interviews and drawing

⁶¹ Elaine Latzman Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes: An Oral History of Detroit's African American Community, 1918-1967* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994) 16.

conclusions from what they heard. If the narrators were limited to those of a certain generation, and a certain length of membership, there might be less contrast in the stories and thus fewer pathways into analysis of the collection. With a cross section of generation and church status in the final interviews, I hope to have furnished a more complex view for those in the future who might be interested in our church and its members.

A Reliable Source

For a variety of reasons that probably include everything from the fetishizing of oral history subjects - as Thompson and Shopes, among others, warn against - to the presumption that one cannot look objectively at a “subjective” narrative, oral histories have carried a reputation as that which does not receive deep examination and so is unworthy of further analysis. Perks suggests that, in response to this marginalization of oral sources a new type of activist was born into the third generation, the historian who argued for the rights and values of oral sources as at least on par with textual sources.⁶² One could go a step further to say that the “new” historian argued for the value of the people themselves whose stories were recorded in their own words.

Mr. T.D. Pearson’s Krueger-Scott interview by Giles Wright was one of the three models utilized for training purposes in the early days of the oral history project. What might Wright have said to the trainees after this very short and difficult interview with the centenarian who wanted to stop talking soon after things got underway? This particular interview took place in 1995 when T.D. Pearson was ostensibly over one-

⁶² Perks, “The Roots of Oral History: Exploring Contrasting Attitudes to Elite, Corporate, and Business Oral History in Britain and the U.S.,” 37.

hundred-years-old, although he could not recall the year of his birth.⁶³ Pearson's voice was weak and the words slurred, but he seemed initially pleased to be speaking with Mr. Wright who gently coaxed answers from the elderly man. Wright often repeated the answers Pearson gave him in order to clarify, ensuring that Pearson heard what Wright believed had been said. This method echoes Linda Shopes' suggestion of repetition by interviewer in order to confirm information as well as to possibly progress the narrative. Wright was excessively patient with the elderly man, chuckling along with Mr. Pearson at moments. After approximately eighteen minutes Mr. Pearson began to sound extremely tired and appeared to ask Wright to end the interview. Wright graciously thanked the narrator for his time and obliged.

Is this a "valuable" interview? A reliable narrator? In the analysis of oral histories, many scholars write about the ways in which we can listen to tone, tempo, velocity and other sonic clues that go past the basic information provided. Alessandro Portelli suggests, for example, that the slowing down of speech might indicate that the subject at hand is a difficult one for the interviewee.⁶⁴ In Pearson's case the slowing down of speech appeared to be the result of age and fatigue, but of course there may have been other issues at play.

The "evidence" gained in the Pearson interview is scant and the fact is that at times Wright filled-in in such a way that it is possible he actually manipulated Pearson's narrative. For example, in speaking of young adulthood, Pearson explained that he worked on the railroads and that he gambled a lot. "You were a gandy dancer?!" asked

⁶³ Of course this means little as so many African Americans of his generation and before had never seen a birth certificate or had parents who could recall their specific date of birth.

⁶⁴ Portelli, "The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event," 65.

Wright excitedly. “Yeah,” replied Pearson non-committedly.⁶⁵ Many people might not be familiar with the term “gandy dancer,” a reference to someone who performs maintenance on trains and railroads. It may well have been a moment in the interview where Wright inadvertently created a story for his interviewee, although again we cannot be certain. In the end any interview is valuable as long as it is analyzed and interrogated carefully, and the interviewer’s influence is one of those analytical tools.

One question that was asked of most everybody in the Krueger-Scott interviews was, “What do you remember about the ‘Mayor of Springfield Avenue?’” The question elicited multiple responses. In a similar way to which Portelli heard so many varying tales of Luigi Trastulli’s death, the Krueger-Scott narrators provided inconsistent yet often definitive-sounding answers to question #73. The responses are illuminating even when no information is actually supplied.

Joe Clark, famous school principal of Paterson, New Jersey, responded to Pauline Blount, “Yeah, I don't know who it was, but I would hear - You'd have different ‘mayors’ of different areas, self-imposed by and large. You still have some of that today, but not at the level that it used to be. This was something that was in vogue. So I don't recall who the individual was right now.” Clark was someone who was going to expand on a subject no matter how little he actually knew. Clark’s social status, professional vocation, and gender position inform his response and suggest multiple entryways into analysis of his interview.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ T.D. Pearson, interview with Giles Wright, July 22, 1995.

⁶⁶ Joe L. Clark, interview with Pauline Blount, July 8, 1996.

Glen Marie Brickus, an interviewer who often added as much to the interview as her subjects, asked Senator Wynona Lipman the same question. Lipman replied, “I don't remember. I've heard it before though. I heard that title before. I just can't remember who it is.” Brickus tried to help:

Someone during one of these interviews when I asked that question - because I'm still curious about it because not many people seem to remember who the Mayor of Springfield Avenue was. And I think - I don't remember who the person was - mentioned it might have been this guy Jenkins that owned a record shop on Springfield Avenue. Near the intersection of South Tenth Street and Springfield Avenue. But that was the only person that I have come across.

Senator Lipman reiterated that she had indeed heard the reference but did not recall who it might have been. Although Brickus was “leading the witness,” Lipman stuck with her original response. Lipman was a politician and a woman and was not moved to go on record as saying something she was unsure of.⁶⁷

Mrs. Brickus asked Edward Kerr and his wife about the “Mayor” six months earlier. “Now this is something I'm totally unfamiliar with. What do you remember about the, quote, Mayor of Springfield Avenue, unquote? Does that ring any bells? The Mayor of Springfield Avenue?” Mr. Kerr had no intention of moving on until he came up with an answer. He urged his wife:

Kerr: Oh you know who they're talking about. What's that guy's name who ran that party for me?

Mrs. Kerr: Simpson?

Kerr: No. No. What's his name? He used to have a music store on Springfield Avenue. What's that guy's name? He ran a party for me. Oh shit. When I made lieutenant. Down the Terrace Room. And I can't - Both his names sound like a first or both sound like a last name.

[Mrs. Kerr in the background continues asking, “What's his name?”]

⁶⁷ Wynona Lipman, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 17, 1995.

Brickus: I don't have the slightest idea. That's why I ask the questions.

Kerr: No it wasn't Centron (sic), it was uh - Hold it now. [Kerr indicates he wants the tape turned off. Brickus does so].

Brickus: Let's go back and start this all over again. What do you remember about the Mayor of Springfield Avenue? Tell me who he was and what you remember about him.

Kerr: Jenkins Holman was the guy's name. And he owned a music store and he was a promoter. You know what a promoter is don't you?

Brickus: Uh-huh.

Kerr: Yeah. That he used to promote affairs. In fact, I think he used to promote Jenkins Holman more than he did the affairs. [Laughter]. Okay? He was a fixture, though, in the city.

Brickus: He was a fixture in the city?

Kerr: Yeah, everybody knew him.⁶⁸

We can only guess as to what Edward Kerr did in order to track down that information. If this had happened more recently we could assume he searched the name on his computer, but unfortunately there is no explanation as to the activity that took place while the tape was turned off. We do know that Kerr was pleased to provide the information, ending with a somewhat ironic affirmation that everyone knew who this person was. Kerr's need to know the "answer," and the dynamic between him and his wife, are at least as useful pieces of information as that which he provided about the "Mayor." Sometimes a question is merely a door to a different answer.

Richard Cooke told his interviewer that the Mayor of Springfield Avenue might have been Tiny Prince. Prince, a community activist, truly *was* a fixture in the city. Named as such for his short stature and his regal comportment, his given name was Carl

⁶⁸ Edward and Kat Kerr, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Sep. 24, year not specified.

Brinson. Prince was mentioned in many of the interviews - but not as “The Mayor.” In this case the question elicited additional information on a community personality, even as it was not directly related to the question at hand.⁶⁹

Councilwoman Mildred Crump was also asked about “The Mayor” by Mrs. Brickus. This time, although the interview took place *after* the one she had with Lipman where she explained she had one possible answer from a participant, Brickus expressed total ignorance as to who the person was.⁷⁰ Councilwoman Crump offered up a few names of people who might be able to help the Krueger-Scott project uncover the name of the person in question. Crump did recall that there was such a person and that he was a great help to the Black community. The councilwoman racked her brain for the name for a moment and then said, “It will come to me at four o'clock in the morning. I'll sit straight up in the bed, and I'm going to call you when it happens at four o'clock in the morning.” Mrs. Brickus absentmindedly replied, “okay” and went on to ask about other “local personalities.” Councilwoman Crump is still known today as a proactive and problem solving politician and this brief segment reflects her mode of operation both then and now.⁷¹

In just this one question exists opportunity for analysis with regard to aspects of gender, social status, memory, and oral history methodology. The listener is also

⁶⁹ Richard Cooke, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, (no date recorded).

⁷⁰ There is a chance she may have been instructed to do so. Mageline Little expressed to me that there were a number of issues with Mrs. Brickus' tendency to interject too much into the interview process and that she was spoken to about this.

⁷¹ Mildred Crump, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Nov. 12, 1996.

Giles Wright never asked this question about the “Mayor” in the three interviews he conducted. We do not know if he or Price knew the “answer.” Perhaps it was a reference made by one of the participants early on in the process that made its way into the questionnaire. We will never know, but all the same it manages to elicit helpful information.

provided with material for further historical re-construction. Oral sources are certainly viable, reliable, and useful historical materials; just as with a book or article or speech, it is what the researcher does with the source that gives the source its value.

A Stand-Alone Source

Allen and Montell's "Toward a Fuller Historical Record" begins, "Orally communicated history is a valid and valuable source of historical information, as oral tradition and formal history complement one another... Alone each one is incomplete..."⁷² Apparently in 1981 it was still necessary to take a somewhat defensive stance when it came to oral history as a relevant piece of historical evidence.

Today's oral history scholars might well challenge the statement that oral history without written history is "incomplete." For example, what of those histories which *have* no written text, whose only evidence of existence is contained within oral sources? To dismiss such histories simply because there are no accompanying written texts available would be to negate many a person's - and people's - life. The authors do contend later in their book that when the historical subject is "a group of people about which very little information exists in written records, the past must be reconstructed almost entirely from oral sources," but clearly they see this as a compromise.⁷³

Allen and Montell, among many oral historians, insist on focusing upon the binary of oral and written sources explaining that interviews, "add the oral perspective to historical inquiry." Yet at the same time they acknowledge the fact that "traditions of a people sometimes bear little resemblance to formal history." Reflecting the oral history

⁷² Allen & Montell, "Toward a Fuller Record," *From Memory to History*, 3.

⁷³ Allen & Montell, "Toward a Fuller Record," *From Memory to History*, 8.

field's second generation outlook these authors concern themselves with the "validity" of oral evidence and the necessity of "testing oral information."⁷⁴ This contradiction was a part of the fashion of the times, the characterization of oral sources as insufficient on their own, right alongside the acknowledgement that sometimes that is all that exists.

Hayden White argued in 1986 that "...history is not a body of events lying before us in the manner of a landscape to be surveyed from a fixed standpoint and reported on in the way a geographer, naturalist or painter might do, such that one could then compare different versions thereof and determine which is the most veracious, objective, informative, useful and so forth." For "pan-textualists," according to White, "history appears *either* as a text subject to many different readings...*or* as an absent presence the nature of which is perceivable only by ways of prior textualizations (documents or historical accounts)..."⁷⁵

White makes this claim in argument with those he calls "counter-narrativists," those who essentially do not believe in "historical pluralism," and who perhaps some might call historical purists. While scholars such as Allen and Montell would not exactly be considered "counter-narrativists," White's caution against valuing one text or story over another - which is what one does if one says something cannot stand alone - is significant. It is fair to say that most contemporary oral history scholars, Wright and Price included, would likely call themselves pluralists, accepting as they do that the same story can be expressed in a valuable multitude of forms. White explains later on in the article that as the oral history field progressed from the 80s through to the 1990s that the

⁷⁴ Ibid, 4, 10.

⁷⁵ White, "Historical Pluralism," 485.

pluralistic lens gained acceptance as oral historians rallied against the exceptionalist treatment of written historical texts.

Scholars such as Alessandro Portelli also argue against the valuing of one source over another. Rather, it is in the combining of sources that most insight can be gained. In his book *The Order Has Been Carried Out*, Portelli discusses his methodology in piecing together the story of the 1944 Fosse Ardeatine massacre carried out by the Nazis in Italy. Portelli explains that he used "...books, essays, news items, and court records...to establish a problematic but plausible framework of events, against which the creative work of memory and narrative can be measured and tested."⁷⁶ Memory was not to be challenged but "measured and tested," alongside complementary sources. In his 1991 *The Death of Luigi Trastulli* Portelli does point out that "Historical work using oral sources is unfinished because of the nature of the sources..." but adds that "historical work excluding oral sources (where available) is incomplete by definition."⁷⁷ In order to understand the lives that lived history, oral sources must be included in the interrogative package.

Krueger-Scott's project directors appeared to have no qualms when it came to the value of the historical oral source. Both Wright and Price dedicated much of their work to oral histories as evidenced in the Krueger-Scott undertaking as well as in the production of and attention to various other oral history projects.⁷⁸ In fact, I have come upon nothing

⁷⁶ Alessandro Portelli, *The Order has been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (New York; Houndmills, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 16.

⁷⁷ Portelli, "The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event," 71.

⁷⁸ Two examples are Wright's *New Jersey Multi-Ethnic Oral history Project* and Price's 3 volume *Slave Culture: A Documentary Collection of the Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project*.

that suggests there were any doubts on the part of the Krueger-Scott Mansion project at large, City Hall, or the community as to the need for these interviews. A third generation oral history tenet states that voices in danger of obscurity must be recorded, no matter the social, political or historical standing of that voice. The Krueger-Scott project ascribed fully to this principle and in so doing ultimately became a contemporary social history enterprise.

Conclusion

The Krueger-Scott Oral History Project provides us with a large collection of interviews, based upon a carefully crafted set of questions and particular procedures. These procedures reflect both traditional and more current scholarly thinking, much like the project directors themselves. What has yet to be put forth until now is any kind of methodological, historical or political analysis to accompany and expand upon these valuable narratives. Sadly for all, Newark is bereft of two excellent and thoughtful historians and no one can know exactly what Giles Wright and Clem Price were envisioning for this collection. We can only be grateful that the voices of these “ordinary” African-American citizens of Newark, New Jersey have been recorded for posterity through thoughtful consideration of methods, theories, and most importantly people.

CHAPTER THREE

Sundays

We must face the sad fact that at eleven o'clock on Sunday morning when we stand to sing 'In Christ there is no East or West,' we stand in the most segregated hour of America."

- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Introduction

Before Joe Clark was famous for "shaping up" Paterson, New Jersey's troubled East Side High School; and before the movie *Lean on Me* was made about his tenure there as principal, Joe Clark was attending prayer meetings every week with his grandmother at Newark's Greater Abyssinian Baptist Church on West Kinney Street.¹ The Rev. Raphus Phillips Means was pastor. Clark's mother was president of the usher board and Clark's father was a deacon.

We went to church in the morning - Sunday school - and didn't get back until seven, eight o'clock at night... I'll never forget the number, 224-6 West Kinney Street. That was the hub of activity... my grandmother... would have me in prayer meeting every Wednesday... That was the avenue that kept me from going to jail... I was indoctrinated with the ideology that God was in the sky looking down on me and I dare not do anything that would violate the principles of Christendom.²

Clark's interview illustrates just one of the many ways in which oral histories can prove revealing. Reams of interviews and articles have been published regarding Mr. Clark since his famous stint at Paterson's East Side High from 1982 to 1991. But in his own words we hear of his "indoctrination" and in doing so can better understand the

¹ See Joe Clark, *Laying Down the Law: Joe Clark's Strategy for Saving Our Schools*. (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1989).

² Joe L. Clark, interview with Pauline Blount, July 8, 1996. Note that all transcriptions in this dissertation are my work. Although a handful of transcriptions were completed prior to the Krueger-Scott project's cancellation, they tend to contain numerous errors.

principles so clearly integral to his pedagogical and administrative approaches. Church played a powerful role in Clark's life.

Such is the case for so many of the Krueger-Scott interviewees; church molded them and their lives and their families and their rituals. And church was even bigger than Sundays – or Wednesdays. Church delineated routines and families and was a bond between many of the interviewers and narrators in this particular oral history collection. Yet church could also be a site of conflict, supporting once again the argument against viewing “the Black community” as a monolith.

The Black church has been a central part of Black American history since before the country claimed its independence. For the generation interviewed in the Krueger-Scott collection, the church was still the epicenter of their community - for the most part. Some rejected church, turned off in part by the regularity with which they had to attend as children. Sometimes a particular occurrence that they disagreed with had pushed them away from the church – or from religion more generally. There were those unable to attend church simply because they had to work on Sundays – or did not have the clothing in order to dress in a way that they deemed appropriate. In these narratives we are allowed to witness African-American relationships with the church, and while this collection is not a perfect sampling of church behavior and attitudes we are given enough difference in story that we might construct - in concert with the scholarship - some general conclusions surrounding African Americans and what they did with their Sundays.

Scholars of African-American history and culture know to use the church as one lens with which to view Black life. As Davarian Baldwin writes, “It is precisely in

these...traditional intellectual spheres of church...where class struggles were waged, theoretical insights were produced historically, and many of the thoughts of the “people” are now revealed to the historian.³ Yet the Krueger-Scott oral histories remind us that church “spheres” can differ drastically at times, that they are often spaces wherein class conflict is avoided due to the economic heterogeneity of a congregation. The church spheres are also where the “people” becomes a complicated and even contradictory reference point. Nevertheless, church is an integral component of Black Studies.

Karl Ellis Johnson writes about “Black Church Activism in Postwar Philadelphia,” arguing that activism and the church cannot be regarded separately:

In studying black religious institutions, it is a mistake to separate civil rights activities from the church’s community-service role. Community service was often closely linked to social protest, because it displayed the ability of black institutions to provide some of the human and social services to their people that were often denied or unequally allocated by mainstream private, state, and local institutions.⁴

This argument helps us as we look at the ways in which so many African Americans in the Krueger-Scott collection - such as Louise Scott - took it upon themselves to close that gap in services. As well, this helps explain the responses from so many narrators in chapter four that will claim no political activity yet list numerous active roles in their prospective communities. Historian Timothy Neary writes, “It shouldn’t just be religious history scholars but urban, labor, sports, cultural, and political historians who ‘take religion seriously’ as a category of analysis. We’ve seen tremendous growth in this area

³ Davarian L Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, & Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007) 19.

⁴ Karl Ellis Johnson, “‘Trouble Won’t Last’: Black Church Activism in Postwar Philadelphia,” *African American Urban History Since World War II* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 2009) 246.

over the last generation, and I'm cautiously optimistic about the future.”⁵ The conclusion here is that we cannot understand African-American life without some accompanying understanding of the African-American church. In the ensuing chapter I hope to offer some of both.

Origins of the Black Church

From the beginning of African-American history, the church became a locus of Black life in large part out of necessity. Most are familiar with its origins of the Slave Era. But there came a time when one could actually find African Americans at churches that featured predominantly White congregations. This trend would not last long, however. In *The Philadelphia Negro* W.E.B. Du Bois points to the fact that the early 1900s Black church came out of the barring of said African Americans from those White churches. The Great Migration “contributed” to segregation wherein initial “social privileges” of some Blacks, such as going to a White church, “were practically withdrawn after the influx of Negro migrants...”⁶ We will hear several stories of religious segregation throughout this chapter.

The importance of the Black church cannot be overstated and yet its role, its history, is sometimes oversimplified. There are, after all, those African Americans who view the traditional Black Baptist and AME (African Methodist Episcopal) churches as places of social oppression, antiquated tradition, and racial powerlessness. Perceived as yet one more European custom foisted upon Black people, church becomes a symbol of

⁵ Tim Neary, interview with Karen Johnson, “Crossing Parish Boundaries: An Interview with Tim Neary,” *Religion in American History*, accessed April 22, 2017, <http://usreligion.blogspot.com/2017/04/crossing-parish-boundaries-interview.html>.

⁶ Du Bois, W. E. B., *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, (1899), (Philadelphia: University Of Pennsylvania Press, 1996)

“proper” behavior, a place where Mahalia Jackson’s singing was once considered too suggestive for the “the big colored churches.” Jackson’s music reflected that “Sanctified” church service - replete with stomping feet and swaying bodies - that was exactly the image some African Americans were trying to separate from.⁷ And while some churches have been sites of activism throughout history, still other ministries have been accused of avoiding the pressing issues of a particular time.

As L.H Whelchel writes in his introduction to *The History and Heritage of African American Churches*, the Black church is more than an edifice or a religion or set of beliefs, it “is an evolving, dynamic collective historical presence of a people and their patterns of expressing their beliefs and spirituality.” The enslaved Africans “took the hybrid Christianity offered them by their oppressors and made it relevant and meaningful to their needs.”⁸ The Black church is a touchstone of Black history and culture and thus an essential lens in African-American studies. Observing its changes, and the multiple attitudes towards it, provides one way into understanding African-American history and society.

For African Americans church has historically been a site of freedom, if sometimes only temporary. As early as the Slave Era, Blacks garnered a semblance of power within the church, even as the color of their skin brought them inhumane treatment outside the church walls. The development of the church as a site of agency and activism continued and progressed within the Black community as the decades evolved. The

⁷ Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 183.

⁸ L. H. Whelchel, *The History & Heritage of African-American Churches: A Way Out of no Way* (St. Paul, Minn.: Paragon House, 2011) xix.

Northern urban church is its own animal, forged in large part by the political stance taken by Richard Allen and his Black Methodist followers in Philadelphia. Protesting the segregation of Black members in the White Methodist church, Allen et al created the African Methodist Episcopal church in 1794.⁹

By 1800 the establishment of churches and schools was a priority for Black communities around the country. At times the church and the school were one; in Newark in 1826, the AME Zion Church initiated basic classes in reading, arithmetic, and writing.¹⁰ Throughout the 19th century, and on into the 20th, the church continued to be a - if not *the* - powerful and influential Black institution. Of course there was not a lot of competition for sites of Black leadership and guidance at the time. The church was the cultivator of Black leaders on both sides of the pulpit; ministers became representatives of their communities and church members gained empowerment, banding together to organize against social injustice.

As an example, in 2006 Newark's Bethany Baptist Church opened the University Heights Charter School, continuing the legacy of building educational extensions within Black communities. A project long in the making, the concept of the Charter School was mentioned by a number of the Bethany members in their interviews. Rev. James Scott provided reasoning behind the proposed school in his own interview which took place ten years before its completion:

We want to build a school for several reasons. First of all, we believe that Black folk must be in charge of their own education. Secondly, historically the Southern churches created academies and institutes when boards of education in states in the South would not provide quality secondary education. Thirdly, we believe that

⁹ Ibid, 106-110.

¹⁰ Giles R. Wright, *Afro-Americans in New Jersey: A Short History* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1988) 30.

many public schools are cheapening the educational experience for Black youngsters because the administrators or the planners are convinced that Black young people cannot or will not or don't need to learn. And finally, we want to create the kind of school in which foreign language and technology, mathematics, the humanities - that's music and so forth - are built into the curriculum.¹¹

By World War I, Northern cities began changing shape as ever more African Americans migrated from the South for better jobs, housing, and some semblance of respite from the virulent racism back home. These migrants brought with them a different kind of worship, formed in part by the Pentecostal movement in the South, “more emotional and intense” than the Northern churches. This approach would end up informing many of the established church services in Newark while also becoming a bone of contention in yet other Black churches, bifurcating African Americans by class as well as comportment.¹²

By World War II, according to historian Karl Ellis Johnson, there comes a real turning point in the relationship between the African-American urban resident and the church. In his chapter on Philadelphia’s Black churches post-WWII, Johnson points out that social protest and community outreach took center stage in many Black churches and helped lead African Americans into the Civil Rights Movement. In this Johnson challenges the reader to reconsider the term *activism*, something that I will also be encouraging in chapter four. Johnson writes, “This community service was a vital contribution to the struggle against racism in the postwar era...community service became indistinguishable from civil rights activism.”¹³

¹¹ Dr. James A. James Scott, interview with Glen Marie Brickus (no date recorded).

¹² Wright, *Afro-Americans in New Jersey*, 59.

¹³ Karl Ellis Johnson, “‘Trouble Won’t Last’: Black Church Activism in Postwar Philadelphia,” *African American Urban History Since World War II* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 2009) 246.

In the Krueger-Scott oral histories, church community outreach activities are often heralded as activism by those who witnessed them, but not necessarily by the “activists” themselves. Viewing food pantries and clothing drives as forms of activism adds even greater agency to the facilitators, often the women of the church. The stories of Krueger-Scott help counter-narrate the image of churchgoers as passive sheep following a shepherd but instead portray many as active participants and change makers in their community.

While it is heartening to hear of the support systems created by the church it is also important to understand, as Johnson points out, that this was of necessity. We know that throughout history Black Americans have not had access to the same resources, whether by law or by practice, as have Whites. But church services were free and ministers some of the only socially and economically elevated Blacks in the given community. The Black church, at least in its early years, was the level playing field not otherwise available to the average African American.

Elitism became a problem in the church as higher social status was attained by a few select African Americans as some began an effort to distinguish themselves from the “masses.” Whelchel points out that this issue contributed to the Black church’s reputation as an institution that avoids calls of social justice during times of political upheaval. As noted in chapter two, Mahassen Mgadmi argues that elitism or “respectability discourse” quashed much potential activism in the Black community.¹⁴

¹⁴ Mahassen Mgadmi, "Black Women's Identity: Stereotypes, Respectability and Passionlessness (1890-1930) *Revue LISA / LISA e-Journal, Iss Vol. VII – n°1, Pp 40-55 (2009) (2009)*.

But according to Welchel, this is actually an unfair characterization and too typically one put forth by scholars of African-American history. The church has been a historical center of political and social battles and its ministers far from peripheral, claims Welchel. He uses as one example the organizing of Rev. Joseph A. DeLaine in South Carolina who “initiated the protests that culminated in the *Brown* decision...” Welchel laments the fact that secular, celebrated actors received the credit for that which would never have come to fruition if not for “local leaders and especially ministers who made the efforts of [the NAACP] substantive.”¹⁵ While Welchel does not theorize on the reasons for this omission, his claims are certainly supported by the longtime historiographic trend of holding up a select few as icons while overlooking the foot soldiers in any given movement.

Listening to the Krueger-Scott oral histories it is clear that church is integral to the life experiences of the narrators. Even those who did not attend church usually had stories relating to it. Those who did attend did so in a myriad of ways. Very few responded to questions about church as if church did not matter one way or another and that is why we will look into these narratives through the lens of the church and all that it entails.

The Black Church as Community

As one might imagine, at certain historical points throughout the Great Migration the presence of a Black church was not always welcomed by other racial or ethnic urban communities. Rev. Robert Woods of Morningstar Baptist Church tells a story of an alleged 1948 bombing of Bethsaida Baptist Church on Bloomfield Avenue in Newark. In answering the interviewer’s question regarding “overall relations with Whites” Woods

¹⁵ Welchel, *The History & Heritage of African-American Churches*, 177.

notes that there were plenty of restaurants, neighborhoods and shops in which Blacks were “not welcome” when he arrived in Newark. Addressing his interviewer, Mrs. Brickus, directly he says, “You remember they built [Bethsaida] there, they didn’t want it there, they blew it up. They blew the church up.”¹⁶

Ministers quite often became a part of the political world within which their churches existed, whether proactively or in response to particular social and physical threats. Their Sundays were not spent solely in the sanctuaries. Rev. Woods recalls regular informational meetings on Sundays, sometimes held at the community hall at 3 Belmont Avenue.¹⁷ These meetings included notable leaders such as City Council President Ralph Grant, activist-artist Amiri Baraka (then Leroi Jones), Mayor Ken Gibson, and Junius Williams, lawyer and activist. They met, according to Woods, in order to “hash out the problems that existed in Newark” and “formulate plans and ideas that would give some hope to African Americans.”¹⁸ We know from the historiography of the long Civil Rights Movement that churches were so often the only place where large groups of African Americans were able to congregate. Many a protest, boycott and strike have been planned in the pews of a Black church.

According to the majority of the Krueger-Scott narrators, the church really was the place to go for help in the Black community. Time and again this response was heard

¹⁶ Robert Woods, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb 17, 1997. I continue to seek evidence or corroborating stories of this event.

¹⁷ You will notice that I include addresses whenever possible. I have come to do this as habitually as the narrators themselves who provided addresses for most every building in which they worked, lived, played and prayed. Alessandro Portelli, in *They Say in Harlan County*, offers some possible explanations. He explains that people “clinched discovery and possession...with the act of naming.” (16). I suggest that addresses act as a kind of naming.

¹⁸ Robert Woods, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb 17, 1997.

in answer to question #67, “When you or others in your neighborhood got in ‘trouble’ or needed help to solve a problem, to whom did you turn?” Robert Woods said he turned to the church when he was looking for a job. Growing frustrated and impatient with the unemployment office, he received a tip from a Rev. Jones whose son had started working at Haydu Industries, a manufacturer of vacuum tubes in Plainfield. Rev. Woods expands on the importance of the Black church to the Black community:

Most of our people find the church when they havin’ a real social, or even political, or criminal problem...They depend a lot upon the Black minister - I mean on the Afro-American minister - than they do on anyone else. ‘Cause they think we have the solution for whatever problem exists in the community. At least they know that we will try to find out who they can contact...The court system will write letters to the Black clergy about the young men and young women that’s incarcerated in their system. How much we know about them, whether they’re a member of our church, do we know their parents... The Black church is our first line of defense.¹⁹

Lest we consider the Reverend’s perspective biased due to his vocation we also have many non-clergy affirming his claim. Former Newark mayor Sharpe James said in answer to the same question that people “start with the family, with them, and then if the family could not solve those issues, you would turn to the church. The church has been always been a pillar of strength. Always there for guidance and leadership. So it was internally with the family, and if not the family, the church.”²⁰

Family and church were where people turned when James was growing up, not to public servants or government at large. Sharpe James points out what he sees as a modern trend towards disproportionate reliance on welfare and Section 8 housing vouchers, arguing that it has fractured the Black community. We hear in other interviews this same

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Sharpe James, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 3 & 17, 1996.

sentiment, emphasizing the church's ability to take care of all things, and the discouragement of those looking "outside" for aid. Councilwoman Mildred Crump confirmed that to the church was where people turned in times of need:

Ninety percent of the time it was to the ministers in the area. There were some community leaders... But for the most part it was to the church that we were able to turn for assistance... Because they were the ones who were able to produce the results - to make, and to find and to create the action of adjudication of whatever the circumstances were... you could pretty much know that your pastor would be willing to go to the judge and say something on your behalf, in your behalf, that might persuade the judge to give you another chance. But I think that was pretty much true of us traditionally. It was to the church that we went to for support in times of trouble and difficulties.²¹

This was most pronounced when municipal government was made up of a completely White administration. African Americans began to seek help from local politicians and programs once people of color became a part of them. Some Krueger-Scott narrators quickly mentioned the names of public servants, such as the first Black council member Irvine Turner, in answer to the question of whom they looked to for help. Still, this response usually came right after naming the church as the first or second provider.

Harvey Slaten, a Deacon at Bethany Baptist, said that if somebody in the community needed help they went to their church. He explained that someone in the church would often know a judge - usually through their employment by a White family. Judges, he added, always showed compassion in court for their domestic employees. It appears that the words, *trouble*, *help*, and *problem* were a kind of understood code for legal issues among the Krueger-Scott community. Willie Belle Hooper's father had to leave Alabama and change his name because of some "trouble he got into."²² Calvary

²¹ Mildred Crump, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Jan. 12, 1996.

²² Willie Belle Hooper, interview with Catherine Lenix-Hooker, April 12, 1996.

Baptist Church member Zaundria Mapson May said, “Most of the times when there were problems, the people that I know called on the minister who was able to counsel or to refer to various sources for a resolution of the problem.”²³ As the criminalization of the Black body has been such an entrenched part of American history it would only make sense that so often Newark’s Black residents had those problems of a legal nature.

Carolyn Wallace, a member of Redeeming Love Christian Center, said that church was a way to elevate African Americans out of their past history, referring to a kind of uplift theory. The “major accomplishments of the church,” said Wallace, was that it “developed a people forgotten and that came out of what we now know as slavery. God rose up and [brought] people out of those ashes that really knew how to serve Him, okay, in the way Black people do. I mean, in joyful spirit. And I think we kinda gotten away from that...”²⁴ Church was also where Black people got their news, she added.

Bethany Baptist’s first lady, Dr. Beverly Scott, wanted to emphasize the economically helpful role of her husband’s church in supporting Newark’s economy, in that they chose Black-owned businesses when at all possible. “The Church has certainly reached out to use the vendors - Newark vendors - for the needs of the Church. Such as a cleaning service, it was African-American, housed and located in Newark that this church uses.”²⁵ At a time when White society was of little help the Black church provided support, whether practical or emotional, to their congregants - and at times to the community at large.

²³ Zaundria Mapson May, interview with Bill May, Aug. 11, 1996.

²⁴ Carolyn Wallace, interview with Glen Marie Brickus (no date recorded).

²⁵ Beverly Scott, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, (no date recorded).

Katheryn Bethea recalled the strong influence that the church women had on her as a young girl, remembering them as role models and contributors to the community. “I was only twenty-three when those people – they went and rented the Court Street ‘Y’ and sold tickets and gave me the money so I could pay for [swim] lessons [for the Girl Scout badge]. These were the women in my church. And so we had that kinda thing, you understand, where you had this kind of strength within your own community.” If asked, she may well have credited them with her later determination when, as a sixty-year-old, she completed the college degree that she had begun in the 1950s, going on to graduate with a master’s and then ultimately becoming a professor of English literature.²⁶

A member of Bethany Baptist since the 1940s, Mrs. Bethea said she always ended up there even when her family’s membership had them at Zion Hill Baptist Church at 152 Osborne Terrace. Bethany offered youth services, she said – whether children were members there or not. It had a strong community consciousness and there was always something to do there. Mrs. Bethea related a story of a young White coworker who once asked if during the Depression Bethea had gone to soup kitchens with the proverbial pot in order to receive free food. Bethea said somewhat indignantly, “I don’t know any Black people who was goin’ down [to get soup].”²⁷ According to Bethea and others, churches at one time did not even need to set up structured feeding programs because people just took care of each other. There were private exchanges for those in need, perhaps so that public displays of lack could be avoided. Bethea asserts the idea, in concordance with

²⁶ Katheryn Bethea, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 7, 1997.

²⁷ Ibid. Of course we do know that some African Americans “stood in line.” Take for example the iconic 1937 photo, “The Louisville Flood,” shot by Margaret Bourke-White that showed African Americans lined up at a relief station in front of a billboard of a smiling White family in their car.

Sharpe James, that the Black community always helped each other. “Churches played a large part - there were no organized community groups... You did it within your church... In the Depression days...if you had two potatoes and somebody had one you gonna give them part, you understand?”²⁸ Even today, members of Black churches will approach their pastors to make requests for rent money or some help paying a light bill. It is common for churches to supply the pastor with a “benevolence fund” wherein he or she can provide for a member at the pastor’s discretion.

Newark had an especially strong social and religious Black community, according to Isaac Thomas, a member of St. James AME. That is where one turned for help - to family, to church, and to extended family. Thomas insisted that race relations were quite strained in Newark, and with the police specifically:

They had total disregard - or tolerance for Blacks doing certain things. I recall...when I first came here how one of the policemen interrupted a church service at Abyssinian Baptist Church and went into the church during the service and arrested the young man – not waiting until the service was over for him to come out but went in and took the person out. Well that rippled through the community that this happened.”²⁹

Those were the kinds of things, Thomas said heavily, that led up to the 1967 uprisings.

Veronice Horne explained that in the post- rebellion era, churches began reaching out to their communities more, regardless of faith. “...the churches, the priests - didn’t matter the denomination, it was almost like it was fellow man helping fellow man... There were times when I didn’t have things and the church would open their doors. They would obtain things from businesses and they would distribute it to the community.”

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Isaac Thomas, interview with Pauline Blount, July 2, 1997.

Horne said that she believed things were “coming up” again in terms of community solidarity, pointing out various ministries that her church, Bethany Baptist, was involved in at the time of the interview.³⁰

Elma Bateman, a retired secretary at AT&T and member of Queen of Angels, contrasted some of her peers’ tales when it came to seeking aid only within the Black community. Bateman explained that she held no animosity towards Whites or Jews, in part because of the “good Jewish doctors” that she knew. “When I left the government and went to look for a job – when I had three kids and couldn’t keep the schedule up here, uh, I was interviewed by several [Jewish] doctors... And the first Jewish doctor I worked for, he knew I had the background... He said, ‘I don’t have to see anybody else, you got the job.’” Bateman worked for another Jewish doctor after that and these doctors treated her well, even securing a lawyer for her son at one point. “Not only did I work for them but they were always advising me. Some of the things I couldn’t take advantage of because I didn’t have any money... When my son got in trouble at one time, one of the doctors said to me, ‘Wait, wait, let me call my lawyer.’ You know, never had to put a penny out or anything, you know. They were always there for me.”³¹ Bateman was an example of an African American willing to turn to those outside of her own people for help.

Willa Coleman, member of Emmanuel Missionary Baptist Church and a retired healthcare worker, said that indeed the Black community was good at taking care of itself – as long as it involved people that they already knew. Blacks would not help strangers,

³⁰ Veronice Horne, interview with Katherine Bethea, June 3, 1997. Horne is one of the few participants who acknowledges any personal reliance on institutional support, whether faith or government-based.

³¹ Elma Bateman, interview with Pauline Blount, April 29, 1999.

no matter their race, according to Coleman. At one point she and her husband both took ill at the same time; they needed help in taking care of their children and they looked to the city government for some assistance. Coleman reports that the city was “ineffective,” but that her neighbors were indeed helpful.³²

Dr. Scott, pastor of Bethany, wrote in 1995 that “Segregation forced blacks to live in the ghetto, and the church served as a *general* purpose institution, providing identity and status as well as social control and advocacy for greater opportunity.”³³ As recently as 2002, according to a Gallup Poll, that was still essentially the case. Church attendance by African Americans remained high, with approximately 79% polled answering that they belonged to a church. (In a 2007 poll, however, it had only 53% of African Americans claiming membership to a church).³⁴ What seems to have changed most of all is the needs of the Black faith community; according to the 2002 poll, less time is now spent on “social justice” and more on “self-empowerment and self-help.”³⁵

Our society continues to move towards a more individualistic center, cordoning ourselves off from family and community at large. While some African-American ministers may be changing their directional approaches in the pulpit - and in the street - there is still today a foundational community of African Americans who desire to be associated with a church.

Bethany Baptist Church

³² Willa Coleman, interview with Kitty Taylor, May 16, 1996.

³³ James A. Scott, “Bethany Baptist Church: Growth through Planning and Social Action” in *Church and Synagogue Affiliation: Theory, Research, and Practice*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995) p. 135.

³⁴ “A Religious Portrait of African Americans,” *Pew Research Center*, Jan. 30, 2009, pewforum.org.

³⁵ Steve Crabtree, “Black Churches: Has Their Role Changed?” *Gallup*, May 14, 2002, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/5998/black-churches-has-their-role-changed.aspx>

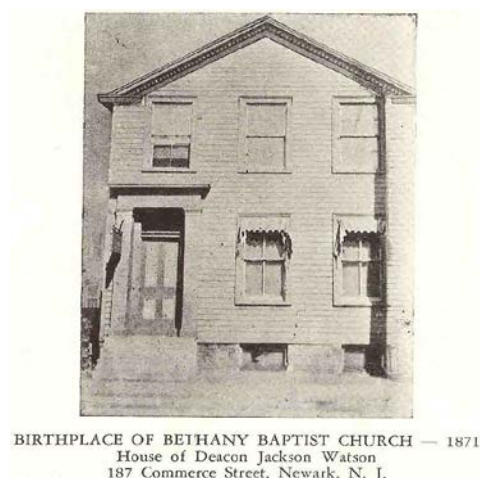


Figure 9. Bethany Baptist Church, 1871, bethany-newark.org/history.

Religion is and was a location of identity and affirmation in the Black community.

One can often hear fierce pride in the Krueger-Scott interviewees when discussing their various houses of worship; the words *pride* and *proud* in fact are quite often utilized in this discussion. Bethany Baptist Church looms large on the horizon of Newark's great houses of worship. Rev. James Scott said in his interview, some thirty years after accepting his call to Bethany:

This belief that Black people are superior or singular. We've already proved it. And so now we're able to welcome all people into our institution. Here in our church, it would have been very difficult for us to have welcomed West Indians, Africans, people from Poland, people from this and that place - and we have now about twenty-three different nations represented in our congregation. But that would have been impossible until we had a sense of solidarity and an understanding amongst ourselves who we are and why we have a right to be proud.³⁶

Bethany is the church of the majority of participants of the Krueger-Scott Oral History Project. Approximately 28% of those interviewees who claimed a church affiliation belonged to Bethany. St. James AME came in second at approximately 16%. The preponderance of Bethany members, and the church's influence on and participation

³⁶ Dr. James A. James Scott, interview with Glen Marie Brickus (no date recorded).

in the Krueger-Scott Oral History Project, is regarded methodologically in chapter two. Suffice it to say that the presence of Bethany does inform the production of the Krueger-Scott oral history collection. From class standing, to community involvement, to the fact that it was the church of the oral history project's executive director, the imprint of Bethany Baptist is quite visible. But in understanding Bethany we have a lens with which to view the narrators' thinking about such issues as status, gender and religion. Bethany's strong presence is also a reminder that no set of oral histories can truly be a "perfect" sampling of a *community*, the term itself misleading in its implication of homogeneity and accord. Therefore it is not a problem that more interviewees hail from Bethany, rather it is simply a particular foundation upon which to build the questions.

In 1922 Bethany member Richard Cooke's paternal grandmother devoted herself to writing a book entitled *Faded Foliage and Fragrant Flowers from the Heart of Bethany*. In his Krueger-Scott interview Mr. Cooke explains that the publication is a history of the first fifty years of the church, from 1870 when a small group of Baptists met in Deacon Jackson Watson's home at 187 Commerce Street; to their "adoption" by Peddie Memorial Church on Broad Street; to their official sanctioning as a church in 1871; through the 1905 purchase of their first building; and up until the 50th anniversary celebration in 1921 which included a mortgage burning ceremony.³⁷ This points to yet another example of how oral histories can prove invaluable, this time highlighting a possibly heretofore unknown primary source, itself based upon oral histories.

The book itself is a difficult read as it is written in the language of the time, embellished and full of emotional descriptions; Mrs. O'Kelly-Cooke was a poet and so

³⁷ "History," *Bethany Baptist Church*, accessed Feb. 14, 2016, <http://www.bethany-newark.org/history>.

her lines are more elaborate than a traditional historian's might be. That said, *Faded Foliage* offers a valuable collection of photographs and stories that tell of the church's history and Newark's history more generally, from a perspective still all too often rare. *Faded Foliage* also provides more detail about those who first came together at the boarding house on Commerce Street as well as the revered pastors who had come and gone in those early years of Bethany. The author interviewed a Mrs. Carter who explained that in New Jersey in 1870 there were no Black churches so that many African Americans were indeed attending White churches, but of course they were barred from participating and serving. That, Mrs. Carter says, was the impetus for the creation of Bethany— and for so many other Black churches in the North during that time.³⁸

Methodologically, Mrs. O'Kelly-Cooke first interviewed her blind grandmother, Mrs. Nancy Thomas, and recorded more the affective experience of the interview rather than particular stories told by the grandmother herself. "Softly I entered the room and found her sitting on the side of her bed. The massive frame of what had once been a strong and portly woman. 'How are you Grandmother,' and I reverently held within my own the hand which she extended."³⁹

The majority of the book is made up of small biographies of various members. Descriptions include a man from a "prominent caste," a woman with a "spirit of christian piety," and a department store doorman who had "the respect of both races."⁴⁰ We can

³⁸ O'Kelly-Cooke, *Faded Foliage and Fragrant Flowers from the Heart of Bethany*, 8.

³⁹ Amorel E. O'Kelly-Cooke, *Faded Foliage and Fragrant Flowers from the Heart of Bethany* (Newark: Joseph Schreiner, 1922) 17, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/101643354>. I intend to research more at some point the "O'Kelley" part of Mrs. Cooke's name.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 22-25.

see here the foundation of a particular way of thinking and behaving established early on in Bethany's history. Bethany Baptist Church today carries a reputation of a slightly upscale - and even uptight - house of worship. Ed Crawford says in his Krueger-Scott interview that growing up in Bethany exposed him to very little gospel music, for example.

Well, growing up in Bethany did not afford me a true picture on gospel music, I guess until I got grown. Because Bethany was a very staid, reserved type of a church. Our service was very - one thing that we retained between Rev. Hayes and Rev. Scott that the service is a fairly reserved, conservative, staid service. You're not apt to see folks 'get the spirit' too often, too frequently in Bethany. It's gotten better over the years...⁴¹

These Bethany stories may help explain the slightly bourgeois reputation the church still carries for some today, a reputation that might be based more upon outdated history and less on recent reality. Franklin Banks, born in 1924 and longtime Deacon at the church, provided some insight into the earlier decades of Bethany: "You weren't allowed to dance down there, but we had good times in there."⁴²

Churches are traditionally reflections of the ministers in charge at that given moment. Ed Crawford recalled the renowned Rev. William P. Hayes who served the church from 1932 until 1961. Later Hayes would have a public housing project at 71 Boyd Street named after him.⁴³ Crawford, who would have been eleven years old at the time of Pastor Hayes' retirement, remembers a sense of privilege carried by the lighter-skinned members of the church at the time. Hayes himself, Crawford pointed out, had a

⁴¹ Ed Crawford, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 23, 1997.

⁴² Franklin Banks, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 19, 1997.

⁴³ I came to understand through these interviews that this was truly a sign of respect and a source of pride for the Black community as the "projects" were initially symbols of improvement and hope.

fair skin complexion. When Dr. James Scott accepted the call to follow Hayes as pastor to Bethany, Crawford said things improved; Scott was a dark-skinned man himself and did not perpetuate the allegedly unequal treatment. Crawford called Scott a role model and man of “true color.”⁴⁴

Rev. Hayes and his wife are typically remembered in the Krueger-Scott interviews as nothing less than pillars of the community, those who could bring people together while still working for their own. Retired law enforcement officer Henry Robinson told his interviewer, “Pastor Hayes was chairman of the Housing Authority...and a few White folks was with him...they all worked together at that time.”⁴⁵ Edna Thomas, a member of Bethany, said emphatically that Hayes should have had a plaque erected for him in the city because of the major contributions he made to Newark. “Like I tell the members of Bethany Baptist Church every time I see them, ‘Why did you let Rev. Hayes just pass away?’ His contributions to Newark... Just passed away... That project up on the hill, the Hayes Homes, that’s Rev. Hayes”⁴⁶

Edna Thomas’ sentiment begs the question as to what the Hayes Homes really symbolized for her. Thomas was concerned that people would forget Rev. Hayes if his namesake Homes were demolished. Was this also perhaps an effort to keep her own history – or that of the Black community or the Black church community or more specifically the Bethany community – alive? Even as she was sitting for an interview that

⁴⁴ Ed Crawford, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 23, 1997.

⁴⁵ Henry Robinson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Jan. 17, 1997.

⁴⁶ Edna Thomas, interview with E. Alma Flagg, Oct. 7, 1996. The Hayes Homes are a major part of the story of the 1967 rebellion. It was from there that the residents witnessed, across the street from them, the dragging by police officers of John Smith, the Black cab driver whose arrest is seen by many as a catalyst of the uprising.

was slated to be stored in a public “museum” of African-American culture, Thomas worried that the Newark she knew would soon be little more than rubble and forgotten stories, “faded foliage” if you will. Considering America’s tendency toward the erasure of African-American history in multiple forums, it seems a quite rational fear on the part of Edna Thomas and probably one that was carried by other narrators, whether they expressed it or not.

Willa Rawlins, an administrative assistant at the Urban League, said that when she was young her family went to Bethany but then there was some “trouble.” “They threw the minister out, his name was Rev. Hurdle.”⁴⁷ The Bethany website does mention a Dr. Hurdle and reads, “Through his solid, biblical preaching, Bethany became even stronger. Dr. Hurdle served with distinction from 1924 until 1930.”⁴⁸ Mrs. Rawlins told her interviewer that Hurdle later opened a storefront church on Rutgers Street which she and her family attended for a short while.⁴⁹ There were no other reports in the Krueger-Scott interviews of any pastor being dismissed from Bethany Baptist. This absence may be telling; if indeed a pastor was ousted, that sort of event would not be in keeping with the respectable decorum perpetuated in the pages of Bethany’s history. We might presume that Mrs. Rawlins may have been less concerned with respectability than some as she was willing to work for the Urban League - an organization known for its disruptive behavior. Perhaps she had less inhibition about the reporting of a pastor’s ouster.

⁴⁷ Willa Rawlins, interview with Katheryn Bethea, Aug. 8, 1997.

⁴⁸ *Bethany Baptist Church*, “History,” <http://www.bethany-newark.org/history>.

⁴⁹ Research has been inconclusive as to the existence of this church.

Dr. Beverly Scott did not paint exactly the same highly regarded picture of Bethany members that some of the other Krueger-Scott interviewees did. While Katheryn Bethea referenced its strong community and Mildred Crump extolled its wide ranging activities, Dr. Scott had a somewhat different experience. The first lady said that when she arrived at Bethany she found it to be an extended family to be sure – as long as one was a member of the church. In response to Glen Marie Brickus asking about the initial reception that Beverly Scott received, Scott conceded that she was never totally embraced by Bethany’s parishioners. In fact, Dr. Scott tells the story of one member who said to her, “you will never be the woman Mrs. Hayes [the previous first lady] was.”⁵⁰ Placing this information together with Ed Crawford’s memories regarding the treatment of darker-skinned members of Bethany Baptist Church under Pastor Hayes, one might conclude that the Scotts came to Bethany and implemented a change in culture. The Scotts apparently brought a new look alongside a fresh mission to extend Bethany outside its four walls and past West Market Street. The website’s history page reads regarding Rev. Scott’s arrival, “The congregation accepted many new ideas, installing Mrs. Thelma B. Robinson in 1965 as its first female trustee.”⁵¹

Bethany Baptist has had many lives and bore witness to the changes of Newark’s African-American community – as well as its own congregation. Ed Crawford explained:

...it's a church that has grown, felt its impact from folks moving out into the outlying areas. Obviously as people have become more economically stable and things have gotten better, folks have moved from the inner city of Newark out into some of the outer areas. So we've gone from being what might have been

⁵⁰ Beverly Scott, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, (no date recorded).

⁵¹ “History,” *Bethany Baptist Church*, accessed Feb. 14, 2016, <http://www.bethany-newark.org/history>.

more of a neighborhood church to being more of a commuter church in our latter years now.⁵²

Many of Bethany's member families departed Newark for the suburbs - or at least smaller urban areas - during the last few decades and yet the majority continue to return to Bethany, at least on Sundays.

Rev. Scott describes Bethany's staying power in his interview:

Bethany has always been a downtown church...Curiously, Rev. Glenn Hatfield, the pastor of Peddie [Memorial] Church, when he came here to preach he said that Peddie Church, the large, White Baptist church had organized about a dozen churches in its lifetime, and the only one that has managed to survive is Bethany...It's not that, I think that we had, not only had an educated clergy, but we pushed education.⁵³

Bethany has always played a prominent role in Newark and has certainly become a touchstone for many Black Newarkers, even today. As it welcomes a new pastor, the Rev. William Howard having retired in 2016 after fifteen years of service, we await the next phase of this important religious institution's life.

The Krueger-Scott Oral History Project was designed to archive stories of African Americans' contributions to Newark, and to the nation as a whole. With many familial connections to the city and to the church Bethany's members tended to have the resources to affect change in their own city. Bethany's reputation as a central figure of the community is a reflection of the reputations of many of its members. While this particular bent of the oral history project could be viewed as a limiting disadvantage, it also allows for further analysis of just what middle-class values might look like in a majority African-American city prior to the turn of the 21st century.

⁵² Ed Crawford, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 23, 1997.

⁵³ Dr. James A. James Scott, interview with Glen Marie Brickus (no date recorded).

In Albert Broussard's chapter on "Race and Oral History" he lists numerous oral history projects surrounding African Americans. Most all of them cover impoverished communities, drug-infested neighborhoods, or gang members. Broussard references a journalist, Leon Dash, who performed a long term oral history interview with a woman who lived in public housing. Yet Broussard goes on to argue that "members of the black underclass...seldom find their way into oral history collections, for scholars are more inclined to seek out individuals who shed a more positive light on African American progress and reflect the values of the black middle class."⁵⁴

In fact the general knowledge of the African-American experience is quite polarized, encompassing either "the greats" or those who have struggled "against all odds." I echo other scholars in arguing that there is still not enough recognition of the Black American who lives an average life – even as she makes powerful changes in her community towards a greater good. Krueger-Scott's collection looks at those who live between the two poles: predominantly middle-class Blacks, some who can be deemed activists, others who worked quietly through their church or other community programs, as well as some yet others who were just not all that interested in changing the world. It may well be that Wright and Price were satisfied with the emphasis on one church's membership, especially as it was juxtaposed against enough others whose lives outside of Bethany – and even church itself – offer ample analytical opportunities in this oral history collection.

Queen of Angels

⁵⁴ Albert S. Broussard, "Race and Oral History," *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 196.

Bethany may have been the most visible church within the Krueger-Scott oral histories but it was not the only one. There are numerous church memberships amongst the interviewees and space does not allow for a history of each one.⁵⁵ While we do learn about a few of Newark's churches through this chapter, a more complete oral history study of Newark's Black church membership would provide researchers and residents alike with a profound piece of Newark's long history. While much can be found on history of the Black church writ large, and many Black churches have taken care to archive and share at least some portions of their own histories, one might be surprised at how few Black churches in this country have actually enjoyed full scholarly attention.

A handful of the Krueger-Scott participants mention Queen of Angels as their home church, or at least one that played a particular role in their Newark experience. Queen of Angels was the first Black Catholic church in Newark and carries a fascinating past along with it. The first meeting of what would end up being Queen of Angels was held in 1926, called together by African-American women with the mission of serving their community. The original building on Academy Street was ordered from the Sears Roebuck catalog for \$1,400. In 1958 the building suffered a fire and the congregation was invited to share St. Peter's church building on Belmont Avenue, a predominantly German parish. By 1962, the White congregation had all but disappeared and St. Peter's Church was rededicated as Queen of Angels that same year. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. visited the church, and meetings for his Poor People's campaign were subsequently

⁵⁵ Newark does pride itself on its churches, each its own page in Newark's history book. One can access brief information on many of them with very few clicks. Try for example: <http://newarkreligion.com/mainindex.php>.

held there. After King's death, the Church organized a walk for racial harmony that drew 25,000 people.⁵⁶

Elma Bateman extolls the onetime leader of Queen of Angels, Father Carey, who quietly created an artistic community out of his church, "to expand on church connections." "He started Queen of Angels Players...and for ten years we gave shows... we put them on at Essex Catholic High School and then at St. Benedict's.... Things like that weren't being done in the church, you know, through the church. We brought people from all around Newark, not just Queen of Angels...."⁵⁷

Scholarly studies performed on churches tend to look at foregrounded leaders or perhaps at "historic" churches deemed as such by association with major events or people.⁵⁸ This is a good start but, as pertains to oral history in general, until we hear from the "ordinary" citizens we cannot truly begin to understand our history.

Zachary Yamba, who became president of Essex County College, remembered visiting Queen of Angels on Academy Street, prior to the fire.⁵⁹ Nathaniel Potts was an altar boy at Queen of Angels, which he explains was started as a mission for "coloreds."⁶⁰ Hortense Williams Powell belonged to Queen of Angels since she was seven years old:

⁵⁶ *Society of African Missions*, "The History of Queen of Angels Church," accessed Feb. 15, 2016, <http://www.smafathers.org/about/our-history-2/queen-of-angels-church/>. This link is now dead; I am assuming that the Society finally removed the church from its website as it no longer exists.

⁵⁷ Elma Bateman, interview with Pauline Blount, April 29, 1999.

⁵⁸ See as examples, University of Miami's *Historic Black Churches Oral History Film Project, 2011-2014*, <http://proust.library.miami.edu/findingaids/?p=collections/findingaid&id=1358>; The University of Kentucky's *Black Church Leaders in Kentucky Oral History Project*, https://www.loc.gov/folklife/civilrights/survey/view_collection.php?coll_id=2364.

⁵⁹ A. Zachary Yamba, interview with E. Alma Flagg, April 26, 1999.

⁶⁰ Nathaniel L. Potts, interview with E. Alma Flagg, Dec. 12, 1997.

Back then, the Catholics were trying to get Negroes to join the church. Because most

Negroes are Baptist, Methodist, scattered Presbyterians, scattered Episcopalians... In fact, Queen of Angels was a missionary church... They had a little car - or it was a car or bus or van or something that they would go around, and they would pick the kids up, you know, for Sunday School or, Protestants call it Sunday School, we call it catechism - for catechism and for mass on Sunday. You know. And they had that church there on Academy and Whitley Street [?]. Was one story, had a basement. The men of the church, the men of the missionary, built that church. And, you know, we all went to that church.

Theirs was the *Black* Catholic church, although a few Black families did belong to nearby St. Patrick's, a predominantly Irish church, explains Powell:

Now, St. Patrick's had a church right there...on Washington and Central Avenue. But, you know, those - that was predominantly an Irish church. Mostly Irish went to St. Patrick's. But children who lived in that area, if you were Black, you didn't get your first Holy Communion and confirmation at St. Patrick's. You came up and you got your - you might have gone there for catechism, but when you got your confirmation and your first holy communion and any other sacrament, you got that at the Queen of Angels, which was the, I would just say, that was the Black church, the Black mission. You know. So the church was, the church was segregated... I was very disheartened, too, when I came to the realization that all Catholics were not the same.⁶¹

Membership at Queen of Angels began to dwindle by the 1980s. As mentioned previously, Black church attendance nationwide has been in decline since 1990; those who identify as Baptist, for example, went from 50% in 1990 to 45% in 2008. Because Catholics are a minority of the African-American faith community already, their decline from 9% to 6% in those same years made for a marked difference.⁶² The archdiocese finally closed the doors on Queen of Angels Church in 2012.

⁶¹ Hortense Williams Powell, interview with Annemarie Dickey-Kemp, July 2, 1998.

⁶² "The Black Church," *blackdemographics.com*, accessed Feb. 9, 2017, <http://blackdemographics.com/culture/religion/>



Figure 10. Queen of Angels Parish, 2014, nj.com.

Queen of Angels remained an abandoned building until the summer of 2016, debris strewn within its walls and wire fencing surrounding the building. It was an eerie replica, in both image and narrative, of the Krueger-Scott Mansion. The Church was finally demolished in July of 2016 after it had sat for two years with a demolition crane parked in its driveway. The demolition was initially slated for the summer of 2015, but as we have already witnessed, municipal wheels can take a long time to turn. One of the stays of demolition came upon the discovery that the church was on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places. A demolition permit should have never been ordered in the first place, argued the building department. It turned out there had been confusion surrounding addresses of the old and new sites of the church. Apparently the archdiocese ultimately made a strong enough argument such that the demolition was rescheduled.⁶³

In a 2015 nj.com article Matt Gosser, member of the Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee and New Jersey Institute of Technology professor, claimed that

⁶³ Barry Carter, "Queen of Angels: Beloved Catholic church in Newark remains in limbo," *The Star Ledger*, Oct. 29, 2014, nj.com.

he had attempted to purchase the building from the archdiocese in 2014 for \$50,000. He planned to turn it into a gallery or museum, but his offer was declined. According to Gossner the archdiocese was asking \$500,000 for the property. Gosser believed that the church could be saved but that "whenever a building owner wants a building to be demolished, they stop making repairs to it so eventually, nature takes over and they say they have to knock it down."⁶⁴ As with so many stories of the urban built environment, Newark's Black Catholic community lost its house of worship to a diagnosis of "blight."

In honor of the 350th anniversary of Newark, a call to artists was made in 2016 for a project celebrating the church. Soliciting "artwork of any and all mediums that have some connection to the recently demolished Queen of Angels church in Newark, NJ," a Facebook page was created by Gossner. The exhibit, called "Queen of Angels: When a Church Dies," had its opening reception on October 23rd, 2016 in "an old auto dealership on Central Ave."⁶⁵

Personal Reasons

Church-going was certainly not a given for all. Mrs. Marzell Swain remembered her grandfather as a man who never knew his birthday, always wore a hat, and took his grandchildren to church - but did not believe in God himself. Swain asked him once why

⁶⁴ Barry Carter, "Archdiocese to Demolish Newark's First African-American Catholic Church," Nov. 10, 2015, nj.com.

⁶⁵ "Queen of Angels: When a Church Dies" Facebook page, accessed Feb. 9, 2017, facebook.com. For more on African Americans and the Catholic Church see Timothy B. Neary, *Crossing Parish Boundaries: Race, Sports, and Catholic Youth in Chicago, 1914-1954* (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 2016). An interview with the author does not reference any negative experiences Black Catholics may have had within the Church, such as that of Krueger-Scott's Hortense Williams Powell. See, Tim Neary, interview with Karen Johnson, "Crossing Parish Boundaries: An Interview with Tim Neary," *Religion in American History*, accessed April 22, 2017, <http://usreligion.blogspot.com/2017/04/crossing-parish-boundaries-interview.html>.

he would get them up, take them to hurch but not attend himself. His response was based upon his experience as an enslaved man, said Swain. “He said, ‘If there was a God why would He let me suffer the way that I did?’”⁶⁶ Ed Crawford, a community counselor for halfway houses and the state prison, said that while his family were members of Bethany Baptist Church since his grandfather joined in 1919, Crawford had stopped going for a while. “As I finished high school, I thought I no longer needed that so I walked away for a number of years.”⁶⁷

This is the time of life that a number of the Krueger-Scott participants stepped back from the church, if indeed they were given that choice. Some of those interviewed decried the idea of children choosing whether they wanted to go to church or not. Rev. Alvin Conyers said, “When I came North I found there were a freedom of desire. If you wanted to [go to church] you could, if you didn’t, uh, you didn’t have to... We lost our family church connection when we migrated to the North and adopted that method of freedom.”⁶⁸ According to many this separation from the church, as well as the idea of allowing children the freedom of choice in general, was a contributing factor to the downfall of their community. Ed Crawford ended up going back to Bethany once he had children of his own, ultimately serving as an usher and trustee.

Society was changing quickly in the middle of the 20th century and for a myriad of reasons church was losing its centrality in Black life. For some the church had become too political. As L.H. Welchel, Jr. notes, “Black theology can be connected to the Black

⁶⁶ Marzell Swain, interview with Annemarie Dickey Kemp, May 14, 1998.

⁶⁷ Ed Crawford, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 23, 1997.

⁶⁸ Alvin Conyers, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, 1997(no day or month recorded).

Power and Civil Rights Movements... a number of scholars and clergymen began to realize that struggles of African Americans called for a new conceptualization of themselves in their relationship to the divine that was radically different from the theology provided by Eurocentric Christianity.”⁶⁹ Some ministers felt it their duty to participate in political life and that was not always attractive to traditional Black churgoers.

Yet other African Americans would end up leaving the church because the opportunity to work towards their community’s collective good was now occurring in the workplace. Charles Payne and Adam Green point out in their introduction to *Time Longer Than a Rope*, “...the spaces and institutions of worker unity and workplace justice take on new importance within the development of black activism, as important to the broader movement as the Black church and press have been seen to be in more traditional accounts.”⁷⁰ For some, the church became less of a necessity than it once had been and so they placed their efforts elsewhere.

In the mid-20th century people were also going to church differently, perhaps attending Sunday services but choosing not to sing in the choir or join a committee. Church had gone from requirement to option for some in the Black community and there are older and/or more conservative African Americans today who still assert the statistically unfounded claim that a decrease in church attendance is the reason for the havoc in their neighborhoods. In much the same way as Linda Shopes discovered through her Baltimore project the ways in which citizens were sometimes slow to connect their

⁶⁹ Whelchel, Jr., *The History and Heritage of African-American Churches*, 219.

⁷⁰ Charles M. Payne and Adam Green, *Time Longer Than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850-1950* (New York; London: New York University Press, 2003).

adversity with larger, systemic issues, there are African Americans who continue to see the problems of their cities as due to their own people's behavior.

For yet others, churchgoing was more a luxury than a weekly activity. Willa Coleman, a retired health care worker, told her interviewer that she had been a member of Emmanuel Missionary Baptist Church on Chancellor Avenue and Clinton Place since 1970. But "before that I was workin', when I was workin' I didn't get to church much. When I did have a Sunday off I would go to any church around," Coleman explained. Willie Bell Hooper, who belonged to Mt. Zion Baptist, reported that she did not get to church too often as a young mother, much as she would have liked to. Hooper said, "I had so many children that by the time I got them dressed I didn't have anything to wear myself."⁷¹

There are numerous reasons why people joined a particular church. Often they were following a family tradition, but other times it had more to do with the pastor. Occasionally the reason given was as simple as a matter of geographical location. Louise Epperson, who came to Newark as an African Methodist Episcopalian explained, "The AME Church was so far away, I would get lost trying to find it. I joined the Clinton Avenue Presbyterian Church."⁷² Clinton Avenue was approximately one mile from her aunt's home on Orange Street.

Just these few stories confirm that African Americans, as with any other racial, ethnic or cultural group, are not necessarily a monolith of thought and behavior. The role that the church played in their lives looked different depending upon the individual. By

⁷¹ Willie Belle Hooper, interview with Catherine Lenix-Hooker, April 12, 1996.

⁷² Louise Epperson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 25, 1997.

listening to the unique stories of each person from the Krueger-Scott collection, we can understand better the complicated role of religion in the urban African-American setting and witness its conditional existence in people's lives.

Nobody Here is Perfect

Owen Wilkerson reported in his interview that the Black faith community did not unfailingly embrace each other. There were rifts between classes and colors and there were distinctions made between new arrivals and old. "The church has to change also to the norms of present day African-American society and not African-American society of the 1940s," Wilkerson admonished. He blamed some religious people for the creation of these barriers.⁷³ Amiri Baraka, son of Newark, echoes this community fissure in his book *Blues People*. "There were now such concepts as a Northern and a Southern Negro, and they would soon be, to a certain extent, different people."⁷⁴

Historian Davarian Baldwin argues for the utility of the "old" and "new" settler binary when looking at rifts in the Black community. In conversation with the theory of "politics of respectability" Baldwin described in *Chicago's New Negroes*, the supposed attitudinal differences between longtime urban residents and the newly arrived migrants. This analytical tool can at times be helpful in understanding African-American communities of many sizes and compositions. In writing about early 20th century Chicago's "Stroll" - a leisure district within the city's "Black Belt" area - Baldwin explains:

...those who identified with the old settler ideology attempted to...focus on a respectable and hence daytime image of the Stroll in creating the black metropolis. At the same time, the physical structure of the black community

⁷³ Owen Wilkerson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 12, 1997.

⁷⁴ Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Perennial 2002) 108.

forced them “to live with those of their color who [were] shiftless, dissolute and immoral” and to witness “the brazen display of vice of all kinds.” Old settlers then both depended on and distinguished themselves from the black migrants they felt reinforced white visions of black deviance, most clearly embodied in Stroll nightlife.⁷⁵

Baldwin may be reaching a bit in order to theorize this particular idea. While he does acknowledge that these outlooks can be carried non-respectively, as in some “new settlers” had the “old settler” mentality (and vice-versa), we can hear in the Krueger-Scott narratives that these conflicts are based upon things a bit more complex than time spent in Newark. However, it is certainly true that the “physical structure of the black community” created a need in people to define themselves within those tight confines. These definitions took on the form of fashion, food and leisure activities, among other things. Often these defining acts were as related to gender and generation as to geographical origin. Yet other times the lines drawn were familial, wherein groups solidified around family – distant, fictive, and nuclear. Certain families “did things different” or lived in varied levels of economic status from others thus creating definition, sometimes separation, and even alienation from those who may well have been next-door neighbors. Still the South versus North dichotomy does show itself in these interviews, and at times reflects Baldwin’s old/new settler theory. In the end some people simply assimilated more readily than others.

In his Krueger-Scott interview Owen Wilkerson portrays his ambivalence about the church - and the Black community at large. Here he explains how the church often sheltered “new settlers” from the harassment of their own people. Yet he goes on to illustrate the church’s imperfectness:

⁷⁵ Davarian L Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*, 30.

Outside of the church, on the street and what not or within a community, I think I had mentioned, you know, we as kids we sort of ostracized the kid who came from the South and what not because of his or her talk or his clothing... Those are one of the pluses that I have of the Black church. That I really have a lot of respect for the Black church. I mean, there are other situations that are within the Black church as far as the gossiping and the scandals and everything that I detest.⁷⁶

Baraka also confirms the lack of continuity in the Black community, in this case echoing the “old settler” theory to foreground the kind of hazing process perpetrated on the newcomers. “Nothing was quite as disparaging as being called ‘a country boy’... But the displaced persons made quick movements towards the accomplishment of the local sophistication and in a few months could even join in to taunt a new arrival with greetings like, ‘Hey, Cornbread!’”⁷⁷ Even Amiri Baraka shows his hand as an “old settler,” defining the new arrivals as “displaced” among his city’s residents.

Owen Wilkerson goes on to give an example in his interview of the troubling “mindset” of certain church people:

I could just bring up an example. Zion Hill Baptist Church. There was this guy, Milton Wesley, fantastic organist. Gospel organist. He went to Arts High School. Very creative, music-wise and what not. He was dating this young lady, Thelma. Thelma lived somewhere around here. She went to Westside. To make a long story short, he knocked her up. That's the expression we used to use in those days. And, you know, they had to stand before the deaconess board, the church board, and this board and that board. But they kicked them out of the church. You know, and I felt that this was the time when they needed God. They needed the church. You know what I mean? ...That's when I really started, really started looking at the Black church, Mrs. Brickus...⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Owen Wilkerson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 12, 1997.

⁷⁷ Baraka, *Blues People*, 106. Music was one illustration of the old/new binary according to Baraka. The evolution of Black music – gospel, blues – was symbolic of the ways in which Blacks embraced or eschewed past traditions and identities. See especially chapter 5, “The City,” for further discussion of this theme. W.E.B DuBois concurs with Baraka’s observation that music is an important thermometer in testing degrees of “Blackness” and the distancing from Southern roots. See “The Sorrow Songs” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, 1903).

⁷⁸ Owen Wilkerson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 12, 1997.

Louise Epperson, health care worker and community activist, tells a story about a rift at her church. She had joined 13th Street Presbyterian which eventually moved to Clinton Avenue and became the Clinton Avenue Presbyterian Church. Epperson was head of “women’s work,” a sort of women’s ministry. Her minister Rev. Collington and his wife, Epperson points out, were White. At one point Epperson suffered a heart attack and soon thereafter a trustee from the church came to her hospital bedside with a resignation letter for her to sign.

When I had a heart attack, Vickie Booker, who was also a trustee or a deaconess at the church, she came to the hospital with a paper and asked me - She told me that the pastor's wife told her to ask me if I would sign from being - that I resigned from being the president of women's work because I was sick and they didn't want me to suffer with all of this heavy load on me. And they had someone else that they could appoint as president of the women's work. I said, “If you don't want me, that's fine. But I know I have served you well.” And she asked me in the hospital. And I said, “But if you brought the paper to me and it came from the church that I will accept it and sign it.” And that's what I did.

Epperson signed away her leadership position, but not happily, believing that the pastor’s wife had just been waiting for an opportunity to get rid of her due to her outspoken nature – which we will see more of in the next chapter. It turns out that she was right. Epperson explains:

And years later Mrs. Collington met me taking a course at Rutgers where she taught school also. Mrs. Collington told me then that she owed me an apology because what she thought I was about, she find out that I was not about that but I was speaking out and she respected my judgment now. And she regrets that she had turned some of the women from my church against me. But that didn't bother me because I joined the church and not the minister.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Louise Epperson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 25, 1997. It is not clear whether there were racial implications involved in this feud but it seems likely as Epperson does make mention of the first lady’s race. It could be that Epperson uses her own trait of outspokenness as code for the cultural stereotype of Black women as excessively emotive, thus couching potentially racist accusations for the sake of respectability.

Frantz Fanon might suggest, more expansively than Baldwin, that oppressed people continue to in-fight because the enemy is too great. While we consider the ways in which many of the Krueger-Scott participants are of a higher than average social and economic status it can never be forgotten that they are at the same time African Americans living in a racist society. The daily stressors of racism in the North, perhaps more subtle than the South but certainly there all the same, pushed people to find comfort and safety where they recognized it. In the end, it should not be especially surprising that the “Black community” was not one big happy family. As all communities are, it is made up of a multitude of individuals. This instability makes classification more difficult and allows for a richer portrait of those whom we are hoping to understand.

Romans 3:10 reads, “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one...” Churches are made up of people and people are full of imperfections; hypocritical or less than gracious behaviors are, of course, not unique to the church. Here we happen to witness these human frailties all over the church stories of the Krueger-Scott narrators. With the handful of tales that “tell on” the good church people of Newark such as those of Owen Wilkerson, Bev Scott and Louise Epperson, we can surmise that there were probably a few left unsaid as well. It would be fair to say that some politics of respectability were probably in play at points during these interviews. After all, how much is one really going to disparage the church that the interviewer, a local resident, is probably a member of as well? In chapter two we looked more carefully at what might have been at stake in the course of these exchanges between narrator and peer interviewer and how those stakes may have affected what ultimately was shared. What we gather

from the narratives here is a montage of self-deprecation, indignation, and consternation that ultimately (and thankfully) makes the “Black church” difficult to define.

Politicians and the Church

In 1971 Wynona Lipman became the first African-American woman elected to the New Jersey Senate and was its longest serving member at twenty-seven years.

Countering the well-worn narratives regarding the participants of the Great Migration, Senator Lipman also received a Fulbright scholarship to study at the Sorbonne and married her White husband in Paris, France.

As with many of the politically active participants in the Krueger-Scott project, Senator Lipman noted that while she was indeed a member of Bethany Baptist Church that she did not attend regularly. Weekends were busy for politicians.

An amusing conversation thus ensued between the Senator and the interviewer, Mrs. Glen Marie Brickus. As we have come to learn, Mrs. Brickus is one of the more animated and participatory interviewers:

Lipman: Bethany Baptist Church. That's the church I belong to. I don't go very often. I'm not a real good church goer to tell you the truth. I know you were surprised to see me sit so long at the Zion Holy Church.

Brickus: I really was. I expected you to leave almost as soon as you had made your presentation. And the reason I looked at you the way that I did because I go to Bethany and I never knew that you were a member there.

Lipman: I go there.

Brickus: Ahhh. It's nice to know. Okay. There'll be some changes made.

Lipman: Yes m'am. You're gonna call me up and take me to church. [Laughter].⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Wynona Lipman, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, April 5, 1997.

Throughout history many African Americans have felt compelled to ensure that those who they love or care for - and even some who they do not - are “churched.”

Lipman understood exactly what Mrs. Brickus was getting at when she said some changes were going to be made. This push for church is partly motivated by the desire to preserve a strong, Black, Christian community, but the urgency also stems from the Christian belief that if “heathens” are not “saved” they will bypass heaven for somewhere much less desirable when they die.

105 year old Erma McLurkin said to her interviewer, Giles Wright, “Yeah I’m a Baptist, gonna be a Baptist... Baptist is the way. What you is?” Wright answered that he was a Methodist. “You just got to be baptized. You don’t be baptized you don’t make it in,” warned McLurkin. Wright chuckled, then asked permission to take her photograph.⁸¹

Councilman and State Senator Ronald Rice said he refused to commit to a single place of worship. His home church was Allen AME on 19th Avenue but he said he was not very active. Rice believed that politicians were taken advantage of when they stayed at one church too long, expectations placed upon them by the ministers and congregants alike:

I understand the higher power, etc. I just haven’t pinned down a church home. Um, I used to be a trustee at Allen AME when Rev. Druides was there. Unfortunately, when you’re an elected official and you pin a church home down some of the ministers unfortunately expect you to do things – you know, it becomes more of a burden. You want to be active but you get taken advantage of and so I just keep movin’.

Rice, as with Wilkerson, was a man who seemed to have a complicated relationship with the church. He said at one point that the Black church “helped layin’ the foundation to get us as elected officials, to push us in some of these positions where we

⁸¹ Erma McLurkin, interview with Giles Wright, July 22, 1995.

can make decisions on people's lives." At the same time Rice was skeptical of some of those who called themselves "Christian." When asked about the "seamy side" of Newark he described criminal communities such as numbers runners, craps organizers, and bootleggers. Then he said, "These same people at the church."⁸²

Councilwoman Mildred Crump attended church only sporadically but her absence was not so much for political reasons. She provided a unique explanation for her inconsistency:

In fact, our pastor [James Scott] is so wonderful and is so forward thinking - I won't use the word *liberal* because it constitutes another connotation. But as forward thinking... when I was really playing Tournament Bridge and I was traveling almost every other weekend, he would say to me, "okay, I missed you at church. What tournament were you at?" You know, that kind of thing. But Newark is famous nationwide for its Tournament Bridge players. And that's my favorite pastime.⁸³

Interestingly, Crump made sure to disavow any connection between Rev. Scott and the word "liberal." Perhaps even more so than today the word had "connotations" in the 1990s, as Crump suggested, that might even have included "troublemaker" - especially when attributed to a Black man. This is yet another potential illustration of the presence of respectability politics at Newark's Bethany Baptist Church.

As an elected official Sharpe James, Newark's mayor from 1986 through 2006, said he was invited to attend various churches quite frequently. As with so many African Americans, Mayor James felt strongly about the significance of church, saying that the African-American community "has come this far from faith." James went on to talk about his church wedding:

⁸² Ronald L. Rice, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, April 7, 1997.

⁸³ Mildred Crump, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Nov. 12, 1996.

Well, I met Miss Mary Madison, and shortly thereafter we were married in St. James AME Church, I believe in 1963 or '64. It seems like only yesterday so I can't remember the exact time. And I remember Rev. Blake was there. Because the wedding cost us fifteen dollars to use the church, and everyone was invited to bring their own brown bag. So we were married in the church upstairs. Everybody walked right down the back stairs of St. James AME Church, and then on Irvine Turner Boulevard and Court Street, and went downstairs for a reception of about a hundred friends who brought their own food.⁸⁴

Although they were married at St. James AME, Mayor James' wife ultimately joined Elizabeth Avenue Presbyterian. Sharpe James was a Baptist and thus did not join along with her, at least not at first. But in 1985 the Baptist Mayor did join that Presbyterian Church after his son was shot, apparently in a mugging for his leather Bomber jacket.

...when my son was shot in 1985, December the 5th, 1985 - left for dead on the streets of Newark - that church, for the first time in twenty years, on Saturday had a revival. If it were not for them being open for the first time in twenty years on Saturday, and having a revival meeting— Then my son, left bleeding to death, crawled a hundred feet, hearing voices in that church, falling down the steps, and the church choir becoming angels of hope, taking off their white garments and wherever they saw blood mopping it up, wherever they saw a hole in his body sticking their white garment in it. One of them recognized that he was my son. Called up the house. Mary was in New York shopping with Sylvia Ross that day. My son would not be alive today. So our family belongs to that church. But that is a Presbyterian church and I'm a Baptist.

James went on to explain, echoing Senator Rice, that as a politician he made the rounds when it came to church. "So I find myself going to as many as possible out of respect for the work they do. Out of respect for their ministry. Because they don't want to see the mayor come just in election year. They hold that against you."⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Sharpe James, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 3 & 17, 1996. (Irvine Turner Boulevard would have still been called Belmont Avenue at the time of the wedding as its name was not changed until 1977).

⁸⁵ Sharpe James, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 3 & 17, 1996.

Each African-American politician in the Krueger-Scott collection participated somewhat differently in religious life. There was no collective performance of Christianity in that cohort. In fact Mildred Crump says she “flirted with Islam” at one point - although she then made clear that she was indeed a “proud member” of Bethany. “I won’t say I changed my name, but about the age of eighteen I started dating a young man who was Muslim. And what I did for a short period of time was stop using my last name, I remember, my slave name as we used to call it. And I became Mildred X. But once Charles and I stopped dating, that was over.”⁸⁶

Sunday Best

Councilwoman Crump, who came to Newark in 1965 from Detroit, was asked by Mrs. Brickus about any differences she found between Detroit and Newark:

Crump: [I] found when I moved here a lot more flamboyancy, individualism. You know, we were kind of closed in the Midwest, you know, we wore gloves three button to the wrist. You know that kind of thing. The old folks used to bring you up. There was just a certain way you dressed on Sunday. And I found that not to be true here.

Brickus: Hats and gloves to church.

Crump: That's right.

Brickus: And you weren't dressed if you didn't wear hat and gloves.⁸⁷

Clothing was and is an integral facet of the African-American community. At one point it certainly helped differentiate the North from the South, and ascribed a higher status to those who were able to wear street clothes as opposed to those whose daily wear took the form of uniforms and other work attire. The “new settlers” had to get “schooled”

⁸⁶ Mildred Crump, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Jan. 12, 1996.

⁸⁷ Mildred Crump, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Jan. 12, 1996.

in the subject of dress. Once acclimated, migrants from the South would return home each year, often in the “homecoming” month of August, wearing their best clothes - even renting apparel as well as cars in order to impress upon their Southern relatives and neighbors just how well they were doing in the North. Isabel Wilkerson (no known relation to Newark’s Owen Wilkerson) writes in her book *The Warmth of Other Suns*:

At Easter and around the Fourth of July, the people from the North came. They looked like extras out of a movie at the Saturday matinee. They wore peplums and bergamot waves...They flashed thick rolls of cash from their pockets – the biggest bills on the outside...They said they were making all kinds of money. But they didn’t have to say it because the cars and the clothes did the talking. They had been wiring more money to their families back home than they truly could spare and had been saving up all year for those gloves and matching purse. They made sure to show up at their mother-churches...⁸⁸

The body is one thing over which African Americans have had some semblance of control. Their fashion sometimes has expressed that which could not be said otherwise. In 1924 W.E.B. Du Bois gave a speech at his alma mater, Fisk University, admonishing the institution for its trend toward industrial education and conservatism and away from the intellectualism he had experienced while a student there. Addressing the proposed guidelines restricting certain styles of dress, Du Bois said, “All through the life of the colored people and their children the world makes repeated efforts to surround them with ugliness. Is it a wonder that they flame in their clothing? That they desire to fill their starved souls with overuse of silk and color?”⁸⁹

Owen Wilkerson tells of the importance of dressing up and standing out:

On the weekends, that's when I - and I put this in quotes, quote, unquote - that's when the fashion show began. Sunday you had church. Everyone wanted to wear

⁸⁸ Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010) 89.

⁸⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Education of Black People; Ten Critiques, 1906-1960* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973) 54.

their Sunday best. And, I mean, that was in the South. You know, the little girls would wear the white dresses and what not. I mean, I remember my mother used to put so much rouge and lipstick on, and, you know, perfume. And I used to say, 'Gee whiz, Mom, you're just going to church'... [She'd say] 'Well, you know, if I don't dress up and everything I'm not serving the Lord right.'

The night before church had its own fashion rites according to Wilkerson:

You know, on Saturday nights, I mean, hey, you put on your best dress and your suits and your black and white shoes, and you go into the bar and you just leave all your tensions and frustrations that you had on the job and you want to look sharp... I used to shine shoes on Fridays and Saturdays, and I used to hit these bars and everything, and that's when you saw everybody in their - I guess their zoot suits and everything, red suits and yellow suits and everything. But I mean these guys were looking sharp, and the women were looking beautiful. But I'm sure come Monday morning everybody went back into their chauffeur's uniform or the laborer's uniform or their factory uniforms or whatever.⁹⁰

It is unclear whether Wilkerson himself ever left all his "tensions and frustrations" at the club or whether he simply felt a part of that world as he witnessed it from his shoe shine box. Either way we can hear in his voice and read in his words a sense of pride in his people. And yet, resignation comes at the end when it is acknowledged that all of that living it up was only temporary. Inevitably they had to return to jobs, the majority of which were in servitude to others and where the clothes they wore were not of their own choosing.

George Branch also shined shoes for the club-goers on weekends, as did a number of other men in the Krueger-Scott interviews from whom we will hear later. A shoe shine business was a given for so many, something a young boy could set up by himself simply by purchasing a brush, some polish, and a cloth to get started. In his autobiography, Malcolm X relates his own work as a shoe shine boy at the local clubs around Boston. Snapping the shoe rag for zoot-suited dancers and listening to Peggy Lee and Count

⁹⁰ Owen Wilkerson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 12, 1997.

Basie in the background, Malcolm X - much like Owen Wilkerson - witnessed the urban experience of dance clubs while making some money on the side.⁹¹

Owen Wilkerson continued to talk about dress in his interview wherein a dialogue emerged between him and the interviewer, Glen Marie Brickus:

Brickus: But when I grew up in the South, we didn't go to church on Sunday without a hat on your head and gloves on your hands. You know. And then as time went on after I came here, you see more women in church without hats. And in recent years, I almost never see anybody with gloves...

Wilkerson: Except for an usher.

Brickus: An usher yes. And I begin to see women wearing pants coming to church.

Wilkerson: Okay. No. When I was growing up here in the late 40s or 50s, no a woman couldn't wear pants. As a matter of fact, the women who wore pants were looked upon as being manly... Unless they were doing a particular occupation that required pants. Now, I remember Dr. Carroll [who lived on High Street] used to wear pants and what not, but again, she was in a whole different level and what not. And I remember she used to wear pants poking around in her yard because she used to grow a lot of big flowers and everything and plant things and what not. And she'd be out there on her knees in dungarees and what not and everything. But... No. I never, ever saw women wear pants in Zion Hill Baptist Church.

Brickus: Well, we were not allowed to wear pants. As a matter of fact, there was two things that my father was very strict on. His daughters didn't wear pants and they didn't whistle.⁹²

Here Wilkerson and Brickus affirm their class guidelines when it comes to church clothes, and women's comportment more specifically. While White women were quicker to embrace the new trend of pants-wearing by the 1950s, African-American women moved more slowly in that direction. Again, it was the women in particular who were

⁹¹ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964) 48-52.

⁹² Owen Wilkerson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 12, 1997.

assigned to carry that race respectability and femininity, assuring White society that they were able to perform within the gendered social constructs of the time. But Dr. Carroll was at “a whole different level,” according to Wilkerson. Because of her already elevated professional status, the Doctor’s responsibility was now different than that of a working or middle-class Black woman.

Matthew Little worked on the floor at General Motors for thirty-two years and belonged to Mt. Teman AME church in Elizabeth. Little was born in South Carolina and came to Newark in 1947 after finishing up in the Navy. Interviewer Pauline Blount asked Mr. Little, “In what way did people in the North dress differently from people in the South?” After a few moments of thinking he chuckled and said, “Oh, in the South you wore what they call overalls, with suspenders, and here they even wore coveralls, which covered the whole body, you know. And in the South, especially in the country, they washed their shirts and overalls and starch ‘em and wear ‘em on Sunday. [Laughter between both]. Instead of dressing in suits and ties.”⁹³

Zaundria Mapson May, a Gifted and Talented teacher at the time of her interview, told her son, the interviewer, that church clothes were similar in the North and South. “On Sundays we dressed up... We were taught that Sundays were special and that you dressed differently going to church than you did during the week.

“What was dressing up for you? asked Bill May.

“...Putting on a dress with a wide skirt and a stiffened crinoline slip, where the skirt part of the dress would stick out and the crinoline would scratch my legs. [Smiling tone of voice]. Um, socks maybe with ruffles or lace, uh, patent leather shoes, hair

⁹³ Matthew Little, interview with Pauline Blount, Oct. 22, 1997.

ribbons. And something a little extra special, a little pocketbook or even a pair of gloves. Maybe a hat.”

“And your brother? What was the dress up for him?” asked May.

“Uh, dress up for boys would be a suit, maybe with short pants when they were very young, uh, long pants when they were older. Shirts, ties and even hats for them.”⁹⁴

May was raised in Newark. Her family came from Florida when she was ten months old when her father was called to pastor Mt. Calvary Baptist Church on Prince Street. As with many African-American children, she returned South each summer to see family; her grandmother lived in Alabama. As a “PK” (pastor’s kid) it is safe to assume that she was one of the more dressed up children at her Northern church and that her memories of Sunday dress probably reflected her social position.



Figure 11. Mrs. Washington (wife of KS narrator Andrew Washington) with sister and children; Easter Sunday morning, Newark, NJ, circa 1950s, photo courtesy of Adrienne Wheeler.

⁹⁴ Zaundria Mapson May, interview with Bill May, Aug. 11, 1996.

Harvey Slaten, a retired postal worker, grew up believing in the importance of dress. “In the Depression years, late 20s and 30s, we managed to have just about everything that came about as far as styles and customs. Easter was the time you got new clothing. My father would buy second-hand suits from the pawn shop so that we could have new stuff on for Easter.” Slaten learned early that, as the saying goes, clothes made the man; when asked later about important people in Newark, Slaten recalled the first Black county clerk, a Mr. Scotland. Slaten said that people called him “Judge” Scotland because he always wore a suit and tie and worked in the courthouse. Respect and admiration from one’s peers was often earned by those who portrayed an image of upward mobility and assimilation, acting as aspiration and inspiration to many.⁹⁵

Mary Roberts’ memories went to her childhood in North Carolina and her mother taking in laundry, when she asked about habits of dress. “My mother washed the little White girls’ dresses and I would just admire them, they were so pretty. I think that’s why I have a lot of clothes now. Because I always said ‘One day I’m going to have those pretty dresses’...”⁹⁶

Class figures greatly into the discourse on fashion and the African American. Andrew Washington (whose wife appears in the photo above), a retired public school teacher, was asked about his relationships with White neighbors as a child. He reported that he grew up in a neighborhood where his was one of the few Black families. “You know, they looked out for me if I got involved with some kind of trouble...They would

⁹⁵ Harvey Slaten, interview with Pauline Blount, Jan. 6, 1997.

⁹⁶ Mary Roberts, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Oct. 26, 1997.

give us different things, you know. We always got clothing and stuff like that.”⁹⁷ There were other Black families who would have never considered accepting “handouts,” especially from White people. It seems that those most in need were the ones least willing at times to seek help outside their inner circle.

Owen Wilkerson’s mother deliberated going “on the state” - moving into subsidized housing in this case - but decided against it. She told her son that White people tried to make Black people think they were poor when they were doing just fine. Wilkerson explained, “Because when you were on the state, you know, naturally you would have a White person to come by once in a while and check on you and everything. And then, you know, for some reason all the clothing looked alike. You know, the glasses looked alike. So, you know, you could say, ‘oh yeah, he’s on the state.’”⁹⁸

Style equaled agency but its pursuit was not an easy one. Clara Watkins, along with a number of others, remembered that some of the downtown stores barred African Americans from using the fitting rooms. “Well at that time they wouldn’t let you try on clothes. You had to just look at ‘em, pick out what you wanted. And you bought them.”⁹⁹ African Americans were forced to take their chances on the garments that they bought in hopes they would actually fit once they were tried on at home. Here we have just one more example of how cards can be so readily stacked against a group of people and negative messages reinforced, this time under the aegis of fashion. Black bodies would ruin new clothing and Blackness was to be apologized for, even camouflaged - perhaps even in layers of “silk and color.”

⁹⁷ Andrew Washington, interview with Annemarie Dickey-Kemp, Nov. 24, 1997.

⁹⁸ Owen Wilkerson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 12, 1997.

⁹⁹ Clara Watkins, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, (no date recorded).

Of course not everyone went along with the “rules.” Bernice Johnson, a retired educator, remembered:

Stores downtown were mostly Jewish and they would sometimes didn’t want you to try on hats or different things... There was a hat mother liked. We knew mother wasn’t going to buy that hat because then you bought things “on time”: dollar and a half here, two dollars there. Lady said, unless you buy that hat I can’t take it out of the window. And I remember my mother say, “How do you know I’m not gonna buy it?” So the lady took it out the window, mother tried it on, gave it back to her, and walked on out the store... She had a right to try it on. She was just like that, before her time.¹⁰⁰

Sundays on the Field



Figure 12. Postcard, 1941. Glenn G. Geisheimer, oldnewark.org.

One Sunday pastime that did not involve pews or sermons or clothing was America’s alleged favorite. The Newark Eagles baseball team was part of the Negro Leagues and played in the league from 1938 to 1948, sharing Ruppert Stadium with the White minor league Newark Bears. In 1946 the Eagles won the Negro League World Series. Owner and manager Effa Manley, who lived at 71 Crawford Street in Newark, made the Eagles the first professional baseball team ever owned and operated by a woman. In James Overmyer’s book on Effa Manley, Eagles player Max Manning (in photo above) is quoted as saying, “The Eagles were to [black] Newark what the Dodgers

¹⁰⁰ Bernice Johnson, interview with Annemarie Dickey-Kemp, July 8, 1997.

were to Brooklyn.”¹⁰¹ The Krueger-Scott oral histories bear out the significance of this team to at least a good number of people in Newark’s African-American community.

James Churchman, funeral director, remembered:

Oh, I used to swear by all the Newark Eagles. I used to go to the games. The thing that bothered me the most is they used to have opening day on Mother's Day. But my mother would always - we'd go to church, and she'd say, 'I know you want to go to the ballgame. So you go ahead.' ...And I can remember Mule Suttles and Ray Dandridge, all of the ballplayers. I remember when Larry Doby was playing with the Newark Eagles. 'Cause Larry and I finished high school the same year. Newark's own Larry Doby happened to be the second African American to break baseball's color barrier when he joined the American League in 1947.¹⁰²

Willie Belle Hooper recalled the Eagles as a regular Sunday event. It becomes clear in these interviews that the women were as equally involved in the culture of the Eagles as the men. Hooper said, “Well, the Newark Eagles was a baseball team, a Newark baseball team that everybody went - every Sunday they played in the stadium. Or any time they was in the stadium we went to the game. We didn't want to miss that. That was one of the highlights. And I think everybody used to go down there.”¹⁰³

Carolyn Wallace, a retired Social Services director, remembered the Eagles well if not necessarily fondly. “My mother was a baseball fanatic and maybe that's why I don't care for baseball now because she would go to every one of those games and take me... I was so glad when I was old enough to not have to go.”¹⁰⁴ Just as with church, apparently attendance at baseball games could be considered mandatory by some parents.

¹⁰¹ James Overmyer, *Queen of the Negro Leagues: Effa Manley and the Newark Eagles*, (Maryland: Scarecrow Trade, 1993) 58.

¹⁰² James Churchman, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Oct. 11, 1996.

¹⁰³ Willie Belle Hooper, interview with Catherine Lenix-Hooker, April 12, 1996.

¹⁰⁴ Carolyn Wallace, interview with Glen Marie Brickus (no date recorded).

Richard Cooke, retired Newark public school teacher, used to go every Sunday to Ruppert Stadium. It was a “privileged life” he says, going with his “uncle and cousins,” part of his “fictive kin.” “I saw Satchel Paige when I was a little kid - and we’d have popcorn and a hot dog – we’d have a ball!” Cooke said that his grandmother was a baseball fan as well. “I got to see baseball games at the Yankees, and the Dodgers, when Jackie Robinson started playing. Oh boy I’m tellin’ you, I really enjoyed myself.”¹⁰⁵

The Eagles were important to Coyt Jones, too; baseball was a family ritual. “Well, my son and I have never missed a Sunday going down to see [the Eagles] play. Every Sunday we’d go down,” he recalled.¹⁰⁶ Mr. Jones’ son was LeRoi Jones, known to most as Amiri Baraka. These moments in oral histories are ever so illuminating as they allow us to view the regular-ness of some exceptional people, to humanize those who have been iconicized and even vilified. Amiri Baraka, late poet, playwright and activist, attended the local baseball game every Sunday with his father. That seems an important piece of information and begs the question as to whether those who rail against his radical ideas and words without knowing the man might benefit from hearing his father’s story. Oral histories hold possibilities far past their value in historical construction.

Whether discussing sports or worship, the subject of segregation regularly entered the Krueger-Scott interviews. The Eagles were the Black team, the Bears were for the Whites. Mayor Shape James said, “I’ve seen quote, unquote, not overt, but covert segregation in the North. And again, it was not based on neighborhoods. It was different

¹⁰⁵ Richard Cooke, interview with Glen Marie Brickus (no date recorded).

¹⁰⁶ Coyt Jones, interview with Pauline Blount, Jan. 25, 1996.

in the South. In the South, you lived together, but you had to be a boy, stay in your place. In the North, they didn't want to live together.”¹⁰⁷

There were, according to many, benefits and disadvantages to the shift towards desegregation. Sharpe James argued that there were more Black millionaires when American society was segregated, and a better network of Black media outlets as well. “We had more restaurants, more of our own under a segregated society than we have now. Coleman Hotel. They had a restaurant. We had everything we needed under segregation. Our own hotel, our own stores, our own merchants began to grow. Integration brought competition where we lost many of our beginning industries...”¹⁰⁸

The Negro Leagues were victims of this decimation by integration. Early on Effa Manley and other Negro League team owners pushed for that integration. Not foreseeing the ways in which that would ultimately shut down their League, owners believed that once White fans saw how talented their Black players were they would then flock to Negro League games as readily as to Dodgers and Yankees games.¹⁰⁹ But as a few Black players began to have the opportunities to work for White clubs that offered more money and better resources, their peers were hard-pressed to stay put in the relatively low-budget Negro Leagues. Along with those perquisites, however, Black major leaguers also endured the rampant racism still incorporated into the fabric of American culture, and accentuated by increased exposure to White crowds. Ultimately, integration finally swept professional baseball as it had so many other Black industries. Owen Wilkerson said:

¹⁰⁷ Sharpe James, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 3 & 17, 1996.

¹⁰⁸ Sharpe James, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 3 & 17, 1996.

¹⁰⁹ Overmyer, *Queen of the Negro Leagues*, 216.

I sincerely believe that the worst thing happened to African-American society was the lifting of segregation. I tell you the reason why. Because when you had segregation, you had your support system. Everybody worked. We had a common boogie man to fight. We had a common goal to reach in life and in society. The doctors lived with the laborers in the neighborhood and what not. Why, because of segregation. So you had more of a family, you had more of a support system here. You knew the odds against you if you stepped out of that support system and tried to make it on your own out here in the, quote, unquote, White world.¹¹⁰

In an interesting twist in his discussion of leisure activities, Mayor Sharpe James declared, “I played on the Newark Eagles. Everybody thought I was going to be a professional baseball player.”¹¹¹ Mayor James’ interviewer, Glen Marie Brickus, did not seem at all interested or surprised at James’ claim to have played for the famous baseball team. Born in 1936 he would have been ten years old when the Eagles won the Negro World Series. Two years after that the league disbanded. But James continued on in the interview, talking about how good the team was, better than the segregated White Newark Bears. He then reminisced about going to the games to watch the famous Negro League players. Of course if one is playing on a team one would probably not need to go to the stadium to watch the games. There is no evidence that Sharpe James played with - or was in any way connected to - the Newark Eagles. He seems to have fabricated the story – not the only time we will witness such an act within these oral histories. The interviewer in this case was either not engaged enough or reluctant, perhaps, to comment upon this important man’s apparently false claim.

As oral historian Alessandro Portelli reminds us, this moment is “another door” through which to enter a particular history:

The first thing that makes oral history different, therefore, is that it tells us less about events than about their meaning. This does not imply that oral history has

¹¹⁰ Owen Wilkerson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 12, 1997.

¹¹¹ Sharpe James, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 3 & 17, 1996.

no factual validity. Interviews often reveal unknown events or unknown aspects of known events; they always cast new light on unexplored areas of the daily life of the nonhegemonic classes. From this point of view, the only problem posed by oral sources is that of verification...¹¹²

In this case it is not difficult to verify that James could not have done what he claimed, so we are left to question the meaning. Portelli theorizes on “velocity” in oral histories; how long someone spends on a topic can offer a pathway for analysis – especially when the “duration” of the narrative does not fit that of the topic. Portelli suggests it might be that when someone spends a long time on a seemingly small event - or in this case an untrue event - it may be because he is attempting to avoid or bypass another topic. “...dwelling on an episode may be a way of stressing its importance, but also a strategy to distract attention from more delicate points.”¹¹³

Of course it certainly is an interesting oral history moment to consider with regard to Sharpe James’ subsequent convictions on fraud while mayor of Newark. Perhaps Mayor James was more comfortable spinning another tale of athleticism in hopes of avoiding “delicate” conversations about his political life, even though it was fairly evident that Mrs. Brickus had no intention of pushing James in any direction he did not want to go. As well we can see the emphasis on his connection to the Eagles as one more indication of the major role that the baseball team played in Newark’s Black life. Furthermore, Mayor James’ athletic prowess was central to his public persona, an integral part of his numerous campaigns’ strategy and was also utilized in connecting with constituents during his time in office. In the City Archives one finds piles of photographs of James taken during his administration, variously swimming, playing tennis or simply

¹¹² Alessandro Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different?” in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) 50.

¹¹³ Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different?” 49.

shaking hands with people while sporting a track suit. In 1996, the year of his Krueger-Scott interview, young Cory Booker had begun making his way into Newark and its politics. Consciously or not, James may well have been stumping on tape.

What we learn through these interviews is just how engrained in life were the Newark Eagles for so many African Americans of the time; at least one person even made up a story simply to be associated with them. The Eagles - and the Negro Leagues more generally - symbolized strength and ability in the Black community and were an example of success outside of the White power structure. The Eagles brought families together and even usurped church at times. By the time Effa Manley insisted in August of 1940 that attending an Eagles game to raise money for the Booker T. Washington Community Hospital was a “civic responsibility no one should shirk” the Eagles had become vital in the lives of numerous Black Newarkers.¹¹⁴

Sunday Leisures

“What do you recall regarding the kinds of music that you heard in Black Newark, or do you remember listening to and/or seeing musicians perform jazz, gospel or the blues and at what places and what musicians?” asks question #76. Ministers and politicians might have been busy on Sundays but that does not mean they forwent all forms of leisure activity. Bethany’s Rev. Scott recalled Sundays as more than just time

¹¹⁴ Overmyer, *Queen of the Negro Leagues*, 59. Effa Manley’s own life was fascinating; born to a White mother who was married to an African-American man but who had an affair with a White man who was Effa’s father, Manley lived most comfortably within the African-American community. See Amy Ellis Nutt, “Baseball’s ‘black’ trailblazer - The peculiar story of Effa Manley and her Negro League team,” *The Star Ledger*, Feb. 22, 2006, <http://www.amynutt.com/starledgerPDF/EffaManley.pdf>

spent in the pulpit. “I not only went to church, but I did know something about nightclubs and so forth in our community. I like jazz,” Scott explained.¹¹⁵

Senator Wynona Lipman answered the question saying, “I used to think that the most of what we had in Newark were churches and bars.”¹¹⁶ Both institutions played a large part in the weekends of these Newarkers, although most of the narrators were more eager to discuss their churchgoing activities than their times spent in nightclubs. This was especially true of the women, although it may just be that they spent less time in those establishments due to traditional gender roles of the times. Women’s lives were typically spent in domestic privacy whereas men spent more of their time in the public. Even so there were exceptions to the “rule,” as always.

Louise Epperson reported, “When I came to Newark, I thought it was great to run to taverns and go to church. Those are the two main things that I did. [Laughter] That’s true. Church work and taverns. We just had a lot of fun doing that.”¹¹⁷ In chapter four we will see that Epperson’s familiarity with bars proved quite useful in her organizing. Her community engagement portrays a woman who is not especially concerned with respectability politics; Epperson did what she felt she had to do, and said what she felt needed saying. The idea of being in a bar - and thus being *seen* in a bar - was clearly of no concern to her. Part of Epperson’s attitude may well have been informed by the fact that her aunt, with whom she lived when she arrived in Newark, owned the first bar in the city after Prohibition.

¹¹⁵ Dr. James A. James Scott, interview with Glen Marie Brickus (no date recorded).

¹¹⁶ Wynona Lipman, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, April 5, 1997.

¹¹⁷ Louise Epperson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 25, 1997.

The ways in which people responded to the question about music and music venues can offer yet another lens onto attitudes surrounding respectability. Some saw these establishments as mysterious and exotic, others looked upon them as locations for “the seamy side of Newark,” as the questionnaire puts it. Others still embraced the club scene as yet one more occasion to live publicly after spending so much of their lives barred from such activity.

“Again with that stereotype that after work our reward is to get drunk and to party and to act like a fool. Not to say, ‘how much you going to pay me? What benefits I have, what health care I have.’ Meet and drink, get plastered and forget the labors of the week and forget that you’re being underpaid. And then, of course, you know, the real tragedy, forget to bring some money home,” so laments Sharpe James.¹¹⁸

Hortense Williams Powell remembers that as children they would peek into the Bikini Club to look at the men sitting at the bar. Mageline Little said, “Newark had some good music because I’m a Nancy Wilson, Sara Vaughn kind of person.” After talking about some music she saw down South she quickly said, “I didn’t like the bars - but I liked the concerts they would have at Symphony Hall...”¹¹⁹ Councilman Calvin West reported that when he was young adults knew how to have fun at home. “They’d have a jolly good time...Nothing out of line or what not...It wasn’t like goin’ to bars and things of that nature. Didn’t really know that that existed...”¹²⁰ Owen Wilkerson, on the other

¹¹⁸ Sharpe James, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 3 & 17, 1996.

¹¹⁹ Mageline Little, interview with Pauline Blount, Nov. 18, 1998.

¹²⁰ Calvin West, interview with Pauline Blount, March 20, 1996.

hand, saw the taverns as a part of life. "Everyone was entitled to some relaxation," said Wilkerson, and the church "would take care of that on Sunday," he explained.¹²¹

Mary Roberts, a retired teacher, recalls watching entertainers at a downtown club - whose name escapes her. "Mostly we listened to our Black artists, you know, Sara Vaughn, Louis Armstrong, all those people... My brother used to take me down there. It was really a nice place to go. There was jazz...I remember going on Sunday afternoons sometimes..."¹²² Going out in the afternoon, perhaps right from church, may have been looked upon differently than venturing out after dark, dressed in non-church attire. Davarian Baldwin makes mention of this in his earlier quote regarding the "daytime image" that some African Americans sought to project upon Chicago's Stroll and their leisure activities in general.

Owen Wilkerson, legislative analyst for the Office of the City Clerk at the time of his interview, agreed that there were many options in the bars and taverns that one could visit on the weekends and he remembered gospel groups playing on Sunday nights such as Ronnie Williams with the Five Blind Boys [of Alabama] or the Mighty Clouds of Joy:

I mean, everybody on a Friday night, you know, after you'd been working and slaving all day and what not and everything all week, you know, you would have a drink You would go around the corner to the Meyer's [sic] Tavern on Belmont Avenue, which was right next to the Baer's supermarket. It was between the Baer's supermarket and Fisher's Bakery. And there was this one particular gentleman named Rudy, on Fridays, you know, Rudy would have a couple of drinks and come home and raise all kind of hell. And the cops knew him. I mean, every Friday they were there. You know, they'd just take him on the stoop and sit down and talk with Rudy and what not. Hey, Monday morning, Rudy's the nicest guy you ever want to meet.¹²³

¹²¹ Owen Wilkerson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 12, 1997.

¹²² Mary Roberts, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Oct. 26, 1997.

¹²³ Owen Wilkerson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 12, 1997. In a list of 140 music venues of Newark that existed, none are named "Meyers" or anything similar. It does not come up in an internet

Willie Bradwell said, “Laurel Gardens used to have - Ronnie Williams used to sponsor their gospel shows. And everybody came. That's the first place I saw Aretha Franklin... Every Sunday practically we were in Laurel Gardens for a gospel show.” Bradwell also remembered another weekend leisure activity. Public Service would run buses on Sundays for excursions outside the city. They traveled to places such as Roadside America - a miniature village tourist attraction, various caves in Pennsylvania, and other such non-urban sites.¹²⁴



Figure 13. “PSNJ GM No. 4081 at Franklin Avenue Loop circa 1954-1955,” Copyright 2014 Brian Cudahy. www.nycsubway.org.

Of course Sundays were leisurely feast days too, where many enjoyed a particular meal or food item specific to observing the Day of the Lord. Calvin West, member of Friendship Baptist on Norfolk Street, said that Sundays were about “getting ready for

search either. List: “Newark Jazz Clubs, Theaters, Hangouts and Other Venues,” Barbara Kukla, *Swing City: Newark Nightlife, 1925-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), Leo Johnson, *JJ's Theme: Newark Jazz Clubs of the 1960's and 70's* (Rutgers University: Master's Thesis, 2005).

¹²⁴ Willie Bradwell, interview unstated, Dec. 8, 1997. In terms of oral history and the practice of transcription, it should be noted that Bradwell's transcript reads, “Olive Garden.” After much research I confirmed that indeed there was no such place and that Mrs. Bradwell was referring to the famous Laurel Gardens club at 457 Springfield Ave. Transcript verification is an important piece of the discussion of oral history scholarship.

Sunday meals and going to church, coming back home, having Sunday dinner, then going back to church. I used to say to myself, why do we have to go to church so much?"¹²⁵

"On Sunday we had corn bread that tasted like cake," remembers Rev. Scott.¹²⁶

Queen James reminisced on her father's good cooking. "My daddy used to love to cook 'cause he cooked in the army. He was a chef and that's what he got his diploma from... He was a head chef in the service. And he was a good cook. And you talking about some corn bread. Whew! My dad could cook. He'd get up on Sunday morning or whatever and cook that corn bread..."¹²⁷

James Churchman had early memories of church that had as much to do with what he got to eat afterwards. "And then we had an ice cream parlor there called Dellcrest, and it was a big thing on a Sunday after church, cause we didn't go to movies on Sunday, that we would walk over to Dellcrest Ice Cream Parlor and sit down and eat ice cream there. It was quite a treat for us to go over there."¹²⁸

Ice cream, it seems, was both a luxury and a money-maker for Black Newarkers. One of the many earning schemes that Joe Clark devised as a young boy was the sale of Kool-Aid and ice cream. Using his mother's churn he would make the ice cream and then sell it for five cents a scoop. Children who were a part of the Boys and Girls Scouts would get free hot dogs and ice cream at Eagles games, according to Katheryn Bethea. Owen Wilkerson's "uncle" would pick up a bunch of kids in his Hudson and take them to

¹²⁵ Calvin West, interview with Pauline Blount, March 20, 1996.

¹²⁶ Dr. James A. James Scott, interview with Glen Marie Brickus (no date recorded).

¹²⁷ Queen James, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, undated.

¹²⁸ James Churchman, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Oct. 11, 1996.

Weequahic Park for ice cream in the summer time. And included in Louise Scott's business empire was an ice cream parlor.

Calvin West was seventy-one years old at the time of his interview. At one point West is asked about birthday celebrations and responds that people did not need to go to bakeries "back then" but made their own cakes at home. It appears that West in general highly values the life lived at home. For the second time in his interview he points out the merits of self-sufficiency that adults apparently once had; they created their own cakes and their own fun. But West's voice becomes more animated as he thinks back. "We even made our own ice cream!" he exclaimed. The interviewer responded, "You're kidding," perhaps as much in response to the joy in his voice as to the incongruity of the statement. "Oh certainly. We made our own ice cream in the churn...it was a wonderful thing," beamed West through the tape recorder.¹²⁹ As Theodore Rosengarten wrote about his experience interviewing Nate Shaw, the elderly Shaw seemed to "suspend his age" when he spoke of moments during his youth, as if he was experiencing them right at that particular moment. Many of the "storytellers" in the Krueger-Scott project also seem to retreat in time as they speak of childhood memories and events.

Calvin West, Newark's first African-American Councilman at Large, began working at the age of six. Yet he tells his interviewer that the family really was not in want of anything, painting a romantic picture of a childhood where nothing bad seemed to happen. "Everybody was doing the same thing so that made it so wonderful." Further into the interview, however, West would acknowledge that the later years did bring with them some racial issues, political tribulations, and a loss of African-American

¹²⁹ Calvin West, interview with Pauline Blount, March 20, 1996.

solidarity.¹³⁰ That homemade ice cream may well have been a symbol to West of all that he perceived as simple and good, including his childhood.

Sundays were also shopping days according to some Krueger-Scott narrators. In listening to the oral histories one hears more of Saturdays as the day relegated to consuming, but that usually entailed practical items such as groceries or school shoes. Queen James said that she and Madame Louise Scott used to treat themselves to a day of shopping in the city on Sundays. It is not clear whether this was after church or in lieu thereof.

Mrs. Scott, we used to go shopping on Sundays in New York. So I didn't really do a lot of big shopping here in Newark. I would go with her. We would go to New York, and she would drive. When she bought her first Cadillac. And we would drive to New York and go down, you know, where they, what did they call it? They used to go down where the big shopping area.

Brickus: In the Village?

Mrs. James: In the Village and all downtown and all that. We used to go there. I used to go with her. And we would pick up clothes and stuff like that.¹³¹

Coyt Jones remembered that Sunday afternoons were often spent strolling down Broad Street, window shopping. He compared the ease with which people stayed out until all hours back then to the present times, "Come in any hour we wanted to. No one was afraid of anything. Now it's a different story. You can't do that."¹³²

According to Rose Tucker, at one time an operating room assistant, she could not "come in any hour" back then either. Tucker explains, "You had to be home at a certain

¹³⁰ Calvin West, interview with Pauline Blount, March 20, 1996.

¹³¹ Queen James, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, (no date recorded). I am not so certain that Madame Scott and Queen James did their shopping in the Bohemian stores of the West village; Brickus' prompt negated the opportunity for James to come up with the location on her own.

¹³² Coyt Jones, interview with Pauline Blount, Jan. 25, 1996.

time, you didn't just walk in when you were ready. My time was 11:30. My brother could stay out longer." The rules, and thus experiences, were different for males and females.

But Tucker does confirm the safety of the times, remembering how she could run home at 11:15 at night, down Court Street from the "Y", just in time to make her curfew. Tucker also recalled the Griffith Piano Company on Broad Street, built in 1927, and how sometimes they would actually have a person playing the piano right there in the store window.

The downtown was a very particular actor in the lives of numerous Krueger-Scott narrators:

Tucker: You go downtown on Sunday. You could walk downtown, walk over High Street and go down Market Street and back up Broad Street. That was an afternoon out.

E. Alma Flagg: I know what you mean... You really went sightseeing downtown didn't you?¹³³



Figure 14. The Griffith Building on Broad Street. Circa 2008, *The Star-Ledger*/ Amanda Brown. nj.com
Downtown was an incredibly important locale; it was a site of awe-inspiring

stores and coveted goods and yet not fully available to all. Window shopping was quite often the only option for African Americans in Newark. The generation that was

¹³³ Rose Tucker, interview with E. Alma Flagg, Sept. 29, 1997.

interviewed for Krueger-Scott by and large took for granted the implicitness of Northern segregation. Pauline Mathis proclaimed the beauty of downtown but also said, “I always felt that sometimes at some of the stores you could be waiting and there’d be several people waiting and sometime it took a little while for them to get to you sometimes. You know what I mean? Sometimes they’d take someone ahead of you and you knew you may have been there first...”¹³⁴ So many qualifiers -*sometimes, little, may* - in Mathis’ explanation speaks to possible concerns about sounding too harsh, even as she describes what were clearly racist practices in the stores.

As children, many of the narrators accompanied their parents on ritual trips downtown to look at the merchandise that was out of most families’ reach – financially as well as logistically. For that reason there is a tension in the interviews between shopping downtown and spending one’s money on Springfield Avenue and Prince Street. Ethel Richards remembers that her mother bought her shoes at Allison’s Shoe Store on Springfield Avenue. “There was no need to go...downtown,” said Richards.¹³⁵

The department store windows, the well-dressed people walking by...going downtown was an outing and for some a representation of things aspired to. At the time of the interviews there was no longer the downtown that existed in most of the narrators’ memories. Malls had commandeered city center department store culture, in Newark and across the country. There was a sense among the narrators that even if they no longer would have gone downtown, they wished it was still there. Marion Williams remembers,

¹³⁴ Pauline Mathis, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Oct. 7, 1997.

¹³⁵ Ethel Richards, interview with Bertha Miller, April 16, 1999.

“Having Bamberger’s and Hahne’s downtown allowed people to know what was in style.”¹³⁶

Historian Lawrence Levine’s work argues for cultural consumption to be viewed as “the folklore of industrial societies.”¹³⁷ But Robin D.G. Kelley cautions that because it is the elites who control mass culture that Black cultural consumption needs to be considered through complicated lenses of opposition and agency.¹³⁸ Oral histories give us yet another possibility. As the Krueger-Scott narrators participate in the consumption of culture and goods in Newark, the oral historian asks *how* they do so. We see that those interviewed for Krueger-Scott approached their leisure time in a myriad of ways even as they often arrived at the same place. Downtown was both a cornucopia of shops and a reminder of Jim Crow; music clubs offered respite from a challenging work week and yet were nothing less than dens of iniquity to some. Cultural consumption is an invaluable pathway into historical enquiry but it must be traversed in multiple ways.

Radio Sundays

The Krueger-Scott community spent their leisure time at home as well, and the radio was their foremost supplier of news, information and entertainment. As Robert Woods explained, his family could not afford television so he listened to a lot of radio, especially WWRL and WNJR. Woods remembered Sunday radio shows devoted to music from local Black churches as well as traveling quartets. Others recalled Father

¹³⁶ Marion Williams, interview with Pauline Blount, June 28, 1999.

¹³⁷ Lawrence W. Levine, “The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences,” *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹³⁸ Robin D. G. Kelley, “The Riddle of the Zoot Suit,” *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Toronto: Free Press, 1994).

Divine's programs. Also known as George Baker, in 1936 Father Divine broadcast six radio shows over station WBHI in Newark.¹³⁹



Figure 15. Father Divine, Image from Gonzalo Alberto, oldnewark.org.

WBHI broadcast from the “Hotel Scott.” Louise Scott herself later had a radio show that aired from her Mansion, the “Scott Cultural and Civic Center Program.” Kitty Taylor remembered Scott’s show as playing gospel music and once having Amiri Baraka on as a guest. “He performed for her in many ways...” said Taylor, describing the admiration so many Newarkers had for Madame Scott. “Bernice Bass and Connie Woodruff “were two of the most important women who took part in Louise Scott’s life,” added Taylor.¹⁴⁰ It is unfortunate how little is left in the way of program recordings from Newark’s thriving radio days.

Eugene Thompson, an attorney, described the radio in his lifetime as:

...instrumental in getting a lot of information. I remember during the war there was a radio announcer called Gabriel Heater. And he used to come on every night to bring you up on the events that were concerned during the war. And he had an

¹³⁹ “Father Divine Dates from 1876 Pertaining to the Work and Mission of Father Divine” (Word Press, 2006) <http://peacemission.info/father-divine/>.

¹⁴⁰ Kitty Taylor, interview with Virginia Morton, Aug. 31, 1995.

old saying. He used to say, “Ladies and gentlemen, I’ve got bad news for you tonight.” ... And, of course, there was a famous correspondent Edward Murrow. I didn’t know who he was then as a kid. We used to listen to him when the bombs would drop – they dropped in London. It wasn’t funny but when you was a kid this was just something you couldn’t visualize in your world...because you didn’t have television so you had to use your imagination on exactly what was really going on. But we knew that there was a war going on.¹⁴¹

Sundays were one of the most talked about days when it came to the subject of radio in the Krueger-Scott interviews. Listening to radio was indeed a leisure activity as it required being home and in one place long enough to pay attention to a program. Bernice Bass’s weekly *News and Views* on WNJR, which spanned the 1950s through the 1980s, was mentioned in most every single interview. Louise Epperson said, “We always had, at that time, *News and Views* on the radio with Bernice Bass. Bernice Bass was one of the first persons that ever give me free access to the airwaves to talk about the dilemma of Newark [and the fight against the Medical School]. And she continued to help us up until she left.”¹⁴²

This particular show was a part of the cultural fabric of this African-American community. An outspoken, intelligent, politically astute woman, Bass - whose day job was as a clerk at the downtown passport office - regularly stirred the political pot in Newark.¹⁴³ Mrs. Bass’ obituary in the *Star Ledger*, written by veteran journalist Barbara Kukla - also a friend of Bass - included testimonials from her various friends and co-workers. (A number of whom were also participants of the Krueger-Scott Oral History

¹⁴¹ Eugene Thompson, interview with Annemarie Dickey-Kemp, Oct. 1, 1997.

¹⁴² Louise Epperson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 25, 1997.

¹⁴³ Unfortunately Bass was not interviewed along with her peers in this oral history collection. Had she even been approached she probably would have declined as she had reportedly become a recluse in her later years, passing away in her home alone in 2000.

Project). "Because of Bernice Bass, I'm a better person," said Mayor Sharpe James in the article, "Newark is a better city, and America is a better place."¹⁴⁴

Kitty Taylor, in her Krueger-Scott interview said about Bass' show, "On Sunday nights, Newark's seniors would rush home from church to listen..."¹⁴⁵ Taylor, also a journalist, was a guest on Bass' show and said to Barbara Kukla, "You had to be quick and witty when you were on Bernice's show. You were better off saying nothing than saying the wrong thing."¹⁴⁶

Councilman George Branch, who was quoted in Bass' obituary as saying, "If you said the wrong thing, she'd get you," remembered visiting the "Scott Mansion" regularly and hearing Bass' early shows in person. "We used to go in there for the radio shows at Miss Bernice... We always invited to come and sit and listen to ... to raise questions on political issues, you name it, what have you - she was tough.... And everybody listened on Sunday night to hear Bernice Bass... Nine o'clock at night..."¹⁴⁷

Mageline Little, project director for the oral history project, recalls that most of the community's news came from Bernice Bass' radio show, that it was listened to every Sunday night and that after Bass stopped hosting the show there was no "pipeline" anymore. "That's the one show nobody has thought of to replicate... That's something that's missing in the Newark community," noted Little.¹⁴⁸ Elma Bateman recalled

¹⁴⁴ Barbara Kukla, "Radio Personality Eulogized As Newark's Unsung Hero - The Fearless Bernice Bass Took Her Battles to Help the City's Ordinary People and Older Residents to the Airwaves," *The Star Ledger*, Feb. 3, 2000, nj.com.

¹⁴⁵ Kitty Taylor, interview with Virginia Morton, Aug. 31, 1995.

¹⁴⁶ Kukla, "Radio Personality Eulogized As Newark's Unsung Hero."

¹⁴⁷ George Branch, interview with Pauline Blount, Aug. 28, 1996.

¹⁴⁸ Mageline Little, interview with Pauline Blount, Nov. 18, 1998.

listening to Bernice Bass as well; it was the only time she “got involved in politics,” Bateman said. She wanted to see what was “going on” and Bass could supply her with that information in the comfort of her own home.¹⁴⁹

Frank Hutchins said he got his information from attending council meetings and listening to Bernice Bass' *News and Views* on WNJR and WABO. It was a controversial show and Hutchins recalls the community having to “stick up for her” at one point.¹⁵⁰ This was probably in reference to the radio show's cancelation after Bass refused to follow the guidelines handed down by the station in response to her “spontaneous” on-air conversation style. The owner moved to pre-record her interviews. Bass refused this for a number of reasons, both ethical as well as logistical. The case went to the city's Human Rights Council and eventually the restrictions were lifted.¹⁵¹ Bass' show had become as close to a Sunday ritual as church for many; avid listeners were not about to let the powers-that-be take it away.

Bass' show created and nurtured political actors in the Black community. But it also must have put some off who continued to follow the line of respectability. Listening to Thomas Dorsey on the radio was one thing but not everyone in the Krueger-Scott community could have been pleased with a woman of color speaking up for her people and out against the city administration. Within the Krueger-Scott interviews there is no criticism of Bass - or of how Black radio in general had started to leave behind the

¹⁴⁹ Elma Bateman, interview with Pauline Blount, April 29, 1999.

¹⁵⁰ Frank Hutchins, interview with Pauline Blount, June 29, 1998.

¹⁵¹ See *Star Ledger* articles on this event at the Newark Public Library New Jersey Room's microfilm archives: July 24, 1968 “Negro Leaders Assail Dismissal by WNJR” and September 18, 1968, “Radio Personality Gets Her Job Back,” Newark Public Library.

typically traditional religious programming of the earlier 20th century for more straightforward news and controversial views. On the other hand there are a select few in the oral history collection who do not mention Bass' name when asked about radio. Considering the way in which Bernice Bass was synonymous with radio to so many, those who neglected to speak her name may well have been protesting in silence.

There is scant archival information available to document Bass' obvious impact on the African-American community of Newark and beyond. Images of her are elusive even as she was "famous" enough to have a street named after her. As with so many of those interviewed in this collection, Bass was an "everyday person" who greatly affected history. Forgotten by many, left unknown to others, Bass' story is another example of the import of oral narratives in the restoration of Black history.

Radio was a "pipeline" for the African-American community according to these interviews – for news as well as entertainment. Joe Clark and many others remember the excitement when boxer Joe Louis had his fights aired on the radio. Clark brings this up in answer to a question concerning traditional "ethnic" celebrations. "That was a celebration when he would knock people out...up and down the street."¹⁵² James "Chops" Jones also remembers Joe Louis as a hero, who grew in stature thanks to radio. "Joe Louis was like our idol...Anytime Joe Louis fought, everybody stayed up...The first time Joe Louis lost to Max Schmelling, well everybody was outside cryin' like somebody hit 'em. Grown people."¹⁵³

¹⁵² Joe L. Clark, interview with Pauline Blount, July 8, 1996.

¹⁵³ James "Chops" Jones, interview with Pauline Blount, April 7, 1997.

Much like clothing, radio offered a location in which to practice, and a site in which to witness, Black agency. Radio was where African Americans could actually hear about themselves. At first, popular Black media production essentially limited itself to the foregrounding of performers and athletes, but by the 1950s Black intellectuals and activists had found space on the airwaves as well. Radio built and sustained the Krueger-Scott community and allowed for shared experience among the people, even as they remained in their own homes and lived their separate lives. Black radio programming progressed and contributed to an affirmation that there was indeed a place in American society for African-American life.

Conclusion

If we were to base our conclusions solely on the Krueger-Scott interviews then we would surmise that the majority of urban African Americans attended church during the mid-20th century. History tells us that this is actually accurate. Although the Newark group in question was reliant on one particular church, the fact is that most every person interviewed was at the least connected to a church through family or through music or through history. If nothing else, churches played an integral role as landmarks in these interviews. So often a building was “down the street” or “across” or “one block over” from a given house of worship. This foregrounding was due to the physical proliferation of churches in Newark as well as their central positioning in Black life.

Those who were church members had varied expectations of their churches – and of themselves. Coyt Jones loved Bethany Baptist and seemed to have volunteered for most every post available. “If they paid me I would give it back to them,” he said.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Coyt Jones, interview with Pauline Blount, Jan. 25, 1996.

George Branch, who belonged to St. James AME, cautioned, “I never looked for just to do anything but just go to church. I didn't want to take an active part because I know when you take an active part - all I know is that they work the devil out you.”¹⁵⁵

Using the lens of Sunday, with a focus on church and ball games, radio, clothing and food, we are provided a snapshot of the lives of these African-American urban citizens. We see that at once they have so much in common and yet are all quite individual in the ways in which they experience some of the very same things. We hear people speaking up about their socializing and others demurring. We see humor about religion and sorrow over its “demise.”

Dr. King lamented the segregation of Sundays but these interviews allow us to consider a possibly different analysis of this “most segregated” day. During the core of the 20th century – and throughout American history as a matter of fact – Sunday was a day that African Americans had the most freedom of movement. Whether given a respite from field work or a day off from delivering the mail, it was for most a rare day of rest. It was “the day the Lord has made” and in many and varied ways these Newarkers would “rejoice and be glad in it.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ George Branch, interview with Pauline Blount, Aug. 28, 1996.

¹⁵⁶ Psalm 118:24, *New King James Version*.

CHAPTER FOUR

Workdays

Blacks have earned a place in this society; they have earned a share of its enormous wealth, with physical labor and intellectual sacrifices, as wages and as royalties.

-Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*

Introduction

Newark helped build this country and African Americans helped build Newark.

African Americans have worked hard for the city throughout the 20th century, and on the whole their jobs have been more arduous and less lucrative than those of other racial and ethnic groups. During the time of the long Great Migration there was a fairly well defined and limited list of jobs available to Blacks in the cities.¹ The most common employment for Black men early on were those in the unskilled labor force, which meant that they were typically underpaid and without job security. Choices were even more limited for the African-American women; most all were domestics at one point or another, no matter their educational background.

The concept of work will not be limited here to that which one did in order to draw a salary. African-American Newarkers spent much of their time working for the betterment of their communities. For some it was by way of educational activism, attending PTA and school board meetings; others were concerned with the upkeep of their neighborhoods, calling City Hall each time their area was passed over for basic

¹ This is echoed by the responses to question # 56 on the Krueger-Scott questionnaire which reads, "What were the common occupations for black men/women in Newark when you came? Did blacks enter new occupations during your residence in Newark? If so, what occupations? When?" Repeatedly the answers included: domestics, porters, and delivery for the first half of the 20th century, with the addition of skilled factory workers, teachers, secretaries, and civil servants coming more frequently in terms of the latter half of the century. This chapter will concentrate on the decades of the 1940s through 1960s as this is the time period to which most of the Krueger-Scott narrators are referring.

services; still others fought the injustices perpetrated on them through continued racist practices within the urban environment.

W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in *The Philadelphia Negro* in 1899 that “The humblest white employee knows that the better he does his work the more chance there is for him to rise in business. The black employee knows that the better he does his work the longer he may do it; he can not hope for promotion.”² Fifty and even one hundred years later that statement may not always be the case but it still stands as much more than an exception. Sociologist E. Digby Baltzell writes in his introduction to the 1967 edition of Du Bois’ book, “The 1950’s were definitely years of increasing opportunities for Philadelphia Negroes, even though in 1960 Negroes were twice as likely to be unemployed as whites...” The fact is that even this “increase” in opportunity is quite relative. In the 1950s, for the first time since emancipation, the domestic trade was no longer the foremost employer of Black women and men. A marked uptick in white-collar jobs for African Americans was the result. This transformation, Baltzell argues, indicates a sea change in urban race relations.³ Oral histories, however, provide a slightly different understanding of this particular trend.

The Krueger-Scott narrators’ experiences in the workplace certainly do reflect the cultural shift of job opportunity for African Americans throughout the 20th century. We hear stories of parents who were domestics and then how subsequently the narrators walked long paths into more skilled and higher paying employment. Many of the racist employment policies of the 1930s in fact had indeed been erased by the 1950s, and yet

² Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, 328.

³ E. Digby Baltzell, “Introduction,” *The Philadelphia Negro*, xxxix.

this does not mean that Blacks were anywhere near equal opportunity alongside Whites when it came to employment. Countering Baltzell's claim that all these "strict taboos" on the hiring of African Americans "were removed in the decade of the 1950's," we will hear tales from the Krueger-Scott oral histories of continual racist employment practices in Newark right on into the 1970s.⁴ This situation required an enduring need for workplace activism. African Americans' efforts to secure fair employment for themselves and their people entailed challenging a well-established system of unequal job opportunity.

As well, Blacks had to challenge other systems such as urban renewal, education reform, and retail policy as they attempted to partake fully in all that was available in a given city. These efforts were often akin to second jobs. Mandi Isaacs Jackson writes about New Haven, Connecticut's activist organizing during the 1960s, noting ways in which Blacks and Whites worked towards the betterment of particular communities. Much as when Tom Hayden and his predominantly White Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) came into Newark's Clinton Hill to "organize" the neighborhood residents, New Haven had well-intentioned mostly White Yale students entering this same sort of community in an attempt to rally support of anti-establishment activity.

Jackson writes:

The story of neighborhood organizing in The Hill also offers an alternative microhistory of the New Left. Although an infusion of young white activists who moved to the neighborhood in 1964 facilitated the establishment of a neighborhood union and a number of other community programs, the concurrent emergence of an organized group of black parents – demanding improvements at

⁴ E. Digby Baltzell, "Introduction," *The Philadelphia Negro*, xl.

their children's school – laid the foundation for more comprehensive and radical community organizing in the years to come.⁵

Oral histories, alongside work by scholars such as Jackson, put forth a more nuanced understanding of community alliance and progressive activity. The fact is that while various activist organizations regularly descend upon cities with the intention of helping, rarely do they remain. The stories of these outside political organizations tend to be foregrounded while those stories of ordinary neighborhood residents' hard work receive much less attention. This historical absence in turn prevents potential future advocates any kind of model of community activism going forward.

In short, African Americans have tended to work harder than other Americans in order to prove themselves - both in the workplace and in their communities - to a society that continues to insist that they do so. This fight continues today, progressing Black people past the starting line that so few ever even had a chance to get to in the first place.

PAID WORK

Newark was not always a city of color, of course, but the Great Migration brought that color in the form of so many African Americans looking for work and a better life. Below is a chart that illustrates the minimal Black population of 1836, the enslaved included:

⁵ Jackson, *Model City Blues*, 84. See also Curvin's *Inside Newark* for discussion of the SDS and the Clinton Hill Neighborhood Council, 87-90.

According to the Census completed in September, 1836, under the direction of the City Council, the Population and Buildings of Newark were as follows:—

Number of Inhabitants.	West Ward.	North Ward.	South Ward.	East Ward.	Total.
Of 5 yrs. old and under,	769	593	751	726	2839
Between 5 and 12, -	721	553	648	534	2456
Between 12 and 21, -	1170	597	1100	941	3808
Over 21, - - -	2783	1916	2339	2767	9805
Male Colored, - -	131	81	46	66	324
Female Colored, -	160	84	67	85	396
Slaves, - - -	3	6	-	1	10
Total, - - - -	5761	3967	4984	6120	19732
White Males, - -	2858	1867	2442	2808	9975
White Females, -	2590	1822	2429	2150	8991
Male Aliens, - -	450	459	270	553	1732
Female Aliens, - -	333	338	201	399	1271
Males Naturalized,	106	20	65	88	279
Females Naturalized,	105	14	42	81	242
Total Foreigners,	-	-	-	-	3624
Dwellings, brick or stone	58	19	21	46	144
Do. frame,	503	357	488	466	1814
Stores, brick,	84	11	-	1	96
Do. frame,	36	20	20	2	78
Workshops, brick,	7	-	2	9	18
Do. frame,	68	15	68	49	200
Total, - - - -	-	-	-	-	2300

Figure 16. 1836 City Census, oldnewark.org.

In the next one hundred years the numbers changed drastically as African Americans began to be paid for their labor. A 1941 Works Projects Administration (WPA) report noted that prior to 1917 approximately 75% of African Americans were “gainfully employed, mostly in domestic and ‘personal service’ jobs.” World War I kept those sorts of occupations available while creating more jobs for Black migrants from the South. But as would happen again after World War II, after the First World War White soldiers returned to their jobs and suddenly Black laborers were no longer competent or capable enough to remain employed.⁶

By the summer of 1940 there resided 45,760 African Americans in Newark; 11% of them had paid employment. By 1950 17% of Black Newarkers were employed.⁷ These are not impressive numbers in terms of racial equality. We will learn from the Krueger-

⁶ WPA Negro Case Histories – Newark (New Jersey: Work Projects Administration 1941) 1-5, bergen.org.

⁷ James Overmyer, *Queen of the Negro Leagues: Effa Manley and the Newark Eagles* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1941) 176.

Scott interviews that which has been echoed by so many scholars, that those participating in the exodus to Northern urban spaces did not always find themselves in a land of milk and honey.

The Thirties and Forties

Domestic Work

Louise Epperson told a familiar story of day-work in the domestic realm:

My first job in Newark [in 1932], my friend asked me if I would hold a job for her while she tried to get a better job. Because she didn't want to lose that job. It was a part-time job. I had never been in a White person's house to work, and I was very nervous and excited over it. And she said I could do it, and I did it. I did all the cleaning. I did the cooking. And I received five dollars a week.

Glen Marie Brickus: So that was a domestic job.

Epperson: Domestic job. Then I got a second domestic job working for Dr. Swain on Roosevelt Avenue. And I thought I was really coming into something then because I started off with twenty-five dollars a week. I was his receptionist, and when the people would all leave the office, he would come into the house. Then I would take my uniform that I was a receptionist in and change into another uniform and cook dinner.⁸

Epperson said that she hated the first family she worked for but noted that the Swains were very nice. But as she told her interviewer, she had no intention of being a domestic her whole life. After another “hold” job in Montclair as a chauffeur and cook, Epperson landed a job at Western Electric. Mrs. Epperson was ultimately able to purchase her own home a few years later, a fact of which she was very proud. What she thought would be her final job - the one she held as she famously battled against the expansion of the Medical School - was with the Willowbrook State School on Staten Island. There she worked with developmentally challenged youth. Mrs. Epperson

⁸ Louise Epperson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 25, 1997.

ultimately retired as a Patient Relations Director from the New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry.⁹



Figure 17. Louise Epperson at her house on 12th Ave. circa 1960, newestamericans.com.

Many of the Krueger-Scott narrators' mothers performed domestic work, if they worked outside the home at all. Joe Clark made a distinction between someone who merely cleaned and one who was given responsibility of an employer's children. "My mother took care of the children up to a point, but on occasion did domestic work."¹⁰

Eugene Thompson's mother was a domestic in Virginia, Katheryn Bethea's mother was a domestic in Newark, and Carolyn Wallace's mother was a domestic in Bernardsville, while living in Newark some thirty miles away. Mildred Crump's mother stayed at home with the children in Detroit until Crump's father lost his job; then Mrs. Crump did domestic work. In discussion with Senator Wynona Lipman, interviewer Glen Marie Brickus noted that when she herself arrived in Newark in the 1950s that most

⁹ Chapter five will provide more details on housing issues and will tell the story of Mrs. Epperson's activism in response to the "blighting" of her neighborhood and expansion of the Medical School.

¹⁰ Joe L. Clark, interview with Pauline Blount, July 8, 1996.

African-American women were still domestics. Lipman added that it had been the same in the South. "... when I first came to Newark, it was the early 50s. And most women, most Black women, were doing domestic work. And most Black men were laborers."¹¹

Rev. Woods told the interviewer, "My wife was a domestic. And most of her friends were domestics. Even though she was a beautician. They felt that they could make out better by doing... 'days' work' ... 'cause they didn't have to pay any income taxes, social security at that time, which was wrong. They thought it was right because they didn't have to pay anything out of it."¹² Of course this practice continued on throughout the 20th century, benefiting employers much more than their employees. It is only somewhat recently that laws have been enacted against this particular practice.¹³

Marzell Swain told her interviewer that even though she graduated from high school, in 1940, the only work she was able to secure was that of a domestic.

That was the only job I could get. Until I was workin' for a lady and she said, "How far did you go in school?" So I told her and she said, "What are you doin' doin' domestic work?" She said, "You got an education you should not be doin' domestic work and you should not be takin' care of babies." So then she tried to help me get into a store and she still couldn't help me. Some friends she knew. They wouldn't touch you.¹⁴

So Mrs. Swain worked as a domestic until she married. Later she worked for a Mr. Strauss who owned a small clothing store on Prince Street. Her responsibilities were

¹¹ Wynona Lipman, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, April 5, 1997.

¹² Robert Woods, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 17, 1997.

¹³ While a law was enacted in the 1950s that required employers to include domestic laborers in their tax returns, it was not until the mid-1990s that the "Nanny Tax" had its own section on the 1040 form. See Albert B. Crenshaw, "Simplified Nanny Tax Rules Can Still Create Headaches," *The Washington Post*, Dec. 10, 1995, washingtonpost.com.

¹⁴ Marzell Swain, interview with Annemarie Dickey-Kemp, May 14, 1998.

to "...help put up merchandise, take care of customers, sweep what had to be swept, you know, I did domestic - you know, took care of the customers - you know, salesperson..." Swain's interjection of the word "domestic" into her job description might mean that she was so used to that form of employment that she naturally utilized the descriptor; or perhaps that her tasks still felt closely similar to those of a domestic's.

Domestic work was the only option available for so many African-American women during at least the first half of the 20th century. It was not ideal but it was also not something that necessarily carried dishonor. If we are able to switch to the sensibilities of a past historical moment we can better regard the lives of the people living in that particular moment. This often results in a reconvening of agency. I recently conducted an oral history project at my predominantly African-American, First Baptist Church of Madison. One interview with a former "first lady" (the wife of a deceased pastor) included her story of live-in domestic work. Mrs. Johnston reported that the Jewish family for whom she worked used to drive her to First Baptist every Sunday and then wait for her until service was over, bringing her back to their home. It was of course important to note that they were Jewish because that meant that they did not have religious services of their own to go to on Sundays.¹⁵

The ability to attend church was rare among live-in domestic workers, according to Elizabeth Clark-Lewis in her book *Living In, Living Out: African-American Domesticity and the Great Migration*. In fact, Clark-Lewis explains that the inability to go to services

¹⁵ Johnston is not her actual name. While deeds of gift were signed, these were specifically to the church. I feel it inappropriate to utilize any more than my experience and some general anecdotes with regard to this particular project that I undertook as a member of my church in honor of its 120th anniversary.

contributed greatly to the movement of domestics liberating themselves from live-in to “day’s work.”

As was addressed in chapter three’s discussion of Sunday fashions, what was worn - and when - was of great importance to many. In this case it was also political. Clark-Lewis interviewed ninety-seven past domestic workers and learned just how meaningful - financially and emotionally - was the shift from total availability to one’s employer to the relative luxury of a defined schedule and pay scale. One of the advantages that came from “living out” was that the women no longer lived in their uniforms. Carrying one’s uniform in a bag became its own sign of liberation. “To these women, their shopping bags full of work clothes meant no less than their hard-won personal freedom,” writes Clark-Lewis. One of her narrators, Sadie Jones, explained that the bags in which the women carried their clothing came to be known as “freedom bags.” Jones told Clark-Lewis, “Mostly I guess I wanted to show I didn’t wear a uniform. I wasn’t a servant.”¹⁶



Figure 18. Woman in uniform in front of market, undated, Newark City Archives.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, *Living In, Living Out: African American Domestics and the Great Migration* (New York: Kodansha International, 1996) 160-161.

Donald A. Ritchie, in his handbook *Doing Oral History*, suggests that students will find that “Oral history challenges their preconceived notions and makes them rethink how they research and analyze.”¹⁷ After wresting myself away from earlier projections that I had placed upon the act of domestic work, I was able to witness the pride that emanated from both the women in my church as well as the women of Krueger-Scott. The pride was not necessarily in the job of domestic work itself but in their fortitude, a deep-running thread throughout the Newark interviews and African Americans of a certain generation overall. The women I listened to came North, from Georgia, South Carolina and Virginia, by themselves or at very young ages with family. They found work and that meant food and shelter, for themselves and often for their families. While this form of servitude can be looked upon as an initial compliance with the caste structure of the time, there quickly came a period when most of the women in question decided to make changes in their situations – within the job or outside of it. Black women who were domestics worked very hard, and then they worked hard to challenge the restrictions of that vocation. Ultimately, that hard work changed some deeply entrenched cultural thinking.

¹⁷ Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) 225.

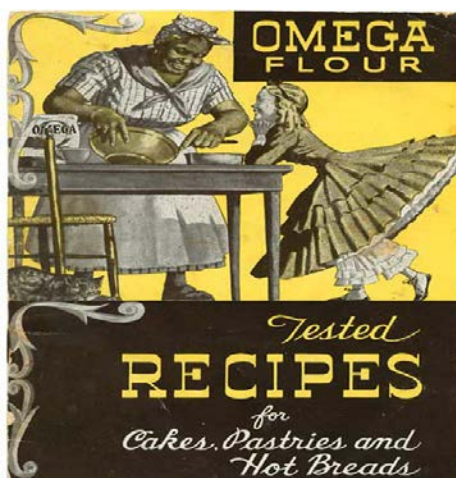


Figure 19. Omega Flour's 1941 Tested Recipes for Cakes, Pastries, and Hot Breads. collectorsweekly.com.

Non-Domestic

Not every woman worked as a domestic. Queen Elizabeth Wright James, also known as “Queenie,” worked for none other than Mrs. Louise Scott beginning in 1941, when she arrived in Newark. “She was a gem,” said Mrs. James about Madame Scott. According to many interviews, Louise Scott was a generous community leader as well as employer. “She never had any children, and so the girls that worked for her, you felt like she was a mother,” James said.¹⁸ Mrs. James worked five days a week at the beauty school at Scott Mansion “doin’ heads.” They were closed Sundays and Mondays. Mrs. James trained under Scott for three years. “Well, after I left her, I opened my own shop on West Street. After I left her. And I had that for ten or fifteen years. My own on West Street, 55 West Street was my beauty shop. And I had that, and I kept that for maybe fifteen, twenty years...”¹⁹

¹⁸ Mrs. Scott did “adopt” (a legal process does not seem to have taken place) a young girl whose mother had studied at Scott’s beauty school. According to Cathy Lenix-Hooker it soon became clear that the mother could not care for her child and so Mrs. Scott took her on as her own. The young girl was called Louise, sometimes “Little Louise,” by those close to her. The Reverend Malachi D. Rountree was her father by way of marriage to Louise Scott. Today “Little Louise” is an ordained minister and works in the mayor’s office. She goes by the name, Louise Scott-Rountree.

¹⁹ Queen James, interview with Glen Marie Brickus (no date recorded).

Katheryn Bethea, who ultimately retired as an assistant professor of English literature at Rutgers University-Newark, worked multiple jobs in her lifetime. This is a typical employment trajectory for most Black city residents, according to not only the Krueger-Scott interviews but the body of literature on the Great Migration.²⁰ “When I got out of high school in 1940 there were really no jobs for young Black women except takin’ care of babies,” said Bethea. After a stint working for her father in a Cleveland grocery store she returned to Newark and later worked in a “war plant.” There she helped make “inflatable mechanisms” for use on life rafts. “When the war was over of course that job ceased,” Bethea explained.²¹ The majority of Bethea’s middle years was spent as a seamstress; at one point she had her own tailoring shop on 13th Avenue. This work situation allowed her to care for her children while still bringing in a salary. When business was slow at the shop, she would take on additional work in a dress factory or at the post office.

Mrs. Bethea recalls one Christmas season, in 1942, when she sought to supplement her income by working at Bamberger’s department store. She was hired as a “floor girl,” carrying up clothing from the basement. Because of her diligence as an employee, she was asked to stay on after the season was over. Bethea agreed to do so but only if she could work in the position of clerk. “They weren’t hiring any Black women – girls...to be clerks. We could go down there and lug all that stuff...” but they were not given positions in sales. Her manager told her that while she was personally ready for an

²⁰ See for example, Isabel Wilkerson’s *The Warmth of Other Suns*; or *African American Urban History* edited by Kusmer and Trotter; or Giles Wright’s *Afro Americans in New Jersey*.

²¹ Katheryn Bethea, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 7, 1997.

African American “on the floor” that Bamberger’s was not quite there yet. Bethea declined the store’s offer of continued employment.



Figure 20. L. Bamberger & Co., Newark, New Jersey, Quality Dress Salon, interior view, 1940, Shorpy Historical Photo Archive, [pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com/shorpy/).

There were some, although very few, of the Krueger-Scott interviewees who were forced to accept government aid during especially difficult financial times. They were, as some put it, “on the state.” Welfare statistics during this time period have been difficult to find for Newark, many of the census figures simply report the overall number of families listed below the poverty line. From the Krueger-Scott community we glean that a low socio-economic level does not necessarily correlate to the utilization of government assistance. As noted by many of the narrators in chapter three, the Black community was expected to help each other and not necessarily turn to the government for aid. Sometimes Whites helped their Black employees, donating clothing to their domestics for example. Owen Wilkerson recalled just such an exchange with regard to his mother who cleaned a number of Whites’ homes in Summit.

She would take the Summit bus, the 70 Summit, you know, and go to Summit, and she

mother secured the factory job. The interviewer was apparently unfamiliar with this system and asked, “Exactly how did that work?” Powell answered, “If you didn’t have any job and – or like the father was dead, uh, then - and you had children and you couldn’t work... Even if you could *find* work you couldn’t work because the children were too little, right? Then they had the Board of Children’s Guardianship and they would send you a check.”²³ Powell’s mother subsequently drew a Widow's Pension due to her husband’s military service, as well as unemployment. She did not have a lot of choices, Mrs. Powell reminds the interviewer, as there were not many jobs available for a fifty-five year old African-American woman in the 1950s.

It is possible that Dickey- Kemp was merely being a diligent interviewer in asking Powell for an explanation of welfare, positioning herself as ignorant in order to draw out more information. But her technique throughout her interviews is not consistent with this kind of proactive approach. In the end we can hypothesize, based upon the median economic status of the Krueger-Scott group, and Dickey-Kemp’s place of residence in Upper Clinton Hill, as well as her membership to the middle-class St. James AME church that Dickey-Kemp probably had no experience with government subsidy in her own life. The lack of government assistance noted in these interviews could be a result of a number of factors, including the preponderance of interviewees who belonged to the squarely middle class Bethany Baptist Church.

Clearly, the Krueger-Scott narrators do not reflect the African-American population of Newark as a whole, yet the sample is enough such that general conclusions can still be appropriately drawn when based upon supplementary research that

²³ Hortense Williams Powell, interview with Ann Marie Dickey-Kemp, July 2, 1998.

corroborates said conclusions. Furthermore, the value of oral history collections is not necessarily in data collection as much as in question collection. That is, these narratives give us context with which to further our own research enquiries via the archives, literature, and additional oral histories. This research in turn allows for scholars to offer up their ideas based upon inference and study in order to contribute to - as well as stimulate - further discussion, observation and personal testimony.

Penny Summerfield in her book of oral histories, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, relates an angry response she once received after a presentation she made on her work. Accused of treating World War II women workers as a monolith, Summerfield writes that it "was a warning to me that interpreting, and generalising about, women's subjective responses to the war was problematic." Summerfield explains that it was a reminder for her of the scholarly tendency toward "forced synthesis," our desire for a uniform answer as a result of our work. In keeping with my own ideas on this subject, Summerfield argues that oral history actually destabilizes such uniformity. As an example, she uses the question asked of her subjects regarding whether the war had changed them. Because of their varied answers Summerfield realized that instead of trying to *construct a contribution to a given argument* through analysis of the oral histories - in this case the argument being that war changes people - she needed to simply *examine the question further* through the narrators' responses [italics added]. In other words, employing the old reliable "compare and contrast" device in order to elaborate on a particular subject acknowledges that there will be no "final word" but instead a valuable collection of questions for application going forward.²⁴

²⁴ Penny Summerfield. *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1998) 2, 252.

On the subject of welfare and the Krueger-Scott narrators, worth considering is the possibility of an affective response of shame or embarrassment that some in the group may have felt around the sharing of tales about poverty. Summerfield, Portelli, Steven High and others urge oral historians to take into full consideration the fact that there are two people in the room in the construction of an oral history interview – even if only one of them is doing most of the talking. Portelli explains that “documents of oral history are always the result of a relationship, of a shared project, in which both the interviewer and the interviewee are involved together.” Summerfield calls this the “inter-subjectivity” of the relationship.²⁵

In previous chapters the consideration of respectability politics has included theorizing on the inter-subjective relationship of interviewer and narrator that is the performance occurring between the Krueger-Scott participants. While they often knew each other - sometimes quite well - human beings do tend to foreground the good stuff and place on the back shelf those stories that just might highlight some less celebratory moments of the past. As scholars it is incumbent upon us to listen carefully to these oral histories, for what is not said as well as for that which is. In this case of potential poverty, we can listen for a spate of unemployment lodged between job descriptions or a story of hand me downs or perhaps even a particular church’s support at a given moment in one’s life. From there we can draw conclusions but not arguments, forwarding considerations and keeping the conversation moving ever forward.

²⁵ See Summerfield, 264; Steven High, “Sharing Authority: An Introduction” *Journal of Canadian Studies* (1): 12, 2009, 21; Allesandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2003) 70.

While some of the Krueger-Scott interviewees may have grown up poor, only a handful in this particular cohort fell outside of traditionally middle-class professions once they attained adulthood. This fact, combined with a likely good dose of resistance to “leaning” on the government, might well be one explanation of the dearth of Krueger-Scott families reporting any experience with government assistance. Recall as well that an account of taking government “handouts” would also challenge the collective narrative, shared in numerous interviews in chapter three, of a close-knit community wherein African Americans came to each other’s aid. With that said we will return to the narrators and their stories.

Rev. Alvin Conyers’ first job in Newark was as a porter at Columbia Laundry in 1946. He ultimately became a professional barber and later a teacher and ordained minister. The employees at Columbia Laundry were 90% Black, Conyers answers in response to the interviewer asking whether positions were similar among races. “Whites were mostly truck drivers, check-out men...” explained Conyers who worked at the laundry three summers in a row while home from college. He called it a “nice job.”

“I swept the floor, uh, dusted the machines and, uh, took the clothin’ that were washed from one area to another...I enjoyed it. That was my first employment. I remember vividly I was making \$30 a week...It made me feel like I was becomin’ a young man...” In Conyers’ voice we hear no form of resentment even as he relays the information regarding apparent racial inequity in job assignments. Perhaps this is simply acceptance of “how it was” at the time, much as with the women who were performing domestic work. It certainly is not apathy or naiveté on Mr. Conyers’ part that explains his lack of negativity in describing his tasks; his future work for several social justice groups,

as well the degrees that he secured in education and theology, indicate a very conscious and thinking man. But as he said, Alvin Conyers was glad to have a job, to bring some money home to his aunt with whom he lived, and to be treated fine if not necessarily fairly. At least that was what was acceptable to him in 1946.

We will witness within these interviews that people became more “political” about their work environment as the years went on. A simple labor timeline of Blacks might go something like: unpaid slave labor to sharecropping to service jobs to factories and industry. At this point, mid-century, African Americans had established themselves as a labor force wherein collective and individual moments of activism in the workplace increased. Of course, we know now that since they were enslaved African Americans have resisted unfair labor practices in a myriad of ways, from work stoppages to property destruction.

Willie Bradwell started working as a domestic when she first came to Newark in 1939 at the age of eighteen. But she did not like domestic work, neither the tasks nor some of the people for whom she worked. “I hated it. I don’t like housework, not even my own,” she told her interviewer. At one point her employer insisted that Bradwell get all her work done each day before eating lunch. “So when I had my lunch it was time to come home...” remembered Bradwell. “I didn't go back.”

Bradwell next found factory work which she liked much better. She started out at a paper-cup factory in North Newark at 55 cents an hour, minimum wage at the time. After a few months she secured a new factory job with H.A. Wilson at 97 Chestnut Street around the year 1946. “...they didn't even hire Black people ‘til after the War. So when

we went in there after the War, it wasn't too much of a problem.” The racial make-up at H.A. Wilson was about 25% Black and 75% White Bradwell reported.



Figure 22. H.A. Wilson advertisement in *Gas Age-Record* Oct. 7, 1922, Google Books.

Soon after starting at the factory a union came in, explained Bradwell. The employees received insurance benefits and a raise to 75 cents an hour. At this point the interviewer asked Bradwell about her benefits, “Did you not get paid vacation before the union came in?” Bradwell replied, “No.” “Oh, that's interesting,” said the interviewer, “because my whole work experience, you know, that's always been, you know, part of it.” With that comment - from Bradwell’s daughter in probability - we come to understand that, after just one generation, compensation for vacation days is considered within a normal expectation of employment benefits. This is most likely a result of the increased demands that Willie Bradwell’s generation of African Americans made in their various workplaces.

Mrs. Bradwell herself was involved in the union, even becoming shop steward at one point. Later the Engelhard Company took over H.A Wilson and working conditions remained essentially the same. In 1953 Bradwell said she was able to buy a car, no longer having to rely on the #140 Somerset Line bus to get her to work. (It is worth noting that it took her approximately seven years to save up for that car). Bradwell also reported that as

the union's shop steward she had to challenge management on a number of occasions.

Bradwell's stories of union organizing are told in a most straightforward sort of way.

"Did you guys ever have a strike?" asked her interviewer. "Yes," replied Bradwell. "What was that like?" asked the interviewer. "That was rough 'cause we were out there about six weeks. And I don't even, now, I don't even remember why we struck. And don't know if we got what we struck for." The interviewer encouraged, "So you, well, I guess being the shop steward, you were out on the line." Bradwell said, "Yes. But I just don't remember the details." Her daughter then commented that it must have been dangerous. Bradwell replied, "No. It wasn't dangerous. 'Cause there wasn't anybody attempting to cross the line, just the foreman. And they didn't attempt to bring in any strike breakers, anything like that. Our biggest problem was attempting to stop the trucks that was comin' in with materials and things."

The Engelhard Company eventually relocated to Union. Bradwell worked for the company for thirty years, yet was not offered the chance to retire from the company.

Bradwell: They shut down that division where I worked. They closed out that division where I worked. And they put us out of a job.

Cleta: So how did you feel?

Bradwell: I felt very badly because they didn't even give us our benefits or anything... They told - I don't know who was responsible - maybe the union sold us out. Because we had a closing clause in our contract. But they called in the union to negotiate a closing contract, and they did us out of our severance pay.

Soon after leaving Engelhard Bradwell became ill and went on disability. She was "having a problem with the muscles in her arms" and applied for Social Security. It was approved three years later. She worked "here and there" along the way.

Cleta Bradwell: Were you ever unemployed from the time that you went to work when you came to Newark, other than when the company, you know, closed down on you all, were you ever unemployed?

Bradwell: Not really. Because I went from one factory to the other, and then I stayed there for - this happened. I mean, until they shut down. And for one small, I mean, one eight-month period in there, I went on welfare while I was waiting for my Social Security to come through.²⁶

As with so many of the interviewees, Bradwell sounded proud of the duration and consistency of her work life. Working was a sign not only of success but of respectability for many of these Newarkers. The “work ethic” is referenced on a regular basis. We get little sense that Bradwell was looking back and envisioning how things might have been better - save for Englehard’s summary closing of her division. She worked hard, but she worked and that seems to be what mattered to so many of the narrators. Bradwell’s interpretation of the following question can help us understand this position.

Cleta Bradwell: And what were the common occupations for Black men and women in Newark when you came here?

Bradwell: Oh, there was plenty of work in Newark at the time. ‘Cause this was a manufacturing hub. There was plenty of work in Newark. They had the chemical plants, and they had all kinds of manufacturing. So there was plenty of work.²⁷

What was important to Bradwell was that there were jobs at all - what *kinds* of jobs those were did not seem as relevant. We must recall that even in 1955 only 17% of Newark’s African Americans were employed. A job was a job – for a while.

The Fifties and Sixties

Getting Work

²⁶ Willie Bradwell, interview with Cleta Bradwell, Dec. 8, 1997.

²⁷ Willie Bradwell, interview with Cleta Bradwell, Dec. 8, 1997.

Elma Bateman, a retired secretary with AT & T said, “Once we got out of school and began to work then we got into the problem of ...race relationships.” Bateman was answering questions about race relations in her school experience, explaining that there was little in the way of trouble as she made her way through Robert Treat High School in the early 1940s. Of course she also mentions asking her school counselor for permission to register for a “commercial” course that taught typing and stenography, instead of another one of the “basic” courses to which Black students were most often steered. “The counselor wanted to know why, when Black people aren’t hired as secretaries,” said Bateman. Taking the basics, she explained, “all you could do when you came out was work in a factory.” So she took it upon herself to further her job possibilities. “I took a secretarial class and I’m so glad I did...I came out and was able to get a job at the VA (Veteran’s Administration).”²⁸ Bateman would be one of the women who would later answer that she was “not political” when asked about community activity. Yet, this move, to register for a course that an authority figure had advised against, can be considered quite political – in part because of why she did it.

This opportunity exclusion at a young age was a common experience for the narrators of Krueger-Scott, and for African Americans in general during at least the first half of the 20th century. Even as we hear of how “good” the Newark schools were in these interviews, right alongside are anecdotes regarding the predominantly White teaching population and the extremely low expectations it had of the Black students. African-American students have often found themselves routed through vocational courses that would prepare them only for work in factories and other sites of unskilled

²⁸ Elma Bateman, interview with Pauline Blount, April 29, 1999.

labor. As John Cunningham points out, this pattern started early on with Newark's government moving quickly in the early 1900s to create an education system for the city's immigrants but excluding the educational needs of the city's "colored" citizens at the same time.²⁹ Decades later the term "tracking" would be employed to describe this continued practice of inequality in education, wherein students of color would not receive equal access to upper level courses. This practice directly affects the kind of work an African American is able to secure, whether once out of high school or college.

Elma Bateman told her interviewer Pauline Blount that she was very pleased to get a government job at the VA, as a Black woman, and that the atmosphere was fairly civil amongst the mixed-race group of coworkers. But when she moved into the Air Force, sometime around 1950, she came up against pronounced racial tension. Bateman was a woman of color succeeding in a military environment and she believed that the White women who objected to her promotions did so because of her race. That "jarred her."

Blount: Do you recall any personal discrimination?

[Long Pause]

Bateman: For me? Well, I had one incident, well it wasn't really... discrimination...when I was working for the Air Force...I was to be promoted, you know, to work for this captain... There was this one White woman... boy she put up such a fight... I ended up gettin' the job anyway...She just felt that, you know, how dare I get the promotion and she was White... That was the only incident I can remember... Made me realize what you can come up against.³⁰

For the second time we hear Bateman resist the characterization of racism even as she shares stories of negative experiences based upon her race. These oral histories make

²⁹ John Cunningham, *Newark* (NJ Historical Society: Newark, 1988) 215-216.

³⁰ Elma Bateman, interview with Pauline Blount, April 29, 1999.

apparent the varied definitions of “discrimination” among the interviewees. There can be several reasons for this, including the participation in respectability politics. Sarah Ahmed writes in *The Affect Theory Reader* about “affect aliens,” those who essentially refuse to play by the rules of “getting along.” This accusation, argues Ahmed - in conversation with Black feminist authors such as Mgadmi and Audre Lourde - is regularly leveled at African-American females. The “angry Black woman” persona can be considered a “kill-joy” so much so that “some bodies are presumed to be the origin of bad feeling insofar as they disturb the promise of happiness, which I would re-describe as the social pressure to maintain the signs of ‘getting along,’” writes Ahmed. Respectability politics informs how one defines a word, an act, an experience. African Americans who desire to assimilate into the world in which they have been placed have often been expected to comport themselves in order to “sustain the comfort of others.”³¹ Calling out discrimination could be deemed alienating, by those both inside and outside of the interview process.

The fact is that Elma Bateman was kept from taking a particular class in a public school due solely to the fact that she was Black and was later resented for bypassing Whites in the hierarchy of her job. This is of course discrimination and racism. But Bateman hedged somewhat, framing her experience as simply a few occasions wherein she believed she may have been treated less than adequately due to her race. We recall that Mrs. Bateman was someone who was also concerned that she came off as “negative” in her interview. This was a woman who was conscious of the sound of her answers.

³¹ Sarah Ahmed, “Happy Objects,” *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg, Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010) 39. See also Nicole Fleetwood’s *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 2011) for discussion of the assumptions projected upon Black bodies.

Pauline Faison Mathis was born in 1932 in Clinton, North Carolina. She came with her husband to Newark in 1951. He had read about Newark's job market in the newspaper down South. Mathis said, "Well it wasn't exactly what we thought when we got there. We thought the opportunities were greater... You could read in the paper there were opportunities... and the next thing you knew because of your color, because of your voice or whatever, you wouldn't get the... job."³²

In this particular push-migration the theme of ensuing disappointment upon coming North is repeated in a number of the interviews as well as in scholarship on the subject. We also see this theme covered in artwork inspired by the Great Migration. In 1941 Jacob Lawrence created a collection of sixty paintings entitled *The Migration Series* based upon what he had witnessed growing up in the South, as well as on stories he heard from family. This artistic historical record was recently published in a book by New York City's Museum of Modern Art. Panel # 34, captioned by Lawrence in 1993 as, "The Black press urged the people to leave the South," depicts a brown-skinned man hunched over a newspaper and a brown-skinned woman in the background, either listening or waiting for her chance to read. Curatorial Assistant Jodi Roberts writes in her notes on this piece:

By the late 1910s, many outlets of the black press had been forced underground in the South as officials, worried about the growing momentum of the Migration, worked to suppress reports of better conditions elsewhere. White authorities routinely harassed both vendors of pro-Migration periodicals and the black ministers, teachers, and community leaders known to read these sources aloud. The punishments for buying or distributing the titles could be harsh: arrests were very common...³³

³² Pauline Mathis, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Oct. 7, 1997.

³³ Jodi Roberts, *Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series*, ed. Leah Dickerman (New York: Artbook, 2015) 114-115.



Figure 23. Jacob Lawrence, 1940–41, “Casein tempera on hardboard, 18 x 12 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mrs. David M. Levy. Image from Phillips Collection,” phillipscollection.org.

In other words, just by accessing the newspaper in which Mr. Mathis read of Newark’s potential job prospects, he probably risked some sort of retribution. Another political act. Jacob Lawrence’s *Migration Series* illustrates the lengths that the Southern power structure would go to in order to keep Blacks from migrating. Labor agents from the North were imprisoned; law enforcement made mass arrests at train stations; and some Southern White reformers went so far as to offer suggestions as to how to improve living conditions for Blacks in the South in order to keep them there.³⁴

Pauline Mathis tells a story in her Krueger-Scott interview illustrating the racism that did not stop at the Mason-Dixon Line. In 1952 Mrs. Mathis started her first job in Newark, as an office clerk working for the *Newark Newsdealers Supply Company* on Halsey Street. She had gone to an employment agency and secured a job which she was told would pay \$38 a week. She headed straight to the office to begin her new career.

³⁴ Jodi Roberts, *Jacob Lawrence*, panels 41-43, 128-133.

“When I walk in I am surrounded by nothing but Whites. ‘Uh oh,’ that is the first thing you say to yourself. I don’t know if I’m gonna get this job or not...” According to Mathis as soon as she handed over her employment papers the general manager, the office manager and the owner quickly huddled together. Mathis waited nervously in her chair. The three men finally returned to address Mathis, informing her that the employment agency had indeed made a mistake and that actually the pay was \$35 a week and not \$38. (That would equal an approximate \$30 difference in weekly pay today).

Mathis tells her interviewer: “Now I know what’s goin’ on here...I’m Black, they changed the salary on me. ‘Cause I heard about that kinda thing going on.” But Mathis decided at that moment that she would be the one to integrate the office - the only other African American there being the man sweeping the floor. So she called the men’s bluff, assuming they were trying to dissuade her from working there by offering the lower pay, and accepted the salary. “So I guess they had to hire me,” she said, with a lilt of satisfaction in her voice.³⁵ This is yet another example of activism in the workplace, as African Americans worked ever harder - even when accepting a job that was already theirs.

In 1952 the Rev. Robert Woods was hired as a manager at Allied Electric in Irvington. This was not his plan when he first came to Newark. Woods arrived in the city with the purpose of attending the Newark Academy of the Arts, promised a job at the *Newark News* once he graduated as a commercial illustrator. This did not come to fruition. “Upon graduation, I guess they discovered that I was not Caucasian. I didn’t get employment in the *Newark News*. They couldn’t hire me because the rest of the artists

³⁵ Pauline Mathis, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Oct. 7, 1997.

would leave the studio. So that created a bad taste in my mouth,” said Woods. He never did gain employment in the art field.

Woods said he actually felt fortunate in finally landing the position that he did at Allied Electric. He told the interviewer that it was a coup as a Black man to be hired for anything other than simple labor work at the time. Woods explained that his college degree probably helped him, even as Coyt Jones and others pointed out in their interviews that Blacks with college degrees were still having a difficult time finding jobs during the mid-century. African Americans graduating college in the 1950s was far from an everyday occurrence, many of the country’s universities only just beginning to accept African-American applicants at all. Between 1950 and 1960 less than 5% of Blacks over 25 had completed four years of college.³⁶ This statistic once again reminds us that the Krueger-Scott participants were not necessarily reflective of the African-American community as a whole; over 30% of the Krueger-Scott participants had college degrees or higher. At the same time, if one looked at the college completion statistics of *urban* African Americans alone, the percentage would presumably be more in keeping with that of the Krueger-Scott interviewees. Educated people tend often to be found in urban centers.

Even with a college degree one did not necessarily secure a job commensurate with one’s education. College-educated Jessie Johnson said that Blacks with college degrees became trainers at their jobs. She worked for the Office of Dependent Benefits (ODB) and remembers training White employees with high school educations who would then end up supervising her.

³⁶ *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education: National Center for Education Statistics, 1993) 8, nces.ed.gov.

Johnson: I was a processor at the ODB and a trainer for new people coming in. Because they used the people with the degrees to help - after they trained us - to help train others while we remained in the same job. And after we trained other people from the Pennsylvania area, they would get to be the supervisors of whatever.

Brickus: Oh, I see. Are you saying then that the people you trained were basically White folk?

Johnson: The people we trained were basically White folk.

Brickus: And they moved up while you stayed where you were?

Johnson: And they moved up while we stayed where we were.

At the same time, when Pauline Mathis applied for a job at Bamberger's she was told that she "wouldn't like it" because she was so educated. "That was the word going then, 'You have too much education, you wouldn't be too happy here,'" explained Mathis.³⁷

Rev. Woods' new job at Allied Electric was not without its racial complications either:

Woods: I was the manager of forty women... [Laughter] You know how that was!

Brickus: No I don't really know how that was.

Woods: Well they wasn't used to an Afro-American manager...boss...

Brickus: Most of these are White women?

Woods: Yes. They wasn't used to that - wasn't used to taking orders from nobody like me. And sometimes it became difficult and we'd have to wind up in the president's office with a grievance...³⁸

Woods' first remark could have been misconstrued as sexist, but we quickly learn that Woods is describing workplace racism. The fact that in his job as manager he was

³⁷ Pauline Mathis, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Oct. 7, 1997.

³⁸ Robert Woods, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 17, 1997.

regularly challenged by White women working under him is an illuminating commentary on both race and gender in the mid-20th century. *Even* the White women, who certainly ranked below their male counterparts in terms of opportunity and pay, were unhappy at being told what to do by a man of color.

As Jacob Lawrence writes in yet another painting caption, one that foregrounds an angry White man wielding a club, “Race riots were very numerous all over the North because of the antagonism that was caused between the Negro and white workers...”³⁹ Many companies simply did not hire Blacks in order to avoid these racial conflicts that were often considered inevitable during this time period. In a 1956 State of New Jersey report on employment practices in retail stores, shop owners and managers were interviewed about “Employers’ Attitudes Towards Minorities.” The respondents claimed that either no “Negroes” ever applied for the jobs in which they were conspicuously absent, or that they were sometimes turned away from employment because the White customers might not be comfortable if waited upon by a person of color.⁴⁰ Katheryn Bethea was told the latter outright at Bamberger’s in 1942, and Mr. Woods was a victim of the same “attitude” yet a decade later.

By around 1955, after leaving Allied Electric, Robert Woods became the first Black machine glass blower at Chris Electronics, “blowing the nets” for the television tubes. When Chris Electronics folded, he was unemployed for two weeks but then moved to a similar operation at Haydu Brothers. He left soon thereafter to work for Progressive Life Insurance as a collector but he disliked his job. Aside from the amount of work and

³⁹ Jacob Lawrence, 146-147

⁴⁰ Marion L. Courtney, *Employment Practices in Selected Retail Stores* (New Jersey: Dept. of Education) 7, RuCORE.

time he had to invest simply to make a “couple dollars” - eight hundred visits a week, according to Woods - he did not like the idea of “collecting from our people.” He later moved on to North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, presumably tasked with a different set of responsibilities.



Figure 24. “Glassblowing television tubes in a factory,” 1955, [gettyimages.com](https://www.gettyimages.com).

It is evident that the African Americans of the Krueger-Scott project simply had fewer job opportunities than did Whites. In some of the promotional materials for the Krueger-Scott African-American Cultural Center, the creation of more jobs for the Black community was put forward as one of its selling points. Whether in the construction process or service and retail once the restoration was completed, it was promised that the Center would provide work for the community. Late into the 20th century the possibility of work for people of color continued to be a major draw.

Part of the vicious cycle of underemployment was propelled by the fact that Blacks did not own numerous businesses nor typically worked in positions that would allow for the hiring of their peers. African Americans had less economic power than Whites as a result. Wynona Lipman told her interviewer that the same idea of a neighborhood declining once Blacks moved in also carried over to the workplace. White

employers wanted to keep the status quo in their factories, offices and stores - and they had the power to do so.

Pearl Beatty was born in 1935 and came to Newark from Pittsburgh with her family as a baby. Her father had been injured in the Pennsylvania coal mines and wanted to leave the area in order to find different work. Beatty's aunt lived in Newark and so the family moved to the city, wherein everyone had to pitch in.

Beatty recalls:

Well, my first job was in a factory two blocks from here. From the beginning we lived on Baldwin and Washington Streets. And one day I was walking down the street and I saw this sign, "employment needed." And I went in and applied. I was sixteen. And they hired me. And I was thrilled because my job was just two blocks from home. We're talking about, let's see now, we're talking about '52.

Pearl Beatty was biracial; her mother was Italian. This arises in the interview when she is asked by interviewer Geri Smith about her racial status. Smith was apparently already acquainted with Mrs. Beatty.

Smith: I don't know whether we talked about - I know you're multi-racial and I don't know whether we talked about whether your mom or your dad was -

Beatty: My mother was Italian and my father was Black.

Smith: How did that affect you when you were coming up in the neighborhood, and how did people perceive you?

Beatty: Oh we used to get beat up.

Smith: You did?

Beatty: Oh yes we did. Going home from school.

Smith: Was that by Black children or by White children?

Beatty: Black.

Smith: They were Black?

Beatty: They were Black.

Smith: What was your feelings about that?

Beatty: Oh, it's very hurtful. I mean, why couldn't *we* belong? They sort of us held us standoffish. [Long pause] There was a lot of teasing. Not - not too much fighting. Here and there a fight. But a-a-a lot of teasing. [Another pause] Awful lot of teasing. And name calling.

Smith: Did this affect you, you think, when it came to... your first job?

Beatty: ...In fact, when I walked in [to the factory job], the White girls thought I was, uh, White. And this one White woman said to me, "I want you to know that the Black girls that work here are very clean."

[Chuckling between Smith and Beatty]

And at my lunchtime I went over to the Black girls and introduced myself. And when I came back to my bench to work - [pause] the White lady said to me, "Now, just because I said that the Blacks were clean here, that didn't mean that you have to go over there and eat with them." And I politely let her know that I was Black... Now the Black women, they knew I was Black.⁴¹

Pearl Beatty goes on to say that she worked at this factory for eight years. The name of the place is not mentioned but my research suggests that it may have been the Imperial Manufacturing Company at 297 Washington Street.⁴²

Joe Clark claimed that the highest level jobs for Blacks when he was in the job market were "preaching and teaching." Hortense Williams said "Newark was a place of entry" when it came to work. During this period when many of the Krueger-Scott participants were looking for work Blacks could still not drive busses, and were only later

⁴¹ Pearl Beatty, interview with Geri Smith, Dec. 12, 1997.

⁴² In a 1917 publication entitled, *The American Stationer and Office Outfitter* there is a section for tradespersons to place queries for goods and services. On page 14 No. 2777 reads, "Will you kindly give me the names of people who make Rubber Cushion Key Tops for typewriter keyboard?" The editors answer with the name of the Imperial Manufacturing Company of Newark.

hired to work in stores once integration started taking effect. Even once in a store, they would certainly not be in a position to handle money.

Ed Crawford was born in 1950, late enough so that he was able to secure a job at Bamberger's after high school, performing multiple jobs, but all behind the scenes.

Crawford's manager acknowledged him as an excellent worker and in turn Crawford requested a raise, an act of self-determination, at the least.

Crawford: So I remember having to sit with him and somewhat plead my case to get a nickel raise, a nickel an hour raise. However, when I transferred out of the section and went on to another section to work, and the next fur storage season started, they hired two guys to do the job I did by myself...Made me wonder why I had to work so hard to get that nickel out of them when they had to pay two salaries for the salary they paid me.

Brickus: Were these White fellows that they hired to replace you, or were they Black guys?

Crawford: White guys. Another irony of the situation.⁴³

Nursing

One occupation that is less well represented in the Krueger-Scott oral histories than in African-American historiography at large is that of nursing. Only a few of the women interviewed for the Krueger-Scott collection worked as nurses or nurses' aides: Lenora Means, Lurline Byass, Carolyn Wallace, Shirley Sylvan, and Hortense Powell. Vivian Berry trained as a nurse but for various reasons never worked in that position. Mageline Little told me that the project had hoped that in hiring retired nurse Annemarie Dickey-Kemp as interviewer that they would attract more nurse participants. Wright and Price must have known the relevance of this particular occupation in African-American history and thus made an effort at least to secure stories related to the field.

⁴³ Ed Crawford, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 23, 1997.

Nursing was an occupation that African-American women initially fought hard to enter. In the Black church, nursing was and still is a highly vaunted profession. The more traditional churches today still feature Nurses' Guilds to honor working and retired nurses. One Sunday service a year is typically set aside to celebrate Black nurses wherein they congregate together in the pews, smartly dressed in their white, starched uniforms.



Figure 25. "St. James A.M.E. Church (Newark) Joint Usher Board Ministry, Ushers and Nurses Guild Sunday 2013," theafricanamericanlectionary.org.

Part of the pride in nursing comes from the fact that the field was inaccessible to Blacks for so long. In a 1950 nationwide study only 3% of those who identified themselves as nurses were African-American women. That is just a little over 13,000 Black female nurses. Professors Patricia D'Antonio and Jean C. Whelan, both registered nurses themselves, published a study entitled "Counting Nurses" which provides statistical and biographical sketches of the profession through the lenses of race and gender. They write:

The dominance of white women nurses, however, did not come at the expense of African American women. Throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, the proportional representation of African American women who identified as professional nurses remained fairly stable at an approximate average percentage rate of 3% of all women nurses for the first five decades of the 20th century.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ P D'Antonio and J. C. Whelan, "Counting Nurses: The Power of Historical Census Data," *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, Oct. 18, 2009, 3.

Mabel K. Staupers might have argued with this particular claim. Staupers was the executive secretary of the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN) and fought against the segregation and outright banning of Black nurses from the military during World War II. Once Black nurses were finally allowed in it was only to care for prisoners of war and not American soldiers. The Navy actually continued to refuse the induction of Black women into their Nurse Corps altogether. The Red Cross, supplier of nurses to the military, did not look to the NACGN as a viable source; only members of the all-White American Nursing Association (ANA) were recruited. (Another practice by the Red Cross included the separation of blood donations by race). At one point during World War II there was actually a draft suggested due to the shortage of nurses, even as there remained a large pool of Black nurses available.

Echoing the segregationist rhetoric that the Krueger-Scott participants faced, the military's argument to those fighting racially discriminatory hiring practices was that White people just would not be comfortable serving with, or being cared for, by African Americans. It was strongly believed that Blacks were just not as capable as Whites - whether in school or at work - and thus it made no sense to provide Black nurses with equal opportunities. Fourteen years after her battle began, in 1948 the ANA was finally desegregated and in 1950 Staupers deemed her organization of Black nurses no longer necessary.⁴⁵ It should be noted that twenty years later the National Black Nurses Association (NBNA) was founded in order to progress health care for African Americans

⁴⁵ Darlene Clark Hine, "Mabel K. Staupers and the Integration of Black Nurses into the Armed Forces," *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century* (Urbana, Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1982) 241-257.

and elevate the positioning of Black nurses in education and leadership. Apparently things had not progressed quite as much as Staupers had believed.

How many of the Krueger-Scott women who worked in the medical field knew the history of Mrs. Staupers, a history that was being made even as they were studying nursing? It would have been an inspiring story no doubt, a narrative to prop someone up who might be growing weary of the obstacles placed in her way. As Charles Payne and Adam Green write in their introduction to *Time Longer Than Rope*, “An alternative understanding of the past can help people envision alternative futures and the steps that lead there.”⁴⁶

Hortense Williams told her interviewer, fellow nurse Annemarie Dickey-Kemp, that she went to nursing school at City Hospital in 1949 as part of the third graduating class to ever allow African Americans. She had really hoped to become a doctor and thought perhaps she could get through nursing school, make enough money to go to medical school, and finally become an MD. “But it didn’t work out that way,” Powell said. Her class had eight women in it, three White and five Black and they lived in segregated residences. Powell, who was one of the only women who chose to speak consistently about racism during her interview, said she was treated fairly well during her time there:

There were only two incidents that gave me cause... During the senior year, the alumni association usually took two students to the convention, the American Nurses Association Convention in Atlantic City. And during my senior year, two students were selected, I being one of them. The other one being a White student. And two of the White representatives from the alumni association went down with us. I recall we stayed in the Claridge Hotel. It’s the first time I had ever been to Atlantic City and the first time I had ever been in a hotel that big. And it reminded me of a castle. And the girl I was with, I don’t think she had been anyplace like that either. So we were both rather awed with the whole experience.

⁴⁶ Payne and Green, *Time Longer Than Rope*, 4-5.

But when we got to the hotel, we didn't - neither one of us understood why we had separate rooms... There was an adjoining door, but we had separate rooms. And the two ladies, they stayed together in a room... But the feeling that dawned on me was that I was in that room, and she was in that room because she was White and I was Black. And it hadn't really come to the point in New Jersey wherein you had integration in these hotels. In fact, it was still hotels that you really couldn't go in at all.

And the other thing was when a scholarship was given to the student who had the highest academic and general all-around achievement upon graduation. Had never gone to a Black student before. Well, we only had three, four classes, you know, that they had been entered into. But I was the one that was in contention for this scholarship. It was a five hundred dollar scholarship. Doesn't seem much now, but it was a lot at that time. You had to go before the board... they put me through a rigorous question, almost as if they didn't believe some of the things I said... And I remember it was sort of amusing. You know, there was one person that just kept questioning me and asking me about my activities, and I just said, "Do you think that's enough or shall I go on?" [Interviewer laughs]. And somebody kind of chuckled a little bit. I guess maybe, I don't know whether because of the way I said it or because that they were thinking that it was a bit too much too. Well, in either case, the end story is, I think that what they were trying to do - certain factions were trying to do - is to not give this scholarship at this time to a Black student. So they interviewed the others, they had two other candidates, two White girls...but they really didn't want to go on to a get a degree. One said, she told them clearly she really planned to get married. And the other one, for some reason or other, she didn't really want to go to school right at that time... They were faced with a dilemma because they either have to give it to me -

Dickey-Kemp: 'Cause you wanted to go on to school.

Powell: Yeah. Oh, I wanted to go on to school. And either give it to me, not give it, or give it half to one of them and half to me. And I think after some deliberation, I guess, or some compromise or whatever goes on behind the doors...they decided that they were going to split the scholarship and give two-fifty to one and two-fifty to the other. So, which was all right, you know, it's all right with me.

Dickey-Kemp: So you got two-fifty and someone else -.

Powell: I got two hundred and fifty dollars instead of the five hundred.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Hortense Williams Powell, interview with Ann Marie Dickey-Kemp, July 2, 1998.

D'Antonio and Whelan tell a story in “Counting Nurses” of Florence Jacob Edmunds, an African-American nurse who “turned to sewing to supplement her husband’s salary during the 1930s.” Edmunds had trained at Lincoln Hospital in New York City after the White school of nursing in Pittsfield, Massachusetts refused her admission. “[The school] had never entertained the possibility of an African American student,” write the authors. Edmunds won a scholarship to further her study at Teachers College, and worked at the Henry Street Settlement House after receiving her degree. She and her husband then returned to Massachusetts because they thought it a better place to raise African-American children than the environs of New York City. There Mrs. Edmunds took in sewing because, as she was quoted as saying, the town “wasn’t ready” for a Black nurse.⁴⁸



Figure 26. Unidentified graduation photos, Newark Public Library archives, Black nurse/ White nurse.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ D'Antonio and Whelan, “Counting Nurses,” 8.

⁴⁹ Note the facial expressions on the men visible in the pictures. In the left photo they seem to appear somewhat somber when congratulating the African-American nurse and yet more ebullient in the right, at the moment of White nurse’s award.

In the 20th century, one cannot consider African-American employment without considering racism alongside it. Each job that a Black person wanted, applied for, worked in, and was fired from included experiences linked to race, usually negative ones. The majority of employers and business owners in this time period, according to the interviews and various studies, were not especially concerned with racial issues and inequities, nor the possibility of being perceived as racist themselves. This was just “how things were done.” Yet, in large ways and small, from demands for raises to refusals of jobs, the Krueger-Scott narrators disrupted the system. And things began to change. Rev. James Scott made the following observation:

Well, during the late 1960s, early 1970s, a lot of occupations broke open. There were jobs in banks, in the public sector there was a general opening up, civil service became much more concerned about having a good representation of Blacks. The professional schools, the law schools, the school of pharmacy, the social work school, the library school, and so forth, began earnestly looking for Blacks. And as a result, Blacks moved into many areas whether it was architecture or engineering, driving a bus, veterinary medicine. For the first time you began to *see* Blacks and you weren't surprised when you saw this.⁵⁰

Willie Bradwell noted the same trend, “Well, you got to remember that Affirmative Action came along during those years. So it made it much easier for Blacks to move into certain jobs that they wasn't in before... Back with the Civil Rights Movement.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ Dr. James A. Scott, interview with Glen Marie Brickus (no date recorded).

⁵¹ Willie Bradwell, interview with Cleta Bradwell, Dec. 8, 1997. 1961 had President John F. Kennedy employing the term “affirmative action” upon establishing his Committee on Equal Opportunity, Executive Order 10925. It reads in part, “The contractor will take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed, and that employees are treated during employment, without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin,” *Executive Order 10925 Establishing the President’s Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity* (March 6, 1961) eeoc.gov.

Rev. Woods asserted that the shift in job opportunity for African Americans in Newark came with the 1967 rebellion. By 1968/1969 there was a new kind of thinking, he said, “a brand new generation was born as a result of those riots.”⁵² Black Muslims were opening businesses; more Black nurses appeared; and African-American teachers were finally being promoted. As with Rev. Scott, Woods related a visual change in the employment landscape. The more that African Americans were seen working, the more (little by little) employers and consumers became accepting of their presence in the workforce.

SOCIO-POLITICAL WORK

In the introduction to *Time Longer Than Rope* Payne and Green lament what many call the “Master Narrative” surrounding the Civil Rights Movement. They write that while the story that features a handful of leaders - and events of dramatic redemption - is compelling it does not “take seriously the ‘ordinary’ people whose years of persistent struggle often made the big events possible.”⁵³ This “politics of the everyday,” as Robin D.G. Kelley might name the counter narrative, has become more prevalent in the Black activist historiography these last few decades. The redefinition or expansion of *activism* - and *politics* - is a necessary step in this scholarly trend towards foregrounding the “ordinary” person’s work. The Great Migration, scholars are now arguing, is the most powerful and long-lasting labor action against systemic White supremacy in America. This is an idea that could not have been put forward without a change in thinking about what is actually considered activism.

⁵² Robert Woods, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 17, 1997.

⁵³ Charles M. Payne, and Adam Green, *Time Longer Than Rope*, 1.

The Krueger-Scott participants may not have always seen themselves as activists, in part because of their understanding of the term which probably came from traditional sources based upon the Master Narrative. Yet it becomes apparent while listening to the interviews that this community was made up of many an activist. As Payne and Green write, “everyday life for Black folk was invariably politicized...” and “everyday life constitutes the core substance of Black politics...”⁵⁴ Life was “no crystal stair” for the majority of African Americans of the Great Migration Era and thus required many an activist stance.⁵⁵

Robin D. G. Kelley writes in *Race Rebels*:

Writing “history from below” that emphasizes the infrapolitics of the black working class requires that we substantially redefine politics. Too often politics is defined by *how* people participate rather than *why*: by traditional definition the question of what is political hinges on whether or not groups are involved in elections, political parties, or grass-roots social movements. Yet the *how* seems far less important than the *why*, since many of the so-called real political institutions have not always proved effective for, or even accessible to, oppressed people.⁵⁶

Kelley’s reference to “infrapolitics” is based upon political anthropologist James C. Scott’s concept. The term covers the resistive actions that marginalized people tend to perform “offstage.” These might include “theft, footdragging, the destruction of property – or, more rarely ...open attacks on individuals, institutions, or symbols of

⁵⁴ Charles M. Payne, and Adam Green, *Time Longer Than Rope*, 1-4.

⁵⁵ Langston Hughes’ poem, “Mother to Son” reads in part, “Well, son, I’ll tell you: Life for me ain’t been no crystal stair,” poetryfoundation.org.

⁵⁶ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Toronto: Free Press, 1994) 9. Kelley received some criticism for his “tendency to politicize every aspect of African American life” instead of regarding some acts simply as “alternative forms of expression.” See Bruce Nelson, “Review: Untitled: *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* by Robin D. G. Kelley,” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (Feb., 1996) 171-172. Yet Kelley has much support in his argument. Consider bell hooks’ work on photography as an activist measure in the Black community. hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: New Press, 1995).

domination.”⁵⁷ These actions may take place in plain sight but not necessarily in view of those in power, nor in the form of what the powerful recognize as political. We hear about offstage resistive actions in the Krueger-Scott histories – or resistive actions that began offstage and subsequently made their way into the streets and institutions. It was quite often the women who tended to perform these offstage actions.

Dr. E. Alma Flagg, for instance, tells her interviewer about the changes that occurred in the Newark public schools beginning in the 1970s. She had been appointed assistant superintendent in charge of curriculum services in 1967, a major coup for an African-American woman at the time. But by the mid-1970s reductions in state requirements for administrators signaled the beginning of the end as far as Dr. Flagg was concerned. Her position was eventually abolished and she received a demotion. Explaining in the interview that she did not want to change jobs nor was she ready to retire, she registered for advanced math courses at the National Science Institute, taking advantage of the paid tuition plan through the school system. In 1980 she published a math text book that became a part of the regular school curriculum.⁵⁸

Using the framework of Kelley and Scott helps us to understand why it might be that the narrators of Krueger-Scott differentiated between political and community activities – and why the questionnaire is designed to acknowledge this differential. Separating the questions, “How much have you participated in political activities...” from, “How much have you participated in community activities” indicates an understanding on the part of the historians of the possible connotations attached to the

⁵⁷ Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 8.

⁵⁸ E. Alma Flagg, interview with Catherine Lenix-Hooker, Oct. 20, 1999.

word “political.” If there had been no follow-up with “community” activities, the interviews show us that we would have missed a great deal. Giles Wright and Clement Price appear to have been quite aware of the weight of these words.

The workplace, it is pointed out in Paul Ortiz’ study of early Black voter registration, has long been an important location of Black activist history. In his article, Ortiz points out the ways in which “nonpolitical” spaces such as lodges, secret societies and women’s groups came to be locations of activism. “Contrary to the assumptions of much of the literature on modern protest,” Ortiz writes in this 2003 piece, “it is not charismatic individuals who create movements: it is the relationships between individuals that convince ordinary people to take risks and engage in politics.”⁵⁹ The workplace has long been a location of a vast number of ordinary African-American people doing work far beyond what it is they are paid to do.

Women’s Work

Much as ordinary people have lived in the shadows of celebrated advocates, women’s stories of activism have continued to be overshadowed by men’s. While there has certainly been newfound attention paid to female activists, their erasure from historiography is a difficult habit to break for even the most conscientious of scholars. Because women are moved to activism more often through domestic and private issues, they can be political workers even as they do not identify or present as such.

But of course, if we have learned nothing we have learned that oral histories destabilize generalizations; Carolyn Wallace, for example, stood out as a rare woman who answered in the affirmative when asked whether she was politically active. “Since

⁵⁹ Paul Ortiz, “‘Eat Your Bread without Butter, but Pay Your Poll Tax’: Roots of the African American Voter Registration Movement in Florida, 1919-1920,” *Time Longer Than Rope*, 196-229.

1969,” she said.⁶⁰ A more typical answer from the women of Krueger-Scott would be to deny any political activism while later on, in response to questions about “community activities,” share stories that position them as heavily involved in a world that many would count as political. Even Carolyn Wallace’s claim that her political activity began in 1969 seems a bit modest as her story tells us that she was organizing unions even before then.

Wallace worked at many jobs including nurses’ aide, legislative assistant, and social service director. As with others in the Krueger-Scott community she leveraged her work into activism. Wallace explained her relatively good prospects in the job market by stating that she was a member of one of the first groups of Black college graduates. Wallace told her interviewer that she believed that the increased access to higher education had contributed to the heightened activism and raised consciousness of Black workers, and Black women in particular.

In the mid-1960s Mrs. Wallace organized a union for the Ladies Garment Workers at a sewing factory.

I did some union organizing for the Ladies Garment Workers. I lost a job behind that, too...The company that I was working for on Freylinghusen Avenue – I had got promoted down there and they asked me to go to this other place and... help organize the other shops in the area. And, uh, went up to Dickerson Street, and they were makin’ shower curtains. I will never forget the shower curtains – they would slide through the machines – made me so mad. And a lot of the girls were getting hurt up there and I had started that union.

Wallace subsequently received an offer to go to Switzerland for a training program in labor organization. She explained to her interviewer that she had refused.

⁶⁰ Carolyn Wallace, interview with Glen Marie Brickus (no date recorded).

“My vision was not that wide at that time. I shoulda went. But...I didn’t want to go no place but Newark.”

A later socio-political activity of Carolyn Wallace’s was the founding of the International Youth Organization (IYO) which was organized after the 1967 uprisings. Approximately 35,000 children went through that program according to Wallace. A 2010 news article regarding the 40th anniversary of the group reported that IYO - founded by Carolyn Wallace and her husband - first started meeting in the basement of the Brick Towers housing projects in 1970.⁶¹

Prompted by her Krueger-Scott interviewer, Wallace explained that the organization came from Wallace’s job as part-time management agent for the newly built government subsidized Hill Manor housing project.⁶² In keeping with the Great Society mode of operation and its short-lived movement to facilitate local allocation of federal funds, Mrs. Wallace and the Hill Manor management carried some influence in the choosing of tenants. Focused especially on the wellbeing of local youth, Wallace strove to ascertain whether families were “ready” to live in the brand new housing complex. Wallace told her interviewer that once the federal government discovered that she was interviewing people - “picking and choosing” who would live in the complex - their funding was threatened. “Whatever we try to do for Black people the federal government messes up,” said Wallace. But her experience led her to see the need to better provide for

⁶¹ Ricky Bell, “International Youth Organization Celebrates 40 Years of Serving Newark Youth,” *Star Ledger*, June 18, 2010, nj.com. (As was the case with so many high-rise subsidized housing projects, Brick Towers – famous for its one-time resident Cory Booker – was demolished in 2008).

⁶² This was the low-income housing next door to the Krueger-Scott Mansion whose impending demolition was identified as one of the many contributing factors to the project’s delay. It was finally demolished in 2000.

Essex County's "'disconnected' youth and young adult population," as described on IYO's website. Thus IYO was a product of Mrs. Wallace's paying job and community work.⁶³

Councilwoman Mildred Crump had not always planned for a career in activist politics; she had gone to college in her hometown of Detroit in order to train as a Braille instructor. Once in Newark, her first job was as a teacher. The year was 1965.

When I first started, Sussex County was part of my territory. You talk about being afraid in race relations. When I would drive through those towns early in the morning before the major highways, the White kids would throw eggs and rocks. They knew I was coming through there...And they pretty much knew my schedule, and they'd step out and, you know, go *whoo*, you know, in front of my car. It was quite terrifying sometimes. And I almost never wanted to stop because I never knew what to expect from any of those persons.

Crump worked for Dr. Kelley, then head of the Special Education Department based in Jersey City. The job entailed driving all over the state as there were very few trained Braille teachers at the time. But this was not the job that Crump had been offered initially; she had accepted the position of Director of the Program for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Here again, this was one of those incidents, a promise that was made sight unseen.⁶⁴ And, I mean, at that time I was the first African-American Braille teacher in the city of Detroit, and [Dr. Kelley in New Jersey] was not expecting a Black person. I know that. But when I walked into his office to say, "Hi, here I am," he tried to fake [unintelligible]. So what he did is he said to me, "If you will work for Jersey City in another capacity and while we find funding for this position -" All of a sudden they lost their funding for the directorship. And he said, "...we'll fix it up for you, don't worry."

⁶³ *International Youth Organization, Inc.*, "Home," <http://www.iyo-newark.org/>. Carolyn Wallace, interview with Glen Marie Brickus (no date recorded).

⁶⁴ Crump is referring to her experience of first arriving in Newark with her husband, having been promised an apartment, and then being told it was unavailable once the landlord realized that the Crumps were African American. Her discussion of this situation appears in chapter five.

Crump stayed at the Jersey City program until the end of 1965, fulfilling her three month commitment to Dr. Kelley. Then she moved from that position to a job working for the State of New Jersey, and her salary moved too. “Actually it was more than just Braille teacher... I was actually an education consultant...What I did is I set and monitored programs for students who were officially impaired throughout the State of New Jersey...” Mildred Crump went from making \$3,000 a month to \$7,000 a month. She loved her new job, she said, although being the only Black Braille teacher did entail that she constantly had to prove herself. What she saw and experienced in her job as a teacher eventually propelled her into the political arena.⁶⁵

At the time of her interview, Vivian Berry was retired as Director of Senior Citizens for the City of Newark. She was also an ordained minister. Berry believed that “political” organizations were full of people merely talking about what they would do. Berry said she just did things, that she was “a doer not a talker.” Perhaps this is one reason that so many of the interviewees demurred in response to the questions surrounding “political” activity. The connotation of the word appears to carry some amount of negativity. Even as city government began to feature a few African-American politicians mid-century, and ultimately welcomed its first Black mayor, “ordinary” Black lives did not necessarily improve commensurate to the increase in Black political leadership and so it may well be that Blacks were still not all that impressed with politicians.

Mildred Crump’s remarks when talking about her idol Shirley Chisholm could also prove be useful in theorizing the meaning of “politics” within the Krueger-Scott

⁶⁵ Mildred Crump, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Nov. 12, 1996.

group. Crump said about Chisolm, “I continue to marvel at what she's accomplished as an African-American woman...Now this is a woman who is political, but she's accomplished a lot.” *But* she has accomplished a lot, emphasized Crump. “Political” once again is equated with an all-talk-and-no-action model, just as Vivian Berry characterized it. Clearly the word “political” was weighed with multiple meanings for these Newarkers.

In the beginning of Vivian Berry’s interview we hear a bell go off. She explains, “I’m not gonna answer...I have a little candy store...” Later she discusses her candy store when asked if she contributes to the economic life of Newark. While she acknowledges that she didn’t earn anything “earth-shaking” at her store Berry says, “I consider this my mission field...I use the time to talk to children, to encourage them to stay in school...I try to encourage them by giving them a little gift...” Vivian Berry used her candy store as an outpost for youth, for teaching and encouraging children who might have thought they were just coming by for a soda and some chips.

Berry’s interviewer, Glen Marie Brickus, pushed Mrs. Berry about the candy store income, “Do you consider the volume of business you do significant?” Berry repeated, “No...not ‘earth-shattering.’ I consider it more of a mission field. Nothing I could live off of...” Berry had made her point: sometimes work is not about income but output.

Berry later explained that she had never been especially political, but always voted and also worked at the polls. But we must consider her response while noting the activities with which she was actually involved, including serving as a board member of the antipoverty group United Community Corporation (UCC) and acting as district leader for two years.⁶⁶ Mrs. Berry was also a member of her block club alongside political

⁶⁶ District Leaders were appointed to each election district within a Ward. Their main job was to get voters to turn out on Election Day.

activist Louise Epperson. Their block organization was a part of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), a well-known national advocacy group for low and moderate-income families. “No activities but we *were* responsible for a stop sign being installed there on Second Street,” said Berry. “As a result of us forming this block club we were able to convince... Councilman Carrino [of the North Ward] to get involved...”⁶⁷ If these few undertakings were Berry’s idea of not being especially political then we can only imagine what other activities Berry - and others - may have left out when answering this question.

For Mildred Crump, politics became her work early on and then ultimately her paying job. Still a fixture in Newark government today, Council President Crump has devoted much of her life in the city to political life. She said in her interview that her interest in politics started in Detroit when she was growing up, although it would be decades before she considered making it her vocation. In fact Crump’s mother told her daughter that she “wouldn’t be able to help herself” and would go into politics just like so many others in the Crump family – all men, according to the interview. Once in Newark, a place she “didn’t know beans about,” Mildred Crump indeed became involved. In 1966 a neighbor asked her to help support the election of Calvin West who would end up becoming the first Black elected official of the Addonizio administration. “Well, I fried my first chicken wings for Calvin West, believe it or not, in 1966. I guess you could say and the rest is history.”

⁶⁷ Vivian Berry, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, 1997 (no date or month recorded).

Once the political question had been answered to Mrs. Brickus' satisfaction, Mildred Crump was then asked about her "community activities."⁶⁸ Was she very active in her community? asked Brickus. "Well, I think, I'd say a great deal," replied Crump. As a member of the Weequahic Partnership, Crump battled against the destruction of the park's stadium.

...the first day that they sent the bulldozers out to tear down the stadium, I laid down in front of the bulldozers so they couldn't come. And Wilbur McNeil [President of the Weequahic Park Association] said, 'Mildred, please get up off the ground.' So they didn't run over me. That's how passionate I was about what was done to Weequahic Park. And I know that had it remained a Jewish community, they never would have - The County would not have done that.⁶⁹

While unable to find information on this particular urban showdown, the story is that Essex County at one point simply came in and razed the beloved Weequahic Park stadium. This was a place where, among other things, Newark's young athletes trained. A St. Benedict's Prep alumnus told me he remembers running the stadium stairs in order to prepare for fencing season. We will read more in chapter five of the ways in which Newark's built environment carried the affective experiences of residents even after the structures themselves had disappeared.

⁶⁸ The full questions read as follows: #60. How much have you participated in political activities in Newark? What political organizations (e.g., political parties, protest groups) do/did you belong to? When did you first join them? What positions do/did you hold in them? What roles have you played in them? What do you know about the history of these organizations? Who are/were their outstanding leaders/members? What do you consider to be their major accomplishments? What materials (e.g., photographs, records, posters, banners) do you have that pertain to your political activities? #61. How much have you participated in community activities? What community organizations (e.g., neighborhood groups, civic organizations) do/did you belong to? When did you first join them? What positions do/did you hold in them? What roles have you played in them? What do you know about the history of these organizations? Who are/were their outstanding leaders/members? What do you consider to be their major accomplishments? What materials (e.g., photographs, charters, plaques, awards, flyers) do you have that pertain to your community activities?

⁶⁹ Mildred Crump, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Nov. 12, 1996.

A recent book, *Bulldozer: Demolition and Clearance of the Postwar Landscape* by Francesca Russello Ammon, looks at the ways in which the bulldozer symbolizes the destruction of so many urban neighborhoods – and thus so many lives. It was also a symbol against which Newark activists fought, a tool of the “clearance as progress” thinking in postwar America according to Ammon. “Minority communities were the primary victims,” she explained in a recent interview for WNYC radio. 60% of those who were displaced by what many call “Negro Removal” (urban renewal) were minority groups.⁷⁰ There will be more discussion of the “slum clearance” protocols written into federal mandates for city redevelopment in chapter five. It is simply noted here that this symbol of the bulldozer, in front of which lay a very respectable middle-aged African-American woman in Mildred Crump, is clearly weighted, as Ammon argues.

Mary Roberts complained in her Krueger-Scott interview that there were not enough men participating in her block association. Just as with the church, she argued, it was hard to get them involved. Roberts worked at her church, Sacred Heart Baptist in Brooklyn, as an ordained minister and licensed counselor. She was also an elected district leader - a non-paying job. (She announced in her interview that she would be running a clean-up initiative for her block that coming weekend, perhaps attempting to recruit her interviewer, Mrs. Brickus). Having retired from teaching in 1992, Roberts did not especially want the position of district leader, but people in her community petitioned for her to run. She explained her hesitation, “You know you have a different opinion of political people.” Brickus responded, “Right...Don’t trust them a lot...”⁷¹

⁷⁰ Francesca Russello Ammon, John Hockenberry, *The Takeaway*, Apr 13, 2016, wnyc.org.

⁷¹ Mary Roberts, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Jan. 26, 1997.

Men at Work

Frank Hutchins, who worked for the Housing and Urban Development Tenants Coalition, first wanted to talk about others' work before that of his own. Hutchins clearly contributed to the city's welfare; Mayor Ken Gibson had declared a Frank Hutchins Day, sponsoring an annual festival in Weequahic Park. But Hutchins wanted to talk about Amiri Baraka's work, among others'. He said that after Ken Gibson's election as the city's first Black mayor that Newark became a site of political awareness. Baraka was credited by Hutchins for helping to bring Blacks together as a community after spending way too much time working individually.⁷²

Of course this lack of collective action was not necessarily a result of a failure to try. As so many great thinkers have observed, the reinforcement of the citizen as individual in a "colonized" state keeps those in collective power where they are, while keeping the proletariat far from any ability to create their own power. Jean Paul Sartre writes in his preface to Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, "The different tribes fight between themselves since they cannot face the real enemy – and you can count on colonial policy to keep up their rivalries..."⁷³ We have heard already of some examples of these "tribes" in the Kruger-Scott narratives, for example in the form of Black Northerners and their more recent Southern migrant counterparts.

In Alessandro Portelli's oral histories of a Kentucky coal mining community, *They Say in Harlan County*, one might be surprised to find multiple parallels to the lives

⁷² Frank Hutchins, interview with Pauline Blount, June 28, 1998.

⁷³ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Preface," *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon (New York: Grove Press, 2004) 18.

and stories of the Newarkers of the Great Migration. One example is in this sabotaging of potential collectivity. In the case of Harlan County the coal mine operators were the “colonizers,” ensuring that no strong bonds be forged among the coal miners, literally keeping Blacks and Whites separate even as they all labored under similarly unfair working conditions. Race has always been a handy divisionary line, ever since the days of chattel slavery when landowners ensured that poor Whites - usually exploited in their own right - had a sense that somehow they were still better off than the African enslaved. After all they were “free” to come and go, received pay for their work, and so on. In that same vein Johnny Jones, a coal miner, tells Portelli, “You take this race hatred and stuff, all that sprung from the money man. They get betwixt you and me and make us distrust each other, and make people kill each other for a lousy dollar.”⁷⁴ It should be noted that it is not necessarily the case that these ordinary citizens do not notice the ploys of the powerful. In fact this consciousness is evidenced by the community work performed by so many of the Krueger-Scott participants.

Frank Hutchins continued discussing Baraka, describing him as a community-maker:

He had the ability to bring people together. In the early 70s, right after Ken Gibson’s election, on a given Sunday morning, there would be over two – three hundred leaders meeting at his headquarters. All the fields that dealt with the quality of life in the Black community. Health, education, church leadership. People used to come and meet prior to going to church on Sunday morning... It’s a shame that it didn’t last longer and that more couldn’t have been achieved by that. I think had that concept continued to go...the strides that would have been made in this city would have been terrific.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Alessandro Portelli, *They Say In Harlan County: An Oral History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 174.

⁷⁵ Frank Hutchins, interview with Pauline Blount, June 28, 1998.

This is, of course, not the story everyone tells of Amiri Baraka. To some he was a faction-maker. Indeed some might suggest that he was exactly what “the man” wanted, the person who ensured there was no unified voice on particular issues concerning the Black community. And as Allesandro Portelli might say, both stories are not wrong. Portelli writes, “...the diversity of oral history consists in the fact that ‘wrong’ statements are still psychologically ‘true’ and that this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts.”⁷⁶

In the Krueger-Scott interviews we hear tales that accuse Baraka of tearing at the fabric of the Black community with his Afro-centric focus in education and politics. Willie Belle Hooper speaks of the time she was teaching at the Robert Treat School. Amiri Baraka and Eugene Campbell (ultimately one-time superintendent of the Newark school district) wanted to make the school more Afro-conscious. Campbell starting wearing dashikis and speaking Swahili to the students and together the two men battled for an updated cafeteria menu that would reflect a more African flavor. Hooper and others did not agree with this approach:

And I went back to Robert Treat. And I stayed there until there was all of this confusion with Leroi Jones [aka Amiri Baraka]... They came in there running the school. And raised so much Cain. I don't know how they got them out. But the principal and the vice principal were White. They got them out of there. How he did it I don't know. But he did it... I'm as Black as anybody, but there are certain distances I'll go.⁷⁷

We are continually reminded by oral histories that it is important to listen to what is not said as well as what is. In the case of the Krueger-Scott interviews, because both interviewer and narrator shared the same general civic space, the former played an

⁷⁶ Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different?” *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, 68.

⁷⁷ Willie Belle Hooper, interview with Catherine Lenix-Hooker, April 12, 1996.

especially central role in the process. Perhaps the lack of response on the part of the interviewer, Pauline Blount, when listening to Frank Hutchins wax on about Amiri Baraka is an indication of the feelings that she had about the famous artist and activist. Not once did she comment upon the praises Hutchins was lavishing upon Baraka. In Hooper's interview on the other hand, she was encouraged and asked questions by her interviewer in order to gain more details on the "Cain" being raised at the high school. A lack of engagement might not be surprising in another situation, but in the case of the Krueger-Scott interviews we witness regular and spontaneous interaction between narrator and interviewer. This lens of Baraka allows us to witness a particular form of activism, learn something about a well-known Newarker who was not interviewed, as well as consider some attitudes surrounding political activity through oral history analysis.

Hutchins was, incidentally, atypical of the male interviewees as he spent much time speaking of the work of another. Most of the men were enthusiastic about sharing their own accomplishments and titles. In general the men's stories foregrounded bravery, independence, and fortitude in a way that the women's tales did much less regularly.

Ronald Rice was a city council member from 1982 through 1998. He assumed the office of state senator in 1986. Rice was also deputy mayor from 2002-2006 and ran for mayor against incumbent Sharpe James in 1998 and against Cory Booker for mayor in 2006. But in response to the question about his very first job, Rice tells of shining shoes. From there he performed a string of menial jobs, explaining that by the time he took a position after high school at Skyron Corporation in Belleville, he was committed to furthering his education. "It was a sweatshop."

When asked about his political activities Rice said he preferred working within the community but that "...if the Democratic Party calls me to an event or a meeting I'm there. I'm in leadership." At the time of the interview he was both State Senator and Council member, a double duty one was able to perform at that time. Later a law would be enacted prohibiting public servants from holding dual government positions. Rice was also asked if he had any experiences with "racial discrimination in Newark." He replied, "Oh yeah." He then told of his 1978 campaign against Mickey Bottone for the West Ward council seat, a race he ultimately lost. "They did not want a Black to represent the West Ward," Rice said.⁷⁸ It appears Rice was somewhat understated in his description of that which he went through.

In 2015 the *Observer* ran an article entitled, "Six All-Time Newark Ward Contests and Why They Mattered." Number two on the list was, "Ronald L. Rice versus Michael 'Mickey' Bottone and a New Day in the West Ward," characterized as a "rematch from an especially brutal 1978." A newcomer to the primarily Italian and Irish West Ward, Rice moved to the Vailsburg area in 1974, at that time working in law enforcement. According to the article Rice claimed ballot fraud in that 1978 election although he does not mention this in his interview. The official count had him losing by 760 votes. Four years later Rice won the contest and Bottone became mayor of Lavalette in southern New Jersey.⁷⁹ Rice's activities were traditionally political and he was also an activist within that political sphere. In the case of the West Ward election he spoke out

⁷⁸ At this time the West Ward was mostly White. European immigrant families and people from New York City looking for less expensive housing made up a good portion of its population.

⁷⁹ Max Pizarro, "Six All-Time Newark Ward Contests and Why They Mattered," *Observer*, July 14, 2015. <http://observer.com/2015/07/six-all-time-newark-ward-contests-and-why-they-mattered/>

against the municipality for what he believed were illegal activities and racism. Rice explained in his interview that part of the reason people did not want African Americans in power was, “you can’t do backroom deals with certain Black folk.”⁸⁰

George Branch was another political worker, and one of the council members who had been an original backer of the Krueger-Scott Mansion project. Branch had been a professional boxer at one time, a career which eventually led him to train young boxers. He subsequently found himself invested in the youth of Newark, working on their behalf specifically in terms of public housing advocacy. As with Carolyn Wallace, Branch noted the ways in which youth were often left out of the discussion of fair and adequate housing. His community work in turn gave him “name recognition” as he put it, and contributed greatly to his political success.

Branch told a story of his first reluctant foray into politics:

Yeah. But let me get back to the first part, why I got involved in politics. I had developed a household name. Then I didn't like, really like politics that much. And was a guy because I had the name recognition, his name Ray Burgess. He came to me, and he was slick, slick as an onion. He came to me, he said, “Councilman,” he said, “Why don't you run?” He said, “You got name recognition, everybody knows you. Why don't you run?” I said, “Ray, I'm not interested in that stuff.” He said, “You should run.” He says, “I'll be your campaign manager. I help you raise the money, what have you.” And I like an old fool - goddam - trusted that boy. Come to find out he was using me to raise money...He was packing in money. I ran third in the race and lost. That was in 1974.⁸¹

In 1975 Mayor Ken Gibson appointed George Branch to the Board of Education. In 1982 Branch won a seat on the City Council. Ray C. Burgess has a park named after him in the town of Irvington.

⁸⁰ Ronald Rice, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, April 7, 1997.

⁸¹ George Branch, interview with Pauline Blount, Aug. 28, 1996.

Here we find stories of “everyday” people and a complicating of what politics and activism look like. As well we see how integral politics truly were to Black life; so many people forced to participate in them just to get through an average day. Yet other African Americans saw politics as a way to change things, for themselves and for their people at large. In the analysis of these narratives it is crucial to ask *why* these actors did what they did, and not just *how*.

Ministry

Black ministers have both suffered criticism and received accolades when it comes to their work in local politics, an issue touched upon in chapter three. Theirs have been the voices so often heard in Black historiography and yet it is easy to find people quick to criticize their lack of activism in the face of so much past injustice. Ron Rice pointed out in his interview that “Ministers are people, too, and they have their faults. You know, we can all be critical...”⁸²

African Americans have had a complicated relationship with their pastors; once the only visible authority in Black communities, they were generally idolized. This dynamic persisted even as African Americans came to higher levels of authority across a spectrum of professions. The old guard attitude of pastor reverence rankles some African Americans today who regard with suspicion Black clergy, and the Black church more generally. Modern Black clergy’s tendency toward conservative social and political stances has kept them quiet, or in positions distant from the activist population, as many times as not. Others yet are accused of simply showing up only when the cameras are on.

⁸² Ronald Rice, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, April 7, 1997.

As early as 1912, W.E.B. Du Bois railed against Black preachers in an editorial in the NAACP's *The Crisis* magazine. While he acknowledged the hard working and "self-forgetful" ones, Du Bois wrote, "The paths and the higher places are choked with pretentious and ill-trained men and in far too many cases with men dishonest and otherwise immoral. Such men make the way for upright candidates of business and power extremely difficult."⁸³ Du Bois looked upon these sorts of men (Black women would not serve in the church for decades to come) as actual hindrances to Black progress.

In 1952, in a speech to the National Negro Labor Council, Paul Robeson differentiated his minister father from others. "Never to forget the days of my youth...inspired and guided forward by the simple yet grand dignity of my father who was a *real* [author's emphasis] minister to the needs of his poor congregation in small New Jersey churches, and an example of human goodness... If it were not for the stirrings and militant struggles among these millions [of Negro Americans], a number of our so-called spokesmen with fancy jobs and appointments would never be where they are."⁸⁴

And in a 1967 *Time* magazine article about the Newark uprising, we read a quote from a citizen responding to the accusations from Mayor Addonizio that the "riots" occurred because there was no Black leadership. The article reads:

Another Negro, one of some 900 who assembled in Newark for a conference on black power, told the New York Times: "There was only one man who could have walked on Springfield Avenue and said, 'Brothers, cool it.' That was Malcolm X. We have no such leaders now. Whitey doesn't understand this. Some little Negro pork chop preacher who is hustling pot and girls in a storefront church goes to

⁸³ W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Negro Church," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* (May 1912) 24, books.google.com.

⁸⁴ Paul Robeson, "'The Battleground is Here', No. 1, 1971" in *Freedomways Reader* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000) 12-13.

city hall and gets all sorts of promises. That's not grass-roots leadership, but Whitey thinks he's dealing with responsible Negroes."⁸⁵

Lest we conclude that respectability politics is unique to the experience of African-American women, there are many male ministers of the long Civil Rights Movement caught up in just that. L.H. Welchel, Jr. points to the experience of the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth in Birmingham, Alabama. Contrasted against Dr. King's educated, "conciliatory" style of preaching and organizing, Shuttlesworth was "crude, uncouth and dictatorial," according to the Black elites of the area. Shuttlesworth attracted the "masses" who were then admonished for following someone so clearly ignorant of the need to "uphold the status quo." Welchel points out that these upper echelon detractors also tended to stay "a safe distance away from the trenches of the civil rights battles" while Shuttlesworth himself was most certainly there in those trenches.⁸⁶

There are, of course, numerous occasions when Black clergy have stepped in voluntarily, courageously, and without fanfare in order to battle racial and civil injustices. Robert L. Allen in his 1969 book *Black Awakening* argues that "The black minister remains today an important, if not the most important, social force in most black communities." Allen does, however, go on to acknowledge that those in the profession can also deserve the "Uncle Tom" moniker at times, due to what looks to be "collaboration" between them and the power elite.⁸⁷ In her Krueger-Scott interview, Elma Bateman said there was a time when there used to be more "jack-leg preachers" but

⁸⁵ "Races: Spreading Fire," Time, 7/28/1967, Vol. 90, Issue 4, Academic Search Premier.

⁸⁶ L. H. Welchel, *The History & Heritage of African-American Churches: A Way Out of no Way* (St. Paul, Minn.: Paragon House, 2011) 211-212.

⁸⁷ Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History* (Trenton, N.J: Africa World Press, 1990) 12.

that the profession had increased its education level and that this strengthened their leadership abilities.⁸⁸ Suffice it to say that professional religious leaders of the African-American community live under very particular scrutiny when it comes to their work and the ways in which they utilize their bully pulpits.

One example of Newark clergy active in the “struggle” is the Rev. Henry Cade. According to Louise Epperson’s interview, Rev. Cade opened Central Presbyterian’s Church doors for the Committee Against Negro and Puerto Rican Removal meetings. This was the organization created around the fight to keep the medical school expansion under control in the University Heights area. “We went into the church and had many, many meetings. He was always for us,” explained Epperson. In fact Rev. Cade’s work was later acknowledged by Representative Donald Payne through a tribute in the House of Representatives in 1996:

Over the years Newark's Central Presbyterian Church has recognized the need for the church to become more than a site for worship. The Central Presbyterian Church has opened its doors to programs and services that truly help the community and its residents. The church sponsors programs like SHARE, a food program; preschool-head start programs, senior citizen programs; young adult ministries, homeless ministries, as well as others. It takes a certain kind of leadership to make things happen. For the Central Presbyterian Church that leadership has come from Rev. Henry Cade for 30 years.⁸⁹

Rev. James Scott was praised by many of the Bethany Baptist Church members as a minister who not only changed the church that he was called to lead but also the city in which it stood. Under his leadership Bethany initiated many community outreach programs and was a strong supporter of the NAACP and Urban League. Rev. Scott tells

⁸⁸ Elma Bateman, interview with Pauline Blount, April 29, 1999.

⁸⁹ *A Tribute to Reverend Henry Cade*, Hon. Donald M. Payne, June 6, 1996, Congressional Record, congress.gov.

his interviewer Glen Marie Brickus (a Bethany member) something to help explain why there existed a perception that African-American religious leaders may be less than independent and thus dependable:

Maybe I should tell a little story that kind of highlights how Newark was and show you what it is today. We moved here to the City of Newark, uh, maybe May, June, something like that, 1963. Sometime early in the summer, before August, I got a call from City Hall asking me would I take such and such a job. The job paid almost twice as much as what I was making. And I said, "What do I have to do?" And they said, "Nothing." And I said, "God I want a job [unintelligible]." And someone came and visited me and asked me, and their rationale was "everybody else - every other clergyperson in the city - has a job, why shouldn't you." My feeling was from the outset - and this was during the Addonizio administration - my feeling was that I did not want to be anybody's *house nigger*. That if I was to have any integrity as a leader in this community, I had to be free. And while I needed the money - and I was not being paid very well - I at the same time valued my independence more highly than a handout. So that was my first introduction to the social and political culture here in the city. I've never, and I just decided that I would never be a politician. I didn't see how I could balance the demands of being a leader in the church and being a leader in the political realm.

Brickus: So you have not had any direct participation in political activities in Newark?

Scott: That's right.⁹⁰

Dr. Scott was set on keeping his job separate from City Hall. Scott, as with so many of the narrators in this collection did not consider himself "political," and had no interest in being a politician.

Rev. Robert Woods had strong opinions of what made a good pastor and did not consider these traits common in contemporary ministry. This was evidenced in his answer to Mrs. Brickus' question regarding what made pastors "great." Woods explained that in the past, "Even if they reach a level that most minsters don't reach as far as pulling together congregations and this sort of thing- They were men that was down to earth, that

⁹⁰ Dr. James A. Scott, interview with Glen Marie Brickus (no date recorded).

you could sit with. You could talk with. They were willing to help and aid other ministers and give them directions.” Woods went on to say that those ministers “would give you a lesson in life, just like you’re having in this interview...”

Rev. Woods certainly could be considered politically engaged. When answering questions about social and cultural activities he named his work with block organizations as well as his position as chaplain for a New Jersey human rights association. When asked about his political activity specifically, he and Brickus laughed. “Bob,” said Brickus, “I know about your extensive involvement in politics and associations with politics but just give me-” Woods interrupted, “I was twenty-one years, I was a district leader in the West Ward.” (It can be noted that the women who listed that same particular title typically claimed apolitical lives). Woods was also City chaplain when Mike Battone - Rice’s nemesis - was in office. Woods goes on to name many organizations for which he was chaplain and politicians with whom he “function[ed]. “I designate myself as a Democratic [sic] but I really, I really only go for the people I think can help my people the most.”⁹¹

Rev. Woods certainly believed he was providing a service throughout his long life and probably saw himself as an activist. It seems he also believed that he was offering up some life lessons to his peer, Glen Marie Brickus. A man of his time, born in the 1920s, while seemingly active in racial equality issues Woods was perhaps a bit more old-fashioned when it came to gender equality.

Rev. Alvin Conyers, who had accepted the plight of discrimination early on in his job as porter at Columbia Laundry, ended up becoming active in the fight for racial

⁹¹ Robert Woods, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 17, 1997.

equality. One issue he tackled as a member of the Social Action Committee of the Ministerial Conference was that of discrimination in hiring Black firefighters. We will read more about that effort in chapter five. James Scott was not all that much younger than Woods and Conyers and yet his outlook on community, women, and civil rights was markedly contemporary. This may have something to do with his upbringing in the North as compared to the Southern background of both Woods and Conyers.

Newark is typically characterized as a political town; whether it is made such by the people who live there or whether those who come are drawn to the politics that fuel the city, it is hard to say. A number of Newark's Black ministers were regularly involved in community and political activities. Those who were not we do not hear so much about, and it might be that is exactly how they wanted it.

Conclusion

A lifetime of being denied service in restaurants, of not seeing people who look like you driving the buses you take to work, of being assigned separate swim days at the public pools because you are not White. In the case of the Krueger-Scott participants most times these experiences ended up inspiring action. There certainly was a lot of impetus to make the playing field even. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1947 the average income for an American White family was \$3,157. That same year, a Black family averaged \$1,614, approximately half of what the White family earned. Matters improved, as many Krueger-Scott interviewees noted, but not all that much; by 1970 Black families were earning almost 62% of what a White family was making. After that "peak" things were once again in decline, an observation also made by a number of the interviewees. In 1997, the year most of the interviews occurred, an average Black

household brought in 56.9% of what an average White household brought in that same year.⁹²

In the grand scheme, quality of life did improve for the Krueger-Scott group. Many of those who came North were children of sharecroppers and worked as children in fields of cotton, peanuts and tobacco in order to help support their families. Few witnessed Blacks in professional careers or positions of authority when they were young. Many of those born in Newark saw their parents turned away from jobs or working long hours in menial positions. They grew up poor, even if it was not apparent to them at the time. These children would gain greater freedoms and opportunities than most of their parents upon reaching adulthood. Expectations expanded and these expectations motivated many of the interviewees to work for their people, whether they called that work political or community activity. Their own children were no longer shining shoes or being denied certain courses in school, but there was still a long way to go toward equitable opportunities among races and classes in Newark.

There are at least two schools of thought when it comes to employment and the African-American, two basic ideologies voiced by those of the race and those outside of it. Much scholarship has been written about this particular divide within the Black community throughout history. It is sometimes simplified as the Du Bois/Washington binary. Booker T. Washington for so many years ago exhorted his people to learn a trade, to do whatever they could in order to participate in the social system as it stood at the time. Newark's Joe Clark could perhaps be considered a member of that ideological camp:

⁹² *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 1999, census.gov.

But my major types of work came from carrying groceries, delivering newspapers, shoveling snow. These were all the types of things that gave me a work ethic, a sense of punctuality, a sense of profit too, sense of being in charge of your destiny, a sense of not sitting around holding a pity party for yourself, being an oversensitive crybaby, expecting others to do for you what God has given you the strength to do for yourself. So that's been going on since I was four, five, six years old. It has not stopped and it never will. Because I feel that we must be in charge of our own destiny.⁹³

Du Bois of course believed that many (though not all) African Americans had talents that could not be realized as long as White supremacy was the social model. He believed in battling inequality through the mind, learning and then speaking up about what it was that had been learned.

Senator Wynona Lipman may have been more Du Boisian in her approach to Black progress; Lipman worked tirelessly as a highly educated politician to change the system. Her interview is full of observations on society's racial inequities.

I don't think that the justice system is the best that we have. And I guess it does the best we can. But I don't think that's fair to African Americans either. I used to say when I was in the Hall of Records, if I could just blindfold the judge so he wouldn't see that the lawyer is Black and that the prisoner is Black, then maybe some of these juveniles would get better treatment. Because just go in a prison, just go in a young person's prison, all you see is Black faces. Occasionally, a Latino face. Lots of Latino faces now. It used to make me almost cry to go to the prison just to see the Black faces all around.⁹⁴

Listening to these interviews it is apparent that the African Americans in the Krueger-Scott oral history collection indeed earned more than they received from American society. But that does not make them victims, nor are the experiences of all of these African Americans necessarily the same. Each person worked hard. Some of their goals were based purely upon survival, and then later perhaps on increasing their quality

⁹³ Joe L. Clark, interview with Pauline Blount, July 8, 1996.

⁹⁴ Wynona Lipman, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, April 5, 1997.

of life. Still others yet were bent on changing the way things worked in their city, battling a system structured so as to regularly exclude them. Looking back, most say they are pleased to have lived and worked in Newark. They cared for their city. But, many pointed out at the end of their interviews, there was still much more work to be done.

CHAPTER FIVE

Hot Days

A rebel is someone who says no.

-Albert Camus

Introduction

For many people the name of Newark is synonymous with the “riots” of 1967.¹ Stores on fire, broken glass, and armed forces are the optics of Newark even all these years later. There are a number of reasons for this particular remembering. Firstly, it is a convenient way to dismiss Newark’s problems as unique and thus avoid looking at the ways in which urban crisis was and still is a national issue. The term *riot* implies dysfunction and so the African-American “rioting” in Newark can thus be deemed isolated and irrational. Secondly, Newark itself has not done an especially good job of framing its own story of civil unrest; decades passed before the city began coming to terms with that sliver of its history. It was not until 2008, for example, that Dr. Clement Price and others succeeded in their efforts to have a commemorative plaque placed upon the police precinct building where taxi driver John Smith was taken into custody that summer day. The plaque reads, “On this site on July 12, 1967, there began a civil disturbance that took the lives of twenty-six people and forever changed our city. May this plaque serve as a symbol of our shared humanity and our commitment to seek justice and equality. Dedicated July 12, 2007, by the People of Newark.”

In case there was an opportunity to stop foregrounding the “riots” altogether, various forms of literature keep those fires burning. John T. Cunningham in his 1988

¹ Throughout this chapter the term *riot* will be utilized when quoting or referencing those who employ that particular term. The author chooses to use the terms *rebellion*, *uprising* and *disturbance*.

edition of *Newark* writes about the rebellion in a chapter entitled “The Whole Town is Gone.” The title is in reference to Mayor Addonizio’s response to Col. David B. Kelley’s query as to the state of the city at the time of the rebellion. Cunningham ends his chapter, “Newark had reached bottom. If it ever could rebuild, its new foundation would forever rest on the ashes of July 1967.”² This dramatic narrative has been spun through many cycles. In 1997 Newark’s own Philip Roth published the novel *American Pastoral* whose main character, “Swede” Levov, is a successful Jewish businessman from Newark. One scene has Levov reflecting back:

...the riots, Springfield Avenue in flames, South Orange Avenue in flames... In Newark’s burning Mardi Gras streets... The surreal vision of household appliances out under the stars and agleam in the glow of flames incinerating the Central Ward... the old ways of suffering are burning blessedly away in the flames, never again to be resurrected, instead to be superseded, within only hours, by suffering that will be so gruesome, so monstrous, so unrelenting and abundant, that its abatement will take the next five hundred years.³

In 2011 Thomas A. McCabe wrote *Miracle on High Street: The Rise, Fall, and Resurrection of St. Benedict’s Prep in Newark, N.J.* In this piece of non-fiction McCabe refers to the rebellion that occurred approximately forty-five years previously as, “The watershed event in Newark’s recent history.” “...six days of looting and rioting, death and destruction...” when “fire seemed to be a lasting image.” The chapter is entitled, “‘Camelot is Dead’: The Newark Riots and the Closing of St. Benedict’s Prep, 1967-1972.” In it the reader views the rebellion from a monk’s perspective as he stands atop the roof of the school building. He “looked down and watched the riots through his horn rimmed glasses. African American teenagers looted nearby stores along Springfield

² John Cunningham, *Newark* (Newark: NJ Historical Society, 1988) 319, 327.

³ Philip Roth, *American Pastoral*, 1st Vintage International ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1998) 268.

Avenue.”⁴ It is not important, in this case, the intent of these various authors but what is important is the continued offering up of theatrical depictions of Newark’s mean streets filled with Black marauders, burning flames, and death.

Those five days in July of ’67 are a much more complicated moment than one is often led to believe, as is evidenced by the many perspectives shared in the Krueger-Scott oral histories. For example, Ida Clark described Newark's peak as “behind the riots,” as people started to realize there was “a better way,” and Black people became more involved in their community.⁵ This is a common response to the rebellion by African Americans within this oral history collection, and in urban scholarship in general. Rebellion brings change, many argue. We will hear more on this later in the chapter. But lest we decide all African Americans see rebellion in the same manner, we recall from chapter one that Mary Roberts observed that the city was at its peak when she arrived in 1961 and that the riots brought it to its lowest point.⁶ Marion Williams agreed, claiming that the lowest point of the city came in the 1960s with the riots, when people tore up their own homes and stores and “they went wild.”⁷

Newark’s troubles were of course not limited to July 1967. Krueger-Scott narrator Lewis Turner brought up the 1971 teachers’ strike - not the rebellion - as a possible “watershed moment,” the beginning of a loss of respect for each other, and for authority. Pauline Mathis said that the uprising brought a positive change in terms of the hiring of

⁴ Thomas Allan McCabe, *Miracle on High Street: The Rise, Fall, and Resurrection of St. Benedict's Prep in Newark, N.J.* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011) 158, 157.

⁵ Ida Clark, interview with Pauline Blount, Dec. 9, 1996.

⁶ Mary Roberts, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Oct. 26, 1997.

⁷ Marion Williams, interview with Pauline Blount, June 28, 1999.

Black teachers, but John Martin believed that the riots truly divided the city. Carolyn Wallace responded that she could not call the riots the lowest point because there was some “coming together” that occurred around them, and Vivian Berry answered that the low point for Newark was actually prior to the rebellion. After all, Berry remarked, before the uprising “they just thought because nobody complained about anything that people were just generally happy with the ways things was goin’.” But afterwards, said Berry, “People’s eyes had become open.”⁸

Historical narratives are packaged in particular ways for a variety of reasons. A palatable tale - one that tends to place blame elsewhere than on those in power - is often the result of a process similar to the children’s game of Telephone. One “ordinary” person begins a story and then a journalist, perhaps, relates that story with a slightly different slant, and then those whose voices are most regularly heard - through channels of media and politics typically - hear that story and tweak it just a bit more for public consumption. Later on down that line, someone writes a history book based in part upon the results of this communication process. This in of itself is not a “problem,” as we have heard Allesandro Portelli explain in prior chapters. The “problem” is the way certain sources are considered in a vacuum, devoid of complementary narratives and material culture, as if they alone provide the whole “story.”

Gertrude Fraser and Reginald Butler argue in their chapter, “Anatomy of Disinterment: The Unmaking of Afro-American History” that because experiences of Blacks and Whites throughout history have a tendency to differ greatly that the two racial groups usually have “contrasting views of history.” That said, there is one thing that they

⁸ Vivian Berry, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, 1997 (no day or month provided).

note that is common among both races and that is the practice of the “great persons” approach to history. The authors observe that social history has had little effect on a majority of people because we are trained - as students and citizens - to listen for the accounts of “important” people, not the everyday. With this in mind the authors looked at an African-American graveyard that had been abandoned, implicitly rejected as a site of American history. Fraser and Butler concluded that an “emphasis on the material poverty of the Afro-American graveyard implied a parallel poverty of historical importance.” The authors go on to argue that “the abandonment of the gravesite...marked the power of whites and the lack of power of blacks.”⁹

I would add that this bestowal of unimportance, upon a place or a race, comes with a component of disposability. Living a life deemed disposable would certainly offer a contrasting historical view from one which has been treated with value. Shoddy housing, dangerous factories, and limited resources are regular occurrences in the lives of those whose value has not been established. These particular situations contribute to most all of the fiery events that we will read about in this chapter. Once again the usefulness of oral histories becomes apparent. Whether discussing slavery, the atom bomb, or urban uprisings, when we listen to “ordinary” people tell stories of extraordinary moments we typically gain new understanding of the events in question, as well as the larger historical scope within which actual lives are affected.

Cities struggle with all sorts of unique challenges: numerous people per square foot; multiple tiers of social and economic class; old attitudes bumping up against those

⁹ Gertrude Fraser and Reginald Butler, “Anatomy of Disinterment: The Unmaking of Afro-American History,” *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*, ed. Susan Porter Benson, Steven Brier, Roy Rosenzweig (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986) 130-131.

of the new; and in our country there is always the matter of race. Racism, whether meted out through individual slights or systematic operations, has eclipsed a lot of what is good about Newark. Many tribulations experienced by a majority of Black residents in Newark came from living in a crowded urban location and previous chapters have made it evident that the African-American residents of Newark suffered the overwhelming burden of these varied hardships throughout the 20th century.

In Newark's history fires have constructed and deconstructed the city's built environment. Fire was also a powerful symbol in the lives of so many of the Krueger-Scott narrators and is often deployed in the processes of their remembering. Once again we witness the intentionality behind the questionnaire designed for this oral history project; Giles Wright and Clement Price seemed to have anticipated the importance of the element of fire in eliciting story. Question #81 reads in part, "What would you consider to be the five most important events/developments that have occurred in Newark during your residence here (e.g., strike, election, riot, fire, natural disaster, black in-migration)?"¹⁰

In the Krueger-Scott interviews we learn that fire was seared into childhood memories, devastated Black churches, and ignited in crowded subpar tenements. Fire was a part of the story of multicultural neighborhoods even as it also shone its light on abject poverty. Newark's fires were battled by a primarily White fire department until the 1980s and thus the face of the fire department itself became a certain kind of symbol. And of course fire was deployed during the 1967 rebellion, sometimes by way of Molotov

¹⁰ Note that the question uses the word "riot," as opposed to "the riots." Yet many of the interviewers automatically said "the riots" when posing the question. This placed emphasis on the 1967 uprising and, I would suggest, encouraged a particular discussion that might not have ensued in quite the same manner had the more generic term been used.

Cocktails and other times through the visual and literary metaphors engaged by the media in announcing the demise of Newark, New Jersey.



Figure 27. *Time Magazine*, July 28, 1967, time.com. This “Embattled Cities” issue of *Time* included an article entitled, “Races: Spreading Fire” which began, “Even as the fury of Newark abated last week, other Negro ghettos flared like gunpowder dropped in a fire.”

I have left this particular subject matter for the last chapter as I sought first to foreground the everyday tales of the Krueger-Scott narrators. I hoped that an acquaintance with these humans of Newark would offer respite from the well-worn tropes of a city constantly on fire. But now we will consider two subjects: urban fire and the heated uprising which started on a hot summer day. These two subjects, both intertwined and separate, make up a large part of the discussion in the Krueger-Scott interviews when it comes to some of the darker days of Newark history.

Fires

Firefighting

Funeral home director James Churchman told his interviewer the story of a Richard Freeman who grew up across the street from what has been called the busiest firehouse in Newark, located at 93 Belmont Avenue. Freeman longed to be a firefighter when he was a child, explained Churchman. After finishing high school he took the fire department exam and passed. He requested and was assigned to that station on Belmont

Avenue which he had been eyeing for so long. But Mr. Freeman, because he was Black and it was the 1950s, was not allowed to sleep at the firehouse with the other firefighters. Later, when he made Captain, he changed those particular firehouse rules. Said Mr. Churchman, laughing, “I thought that was a very good story.”¹¹

The addition of Black members to the fire department was significant to many of those interviewed, a sign of progress. Once again it was clear that Giles Wright and Clement Price crafted the questionnaire based upon a deep historical and cultural knowledge. The Krueger-Scott narrators were asked in question #66, “What do you remember about such public servants as the police, firefighters, social workers, etc.?” Or as Glen Marie Brickus put it to Mr. Churchman, “What about Black folk in the police department and in the fire department?”

The increasing African-American presence in particular occupations was referenced frequently as a marker of hope for race equality. Retired social services administrator Vivian Berry noted that, along with more Black school officials, the visibility of Black firefighters was encouraging for the whole Black community. Retired factory worker Matthew Little, among many others, was quick to name the first Black firefighter, a Mr. Thomas.

Inserting Black police and firefighters into the city departments was a cause worth fighting for, judging by the actions of numerous narrators. Rev. Conyers said that he worked with the Social Action Committee to increase the number of Black firefighters and Senator Lipman told her interviewer that she wrote numerous recommendation letters

¹¹ James Churchman, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Oct. 11, 1996.

for men applying to the fire department. (Lipman was, however, disappointed at the continued lack of women's presence in the police and fire departments, she added).

Rev. Robert Woods told his interviewer that he participated in the preparation of Black firemen for the written exam soon after an affirmative action mandate went into place sometime around 1983. Rev. Woods noted that before the early 1980s there were perhaps two African-American firefighters in the whole Newark fire department. Lurline Byass confirmed the paucity of Black firemen when discussing her first home at 95 Clinton Place where she lived from 1962 to 1963. It was in the Homestead Park area, a mostly Jewish neighborhood. She recalled that the nearby fire station [probably the one at 395 Avon Avenue] was made up entirely of White men. A similar image is evoked by many of the interviewees; wherever they looked there was little reflection of themselves, a regular reminder that Jim Crow had followed them North.

Of course we have to look no further than today's newspapers to understand the import of civil servants in African-American neighborhoods. The "material poverty" of so many Black urban neighborhoods appears to be equated, by the police and fire departments, with a poverty of importance over these last few hundred years. Ethel Richards, born in 1918, explained that in her time in Newark fire fighters showed little concern for Black people and rarely came into their neighborhoods. Native Newarker Bernice Johnson, however, reported that while all of the firemen and policemen were White as she was growing up, everybody still knew them, suggesting some semblance of a relationship across the racial divide. Dr. Beverly Scott, who arrived in Newark in 1963, observed that the [White] police were insensitive to African Americans' needs at that time. But Dr. Scott added that she witnessed progress in this realm. "It was gratifying to

see the changes...within the police force. It was gratifying to see the changes in the fire department in terms of their hiring practices.”¹²

It was not until the late twentieth century that a systematic movement went into effect to make available to African Americans these well-paying, prestigious jobs that most other urban (male) residents nationwide took for granted as accessible. In 1988 *Ebony* magazine published a feature on Black fire chiefs. Echoing the Krueger-Scott narrators, the article stated that while fire departments were once called “White men’s country clubs,” now there were actually African-American men in charge.

From Newark to Kansas City to Sacramento, Black fire chiefs are running departments of 400, 600, 1,000 people...They are men who entered the field 20 or 30 years ago with a handful of other Black firefighters, all of whom were relegated to segregated firehouses. The most intense heat they ever felt was not from the blazes they fought, but from their White counterparts who demanded that they prove themselves daily.... They worked their way up to driver, lieutenant, captain, battalion chief, assistant chief, and finally to what one chief referred to as “that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.”¹³

Claude Coleman, who was remembered by many of the interviewees as Newark’s first Black fire director, is featured in this particular *Ebony* article. Coleman was forty-seven years old at the time of the publication. It was also noted that he worked for the Newark police department for fifteen years, as their legal advisor, prior to becoming a firefighter.

Many in the Krueger-Scott interviews make mention of the fact that Mr. Coleman ultimately became a judge. His ascension was held up as a great point of pride. In 1994 Judge Coleman was accused of using a stolen credit card at the Short Hills Mall in New Jersey. He was handcuffed and subsequently suspended from the bench. It was soon

¹² Beverley Scott, interview with Glen Marie Brickus (no date recorded).

¹³ “Hail to the Fire Chiefs!” in *Ebony*, July 1988. 92-98, books.google.com.

confirmed that the accusation was in error and public apologies were made by the department store whose security first apprehended him. In a *New York Times* article written by David Margolick, author of a number of books on historically racialized events, Coleman said, "So long as any black person is thought of as a nigger, until all persons of color are looked upon with respect, none of us are going to be. And it doesn't matter whether you're a lawyer or a judge or a prosecutor."¹⁴ Finally able to access those prestigious jobs, African Americans continued to be forced to prove themselves worthy of taking up those spaces.

Important Event

When asked about "important events" in Newark, City Clerk assistant Owen Wilkerson recalled a large fire on Avon Avenue, as did many of the other narrators:

I remember on Avon Place [sic], this was back in '49 or '50, there was one hell of a fire. And I think that was in Gene Campbell's building... big, bright orange building. But anyway, that place burned to the ground. And I remember the Red Cross trucks and what not and everything out there. You had the NAACP went on a clothing collection drive and what not. I'm surmising a lot of the families, victimized families, were taken in, you know, by families within the community... There was also a sense of embarrassment. I mean, here you were burned out and everything, and you're walking down the street with someone else's clothes on or shoes and everything. Because, you know, I've never been burned out. God forbid I hope I'm never burned out. But I imagine that's a humiliating experience.¹⁵

Respectability politics enter the conversation here as we listen to Wilkerson objectify those who suffered a disaster through no fault of their own. He saw them as involved in

¹⁴ David Margolick, "At the Bar; Falsely Accused: In a Humiliating Arrest, A Black Judge Finds Lessons of Law and Race Relations," *The New York Times*, Jan. 7, 1994, nytimes.com.

¹⁵ Owen Wilkerson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 12, 1997.

From what I can deduce, Wilkerson is referencing Eugene Campbell who was superintendent of the Newark public schools from 1987 until they were taken over by the state in 1995. Looking at Google Maps there is a large building of orange brick across from the Central Ward Boys and Girls Club at 1 Avon Avenue; perhaps it was there at the time of the fire.

an embarrassing and humiliating situation and makes sure to distance himself by noting that he had never experienced such an occurrence.

Juvenile counselor Ed Crawford named three major events in Newark that he thought were important: the rebellion in 1967, the run-off for Mayor between Kenneth Gibson and incumbent Hugh Addonizio, and a big fire on Avon Avenue:

Okay. I remember a very bad fire happened over on Avon Avenue just below the Avon Avenue School there. It took out the church and, matter of fact, that whole area in there - they since started rebuilding with townhouses. But it wiped out, oh, a block and a half, two blocks. About two blocks worth of housing over there... and it took out the church, took the church too. I forget the name of that church.¹⁶

Clara Watkins corroborated the story of a big fire on Avon Avenue, positioning it near Rose Terrace.

In an online chat room about Newark “Alvin” responds to a query from “Jule Spohn” regarding a “huge fire on Avon Ave where at least one, and possibly two blocks, went up in flames and every house there was burned to the ground.” Alvin wrote:

The fire was Saturday afternoon, April 20, 1968, and consumed 35 buildings, mostly frame dwellings. It is known as the largest fire in Newark history. It started basically near the NW corner of **Avon Ave & Bergen St** (I think that was Singer's Pharmacy) and quickly spread to the wooden rear porches of buildings on Bergen, Avon, and **Chadwick Avenues**. It took the entire end of that block, then the other side of Chadwick, and up into **Rose Terrace**. On **Avon** above **Chadwick** a church and large apartment house were destroyed, as well as a brick commercial building at **Rose Terrace & Chadwick**. The fire extended, reaching the **Avon Avenue** School, where the NFD was able to stop its spread. If the large school had been consumed, it is likely the fire would have continued westward for many more buildings.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ed Crawford, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 23, 1997.

The church in question seems to be the Canaan Baptist Church at 215-217 Avon Avenue which established itself on that site in 1956.

¹⁷ Newark Talk: Remembering Newark New Jersey, newarktalk.com.

I highlighted the streets named by the Krueger-Scott interviewees in their discussions of this fire. Singer's Pharmacy seems to have been left out of the history books as far as my research can ascertain but it must have been one of the last Jewish/White-owned businesses remaining after the 1967 uprising in a neighborhood that was once predominantly Jewish.

Owen Wilkerson seems to remember this particular fire as taking place during the 1949/1950 era and we receive little information regarding years from the other narrators' stories.¹⁸ If one maps the addresses and intersections in the various reports about an Avon Avenue fire, a small radius can be drawn that suggests that they were referring to the same event. However, it is possible that Avon Avenue was a site of regular fires throughout Newark's history, or that the street was simply one of the more "important" streets and thus came to mind frequently. Sara Vaughn lived on Avon Avenue; Doctor's Hospital - the "Black Hospital" - was located on Avon at one time; and the street was a shopping hub for many years. Whatever the "facts" are, what is clear is that the fire/s were indeed important to these residents of Newark.

Memory and Fire

Fires have been used to mark history timelines for quite a while. The famous Chicago fire, one hundred years before the fires of Newark's rebellion, has much in common in its telling with more contemporary reports of urban fires. Carl Smith writes about "The Fire and Cultural Memory" in his book, *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief*, "No matter what anyone thought the [Chicago] fire meant, for good or ill, everybody agreed that it marked a moment of major transition in Chicago history." Smith adds that much as with the Civil War, Chicagoans structured discourse of the city into a before-and-after-the-event paradigm. "The local population seized upon the disaster as an historical marker that would help them frame and understand urban experience and this

¹⁸ The interviewers felt tasked to retrieve stories but dates did not seem as important to them. This is frustrating when trying to analyze some of the chronology yet as has been noted, especially in chapter two, there are trade-offs when the interviewer is not a professional historian; some stories probably surfaced only because of the peer status of the interviewers.

period of rapid change...”¹⁹ It will become apparent in this chapter that historical markers can sometimes more closely resemble headstones.

Human sense memory is quickly sparked by images of flames and feelings of intense heat. Major fires are a part of the folklore of a community; spoken of repeatedly, these kinds of stories are handed down through generations. Question #81 on the Krueger-Scott questionnaire might as well be asking, “What have you come to remember as an important event *after talking with others, readings newspapers, and listening to radio reports about such things* as fires, riots and severe weather?” The hearing of a story told in various ways functions in the construction of historical knowledge, by scholars and the public alike. As Alessandro Portelli argues in naming the merits of oral histories as tools of historical construction, “...oral narrators have within their culture certain aids to memory. Many stories are told over and over, or discussed with members of the community; formalized narrative, even meter, may help preserve a textual version of an event.” Portelli adds that one must not forget the literateness of the narrators when considering the many ways one “hears” a story. They often read – and write – about these subjects in question.²⁰

We have already gleaned from these interviews how important newspapers and radio were to the Krueger-Scott narrators in the garnering of knowledge. It would be safe to assume that fires were a prominent local news story when they did occur. All of this

¹⁹ Carl S. Smith, excerpt from *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The Great Chicago Fire, the Haymarket Bomb, and the Model Town of Pullman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 1, press.uchicago.edu/.

²⁰ Alessandro Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different?” *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991) 69.

reading and discussing combined to create a collective memory of fire that is shared in the interviews of the Krueger-Scott community.

As noted earlier, in the theorizing of collective memory Jaqueline Dowd Hall writes that “Personal memories tend to disappear unless they are rekindled through repetition, and we repeat what is considered significant by the groups with which we identify.”²¹ The fact that a question regarding fire is included in the Krueger-Scott questionnaire, and is being asked by an interviewer for a project that is to be ultimately located in an African-American Cultural Center as part of a historical archive, implicitly indicates to the participants the significance of fire to their community.

In an early part of his interview, where discussion of travel to Newark took place, Pauline Blount Coyt Jones if he remembered the taxi fare for the ride from Pennsylvania Station to his aunt’s apartment when he arrived from South Carolina in 1927 at the age of 11.

Jones: I don't remember. There's only one thing I can remember about that ride was the amount of people that crossed the street at Broad and Market. I had never seen that many people before.

Blount: Were they African Americans or were they -

Jones: They were all people, mostly White I think. This was years ago, remember? I asked the taxi driver if there was a fire someplace. Where was all the people going!?

Jones also apparently told Blount, prior to the recorder being turned on, that there was something he wanted to say on tape, a “significant incident.” Towards the end of the session Mrs. Blount urged Jones to “go ahead” with the story. The incident in question concerned a fire he had witnessed sometime around the year 1920. In Hartsville, South

²¹ Hall, “‘You Must Remember This’: Autobiography as Social Critique,” 440.

Carolina, Jones and his family lived three houses down the street from the "Oil Mill Houses." Those were three or four room company homes for the employees of the Hartsville Oil Mill which produced cottonseed oil. Jones recalled knowing that the rent was \$2.00 to \$3.00 per month. On this particular night one of the houses caught fire and ultimately the whole row of homes burned down. "The only thing standing in those houses was a chimney," remembers Jones. His mother had told him not to go down to the site and so of course that piqued the young boy's interest. He secretly left home to take a look:

I must have been about four or five years old. I don't remember. Anyway, a lady got burned up in one of the houses, and she was still holding the baby to her bosom when she burned. She was layin' on those springs and the bed and everything and the mattress was all burned up. I'll never forget that. Never forget it. That's one of the worse things I guess I've ever seen.²²

One can imagine that when the 1967 uprising began, and fires were erupting, that Mr. Jones may well have been transported back to his childhood memory of that gruesome scene. His story and its coinciding images symbolize the disposability of Black life - and of the lives of the poor in general. The housing for these mill workers was clearly subpar and the fire company, according to Jones, did not respond in any kind of timely manner to what was clearly a Black neighborhood. It took so long in fact - between when the first row house caught on fire and when any firefighter came to the scene - that a little boy had time to gaze upon the charred body of a human being.

Jazz musician James "Chops" Jones reported at the beginning of his interview that he was a retired fireman – as well as a musician. There was never any more discussion of the initial vocation nor is there evidence that he ever worked as a fireman. Barbara Kukla,

²² Coyt Jones, interview with Pauline Blount, Jan. 25, 1996.

journalist and author of a book about Newark's music scene, was a good friend of the late Mr. Jones. Kukla told me that he never mentioned any time spent firefighting. So why would somebody want to remember themselves as a firefighter, so much so that he would be willing perhaps to lie about it? This was clearly a statement that could have been easily confirmed, much as with Mayor Sharpe James' claim of being a Newark Eagle. Oral histories provide opportunities for so many questions.

There are myriad reasons that we all, in one way or another, make up stories. This is in part because ordinary people tend to want to be seen as heroic, argues Sandy Polishuk in her introduction to *Sticking to the Union: An Oral History of the Life and Times of Julia Ruuttila*. Ruuttila was a union activist who was more than once called upon to testify in front of the FBI and other government agencies. Polishuk spent years interviewing Ruuttila and then more time comparing her interviews to various "official" transcripts. Often the interviews turned out to be quite embellished, Polishuk observed. "I believe...Julia wanted to have been more important, more effective, and more heroic than the actual facts might imply, but I also think it likely Julia believed what she told me, and that her memory of the events had changed to accommodate her desires over the years." Other stories that Ms. Ruuttila told her interviewer included an assertion of her lineage as that of African-American as well as Jewish. Polishuk found strong evidence against these claims as well.²³ Perhaps at some point in Mr. "Chops" Jones' life he adopted a memory of heroism "to accommodate his desires," one that provided him with an agency that was outside the realm of so many Black men of his time.

²³ Sandy Polishuk, *Sticking to the Union: An Oral History of the Life and Times of Julia Ruuttila* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 1-16. books.google.com.

Having been born in 1916, “Chops” Jones recalled the days before firetrucks. “The fire engines, they had the horses, three horses and the engine on it, you know, with the screen, smoke and stuff comin’ up.” As early as 1913, according to an unidentified newspaper photo published on the Old Newark website, three new “Palmer-Singer Roadsters” were secured in order to allow fire chiefs to “be able to reach fires more quickly.” But for the regular firefighters, old-fashioned horse-driven engines would still be the norm for many years to come.



In the early 1850's, the fire companies of Newark were badly demoralized and the entire department was reorganized and its efficiency greatly increased. The first steam fire engine, shown above on the east side of Broad Street in front of the Merchants Mutual Insurance Company, was bought in 1861. A piece of old hand drawn equipment appears at the left.

Figure 28. “First Steam Engine” from “National Newark and Essex Banking Company,” oldnewark.com.

Jones also remembered fire in terms of Christmastime:

Oh Christmas. Oh, let me tell you about Christmas. Christmas we used to have real Christmas trees. It used to have candles on them. And we used to light the candles on the tree. And they say that's a fire hazard now. But on the branches we had little dishes, you'd put the candle in like the birthday candle, you put the candles in and you light 'em. Never had no fires...Never seen nobody else that had fires.²⁴

Between the interviews and archival research, it appears that even more fires occurred in Newark as the decades progressed, although the national rate of fires tends to

²⁴ James “Chops” Jones, interview with Pauline Blount, April 7, 1997.

decrease each year. If this is accurate, it is likely due the 20th century influx of migrants and immigrants crowding into Newark and other cities, exacerbating the already less than ideal living conditions and weakening infrastructure.²⁵

Senator Wynona Lipman did not indicate that her own life had been marred by fire necessarily, but the element of fire certainly played a role in her childhood memories. The subject also got her interviewer to talking, although as we have learned about Mrs. Brickus it was not difficult to encourage her participation during interviews. A dialogue ensued between the two after Senator Lipman was asked if she knew anybody who used snuff or chewing tobacco.

Lipman: Oh, the snuff, yes. Snuff, the lady who helped us do the washing, at the wash pot outside, you know, where you boiled your clothes for washing over a fire. Oh, she was a snuff dipper I tell you. And my father chewed tobacco. Yes.

Brickus: Oh yeah. Yeah, we had one of those wash pots in the backyard. And somebody had to go and build a fire on the wash day.

Lipman- I remember killing pigs, too. And making crackling.

Brickus: Oh really? Yeah, we did too, we did too.

Lipman: We had chickens, and all of that.

Brickus: We did too. We raised chickens and guineas and there was, you know, you'd wait for special kinds of days as far as the weather to kill hogs. And then you may kill three or four or more at a time. And I can remember seeing them strung up. You know, they'd put up these special poles, with the poles across the top and hang them up there.

Lipman: We had a smoke house.

Brickus: We did too. They would first salt the meat down for so long, and then take it out and hang it up and smoke it. Keep the fire going day and night to smoke the meat. And it would never spoil.

²⁵ One could certainly research these statistics through fire department and housing records and create a quantifiable conclusion, offering up a most useful urban study.

Lipman. No.

Brickus: You could keep it indefinitely and it would never spoil.

Lipman: It was wonderful. We had a cow until the town made us get rid of it.

Senator Lipman concluded that farming was a hard life and Brickus had the last word saying, “Oh, we have more in common than we knew about.” What the two had in common was a rural upbringing in the South. Brickus’ father was a bricklayer in Louisiana and Lipman grew up in La Grange, Georgia, also the daughter of a bricklayer. While their families did seem to have “help,” there were clearly a myriad of chores to be performed around the farms, many entailing the use of fire. In these cases the element acted as a source of energy instead of one of disaster.

Senator Lipman also had a strong memory as an adult of an experience related to fire. She was at the Essex County Jail Annex in North Caldwell while in her position as Freeholder Director, sometime between 1968 and 1972. Her political work at the time included juvenile justice issues so that she - along with a news reporter - was asked to visit the prisoners when a fire broke out at the jail. Lipman told Glen Marie Brickus, “We walked the floors of that hall while the place was burnin’. And the floors were so hot they seemed to burn right through my shoes. They were puttin’ out the fire but we were tryin’ to calm the inmates. That was a novel experience.”²⁶ Reflecting Jaqueline Dowd Hall’s theory, the continued reference to fire in this discussion solidified its significance and ultimately led to further stories related to the subject.

²⁶ Wynona Lipman, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, April 5, 1997. After her passing there would be a halfway house built for “troubled boys in the Senator’s honor,” the Wynona M. Lipman Education and Training Center. According to a *New York Times* article, “It caters to children with severe emotional and behavioral problems, including sexual offenders and arsonists.” Richard Lezin Jones, “New Jersey Suspends Youth Home Admissions After a Beating,” *The New York Times*, Sep. 20, 2003, nytimes.com.

Mayor Sharpe James has shared many times his story of being very young when his mother took him and his brother and fled their Jacksonville, Florida home. Having suffered physical abuse at the hands of her husband she finally moved to Newark to live with her brother.

“...one morning she woke us up very early in the morning, took no belongings, went down to the train track, lit a fire to stop the train. I always remember how you stop trains in the south at the location, build a fire by the railroad. The train stopped. We got on it...”²⁷ Fire, once again, served a utilitarian purpose.

Schoolteacher Marzell Swain had a different sort of memory about fire. First she lamented in her interview that she did not have her school yearbooks to share with the Krueger-Scott project. “Heaven only knows where they are, they all got - We had fires and everything,” explained Swain. Her casual reference to house fires implies an acceptance of the commonality of their occurrence. At a later point Mrs. Swain was answering questions about shopping, recollecting how many stores were closed on Jewish holidays because most shop owners were Jewish. She remembered this because it was an inconvenience not to be able to purchase certain items on particular days. As with others in the Krueger-Scott collection, Swain’s interview illustrates a common knowledge of various Jewish customs, informed by both necessity and one-time proximity. “We used to mingle with each other,” Mrs. Swain said.

Swain continued with the Jewish traditions, “...on Sunday [sic] they couldn’t light their stove. We had to go over there and light their stove. They would always give you – if they didn’t have money they’d give you a piece of bread – or somethin’ to show

²⁷ Sharpe James, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Dec. 3 & 17, 1996.

their appreciation for you comin' in..." Swain was describing the religious law that prohibits Jews from lighting fires or doing any other kinds of work on the Sabbath, Saturday. Perhaps she said "Sunday" unconsciously, keeping with her own ideas of what day the Sabbath takes place. Swain explained that she and other non-Jews would go into the Jewish homes and light their candles, unlock their doors and so on. In Yiddish the people who perform these tasks are referred to as "shabbos goys." Many orthodox Jews still employ people outside the faith in order to circumvent this rule against the lighting of fires - literal and figurative - on Shabbat. In this case fire was used as a sort of currency, one that African Americans actually had more of in that given moment. It is fair to assume that most of these Jewish residents would otherwise not have invited African Americans into their homes, for reasons that might include prejudice but as likely were based upon geographical location and social proximity. In this way the African-American "shabbos goys" were interchangeable if not disposable, simply used to provide a service.

Community Cooperation

Retired teacher Mary Roberts said that the major events in Newark since she arrived in 1961 included "the riots," a fire behind her house where "five little children were burned up," some young boys who went missing, and a terrible snow storm that brought great community cooperation. "It showed a closeness I had not seen," said Roberts.²⁸

While there was not a question specifically asking how supportive African Americans were of each other in Newark during these particular crises, there were

²⁸ Mary Roberts, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Oct. 26, 1997.

questions that engendered that discourse. Whether being asked about the relationships between new and old Newarkers, or those between Black communities within nearby towns, or to whom one turned in times of need, there was an implied interest in the ways in which African Americans related to each other during varied times and circumstances, as well as how outside organizations aided the African-American community. Responses were quite mixed, with some interviewees saying outright that Northern Blacks just did not come to the aid of each other the way that Southerners did. We learned in chapter three that a rift clearly existed at given moments between the Northerners and the newly arrived Southerners as urban “veterans” tried to distance themselves from the newly arrived country folk. Yet another way to consider this gap is through entrenched cultural and social expectations. Funeral home director Franklin Banks explains:

Because the South was very family oriented. And also very racially oriented. Because they had to work and stick together because the Whites were so much against them...they had to depend on each other. And some of that came right up North with them. Like down at the church now, that was family oriented. If they could help you in any way, they would help. Or if you could help them, you'd go there and help them.²⁹

There were, however, just as many narrators eager to bring up examples of ways that the Black community rallied around itself, especially in the face of crises such as fire. Owen Wilkerson remembered fires as commonplace when he was growing up, especially around the holiday season, an association that contrasts with the Christmas memories of James “Chops” Jones. Wilkerson said:

And, you know, for some strange reason, and I guess it was attributed to the Christmas decorations and the trees. I mean, everybody had a tree at Christmas. But fires would always, you would always have an excess amount of fires around the Christmas holidays. But there were people, there was the church, you know,

²⁹ Franklin Banks, interview with Richard Cooke, Aug. 19, 1997.

who would come to the aid of burned out families and victims and what not. And I imagine the Fire Department had some type of a program. I remember the Red Cross...³⁰

Rev. Alvin Conyers remembered a fire on Hillside Avenue that started on a Sunday morning and burned a whole block. He said that his church, Bethsaida Baptist, came to the aid of that community during the time in question.³¹

Sometimes communities did come together, but only reluctantly. James Churchman told a story of St. Philip's Church, a predominantly African-American parish at High and Market Streets. With a reputation as a strong center of Black community life, it was a well-known site of NAACP meetings in the early 1960s. In 1964 the church was destroyed by fire. After much discussion the St. Philip's congregation finally agreed to accept the offer to merge with the predominantly White congregation of Trinity Church which was located opposite Hahne's department store on Broad Street. It took two years for this union to occur because, according to Churchman and others, there were some at St. Philip's who balked at the idea of merging with a church that carried a racist past. Mr. Churchman gave a brief background:

Ironically, when we got ready to merge with Trinity, some of the families that could remember the history where the Blacks used to meet at Trinity and they were asked to sit upstairs... And then when [African Americans] got to be so many, I think they finally went on Foster Street and somebody gave them a piece of land to build a church up on High Street... And I think that though some of the people [were] a little hesitant about returning back - the way we were put out. [But] I think the assets that the Cathedral [had] were too great to turn our backs on.³²

³⁰ Owen Wilkerson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 12, 1997.

³¹ It seems possible that this could have been the Avon Avenue fire that Ed Crawford and Owen Wilkerson and others referenced; Hillside and Avon intersect.

³² James Churchman, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Oct. 11, 1996.

Fires were common enough in the city that community organizations were prepared for them in the same way they were prepared to feed the hungry. In his memoir, *Political Prisoner*, Sharpe James writes about his work with the United Community Corporation (UCC) Area Board 9. “We held food and clothing drives for people who became homeless as a result of fires. We offered them temporary shelter.”³³

Edward Kerr explained that any unity the Black community experienced came from the fact that everyone was “in the same boat.” The adversity of racism was a bond for Black Newarkers - and African Americans in the country as a whole - it was the glue of activist communities and civil rights movements. As Audrey Faulkner points out at the end of her collection of oral histories of “aged Blacks” in Newark, “By 1944 nearly one third of the dwelling units in the black areas were below the minimum standards for health and decency...and defective stoves and oil-soaked stairways made the wooden tenements burn like torches if touched by a stray match.”³⁴ This “closeness” - both literal and figurative - of African Americans in urban settings often caused dire problems, yet at the same time shaped a powerful community.

Personal Fires

Fires changed people’s lives, blazing new paths for them to follow, and chasing others from house to house and church to church. Around 1935, when Willa Rawlins was a student at the Warren Street School, her house on Academy Street caught fire. “There was a blind woman that lived on the first floor and somehow she started a fire. And we

³³ Sharpe James, *Political Prisoner: You can be Indicted, Arrested, Convicted and Sent to Prison without Committing a Crime: A Memoir* (Newark: Nutany, 2013) 66.

³⁴ Audrey Olsen Faulkner and Rutgers University Graduate School of Social Work, *When I was Comin' Up: An Oral History of Aged Blacks* (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1982) 216.

just got out with the skin of our teeth. No clothes, no nothin'." They then moved to Rutgers Street which Rawlins called "one of the worst streets in Newark."³⁵ Vivian Berry moved to Newark in 1954. Although we do not learn the address from her interview, Berry spoke of a large fire "right around the corner" that she remembered. "Four houses - two on 4th Street and two on 3rd Street - and several children lost their lives."³⁶ This may well be the same fire that Mary Roberts described as happening behind her house on North 5th Street.

Sharpe James' first home in Newark was on the infamous Howard Street at Springfield Avenue. Nathan Heard wrote a gritty novel in 1968 entitled *Howard Street* based upon his own experiences growing up in the neighborhood. The place may have looked somewhat different when the James family moved there in the 1940s but it was an economically depressed location in either decade. James lived with his mother and brother in a one-room apartment with an outhouse in the back yard. They heated water for their baths on top of a pot belly stove and then hung their clothes around the same stove to get them dry. One day there was a fire, James told his interviewer. "The fire people came. We almost lost our lives in that fire." James added that he also almost died again in another house fire on Wilbur Avenue. "I learned then about coal and kerosene and why so many houses - Newark's old houses - probably caught fire because they had makeshift conditions. The heat - they use the top of the stove but the top of the stove was kerosene, little burners, little round ones that would - the wind would blow over or something like that."³⁷

³⁵ Willa Rawlins, interview with Katheryn Bethea, Aug. 8, 1997.

³⁶ Vivian Berry, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, 1997 (no day or month recorded).

³⁷ Sharpe James, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Dec. 3 & 17, 1996.

Louise Epperson echoed James' causal reasoning when asked about fires in Newark. "Yes. I remember fires. I've seen fires. I've read about fires that have caused great damage to families, especially poor people who had kerosene stoves, that had no other way of heating except that way. They lose everything. And they have nothing." As with Owen Wilkerson, Mrs. Epperson also mentioned the Red Cross. "And I have to say one thing. The Red Cross always comes through, no matter who, and I like that."³⁸

Epperson is correct in her correlation of poverty and high fire probability.

Multiple studies have supported just such a conclusion. One study in 1977 stated:

Of the variables that explained a lot or some of the variation in fire rates among census tracts within cities, parental presence, good education, adequate income, and home ownership were negatively correlated with fire rates. That is, as values of these variables increased, such as income, the fire rate decreased. All the other variables, including housing vacancy and age of housing, were positively correlated with fire rates--as the percent of impoverished persons in a census tract increased, for example, so did fire rates.³⁹

It is apparent that all of the aforementioned "variables" are closely linked to the lives of urban African Americans. Parents are at home less frequently if they are heading up a low-income family as they are forced to work extra hours - or additional jobs altogether; education is often limited for those who are poor - for varied reasons; and of course, the poor tend to rent more than own. Fire, it seems, is an almost inevitable part of being poor and by extension, Black.

Fear of Fire

³⁸ Louise Epperson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 25, 1997. The Red Cross had apparently moved past its racist practices - such as the separating of "Black" blood from "White" which we learned of in chapter three.

³⁹"Socioeconomic Factors and the Incidence of Fire," Federal Emergency Management Agency United States Fire Administration National Fire Data Center, June, 1997, usa.fema.gov.

Fire represents for African Americans, now and in past history, both an immediate danger and a symbolic reminder of their historic vulnerability in the urban environment. One time union shop steward Willie Bradwell said she had witnessed just how fearful people were of fire. In her interview she was asked about music in Newark which eventually brought her to a discussion of fire. She began describing the famous gospel music venue Laurel Gardens whose halcyon days were in the 1940s. Bradwell's interviewer said, "I remember you telling a story about, uh, when the Blind Boys were there..."

Bradwell told the story:

...somebody hollered fire... Well, everybody started running. I mean, the manager - and the Blind Boys was on stage singing. And they were selling hotdogs over on the side, and somebody knocked the pot over and it was just steam went up and someone hollered fire. And the manager was the only one of the Blind Boys who could see, and he ran off and left them...he forgot 'em for a minute.⁴⁰

There is in urban spaces a hyper-consciousness about fire. So much property and possession lie in close proximity so that a single flame can ruin many lives very quickly. Driving through Baltimore recently I saw a large sign on the side of a high rise building that noted there had been five fires so far that year and five fatalities due to fire. Below these statistics was information as to where one could secure a free smoke detector through a program sponsored by the Baltimore Fire Department.

Urban fear of fire is, of course, not without cause. Beryl Satter explains the complicated system of discrimination, greed, and laziness that contributed to so many of

⁴⁰ Willie Bradwell, interview with Cleta Bradwell, Dec. 8, 1997. It is somewhat unclear as to whether Mrs. Bradwell was being interviewed by her daughter or not. There are those involved with the oral history project who say indeed she was, yet others claim that was not the case. The discussions sound as if the two women are closely related at times, yet other questions and comments reflect a sense of unfamiliarity.

Chicago's fires in the mid-20th century in her book *Family Properties*. Illegal conversions were common in what had typically become rooming houses, a popular if not especially inviting destination for many in the Great Migration. Locked doors and closed off fire escapes were some of the more obvious reasons for the high numbers of deaths from inner cities fires, but the insidious practices of redlining and contract sales were the even larger culprits. Because of the hyper-segregation of city neighborhoods, African Americans had few options for living quarters. If code violations were discovered, or apartments restored to original layouts, that would disproportionately affect African Americans and quite often render them homeless. This fact had Black landlords and residents sometimes complicit in these sorts of violations for the sake of holding on to a place to live.

Satter's study illustrates the ways in which the news media were some of the first to voice concern about these issues, calling for stricter housing law enforcement. Dramatic editorials about those less fortunate, "crammed into unsafe, unhealthy cubicle flats, paying exorbitant rents for the privilege of dying like cattle caught in a barn," attempted to catch the attention of policy makers and capture the imagination of fellow Chicagoans. Unfortunately, fair and just rulings against the "white collar" instigators and perpetrators of housing crime would be a long time coming.⁴¹

Retired teacher Ella Rainey agreed - after establishing that her Krueger-Scott interviewer wanted to hear about good *and* bad "important" events in Newark - that the riot "created a lot of problems here in Newark... and it was frightening, too..." She

⁴¹ Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009) 60-61. Newspaper quoted in Satter: W.N. Sutherland, "4 Points Offered to Halt Slum Fires," *Chicago American*, Jan. 29, 1958.

explained, “Because I ‘member standing at my window and watching all these White fellows coming from that side of Bloomfield Avenue and we didn’t know what they were gonna do, you know. But luckily we didn’t have that burning and all that stuff that went with the other riot business across town. But it was a frightening time...”⁴²

This fear is not just one experienced by city residents. Lurline Byass recalled that people from surrounding areas became afraid to come to Newark after the burning that took place during the “riots”; Senator Lipman remembered that one could see those fires burning all the way from Montclair. This is a part of the fallout of urban unrest, a fixation upon a particular image or moment in the identification of a geographical location. In the case of Newark, this fixed incendiary image has been all but impossible to extinguish. The result is a lack of tourism, investment and inclusion that affects tax base, local business and federal funding in the city.

State Senator Ron Rice answered the question regarding the lowest point in the city’s history by saying that it was the fires and the fear that was created by the riots. Rice lamented the fact that people were “burnin’ the buildings and structures up” during the rebellion. He said Newark would have been further along by the time of his 1997 interview if it were not for the fear that had been instilled in so many people. The riots “starved” Newark’s residents and scared people away from coming to the city. “...those fears um ...eradicating the fears of what we did...will be passed on for generations.”⁴³

⁴² Ella Rainey, interview with Ann Marie Dickey-Kemp, April 16, 1998. Unfortunately it is not stated exactly where Mrs. Rainey was living at the time, but if she was looking out on Bloomfield Avenue then she was probably in the North Ward. Most of the damage occurred in the Central Ward, South of there.

⁴³ Ronald Rice, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, April 7, 1997.

Historian Carl Smith confirms the effects of fire on a city's identity. In writing about the Chicago fire he states:

The most important lesson of the unhappy accident in the barn was that urban order was so vulnerable that, in the words of a popular song, a cow could kick over Chicago, setting off a night of horrors locally and threatening to bring down the whole system of modernity in which the city had assumed so important a position. The public mood could be skittish and brittle, and any bad news, feeding on fear and anxiety, could have large consequences near and far.⁴⁴

Much scholarly work has been performed around fear and the urban landscape. From the earliest metropolises of France to case studies of Manhattan, fear is one lens with which to interrogate collective urban experience over the centuries. Jon Fyfe and Nick Bannister write in their introduction to a 2001 *Urban Studies* issue on "Fear and the City":

The urban studies literature is infused with the image of the city as a celebration of difference, as a medium through which the totality of modern living is co-joined and given meaning. However, this vision of the city, of its public places and streets providing an arena in which to experience and learn from diversity (Sennett, 1996), is under threat. Alternative images which depict the city as an unruly, unsettling and disorderly place are increasingly dominant. Difference is now seen as overwhelming and dangerous, to be excluded or segregated where possible--indeed, something to be afraid of.⁴⁵

Some longtime Newark residents may suggest that this "threat" came even earlier than Fyfe and Banner indicate. A number of Krueger-Scott narrators explain that the perception of Newark to many outsiders had been one of a "slum" or "ghetto" since they could remember.

Franklin Banks says it simply when asked, "The areas where Black folk - primarily Black folk lived - were they considered to be slums as opposed to other areas in the City of

⁴⁴ Smith, excerpt from *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief*, 4.

⁴⁵ Jon Bannister and Nick Fyfe, "Introduction: Fear and the City," *Urban Studies* 38, no. 5-6 (05, 2001): 807-813.

Newark?” Banks replies, “Yeah. It’s always considered where the Blacks live as slum area.”⁴⁶

Newark has borne the label of “scary” for some time, even prior to the rebellion. Today, between the uprising, car-jackings, and the much publicized murder rate, there are many who live only miles away in towns such as Montclair, South Orange, or Maplewood who refuse to visit the city based upon its imagined dangers. As noted before, it is argued that fear was behind the decision to build the elevated walkways that connect the Gateway office buildings to Pennsylvania Station; commuting employees could now avoid setting foot on the mean streets of Newark.

Fires and other “disorders” of a city ultimately leave indelible marks upon imaginations, whether these events are witnessed or simply learned from communications that mirror that game of Telephone. Assumptions of a city’s - and people’s - “material poverty” brought on by disasters not of their own doing, manifest a correlating projection of aesthetic poverty. Ultimately, an assumption of lack of safety combines with these aforementioned ingredients to form a conclusion of irrelevance, at best. The final diagnosis can often be that a city is just not worth saving.

A Particular Fire - the Rebellion

Words

Martin Luther King, Jr. visited Newark just two weeks before he was assassinated, an event that would incite civil disturbances in cities around the country, but not in Newark. A number of the Krueger-Scott narrators recalled the day that Dr. King

⁴⁶ Franklin Banks, interview with Richard Cooke, Aug. 19, 1997.

visited South Side High School. Some saw him from afar while others actually attended the speech he made in the school auditorium. It was auspicious timing as many noted.

Sharpe James was one of the Krueger-Scott narrators who recalled King's visit:

How about Dr. Martin Luther King who came to Newark one week before his death, March 27th, 1968. Who came to my high school, Southside High School, stood on that stage with a capacity crowd, saying he was tired. And Dr. King looked at a capacity student body and said, "Learn, baby, learn so you can earn, baby, earn." He had that phrase before another person came with his chain and medallion...⁴⁷

In 1968 Dr. King wrote an essay entitled "A Testament of Hope," arguing in part that the Newark rebellion could have been avoided. Dr. King used language that those unfamiliar with his writings outside the "I have a dream" speech may find uncharacteristic. The essay was first published posthumously in *Playboy* in 1969. It reads in part:

The Newark riots, for example, could certainly have been prevented by a more aggressive political involvement on the part of that city's Negroes. There is utterly no reason Addonizio should be the mayor of Newark, with the Negro majority that exists in that city. I'm sure that most whites felt that with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, all race problems were automatically solved. Because most white people are so far removed from the life of the average Negro, there has been little to challenge this assumption. Unfortunately, many white people think that we merely "reward" a rioter by taking positive action to better his situation. What these white people do not realize is that the Negroes who riot have given up on America. When nothing is done to alleviate their plight, this merely confirms the Negroes' conviction that America is a hopelessly decadent society. When something positive is done, however, when constructive action follows a riot, a rioter's despair is allayed and he is forced to re-evaluate America and to consider whether some good might eventually come from our society after all.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Sharpe James, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Dec. 3 & 17, 1996. It is up to the reader to decide whether or not Dr. King employed this particular phrase as reported by Mayor James.

⁴⁸ *Playboy Magazine*, "'A Testament of Hope' by Dr. King," *Hef's Philosophy: Playboy and Revolution from 1965-1975*, forthearticles.omeka.net.

Carl Smith wrote about Chicago's "great fire" of 1871 in a way that sounded similar to many characterizations of Newark's "riot" era:

As powerful and even as justified as was the booster dream [of resurrection, purification, revival, and renewal], it could not dispel this fear, which the fire literature imagined as the fair city in distress at the hands of incendiaries and demons who would defame, defile, and destroy her unless good citizens were vigilant and forceful. All too soon the ritualized hanging of the enemy of the people would move from dark fantasy to real event and occupy center stage in the public imagination. The most terrible reality of the fire was that the unspeakable and the indescribable had happened, furnishing a vocabulary and a conceptual framework for a troubled future.⁴⁹

The July 1967 Newark uprising comes with almost as many stories as there are people to tell them. It was not until sometime after the event that the words of those who actually experienced what occurred were finally heard. And yet today there still persists a dominant narrative or "conceptual framework" surrounding Newark's rebellion, put forward by some who are less than knowledgeable of its circumstances. That narrative is one of Black people "going wild" for no particular reason. The uprising furnished a handy Newark "vocabulary" to anybody who wanted to use it.

"Riot"

Henry Robinson was a correction officer at the old Essex County Jail during the uprising. Located at New and Newark Streets, the prison closed in 1970. It has been named an historic landmark but, much like the Krueger-Scott Mansion, not enough has been done to preserve the structure and so it still sits on the corner, crumbling. Mr. Robinson recalled in his Krueger-Scott interview how his mother did not want him walking to work in his uniform during the week of the rebellion, fearing that people might assault him. But Robinson assured his mother that he had a gun and "the Lord on

⁴⁹ Smith, excerpt from *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief*, 6.

my side.” He emphasized his frustration to the interviewer at how “most killing of Black folk” was performed by the National Guard. Robinson went on to describe how he and his coworker, Charlie Black, had been stationed on the roof of the jail, in charge of protecting inmates from anyone who might decide to storm the building.

Robinson continued his comments on how the National Guard just did not “do right” by the Black citizens. His interviewer, Glen Marie Brickus, interjected, “Right, do you remember any fires of any significance ever happening in Newark?” She went on to prod him by sharing her memory of the Avon Avenue fire. Robinson answered, “I don’t know too much about it.” Brickus continued, “What about what we refer to as natural disasters...?”⁵⁰ Mrs. Brickus was apparently finished with the discussion of the rebellion, even if Robinson was not. Perhaps Mrs. Brickus was uncomfortable with the critique of law enforcement that was being put forth, or she simply could have been focused on covering each and every question. For whatever reason we may have lost an opportunity to hear more about those historically important days from one of the few African-American law enforcement officers of the Krueger-Scott community.

Rev. Robert Woods remarked on the level of frustration that existed in Newark preceding the rebellion. In vast company, he and fellow community leaders had predicted that something like this was going to happen in Newark. Those who were knowledgeable of the scope of injustices, and involved in the organizations who battled them, predicted some kind of civil disturbance. In 1969 Robert L. Allen wrote in *Black Awakening*:

Newark, New Jersey, is a drab city located on the Passaic River. Like many other municipalities hit by riots, Newark was a city in crisis. This was no secret, although public officials may have done their utmost to conceal and obscure the

⁵⁰ Henry Robinson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Jan. 17, 1997.

facts. Conditions were bad and were known to be bad. This is why *Life* magazine would call the Newark rebellion “the predictable insurrection.”⁵¹

In his interview Rev. Woods referenced the accusations that were made against Blacks regarding the plotting of the uprising. “No way we would have planned to get that many of our people killed – murdered. I call it murder.” Louise Epperson alluded to this same thinking when she related stories of politicians begging her to “call off” those who were rebelling. She said she tried to explain to them that she had never called anybody “on.”

Rev. Woods stated that all those years later his memories were still fresh when it came to the rebellion. He hadn’t “gotten over it.” He recalled how, alongside other community leaders sporting a black armband, his job during that tense period was to talk to “his people.” The arm band was to identify him as a peaceful community leader, hopefully reducing his chances of being arrested – or worse – by law enforcement. Woods mentioned a clothing store in his interview being “turned upside down in two minutes” and how he admonished those who were removing the merchandise. He said they called him an “Uncle Tom.” Woods and other leaders were also tasked with encouraging their fellow residents to follow the mandated curfews and again drew complaints of behaving like a “traitor,” accused of working for “the man” and not the people. Woods was clear about the terminology. “I don’t think it was a riot,” he stated.⁵²

Police sergeant Edward Kerr said that he believed that the riots were planned, but not in the way others referred to. Kerr’s discussion of the rebellion came from the

⁵¹ Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990) 129. The magazine issue he refers to is that of July 28, 1967 whose cover features the image of a young boy lying in the street and the headline, “Newark: The Predictable Insurrection.”

⁵² Robert Woods, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Feb. 17 & 18, 1997.

question regarding the “five most important events” of his time spent in Newark. Kerr said, “I just mentioned the riots and the fires in the same breath. And that’s my personal involvement ... And I don’t want to get too deep in that because as I say I’m still paranoid about that doggone riot.” Brickus then pushed Kerr by saying, “Well, I want to ask you one specific question about the riot because we heard so much and so many different versions as to why the riot got started. What do you think was the cause of the riot?” Kerr responded, “You’re sure you want my opinion?” Brickus replied, “Yeah.”

Well, I think the CIA and the federal government had a lot to do with it. Okay. Because I

was working as a street boss, a sergeant at the time. I was working out of the Third Precinct. ...my job was to be the sergeant of arms at the council meetings, every time they had a meeting. Okay? And I go down there, and I couldn’t believe what was going on. There’d been people I’d never seen before. I don’t know who they were. They’re like rabble rousers... You go out in the street, you’ll find them. Okay. Rabble rousers. They disappeared the night the riots started. I haven’t seen any of them since then. Okay? But I will never, as long as I live will believe otherwise: the government wanted to find out something. They had a lot of technology over in ‘Nam at the time, and they wanted to know how it would work against civil uprisings. Okay. Now, specifically in Newark, one of the major causes of the riot was - the people over here in this sector over here, the Weequahic section, they had just built all them houses along Fabian Place. People had just bought them. They had bought a lot of that property along that section where 78 is comin’ - came through, see. Number one. Number two: City Hospital - University Hospital, whatever the hell you want to call it, where it is now. Historically, Black folks owned their own properties over there. Now they’re gonna make a farm out of that too, for the university there. Rutgers University come in here. The same thing. Took. At the last count was twenty-five million dollars of ratables they got tax free. Not tax exempt see... Somebody told Addonizio when the riot was going to start. And they told me what Addonizio said. You know what he said? “I got fifteen hundred men between me and all them rioters. Let them go ahead and riot.” You know what my answer was? I’m one of them fifteen hundred. Alright? [Nervous laughter from Kerr].⁵³

James Churchman confirmed that while the “riots” may have caused specific tragedies that the problems were there before, especially when it came to the public

⁵³ Edward Kerr, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Sept. 24, 1997.

housing situation. Mr. Churchman also appeared to echo Sergeant Kerr's theory of outside agitators when he told a story about a walk he took:

... the night before the riots started I was out walkin' my dog, past Bergen, Springfield Avenue, and it must have been twenty, twenty-five men standin' outside. And I didn't know [them] – But for somebody born and raised in the city, somebody's supposed to say, Hello Churchman or Junior or somethin'. And I went home and I told my mother, I said, you know, somethin's about to happen around here and it's not good. And I don't know whether these people were all from out-of-town or what, but it did not look well.⁵⁴

Churchman's voice sounds heavy in this segment; we can almost hear him seeing the quiet streets and then the collection of strange men. After he told Mrs. Brickus that "it did not look well" there were a few seconds of weighted silence. She then picked up with the questionnaire, asking Mr. Churchman if he had ever met Louise Scott.⁵⁵

Rev. Conyers agreed that the causes of the uprising were many and that they had been cropping up for some time. The subject came up in answering a question regarding racial discrimination in Newark. "I remember the riot..." he said. Brickus pushed, "Could you say that the riots though were an incidence of racial discrimination?" Conyers answered, "I think the riot in Newark was the result of a spinoff of a national problem that triggered down through the major cities of our country. To make people aware of the fact that all men were equal." Brickus interjected that in this case she believed the intent of the particular question she asked had more to do with relationships between "Blacks and Whites and their attitudes and interactions. Did you know of any conflicts growing out of those kinds of relationships?" Conyers answered again with regard to the rebellion, "I remember, and this could be somewhat of a hearsay, the thing that triggered the riots in

⁵⁴ James Churchman, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Oct. 11, 1996.

⁵⁵ The race of these "outsiders" is not specified but it is a fair assumption that they were of color as the narrators were surprised that they did not recognize them.

Newark was the fact that some cabdriver had gotten stopped by policemen, taken down to the station house and somehow another they had harmed him. And it just began to mushroom and they say, you know, it just built up - I guess - animosity to the extent that it exploded.” Rev. Conyers clearly saw the uprising as a conflict that grew out of the dysfunctional relationship between races in the major urban areas of the United States. Brickus finally gave up that line of questioning, said “mmm huh” and went on to question #73, “What do you remember about the ‘Mayor of Springfield Avenue?’”⁵⁶

George Branch told of that first night, July 12, at the 4th precinct. At the time he was employed by the Hayes Homes which were located directly across the street from the police station where the incarceration of John Smith occurred. (Branch was probably at the housing project in his capacity as a community leader for inner city youth athletics at the time. He would not become a councilman until 1982). Branch told Pauline Blount:

And so I made it my business to come on up there to join with all of them to find out what was goin’ on at the time. At that time, they had a young man by the name of Tim Still, and Dr. Odom, um, Oliver Lofton, and some of the others.⁵⁷ We had gathered all the folks who had came to the precinct as a result of the news saying that the cabdriver was tailgating the police officer. And they arrested him and they drug him in like he was some dirt or pig or something. And the folks in the area, the project at that time where I worked at, right in Hayes Homes. And it was in the afternoon. And they all gathered around the precinct because of what was happenin’. People was tired of, um, listenin’ to police brutality on Blacks in they community... And that night when all this here took place, all I could think about [was] that long, hot summer - because it happened in the summer months when it was hot - is that the young people was just fed up, brothers in the community, of police brutality. And all they saw was a Black man, like you and I, was being beaten by policemen and drug into the precinct.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Alvin Conyers, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, 1997 (no day or month recorded).

⁵⁷ Timothy Still, director, Newark Community Development Corporation; Dr. L. Sylvester Odom executive director United Community Corporation (UCC); Oliver Lofton, attorney with Newark Legal Services Project.

⁵⁸ George Branch, interview with Pauline Blount, Aug. 28, 1996.

“Oh my goodness,” said Mrs. Blount. Branch went on to describe the nationally engrained image of the gathering crowd outside the police station and community leaders standing on a truck with a megaphone in order to speak to those assembled.⁵⁹



Figure 29. “Robert Curvin, CORE official, uses bullhorn to ask crowd to calm down as they gather in front of the Fourth Precinct Police station during the Newark Riots of 1967,” nj.com.

Then, explained Branch, arguments between onlookers and the police captain ensued - even as various community leaders were attempting to steer the crowd into a peaceful march to City Hall. And then out came all of the officers, a decision that many people feel tipped the scales towards violence. “The captain sent the policemen out of the precinct with their white helmets on, with their white gloves, and their night stick in their hands. Like if they were coming after the Blacks,” said Branch. And then the “Molly cocktails” were thrown off the roofs of the housing project and bricks began flying,

⁵⁹ There have been many who have been placed upon the hood of that car – or truck – to calm that particular crowd on that particular night. There is an iconic photo of Robert Curvin that is most often circulated, standing atop a car speaking into a megaphone. At a panel a few years back, Oliver Lofton claimed to have been the one on the car, even as Curvin sat in the audience raising his eyebrows. At other times in these interviews we hear that George Branch stood atop that automobile, as well as Tim Still and Edna Thomas. There are no corroborating images for these claims.

according to Branch. He said he ran for cover at that point but did attempt to be a “part of the solution” during the ensuing days:

Every day and every night I was out there with the armband on - on my arm. Federal government - and the Prudential - gave money to the UCC, [Imamu] Baraka and them to be leaders in the community - tried to quiet the people down so they didn't finish burning up the community and the stores and whatever. They was turnin' over cars on the corner of Springfield Avenue and Morris Avenue. Pullin' the Whites out of the cars, beating them up. I mean it was awful.⁶⁰

Branch told a tale of fairly even culpability between citizens and law enforcement when it came to violence and property damage. He did not rationalize the behavior of those who threw the fire bombs or attacked innocent people, even as he explained that that behavior emanated from a high level of frustration with longtime injustice.

When it came down to the telling of this story, the people of the Krueger-Scott community tended to speak about the rebellion in terms of their own personal experiences. Their remembering often took shape in bits of scenes or particular images and one could almost hear the memories flooding back in on them as they spoke. In Allesandro Portelli's, “The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory & the Event” he writes:

The discrepancy between fact and memory ultimately enhances the value of the oral sources as historical documents. It is not caused by faulty recollections...but actively and creatively generated by memory and imagination in an effort to make sense of crucial events and of history in general. Indeed, if oral sources had given us “accurate,” “reliable,” factual reconstructions of the death of Luigi Trastulli, we would know much less about it.⁶¹

Clara Little tried to make sense of the events she experienced through an anecdote about a dentist she remembered who watched looters from his office window. She was answering a question in her interview about popular stores and businesses which

⁶⁰ George Branch, interview with Pauline Blount, Aug. 28, 1996.

⁶¹ Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different?” 26.

she frequented. That led her to the memory of a dentist's office on Lyons Avenue where she said most every child went. After that dentist moved, Little explained, people then went to a Dr. Price on Bergen Street. "He was there when the riot came. And could stand at his window – because, you know, he was upstairs – and watch them take his sister's stuff. His sister owned that shop [Gertrude's] and they were takin' her stuff out, like the whole rack of clothes..."⁶²

Zaundria Mapson May remembered that the "riots" occurred on her younger brother's birthday. She was working as a college student at the Springfield branch of the Newark Public Library as a junior librarian. A compelling discourse ensued just prior to that of the rebellion, as Mrs. May was being interviewed by her son, Bill May. (Mrs. May's husband, also named Bill, was the portrait photographer for the Krueger-Scott Oral History Project). The interviewer asked Mrs. May who she was married to and who her son was. There were smiles in both of their voices as she enumerated her family members. But Mrs. May hesitated when asked her son's date of birth and the tape shut off. One might imagine the two laughing together as her son affectionately admonished his mother for failing to recall his birthday. The tape resumed and the two began speaking about the 1967 event.

Mrs. May said in her interview that they closed the library early that day so that employees could go home. It is important to remember that for many Newarkers the rebellion started on the 13th and not the 12th. Some were unaware of the series of events that occurred the day before at the precinct as the rebellion had not begun to spread through the city yet. During Mrs. May's ride home on July 13, provided by a fellow

⁶² Clara Little, interview with Pauline Blount, Oct. 6, 1997.

church member, May remembered seeing the National Guard and hearing gun shots as their car made its way through the streets toward her Osbourne Terrace home. “That was a scary time for me,”⁶³ said May. The riot was centered between the library and her house and had she relied on her usual mode of transportation, the bus, she felt she may well not have made it home that evening.

Veronice Horne was living on 15th Avenue when the riots erupted. There were rumors that something was going to happen, said Mrs. Horne, but no one really believed them. On that Friday she recalled how she and her friends were at the Hayes Homes, how the place was “teeming with people – children out playin’.” Then they heard gun shots right there in the middle of the day, around 1 o’clock she thought. They started running. Someone shouted that a riot was starting. By the time the women had crossed two streets in order to return to their 15th Avenue home, people were everywhere, running and screaming. “And we ran and got our children and we ran upstairs with them. And lockin’ our doors and the only thing you could hear was bullets. You could hear shots. Oh it was so frightening. Tellin’ the children, ‘Get on the floor, stay on the floor.’ And this went on and it was so awful...” Horne recounted to her interviewer the sounds of cars speeding by and glass breaking. This snapshot, of a mother crouching over her children while the disturbance goes on around them, carries both immediacy and relevancy. The affective experience of this woman is starkly portrayed and makes clear that, along with the senses of sight and touch, that the sense of hearing is another powerful tool in the recollection of memory. These sense memories can also prove to evoke emotion in the listener, as well.

⁶³ Zaundria Mapson May, interview with Bill May, Aug. 11, 1996.

Mrs. Horne described men carrying appliances down the street. A furniture store in her neighborhood was broken into and people were stealing the furniture. That night the National Guard appeared and she remembered the sound their boots made walking in the street, yet another sonic memory and one regularly reported. “You were afraid to even move,” said Horne. No buses were running so they had to make their way on foot to the Mulberry Street markets in order to get food for their families. It was a traumatic time for Black people, Horne explained. Their community had been demolished, “...like a hurricane had come through.”⁶⁴

Willie Bradwell told her interviewer, “I had no participation in the riots because when it started I was out of town.” She then went on to tell the following story:

Bradwell: And I came back into town in the middle of it. And I know I had to walk right through all those soldiers and shootin’ over my head, all the way from, I believe it was Renner Avenue at the time. All the way from Bergen Street to Renner and Audubon Terrace ‘cause I couldn’t get a cab into that area.

Interviewer: So how did you get home?

Bradwell: I got a cab from Penn Station, but the closest they could get me home was Winans Avenue and I got off at Winans Avenue and Bergen Street and walked.

Interviewer: With your suitcases?

Bradwell: With my bags. And I was told later, I was lucky I didn’t get shot ‘cause I had these bags. But the troopers just shot over my head.

Interviewer: Deliberately or you were just in the line of fire?

Bradwell: Deliberately. Because I was walkin’ the street, there was other people walkin’ the street and I guess they were scare tactics or whatever – all along Bergen Street. But when I got to Renner Avenue and turned up they didn’t follow me.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Veronice Horne, interview with Katheryn Bethea, June 3, 1997.

⁶⁵ Willie Bradwell, interview with Cleta Bradwell, Dec. 8, 1997.



Figure 30. Woman walking past armed law enforcement during rebellion, photos.nj.com.

Community activist Edna Thomas related a bit of her experience in 1967 as a resident of the Hayes Homes:

That was one part that I guess I left out because it's very painful. Very painful for me, '67. I took my children over my mother's house and left them. And actually left them because that's what I wanted to do, where I wanted them to be. And that's where they could go outside and play and feel at peace. When my son woke up that morning in 1967 and drew a picture of a plane, and said, "Mommy, they're coming to get us," that hurt me so bad. I said, let me get my kids out of here before they get scarred for life. And I went downstairs and all the soldiers were outside. And I saw a longshoreman that worked with my father. And we called him Big Apple. I said, "Take my kids over my father." And he did. I said, "Tell my father I'll come and get them when things are safe." Thank God I did. Because I couldn't take it.⁶⁶

This mention of the son's fear speaks to the experience of so many of the Krueger-Scott interviewees growing up Black in America. Whether it was Sharpe James' description of the fear he knew at age nine of Florida police, or the way Whites "put the fear" in Blacks according to George Branch, or Owen Wilkerson's fear as he rode his bike past his neighborhood's unofficial border into "a whole new world," young African Americans lived, and still exist today, in a state of stress much more intense than their

⁶⁶ Edna Thomas, interview with E. Alma Flagg, Oct. 7, 1996.

White counterparts. The 1967 rebellion's effects for some were simply an extension of already well entrenched fears.

Fear and urban spaces are constantly linked, whether by those living within the city boundaries or by outsiders. Edna Thomas, years after the rebellion, was featured in a *Philadelphia Enquirer* article about the 1992 Rodney King verdict in Los Angeles which resulted in civil disturbance. The thrust of the piece was that Thomas was monitoring the situation from a local precinct in Newark as Los Angeles rioted, fearing another civil disorder in her own city. "And she was unobtrusively monitoring the rat-tat voices that rasped across a police scanner, while the glistening skyscrapers in the heart of downtown Newark disgorged thousands of terrified suburban commuters who thronged the city's PATH railroad station, and jammed the mid-afternoon streets with their fleeing cars," reads the article. It continues, "And Thomas, a lifelong Newark activist - a woman who stood on a car calling for peace outside the city's West District police station on the night that Newark erupted 25 years ago - was absorbed by the events taking place in her home city."⁶⁷

The image of someone standing atop a car outside the fourth precinct seems seared into the collective imaginings of Newark's rebellion for everyone, both in and outside of Newark. The image of Bob Curvin was shared in numerous publications and it is certainly possible that people simply began remembering the picture and not necessarily the person actually speaking into the megaphone that night. Regarding a study by psychology professor Linda Henkel on the creation of memory through photographs, Henkel explains, "In general, we remember the photographs. It's like the

⁶⁷ Ellen O'Brien, "As LA Smoldered, Newark Remembered After 25 Years, the City Has Made Progress. But For Whom?" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 26, 1992, articles.philly.com/.

family stories we tell. There's the original experience, and then the story everyone tells every Thanksgiving. The story becomes exaggerated, a schema of the original event. The physical photo doesn't change over time, but the photo becomes the memory."⁶⁸

Katheryn Bethea shared with her interviewer that she had lost "an extended family member" who was killed by a policeman during the uprising. She took issue with the way the question was posed on the questionnaire as she did not feel comfortable saying that the riots were "important," although perhaps they could be considered as such in terms of how people now saw Newark. Bethea asserted that with the help of the media it appeared at that time as if the rebellion had consumed the whole city.

And one of the things – they gave the impression – you were askin' before about people's impression of Newark... [The media] gave the people the impression that every Black person in every part of Newark was on fire. Part of that was because of the way they showed usually the pictures of the same area pretending it was - not really stating that - pretending it was another part of Newark. All of Newark was not burnin' down, you know that.⁶⁹

The media perpetuated images of the same small portion of Newark, she explained, while implying that these were different areas of the city that were under siege. These protracted optics made the results of the riots seem all that much more dramatic and widespread to those outside the community, Bethea argued, and were incredibly damaging to the reputation of Newark. Those who suffered most from this particular narrative construction – both at the time and for decades to come – would be the African-American residents, for reasons that have been put forth throughout this project. "White flight," deepening associations between Blacks and violence, and a

⁶⁸ Teddy Wayne, "Shutterbug Parents and Overexposed Lives," *The New York Times*. February 20, 2015, nytimes.com.

⁶⁹ Katheryn Bethea, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 7, 1997.

cessation of monies coming to the city are just a few of the burdens that were borne most heavily by the African-American and working-class residents.

Bethea's same assessment of Newark's news coverage so many years back has been leveled at the recent media reporting on urban uprisings such as those in Baltimore in 2015. Television news repeatedly played one particular image of a neighborhood CVS pharmacy in flames. From afar it seemed that Baltimore was truly on fire. In a critique that followed the verdict surrounding the death of Freddie Gray, Jack Shafer of *Politico Magazine* wrote:

Riots are particularly complicated for the media to cover. TV's preferred presentation of any riot is the live shot, and who can object to that? But its next favorite is montage, the stacking of ghastly image upon ghastly image, of looted pharmacy upon burning senior center upon flaming automobile, which it can run in a loop. Not to diminish the horrors of the Baltimore riots, but looping of the Baltimore news makes it look as if the entire city is ablaze and scores have died, even though—praise be to glory—damage is localized and a human life has yet to be taken.⁷⁰

Sensationalist media coverage that unfairly affects the Black citizen is not a modern invention. In Kevin Gaines' *Uplifting the Race* we read of the story of NAACP executive secretary Walter White's experience amidst the "Atlanta riot of 1906." At the age of thirteen White was accompanying his father on his mail route when they heard "ominous rumors of a race riot..." Gaines explains that a recent rape of a White woman allegedly by a Black man, coinciding with a hotly contested gubernatorial race that included one candidate of an especially racist nature were fueling the media fire. The newspapers apparently embraced the drama wherein "inflammatory headlines in the *Atlanta News*" became the norm. Then came an editorial in the *Atlanta Journal* on how Afro-Americans were becoming "more impudent" and were lying "in wait" to assault

⁷⁰ Jack Shafer, "CNN Feasts on Baltimore Riot Coverage," *Politico Magazine*, April 28, 2015, politico.com.

“the fair young girlhood of the south.” Continued publication of fabricated stories of Black rapists finally turned Atlanta into “a tinderbox,” wrote Walter White. In the end ten African Americans and one White person died and much property in the Black neighborhoods was destroyed.⁷¹ The lessons of Newark, Baltimore, Atlanta and so many other urban rebellions have not been well learned because so few of them made their way past the cities’ borders. And so the vicious cycles continue.

Owen Wilkerson told his interviewer that he covered the events of July 1967 for *The Afro-American* newspaper:⁷²

The city was under occupation. It was devastating to see. I think it was Sunday morning, walking along Spruce Street and everything – Bob Queen and myself. Bob Queen at that particular time was the editor of the *Afro-American* newspaper. And we were walking along Spruce Street and here were the stores burned to the ground and what not, and people wandering around in bewilderment, and the National Guard was giving out - National Guardsmen were giving out food and containers of milk to people. And you could just see the expression on the people's faces. They were just humiliated. The people lost as much as the merchants in the community because I’m sure a lot of those merchants had fire insurance...What the people lost was the services and what not. You know what I mean? Food was scarce then and what not. The city was just in a devastated situation.

Again, those with the least seemed to have lost the most.

“I don’t want to get emotional,” finished Wilkerson. He seemed torn between an intellectual analysis of the rebellion and the emotional response he was experiencing as he recalled that particular walk down Spruce Street. He described “the blood in the

⁷¹ From Walter White, *A Man Called White* (New York: Viking Press, 1948) qtd. in Kevin Kelly Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 49.

⁷² Searching the microfilm of all *Afro-American* issues surrounding the time of the rebellion, Wilkerson’s byline does not appear. However, there are a number of articles without bylines. Bob Queen’s name appears most often as the reporter on these stories. Perhaps one or more of the anonymous articles was written by Wilkerson or he collaborated with Queen who is referenced a number of times by the interviewees when discussing common sources of news for the Black community.

streets” and the listener can hear his visceral memories taking shape: the heads “cracked” by State Troopers, sounds of gunfire, smells of burning stores returned to him all at once. As a man – and a journalist – Wilkerson may have wanted to resist an affective response, but as a human he wrestled with the witnessing of that which fellow humans were capable of.

Looking at the *New Jersey Afro* of July 15, 1967, there is no news of the rebellion on the front page. There is a report of a fight that happened in East Orange, on the border of Newark, describing how law enforcement became embroiled in a turf war over jurisdiction. “They’re Lying All Over the Street” reads the headline. By July 22 *The New Jersey Afro* had images of the aftermath of the Newark rebellion, including broken shop windows and National Guardsmen instructing suspected looters to lie on the ground. The headline reads, “In Newark/Nothing Left but the Tears and Hope.”⁷³

The Narrative

In a 2015 interview with Steve Adubato, Kevin McLaughlin talks about his work as director, producer, writer and editor of the unfortunately named 2007 film, *Riot: One City’s 50-Year Struggle to Leave Behind its Worst Week Ever*. The film’s website states in part, “Today, it’s hard to believe that an event that few people remember or know anything about could have had such a huge impact on millions of people. That’s the story that this film attempts to tell.”⁷⁴ I challenge this characterization of the rebellion; this

⁷³ *New Jersey Afro American*, July 22, 1967, Newark Public Library, microfilm. It seems the *Afro* had some significant lag time between when articles were written and published; this explains the absence of news about the July 12 rebellion in the July 15 newspaper. For example, on July 22nd there was a comparison of the Newark uprising to the recent Watts rebellion. Comparing the duration of the disturbances, the article reports that Newark was “Now in its fifth day,” fifteen days after the rebellion had actually ended.

⁷⁴ *Riot: One City’s 50-Year Struggle to Leave Behind its Worst Week Ever*, Stumpsfilm LLC, 2015, <http://riotthefilm.com/>

event in question appears to be, in fact, one of the *only* things remembered when it comes to the city of Newark.

In Flammable Cities: Urban Conflagration and the Making of the Modern World, historian Daniel Kerr writes on Cleveland's "forgotten fires" of the 1970s. His study intersects with Beryl Satter's work on urban housing and echoes the mindset of Newark city administrators around urban renewal. Emily Badger explained in her review of Kerr's work:

The city experienced a spate of riots in the 1960s by blacks who sought more control over their own communities. Less well remembered is what happened next: In the '70s, some 24,000 housing units in some of these same neighborhoods were set on fire by arsonists – usually the property owners themselves – with the tacit approval of the city government... Landlords no longer found it profitable to keep up basic maintenance and repair. Many simply abandoned their properties, pushing the final costs associated with them - their demolition - onto taxpayers... In the end, whole tracts of land were cleared by fire to rebuild the types of housing that officials had long hoped would lure middle- and upper-class families back into the city. But today, few people in Cleveland remember the history of these neighborhoods this way. Rather, public memory has coalesced around the story that these communities were once destroyed by riots in the 1960s. Those thousands of cases of arson, Kerr writes, are Cleveland's "forgotten fires."⁷⁵

Riot, the film, perpetuates this public memory with a well-worn story of fire and guns and looting while implying that "blame" for the rebellion rests most heavily upon the citizens of Newark. These are the "social scapegoats," Badger argues, the marginalized groups who have throughout history been deemed culpable for all that has gone wrong in their cities. I would add that Newark can be seen as a scapegoat for urban crisis as a whole, so many of those traits foisted upon Newark's image as other cities such as Chicago seem to have salvaged reputations less fraught with darkness and danger.

⁷⁵ Emily Badger, "The Uncomfortable Politics Behind the History of Urban Fires," *The Atlantic*, Aug. 22, 2012, citylab.com. *Flammable Cities: Urban Conflagration and the Making of the Modern World*, eds. Greg Bankoff, Uwe Lübken, Jordan Sand (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

The Krueger-Scott interviews, as with so many other oral histories, help to challenge that reputation as we listen to inversions of the blame and gain nuanced understandings of urban living that come from those who actually participated in the city's life cycle.

Senator Wynona Lipman told her interviewer that "there are so many people in Newark who have dropped out of school, who didn't get an education, who remain unemployed for that reason. Just can't get jobs, just can't get - They need to go back to school to get educated. That's why we have all the crime we have. Because it seems that anybody can sell drugs." Lipman identified the easy access to drugs as one militating factor in her people's troubles, while Rev. Woods cautioned that while the city's schools were declining around the same time as the rebellion, that it was not the rebellion that was responsible for that "nosedive." These remarks are in keeping with various studies of urban crisis and the ways in which it is the result of - as opposed to cause of - deep systemic crises.⁷⁶

In the Steve Adubato interview we see a dramatic clip from the film, *Riot*, which includes statistics of the dead and injured rolling across the screen as giant flames engulf the background. McLaughlin, the director, who was born in Newark said in his interview that he had come to realize the value of speaking to "ordinary people" with regard to the uprising. "... I wanted regular people, just citizens – those who remembered. And that was a little harder to dig up but I did-" He is then interrupted by Adubato who asks, "What did your dad tell you?" The director's father was a fireman at the time of the uprising and apparently a "regular" person in Adubato's estimation. "It was a bizarre

⁷⁶ See for example, Mark Krasovic, *The Struggle for Newark : Plotting Urban Crisis in the Great Society 2008* and Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*.

thing for him,” said McLaughlin. Dad had not planned on being shot at when he signed up to be a fireman.”

Then Adubato proceeds “to put things in perspective” and starts with the narrative of “snipers in buildings” shooting at those who were only there to protect them.

McLaughlin interjects that this is actually a story that has been contested. Adubato seems shocked, expressing ignorance that such a controversy even existed.⁷⁷ Although Mr. Adubato is from a long line of Newark residents - born there himself - as well as a journalist, apparently he never came across any conflicting perspectives concerning the rebellion. Owen Wilkerson, who covered the rebellion as a journalist said to his interviewer, “...you had State Troopers who just came in and started beating up on people, shooting people.”⁷⁸ Could this be the “protection” Adubato was referring to?

The cover of the infamous July 28, 1967 edition of *Life* magazine features the image of a wounded twelve-year-old boy, blood pooling under his left arm. It reads, “Shooting War in the Streets/ Newark: The Predictable Insurrection.” Sensationalist reporting dominated this event as was mentioned by a number of the Krueger-Scott narrators. In this particular *Life* magazine’s “Editor’s Note” entitled, “Our Men on the Streets of Newark,” Bud Lee writes, “The gripping photographs and eyewitness reports which make up our lead story attest to the courage of the people who covered the Newark uprising for us. They faced danger and death in the riot-torn city, ducking sniper fire, skirting angry mobs...”

⁷⁷ Kevin McLaughlin, interview with Steve Adubato, *One on One with Steve Adubato*, Sept. 22, 2015, 3:00 mark.

⁷⁸ Owen Wilkerson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 12, 1997.

Later in the magazine a feature by Russell Sackett reports on a “secret meeting with the snipers.” Next to the article is an image of a Black man holding a weapon crouching in the corner of an apartment. The man is identified as one of the “Negro snipers...who holed up in apartments and on roofs and carried on sporadic rifle exchanges with Guardsmen, state troopers and city police.”⁷⁹ The coverage of the rebellion, incidentally, was the only section of this particular magazine issue that contained any images of African Americans.

The reference to citizen snipers is made regularly in much of the writing and telling on the Newark rebellion, again placing a burden on Newark’s Black residents that was not all theirs to carry. It seems to have been only later that some, such as longtime New Jersey reporter Ron Porambo in his 1971 book *No Cause for Indictment*, were willing to question the veracity of such reports. Porambo writes regarding the aforementioned “sniper” fire referenced in *Life*, “What was at most a meager and disorganized response to wild gunfire on the part of the occupation forces was subsequently blown out of proportion. The image of a black man, his head wrapped in a scarf, peering down the barrel of a Mauser [rifle] from a tenement window is based on colorful imagination rather than truth.” Porambo goes on to say that the piece written in *Life* and its accompanying photograph were simply “fabrications.”⁸⁰ At the least they were an incredibly tight focus on a much larger phenomenon.

Director Spina of the Newark Police Department testified to the Commission on Civil Disorder after the rebellion, “I think a lot of the reports of snipers was due to the, I

⁷⁹ “Newark: The Predictable Insurrection,” *Life*, July 28, 1967, 16.

⁸⁰ Ronald Porambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark* (Hoboken: Melville House, 1971)130.

hate to use the word, trigger-happy guardsmen, who were firing at noises and firing indiscriminately sometimes, it appeared to me, and I was out in the field at all times.”⁸¹

When listening to the Krueger-Scott interviews – a group of the kinds of “ordinary people” to whom the director of *Riot* might have turned – we hear no mention of snipers. This is not due to any kind of consistent support for the rebellion, either, as many expressed adamantly that their neighbors had ruined their city. Yet snipers are at the forefront of the 1967 rebellion’s lore. This situation is emblematic of what Hazel Carby argues the longtime depiction put forth of the urban landscape as a battlefield of Black versus White.⁸²

At one point during the Adubato interview the discussion of nomenclature arises, as it does so often around this subject. Adubato reminds the audience that Dr. Clement Price always insisted it be called a *rebellion* as opposed to a *riot*.⁸³ McLaughlin - who points out that most Whites called it a *riot* while “Black folk” preferred the term *uprising* - relates an analogy surrounding the Boston Tea Party that Dr. Price employed in the film: it was an *uprising* to the patriots, but a *riot* to the British. McLaughlin then offers his own definition when he says that “legitimate complaints” turned into a riot when people “took the opportunity to get a free television.”⁸⁴ Yet Krueger-Scott narrator, attorney Eugene Thompson refused the word “riot,” calling the 1967 event a “civil

⁸¹ Dominick A. Spina, Governor’s Select Commission on Civil Disorder, *Report for Action*, 1968, 136.

⁸² Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) 170.

⁸³ This is not exactly accurate. For example, in Dr. Price’s documentary, *The Once and Future Newark*, he employs the word, “riot” on several occasions.

⁸⁴ McLaughlin, interview with Steve Adubato, 6:00 mark.

disturbance”; Rev. Woods said it was more of a “rebellion” than a “riot”; and Councilwoman Mildred Crump referred to it as a “racial disturbance.”

One more piece of this director’s interview is useful in illustrating the familiar lack of understanding in so many who report, write and speak on Newark – and on majority African-American cities as a whole. The conversation between Adubato and McLaughlin moves to that of the production team who is all White, save the narrator who is the African-American actor Andre Braugher. “He contributed more than his voice,” McLaughlin remarks, “because he was the first Black person to see the whole thing and offer that perspective. So he kinda helped shape the narration based on his perspective.”⁸⁵ That “perspective” that Braugher contributed apparently came simply from him being a Black person as he had no experience with the rebellion itself.

I put forward this film as an example of what happens when those who have not experienced an event, and have paid attention to an inordinate number of like-minded inexperienced people, tell stories of said event. Of course this is not to say that there is any rule that states one must never write or tell about anything that has not been personally experienced; it would be impossible to limit historiography to only that constructed by those “who were there.” But the swirl of narratives surrounding the Newark rebellion is full of cautionary tales of what happens when one decides he is talking to and for “the people” even as those people have been minimally engaged in the process.

At the end of the film *Riot* Senator Cory Booker gets the final word as he waxes optimistic about the way in which Newark has turned itself around. “It will go ablaze

⁸⁵ McLaughlin, interview with Adubato, 8:00 mark.

again,” he says. “We will be on fire. And it’s not gonna be an inferno of riot and rage and bigotry and hate but I think it’s going to be a different type of fire. It’ll be the blaze of hope, the blaze of opportunity, the very torch of the American Dream.”⁸⁶ It seems Booker is attempting to counter the blazing images of Molotov cocktails with depictions of deeply burning hope. In keeping with this oratory, many Krueger-Scott narrators expressed the same kind of optimism for their city, although with somewhat less hyperbole. Senator Lipman said, “I love the way that Newark is responding in the years that I have been here.”⁸⁷ In their own words both Booker and Lipman envisioned a Newark on its way back.

Some have asked me what has been most unexpected in my time spent with these oral histories. My answer would concern the uprising. Many of the people interviewed believed that the 1967 civil disturbance brought positive changes to their city and I was surprised at the number who were willing to say so. From conservative ministers to progressive activists, more than a few of those interviewed for the Krueger-Scott project shared the view that times were better for the city, and/or for African Americans, after July 17, 1967. A number of narrators emphatically noted that this period was not “the low point” in Newark’s history by any means, which is one reason why the naming of this event is so important. For those who saw those five days as a catalyst for change, “riot” does not reflect their experience. What some saw as a high peak in Newark history, the post-rebellion moment was a time of elevated hope and even optimism for many African Americans and their allies. There was a feeling that change was really going to come.

⁸⁶ Kevin McLaughlin, interview by Steve Adubato, film clip with Cory Booker.

⁸⁷ Wynona Lipman, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, April 5, 1997.

It should be noted that there were also narrators who were not all that engaged with the subject of the rebellion either way. The event did not seem to mean much to these narrators and they expressed an inability to answer questions surrounding it with much depth. Katheryn Bethea told her interviewer, "...if I had been less occupied with earning a living and getting an education I might have been more aware..." Bethea later made reference to an argument she had with a Black professor of hers at Rutgers University who at the time told her she was not being "militant enough" about the situation.⁸⁸

One lesson garnered from these oral histories is that simply because a group of people share a racial or geographical or even generational location, it does not mean that they all think alike. Not everyone interviewed thought that the "riots" were a positive or useful occurrence- or an inconsequential one. There were, in some of the Krueger-Scott interviews, voices of deep disappointment as the now elderly residents looked out their windows and mourned their city. Many spoke of moral corruption, rampant drug use, and dirty streets. Even as they were present for the same rebellion and now gazed down at the same streets as those who saw progress and then hope in the city's future, these particular narrators remembered a city that died in 1967 and had yet to be revived.

Oral histories are a good reminder of the need to question certain narratives, a reminder of the individuality and limits of the lenses used to report, write about and research an event. This also goes for the interrogation of sources surrounding the oral histories themselves. For example, if one were to only read the Interclipper annotations from Henry Robinson's Krueger-Scott interview we would determine that he believed the

⁸⁸ Katheryn Bethea, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 7, 1997.

riots represented a grave loss for the city.⁸⁹ The annotation reads, “has him briefly referencing the 1967 uprising as a ‘disgrace.’” But upon listening to the full interview we hear that Mr. Robinson’s choice of the word *disgrace* was actually made in describing the behavior of the law enforcement officers who were shooting innocent citizens. “...they really discriminated against the Black folk because people were lookin’ in their windows – these National Guards came or whatever they were, shootin’ people. It was a disgrace.”⁹⁰ Lest we forget, a transcript is a secondary source and as such must be interrogated alongside the audio recordings if at all possible.

Perceptions

Question #68 reads, “How was Black Newark perceived? Was the community seen as a slum?” Mrs. Brickus posed this particular question to Katheryn Bethea to which she said, “You mean like White people thinkin’ of us?”

“Right,” answered Brickus.

“Since I never really asked them I really can’t say...” responded Bethea.⁹¹

Perception, one’s interpretation of received information, naturally plays a large role in the discourse surrounding the Newark uprising. As is evident, the Krueger-Scott narrators had varying perceptions surrounding the city’s state of health at the time of the interviews, as well as what role the rebellion played in the diagnosis. The question regarding the high and low moments in Newark extended the conversation on perception,

⁸⁹ Interclipper software allows one to record, stream, mark, annotate and organize both video and audio recordings and is the program utilized by Rutgers University in the digitizing process of this oral history collection.

⁹⁰ Henry Robinson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Jan. 17, 1997.

⁹¹ Katheryn Bethea, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 7, 1997.

yet another prompt crafted by Wright and Price which provided a prismatic view of the city through a multiplicity of responses.

As far as Katheryn Bethea was concerned, when it was all over the Newark rebellion did not seem to accomplish much of anything. Whatever it was they wanted, she said, all the people did was “destroy their own neighborhood.” But there were improvements as well. “I think one of the positive things that came out of it is that, um, that whole area – with the exception of the housing over there – has been rejuvenated more or less to the credit of the New Community Corporation.” But there was a host of negatives, Bethea reiterated, and that was why she would not call the historical event “important.”⁹² Rev. Conyers concurred that “While we lost some houses in the riot situation, yet we have done some great things in reestablishing ourselves - our housing situation - and I think it has had a great impact on our city.”⁹³

Danita Henderson told her interviewer, Mrs. Brickus, that people still perceived the whole city as a war zone. “Anywhere you go if you say you’re from Newark they’ll say, ‘ohhhh.’ ... You say ‘Newark, New Jersey’ and they think of that, um, riot that they had thirty years ago – that it’s still like that. That’s all you have there is that one particular area just torn down and what not. Unfortunately.” Glen Marie Brickus interjected with a story of her own. “I was in Ireland. And people asked me negative questions about...why was it that children in Newark don’t like to go to school... All the way over – ... I don’t know where they got it but they had it.” Henderson replied, “It’s the media” who “promote slums...And when you have people who come here they’re

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Alvin Conyers, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, 1997 (no day or month recorded).

surprised.” The results of the riots should no longer be at the center of Newark’s identity, continued Mrs. Henderson, and it was partly the fault of the city’s; so many years later something should have been done with the decimated landscape, specifically the site of the worst of the riot on Springfield Avenue. Henderson’s perception of neighborhood improvements did not align with those of Bethea’s or Conyers’, although she did add that she held high hopes for the New Jersey Performing Arts Center’s (NJPAC) arrival.⁹⁴

Owen Wilkerson’s perception of the rebellion’s outcome was that it “energized the community” and directly led to the convening of the Black and Puerto Rican Convention and ultimately to the election of Mayor Ken Gibson.⁹⁵ The economy of the city, however, had been clearly devastated post-rebellion Wilkerson conceded. James Scott described the uprising as a “turning point,” as did Mildred Crump although not in quite the same way. Crump felt that at the time of her interview, 1996, Newark was at its lowest point. “The unfortunate aspect of it all is that as we were climbing, our ascent was cut off by the 1967 civil disobedience. And we’ve just not been able to grapple with the comeback after that.”⁹⁶ Matthew Little agreed that before the riots the city was on an upward track but became derailed and was still trying to recover. He, too, cited NJPAC as a hopeful sign of renewal. Beverly Scott said that the peak of Black life in the city occurred *after* the “riots” when both hope and federal funding were empowering the city.

⁹⁴ Danita Henderson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 13, 1997.

⁹⁵ “On November 14-16, 1969, the Committee for Unified Newark (CFUN) sponsored the Black and Puerto Rican Convention, which was designed to formally select the ‘Community’s Choice’ for Mayor and City Council in the 1970 election,” riseupnewark.com.

⁹⁶ Mildred Crump, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Nov. 12, 1996.

Retired municipal administrator Isaac Thomas repeated the Rev. James Scott's observation regarding federal subsidy; the money provided a perception of uplift in numerous cities, and gave an actual boost to Newark's economy. "Although you sound liberal when you say this, during the Johnson Administration when he talked about the Great Society. During the Model Cities monies that came down through HUD [Housing and Urban Development] and DOL [Department of Labor]... All these funds that came in... You had people who was starting to move...in an upward mobility." The low point, as far as Thomas was concerned, was at the moment of his interview in 1997.⁹⁷

Willa Coleman said that Newark was most definitely at its lowest during the riots and Mageline Little agreed. They were "like a bad dream" said Little.⁹⁸ Marzell Swain concurred and blamed the rebellion for an overall decline in Newark's Black life. Owen Wilkerson said that positives came from those riots and brought the city to its peak. It was actually something else entirely that negatively affected urban areas nationwide. "The Reagan administration. I think that set things back during the Reagan administration. That to me was the lowest peak in the city. The city is now being revitalized and what not."⁹⁹ Harvey Slaten said that after the riots things went downhill, but the perception of them as a "black eye" for Newark was unfair. After all, he pointed out, a lot of cities had riots. They were all fighting the same things: poverty and discrimination.

What becomes clear is that the stories of those who were there have been overshadowed by those told from a relative distance. The destruction so largely blamed on the African-American population of Newark has helped to negate the importance of

⁹⁷ Isaac Thomas, interview with Pauline Blount, July 2, 1997.

⁹⁸ Mageline Little, interview with Pauline Blount, Nov. 18, 1998.

⁹⁹ Owen Wilkerson, interview with Glen Marie Brickus, Aug. 12, 1997.

the African-Americans' stories. Clearly the Black community shouldered the weight of the hardships that came as a result of the 1967 uprising, as they were also assigned oversized responsibility for the uprising itself. Yet even as tragic stories were shared there were a good many of the Krueger-Scott narrators who claimed progress had been made, due in large part to those five heated days in July.

Conclusion

City living is not easy. Many of the Krueger-Scott participants had given up quiet country lives for bustling, crowded spaces and busy, demanding schedules. There were tradeoffs in both directions. These Newarkers were exposed to experiences they could not have imagined at one time in their lives. Parades and festivals filled the streets and race pride progressed in the city as African Americans said "no" in different ways to unjust rules and unequal treatment. Black Newarkers were even seeing people who looked like them in municipal offices, something that would take much longer in the small Southern towns of their youth. Their opinions mattered in Newark, claimed Jessie Johnson who moved to the city from Mariana, Florida. Senator Lipman, originally from LaGrange, Georgia, said that she loved the way Newark had become a "buzzing metropolis." And even as Edward Kerr, also born in Georgia, observed that the city had declined in its education system, as well as economically, he told his interviewer that he missed Newark when he was away. James Scott called Newark an "exciting but frustrating" place.

The Krueger-Scott narrators suffered *and* challenged the characterization of disposability placed upon them by those both inside and outside of the city. Fires took out homes, livelihoods and even lives and the rebellion did much the same. These events were seen through multiple lenses by the interviewees but in the end they were events to

be transcended, and sometimes even gained from. Outsider tales of Newark's individual lives are often filled with hyperboles of devastation, violence, and hopelessness. While the narrators and their families suffered some great losses, and on repeated occasions, the Krueger-Scott oral histories reconstitute the complications of some legends so deeply solidified in the nation's collective imagination. Within this discourse on urban fires and "riots" we retrieve the historical importance of these Newarkers, their experiences, and the city within which they lived.

CONCLUSION

The Krueger-Scott Oral History Project has informed much recent scholarship in Newark, in the state of New Jersey, and nationwide. Those who labor to establish sites of African-American historical commemoration are working on more than just providing a physical space in which particular materials can be stored. These centers, museums, houses and memorials are also shapers of surrounding communities and suppliers of traveling information that becomes utilized by teachers, students, politicians, researchers, and residents of the community.

Joyce Fowler of New Jersey's Lawnside Historical Society shared with me some of the process that the Society went through in order to establish the Peter Mott House there in that historically African-American community. Peter Mott was an African-American minister and around 1845 he erected the first house in Lawnside. His home is said to have been a stop on the Underground Railroad. Mrs. Fowler explained that there was not much support from town officials initially, most arguing that the house was simply beyond repair, echoing one aspect the Krueger-Scott Mansion story. Making a long story short, in the end the Society did receive enough support to restore a good amount of the house and in 2001 a museum was opened within the Peter Mott House. It is now listed on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places.¹

Questions as to why one historical project is completed, while another one stalls, make for a good structure upon which to build both historical knowledge and a deeper understanding of the dynamics present when communities attempt to preserve their history. There are numerous queries to make of successful museums; from who was

¹ Joyce Fowler, phone conversation with author, March 20, 2017.

"Peter Mott House," *Lawnside Historical Society*, March 29, 2017, petermottthouse.org.

sitting in municipal government, to whether there was competition for restoration dollars, to the mission of the museum itself. A comparative study of a handful of sites, such as Baltimore's African American Civil War Memorial and Museum, New York City's African Burial Ground Monument and Visitor Center, and the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture in Charlotte would offer lessons in the preservation of Black history and the navigation of bureaucracy at the same time. Applying the kinds of questions previously noted, along with those that emerged in chapter one with regard to the Krueger-Scott African-American Cultural Center, may well unearth a great deal of useful information for those going forward on these kinds of historical projects. In addition, if the proposed study included a sampling of the scholarly, cultural, artistic and educational productions emanating from these centers, it would greatly enhance the argument for their existence.

The Krueger-Scott Oral History Project alone has informed numerous works of art and scholarship since its reintroduction and ultimate digitization within these last six years. A Glassbooks project, for example, was launched within a Rutgers University-Newark Book Arts class taught by Nick Kline, along with Adrienne Wheeler as artist-in-residence. Students listened to a selection of the oral histories, chose phrases that stood out to them, and then crafted glass books that reflected those words. This work was aided by scholar Samantha Boardman who had familiarized herself with the majority of the interviews and their contextual history through her exhaustive work with the oral histories. An exhibit of these artistic productions was then displayed at the Gateway Center in Newark.²

² "Provisions," *The Glassbook Project*, accessed March, 29, 2017, glassbookproject.com.

Dr. Boardman also created an installation at the Newark Public Library in 2016, along with great assistance from the staff, of material culture associated with the oral histories and the Great Migration time period more generally. Included in the exhibit entitled “We Found Our Way” were such objects as photographs of the narrators, maps, souvenirs, the Glassbooks collection, and audio excerpts from the oral histories that visitors could access through headphones.³

Yet another use of the oral histories was in the creation of a short multimedia piece produced by Rutgers-Newark’s *Newest Americans* project. Telling the story of Newark Mayor Ras Baraka through interviews and photography, the oral history taken from his grandfather Coyt Jones was inserted throughout the film, creating an historical bridge between generations. *Newest Americans* also produced a piece I wrote on Louise Epperson, one of the community activists featured in chapter four. *Newest Americans* projects are overseen in large part by students, allowing them both practical experience in documentary style production as well as exposure to histories particular to Newark, New Jersey.⁴ This is just a sampling of the ways in which the oral histories - and the Mansion’s story - have been utilized in the construction of urban historical knowledge.

Clearly these historical centers provide so much more than the eye can see, going beyond the brick and mortar and into the imaginations of anyone coming across all that is typically made available in these institutions. Accessible, educational, entertaining, and usually in acknowledgement of a fuller story than more traditional sites of historiography

³ Katie Singer, “Voices of Newark’s Past at ‘We Found Our Way: Newark Portraits from the Great Migration’,” *Brick City Live*, Feb. 5, 2016, brickcitylive.com.

⁴ Ashley Gilbertson, Ed Kashi, Julie Winokur, “We Came and Stayed: Coyt Jones/Ras Baraka; Katie Singer, Louise Epperson, “Over My Dead Body,” *Newest Americans*, newestamericans.com.

such as textbooks and earlier museums, the African-American culture centers in this country carry forth the story that is only recently becoming common knowledge in select classrooms and publications.

Is there still hope for a Black culture center in Newark today? Of course there is. Those of us affiliated with African-American history always carry hope – with a good deal of faith – when it comes to the consistent furthering of this particular narrative. In fact now seems quite a good time to try again. Mayor Ras Baraka is a proud African American with a Newark family lineage that positions him as a true “insider” in a city not always willing to trust. Last year Newark celebrated its 350th anniversary and history was front and center at lectures, festivals, parades and art exhibits; the momentum for historical commemoration is there. What about money? Therein lies the rub. At a time when budgets for arts and humanities organizations are being threatened by the federal government on a daily basis, solicitations for money may well be met with trepidation. But I truly believe that if the right organizations - local, state and federal - banded together in full support of the mission to preserve the African-American history of Newark, that it is possible to build such a Center.

Should it be in the Mansion? Of course it “should,” because it is the perfect location for such a site. But unaware as I am of the physical status of the structure at this particular time I cannot say if that would be the soundest use of the energies required in attempting such a project. Then again, we apparently will not have to go long without this knowledge. Louise Scott’s daughter, the Rev. Louise Scott-Rountree has spearheaded a plan for the rebirth of her mother’s home. I attended a recent stakeholders’ meeting wherein a developer presented a proposal that included use of the Mansion and

construction on the surrounding property. Newarkers are a hopeful bunch, evidenced by so many of the stories in the Krueger-Scott oral history collection. I, myself, have caught that hope and heartily believe that the Mansion has another chance. It is an advantage, I would imagine, that Rev. Scott-Rountree works in City Hall but of course any upcoming project will not be without its problems - obstacles both new and familiar to those who already have worked so tirelessly for a Black cultural center.

At one point during a recent phone call with the Rev. Scott-Rountree who was onsite at the Mansion, she asked me to hold on. I heard her speaking to someone while the sound of cars whooshed by in the background, "We've got to get these entrances boarded up. I've been trying to get this done for months. It's got to happen now!" She came back to the phone and we finished with our call. I hung up laden with a feeling all too familiar, a feeling that the Mansion was still not receiving the kind of attention it truly needed in order to grow into the vision that so many Newarkers carry for its future. The vision is simply that of an African-American Cultural Center that pays homage to the men and women who not only made Newark great, but simply made Newark Newark. It is a vision well worth pursuing.

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