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# Higher than those of their race of less fortunate advantages: Race, ethnicity, and West Indian political leadership in Detroit's African American community, 1885-1940

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**‘HIGHER THAN THOSE OF THEIR RACE OF LESS FORTUNATE ADVANTAGES’:  
RACE, ETHNICITY, AND WEST INDIAN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN DETROIT’S  
AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY, 1885-1940**

by

**KATHRYN L. BEARD**

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted to the Graduate School

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MAJOR: HISTORY

Approved by

Advisor	Date

## DEDICATION

*For my ancestors who brought me this far: My great-grandparents, Wylie Warren and Belle Dora Jackson Warren; Charlie Hayes and Walter Trotter Hayes; my grandparents, Catherine Warren Buffington and James Clemons; Emma Hayes Beard, and John Lallie Dowd. My mother Wanda Lavenia Clemons Beard and father, Arthur Walter Beard. And for my Nana, Phylis Beard Hall. To my elders that keep me going: Chelsea Warren Sandifer, Stanley Samuels, Richard Beard. All of you have blessed me with your wisdom, wit, fortitude, and gumption. There is no me without you.*

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Those who have helped see this project to fruition are far too numerous to name, but I thank each person who ever assisted me, even if not named individually. My thankfulness is deep-seated and sincere.

Firstly, I thank the brilliant members of my dissertation committee, who demanded the best I could give: Drs. John Bukowczyk, Monica Schuler, Marc Kruman, and Guerin Montilus. Your criticism and advice always contributed to the creation of a better project than I ever envisioned and your support of my work was invaluable.

To the staff of the Wayne State University History Department, specifically Gayle McCreedy, Ginnie Corbin, Kay Stone, and Terri Patton, I thank you for keeping me calm and sane (mostly!) at every step of this project. These women were an incredible source of emotional support, bureaucratic savvy, and technological expertise. We've shared so much over the years that they feel like family at this point.

While I met dozens of helpful staff members in repositories far and wide, I have a special appreciation for the staff of the Burton Historical Collection at the Main Branch of the Detroit Public Library. David, Anna, Debra, and Mark all spent many, many hours assisting me with research and providing information about Detroit that I never would have found in any printed source.

I want to thank my children for their willingness to live with a shadow much of their lives and for being an unceasing source of inspiration. I like to thank my grandsons for always making Nana smile.

## **PREFACE**

This is a dissertation on West Indian immigrants in the city of Detroit and their leadership of key institutions in the African American community from 1885 to 1940. This study examines two distinct periods of Detroit history. The first part of the dissertation explores the period prior to the Great Migration when Detroit had a very small African American population and West Indian immigrants held key positions in political organizations, religious institutions and social clubs. The second part of this study investigates the period when the African American population swelled greatly and West Indians continued to hold positions of leadership. The dissertation also identifies the emergence of a small West Indian community in post-World War I Detroit, prior to the arrival of the mass of immigrants from the Caribbean after changes in immigration laws in the mid-1960s.

I argue that West Indian immigrants perceived that they were better positioned to assume positions of leadership and viewed themselves as the legitimate leaders of the African American community. They conveyed, to some extent, their perceptions to both black and white Americans. African Americans, while they accepted West Indian immigrants in leadership positions, often resented the relative success of their foreign-born counterparts. This resentment led to friction between the two groups and was often disclosed in public forums. These immigrants sought to overcome the worst effects of racial discrimination by distinguishing themselves from African Americans and by fusing middle-class status to ethnicity. As more African Americans began to enter the middle class and the West Indian immigrant population remained dwarfed by their American-born counterparts, the link between class and ethnicity lessened in significance as race became a more salient characteristic with which both African American and Afro-Caribbean people had to contend. West Indians continued to value their

Caribbean origins, but incorporated in the African American community and assimilated into American society.

I chose this topic to understand better the diversity of black Detroit. I first met West Indian immigrants at the community college I attended as a teenager. The United States had recently invaded Grenada and one of the West Indians I met was Grenadian. He seemed surprised that an American like me knew where his country was and had some familiarity with the leftist politics of Maurice Bishop, and that I could argue somewhat cogently against the actions of the United States. As I became more aware of a Caribbean community in the city, I gained an appreciation for the cultural differences between African American and West Indians. I began to notice class distinctions among West Indians and wondered had earlier immigrants shared the working-class backgrounds of the majority of the immigrants I encountered. Were the differences and distinctions I noted between African Americans and West Indians related to culture, class, or both? My dissertation is a continuation of the curiosity that emerged from my first encounters with blacks who were not from America. I wanted to discover when the first West Indians began to arrive in Detroit, how they interacted with African Americans, and why some West Indians felt superior to African Americans. I questioned had their perceived superiority always existed and if so, why? I also wanted to understand what role class played in the West Indian community. My observations made me want to examine the past to gain a greater understanding of the present.

Writing my dissertation answered the majority of the questions I had. My research demonstrates the arrival of West Indian immigrants in Detroit beginning in the late nineteenth century and their continual arrival in the city throughout the interwar period. My work illustrates the existence of cultural differences between black people from the Caribbean and American-born blacks and how transnational patterns kept West Indians physically and psychologically

connected to the region. This transnationalism reinforced their distinctive culture and frequent and extensive contact with the Caribbean brought fresh cultural infusions to Detroit. This project reveals that the majority of West Indian immigrants had middle-class backgrounds or aspirations to become middle class. Furthermore, this dissertation describes how they attempted to link middle-class status to ethnicity to separate themselves from African Americans, with whom they were racially identical. West Indians' efforts to distinguish themselves from African Americans created conflicts between the two groups as the immigrants perceived themselves as legitimate leaders of the black community. My work uses biographical sketches of Caribbean blacks and institutions and organizations in black Detroit to establish that these immigrants did obtain leadership positions disproportionately to their numbers in the Detroit's black population over a fifty-five year period. The project confirms that upwardly mobile and naturalizing West Indian immigrants had the ambition and the resources to expand the spatial boundaries created by racial segregation and were among the first residents of a new West Side neighborhood that had several features of an ethnic enclave. Finally, my dissertation indicates that as more African Americans gained middle-class status, West Indians had less success differentiating themselves by linking class to ethnicity. A shared racial identity increased in significance, as West Indians integrated into the African American community and assimilated into American society.

This work has obvious deficiencies. This dissertation does not offer a comparative analysis of other immigrant communities, although studies of the development of West Indian communities in New York and Boston inform it. Nor does my work examine the experiences of working-class West Indians and the institutions that served them—the spiritualist churches, mutual aid societies, and rotating credit associations—that are common in West Indian society and undoubtedly emerged in Detroit with the arrival of lower-class immigrants from the Caribbean. As an exploration of middle-class elite leadership, it provides little description of the

West Indian or the African American rank and file whom the West Indian immigrants led. I intend to address this weakness in a later revision. Neither does the dissertation identify cross-ethnic alliances. West Indians and African Americans shared a community in spite of the friction created by competition and resentment. The lack of a description of the rate of intermarriage between first- and second-generation West Indians and African Americans is another flaw that I will attend to with further research. Lastly, the quantitative analysis provided in my dissertation is slight and requires a more in-depth investigation of census records and other statistical data to supplement my qualitative approach.

The previously unexamined existence of a West Indian immigrant population in Detroit gives significance to this dissertation. The largest number of Caribbean immigrants settled in New York, and logically, most studies of West Indian communities focus on that location. West Indians did reside in places like Detroit in smaller numbers and kept the black community from having a monolithic character and they had substantial influence in the city from their arrival during the late nineteenth century as well as during the interwar period. The period that my dissertation examines is of further significance, since most studies of West Indian immigrants concentrate on later arrivals and classify them as new immigrants. In tracing their arrival to Detroit to the nineteenth century, my dissertation proposes that West Indian migration to the city was not a new phenomenon but the continuation of a migration pattern established in the previous century.



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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

In the lead article of the January 2006 issue of *The Crisis*, Detroit journalist Lori S. Robinson explores how the growing presence of black immigrants “has forced communities nationwide to confront the issues of intraracial diversity.” Robinson notes “misunderstanding, tension, and even animosity” often result when black immigrants and African Americans reside in the same communities. Significantly, W. E. B. DuBois addressed the subject of the relative economic success of West Indian immigrants in Harlem in the same magazine in 1920. DuBois noted the rapid increase of “foreign born Negroes” in the United States between 1910 and 1920 and, like Robinson eighty-six years later, noted that intraracial diversity “make[s] misunderstanding very easy.”<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation serves as a preliminary examination of West Indian immigrants in the African American community of Detroit between 1887 and 1940. Detroit currently has a rapidly expanding West Indian population, which I contend has antecedents in the nineteenth century. Detroit’s African American community has never existed as a monolithic entity, rather it is marked by class divisions related to North American and West Indian ethnicity. West Indian immigrants, who traditionally have had more education and greater economic resources, and during the period of the city’s industrial growth were more often employed as skilled laborers or in professional occupations, viewed themselves and were viewed by African Americans and whites as “the other.” As suggested by the quote in the title of this dissertation, “Higher than Those of Their Race of Less Fortunate Advantages,” because of their origins in the British Empire and educational and professional credentials, many West Indians perceived their otherness as

superiority not only to African Americans, but to white Americans as well, whom they considered “unpolished, crude, lacking in culture and manners, and not to be taken seriously at the social level.” By the 1930s, West Indians’ superiority complex would exacerbate conflict and tensions between them and African Americans. Conflict resulted as West Indians began to integrate into American society and Detroit experienced the maturation of an African American middle class.<sup>2</sup>

If sociologist Edna Bonacich’s theory of a split labor market is applied historically to black Detroit until the 1920s, the relative economic success of West Indians suggests that a higher level of education and access to capital gave them advantages unavailable to African Americans. Instead of ethnic antagonism resulting from these discrepancies, however, the higher class status of West Indians often led to their assuming leadership in the foundational institutions of the city’s developing African American community. As John C. Walter contends, “West Indians came ably equipped to . . . [provide] leadership that instilled pride in the ancestry of race, and formulated and pushed radical programs for improving the race’s posterity.” By the 1920s, when African Americans and West Indians both began migrating to the city in significant numbers during the Great Migration, competition for jobs, housing, political and social leadership, and entry into American society would increase tension and lead to the type of antagonism suggested by Bonacich.<sup>3</sup>

West Indians arrived in Detroit in continual streams during the period under examination, illustrating a “tradition of immigration,” noted by Dawn Marshall, Milton Vickerman, Elizabeth Thomas-Hope, and other scholars of Caribbean migration. Contrary to the conventional view of emigration from the Caribbean as a “recent

phenomenon,” an active migration had begun throughout the slave era and increased after full emancipation in the Anglophone Caribbean in 1838. Initially, this was mostly an intra-Caribbean migration, but some emigrants comprised a vanguard of those leaving the Caribbean for the United States, in a process which “[b]y the end of the nineteenth century, . . . [would] become a solidly entrenched aspect of the culture of the various West Indian territories.”<sup>4</sup>

Vickerman asserts this is a major cause of West Indians’ tradition of emigration. Vickerman considers this a major cause of both early and late West Indian migration, which derives from the region’s colonial status and underdevelopment.<sup>5</sup>

The poorest members of any society rarely have the resources to migrate. In the Caribbean colonies the colonial elite created the paucity of opportunities for advancement by the deliberate restriction of access to good land and jobs. These were reserved for indentured Asian immigrants and British expatriates, a situation designed to keep blacks as low-paid laborers, or else as low-level and low salaried civil servants or schoolteachers in black schools. While the well-educated and fairly comfortably situated West Indians in this study were not compelled to migrate, they did so because they often received better offers elsewhere and were in a position to “weigh the advantages and disadvantages at origin and destination.” Late nineteenth century West Indians were well educated and migrated several times to further their education and job advancement to improve their economic situation.<sup>6</sup>

While racial discrimination was the main disadvantage faced by Afro-West Indians in the United States, better education enabled some to get more remunerative

occupations in northern cities like Detroit, which at first had a relatively small competing black and European immigrant population.

The motives of West Indians who immigrated to Detroit between 1887 and 1940, included “search[ing] for opportunities in *higher-paying occupations*.” Larry A. Sjaastad posits this economic motive as the cause of migration in his article, “The Costs and Returns of Human Migrations.” It was the high level of education or skill these West Indian immigrants possessed that allowed them to obtain employment in higher-paying occupations in Detroit’s small African American community that was relatively more fluid than society in the West Indies.<sup>7</sup>

Ethnicity, as with other immigrant groups, was of great significance to West Indians who remained connected psychologically and physically to their Caribbean countries of origin. They kept abreast of events and most importantly, maintained contacts with other West Indians in Detroit and elsewhere. Even in the era of steamship travel, West Indians often visited and vacationed in their homelands. This travel increased with the advent of journey by aircraft. Many of the subjects under study took well-publicized excursions to their countries of origin, often recounting their journeys in memoirs. Although most obtained American citizenship, their solidarity with and interest in affairs of their West Indian homelands endured. In this manner, many of them established the transnational patterns with various levels of engagement. As noted by Elliott R. Barkan, transnationalism exists along a continuum. Some immigrants totally disengaged from their homelands as they incorporated into the host society, while “most immigrants fall into the middle range, maintaining only limited, intermittent, episodic, financially uneven ties.” Others, like some of the subjects under study, have continual

and extensive interactions with their birthplaces. In spite of the significance of ethnicity, however, West Indian immigrants integrated into black Detroit and incorporated into American society.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the period examined by my paper, a preponderance of West Indians, unlike Europeans, migrated as single men under the age of thirty even when they intended to remain in the United States. While a few migrated with spouses, most found first- or second-generation West Indians mates after their arrival. Some immigrants married African Americans.<sup>9</sup>

In *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920*, Olivier Zunz presents a critique of the Chicago model of immigrant assimilation and upward social mobility in American society formulated by sociologists Ernest Burgess, Louis Wirth, and Robert Park. According to Zunz, the Chicago model did not apply to Detroit as it industrialized in the 1880s because of its “smallness, open space, and multiethnic population.” The Chicago model posits that “[i]mmigrants started at the bottom economically and suffered from cultural and geographic isolation. With time, or from one generation to another, they improved their situation, moved away from the zone of transition [or “ghetto”], and became assimilated into an undefined middle-class America.” Although Zunz argues that this theory did not apply to white immigrants in Detroit, I contend it did describe the assimilation experience and upward mobility of West Indian immigrants in the city, in part because they did not start on the lowest rungs of the economic ladder.<sup>10</sup>

While the majority of Detroit’s small black population was marginally employed, a black elite nevertheless existed. In Detroit after the Civil War, with the Republican



Party in political control of Michigan and with Republican leaders' commitment to equal rights for blacks, the members of the black elite "reaped nearly all of the political patronage and opportunities for public office that came into the black community."<sup>11</sup>

The pains taken by this "caste within a caste" to distinguish themselves from the general black population highlights "intra-racial class divisions and . . . [illustrates] contradictions inherent in . . . [the black elite's] claim of bourgeois respectability."<sup>12</sup> Historian Willard B. Gatewood examines class divisions in the black community in *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920*. Gatewood notes that the heterogeneous nature of African American society began during the slave era, with blacks making hierarchical distinctions between persons born in freedom, those who acquired freedom, and the enslaved, who had a class structure of their own. After Emancipation, blacks made status distinctions between individuals who were free prior to the Civil War and those freed by the war. He observes that such definitions of prominence and standing had no counterpart in white society. Definitions of status shared by blacks and whites, such as an emphasis on ancestry and family history, for blacks took on added significance according to how "bound up . . . [they were] with slavery—their place in the slave system, their role in opposing it, and the extent to which their families had been free from it."<sup>13</sup>

Considering the fact that full emancipation came earlier (1838) to the enslaved in the British Caribbean, West Indians were less "bound up" with slavery than African Americans. In some instances, they had been free for generations, either through a Maroon tradition or as a result of manumissions, like some members of the black elite in America. In the case of freedmen in the British West Indies, they had experienced full

freedom for over a generation prior to their African American counterparts. The former slaves of the West Indies were thus able with much effort to establish a peasant class in territories where land was available. The wealthier members of this peasant class had the means to provide economic resources and to educate their children. In many cases, the West Indians who immigrated to Detroit and became members of the black elite there came from an already upwardly mobile class in their countries of origin. This fact suggests that an earlier emancipation played a significant role in West Indians' ability to acquire sooner than African Americans the indices of elite status that permitted their "admission to the upper reaches of society" and that "required a combination of respectability, moral rectitude, social grace, education, proper ancestry, as well as wealth and color." One marker of elite status for British West Indians was membership in an elite church, most frequently, the Church of England.<sup>14</sup>

Part One of my dissertation begins in the 1880s, when West Indians joined Detroit's old-guard black elite comprised of families who had established themselves in the antebellum era. By the 1890s, the black elite had created what would become known as the "Cultured Colored 40." As members of a privileged group, they "had family connections, personal wealth . . . [and] refinement and culture," and while most were born in the United States, some were of West Indian origin. Like the members of the old guard, the West Indian immigrants had superior educations and economic advantages and firmly took leadership of the city's African American community.<sup>15</sup>

An examination of the leadership of the elite's political, religious, and social organizations clearly illustrates the role West Indian immigrants played in nineteenth-century black Detroit. West Indian immigrants held prominent positions in the city's

African American churches and social organizations and had significant political connections to the white Republican leadership of the city and the state. Clearly, as members of the black middle or upper middle class, the West Indian immigrants formed a tiny but highly influential clique within a clique.

In most cases, the West Indians who migrated to Detroit during the late nineteenth century did not migrate directly to the city from the Caribbean, nor did they all stay to make Detroit their permanent place of residence. For example, D. Augustus Straker, an attorney from Barbados, had spent many years in the Reconstruction South before marrying a woman from one of Detroit's elite families and moving to the city in 1887. Joshua B. Massiah, also emigrated from Barbados, lived on the East Coast prior to migrating to Detroit where he served as the rector of the elite St. Matthew's Episcopal Church from 1893 to 1906 before accepting a position in Chicago. Jamaican immigrants N. H. McBayne, a Baptist minister, and physician Robert M. Stimpson also migrated to the city in the 1890s, but left when other opportunities presented themselves elsewhere. Some of the West Indian immigrants would settle in Detroit after residing in other regions of the country and others would stay in the city only long enough to make an indelible impression on the city before migrating to other places, in some cases returning to their country of origin to live out their lives. The duration of their residence in Detroit did not detract from their influence in the community.

Those who returned to their countries of origin followed a tradition of "significant counter flows," which existed in tandem with the tradition of migration. Elizabeth M. Thomas Hope states that "[t]he fundamental issue is that the socio-economic implications of the [return] movement are related to the educational and occupational changes which

occur in the migrants themselves.” While the majority of West Indians under study can be characterized as settlers, some had clearly defined educational or professional goals, which, once attained, resulted in their return to the Caribbean.<sup>16</sup>

During this era, West Indian leaders began acknowledging a class difference between West Indians and African Americans. Employed in a variety of professions, this next generation of West Indian leaders occupied a higher class stratum than the vast majority of the city’s native black residents. In Progressive Era Detroit, West Indians often comprised the elite of political and religious leadership and quickly made social and economic links with the old guard, which also was comprised partially of second- and third-generation West Indian immigrants. By the 1920s, when large numbers of southern migrants began to arrive in Detroit, enticed by the high wages of the automobile industry, West Indians had attained an undeniable influence in the affairs of the African American community.

Notable West Indians active in Detroit between 1885 and 1915 included Barbadian attorneys D. Augustus Straker; Joshua B. Massiah, rector of St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church; and Jamaicans N. H. McBayne, who served briefly as pastor of Second Baptist Church, and physician Robert M. Stimpson, who governor Hazen Pingree appointed as a surgeon to an all-white regiment during the Spanish-American War. All had emigrated from islands in the British Caribbean where they had received excellent educations prior to their arrival in America and had resources far exceeding those of African Americans of the post-emancipation generation.

West Indian immigrants in Detroit during the last decade and a half of the nineteenth century entered the elite substratum of the African American community,

since they possessed the requisite education, wealth, and connections associated with the local black elite. Also like the members of the black elite, they saw themselves as equal to whites and superior to the more marginalized members of the black population and to African Americans in general. Even more so than the African Americans of the city's black elite, West Indians sought to distance themselves from the lower classes of Detroit's small black population, as well as to assimilate into, emulate, and integrate with upper middle-class white society. Their actions reflected their desire for separation and ethnic distinction between themselves and African Americans.

The second part of my dissertation examines West Indian immigrants who arrived in Detroit along with thousands of African Americans during the Great Migration. Between 1900 and 1930, over one hundred thousand West Indians arrived in the United States, most emigrating from British colonies. While the majority of West Indian immigrants settled on the East Coast, especially in New York, a considerable number came to Detroit. As noted by Maldwyn Allen Jones, most of the West Indian immigrants were "probably unskilled . . . [but] not a few of the newcomers possessed professional qualifications which, allied to a knowledge of English, generally opened the door to prosperity." Jones notes that "by the 1930s, a high proportion of New York's black physicians, dentists and lawyers were immigrants from the British West Indies" and the same can be said of black professionals in Detroit.<sup>17</sup>

West Indian professionals who migrated to the city during the period between 1915 and 1940 and who became known as leaders of the city's African American community included rector of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Everard W. Daniel of St. Thomas, Danish (later U.S.) Virgin Islands. Antiguan-Trinidadian Joseph Gomez served

as pastor of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and eventually became a bishop in the AME church. Trinidadian Charles Zampty and attorneys Joseph A. Craigen of British Guiana and Milton Van Lowe of St. Kitts were leaders of the Detroit divisions of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association. Craigen became an influential force in blacks' change of allegiance from the Republican to the Democratic Party. Guianese attorney Earnest C. Mitchell assumed directorship of one the oldest black law firms in the city in the late 1920s.

West Indian immigrants comprised many of the leading medical professionals in the African American community. Robert Greenidge of British Guiana was a physician who helped found Dunbar Hospital to redress discriminatory practices of white hospitals in the area. Physician Rupert L. Markoe of St. Croix, Danish Virgin Islands had co-ownership of Fairview Sanitarium. Other medical professionals included Guianese physician Anthony Featherston, a resident at Parkside Hospital and founder of the Detroit Medical Society. Jamaican Canute G. Constable and Joseph Mills of British Guiana became leading physicians in the city, while James M. Gregory of Jamaica had professional licenses as both an attorney and a dentist.

During the period of the Great Migration of the 1910s through the 1940s addressed in my dissertation, the black community of Detroit was residentially segregated. As noted by Olivier Zunz, "[t]he redistribution of the population in . . . [Detroit's] growing metropolitan area is usually described as a class-selective process, in which those who could afford it were the first to move out of the city." West Indians comprised the vanguard of those who left the confines of the predominantly black neighborhoods of the city's lower East Side by the 1920s as the Great Migration hit its stride.<sup>18</sup>

Many West Indians in this group were professionals or skilled laborers such as electricians, machinists, carpenters, welders, and drill press operators, often employed in the automotive industry. With better employment and higher incomes, they either moved to neighborhoods usually reserved for white families, or expanded the spatial boundaries of black Detroit. They accomplished this expansion of spatial boundaries prior to 1920 by renting and purchasing homes on the near West Side, which had traditionally been an enclave of the white middle class. Perhaps they wished to separate themselves from the masses of poor black southerners who migrated to the city between the two world wars. This spatial separation suggests that the misunderstanding, tension, and animosity that have been noted to exist between West Indians and African Americans had begun to emerge by the early decades of the twentieth century.

By 1940, West Indians in Detroit founded an organization based on their views of themselves as ethnically distinct from African Americans. Prominent immigrant professionals of West Indian background, such as physician Alfredo Graham and educator Millicent Wills of British Guiana, niece of physician Joseph Wills, formed the West Indian Social League. This early ethnic association did not organize along national lines, since no one group of immigrants dominated numerically. The founding of separate national organizations of Jamaicans, Guianese, and Trinidadians and other Caribbean nationals would not occur until the 1970s, when the city experienced an influx of West Indians owing to the changes in federal immigration laws under the Hart-Celler Act of 1965.

The subject of Chapter 9, Joseph Craigen, embodied the pattern of incorporation into American society and integration into black Detroit by later West Indian immigrants

as they entered the country in greater numbers. While maintaining an interest in his Guianese ethnic identity privately, Craigen publicly minimized his ethnic background and used his participation in the politics of the Democratic Party and in cultural institutions in the African American community as a means of assimilation into the black middle class and into the broader American social order. Craigen's political battles illustrate the competition among naturalizing West Indian immigrants in a maturing African American bourgeoisie.

This dissertation is based on a representative number of West Indian immigrant biographies in a process that might be called collective biography. Examining a few biographies of West Indian leaders in Detroit provides an understanding of how these immigrants obtained their educations and became professionals or were employed in highly skilled positions. Ethnic and class distinctions between African Americans and West Indians are clear and facilitated West Indian immigrants' access to positions of leadership. Examining these differences in these two racially identical but still dissimilar populations and their interaction in the African American community became one of the central focuses of my study.<sup>19</sup>

Ira De Augustus Reid provided seminal studies of West Indian immigrants who came to New York from the end of the nineteenth century to the period just prior to World War II. Other scholars who examined immigrants from the British West Indies, their distinctive culture, and the creation of ethnic enclaves especially in New York include Nancy Foner, Philip Kasinitz, Irma Watkins-Owens, and Mary Waters. As the largest West Indian community emerged in New York, it is logical that these authors focus on that city in their analysis of West Indian Americans. However, as shown by



Violet Showers Johnson in her book, *The Other Black Bostonians: West Indians in Boston, 1900-1950*, New York was not the only American city to which West Indians migrated. Johnson's analysis of the literature that addresses West Indian migrants suggests that by focusing almost exclusively on New York, these scholars ignore other locations where African Americans and West Indians were members of a larger community and where class, race and ethnicity met in complex intersections. My dissertation attempts to demonstrate how these factors overlapped as immigrants from the Caribbean settled in the African American community of Detroit.<sup>20</sup>

Most studies of West Indian Americans address the large contingent of immigrants who immigrated in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Irma Watkins-Owens in her book, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900– 1930*, provides an examination of West Indians who settled in New York in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Johnson's study of West Indians in Boston also concentrates on an earlier era. My dissertation begins with a focus on immigrants who arrived in Detroit in the late nineteenth century and established the foundation of a small immigrant community. I endeavor to illustrate that the West Indians who immigrated in the interwar period augmented this preexisting group who had settled in Detroit some fifty years prior to a later group of Caribbean immigrants.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lori S. Robinson, "Black Like Whom?" *Crisis* 113, no. 1 (January/February 2006): 26; W. E. B. DuBois, "The Rise of the West Indian," *Crisis* 20, no. 5 (September 1920): 214.

<sup>2</sup> John C. Walter, "West Indian Immigrants: Those Arrogant Bastards," *Contributions in Black Studies* 5 (1981-82): 20; Winston James, "Social Mobility in the United States: Beyond the Sowell Thesis," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no.2 (April 2002): 219-226.

<sup>3</sup> Edna Bonacich, "A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: A Split Labor Market," *American Sociological Review* 37 (October 1972): 547-559. Bonacich states, "[t]he central hypothesis is that ethnic antagonism first germinates in a labor market split along ethnic lines. To be split, a labor market must contain at least two groups of workers whose price of labor differs for the same work, or would differ if they did the same work." She notes further that "labor markets that are split by the entrance of a new group [in this case, West Indian immigrants] develop a dynamic which may in turn affect the price of labor." In her analysis,

Bonacich assumes the incoming group to have the “poorer economy,” fewer resources, less information and political resources. The reverse is true in the case of West Indians who migrated to Detroit as they had greater resources and education than the African Americans who resided in the city. Walter, “Arrogant Bastards,” 20.

<sup>4</sup> Milton Vickerman, *Crosscurrents: West Indian Immigrants and Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 59, 61-62; Dawn Marshall, “A History of West Indian Migrations: Overseas Opportunities and ‘Safety-Valve’ Policies,” in *The Caribbean Exodus*, ed. Barry B. Levine (New York: Praeger, 1987), 15-31; Elizabeth M. Thomas Hope, “Transients and Settlers: Varieties of Caribbean Migrants and the Socio-Economic Implications of Their Return,” *International Migration* 24, no. 3, (September 1986): 559-560.

<sup>5</sup> Vickerman, *Crosscurrents*, 59-60, 81.

<sup>6</sup> Maldwyn Allen Jones, *American Immigration*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 91; Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951, 1972), 29-30; Larry A. Sjaastad, “The Costs and Returns of Human Migration,” *Journal of Political Economy* 70, no. 5, Part 2: Investment in Human Beings (October 1962), 80; Everett S. Lee, “A Theory of Migration,” *Demography* 3, no. 1 (1966): 56.

<sup>7</sup> Sjaastad, “Human Migration,” 83.

<sup>8</sup> Nancy Foner, ed., *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 7-10; Elliott R. Barkan, “Integration, Incorporation, Assimilation, and the Limits of Transnationalism,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25, no 2/3 (Winter-Spring 2006): 15. Barkan refers to immigrants’ limited, but on-going, interaction with their homelands as “translocalism.”

<sup>9</sup> Philip Taylor, *The Distant Magnet: European Emigration to the U. S. A.* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), 32, 36, 60, 62, 164.

<sup>10</sup> Olivier Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 8-10.

<sup>11</sup> David Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 84; Edward J. Littlejohn and Gerry M. Doot, “Detroit’s Exclusive Social Clique,” *Detroit Legal News* (October 1995): 20; Kevin Gaines, “Rethinking Race and Class in African-American Struggles for Equality, 1885-1941,” *American Historical Review* 102, no. 2 (April 1997): 382, 384.

<sup>12</sup> Littlejohn and Doot, “Detroit’s Exclusive Social Clique,” 20; Gaines, “Rethinking Race and Class,” 382, 384.

<sup>13</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 13, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 15-21. For the creation of a peasant class and post-emancipation economies in the West Indies, see Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981); Brian L. Moore, *Cultural Power, Resistance, and Pluralism: Colonial Guyana, 1838-1900* (Barbados: The University of the West Indies Press, 1995); Patrick Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902: Race, Class and Social Control* (Barbados: The University of the West Indies Press, 1991). See also Donald Wood, *Trinidad in Transition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) and Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1981). For an examination of free blacks in slave era Barbados, see Jerome Handler, *The Unappropriated People: Freedmen in the Slave Society of Barbados* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Littlejohn and Doot, “Detroit’s Exclusive Social Clique,” 19; *Detroit News-Tribune*, 27 April 1902.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas-Hope, “Transients and Settlers,” 559.

<sup>17</sup> Jones, *American Immigration*, 252; Walters, “Arrogant Bastards,” 20. Walters notes that “[b]y 1930, 40 per cent of the M.D.s in *Who’s Who in Colored America* were West Indians, while West Indians accounted for between only 1.2 and 1.5 per cent of the population.”

<sup>18</sup> Zunz, *Changing Face of Inequality*, 42.

<sup>19</sup> Brownwyn Davis and Susanne Gannon, *Doing Collective Biography (Conducting Educational Research)* (Maidenhead, Berkshire, England: Open University Press, McGraw Hill Education, 2006), 3-5.

<sup>20</sup> See Ira De A. Reid, *The Negro Immigrant: His Background, Characteristics and Social Adjustment, 1899-1937* (New York: AMS Press, 1939); Nancy Foner, *New Immigrants in New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) and *Islands in the City*; Philip Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York: Black*

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*Immigrants and the Politics of Race* ( Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992); Irma Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900– 1930* ( Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Mary C. Waters, *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999); Violet Showers Johnson, *The Other Black Bostonians: West Indians in Boston, 1900-1950* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> See Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900– 1930* and Johnson, *The Other Black Bostonians: West Indians in Boston, 1900-1950*.

## **Chapter 2**

### **“Higher than Those of Their Race of Less Fortunate Advantages:” D. A. Straker’s Political Leadership in Detroit, 1885-1912**

David Augustus Straker, an emigrant from the colony of Barbados, exemplifies the privileged, upper middle-class West Indian who came to Detroit in the late nineteenth century. He served as the spokesperson of the city’s black elite and introduced West Indian newcomers to the upper stratum of the African American community. Straker’s very clear awareness of the ethnic and class distinctions between West Indians and the majority of African Americans led him to proclaim the former were “higher than those of their race of less fortunate advantages.” Because West Indians like himself possessed these fortunate advantages, Straker believed them better equipped to lead than African Americans. In spite of Straker’s ethnic Caribbean awareness, however, the small number of West Indian immigrants in the city during the late nineteenth century did not result in his leadership of an ethnic community, rather, he attained a position of leadership in black Detroit.<sup>1</sup>

Straker became an influential political figure in Detroit, migrating to the city in 1887 after working since 1869 in the Reconstruction South as a teacher in Kentucky and South Carolina and as a law student at Howard University in Washington, D.C. After Straker earned a degree in law from Howard University in 1871, he established a law practice in Detroit and became known as a vocal advocate of blacks’ civil rights. He played an instrumental role in obtaining municipal employment for blacks and worked to end discrimination in the city’s early unions. Straker served as a convention delegate to the 1888 Republican National Convention and organized partisan-based clubs such as the

Detroit Industrial and Financial Cooperative Association in 1890 and the National Federation of Colored Men in 1895. In 1892 and 1894, Straker was elected as a circuit court judge as a Detroit resident in the 1890s.<sup>2</sup>

Straker was officially a Republican, but his failed attempt to acquire a federal judgeship nevertheless had broad two-party support and illustrated his national appeal.<sup>3</sup> Ironically, Straker would become known as an example of the progress made by *African Americans* since emancipation.

Straker's early life in the West Indies played a significant role in his political views and the success he achieved. Because of his experience as a black immigrant, Straker developed a political perspective that was broad and progressive in his ardent agitation for civil rights and strikingly conservative in his nativism and perception of West Indians as superior to African Americans. His origins in a post-emancipation British colony explain some of the paradoxes in Straker's perceptions of race and class in his vision of racial uplift as well as the policies he advocated as a Progressive Era politician.

Many of his contemporaries admired Straker for his educational and professional achievements. However, by 1915, he received some criticism from African Americans who found his efforts to ingratiate himself with whites objectionable and his mode of political activism catered to white patronage during a period when blacks were becoming more militant. While his critics did not associate these issues with class and ethnicity, Straker clearly was one of the "West Indian political activists and intellectuals . . . who were anxious to establish their legitimacy as the brokers of [b]lack advancement. Ironically, in their quest for this goal, the small West Indian elite became embroiled in

various political rivalries with their American-born counterparts and fought hard to vindicate their leadership roles.” Straker “amplif[ied] the positive group characteristics,” what he termed advantages to ensure whites viewed him and other West Indians as superior to African Americans.<sup>4</sup>

Previous accounts of Straker’s life portray him as either an elitist or as radical for his efforts toward African Americans full integration into American society. David Katzman’s book, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century*, provides an introduction to the racial and class divisions to which Straker adhered. Katzman depicts Straker as an economic and political opportunist, alienated from working-class African Americans in the city. According to Katzman, Frederick Douglass became a mentor to Straker, who fluctuated between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois in his political ideology. Katzman offers little comment, however, on the role of Straker’s West Indian background in the development of his political views, which have may accounted in part for the elitism Katzman describes.<sup>5</sup>

In a brief biography, “The Response of a West Indian Activist: D. A. Straker, 1842-1908,” Glenn O. Phillips takes into some account Straker’s early influences in Barbados and attributes his success to the persistence and determination associated with immigrants in general. Phillips notes the small but increasing number of West Indians immigrating into the United States after the Civil War and the comparable circumstances they observed between blacks in America and those in the Caribbean. According to Phillips, Straker’s black and white political opponents discriminated against him as an immigrant and criticized him as “an old opportunistic Reconstruction politician, an uncompromising Republican and even a diehard integrationist.”<sup>6</sup> A conception of how

Straker's West Indian upbringing influenced his political activities helps put this critique of Straker into perspective.

Straker received a considerable amount of attention from the local press, but few articles mention Straker's early background or comment on his emigration from the West Indies. Most give an account of Straker's life beginning with his arrival in the South. The newspaper serving Detroit's nineteenth-century black community, the *Plaindealer*, featured articles about the conditions of the black population in the West Indies in comparison to those in the United States and contained news of the political achievements of blacks in the islands. This illustrates that the black community possessed at least a rudimentary knowledge of and interest in the affairs of the Caribbean. However, local sources paid relatively little attention to Straker's West Indian ethnicity and observations concerning his early years in Barbados appeared infrequently.

Straker wrote an account of a trip he made to the West Indies that depicts his interest in the Caribbean region, his continued identification with his place of origin, and his close relationships with other West Indian immigrants. His book, *A Trip to the Windward Islands: Or Then and Now*, shows how Straker's assimilation into American society influenced his conception of the region and his desire to bring the Caribbean and the United States into closer contact. Straker felt this interregional involvement would benefit both West Indians and blacks in the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Analyzing the society from which Straker originated provides a means to understand the role he would play as a political actor. Certain characteristics of nineteenth-century Barbadian society would have a noticeable impact on Straker's life. These characteristics included the economic conditions of the colony, the relatively

extensive educational opportunities available to blacks, a racial hierarchy, and the existence of class divisions that played an integral part in the environment that shaped Straker's early life. That he was born in 1842,<sup>8</sup> shortly after Great Britain declared the legal emancipation of slaves in its West Indian colonies, provides information crucial to the framework of Straker's life. Politically, the free black population of the colony was aggressive and strident in its efforts to gain full rights of citizenship and Straker's life was influenced by this struggle. Straker's grandmother was a slave, but his parents were both freed people.<sup>9</sup>

In his study of the free black population of Barbados, historian Jerome S. Handler notes that freedmen comprised a minority of pre-emancipation society, but the free population expanded from the beginning of the nineteenth century, due to both natural increase and a higher incidence of legal manumissions. According to Handler, a large number of the free black population resided in the parish of St. Michael, mainly in the capital, Bridgetown, the town where Straker was born.<sup>10</sup> None of the available sources reveal if the Strakers had resided in the urban area during slavery or, like many others of the freedmen, migrated from the rural plantation district after their manumission. Freed blacks naturally had more job and wage opportunities in towns.

Straker credited his ability to "overcome the obstacles which beset" the black race in part to his parents' status as part of the free black population.<sup>11</sup> Denied their full civil rights, the freedmen vocally asserted their claims to British citizenship. Freedmen petitioned the House of Assembly for the right to testify in court as early as 1811, formed a committee to block the passage of a bill to restrict the immigration of free blacks to the colony in 1819, and agitated for the franchise in 1823. By 1829, the freedmen had



organized a reform movement that secured the passage of a bill giving them full legal rights in 1831.<sup>12</sup> The active role of the freedmen left an imprint on Straker, who later advocated for the civil rights of freedmen in the Reconstruction South in a similar manner.

Because of the subordinate position shared by free coloreds and free blacks, Straker easily identified with men who to the casual observer appeared white, which underscored the injustice and arbitrariness of status and caste distinctions based on race. Two of these figures admired by Straker were Samuel Jackman Prescod and William Conrad Reeves. Prescod, a principal leader in the free community's assertion of civil rights in 1843, became the first colored member of the colony's House of Assembly. Prescod made no racial or status distinctions between blacks and coloreds, gaining him wide support within the free population. Where Prescod "ha[d] no distinguishing marks of Negro complexion,"<sup>15</sup> the racist *Charleston News and Courier* described Straker as "black enough to suit the most exacting negrophilist,"<sup>16</sup> but in Barbados they had the same legal and social status.

Reeves, a Chief Justice in the 1890s whose political activism encouraged Straker to make law his profession, also had a complexion light enough to be considered white. Straker noted that Reeves had a white father and his mother was a slave. Colored and poor, Reeves obtained an education that allowed him to achieve a high government position. Straker, though black, would follow a similar course.<sup>17</sup> Because the free population of blacks and people of mixed race in Bridgetown organized along class rather than racial lines, Straker developed a view of the political process that included blacks and their entitlement to full civil rights.

In describing the social hierarchy found in nineteenth-century Barbados, Straker made class rather than racial distinctions. For him, the upper and middle class reflected “wealth, culture, and rank . . . [which] marke[d] the refinement, culture and intelligence of the natives. . . . The educational qualification of the colored people of the Windward Islands is far above the qualification of a majority of the poor whites of the South.”<sup>18</sup> He noted that the lower class contained blacks, coloreds, and whites. All three racial groups had representation in all socioeconomic strata and Straker commented that “colored men of prominence” served as judges, court and church officials, and doctors.<sup>19</sup> Many of the free population belonged to the middle class and the growth of a prosperous black and colored middle class that shared the social and economic values of whites would continue after emancipation.<sup>20</sup> The class-based social hierarchy that framed Straker’s perspective of political and economic interactions originated in his experiences as a youth in colonial Barbados.

As a prominent attorney and politician in Detroit, Straker resided in an exclusive white neighborhood and as the owner of real estate refused to rent to blacks. He described blacks in Detroit as “ignorant, uneducated, poor, and unenlightened, save with few exceptions.”<sup>21</sup> Straker belonged to exclusive social clubs including the Zach Chandler Lodge, a chapter of the Negro Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, and the Sumner Club. He served on the administrative board of the Phillis Wheatley Association, a relief agency for destitute elderly black women. While viewing Straker as part of “a group of elite blacks, politically aware and socially conscious,” Katzman ignores the classist and racist nature of the society from which Straker originated.<sup>22</sup> Although some coloreds and blacks in Barbados had the wealth to classify them as upper class, whites

still ostracized them socially, which caused much resentment. Straker absorbed the prejudices of white Barbadians and like other middle-class blacks, shared the cultural values of the elite. Although his discriminatory practices deserve condemnation, Straker simply saw himself as a member of the upper class, aligned with his social equals, who in this case happened to be white.

Straker's depiction as a "diehard integrationist" had origins in his Barbadian background.<sup>23</sup> Straker warned black Detroiters against forming separate professional and social organizations, stating that segregation was the main "weakness" facing blacks.<sup>24</sup> He encouraged blacks to join established white institutions rather than form their own and he had membership in the predominantly white Michigan Club. Katzman notes Straker and other upper-class blacks interacted with whites "on a regular and equal basis," and many of Detroit's black leaders had attended schools with white community leaders.<sup>25</sup> In Straker's case, he developed a feeling of equality with whites not in Detroit, but during his childhood in Barbados.

Barbadian society had a larger number of native-born whites in the population than other British colonies. While many of the whites comprised the wealthy planter class, the majority was of a lower economic and social station, although all whites had higher status than the colored and black sector of the society. Lower-class whites, known as "Redlegs," frequently expressed resentment at the economic successes of nonwhites.<sup>26</sup> In spite of the rigid racial hierarchy, Straker would have interacted with whites in a variety of settings. His attendance at the private and largely racially exclusive Codrington College would have placed him in close proximity to whites and it was the white president of the school that encouraged Straker to emigrate from Barbados.<sup>27</sup> One

biographical sketch would proclaim Straker as “a popular idol of the white people”<sup>28</sup> during his residence in Detroit, but access to influential whites preceded Straker’s residence in United States and led him to promote integration.

Education played a major role in Straker’s life and he credited his mother, a widowed seamstress, for the sacrifices she made to send him to school.<sup>29</sup> This reflected a general pattern in the free population. Many free black women served in domestic occupations in urban areas like Bridgetown, as their slave counterparts did on the plantations. As a seamstress, Straker’s mother held a reasonably high-status position and her labors apparently proved profitable enough to allow her to educate her son. According to Handler, this type of industrious behavior characterized the colony’s free population. It also illustrates that women in Barbados could “achieve positions of relative wealth” and, if not wealth, could provide for their families as single heads of households,<sup>30</sup> even if economic security did not translate into upward mobility. Straker’s mother served as one of the major influences in his life, and throughout his career he would fight for civil rights for women.

Although he would become an esteemed educator and lawyer, in his youth Straker apprenticed as a tailor, a common skilled trade.<sup>31</sup> Blacks and coloreds dominated skilled-trade occupations, causing a high rate of unemployment for poor whites in the colony. Public schools taught skilled trades such as tailoring as well as academics and it was a position in high demand in Bridgetown.<sup>32</sup> Katzman states that Straker felt unsuited to the work, and received private tutoring to prepare for an academic career.<sup>33</sup> Because the public schools in Barbados operated under the monitorial system, in which more

advanced students assisted teachers in the instruction of less developed pupils,<sup>34</sup> Straker would become principal of a school, St. Mary's in Bridgetown, when only seventeen.<sup>35</sup>

Straker considered the public school system in Barbados as “excellent” and noted that “it . . . [was] a rare thing to find a totally uneducated person, man woman or child, in Barbados, or of the West Indies in general.”<sup>36</sup> As in the United States, literacy and education became a way that blacks and coloreds could begin to erase the stigma of slavery. Public schools opened for freedmen beginning in 1818. By 1833, Christian schools for slaves existed on several plantations. The desire of colored and black parents, both slaves and free, to educate their children became a notable feature of Barbadian society.<sup>37</sup>

Straker attended Central Public School in Bridgetown,<sup>38</sup> founded in 1819 and located in the parish of St. Michael where the activity of church groups and aid from the British government led to an increase in public schools. Colored and black students from working-class backgrounds attended public schools such as Central. The public schools employed colored and black teachers and often more pupils wished to attend than the schools could accommodate.<sup>39</sup> Straker also attended Codrington College, an elite preparatory academy that operated under the auspices of the Anglican Church.<sup>40</sup> Governor Codrington and his wealthy family endowed the school, which discouraged nonwhite students from attending and accepted none until after 1838.<sup>41</sup> Although not a part of the wealthy colored or black population who educated their children in England, after graduating from Codrington, Straker planned to attend Oxford.<sup>42</sup>

Straker's decision to emigrate reflected his Barbadian heritage. The first migration of poor people was of poor whites, who migrated to South Carolina and other southern

states in the U.S. Studies have shown that in the older colonies like Barbados, the population density and the monopoly of cultivatable land by plantation owners resulted in migration patterns that commenced soon after emancipation.<sup>43</sup> Emigration proved such a common response to overpopulation and underemployment that the Barbadian government would pass a law restricting migration in 1839, only to reverse its position at mid-century when the legislature passed acts that encouraged its superfluous population to emigrate.<sup>44</sup> Winston James notes that “Barbados disgorged 150,000 of its sons and daughters between 1861 and 1921, a figure equivalent to the entire population of the island in 1861.” James asserts that the high price of land, its scarcity, and the dependence of the mass of workers on a declining sugar industry produced the colony’s high rate of emigration. Natural disasters, including droughts and epidemics of typhoid and dysentery, compounded the effects of the economy, furthering incentives to emigrate.<sup>45</sup>

Straker serves as one example of the “first large-scale outward movement of Barbadians” who would begin to migrate in the 1860s. In their article “Migration and West Indian Racial and Ethnic Consciousness,” Constance Sutton and Susan Makiesky-Barrow note that “[e]migration had always been an integral feature of Barbadian society. . . . and in the societies to which they went they gained ascendancy in the two occupations that carried authority and were open to Black and Colored people at that time: they became known as the teachers and policemen of the West Indies.”<sup>46</sup>

Barbadian immigrants dominated these professions, particularly in Trinidad and British Guiana, where their relatively high level of education made them “too independent and insolent” to perform fieldwork.<sup>47</sup> Straker, too, would immigrate to become a teacher, but instead of moving to another British colony, he chose to come to

the United States. In 1867, the president of Codrington, Reverend Richard R. Rawle, recommended Straker to Bishop B. B. Smith of the Episcopal Church in Kentucky for a position teaching former slaves in the United States.<sup>48</sup> Straker knew first-hand from his experience in early post-emancipation Barbados how coloreds and blacks could benefit from educational opportunities.

Straker believed he and other West Indians had benefited from having received emancipation earlier and enjoyed greater civil rights than freedmen in the United States. He saw himself and other educated West Indians as having a duty toward their American counterparts. The government, too, had obligations. As he would come to view it, “[t]he South owe[d] the negro an education as a just debt; the nation owe[d] it to its citizens, black and white, as the highest duty towards them. The national government [was] duty bound to supply the need of education in the South.”<sup>49</sup>

Straker taught in a school operated by the Episcopal Church and the Freedmen’s Bureau from 1868 through 1870. He would encounter white southern racism for the first time, causing him to rethink his professional goals. John Mercer Langston, acting dean of Howard University’s Law School, convinced Straker that a legal degree would “allow him to be of more direct assistance to the struggling black communities in the South” and, following Langston’s advice, in 1871, graduated from Howard with a degree in law. He could use law to aid the freedmen in their fight to obtain civil rights in the Reconstruction South as his role models, Prescod and Reeves, had done for free blacks and coloreds in Barbados.<sup>50</sup>

Because Barbadians spoke standard English in addition to a creole *patois*, they had an advantage achieving success in higher status positions like teaching and law

enforcement.<sup>51</sup> Straker was known in Detroit “as the black Irish lawyer because of his British accent,”<sup>52</sup> which, with his aspirations to join the upper class, he would have cultivated. Accounts of his speeches commended him on his “vigorous and chaste speech,”<sup>53</sup> and he did not seem to suffer from any sort of communication barrier upon arriving in the United States. His distinctive accent actually may have aided him in his professional and political goals.

While living in the United States, Straker formed close personal and professional relationships with other West Indians first in the Reconstruction South and later while living in Detroit. He titled one chapter of his book “Colored [as used in the United States to mean black] West Indians Who Have Attained Prominence in the United States,” in which he pays homage to associates with whom he shared an ethnic identity. He noted the “many other West Indians who ha[d] adopted the United States as their . . . home [and] made their mark among their fellowmen of the colored race.”<sup>54</sup> Although Straker became a United States citizen in 1870,<sup>55</sup> he sought the companionship of others who, like himself, came from West Indian backgrounds.

Some of Straker’s childhood friends had emigrated from Barbados with him and also attended Howard. This type of friendship network has proven crucial to the immigrant, and especially for the black immigrant who suffered for both his foreignness and race. Straker had no family other than his mother and his wife, the former Annie Carey of Detroit, whom he married in 1871. His wife was a member of the Richards family, one of most elite in the city and whose patriarch, Adolph Richards, had emigrated from Guadeloupe before settling in the free black community of Fredericksburg, Virginia.<sup>56</sup>



The lack of extended family connections increased the significance of his friendship network, since his friends replaced the support and companionship of his kin.

Gabriel L. Ford emigrated the year before Straker and came to Kentucky to work in the freedmen's schools. Ford graduated from Howard in 1872, a year after Straker, but died shortly thereafter.<sup>57</sup> Straker's closest friend, Nathaniel Evanson King, came to Kentucky with him, graduated from Howard's medical school, and became a clerk with the U.S. Treasury Department.<sup>58</sup> His brother, Samuel King, arrived in Washington, D.C. in 1870 and worked for a time in the U.S. printing office before he became ill and returned to Barbados where he died.<sup>59</sup> Straker also had a previous acquaintance with brothers James and Joshua Davis, who studied medicine at Howard. James continued his education at the Toronto College of Medicine and returned to the West Indies to set up his practice in Demerara, British Guiana, where the capital, Georgetown, was located. Joshua became ill before completing his studies and died shortly after returning to Barbados.<sup>60</sup>

Straker met C. T. W. Smith, a West Indian from Bermuda whom he referred to as "a friend and early companion," while attending Howard. After completing his medical studies, Smith returned to Bermuda where he became a "practitioner of high standing and ability."<sup>61</sup> Another West Indian associate of Straker's, W. B. Derrick, came from Antigua and resided in New York, where he served as the politically active pastor of the Bethel A. M. E. Church.<sup>62</sup> Straker does not indicate where he and Derrick met, but he himself belonged to the Bethel A. M. E. Church in Detroit<sup>63</sup> or they could have met in conjunction with their political activities. Straker noted the paucity of opportunities for educated blacks in Antigua and other smaller colonies, leading them to "come to the

United States to find greater scope for their intelligence.” He no doubt included Smith in this group of West Indian immigrants “[a]mong . . . [the] school teachers, professors, and ministers of the gospel in the Southern, Northern and Western States, and especially in the A.M.E. and A.M.E. Zion . . . churches, in which they have reached distinction in their labors.”<sup>64</sup>

His personal and professional association with Robert Brown Elliott illustrates Straker’s affiliation with other successful West Indian immigrants. Straker met Elliott when he moved to Washington, D.C., in 1869 to attend Howard and where he became active in politics.<sup>65</sup> Elliott came from Jamaica and like Straker had origins in the black, rather than the mixed-race freeborn population.<sup>66</sup> Straker’s friendship with Elliott weighed heavily in his decision to relocate to Charleston, South Carolina in 1875. Both men played an active role in Republican politics, practiced law, and established a firm with another black attorney, T. McCants Stewart, outside of Charleston.<sup>67</sup> Charleston, like West Indian society, had a racially based hierarchy with clear divisions between “browns” and “blacks,” a social division familiar to both Straker and Elliott.

Like Straker, Elliott ardently defended blacks’ civil rights and both received recognition for their oratory and debating skills in the political circles of Washington and Charleston. After Elliott debated against Alexander Stephens for the passage of the civil rights bill in 1874, a crowd gathered in front of the boarding house where he lived to commend him for his devotion to the cause of civil rights. Straker made the first speech in Elliott’s honor<sup>68</sup> and reprinted part of Elliott’s speech in his book some twenty years later.<sup>69</sup>

Between 1868 and 1876, in addition to Elliott and Straker, three other West Indians, Martin F. Becker, R. M. Harriet, and Benjamin Byas, played a role as South Carolina legislators. Byas was the same age as Straker and also attended Howard University. Becker owned property valued at \$7,000, the same amount reported by the wealthy Francis Cardozo. Cardozo, a mixed-race Presbyterian minister in Charleston, served as a delegate to the 1868 state constitutional convention and in the same year the people of South Carolina elected him secretary of state.<sup>70</sup> Although no source links them to Straker, in all likelihood Straker had made at least passing acquaintance with the other West Indian immigrants active and visible in South Carolina's politics.

The political climate of Reconstruction South Carolina helped shape Straker's views and led to his contradictory depiction as a radical activist. While most white South Carolinians only conceded to the freedmen basic protections and legal rights, Straker felt blacks were entitled to equality as well.<sup>71</sup> Thomas Holt notes that black Republicans in South Carolina never existed as a monolithic political entity and divided into factions based on personal concerns and self-interest. Holt explains that black politicians also had "divisions that appear to have been ideological in content and related partly to the differences in social status." Straker's insistence on equality was perceived by some of his fellow Republicans as too assertive. His West Indian ethnicity may have played a role in the creation of "differences that were significant enough to contribute to the failure of some of the party's legislative initiatives, and to restrain some of the more radical or experimental policies that were put forth."<sup>72</sup>

In 1876, 1878, and 1880 Straker was elected to the South Carolina general assembly, but Democrats denied him his seat. They claimed Straker lacked citizenship not as a

black man, but as an immigrant.<sup>73</sup> According to Phillips, in spite of Democratic hostility to black politicians and voters after they regained control of the political system, Straker continued to run in (and win) state elections.<sup>74</sup> A reporter asked Straker when he visited Detroit in 1885 if he had “left politics” because of the conditions in the South under Democratic rule. Straker answered in a manner suggesting that he had and was content to teach at Allen University, where he had recently become acting dean of the law school.<sup>75</sup> Straker left the South Carolina two years later to reside for the remainder of his life in Detroit, his political life far from over. In this city, as well, he would form enduring friendships with other West Indians.

Straker moved to Detroit in 1887,<sup>76</sup> becoming an early example of the movement of blacks to the urban areas of the North and Midwest to escape the hostile climate of the post-Reconstruction South. Migration certainly was not a new experience for Straker. He argued blacks had a better chance to exercise their civil rights in the North<sup>77</sup> and previous visits to Detroit, where he spoke before the Detroit Bar Association and at other prestigious events,<sup>78</sup> had convinced him.

Although blacks had begun to migrate from the rural to the urban areas of the South during the Civil War, the mass movement of blacks to the urban North, known as the Great Migration, would not begin in earnest until just prior to World War I.<sup>79</sup> Sources from the 1890s reveal a desire to leave the South, with blacks discussing the issue in the press and urging the development of “immigration bureaus” to assist migrants.<sup>80</sup> Some southern blacks would associate Straker with northern migration.<sup>81</sup>

Straker would influence others to leave the South, where blacks were “living serfs,” and come north.<sup>82</sup> He stressed the “liberality of feeling among the white people of

Detroit . . . [and the] great contrast with the conduct of the white race in other portions of the country.”<sup>83</sup> The *Plaindealer* told of how Straker inspired a large group of blacks living in Arkansas to consider moving to Michigan. A letter to the editor explained how a man named A. C. Foster delivered an address in which he told the audience in Palestine, Arkansas “of Michigan and her liberties. . . . which creat[ed] a new love for the North in every southern heart. He spoke in the most complimentary manner of one David Straker of Detroit, Michigan.”<sup>84</sup>

While living in Detroit, Straker met other West Indian immigrants who played influential roles in his life as well as in the life of the city. One of these men, Joshua B. Massiah, came from a wealthy black family in Bridgetown, emigrated from Barbados to attend Oxford, and continued his education at the General Theological Seminary in New York.<sup>85</sup> In 1893, he became the rector of the exclusive St. Matthew’s Protestant Episcopal Church, which Katzman called “an elite church . . . with much prestige even in the white community.”<sup>86</sup> Like Straker, Massiah played an active role in obtaining social equality for blacks. In 1891, he attended the meeting of the Episcopal Council where he advocated for the training of more black priests and a wider role for them in the church.<sup>87</sup> Straker noted that earlier that year, black Episcopalians chose Massiah as their delegate to a church council in England where he served “as a representative of the work of the American Church among the colored people of the States.”<sup>88</sup>

Straker met a Jamaican immigrant, Robert Stimpson, when he came to Detroit in 1895. Stimpson had degrees in pharmacy and medicine and studied at Bishop University in Montreal before migrating to Detroit. Like Straker, Stimpson would benefit from his association with the Republican Party in Michigan. The Republican governor of the state,

Hazen Pingree, appointed him to the position of assistant surgeon for the 33<sup>rd</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> Michigan Regiments and Stimpson became “the first colored physician appointed from the North to practice among . . . white regiments” during the Spanish-American War.<sup>89</sup>

Straker noted that the war brought attention to the West Indies, and the acquisition of Cuba and Puerto Rico by the United States and other imperialist actions raised the question of annexation of the British colonies as well.<sup>90</sup> The issue of the region as a “Caribbean lake” of the United States was not new, having been raised by southern expansionists since the 1820s and reaching a peak in the decade preceding the secession crisis.<sup>91</sup> Straker would describe the West Indies as the “arms to the main body” of the United States.<sup>92</sup> He supported annexation and increased commercial connections between the two.<sup>93</sup> Straker would advance the notion of an exchange of human resources as well.

The idea of West Indian immigration to the United States appealed to Straker “as an effective factor in bringing about such changes as would improve the condition of both.”<sup>94</sup> He likewise promoted the “sending [of] colored American[s] to the West Indies”<sup>95</sup> to increase the influx of American money. His favorable opinions about immigration stopped there, however. In the 1890s, Straker spoke out strongly against immigrants from southern and eastern Europe who came to Detroit and other urban areas of the United States. To Straker, the cities of America were

teeming [with the] ignorance of aliens who swarm the shores unacquainted with first principles of good government, inimical to our constitution, and totally incapable of how to read, write or calculate in figures. This class dominates all of our large cities, and yet for a time we survive.<sup>96</sup>

Nativist sentiment had risen in the United States throughout the previous decade and labor conflicts, economic depression, and intense nationalism exacerbated the problem. The northeastern and midwestern regions of the country especially had become permeated with nativist thought and it would spread to the South as well.<sup>97</sup>

Michigan had the leading number of chapters of the nativist and anti-Catholic organization, the American Protective Association (APA).<sup>98</sup> The presence of this and other organizations, which loudly proclaimed their nativist rhetoric, helped to drive a further wedge between Detroit's Democratic and Republican parties. Democrats courted the immigrant vote, while Blacks, including Straker, tended to side with the Republicans against the immigrants.<sup>99</sup>

In light of his own status as an immigrant and his support of continued emigration from the West Indies to the United States, Straker's nativism seems inconsistent. Katzman attributes the contradictions in Straker's views toward immigration to both his affiliation with the Republican Party and because he

had led the fight against the caste line in the municipal uniformed services, the skilled trades, and the city's factories, . . . [he] questioned the equity of granting immigrants relatively well-paying jobs in Detroit while native-born Afro-Americans [which he was not] were limited to menial occupations.<sup>100</sup>

Why then did Straker promote West Indian immigration? West Indians would have increased economic competition the same as European immigrants did. Perhaps because he believed that emigration would best benefit West Indian colonies, rather than the United States? Or possibly Straker saw emigration from the West Indies in a more

favorable light because of class differences, expecting educated people like himself to comprise the bulk of immigrants. Encouragement of West Indian immigration to the United States, but not European immigration-this was Democratic territory and blacks sided with Republican nativism. Straker saw West Indian immigration as beneficial to them in the provision of new skills and expected them to return to the West Indies with these skills.

Straker recognized the colonies' dependence on sugar as the basis of a monocrop export economy left the mass of the working and middle class economically vulnerable.<sup>101</sup> He knew that without skills and education, West Indian immigrants would succeed only in "adding to the weight of negro debasement in the States." Like Booker T. Washington, he urged West Indians to immigrate to learn the skills required by industrial capitalism and mechanized agriculture.<sup>102</sup>

Straker conceived that upon learning these new employment skills, immigrants would return to their native countries and introduce "more of modern industries"<sup>103</sup> into the colonies. With "Yankee energy, . . . Yankee push,"<sup>104</sup> and "Yankee hustle,"<sup>105</sup> not to mention Yankee dollars, West Indians could capitalize on the natural and human resources of the region. How could West Indian immigrants obtain, for all practical purposes, what amounted to an apprenticeship if European immigrants, for reasons of race, monopolized the higher skilled jobs? Straker's plan had obvious flaws, but it does help explain his nativism and shows as well his enduring concern for his native land.

Straker visited Barbados only once after leaving the country some thirty years earlier.<sup>106</sup> His journey in itself indicates the continuing significance his homeland held for him. That he published an account of his travels only reinforces Straker's lifelong



intense pride in his origins throughout his lifetime. He expressed the feeling he felt upon seeing Barbados after twenty-eight years as “indescribable,” as he “silently thanked God for his kind providence through the years of . . . [his] absence and [his] return.”<sup>107</sup>

His reaction should not be dismissed as overly sentimental. Barbadians long have had a reputation throughout the West Indies for their intense love of their country and Straker proved no exception. James notes that

it appears that no group of black Caribbeans had a stronger emotional attachment to their native island than black Barbadians. Travelers to and through the region, including fellow black Caribbeans . . . have almost invariably remarked upon the black Barbadian’s love for his or her native land. It is a passion so strong that it appears to be irrational, but that is only because no one has adequately explained it.<sup>108</sup>

Straker seems to have shared this ethnic trait with his compatriots and his many years in the United States did not diminish it.

Although contemporary sources and later biographical accounts provide much information concerning D. A. Straker’s educational, political, and economic achievements, few include facts regarding his family or early life in Barbados and the impact of the culture on his views and actions. Examining the society from which Straker originated provides a richer interpretation of his life in the United States.

Straker and others like him were products of postemancipation Barbadian society. His educational achievements, attitudes concerning race and class, and his immigration to the United States reflect the conditions found in the colony during Straker’s formative years. As an immigrant, Straker did not come to America as a *tabula rasa*, but had the imprint of Barbadian society in his personality.

Straker's background also provides a Barbadian framework for understanding the conservative nature of his political agenda. His class-based interpretations of society and his fervent fight for integration find explanation by applying this framework to his political agenda and also help reconcile depictions of Straker as both an elitist and a radical. Understanding the ethnic and cultural foundation on which Straker stood offers a sharper image of his life.

In spite of his assimilation into American society, Straker continued to identify with his country of origin and maintained a friendship network with other West Indians both in the United States and in various colonies. Ethnicity was an important factor in his life, even after he became a naturalized American. From his arrival in the United States, he had some form of interaction with other West Indians, either personally or professionally. In Detroit, Straker used his connections to benefit other West Indian immigrants and served as the nexus between West Indian immigrants, the black elite, and white Republican politicians in Detroit during the late nineteenth century. He integrated these various sectors to assist in his and other West Indian immigrants' integration into American society. Straker exemplifies West Indian leaders of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who sought to act as power brokers and obtain patronage for West Indians and elite African Americans from whites. He based his efforts to advance this small segment of the population on ethnicity and class and viewed the mass of African Americans as unsuited for progress. Straker considered American blacks as inferior, those of their race of less fortunate advantages, and regarded West Indians as of a better quality, the higher of their race. West Indians like Straker exploited this perceived dichotomy in effort to secure positions of leadership in the black community.

<sup>1</sup> D. Augustus Straker, *A Trip to the Windward Islands: Or Then and Now* (Detroit: Press of James H. Stone & Company, 1896), 72.

<sup>2</sup> David M. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 191-94; Glenn O. Phillips, "The Response of a West Indian Activist: D. A. Straker, 1842-1908," *Journal of Negro History* 66, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 133-135.

<sup>3</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 10 August 1888; Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 190; "Dean Straker, An Interesting Sketch of What a Colored Man Has Done," *Detroit Free Press*, 31 August 1885; "D. A. Straker is Dead, One of the Leaders of the Negro Race in Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, 15 February 1908; Afro-American Appointee," *Detroit Plaindealer*, 24 April 1891. For a year, when it became apparent Harrison would not appoint a black man as a federal judge, the paper ran articles discussing Straker's qualifications for the position and endorsements from civic communities around the country. Nationally, Straker also had the unanimous support of the black press.

<sup>4</sup> Violet Showers Johnson, *The Other Black Bostonians: West Indians in Boston, 1900-1950* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 193.

<sup>6</sup> Phillips, "West Indian Activist," 129.

<sup>7</sup> Straker, *A Trip to the Windward Islands*, 72-74.

<sup>8</sup> Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 190; Phillips, "West Indian Activist," 129.

<sup>9</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 31 August 1885. In Barbados, slaves were freed most frequently by the will and deed of their masters, with self-purchase being the second, but relatively uncommon method of slaves obtaining freedom. Straker did not reveal the circumstances that led to his parents' freeborn status, nor does the available literature provide any insights concerning when and how the senior Strakers obtained their freedom.

<sup>10</sup> Jerome Handler, *The Unappropriated People: Freedmen in the Slave Society of Barbados* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 16.

<sup>11</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 31 August 1885.

<sup>12</sup> Handler, *Freedmen in Barbados*, 83, 103.

<sup>13</sup> Phillips, "West Indian Activist," 129; Handler, *Freedmen in Barbados*, 104, 105, 194, 196, 192.

<sup>14</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 1 May 1891.

<sup>15</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 38; Phillips, "West Indian Activist," 129.

<sup>16</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 42, 94.

<sup>17</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 40, 38.

<sup>18</sup> Handler, *Freedmen of Barbados*, 214-216.

<sup>19</sup> Straker, "The Past, Present, and Future of the Colored Race in Detroit," 31 December 1900.

<sup>20</sup> Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 78, 80, 132, 149, 151.

<sup>21</sup> Phillips, "West Indian Activist," 129.

<sup>22</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 14 August 1891.

<sup>23</sup> Katzman, 160, 161, 164.

<sup>24</sup> Handler, *Freedmen in Barbados*, 82.

<sup>25</sup> Handler, *Freedmen in Barbados*, 195; *Detroit Free Press*, 31 August 1885; Phillips, "West Indian Activist," 129.

<sup>26</sup> Francis H. Warren, comp., *Michigan Manual of Freedmen's Progress* (Detroit: John M. Green Publishers, 1915), 36.

<sup>27</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 31 August 1885; Straker, *Windward Islands*, 31; Phillips, "West Indian Activist," 129.

<sup>28</sup> Handler, *Freedmen in Barbados*, 142, 125.

<sup>29</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 15 February 1908; Phillips, "West Indian Activist," 129.

<sup>30</sup> Handler, *Freedmen of Barbados*, 138, 124-125.

<sup>31</sup> Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 190.

<sup>32</sup> Handler, *Freedmen in Barbados*; 174, Phillips, "West Indian Activist," 129; Ronald Rayman, "Joseph Lancaster's Monitorial System of Instruction and American Indian Education, 1815-1838," *History of Education Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (Winter 1981): 395-396. The monitorial system of education, also known as the Bell-Lancaster method, was developed in the nineteenth century in Great Britain and used to make education more inclusive and less expensive, and to increase class size. The system was adopted by the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, for example.

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- <sup>35</sup> Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 190; Phillips, "West Indian Activist," 129.
- <sup>36</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 31 Aug 1885; Straker, *Windward Islands*, 43.
- <sup>37</sup> Handler, *Freedmen in Barbados*, 171-173, 177.
- <sup>38</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 31 August 1885; Phillips, "West Indian Activist," 129.
- <sup>39</sup> Handler, *Freedmen of Barbados*, 177, 181, 185.
- <sup>40</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 31 August 1885; Phillips, "West Indian Activist," 129.
- <sup>41</sup> Handler, *Freedmen of Barbados*, 165, 176.
- <sup>42</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 31 August 1885; Phillips, "West Indian Activist," 129.
- <sup>43</sup> Dawn I. Marshall, "A History of West Indian Migrations: Overseas Opportunities and 'Safety-Valve' Policies," in *Caribbean Exodus*, ed. Barry Levine (New York: Praeger, 1987), 16, 17; Constance Sutton and Susan Makiesky-Barrow, "Migration and West Indian Racial and Ethnic Consciousness," in *Caribbean Life in New York City: Sociocultural Diminutions*, ed. Constance Sutton and Elsa M. Chaney (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1992), 89; Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1998), 38.
- <sup>44</sup> Marshall, "West Indian Migrations," 17; Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow, "Migration and West Indian Consciousness," 89.
- <sup>45</sup> James, *Holding Aloft the Banner*, 30, 36-38.
- <sup>46</sup> Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow, "Migration and West Indian Consciousness," 89.
- <sup>47</sup> Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1981), 96.
- <sup>48</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 31 August 1885; Phillips, "West Indian Activist," 129; Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 190.
- <sup>49</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands* 81; *Detroit Free Press*, 31 August 1885, 1 September 1885.
- <sup>50</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands* 81; *Detroit Free Press*, 31 August 1885, 1 September 1885.
- <sup>51</sup> Brereton, *History of Modern Trinidad*, 96-97.
- <sup>52</sup> Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 191.
- <sup>53</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 1 October 1891.
- <sup>54</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 70.
- <sup>55</sup> Phillips, "West Indian Activist," 131.
- <sup>56</sup> Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 191. The Richards family left Fredericksburg, Virginia after Adolph's death in 1838 during the antebellum period because of increased discrimination against free people of color in the wake of the Nat Turner rebellion. Upon settling in Detroit after a brief period in Canada, they became radical abolitionists and active in the political campaigns for suffrage and education for members of the free black population in Detroit. With the outbreak of the Civil War, some of the men in the Richards family served as recruiters for black regiments and later would obtain government positions through their associations with white politicians in the Republican Party. Fannie Richards would become the first black woman employed as a teacher in the Detroit public school system.
- <sup>57</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 68.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>59</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 69.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>61</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 68.
- <sup>62</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 69-70. Derrick also was related to Joseph Gomez, who became pastor of Bethel AME in 1919 and whom I will address in a later chapter of this dissertation.
- <sup>63</sup> Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 141. It is significant that Straker, with his earlier association with the Anglican Church, did not join the more elite St. Matthew's Episcopal Church when he moved to Detroit. Katzman suggests this was because Detroit political leaders needed to feel more connected to their middle-class constituents, who attended Bethel.
- <sup>64</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 24.
- <sup>65</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 65; James, *Holding Aloft the Banner*, 11; Phillips, "West Indian Activist," 131; Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 191.
- <sup>66</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 65; James, *Holding Aloft the Banner*, 11; Peggy Lamson *The Glorious Failure: Black Congressman Robert Brown Elliott and the Reconstruction in South Carolina* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973). Straker has no doubt about Elliott's Jamaican birth. Elliott's biographer, Peggy Lamson, uses some rather tortured logic to consider that Elliott was concealing the fact that he was born in South Carolina of runaway slave parents. She rejects this because, had it been the case,

the “dramatic” Elliott would have boasted of their escape. Lamson concludes that Elliott was probably born in England, but offers no conclusive proof. Both Straker and Elliot were dark-skinned men, who in the three-tiered racial hierarchy of whites, mixed-race “browns,” and black people of unmixed descent belonged to the latter group.

<sup>67</sup> Phillips, “West Indian Activist,” 130-132.

<sup>68</sup> Lamson, *Glorious Failure*, 182.

<sup>69</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 66-67.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas Holt, *Black over White: Negro Political Leadership in South Carolina during Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 229-241, table 5.

<sup>71</sup> Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 326.

<sup>72</sup> Holt, *Black Over White: Negro Political Leadership*, 124-125.

<sup>73</sup> *Detroit Free Press* 31 August 1885; Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 191.

<sup>74</sup> Phillips, “West Indian Activist,” 132.

<sup>75</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 31 August 1885.

<sup>76</sup> *Detroit Free Press* 15 February 1908; Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 191; Phillips, “West Indian Activist,” 134.

<sup>77</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 3 June 1892.

<sup>78</sup> Phillips, “West Indian Activist,” 134; *Detroit Free Press*, 1 September 1885.

<sup>79</sup> Joe William Trotter, Jr. ed., *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Diminsions of Race, Class, and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 151.

<sup>80</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 1 April 1892, 8 April 1892.

<sup>81</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 1 May 1891.

<sup>82</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 3 June 1892.

<sup>83</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 71.

<sup>84</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 1 May 1891.

<sup>85</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 67.

<sup>86</sup> Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 137.

<sup>87</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 30 October 1891.

<sup>88</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 68.

<sup>89</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 70-1.

<sup>90</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 7, 78, 83.

<sup>91</sup> Robert Mays, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 19, 17, 3.

<sup>92</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 7.

<sup>93</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 84-85, 95, 78, 8.

<sup>94</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 81.

<sup>95</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 43, 51, 109.

<sup>96</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 89.

<sup>97</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1975), 39, 68-9, 73-74.

<sup>98</sup> Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 80-81.

<sup>99</sup> Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 122-123.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 45, 17, 27, 82.

<sup>102</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 53. Straker and his friends serve as classic examples of W. E. B. DuBois’s “talented tenth,” albeit immigrants.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 82.

<sup>105</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 59.

<sup>106</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 10, 31, 52.

<sup>107</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 31.

<sup>108</sup> James, *Holding Aloft the Banner*, 38.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **West Indian Immigrants and the Leadership of Detroit's Black Churches, 1890-1910**

West Indian immigrant leaders of black churches in Detroit also made evident the connections between class, ethnicity and race. The immigrant leader of the church the middle-class black elite attended attempted to negotiate between powerful whites and elite blacks, while they shunned the working-class poor members of the African American community. Working-class blacks, in competition with the black elite for social status, viewed West Indian leadership of their church as a method of improving their standing in the community. Black immigrant ministers can be compared with politicians like Straker, who in their quest to establish themselves as the leaders of the African American community, extolled their virtues over those of native-born blacks. West Indian religious officials could also claim they advanced the position of African Americans through leadership of the black churches.

Three churches stand among the oldest and most central organizations in the city's African American community, Second Baptist (1838), Bethel AME (1841), and St. Matthew's Episcopal (1846). According to Katzman, in the nineteenth century "[t]he first permanent Negro institutions in Detroit, and the cornerstone of nearly all black activities, were the churches." Furthermore, "church membership was an excellent measure of class standing in black Detroit," with St. Matthew's as the choice of the black elite, Bethel the choice of "middling class," and Second Baptist with mostly working-class congregants. Both St. Matthew's and Second Baptist had West Indian ministers in the 1890s and by the 1920s so did Bethel.<sup>1</sup>

The rectors who served at St. Matthew's "were the best educated of the black clergy in Detroit" and the advanced education of Joshua Bowden Massiah attests to the fact. Born in Bridgetown, Barbados, in 1856, Massiah came to Detroit in 1893 to serve as rector of St. Matthew's Protestant Episcopal Church, the central organization of the black elite in Detroit. Some considered him "among the oldest and best educated of the [Episcopal] clergy" and "one of the ablest clergymen in the diocese."<sup>2</sup>

Between 1864 and 1880, St. Matthew's had dissolved as an organization, its property sold, with the "[b]aptisms and [c]onfirmations of colored persons . . . administered in the white churches until a sufficiently large number of colored communicants could be organized." In 1883, a new building was erected at the corner of St. Antoine and Elizabeth Streets. After a failed attempt of white clergymen to take over the church and exclude blacks from the congregation, blacks regained control of the church. When Massiah became rector, church membership had declined to fewer than three hundred people, as many members had temporarily joined white churches during St. Matthew's period of reorganization. In an effort to increase membership, "the Church determined to call as good a colored man as could be found" and church officials viewed Massiah "in every way providentially fitted for the work."<sup>3</sup>

Massiah came from a family with considerable wealth. Locals in Bridgetown called his father, John B., "Count Massiah" because of his wealth and social status. Like a few of the children of the wealthier members of the black middle class in Barbados, Massiah had the opportunity to emigrate from the colony as a young man to continue his education. In pursuit of education, Massiah displayed the type of transnational immigration pattern associated with later generations of immigrants and the development

of improved transportation technology in the twentieth century. He went first to England where he attended Oxford. After completing his studies in England, Massiah moved to New York where he entered the General Theological Seminary and became a noted scholar of Judaism and Hebrew. In 1882, at the age of twenty-six, he was ordained in the Protestant Episcopal Church.<sup>4</sup>

Born into advantageous circumstances, Massiah attained a position of leadership in Detroit's black community based on advanced education and economic resources. His "unassuming and reticent" demeanor, "splendid character," and intellect made him a favorite of the city's black elite. Parishioners noted he "left a deep impression upon the church and upon the community" while the local white press remarked that Massiah "wielded a strong influence among the Negroes of the Episcopal faith."<sup>5</sup>

Church records note that Massiah "immediately started out to make many changes, the first of which was [implementing] the high church service," which reinforced the perception of St. Matthew's as "a religious body with much prestige even in the white community." He assumed leadership of the church during the period when "St. Matthew's appeared to have consciously sought to preserve its elite role and [began to] slowly erect barriers to membership." It was during Massiah's tenure at St. Matthew's that the church introduced a system of pew rentals, common in many British West Indian churches, which closed "the church doors . . . to the black poor."<sup>6</sup>

The changes implemented by Massiah were geared to secure St. Matthew's position as the elite church in black Detroit and church historians considered his efforts "unusually successful." In addition to liturgical changes, he improved the appearance and worth of the church's recently purchased building. He added accoutrements, such as



a pipe organ and an ornate chancel and altar to add to the image of St. Matthew's as an Anglican "high church." To highlight the pomp and circumstance of Massiah's enhancements, in the fall of 1894 he arranged to have the bishop of Liberia consecrate the ground where the chancel stood.<sup>7</sup>

Massiah gained an international reputation "as leader of the high church movement," and in 1891 church officials elected him as a delegate to an Anglican Church council where he spoke "as . . . [a] representative of the work of the Episcopal church of the colored people of America." While in London, he received a special invitation to give a sermon at St. Paul's Cathedral, "an honor conferred on no other colored clergyman in the world" at the time. Massiah's appearance at St. Paul's did little to improve the overall condition of blacks throughout the diaspora. But as a symbolic act, "the first and only colored clergyman to preach before thousands" at such a prestigious site epitomized why a well-educated and wealthy West Indian like Massiah served as the spiritual leader for many who comprised the Cultured Colored 40.<sup>8</sup>

His appearance at the historic cathedral solidified the "high esteem" in which the elite of black Detroit held Massiah. He ably demonstrated that blacks, or at least the black elite, had the cultural refinement that made them the equals of whites. Making use of the advantages conferred by Massiah's West Indian ethnicity, members of Detroit's black elite viewed his accomplishments as "conducive to the winning of confidence for our people from those whose confidence we need."<sup>9</sup>

Significantly, although the black elite knew of his West Indian ethnicity, they claimed Massiah as one of "Detroit's representative colored people." Brief biographical information notes that Massiah came to the United States as a young man, "before he

reached his majority,” and had lived half his life in the United States. The sketch emphasized that he had completed the steps for naturalization and noted that Massiah “fe[lt] very proud of his American citizenship.” Paradoxically, in view of Massiah’s privileged middle-class background that facilitated his leadership of the city’s black elite, the account remarked that “he ha[d] absorbed the atmosphere of our life and customs.” It portrayed Massiah as an immigrant who succeeded in the assimilation of middle-class norms, rather than the more accurate depiction of his role as an individual whose class and ethnic background helped establish a standard of living the black elite wished to attain.<sup>10</sup>

Massiah remained the rector of St. Matthew’s until 1906. Church membership had increased to 985 persons when he left to assume the leadership of St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Chicago. He served at St. Thomas until his death in January 1916, but his body was returned to Detroit where it lay in state at St. Matthew’s prior to the funeral service.<sup>11</sup>

Massiah exemplifies the connections between class and West Indian ethnicity. His leadership of one of the bastions of the black elite serves as a clear example of why and how West Indian immigrants often rose to positions of prominence and leadership in black Detroit. Massiah faced few challenges to his standing from African Americans of elite status, since he so perfectly represented what they wanted to convey to whites and working-class blacks. The West Indian pastor of Detroit’s African American working class faced subtle trials to his leadership from the black elite.

Second Baptist Church lacked St. Matthew’s prestige as the church of the black elite, but it did enjoy status as the first church founded by African Americans in Detroit.

Established 1836 in protest against the policy of segregation at the white First Baptist Church, the founders of Second Baptist became well known for their militant abolitionism and the church as one of the city's busiest stations on the Underground Railroad. Second Baptist had the second largest congregation during the nineteenth century, with most of the members from the working-class stratum of the city.<sup>12</sup>

While Second Baptist did not generally attract members of the black elite, two of the black community's most prominent families had attended the church from their arrival in Detroit prior to the Civil War. The DeBaptistes and the Richards families had played integral roles in the church's abolitionist activities and in the efforts to obtain civil rights for the free black residents of the city. Both families were wealthy and had migrated from Fredericksburg, Virginia when the state denied free black children the right to an education. The DeBaptistes and the Richards are associated with the leadership of the free black communities of both Fredericksburg and Detroit. Significantly, they were second- and third-generation West Indian immigrants. The patriarch of the DeBaptistes, John, had emigrated from St. Kitts and settled in Fredericksburg in 1766. He would serve in the American Revolution and in 1998, in effort to correct the historic omission of his service, be inducted into the Sons of the American Revolution. Adolph Richards, born in Dutch Curaçao, was educated in England, and migrated to Virginia around 1820. Both men married free black women in Fredericksburg and were counted among the wealthiest men in the town, black or white. Their descendants and offspring left Fredericksburg in the 1840s and 1850s to take up residence in Detroit. As descendants of West Indians, they had the education, wealth, and connections associated with the city's black elite even prior to the Civil War. In the

antebellum era, these resources made both families central to the development of Detroit's African American community. Militant abolitionist George DeBaptiste died in 1875. John Richards was a customs inspector from 1863-1874 and elected Wayne County coroner in 1880. He died in 1882. Fannie Richards was one of two black teachers hired by the Detroit Board of Education in 1869. She taught Sunday School at Second Baptist for fifty years and helped found the Phyllis Wheatley Home in 1897. She died in 1922.<sup>13</sup>

Compared to St. Matthew's, the leadership of Second Baptist went through frequent turnovers, with eleven pastors serving between 1874 and 1910. None of the eleven remained as pastor of the church for more than five years. The black elite criticized the members of Second Baptist for their emotional style of worship and their retention of southern customs. Members of the black elite "thought poorly of the educational qualifications of the Baptist ministers." Higher status blacks generally attended Episcopal or Methodist AME churches whose clergy, in contrast to uneducated Baptist ministers, often held advanced degrees.<sup>14</sup>

Contemporary accounts painted an unflattering portrait of the houses of worship of working-class African Americans as "very poor or very mean churches" with "only the most illiterate men as pastors" and noted the inability of many congregations to support their ministers. The press condemned "deacons, local preachers, and stewards" for "often turn[ing] out wearing hickory or flannel shirts, unblackened [sic] boots, and uncombed heads." Black journalists denounced "every ignorant preacher" who lacked the skills to successfully "plan and manage" and created a situation in which "[church] buildings [were] shabby and an eyesore, the gatherings are noisy, and the neighborhood is soon led

to consider the church a nuisance.” Conversely, reporters noted also the “very wide-extended prejudice among the people against so-called educated preachers,” and referred to ministers who had graduated from college as “Rev. A. B. C. Pomposity.”<sup>15</sup>

In the 1890s, Second Baptist attempted to attract leaders who would “destroy a number of stereotypes about Black preachers of that era.” Prior to 1910, the educational qualifications for the ministry were less important than charismatic leadership. Second Baptist “search committees tended to favor ministers who were men of high moral and ethical standards,” even if they lacked formal theological training. The high profile of the black elite and the attention they received in local newspapers made the working-class blacks more conscious of class status and the impression they made on the upper class of both races. In an effort to counter the image of the southern Baptist haranguer, the search committee selected Jamaican Noah F. McBayne to serve as Second Baptist’s fourteenth minister.<sup>16</sup>

McBayne had emigrated from Jamaica and moved to Toronto where he attended medical school and served as the pastor of a church. While little information exists pertaining to McBayne’s early life, his ability to migrate overseas to further his education and his membership in the clergy suggest his origins lay in Jamaica’s black middle class. As noted by Jamaican historian Patrick Bryan, “[t]he priesthood was . . . [an] important middle strata profession for coloured [i.e. mixed race] and black men.” Regarding the high esteem in which clergymen were held in the colony, Bryan states that

[t]he Minister of the Gospel enjoyed considerable prestige in rural Jamaican society, partly because of the old tradition of close association between preacher and labourer, the former often acting as surrogate for the interests of the latter; partly because the Church and/or the school was often the social center of life in rural Jamaica. The origins of the black minister of religion also rested in the rural smallholding class. In 1881 the

census listed 261 ministers of religion and in 1891 it recorded 329 fairly evenly spread throughout rural Jamaica.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, even prior to emigrating from Jamaica, McBayne had a status associated with the black middle class. Once in the U. S., he would rely on his class status and ethnic background to further his ambitions.

In December 1891, McBayne agreed to serve as pastor of Second Baptist for a one-year term and took over the church's pulpit in April 1892. The next month in one of his first acts as minister of the church he staged a series of revivals, which drew a favorable response from working- and middle-class blacks in Detroit. Significantly, a revivalist movement led by a man named Alexander Bedward was occurring simultaneously in Jamaica. Bedward was originally a Wesleyan Methodist and later a Native or Spiritual Baptist (unaffiliated with British Baptists) who led a sect in St. Andrew Parish, Jamaica. It is reasonable to assume that McBayne was aware of the Bedwardian revivals and preached in a similar manner, which was typical of many Jamaican and West Indian revivals. The revivalist preacher-healer was a spirit medium with the power to bring the Holy Spirit into the congregation. The revivalist religion had both Christian and African antecedents, and drew negative attention from Jamaican colonial officials and a wide response from the colony's lower class.<sup>18</sup>

In July McBayne, along with Bethel's pastor, John M. Henderson, convened "a union meeting" for the "Afro-American who has the interest of his race at heart," held at Bethel AME. D. Augustus Straker was featured as the main speaker. Straker and Henderson both addressed the formal reception given by Second Baptist in McBayne's

honor. Henderson and McBayne at times shared the pulpit or gave sermons at the church of the other.<sup>19</sup>

McBayne initially made a favorable impression in the black community and observers felt he had a “promising future before him” in Detroit. The press noted the “spirit of activity” at Second Baptist under McBayne’s leadership. Commentators described McBayne as a young man and commended his sermons “especially for the young people.” Reportedly, the Baptist youth convention held in Detroit in the summer of 1891 drew a crowd of five thousand and McBayne shrewdly appealed to young, working-class blacks.<sup>20</sup>

In November 1892, McBayne officiated at the Golden Jubilee of Second Baptist, a weeklong event featuring addresses by guest ministers, “first class” performances, with the “ability to please the most critical musical taste” and “Christian reminiscences.” An observer referred to the program as the “attraction of the week,” a far cry from the image “the better people” presented of Baptists as “[d]irty people [who] don’t want new churches with beautiful pews, soft carpets, and stained glass windows” or “well dressed and soft-mannered pastors.” McBayne had effectively challenged the stereotype of the Baptist preacher held by the black elite.<sup>21</sup>

The elite had clear standards for what constituted an “ideal colored church.” A critic of the city’s African American community, writing for the African American newspaper the *Plaindealer* under the pseudonym, “Plutarch,” asserted

[a]t least one-tenth of the membership should be composed of some of the best and highest persons of the community, the remainder should be made up of all classes and grades of persons who can be induced to conform to church discipline, and over all should be a pastor who first is a sound and spiritually minded Christian; second, who is a humanitarian; third, who is a man of intense earnestness and of strong and sterling moral worth, and

fourth, a man of refined tastes and good all-round education, and fifth, a forcible orator as well as a clear-cut and positive preacher of ethical truths.<sup>22</sup>

Comments in the black press indicated McBayne met the standards set by “the better class.”

One critique made by the elite centered on the inability of working-class congregations to “support and do justice to the church.” However, McBayne received accolades for getting Second Baptist “virtually out of debt.” The emphasis McBayne placed on genteel entertainment and racial uplift won him admirers among the upper class. Noting that the church was the only organization available to “the poorest and most illiterate class,” the black press praised McBayne’s leadership abilities and was “much pleased at the renewed interest” in Second Baptist “which . . . [was] everywhere manifest.” McBayne tried to increase the number of organizations associated with the church, for example hosting a local chapter of the Knights of Pythagoras when they held their “first annual service.”<sup>23</sup>

The black elite viewed the relative poverty of the majority of the black churches as one of the most critical “shortcomings of the laity.” Poor congregations could not afford good pastors and the press admonished against “pinching your minister down to a starvation salary.” The press propagated the image of the “preacher going through the streets with a brush and bucket, or saw and buck . . . compelled to earn their bread.” Those slightly more fortunate were “competent to earn a livelihood at other than mechanical occupations, either support themselves teaching school or else quit the ministry.” As a physician, McBayne fit neither category nor did he depend on his salary from Second Baptist alone.<sup>24</sup>



Officials of the church assumed McBayne would concentrate solely on his ministerial duties while at Second Baptist, but he also established a medical practice. His work as a physician competed with his ministerial duties for McBayne's time and attention as he "ma[de] rapid strides toward success with his profession" and became the attending physician to "some of . . . [the] well known families" of the black elite. Church historians claimed later that he took a temporary hiatus from medicine to assume leadership of Second Baptist, but also have mentioned that "it . . . [was their] understanding that the Rev. N. H. McBayne was practicing both callings while in Detroit."<sup>25</sup>

After an initially warm reception by all classes of the city's African American community, McBayne suffered a loss of reputation due in part to his social climbing, an unethical business deal, and a generally supercilious attitude. When he first arrived in Detroit, his name was misspelled in the *Plaindealer* as "McBain" and again as McCabe, but the mistake was quickly corrected, suggesting the staff of the paper knew his actual given and surname. With uncharacteristic carelessness, the *Plaindealer* began erroneously to refer to him as "Reverend A. G. McBayne" rather than by his correct initials, N. F. Considering that "naming—proposing, *imposing* [italics mine], and accepting names—can be a political exercise," the paper's incorrect identification may have indicated an attempt to slight and devalue the minister as his popularity waned and his actions in the community became contentious. That his misnaming may have occurred as a harmless typographical error is a possibility, but other events that occurred in McBayne's life during the time suggest that this was not the case.<sup>26</sup>

During his brief stay in the city, McBayne changed residences several times. Upon his arrival in Detroit, he roomed in a house at 180 Macomb Street. He took a room in a house at 167 Mullett Street and in April 1893 moved again to 222 Maple Street. Little is revealed in extant sources to explain why he moved so frequently in such a brief period. His reasons may have been as simple as a desire for better or cheaper housing. As his residential moves took him further from the heart of the black district, they could suggest an effort to live amongst the city's "better classes" and separate himself from the working-class blacks who comprised the bulk of his congregation.<sup>27</sup>

The Depression of 1893 had a devastating effect on white workers employed in Detroit industries, with estimates of 25,000 unemployed men. The economic effect of the depression on the African American community proved even more severe, as blacks, who already had the most marginal employment, also had to compete with scores of immigrant whites for jobs. Few forms of government social welfare existed and even fewer African American institutions had the resources to provide members of the black community with any economic assistance. The working-class congregation of Second Baptist had the fewest resources of the city's African American churches and McBayne's departure from the city may relate to this fact.<sup>28</sup>

One incident provides clues to McBayne's removal from Detroit to return to Toronto. As reported in the *Plaindealer* in May 1893, McBayne had evidently experienced economic difficulties that may have influenced his decision to leave the city. He had purchased a horse from a woman named Adelaide Smith Venell at an agreed upon price. After paying an installment of the purchase price, he would not or could not pay the remainder and returned the horse to Venell. Then he demanded the horse back

and when Venell refused to surrender the animal, McBayne “replevined it.” Venell hired an attorney to represent her in court in effort to reclaim the horse or obtain payment.<sup>29</sup>

While no sources exist that reveal the outcome of the case, the evidence suggests McBayne acted rather unscrupulously for a member of the clergy. Since ownership of a horse was considered a status symbol, perhaps he was attempting to represent himself as a member of the elite, albeit in an unethical manner. Possibly the economic depression had affected his financial circumstances to the extent that even his dual professions prevented him from acquiring the luxury goods to which he still believed himself entitled. Perhaps he needed the horse as transportation to make house calls on his patients to maintain income as a physician. African Americans have traditionally stereotyped West Indians as “being extremely frugal” and “being extremely pushy,” and McBayne’s actions in the incident indicate his willingness to lower his moral standards to push his way into Detroit’s “better classes.”<sup>30</sup>

The court case preceded McBayne’s exit from the city. Church historians claim that by December 1893 he began practicing medicine full-time. The 1893 city directory corroborates this information and listed him as a physician at his Maple Street address, although he had begun to use the name Nathaniel rather than Noah. Perhaps his legal difficulties led him to practice medicine under an alias. As neither name appears in any directories after 1893 or in any census records, McBayne had conceivably left Detroit by 1894.<sup>31</sup>

Joshua Massiah and Noah McBayne both had advantages such as education that gave them recognition and that allowed them to claim leadership of different strata of Detroit’s African American community in the 1890s. Both men migrated to the city to

further their professional ambitions and had a significant influence in the primary institution of the community, the black church. While Massiah had a secure position in the black elite and spent a considerable amount of his professional life in the city, McBayne attempted and failed to gain permanent access to upper-class society and left the city after a brief sojourn.

The lives and careers of both men illustrate the transnational patterns associated with West Indian immigrants in the twentieth century. Massiah emigrated from Barbados and lived in England before he migrated to the U. S. McBayne left Jamaica to obtain an education in Toronto prior to his arrival in Detroit. These two men provide examples of the kind of mobility that characterized West Indian immigrants and that later benefited from improved transportation after World War II.

Other West Indian immigrants migrated to the city during the period for similar reasons and some, like Massiah, remained for a large portion of their adult lives. Others, like McBayne came to Detroit briefly, but achieved acknowledgment for his superior educational attainments as well as his contributions one of the preeminent institutions in the African American community. Both men had experiences that illustrate how African Americans' perceptions of class status and West Indian ethnicity contributed to immigrants ability to rise to positions of leadership in nineteenth-century black Detroit. Immigrants like Massiah and McBayne encouraged the perception of West Indians having a higher class status to take advantage of professional opportunities in black churches.

The next chapter examines the experiences of Jamaican immigrant Robert M. Stimpson, who, like McBayne, resided in Detroit for a very short time. As is the case

with all of the subjects examined in this study, Stimpson sought to parlay his advanced education in medicine and professional attainment as a physician into economic reward, but proved unable or unwilling to integrate successfully into the African American community of Detroit or the broader American society and returned to Jamaica where he became a member of the small black middle class of the colony.

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<sup>1</sup> David Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 18, 135. Working-class West Indians no doubt established several smaller storefront black churches, examples of what Wallace Zane describes as “shamanistic Christianity” in the city, although these not addressed in this study because it examines the middle class. The churches of that combine “shamanic technique and Christian ideology” are found throughout the Caribbean and known as Spiritual Baptists, Shango Baptists, the Converted, the Penitent, and many other names. The churches and the religious practices they follow emerge out of the colonial context of the Caribbean from African, European, and local antecedents. These religions and their churches have less status than the more orthodox denominations and generally attract poorer congregants. When these congregants immigrate to the United States, they recreate their religious practices in the new setting, as Zane finds in the case of St. Vincentians who migrated to New York. Although beyond the scope of this dissertation, I am almost certain immigrants from the Caribbean brought these religious practices to Detroit as well. See Wallace W. Zane, *Journey to the Spiritual Lands: The Natural History of a West Indian Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 137; D. Augustus Straker, *A Trip to the Windward Islands: Or Then and Now* (Detroit, Michigan: James H. Stone and Company, 1896), 67; George F. Bragg, *The History of the Afro-American Group of the Episcopal Church* (Baltimore: Church Advocate Press, 1922), 178, 119.

<sup>3</sup> Bragg, *Afro-American Episcopal Church*, 118-119; “St. Matthew’s Celebrates 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary,” Histories and Historical Miscellanea, Box 1, St. Matthew’s and St. Joseph’s Episcopal Church (Detroit, Michigan) Records, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan; *Detroit Free Press*, 16 January 1900. The church erected at St. Antoine and Elizabeth Streets stood from 1883 until it faced the wrecking ball in 1998. The building itself was abandoned in 1971 when St. Matthew’s merged with St. Joseph’s Episcopal at Woodward and Holbrook, where it currently resides.

<sup>4</sup> Straker, *Windward Islands*, 67; *Detroit Informer*; 6 January 1900; Nancy Foner, ed., *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 7-10; Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 137.

<sup>5</sup> *Detroit Informer*, 6 January 1900; “A Brief History of St. Matthew’s Church,” St. Matthew’s and St. Joseph’s Records; *Detroit Free Press*, 12 January 1916.

<sup>6</sup> Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 139.

<sup>7</sup> “Brief History of St. Matthew’s,” St. Matthew’s and St. Joseph’s Records; Bragg, *Afro-American Episcopal Church*, 119, 178.

<sup>8</sup> *Detroit Informer*, 6 January 1900; Bragg, *Afro-American Episcopal Church*, 119.

<sup>9</sup> *Detroit Informer*, 6 January 1900.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 12 January 1916.

<sup>12</sup> Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 19, 136, 144; Second Baptist Church, *Sesquicentennial Journal*, “Continuing in Service by Faith:” Celebrating One Hundred Fiftieth Anniversary of Second Baptist Church, 441-461 Monroe Avenue, Detroit, Michigan, 1836-1986 (Detroit: Second Baptist Church. 1986), 74.

<sup>13</sup> Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 19, 136, 144; Second Baptist Church, *Sesquicentennial Journal*, “Continuing in Service by Faith:” Celebrating One Hundred Fiftieth Anniversary of Second Baptist Church, 441-461 Monroe Avenue, Detroit, Michigan, 1836-1986 (Detroit: Second Baptist Church. 1986), 74. For biographical material on John DeBaptiste and Adolph Richards, see Ruth Coder Fitzgerald, A

*Different Story: The Black History of Fredericksburg, Stafford, and Spotsylvania, Virginia* (n.p.: Unicorn, 1979) and W. B. Hartgrove, "The Story of Maria Louise Moore and Fannie M. Richards," *Journal of Negro History* 1, no. 1 (January 1916): 23-33. For information concerning the two families, especially George DeBaptiste, see also the Ronald Palmer Papers, Moreland Spingarn Collection, Howard University and Katherine DuPre Lumpkin, "'The General Plan Was Freedom': A Negro Secret Order on the Underground Railroad," *Phylon* 28, no. 1 (1967): 63-77

<sup>14</sup> Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 144.

<sup>15</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 4 December 1891, 11 December 1891.

<sup>16</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer* 25 March 1892, 15 April 1892, 22 April 1892, 29 April 1892; Nathaniel Leach, *Reaching Out to Freedom: The Second Baptist Connection* (Detroit: self-published, 1988), 34; Second Baptist Church, *Sesquicentennial Journal, "Continuing in Service by Faith": Celebrating One Hundred Fiftieth Anniversary of Second Baptist Church, 441-461 Monroe Avenue, Detroit, Michigan, 1836-1986* (Detroit: Second Baptist Church), 74; Frank V. Foster, "The Second That I Know" (Detroit: Second Baptist Church, 1948, mimeographed).

<sup>17</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 15 April 1892; Leach, *Reaching Out to Freedom*, 34; Patrick Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902: Race, Class, and Social Control* (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1991), 225-226.

<sup>18</sup> Leach, *Reaching Out to Freedom*, 34; *Plaindealer*, 20 May 1892; Bryan, *Jamaican People*, 41-45. According to Bryan, in 1895, a *New York Times* correspondent brought Bedwardism to the attention of the paper's American readers.

<sup>19</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 15 July 1892, 16 September 1892, 7 October 1892, 18 November 1892.

<sup>20</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 15 April 1892; 7 October 1892, 22 July 1892, 16 September 1892.

<sup>21</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 4 November 1892, 11 November 1892, 25 November 1892, 29 January 1892.

<sup>22</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer* 4 December 1891.

<sup>23</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 11 December 1891, 11 25 1892, 11 November 1892, 16 September 1892, 7 October 1892, 12 May 1893.

<sup>24</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 4 December 1891, 1 April 1892, 7 April 1893.

<sup>25</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 7 April 1893; Leach, *Reaching Out to Freedom*, 34.

<sup>26</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 5 April 1892, 29 May 1892, 15 July 1892, 11 November 1892, 2 February 1892, 3 March 1893, 10 March 1893; Ben L. Martin, "From Negro to Black to African American: The Power of Names and Naming," *Political Science Quarterly* 106, no.1 (spring 1991): 83.

<sup>27</sup> *Detroit City Directory*, (Detroit: R. L. Polk & Co., 1892), 749, 782; *Detroit Plaindealer*, 21 April 1893.

<sup>28</sup> Dan Lochbiler, "The Shoemaker Who Looked Like a King," *Detroit News*, 11 June 1998, <http://apps.detnews.com/apps/history/index.php?id=175> accessed 8 May 2004; Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 136, 144, 122-124.

<sup>29</sup> *Detroit Plaindealer*, 5 May 1893, 12 May 1893, 19 May 1893.

<sup>30</sup> John C. Walter, "West Indian Immigrants: Those Arrogant Bastards," *Contributions in Black Studies* 5 (1981-82): 22.

<sup>31</sup> *Detroit City Directory*, 782; Leach, *Reaching Out to Freedom*, 34; Second Baptist Church, *Sesquicentennial Journal*, 74.

## **Chapter 4**

### **“Placing Me on the Same Platform as Others Who Did Similar Service”: The Role of Race and Ethnicity in Robert M. Stimpson’s Long-Distance Fight with the U. S. War Department**

Many West Indian immigrants used class and ethnic distinctions to distinguish themselves from African Americans. The experiences of Jamaican immigrant Robert M. Stimpson illustrate that while African Americans and West Indians were well aware of class and ethnic differences between the two groups, whites sometimes ignored these differences and classified both groups by race. Whites’ tendency to categorize West Indians and African Americans as black resulted in West Indians suffering from the very racist treatment they hoped to avoid by differentiating themselves from African Americans.

Like Massiah and McBayne, Stimpson came to Detroit in search of opportunities by which he could maximize his fine education. Emigrating from Jamaica in 1894, Stimpson chose the route of an increasing number of black Jamaicans during the late nineteenth century. Stimpson serves as early example of a West Indian immigrant who established the type of transnational pattern which would become more common in the twentieth century. After attending medical school in Canada, Stimpson arrived in Detroit as the Spanish-American War commenced in 1898. He quickly met Barbadian attorney D. Augustus Straker, who introduced Stimpson into the ranks of the black elite and assisted him in obtaining a position of political patronage, as a physician serving in the 33<sup>rd</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiments during the Spanish American War. Stimpson perceived himself as a prime example of what a black man could accomplish when given an opportunity. It is unclear whether he intended to settle in the United States or came to Detroit as a temporary migrant who never meant to stay

permanently in the country. It is clear that Stimpson considered his service to the Michigan regiments as so highly valuable that he fought to gain recognition and restitution in the form of a pension from the United States War Department. His struggle indicates that no matter how significant his undertakings, his racial and ethnic identity prevented him from achieving the recognition that he believed he deserved. Stimpson did not integrate into the middle-class stratum of black Detroit or incorporate into American society, but returned to Jamaica and his rural bourgeois origins after his exposure to the racially segregated conditions he encountered in the United States. Clearly, Stimpson preferred to attempt to overcome the limited opportunities afforded black Jamaicans in his homeland than to battle against American racism. At the conclusion of the war, Stimpson returned to Jamaica

Stimpson was born December 11, 1868, in the village of Porus in the parish of Manchester. His parents, Philip and Elizabeth, were proprietors who were part of an internal migration to parishes with available land. The availability of land in Manchester resulted largely from the closing of sugar estates in the parish. Stimpson's account of how young men in the parish obtained a home by collective effort presents a vivid description of the economy of peasant proprietors in rural Jamaica:

Needless to say they were all of poor parentage; in some cases removed but one or two generations from slavery. In many instances the parent presented the son an acre of land, taken from the old homestead; in rarer cases, the young man would by a stroke of good fortune, such as having been in the employment of a family of the better class, for a year or more, and by frugality be able to have saved a few pounds, which his parents carefully invested in a piece of land for a home. In those days there were a few coffee plantations with large tracts of forest lands . . . . The prospective "homesteader" would approach the overseer and ask to be allowed to purchase a few hard wood trees . . . tree[s] of considerable proportions would be selected [to build a house]. This done, the trees remained until his friends were able to select a day [to] be given to him. This usually happened to be a Friday, the earlier days of the week being employed either in jobbing or in one's own fieldwork.<sup>1</sup>



Stimpson's narrative attests to the determination of the post-slavery generations to have some autonomy in their work, as well as the "frugality" for which West Indians are known. Stimpson gives a clear account of the economic activities that provided rural Jamaicans with cash—working on the estates, "jobbing" (conducting entrepreneurial activities as vendors in the markets), often selling the goods produced in "one's own" fields. These economic activities provided rural Jamaicans with the fees needed to pay for their children's education.

Stimpson obviously rejected farming as a livelihood, choosing instead to pursue an education. His choice to do so may have resulted from the fact that land was less available by the 1880s, when he would have reached adulthood. Stimpson obtained an education against considerable odds. As noted by historian Patrick Bryan

It is clear that a relatively few black [as opposed to mixed-race] children proved socially mobile through education . . . Yet it should be understood that secondary education was not designed for the working classes but essentially to solidify class boundaries. The fee structure of secondary schools, their selection process, syllabus, and method of evaluation "helped to rigidify class boundaries and to alienate one group of people from the majority in the society." Secondary schools were not only few in number but their intake was also small.<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately for Stimpson, education became government sponsored in 1867, the year before his birth. With the implementation of government subsidy, the establishment of schools increased in the colony from 687 in 1881 to 962 in 1895. In addition, the Anglican bishop (and later Archbishop) Enos Nuttall encouraged at least a rudimentary education for rural black children and "generally favoured educational opportunities for bright or promising students of whatever race," which was an accurate description of Stimpson.<sup>3</sup>

Stimpson's family evidently managed to pay his school fees. Unlike with most rural children, cultivation of the family's land did not require his labor to such an extent that it prevented his attendance at the Pratville Elementary School located in a town near Porus, but

because of the costs of attending school “he was forced to go into mercantile life.” Stimpson noted that “at an early age he beg[a]n to hustle for himself,” perhaps selling the produce his family raised. He received tuition assistance from local minister C. L. Barnes. Another minister, T. A. Fraser, acted as a mentor to Stimpson and advised him to become a pharmacist by training at “the Dispensing School of the Public Hospital [in] Kingston.” After completing his studies in Porus, Stimpson secondary school in Kingston, following a common rural-to-urban pattern of migration, which had begun to increase the population of the colony’s cities beginning in the 1880s.<sup>4</sup>

The sons and daughters of prosperous rural families comprised the bulk of the black middle class in nineteenth-century Jamaica. Positions traditionally reserved for whites or coloreds in the civil service, the military, and police force opened to blacks, who in those occupations formed one section of the black middle class. Another segment consisted of artisans, teachers, and the members of the black intelligentsia. A very few rural youths, like Stimpson, had the opportunity to pursue high-status professional careers.<sup>5</sup>

A caste system based on color and the rigidity of the island’s class structure thwarted Stimpson’s efforts to obtain a position in the upper strata of Jamaican society. As “a full-blooded Negro, very dark, and with features characteristic of the race,” he clearly did not belong to the colored population. To mixed race members of the island’s population accrued the advantages associated with a color caste. For example, slave owners more frequently manumitted them during slavery, they possessed greater economic resources, and they had greater access to the employment in both manual labor and professional occupations.<sup>6</sup>

Although distinctions based on color decreased, the racism that upheld the color caste remained. The elite favored the coloreds for their biological ties to whites, but their kinship with

blacks prevented their recognition as equals in white society. If the “racial power structure conspir[ed] to encourage the colored elite to emulate . . . white[s],” then upwardly mobile blacks like Stimpson must have felt even greater pressure to adhere to the conventions dictated by the dominant social order.<sup>7</sup>

Stimpson clearly spoke Standard English in addition to patois. An interview in a local Detroit newspaper mentioned his speech patterns, noting that he spoke “with a broad English accent,” that the white reporter found “strange.” As was typical of colonial Jamaican society, “[t]he ability to speak ‘good English’ was a measure of the extent to which a citizen was conversant with British culture.”<sup>8</sup>

His formal, as opposed to common law, marriage in St. Michael’s Anglican Church in Kingston in 1895 was another manner by which Stimpson displayed his assimilation of Anglo cultural norms. His first wife died in 1920, and he remarried five years later, this time in St. George’s Anglican Church, in Kingston. Among rural working-class Jamaicans, legal church marriages were uncommon, largely due to the monetary outlay connected with weddings and the loss of independence Jamaican peasant women associated with marriage. In the period between 1890 and 1901, rates of marriage in Manchester were among the lowest of all the colony’s parishes. Stimpson viewed marriage in the same way as members of the plantocracy and the middle class, as a method of conferring respectability.<sup>9</sup>

The majority of rural blacks had little contact with the church or educational facilities, and consequently they assimilated few European cultural norms. Stimpson’s experiences, however, brought him into direct association with these institutions. It is clear that he followed prevailing norms and mores of white colonial society, becoming, in effect, an upwardly mobile “Anglo-African.” The opportunity to attend post secondary institutions was usually reserved for

whites and coloreds. The odds against black men like Stimpson obtaining this level of education during the period were astronomical.<sup>10</sup>

In 1887, at the age of nineteen, Stimpson began the courses required to become a licensed pharmacist. His intellectual ability and determination earned him the attention of the hospital's senior medical officer, a physician named Frank Saunders, who became another of Stimpson's mentors and helped him with the expenses he incurred at the school. A year and a half after he began his courses, Saunders recommended Stimpson for a position at Hordley Hospital in the parish of St. Thomas. Before he received his license in 1895, he held positions in hospitals in Kingston, St. Ann's Bay, and May Pen.<sup>11</sup>

The colonial government enticed physicians to the island from England with benefits such as ownership of the pharmacies, which gave them a near monopoly. Pharmacists who lacked this type of government protection could not compete economically with the physician-owned pharmacies. The government's recruiting of white physicians exacerbated the tension between them and the pharmacists.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps this type of economic and social competition encouraged Stimpson to further his education and attend medical school. Stimpson recognized that the lack of medical services in Porus during the 1890s, required residents to travel considerable distances to obtain assistance. Recognizing this dearth in medical services may have influenced his decision to become a physician as "he first aspired to be a doctor . . . at a very tender age." In spite of the economic and social constraints against upward mobility, Stimpson emigrated from Jamaica to attend medical school.<sup>13</sup>

In 1895, Stimpson left the colony to attend Bishop's University near Montreal where he specialized in surgery. Jamaica had experienced a wave of emigration from 1885 to 1920,

mostly to Central and South America, Cuba, and Haiti as the colony relied on economic growth in neighboring territories to lessen the high rates of unemployment. In the period between 1881 and 1891 a net migration of 24,000 Jamaicans occurred. The stream of migrants to Canada, the United States, and Britain remained minuscule until after the turn of the century, making Stimpson part of the migratory vanguard.<sup>14</sup>

The trend toward increased emigration from Jamaica has many causes. Peter D. Fraser observed in his study of migration during the period that

[r]ecent writers have laid great stress on migration being one sign of West Indians' search for independence from the domination exercised by plantation owners; others have stressed the creation of a migration tradition or a psychological predisposition among West Indians to migrate. Both of these features played a part in the nineteenth century migrations. Migrants were mainly younger adults who could vote effectively with their feet against the restrictions of politics and society . . . Yet basically the struggle against the elite revolved around the issues of the control of limited resources, whether land or labor, and the limited economic, social, and political opportunities available to black West Indians at home.<sup>15</sup>

Stimpson clearly migrated to find greater opportunities than those available to young black men in Jamaica.

While encouraged by the opportunity to study abroad, Stimpson encountered racial discrimination while a student in Montreal. He observed the multiethnic composition of the city, which had "a French-Canadian element and an Irish-Canadian population," but segregated "[c]oloured West Indian students." Because of racism, he believed, "the progressive coloured man could scarce hope to have fair play." The racism he encountered in Montreal led him later to renounce his alma mater Bishop's University and encourage West Indians to attend the University of Toronto, as in his opinion, "it offer[ed] every facility to coloured students" and the city "boast[ed] the best coloured society in all Canada." In addition, he perceived whites in

Toronto to be less overtly racist “and the Negro needn’t be reminded that he ‘has shiny eyes and pearly teeth’ in a manner of derision.” Toronto was a city where West Indian immigrants would “always get a square deal.”<sup>16</sup>

After obtaining his medical degree at Bishop’s University, Stimpson migrated to the United States and arrived in Detroit in February 1898. He established a private medical practice and made the acquaintance of other black professionals who had emigrated from the West Indies. Stimpson found his niche in this small coterie of educated black immigrants, which included Joshua Massiah and N. F. McBayne. Probably Stimpson’s most influential associate was prominent attorney D. Augustus Straker of Barbados.<sup>17</sup>

Through Stimpson’s association with Straker he became acquainted with other members of the city’s black elite, as well as whites who held key positions in the Republican Party. Straker’s involvement in party politics in Detroit most likely led to Stimpson’s acquaintance with the state’s governor, Hazen Pingree. Pingree chose Straker as a delegate to a convention shortly after meeting Stimpson. As an advocate of reformist politics, the governor rewarded members of the black elite with a few patronage positions. He also curried favor with a growing black constituency by requesting that Secretary of War Russell Alger enlist “colored troops” from the city in the Spanish-American war effort.<sup>18</sup>

The governor played a significant role in the recruitment and deployment of soldiers in the Michigan 33<sup>rd</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry, who fought in Cuba during the Spanish-American War. With no immunities to tropical diseases, the soldiers from Michigan died with greater frequency from malaria, yellow fever, and dysentery than from actual combat. In charge of constructing a road from Daiquiri to Siboney and building bridges across numerous rivers and streams, the soldiers of the 33<sup>rd</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry were exposed to the worst disease-causing environments.

Mosquitoes that carried malaria and yellow fever bred in the humid and swampy areas where the Michigan regiments were deployed.<sup>19</sup>

The rates of death from illness prompted the governor to appoint physicians to care for the soldiers from Michigan while serving in Cuba. Previous exposure to yellow fever or malaria served as one of the stipulations of the appointments. Therefore, Stimpson, along with four white physicians chosen by the governor, were known as “immunes.” In May 1898, after the War Department began recruiting immunes, African American leaders suggested to war secretary Alger that blacks could provide ten regiments of immunes and “pointed out the especial service of colored troops, bred in the southern climate.” Alger assured the leaders several of the immune regiments “would be composed of men of their race.”<sup>20</sup>

The governor commissioned Stimpson at the rank of Captain-Surgeon and gave him letters of recommendation to Alger, who provided “necessary credentials” to present to General Rufus Shafter, the commander of ground forces in the Santiago campaign. Stimpson became “the first colored doctor sent from the north to assume such an honorable and important position.” Since no three-tiered color caste existed in America and only slight advantage accrued to people of mixed race, largely in the African American community, so Stimpson’s designation as “colored” had a decidedly different connotation than it would in Jamaica. In fact, the term “colored” in the U. S. was arguably a more polite and generic racial designation that contrasted with various racist epithets applied to blacks at the time.<sup>21</sup>

When reporters questioned Stimpson about going to Cuba, he “said that the trip . . . would bring great pleasure to him as it would give him an opportunity to visit his mother,” presumably when his ship docked in Jamaica to take on coal and supplies. The irony of a black Jamaican physician volunteering to care for white soldiers in an American war of imperialism to

establish control over black and brown people and using the excursion to visit his mother should not be lost on us. The manner in which political, racial, and social factors intertwined during the war portended Stimpson's later experiences with the American government.<sup>22</sup>

Stimpson served as a physician in Cuba until September 1898, when the regiments he attended were ordered back to Detroit. Their condition had deteriorated so severely that they were the first group to leave Cuba. He commanded two companies of soldiers in transport to the military hospitals at Camp Wikoff on Montauk Point, Long Island, where the men received a brief examination and enjoyed a period of recuperation before returning to Detroit. During the whole process, Stimpson acted in some capacity in a position of responsibility.<sup>23</sup>

Stimpson shipped out again, this time en route to San Juan, Puerto Rico. Working directly under the head of the military hospital there, he served in this capacity until 1899. His stay in Puerto Rico was brief. Perhaps he recognized that his opportunities were limited as military personnel and others from the U. S. had transported there a particularly American brand of racial segregation in the new colonies acquired from Spain. At the conclusion of his military service, Stimpson would migrate to Edinburgh, and Glasgow, Scotland, and London before returning to Jamaica in 1902.<sup>24</sup>

Although Stimpson's direct association with Detroit's African American community ended at this time, in Jamaica his professional life continued to focus on treatment of infectious diseases, based on his experience in service of the 33<sup>rd</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> Michigan. As a transnational migrant who had returned with additional professional accreditation, as well as the enhanced status associated with his personal appointment to a position of responsibility by the governor of a state in a foreign country, Stimpson acquired a certain social standing when he returned to the island. He established a medical practice in Manchester, where the local press touted him as one



of the “talented sons” of the parish. The accreditation Stimpson received overseas facilitated his success in building a lucrative private practice. In addition, he obtained several high status appointments in the colonial government’s medical system. Between 1911 and 1921, he served as the appointed District Medical Officer (DMO) for the parishes of St. Mary, St. Elizabeth and Manchester, where he was appointed also as a justice of the peace. He acted as the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) for the parish of St. Elizabeth as well as a brief stint as a resident at the public hospital in Kingston. The opportunity to gain such respectable positions in the colonial bureaucracy is similar to Stimpson’s ability to obtain patronage from Pingree and use his military service to create greater opportunities. Government appointments played a crucial role for the remainder of Stimpson’s professional life.<sup>25</sup>

Upon his return to Jamaica the experience gained while with the Michigan regiments served him well. Much of Stimpson’s work for the government focused on the treatment of infectious tropical diseases, as it had in his service with the 33<sup>rd</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> Michigan. His experiences with the regiments in Cuba primed him for a leading role in the Jamaican government’s efforts to wipe out malaria, yellow fever, and venereal and other epidemic diseases. His appointment in the United States as an “expert” in this branch of medicine provided Stimpson with professional clout in Jamaica.<sup>26</sup>

In October 1911, members of the Annotto Bay Institute held a banquet in Stimpson’s honor to commemorate his services as DMO in efforts to eradicate malaria in the town. He received praise for his “untiring zeal in carrying through the arduous and important duties” in the small swampy lowland regions in the parish of St. Mary. Residents of the community so valued Stimpson’s expertise, that they professed that he had “draw[n] out . . . [their] highest esteem, love, and regard.”<sup>27</sup>

On his arrival, Stimpson regarded Annotto Bay as a “veritable death trap,” which he associated with “coolies, malaria, and mosquitoes.” Stimpson’s opinion rested largely on the presence of numerous indentured East Indians in the town, who had rioted in 1902 in protest of their living conditions, as well as the high rates of disease everywhere on the coasts. He asserted the government needed to assist local endeavors to improve the health of the residents and make the region more resemble the mountainous areas of the island with their much lower instances of disease. He would promote government intervention in prevention of the diseases that attacked schoolchildren, such as yaws and hookworm, and thwarted their education. Stimpson campaigned against the spread of venereal disease and “drew a vivid picture of the terrible ravages of diseases due to impure living, which . . . sapp[ed] the manhood of Jamaica.”<sup>28</sup>

Across the colony in the parishes where he served, both black and white professionals held Stimpson in high regard. The colony’s foremost daily newspaper, the *Gleaner*, frequently published his activities and opinions and hailed him as “a worthy son of Jamaica.” At Stimpson’s swearing-in ceremony as a justice of the peace in November 1911, the senior magistrates commended Stimpson as an example of a black man who they had no doubts “would discharge his duties faithfully and loyally.”<sup>29</sup>

Many of Stimpson’s “friends and admirers” were black men like him who had emigrated from the colony to attend foreign universities and then returned. Many of them like Stimpson had attended Bishop University and obtained medical degrees and returned to Jamaica. Several Jamaicans were counted among the alumni, but as Stimpson noted many scholars “from other West Indian islands had graduated” from the school.<sup>30</sup>

In spite of his return to Jamaica, Stimpson obviously kept abreast of events in the United States. On May 1, 1926 the U.S. government announced that those men who had served in the

Spanish-American War and the Philippine “insurrection” were eligible to receive pensions from the War Department. By the end of the month, Stimpson submitted his application to the Secretary of War, beginning a long and frustrating struggle to obtain what he believed rightfully his.<sup>31</sup>

The Bureau of Pensions first required Stimpson to submit a formal application in place of the typewritten letter he sent describing his service. As the government required the form sworn and subscribed before an official, Stimpson had to obtain a certificate from the American consul in Kingston, verifying the authorized position and signature of Hydl McCaulay, a justice of the peace from the parish of Clarendon. The bureau received the certificate on July 12. Stimpson wrote to Winfield Scott, commissioner of pensions bureau, again two weeks later.<sup>32</sup>

On August 3, Scott requested from the War Department’s Adjutant General’s Office a certificate of examination given prior to Stimpson’s discharge from the army or a tracing of his signature. Ten days later the office announced to the commission of pensions that “[t]he name Robert M. Stimpson has not been found on the rolls of either the 33<sup>rd</sup> or the 34<sup>th</sup> Mich[igan] Infantry in the service of the United States in the War with Spain.” The government denied any knowledge of his participation.<sup>33</sup>

Attempts to locate Stimpson in the War Department’s bureaucratic infrastructure continued throughout September. Toward the end of the month, the Surgeon General’s Office located “a claim of the State of Michigan for reimbursement of expenses incurred in raising volunteer forces for the Spanish-American War, comprising a large number of vouchers, including . . . payments by the State to R. M Stimpson, Contract Surgeon, \$66.50 August 1898, and \$19.98 September 6-12, 1898.” The claim included vouchers for another of the “immune” doctors, O. M. Stephenson, whose expense account expenditures included taxis, telegrams,

champagne, and “special medicines.” Perhaps the frivolity of claims such as this made the War Department leery of Stimpson’s eligibility.<sup>34</sup>

The memo asserted the Surgeon General’s Office and the War Department’s stance in unequivocal terms: “Not contracted with by the United States. No evidence is furnished showing the necessity of his employment, or that the medical officers with the regiments in either Cuba or at Camp Wikoff were incapacitated . . . [by] the performance of their duties.” At this point, the department conceded Stimpson may have performed in the capacity he claimed, but his service was with the state of Michigan not with the United States government. Further, the government maintained that his service had not been necessary and his lack of injuries made him ineligible for a military pension.<sup>35</sup>

Not satisfied with the War Department’s determination, Stimpson continued to press the government for a pension. At this junction, it appears Stimpson wanted acknowledgement that he had served as “an expert in tropical diseases” as he put it, rather than financial compensation, since his total salary while in the army amounted to \$86.50. It is safe to conclude that a monthly pension based on this amount would have been meager and not worth the efforts Stimpson made, unless had he encountered severe economic setbacks in the depression of the late 1920s.<sup>36</sup>

The War Department again reviewed and rejected Stimpson’s claim on April 5, 1927. The department reverted to its original position, that it could not locate Stimpson in the muster rolls of the regiments with which he had served. Communication between Stimpson and the War Department appear to have ceased at this point. Perhaps the department’s reversal of its earlier stance had discouraged him and the complications of long-distance wrangling proved burdensome when concerning such a small sum of money.<sup>37</sup>

In January 1930, Stimpson resumed his battle. This time he appealed to John Ketcham, a congressman from Michigan, emphasizing that he had done “active service, suffered and undertook all the risks of a soldier, and ha[d] a moral claim on the pension authorities.” He requested that the representative “make a local investigation” to “see if . . . [his] claim could not be verified.” In closing his letter, Stimpson indicated for the first time that he suspected the War Department’s refusals had racial implications. In addition to making a moral claim to financial remuneration he understood that “securing a pension” had the effect of “placing [him] on the same platform as others [the white physicians] who did similar service.”<sup>38</sup>

The congressman forwarded Stimpson’s appeal back to the War Department, which again rejected it. Had he complied with Stimpson’s request for a local investigation, he would have discovered much evidence proving that Stimpson at least had contracted with the state government. The War Department in referring to his “alleged service as a surgeon” remained unwilling to concede that Stimpson had served in any capacity and concluded that the prior rejection of his pension was “proper.” He may have gained some slight satisfaction from the final response issued by the War Department, which notified Stimpson in February 1930 that his “service was contracted for by the Governor of Michigan,” not by the federal government, and further “the claim of the State of Michigan for reimbursement was refused by the United States.”<sup>39</sup>

It is tempting to accept the government’s determination at face value. Technically, Stimpson was not entitled to a federal pension. The significance of his struggle with the War Department lies in his perception of the racial bias that he believed kept him from attaining the social status of the white physicians he considered his colleagues. His determination to force the government to acknowledge that his “alleged” service had occurred in fact suggests that his fight

had as much to do with getting recognition for his achievements as a professional, a black man, and a sojourner in America who aided the country in a manner as loyal as any patriot. It is safe to assume that these very factors caused the War Department to doubt the validity of Stimpson's claim and to utilize bureaucratic machinations in order to deny him the recognition he believed his due.

Stimpson's continued battle with the War Department illustrates his refusal to accept or inability to navigate the racial norms that characterized American society at the beginning of the twentieth century. The class-based attributes of education and professionalism that were associated with Stimpson's West Indian ethnic background did not assure inclusion into American society. Like Straker, Massiah and other influential West Indian immigrants in the city, Stimpson had access to powerful whites who could facilitate his progress during his American sojourn. His permanent return to Jamaica, ultimately, however, suggests he rejected integration into the African American middle class in Detroit and chose to return to rural Jamaica, where he took an upwardly mobile trajectory to become part of the island's small black bourgeoisie and benefited socially and economically as a result of his transnational experiences.

Ultimately, Stimpson did not benefit from the wages of class and ethnicity in the manner in which he felt entitled in American society. The white government officials whom he encountered discounted or ignored the class and ethnic advantages West Indian immigrants like Stimpson believed differentiated them from African Americans. Stimpson believed incorrectly his education and professional attainment protected him or would mitigate the brunt of American racism.

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<sup>1</sup> United States War Department, Declaration for Pension, 30 June 1926; Patrick Bryan, *The Jamaican People 1880-1902, Race, Class and Social Control* (Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 1991, 2000), 2, 6, 7, 132; Robert M. Stimpson, "Reminiscences of Communal Life in Southern Manchester," ; "The Men with Backbone--Whom We Delight to Honor," *The Jamaica Critic*. 1, no. 12 (December 1926): 22-23.

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- <sup>2</sup> Bryan, *Jamaican People*, 128.
- <sup>3</sup> Bryan, *Jamaican People*, 116-119.
- <sup>4</sup> *The Detroit Journal*, 5 August 1898; "The Men with Backbone--Whom We Delight to Honor," 22; Bryan, *Jamaican People*, 149.
- <sup>5</sup> Bryan, *Jamaican People*, 216-236.
- <sup>6</sup> *The Detroit Journal*, 5 August 1898; Bryan, *Jamaican People*, 81.
- <sup>7</sup> Bryan, *Jamaican People*, 67, 88.
- <sup>8</sup> *The Detroit Journal*, 5 August, 1898; Bryan, *Jamaican People*, 84.
- <sup>9</sup> United States War Department, Declaration for Pension, 30 June 1926; Bryan, *Jamaican People*, 93, 99, 100.
- <sup>10</sup> Bryan, *Jamaican People*, 118-119.
- <sup>11</sup> "The Men with Backbone--Whom We Delight to Honor," 23; *The Detroit Journal*, 5 August 1898; Bryan, *Jamaican People*, 167-168.
- <sup>12</sup> *The Detroit Journal*, 5 August 1898; Bryan, *Jamaican People*, 167-168.
- <sup>13</sup> Bryan, *Jamaican People*, 169; *The Detroit Journal*, 5 August 1898.
- <sup>14</sup> "The Men with Backbone--Whom We Delight to Honor." See Christopher Nicholl, *Bishop's University, 1843-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994). Bishop's College was founded in 1843 to serve the English-speaking community of Quebec. In 1853, the school became Bishop's University. The university was established under the auspices of the Anglican Church and funded in part by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK). The school was under the direction of the church until 1947, when it became nondenominational. *The Detroit Journal*, 5 August 1898; Peter D. Fraser, "Nineteenth-Century West Indian Migration to Britain," in Ransford W. Palmer, ed., *In Search of a Better Life: Perspectives on Migration from the Caribbean* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 27, 33.
- <sup>15</sup> Fraser, "West Indian Migration," 26.
- <sup>16</sup> *Jamaican Gleaner*, 28 May 1911.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Detroit Journal*, 5 August 1898.
- <sup>18</sup> Melvin G. Holli, *Reform in Detroit: Hazen S. Pingree and Urban Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 141, 144, 174; *The Detroit Journal*, 5 August 1898.
- <sup>19</sup> *Detroit Courier*, 30 July 1898, 6 August 1898; 10 August 1898; Charles Frederic Humphrey, *Expedition to Santiago de Cuba*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 13.
- <sup>20</sup> 33<sup>rd</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> Michigan Regiments Scrap Book of the Spanish American War, State Archives of Michigan, Box 7, record 56-24.
- <sup>21</sup> Robert Stimpson to Earl D. Church, 31 May 1926; *The Detroit Journal*, 5 August 1898.
- <sup>22</sup> *The Detroit Journal*, 5 August 1898; Michigan Regiments Scrap Book.
- <sup>23</sup> Robert Stimpson to Earl D. Church, 31 May 1926; Robert Stimpson to John Ketcham, 3 January 1930.
- <sup>24</sup> Robert Stimpson to Earl D. Church, 31 May 1926; Robert Stimpson to John Ketcham, 3 January 1930.
- <sup>25</sup> *Gleaner*, 4 November 1911, 14 August 1916, 22 March 1917.
- <sup>26</sup> *Gleaner*, 14 August 1916, 22 March 1917.
- <sup>27</sup> *Gleaner*, 4 November 1911.
- <sup>28</sup> *Gleaner*, 4 November 1911, 14 August 1916, 22 March 1917; Bryan, 154, 180. In 1895, the Savanna-la-Mar hospital, located in the sugar belt of the island, treated over 830 patients for malarial fever, the Hordley hospital in eastern St. Thomas parish in the banana plantation area treated 937 cases, while Annotto Bay hospital treated 851 cases. These figures, from areas close to the coast and the sites of monoculture, contrast sharply with the figures from the Mandeville hospital, in Manchester Parish, located 2,000 feet above sea level where there were only ten cases.
- <sup>29</sup> *Gleaner*, 4 November 1911.
- <sup>30</sup> Stimpson, "Reminiscences of Communal Life in Southern Manchester," 22.
- <sup>31</sup> Michigan Regiments Scrap Book ; United States War Department, Declaration for Pension, 30 June 1926.
- <sup>32</sup> Robert Stimpson to Earl D. Church, 31 May 1926; United States War Department, Declaration for Pension, 30 June 1926; Robert Stimpson to Winfield Scott. 27 July 1926.
- <sup>33</sup> United States War Department, Declaration for Pension, 3 August 1926, 13 August 1926.
- <sup>34</sup> United States War Department, Declaration for Pension, 3 August 1926, 13 August 1926, 24 September 1926; US War Department, Office of the Surgeon General, 24 September 1926.
- <sup>35</sup> United States War Department, Declaration for Pension, 24 September 1926; U.S. War Department, Office of the Surgeon General, 24 September 1926.

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<sup>36</sup> United States War Department, Declaration for Pension, 24 September 1926; U.S. War Department, Office of the Surgeon General, 24 September 1926.

<sup>37</sup> United States War Department, Declaration for Pension, 5 April 1927.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Stimpson to John Ketcham, 3 January 1930.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Stimpson to John Ketcham, 3 January 1930, Earl D. Church to John Ketcham, 28 January 1930; Earl D. Church to Robert Stimpson, 5 February 1930.



## **Part II**

### **Chapter 5**

#### **“Citizenship and Homebuilding Are a Definite Part of Our Work”: The Leadership of Everard W. Daniel in Detroit**

As in the period before the Great Migration, West Indian immigrants who arrived in post-World War I Detroit held positions of leadership in the institutions central to the city’s black community. When compared to earlier cohorts of West Indian leaders, these later immigrants continued to promote what they perceived as their superiority to African Americans and to assume positions of authority in black Detroit. Both factors contributed to friction between West Indian and black American leaders.

Between 1910 and 1930, Detroit’s black population increased exponentially as southern blacks migrated to the city. Blacks left the South in droves to escape racial discrimination and intimidation, the economic devastation caused by the boll weevil, and the decreasing price of cotton. In Detroit, as in other industrial regions of the urban North, blacks would begin to replace Europeans denied access to the United States as a result of World War I and federal policies to limit immigration. Accompanying the thousands of southern migrants was a continual wave of West Indian immigrants to the city, who would enlarge the city’s black urban population and compete with African Americans for resources such as housing and employment.<sup>1</sup>

Like West Indian immigrants of the earlier period, those who migrated to Detroit in the era of the First World War often had educational attainments and economic resources greater than those of African Americans, especially the southern migrants. West Indian immigrants would compete for employment in the automotive industry, as

well as for housing. Their greater resources often allowed them to obtain skilled positions in the auto plants that brought higher salaries and led to an earlier exit from the city's squalid black neighborhoods. As with previous Caribbean migrants, a disproportionate number hailed from the ranks of an educated professional elite, who became leaders of religious institutions in the African American community.

Everard W. Daniel, rector of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, was one such leader. Daniel's leadership of the church began in September 1921 as the city's black population swelled rapidly. He gained enormous influence in the black community owing to his ability to obtain employment for his congregants with the Ford Motor Company, the only automotive company to employ blacks in any substantial number. Daniel used the church as an unofficial employee-recruiting agency for the company and had access to some of Henry Ford's top "lieutenants." Daniels's Danish (later U.S.) Virgin Islands origins played a significant role in cementing a relationship with Ford executive Charles Sorensen, the foundation of Daniel's considerable and contested authority.<sup>2</sup>

Daniel reached his ascendancy as the preeminent leader of Detroit's African American community as the city's black journalists lauded "the Negro church" as "the most vital institution of the race" and "the nerve center of the American Negro." Daniel could have served as the subject of the article written by Howard University dean, Kelly Miller, which lambasted "Negro preachers" who from the sinister use of ecclesiastical power to effect political ends, became beholden to "the favor of white politicians for [their] livelihood." Daniel's endorsement of political candidates and the expectation that he would deliver the votes of his congregation came from the directive of Henry Ford.

Industry, politics, ethnicity, and religion colluded within St. Matthew's under Daniel's leadership in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>3</sup>

Daniel illustrates the well-known public figure who mediated between the broader American society and the many West Indian congregants at St. Matthew's. As noted by historian Victor R. Greene, Daniel was among the type of ethnic leaders who "should be viewed as . . . agents of their groups' adjustment in America." He acted as an agent of adjustment through his efforts to secure for members of his church well-paying jobs, home ownership, and naturalization as American citizens. Daniel acted as "leader facilitating . . . [his] followers' ethnic identity" in his preference for the church's West Indian members. As he endeavored to sustain the immigrants' ethnic identity and assist them in settling in Detroit, Daniel assumed the role of an ethnic leader, an intermediary for West Indians in the larger world.<sup>4</sup>

John Higham states "[immigrant] leaders focus the consciousness of an ethnic group and make its identity visible." Daniel used St. Matthew's to make the ethnic identity of West Indians visible. Because economic survival of the congregants and of the church was of paramount concern to Daniel, as a leader in Detroit's black community, he accommodated the conservative anti-union and ant-labor policies of Ford Motor Company and its officials.<sup>5</sup>

Born on February 22, 1879 in the Danish colony of St. Thomas, Everard Washington Daniel had a mixed-race ancestry and came from a middle-class background. His father was a Danish-speaking white man and his mother, Clementina, a black woman from the British colony of St. Kitts. Daniel was bilingual and considered Danish his first language.<sup>6</sup>

The Danish Virgin Islands differed from other colonies in the West Indies in that individuals of mixed race “of good behavior and social standing” attained the same legal citizenship as whites and “there was no sharp dividing line between the white and near-white residents.” Daniel, characterized as a mulatto in U.S. government records, may have benefited from the more liberal racial mores of the Danish colonial system.<sup>7</sup>

The colonial regime of the Danish West Indies historically had a tradition of liberal education of slaves and free blacks, and Daniel, considered a brilliant student, came to benefit from the educational policies of the colony. In 1892, he emigrated from St. Thomas to New York, where he completed his education. His mother followed a year later. Daniel became an American citizen in 1901, sixteen years before the United States purchased the Danish Virgin Islands and twenty-six years before the island’s black inhabitants gained U. S. citizenship.<sup>8</sup>

Characteristic of West Indians who migrated in the nineteenth century, Daniel was highly educated. He attended St. Augustine College in Raleigh, North Carolina, where he received his B.A. and earned his M.A. from New York University. He attended the Union Theological Seminary in New York and earned a doctorate in divinity. Daniel was ordained in the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1902 and became senior curate of the wealthy and prestigious St. Philip’s Episcopal Church in New York City, a position he held for seventeen years.<sup>9</sup>

Daniel married his wife, Marcelline, in 1903. The couple’s only child, son Langton, was born the same year they wed. Marcelline’s father, like Daniel, was a Danish-speaker, a native of St. Croix in the Danish (later U.S.) Virgin Islands. Her

mother was born in Pennsylvania while Marcelline was born in New Jersey about 1880. Marcelline moved to New York, where she earned a living by giving piano lessons.<sup>10</sup>

Daniel left New York to become the rector of St. Matthew's in 1921. St. Matthew's is the third oldest black church in Detroit and an elite of professionals, business owners, and skilled workers comprised its comparatively small congregation. Over the next two decades a significant proportion of the congregation would emigrate from the West Indies, like Daniel, and attend his church, as followers of the Anglican faith.<sup>11</sup>

During the period between 1910 and 1920, St. Matthew's increased from 187 to 600 members and was one of the ten largest black churches in the city. Under Daniel's direction, the church began an aggressive campaign to build a new parish house. Daniel and the congregation placed a time capsule in the cornerstone of the parish house when construction began on the new edifice on December 11, 1926. Early in Daniel's tenure the church became a self-supporting institution, reputedly "the only colored church between New York and Minnesota" that could make such a claim. Many black churches struggled financially and were often in debt.<sup>12</sup>

In accordance with the social service agenda of the Protestant Episcopal Church, Daniel founded the Dorcas Society in 1923, an organization that distributed food and clothing to the poor. A local black businesswoman, Elenora DeVere, assisted Daniel in managing the church's operation and served sometimes as the rector's secretary. Early in his pastorate, he established a benefit society to assist the members of his congregation financially. Daniel helped found the very active Chapter 966 of the Brotherhood of Saint Andrew. Donald J. Marshall, who became Daniel's collaborator in activities outside the

church as well, played a paramount role within the Brotherhood. Birney W. Smith and his son, Birney, Jr., were also active members of the organization. Described as “part of an international organization found where ever the Anglican Church is established,” the Brotherhood proved instrumental in fundraising efforts for projects implemented by the rector, such as building the parish house.<sup>13</sup>

To the parishioners who attended St. Matthew’s, Daniel was their “beloved rector,” and the high esteem in which they held him bordered on hero worship. Members “rejoiced in his selection knowing that . . . [their] troubles were at an end.” Described as “frank and respected by all who knew him, frank and straightforward always,” as well as “a very gruff person, but . . . [with] a heart of gold” and although “his stern demeanor repelled some,” members of his church “realized that he stood firmly for the dignity and welfare” of the black middle class that he represented. Considered by church members as “a priest of outstanding ability” Daniel “embraced all the qualifications” required by St. Matthew’s congregants.<sup>14</sup>

When Daniel first took over leadership of the church, it had a relatively small membership and practiced an informal policy of exclusion and exclusiveness begun in the nineteenth century. Most members lived far from the “Black Bottom” neighborhood where the church was located and “the community around St. Matthew’s was not involved with the church.” Daniel made a conscious effort to establish the church as a more neighborhood-based institution.<sup>15</sup>

Under Daniel’s direction, the church expanded and attempted to become more involved in the community. For some families “all of . . . [their] entertainment, more or less, centered around . . . St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church.” Daniel opened the church to

host noted speakers, to present refined entertainment, and provide music and dancing lessons to children on Saturdays, when recreational programs ran from morning until early evenings.<sup>16</sup>

Records indicate several West Indians arrived in Detroit during the Great Migration and joined the church. Class and ethnicity influenced the tenor of St. Matthew's as larger numbers of immigrants arrived from the West Indies during the 1920s. West Indian ethnicity would become a predominant feature of the church and would remain a constant feature to the present.

Drawn by the continuation of the Anglican tradition common in many British colonies, many West Indians joined the church as members. These members included Charles and Constance Henry, of Antigua and Barbados, respectively. Immigrating to Detroit in 1923, they soon joined St. Matthew's, where Constance would become a founding member of the church's Dorcas Society, Bible class, and bazaar committee. Another couple active throughout their lives in the church, Owen Bennett of St. Vincent, and his St. Lucian wife Ruby, who came to Detroit in the early 1920s, were married by Daniel in October 1924 and would celebrate their wedding anniversary at the church forty-two years later.<sup>17</sup>

John and Belle Coote of Jamaica and their relatives, Mae and Charles Coote, had a lifelong affiliation with the church as well. Other members of the Coote family would immigrate and join St. Matthew's in later years. Alfred Baisden, an autoworker from St. Kitts, attended the church and may have owed his job to his church membership. West Indians James and Mabel White and Anthony and Jemima Leopold of Jamaica, who

migrated to Detroit in 1921, made regular financial contributions to the maintenance of the church.<sup>18</sup>

When West Indian members of St. Matthew's returned to the Caribbean, they maintained their connection to St. Matthew's and established transnational patterns. Member Cleveland Alexander, who returned to Jamaica after living in Detroit for a number of years, wrote a letter that stated that he "miss[ed] St. Matthew's and everybody very dearly." During his travels he "ha[d] visited many churches since . . . [he] left Detroit, including Boston, and St. Matthew's will stand out pre-eminently among them." When Belle Coote returned to live in Jamaica after the death of her husband, John, she continued to give gifts to the church and "still ke[pt] in touch with her beloved St. Matthew's."<sup>19</sup>

In addition, Daniel invited prominent West Indians to speak at the church, further cementing the image of the church as a West Indian institution. At an annual meeting of St. Matthew's Men Club, New York judge James S. Watson acted as the featured speaker for the event. As master of ceremonies, Daniel introduced Watson, focusing on his rise from a hotel clerk in Jamaica to a "friendless immigrant" who took humble position as a door attendant at a New York apartment building before he became a municipal court judge. At the conclusion of the meeting, Watson "was presented with an ivory gavel by a group of his West Indian friends in Detroit, many of whom he had known before coming to America."<sup>20</sup>

In acknowledgement of the ethnic composition of the church, Daniel encouraged the many West Indian parishioners to assimilate and adopt middle-class mores. Speaking at a meeting of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, he addressed the issue directly and



“stated that citizenship and homebuilding [were] a definite part of . . . [the] work” of the organization. In public forums, Daniel used his authority and leadership to stress citizenship and “stated that among the chief things he had done was an attempt to . . . [give] a sense of civic responsibility” to church members.<sup>21</sup>

With his impeccable credentials and influential contacts, Daniel became “the darling of the black elite.” A local newspaper regarded him as “one of Detroit’s outstanding civic and religious leaders and . . . [as] a valuable social asset to the community,” and noted “his high scholarship and sterling qualities as a leader.” His advanced education, genteel disposition, and position as rector of the city’s elite church “made him the Detroit’s chief black spokesman until his death in 1939. With only six of the city’s black pastors having attended college, Daniel commanded respect as the most educated.”<sup>22</sup>

Daniel’s major endeavor entailed finding employment for black men who attended his church. In 1914, Ford Motor Company began recruiting and hiring black men for employment at its plant in Highland Park plant and later in the huge Rouge plant in Dearborn, Michigan. In 1921 Ford’s head of production, Charles E. Sorensen, approached Robert Bradby, the pastor of the oldest and largest of Detroit’s black churches, Second Baptist, about employing members of his church at the company. In 1923, Sorensen made a similar arrangement with Daniel. According to historian Richard W. Thomas, Daniel and Bradby “used their ties to powerful whites to leverage their resources on behalf of the larger black community,” and these leaders “greatly valued their ties to the Ford family which enabled them to dictate the nature of community building.”<sup>23</sup>

Ford viewed the churches as ideal locations to recruit steady, industrious, and sober workers. The company preferred to hire married men, whom Ford viewed as more deserving and in greater need of the high wages he paid. In spite of brutal work conditions, the company became the largest employer of black men in Detroit and one of the only firms where black men could earn enough to support their families. By the mid-1920s, Daniel had become the favorite of Ford executives, making him the most influential leader in Detroit's black community in the period between the two world wars.<sup>24</sup>

Daniel's ability to influence blacks' employment at Ford became a way of controlling his parishioners as well as equipping them with the means to provide themselves with homes and the elements of middle-class status. Parishioners often appealed to Daniel to find them employment with the automaker or to intervene for their reinstatement when fired. According to one church member, "he believed that every man should have a job so that he could support his family." Throughout the black community it was well known that "Father Daniel was responsible for a lot of men getting to work at the Ford Motor Company."<sup>25</sup>

As recounted by St. Matthew's member Birney Smith, Daniel "had influence" with Ford, "but, there was no racket like some people would like to think there was." Smith insisted that Ford never financially contributed to Daniel's church, but many people believed the pastor received some economic benefit from the industrialist. Smith stated, "Father Daniel was, well, he was talked about in many [negative] ways. But Father Daniel wouldn't take a nickel from anybody for anybody's influence."<sup>26</sup>

According to one historian, “by 1925 he [Daniel] and Ford had developed a warm personal relationship.” When Ford, an Episcopalian, began attending the Christmas service at St. Matthew’s with his wife in 1929, it signaled to the African American community that Daniel indeed had influence with the industrialist. As a “close friend,” he “spoke his mind . . . to Ford . . . never asking anything . . . but always commanding respect.”<sup>27</sup>

Daniel acted as the nexus between Ford executives and the African American community. He “often introduced visiting African-American leaders to Ford officials.” This became a reciprocal arrangement and “on numerous occasions Ford asked him [Daniel] to represent the company at formal ceremonies, including the installation of presidents of black colleges.” Ford’s head of advertising, William J. Cameron, had a personal relationship with to Daniel and spoke at St. Matthew’s on at least one occasion.<sup>28</sup>

According to Smith, it was not financial contributions that tied Daniel to Ford, but the fact Ford and his executives “could trust Father Daniel. He made recommendations and they called him in for consultation on different things, industrial things. And they would take his word for it. But they tried to make out that it was some sort of pay-off or something. People were jealous. But it wasn’t.”<sup>29</sup>

While Smith contends Daniel’s character, rather than economics, led to the relationship between the rector and Ford upper management, other sources suggest Ford helped finance the building of the church parish house, a considerable financial contribution. As historian Richard Thomas notes, “Father Daniel had no qualms about using [the recommendation] system to economically strengthen his own congregation”

and received an indirect economic benefit from his relationship with Ford. “No doubt,” states Thomas, “many blacks joined Daniel’s church just to obtain work and once having obtained it, abandoned him.” By the mid-1920s, Ford’s practice of using the black churches for labor recruitment had “drawn the larger black community into a state of economic and political dependency.” While Daniel undoubtedly reaped financial rewards from such an arrangement, the arrangement itself was due in part to his ethnicity.<sup>30</sup>

Daniel became close to Charles Sorensen and “[h]is personal friendship” with such a high level executive of the company “contributed greatly, of course, to his influence.” Sorensen, Ford’s chief production manager, and “probably the best known of Ford’s many lieutenants,” began his employment with the company in 1904. By 1919, he controlled the operation the Rouge plant with the help of men he selected, such as Harry Bennett, who served as head of the Ford Service Department, “said to have been the largest private police force in the world.” Because of their positions at the Rouge, effectively the only Ford plant that employed black workers, both Sorensen and Bennett would have close interaction with St. Matthew’s. Bennett would work closely with parishioner Donald Marshall, as Daniel did with Sorensen.<sup>31</sup>

Both Sorensen and Daniel spoke Danish and the shared language created a strong bond between the two men. Surely the tie between the two men was strengthened by the fact “both were ex-Danish citizens, Sorensen having been born in the mother country; Father Daniel in the islands when they were under Danish rule.” Birney Smith recognized the role ethnicity played in the relationship between Daniel and Sorensen, when he stated, “Charles Sorensen happened to be a Dane. Father Daniels [sic] came

from the Virgin Islands, which was Danish, and they struck up a friendship. It was just a personal friendship,” which rested largely on a shared ethnic, not racial, identity. It could not have rested on a “racial identity” since one was white and the other black.<sup>32</sup>

As noted, the Ford executive initially had approached Robert Bradby, pastor of Second Baptist Church, to recommend black workers and several years later contacted Daniel. However, by the mid-1920s, Daniel had usurped Bradby in access to obtaining Ford employment for his parishioners. Daniel’s favored position with Ford officials was related to his ethnic background, in both sharing a language with Sorensen, as well as the perception of him as “more educated and suave than Bradby,” characteristics for which West Indian immigrants were known.<sup>33</sup>

Also in 1923, to directly oversee the performance and resolve disputes of black workers in the Rouge plant, Sorensen appointee Harry Bennett hired one of the parishioners at St. Matthew’s, a former Detroit policeman named Donald J. Marshall. A vestryman active in the Brotherhood of St. Andrew as well as a Sunday school teacher, Marshall had a very close relationship to Daniel and was a dedicated member of the church. Like Daniel, he exploited his association with the church to his own advantage in regard to his position at Ford, where he “had the entire colored personnel under his jurisdiction.”<sup>34</sup>

First employed in the service department and later given sole control in the hiring of black employees, Marshall answered directly to Ford, Sorensen, and Bennett. Like Bennett, Marshall was well known for his violent methods (beatings) of keeping workers in line. A former Ford employee recalled

Marshall was just the same type of man as Harry Bennett in his day. He

was a nice guy but he was exactly the same type as Harry Bennett. If a colored man would give any backtalk in the employment office (I have been told this over and over, so it must be true), Marshall would take him out in the back room somewhere and give him a working over, just a regular old police method, and just beat the very last daylights out of him. He ruled with a strong hand.<sup>35</sup>

Not only did Ford expect Daniel and Marshall to discipline black Ford employees, but to influence directly the political affiliation of West Indians who were members of St. Matthew's. Because Ford endorsed Republican Party candidates, Daniel and Marshall were expected to deliver the votes of the members of the congregation and black men employed with the company and who attended the church. The 1931 mayoralty race serves as one example. Daniel and Marshall bullied congregants employed at Ford who voted for Democratic candidates. The two men either reprimanded recalcitrant workers or they lost their Ford jobs.<sup>36</sup>

Because of Daniel's close relationship to the company, he had to adhere to its conservative and often repressive policies. Thus, he and Marshall vehemently denounced labor unions as their association with Ford, a notorious anti-union company in an open-shop city, dictated. In 1935, the Detroit Urban League brought in labor organizers affiliated with the association's national Industrial Relation's Department to form a local branch of the Negro Workers Council. Informing black workers of the advantages of union membership stood as the major goal of the council. Daniel and Marshall made it difficult for the labor organizers to find a forum for their initial meeting, played a dominant role in the failure of the organization, and compelled black Ford workers to reject the Negro Workers Council.<sup>37</sup>

Daniel regarded the NAACP as a foe because of its pro-union stance and threatened to organize a boycott of the organization's national meeting held in Detroit in 1937. He accused the organization's New York leadership of interfering in labor issues in Detroit. He denounced them when he railed "[y]ou can't tell a man whom to employ and whom not to employ" and threatened his congregation that Ford "might close down . . . and then where would you be?" He "prayed that . . . [he] would not have to fight [unionism] anymore, but [he] just must fight some things." Daniel would "not stand for" union organizing.<sup>38</sup>

When Howard University president Mordecai Johnson spoke in Detroit in favor of union organizing, Daniel "denounce[d] Johnson" in a "militant sermon" that actually was more a paean to Henry Ford. He disingenuously tried to deny Ford's antiunion stance and claimed the industrialist "ha[d] never asked anyone not to organize against him." Blacks should remain loyal and beholden to the automaker and according to Daniel, "if any people criticize Ford, it should not be the Negroes. The Negroes ought to get up and bless his name."<sup>39</sup>

St. Matthew's provided Daniel and Marshall a forum from which they could relay and reinforce the political stance of the Ford Company. Both men often used Sunday morning services to this end. Daniel "laid down the challenge" to his congregation one Sunday "to anyone to show him any industrialist who ha[d] done more for the colored laborer than Henry Ford." The next week Marshall spoke on "the Ford Policy . . . as the public [was] keenly interested in the issues pertaining to the Ford Plant and Negro labor."<sup>40</sup>

As Daniel grew closer to Ford and Sorensen, a rivalry developed between Daniel and the Baptist Bradby and continued throughout the 1920s and into the next decade. They frequently denounced each other from their pulpits and at parochial meetings. The two men “didn’t agree on many things,” and Daniel “looked on Bradby as an opportunist.” Bradby heard rumors that Daniel said he had fallen out of favor with Ford executives, but Bradby continued to interact with company officials until 1941.<sup>41</sup>

Marshall and Bradby had difficulties as well. Because he had interacted with Ford and Sorensen prior to Daniel and Marshall, Bradby had access to the Rouge plant and initially had the authority to discipline black workers. Marshall, “[a]s a full-fledged employee of the company,” gradually assumed many of the pastor’s prerogatives. Bradby continued to report directly to Sorensen, which Marshall viewed as a usurpation of his authority and “[s]uch appeals did not endear the minister [Bradby] to Marshall, and the two men were engaged in a running fight over the next two decades.” By 1931, competition for Ford’s favor fuelled the intense rivalry between the leadership of St. Matthew’s and that of Second Baptist. The West Indian ethnic identity of the rector and a significant proportion of the congregation became a factor in the struggle between Daniel and Bradby to secure their influence with Ford.<sup>42</sup>

The conflict between Daniel, Marshall, and Bradby culminated in September 1931 when Marshall spoke at a political meeting that was held before a large audience at St. Matthew’s. He accused Bradby of dishonest maneuvers in conjunction with the municipal elections of that year. One of Bradby’s supporters attended the meeting and, alarmed by what he heard, felt compelled to warn the pastor. He wrote Bradby that Daniel and Marshall used unsavory practices in the recommendation and hiring system at



Ford. Furthermore, Daniel discriminated against African Americans and sought to employ only West Indians that belonged to St. Matthew's.<sup>43</sup>

Ultimately, Daniel's "tireless and relentless" anti-unionism caused his appeal to wane and he gained critics both locally and nationally. New pro-labor leaders such as Charles Hill of Hartford Baptist Church, Malcolm Dade of St. Cyprian's Episcopal, William H. Peck of Bethel AME, and Horace White, pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church, challenged Daniel's previously uncontested control of black Detroit. White wrote a scathing article denouncing Daniel and Marshall's support of Ford and "accused the black church in Detroit of having failed black workers." As unionism grew stronger, White and others sought "to preserve the black church's leadership role in the black community by severing it from the influence of the industrialists."<sup>44</sup>

In April 1939, as the fight between Daniel and the pro-labor forces reached its peak, the rector fell ill and left Marshall in charge of condemning the black community when it showed any interest in unionizing at Ford. According to church member Birney Smith, prior to Daniel's death, a rift developed between him and Marshall because of the latter's increasingly brutal tactics in repressing blacks workers with pro-union leanings. Daniel died September 6, 1939; one month later workers at Chrysler went on strike at the Dodge plant on the city's east side. Seventeen hundred black workers employed at the plant joined the strike, which led Marshall to organize a back-to-work group of strikebreakers. With the success of the Chrysler strike, unionists began to turn their attention to Ford, where a strike ensued in 1941 and marked the end of the alliance of black churches and the auto company.<sup>45</sup>

Daniel, the pastor of one of Detroit's most prestigious institutions, had a personal but subordinate relationship with one of the nation's most powerful industrialists, Henry Ford. This gave Daniel authority well beyond his parish, but his influence in Detroit had mixed results. For over fifteen years, he secured employment paying relatively high wages for black men. However, the jobs they obtained with Daniel's recommendation often entailed working in the most dangerous and unsanitary conditions of the plant. For access to Henry Ford's patronage, Daniel, and subordinates such as Donald Marshall, resorted often to autocratic and even brutal methods of controlling black workers politically and preventing unionism in the auto industry. The link between the middle-class West Indian membership at St. Matthew's and employment with Ford resulted in a class and ethnic clash with the pastor, Robert L. Bradby and the poor black American migrants who comprised the congregation of the larger, if less prestigious, Second Baptist Church. The clash between the churches resulted in accusations that Daniel wished to see West Indians employed at Ford to the exclusion of southern blacks.

Ethnicity also played a major role in creating a relationship between Daniel and Charles E. Sorensen, the high-ranking official of Ford's River Rouge plant, where almost all black workers were employed. The shared ethnic backgrounds of the two men resulted in Daniel's advantage over Bradby in access to Ford and his patronage. Daniel, in turn, could parley his influence to advance the economic position of West Indian immigrants who attended his church.

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<sup>1</sup> Jessie Carney Smith and Carrell Peterson Horton, eds., *Historical Statistics of Black America*, vol. 2 (New York: Gale Research, 1995), 1505-1506. In 1910, 5,741 African Americans resided in the city of Detroit. By 1920, that number had increased to 40,838 and by 1930 had increased again to 120,066. Joe William Trotter, Jr., ed., introduction to *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Reed Ueda, *Postwar Immigrant America: A Social History* (Boston: St. Martin's Press, Bedford Books, 1994), 7. While Ueda does not

provide immigration statistics for specific cities, he states "from 1900 to 1930, more than 100,000 blacks from the West Indies entered the United States."

<sup>2</sup> "A Brief History of St. Matthew's Protestant Episcopal Church," Centennial Celebration, 1846-1946, Box 1, Histories, St. Matthew's and St. Joseph's Episcopal Church Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as St. Matthew's Papers); Irving Howe and B. J. Widick, *The UAW and Walter Reuther* (New York: Random House, 1949), 216-219; August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Detroit Independent*, 10 June 1927

<sup>4</sup> Victor R. Greene, *American Immigrant Leaders, 1800-1910: Marginality and Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 4, 5.

<sup>5</sup> John Higham, ed., *Ethnic Leadership in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 2, 4.

<sup>6</sup> United States Census Bureau, New York, Manhattan, Ward 12, Enumeration District 536 (hereafter cited as ED), 1910; *Detroit Free Press*, 8 September 1939. No available records give the first name of Daniel's father, although his mother was listed as married in the census. It is probable that his parents had a common-law marriage, as Daniel's father remained in St. Thomas after his wife and son emigrated.

<sup>7</sup> Norwell Harrigan and Pearl I. Varlack, "The U. S. Virgin Islands and the Black Experience," *Journal of Black Studies*, 7 no. 4, (June 1977): 395; Neville A. T. Hall, *Slave Societies in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1992) 23; 1910 United States Census.

<sup>8</sup> Harrigan and Varlack, "The U. S. Virgin Islands," 390-391, 393, 393. Harrigan and Varlack point to several salient features of blacks' experience in the Virgin Islands that pertain also to Daniel. Economic conditions between 1875 and the turn of the century led to migration to the Colombia, Santo Domingo, and Cuba. Daniel's migration in 1892 was part of this pattern, albeit he went to a less common destination for blacks of the period. The United States' purchase of the Danish Virgin Islands in 1917 would introduce American racial mores to the new colonial possessions, with black residents of the territories unable to obtain U. S. citizenship until 1927. The militancy of blacks in both the islands and Harlem led to their change in national status. *Detroit Tribune*, 9 September 1939; United States Census Bureau, New York, Manhattan, Ward 12, E D 536, 1910.

<sup>9</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 9 September 1939; *Michigan Chronicle*, 9 September 1939; "A Brief History of St. Matthew's Protestant Episcopal Church," St. Matthew's Papers; George F. Bragg, *History of the Afro-American Group of the Episcopal Church* (Baltimore, MD: Church Advocate Press, 1922), 275; Jon Michael Spencer, "The Black Church and the Harlem Renaissance," *African American Review* 30, no. 3 (Autumn 1996): 458. Concerning the church where Daniel served initially as curate, Spencer states "St. Philip's became the largest black congregation in the Protestant Episcopal denomination and the wealthiest of all black churches in the country. The church owned a substantial amount of property in Harlem, including apartment buildings extending a full block on 135<sup>th</sup> Street. Its financial capacity was due to the fact that more New Negroes of educational attainment and financial means were members there than at any other black church in the city." Similar circumstances existed at St. Matthew's on a smaller scale as in New York at St. Philip's.

<sup>10</sup> United States Census Bureau, New York, Manhattan, Ward 12, E D 536, 1910.

<sup>11</sup> "A Brief History of St. Matthew's Protestant Episcopal Church," St. Matthew's Papers; David M. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 139.

<sup>12</sup> Forrester B. Washington, "The Negro in Detroit: A Survey of the Conditions of a Negro Group in a Northern Industrial Center during the War Prosperity Period, 1920" (Public Associated Charities of Detroit, 1920, mimeographed), 20; *Detroit News*, 16 February 1998. The time capsule contained coins, a yearbook, and newspapers from December 11, 1926, the date the cornerstone of the church was laid. By 1971, the building on St. Antoine and Elizabeth Streets no longer was in use and was later demolished to make way for new construction; "A Brief History of St. Matthew's Protestant Episcopal Church," St. Matthew's Papers.

<sup>13</sup> "A Brief History of St. Matthew's Protestant Episcopal Church" and Birney Smith to the Editor of the *Detroit People's News*, 4 December 1929, Box 1, Miscellany, 1920-1970, St. Matthew's Papers; *Detroit Contender*, 13 November 1920; Chapter 966 of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew to Vestry, 15 October 1939, Box 2, Brotherhood of St. Andrew, St. Matthew's Papers.

<sup>14</sup> "St. Matthews Centennial Celebration, 1846-1946," Box 1, St. Matthews Histories, St. Matthew's Papers; Elaine Latzman Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes: An Oral History of Detroit's African American Community, 1918-1967* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 90.

<sup>15</sup> Moon, *Untold Tales*, 90; *Detroit Tribune*, 5 October 1935; "A Brief History of St. Matthew's Protestant Episcopal Church," St. Matthew's Papers.

<sup>16</sup> Moon, *Untold Tales*, 90;

<sup>17</sup> "Mrs. Constance Henry, 1886-1973," Box 7, Historical Backgrounds, and *The Recorder*, October 1966, Box 2, Newsletters, St. Matthew's Papers.

<sup>18</sup> "St. Matthews News," 29 September 1929 and *The Recorder*, October 1966, St. Matthew's Papers; 1930 U. S. Census, Detroit, Michigan, E D 82-429, 82-295, 82-77. As will be discussed in Chapter 8, other members of the Coote family would emigrate from Jamaica and reside in Detroit's black middle-class enclave on the West Side of the city. The West Side Cootes would attend St. Cyprian's Protestant Episcopal Church with West Indians who became some of the earliest residents of the neighborhood.

<sup>19</sup> A more extensive examination of transnational patterns based on a reading of Nancy Foner, ed., *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) will appear in the next chapter to compare similar patterns established by West Indians in Detroit. "St. Matthew's News," 15 September 1929 and "I Am the Resurrection and the Life," Easter Commemorative Program, April 1969, Box 2, Bulletins, St. Matthew's Papers.

<sup>20</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 15 June 1935.

<sup>21</sup> "Minutes," Brotherhood of St. Andrew, 10 September 1935, Box 2, St. Matthew's Papers; *Detroit Tribune*, 5 October 1935.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It: Building Black Community in Detroit, 1915-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 274; *Detroit Tribune*, 5 October 1935; David L. Lewis, "Working Side by Side," *Michigan History* vol. 77, no. 1 (January/February 1993), 29; Forrester B. Washington, "The Negro in Detroit," 27.

<sup>23</sup> Howe and Widick, *UAW and Walter Reuther*, 216; David L. Lewis, "History of Negro Employment in Detroit Area Plants of Ford Motor Company, 1914-1941" (seminar paper, University of Detroit, 1954), 19-23 and "Working Side by Side," 29-30; Thomas, *Life for Us*, 276.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas, *Life for Us*, 276-277; Claude Fisher and Martha Fisher to Everard Daniel, 12 October 1929, Box 1, Miscellany, 1920-1970, St. Matthew's Papers; Moon, *Untold Tales*, 90.

<sup>26</sup> Birney W. Smith, interview by Jim Keeney and Roberta McBride, transcript, 15 June 1969, Walter P. Reuther Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit. Smith was a very active member of St. Matthew's after migrating to Detroit about 1898. Born in South Carolina, Smith lived for a time in Bay City prior to his arrival in Detroit. He held several positions at the church, from altar boy to bookkeeper to vestryman. He also played a prominent role in the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, an organization devoted to instilling leadership skills in the male members of the church. Smith was employed as a probation officer with the Wayne County Juvenile Court until he retired in 1952. He gained renown as the announcer at high-society events of Detroit's black and white elite.

<sup>27</sup> Lewis, "Working Side by Side," 29; *Michigan Chronicle*, 9 September 1939; *Detroit Tribune*, 9 September 1939.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis, "Working Side by Side," 29; *Detroit Tribune*, 14 May 1938.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, interview, 29.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas, *Life for Us*, 276.

<sup>31</sup> Lewis, "History of Negro Employment," 21; Elenore DeVere to Charles E. Sorensen, 21 September 1931 and Charles E. Sorensen to Everard Daniel, 25 September 1931, Box 13, Rectors, St. Matthew's Papers; Ford R. Bryson, *Henry's Lieutenants* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 267, 30; Howe and Widick, *UAW and Walter Reuther*, 216; Smith, interview, 35; H. S. Ablewhite, "Reminiscences," transcript, November 1951, Ford Motor Company Archives, Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, Michigan.

<sup>32</sup> Lewis, "History of Negro Employment," 20; Smith, interview, 30.

<sup>33</sup> Howe and Widick, *UAW and Walter Reuther*, 216; Lewis, "History of Negro Employment," 21 and "Working Side by Side," 29; *Life for Us*, 274; Ira De A. Reid, *The Negro Immigrant: His Background, Characteristics, and Social Adjustment, 1899-1937* (New York: AMS Press, 1939), 107-112. In this seminal work on the subject of West Indian immigrants, Ira De A. Reid, like the examination of a later

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period by Reid Ueda ,who states that 100,000 West Indians entered the United States beginning at the turn of the century.

<sup>34</sup> Lewis, "History of Negro Employment," 21-22; Willis F. Ward, "Reminiscences," transcript, May 1955, Ford Motor Company Archives, Benson Ford Research Center.

<sup>35</sup> Lewis, "History of Negro Employment," 21-22; Ablewhite, "Reminiscences,"

<sup>36</sup> Lewis, "History of Negro Employment," 22-23; Thomas, *Life for Us*, 274-276; Charles Voorhess, transcript, November 1952, Ford Motor Company Archives, Benson Ford Research Center.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas, *Life for Us*, 278-279.

<sup>38</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 21 August 1937.

<sup>39</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 5 February 1938.

<sup>40</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 21 August 1937.

<sup>41</sup> Lewis, "History of Negro Employment," 21; Smith, interview, 35-36; Thomas, *Life for Us*, 273.

<sup>42</sup> Lewis, "History of Negro Employment," 22-23.

<sup>43</sup> Lewis, "History of Negro Employment," 23.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas, *Life for Us*, 290-296; Lewis, "Working Side by Side," 30.

<sup>45</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 1 April 1939, 9 September 1939; *Michigan Chronicle*, 9 September 1939; *Detroit Free Press*, 8 September 1939; Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 67, 85; Smith, interview, 35; Thomas, *Life for Us*, 301.

## **Chapter 6**

### **The Politics of the Pulpit: Joseph Gomez, Afro-Caribbean Ethnic Identity, and Leadership of Bethel AME Church in Detroit, 1919-1928**

An examination of the main institutions in black Detroit as the city's African American population expanded reveals a continued pattern of leadership by immigrants from the Caribbean. In spite of being of the same race, West Indians' middle-class status and perceived ethnic superiority remained a cause of friction between them and American-born blacks with whom they competed for authority and prestige. With limited positions of leadership available in black Detroit, West Indian immigrants also competed among themselves over opportunities and advancement.

During the 1920s, West Indians led Detroit's two most prominent African American churches. Whereas Everard Daniel represented the upper-middle class elite who attended St. Matthew's, West Indian Joseph Gomez led the middle- and working-class membership of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). Many considered Gomez a stereotypical West Indian radical in his time, while later depictions suggest his goals and values had many conservative elements. Gomez's efforts to establish himself as a legitimate leader of Detroit's African American community led not only to conflicts with rivals like Daniel and Robert Bradby of Second Baptist Church, but with African American leaders of the NAACP as well.

Robert Weisbrot, in his study of Father Divine as a reformist religious leader in Harlem during the Depression, asserts that Gomez had a comparatively "conservative orientation" and practiced "a long otherworldly religious tradition [that] often was proof against the clamor for a socially concerned church." This religious tradition urged

Christians to seek rewards for earthly suffering in the afterlife and discouraged protests against social injustices. Weisbrot notes the black church “was inherently neither progressive nor conservative, militant nor escapist.” Gomez, too, was inherently none of these, but he acted much more militantly than did the leaders of two of the other most prominent black churches, Daniel and Robert Bradby of the Episcopal and Baptist churches, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

Compared to Daniel, Gomez was more militant and I would argue many of his more radical acts of agitation for causes of social justice occurred in opposition to Daniel’s conservatism, but he still maintained a respect for order and decorum that he associated with his origins in a British colony. Consequently, his leadership of Bethel exhibited both politically radical and socially conservative aspects. Gomez also had a rivalry with Robert Bradby, pastor of Second Baptist Church, and this rivalry led to a struggle for leadership of Detroit’s African American community.

Because many of the West Indian elite gravitated to the Episcopal church and Daniel attempted to lure West Indians to his congregation with the promise of lucrative jobs in the auto industry, St. Matthew’s began to exhibit a decidedly West Indian tenor. In contrast, Bethel attracted the black middle class and in 1915 had the largest congregation of the city’s black churches. During Gomez’s leadership, Bethel absorbed several hundred southern migrants and no overtly West Indian presence existed. Both established and newly arrived black Detroiters sought the ministry of the church’s charismatic West Indian pastor. Bethel’s overwhelmingly African American membership reinforced Gomez’s racial identity as a black man and subsumed his ethnic identity as a West Indian, but transnational links buttressed his identity as a West Indian. Always

problematic in his early life, racial and ethnic identity issues came to the forefront in Gomez's professional life as he struggled to advance in the AME church hierarchy.<sup>2</sup>

It is evident from his earliest years that race and ethnic identity played a complex role in the life of Joseph Gomez, formerly Antonio Gomes born in Antigua in November 1890. His Maderiran Portuguese father, Manoel, and his Afro-Caribbean mother Rebecca, were living in a common-law marriage at the time, making their son illegitimate. His paternal grandfather, for whom he was named, disapproved of his son's open cohabitation with a black woman and did not want his mixed-race grandchildren to have his surname. The senior Gomes did not object to his son's interracial relationship per se, but to the fact that he chose to make it public. His grandfather knew of a child Manoel had previously with another black woman, but vehemently objected when Manoel chose to disregard social customs in the colony by his legal and social acknowledgement of his mixed-race offspring. The Gomes family, with the exception of Manoel, assimilated the basic pattern of race relations found in the Caribbean and this racial paradigm structured family relationships, which later affected Gomez's identity and how he characterized himself.<sup>3</sup>

Grandfather Manoel Gomes disowned his son and died unreconciled the year his grandson was born. It was only after his grandfather's death that his parents legally married and his paternal grandmother established a relationship with him and his older sisters, but she refused to associate with their mother. Both Portuguese and black people in the town where the family resided ostracized his mother. This treatment wounded him deeply. That Gomez felt confused by the racial and ethnic contradictions that permeated



his personal world as a child is comprehensible and consistent with the multitude of questions that race and ethnicity posed for him<sup>5</sup>

Other inconsistencies concerning race and ethnicity helped shape Gomez's early life. Although his grandmothers loved him dearly and both lived in the same small town and attended the same church on occasion, they shunned each other. He questioned the three-tiered society of colonial Antigua, where the English had supremacy, and looked down on the Portuguese, who in turn believed themselves superior to the blacks. In addition, his father spoke Portuguese as his native language, while his mother spoke the local Afro-Creole.<sup>6</sup>

Gomez developed an appreciation of West Indian and Portuguese cultures and enjoyed *obeah* (folk magic derived from West Africa) stories as well as Portuguese music. Gomez clearly developed a strong identification with Afro-Caribbean culture. He developed a lifelong fear of the dead because he associated them with *jumbis* or ghosts. Once, when thrown from a horse as a child, a local female healer saved his life, according to the physician called in for follow-up care, and this reinforced his belief in traditional healing. Always reluctant to use mainstream medicines, he refused all pills unless "convinced they were absolutely necessary." He was known for his "fiery West Indian temper," a commonly held ethnic stereotype.<sup>7</sup>

Religion, as it related to race and ethnicity, complicated Gomez's early life. As with many middle-class blacks, his mother's family belonged to the Anglican Church, while his father's family was devoutly Catholic. His father wanted all his children christened as Catholics, but because they did not reside near a parish church, Gomez was baptized in the local Anglican Church, but with the assumption he would follow

Catholicism. His mother joined the Wesleyan Methodist Church and often took Gomez to services with her. His siblings continued to attend the Catholic mass with their father. Gomez claimed he preferred the services of the Methodists because he could understand the sermons and the rituals, less complicated than in the Catholic or Anglican churches, especially since the Catholic rites were in Latin. His biographer noted, “it was in Antigua that his love for Methodism was planted.”<sup>8</sup>

Issues of class affected Gomez’s early life as well. Both of his parents had come from humble backgrounds, but their families had attained middle-class status as property and business owners. They had obvious aspirations for upward mobility that they passed to later generations. His father’s family had significant economic resources as shown by Manoel’s cousin’s nickname of “Spit Gold,” whose wealth was known throughout the colony. While his paternal grandfather opposed his parent’s relationship, his maternal grandmother sanctioned it. Like many Afro-Caribbean women of her era, she believed European men had economic advantages and could provide materially in a manner that the majority of Afro-Caribbean men could not.<sup>9</sup>

The family struggled to maintain a middle-class lifestyle. To prove his commitment to his family, his father built a large home for the family in his mother’s village, which housed a bakery and had a stable for thoroughbred horses and an impressive carriage as well. The family employed a housekeeper, a governess, and a white tutor for the children. His parents believed it was imperative that, as the oldest son, Gomez should receive an education that made him competitive in the colonial economy and beyond. Although he worked as a child, his parents demanded he focus on his education, often to the exclusion of other children in the family. His paternal

grandmother wanted him to become a Catholic priest, while his mother intended Gomez to migrate to London and study law or medicine.<sup>10</sup>

After they had five children, Gomez's parents embraced middle-class mores by legally marrying 1896. Their children never knew the parents had not married before then and were not informed of their parents' wedding. Gomez's mother concealed his illegitimate birth by hiding his birth certificate and told him he was actually born in Trinidad in 1890. As a result of his mother's attempts to obscure what she considered the less reputable features of her life, throughout his life Gomez maintained that Trinidad was his birthplace.<sup>11</sup>

The family experienced economic reversals in the late 1890s, a time of global depression. His father's bakery failed and the family could no longer afford servants. A member of his father's family bought their home and they moved into Gomez's maternal grandmother's house. With few available options, his mother persuaded his father to migrate to Trinidad, where earlier his favorite maternal uncle, James, had moved.<sup>12</sup>

The family's migration exemplified a common response to economic hardship in the Caribbean. Intra-island migration, a feature of colonial economies in plantation societies, existed as "a firmly rooted historical phenomenon" and had served as a solution to lack of land, low wages, and unsteady, menial employment since the immediate post-emancipation period. Migrants from smaller islands of the eastern Caribbean and those with high population density and little available land often came to the larger island of Trinidad, which purportedly had better economic opportunities.<sup>13</sup> Trinidad became a magnet for many intra-island migrants because, in addition to having a relatively low population density, the discovery of oil drew workers to the colony at the turn of the

century. Thus early on, the Gomez family viewed migration to the larger and more prosperous island as a way to overcome financial reversal.<sup>14</sup>

The family left Antigua for Trinidad around 1900 and, with money lent by both grandmothers and by local banks, purchased a home in a middle-class residential area in the capital, Port of Spain, and assumed a mortgage for another bakery. The Gomez family had resources available, which facilitated migration and made it a viable option. As we shall see, access to such resources aided Gomez's later migration to the United States as well.<sup>15</sup>

While the family had lived in a rural area in the less cosmopolitan Antigua, in Trinidad they lived in the capital. The population of the capital increased dramatically in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, as rural-to-urban migration and intra-island immigration and Asian immigration occurred. The teeming streets of Port of Spain made St. John, the capital of Antigua, seem bucolic in comparison.<sup>16</sup> Trinidad's greater ethnic and racial diversity made Gomez less self-conscious about his interracial heritage than he had been in Antigua.<sup>17</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, Trinidadian society was far more multiethnic than before. Ethnic diversity differentiated the white elite, comprised of English and Scottish immigrants who served as colonial officials, merchants, planters, and professionals, as well as white Creoles from old planter families of French, Spanish, English, and Irish descent. The black and colored Creole population was equally diverse, marked by class and regional distinctions. The addition of post-emancipation immigrants "from Africa, Madeira, Europe, including Britain, [and from] Venezuela, the eastern Caribbean, China, and India" increased the multiethnic character of the colony. British

rulers did not consider the metropolitan Portuguese as white, and extended this viewpoint to Madeiran immigrant labor in British Caribbean colonies and Guiana.<sup>18</sup>

Gomez was well aware of the racial, ethnic, and class markers that distinguished Trinidadian society. As a biracial member of two marginalized ethnic groups, but nonetheless a member of the black and colored middle class, “[h]e especially wanted to learn to speak English with the precision he heard at the government buildings.” Middle-class blacks and coloreds emulated the white elite “and subscribed to . . . [European] cultural and social values,” and while they did show a large measure of racial pride, their assimilation of European cultural norms distinguished them from the working- and lower-class blacks.<sup>19</sup>

As in Antigua, initially Gomez had a private tutor. When financial setbacks beset the family again, Gomez attended a Methodist private school called Tranquility. Further economic constraints led to Gomez’s enrollment in a public school, where academically he surpassed many of his classmates. For blacks and coloreds like Gomez colonial Trinidadian “culture and intellectual skills” and upward mobility depended on scholastic success. Brereton asserts

[b]ecause education was so important in their rise in status, the members of this group attached great weight to cultural and intellectual life . . . . It was literacy, familiarity with books, the possession of “culture” which mattered, as well as an occupation which involved no manual labor. These things were more essential criteria for membership of the middle class than wealth or lightness of skin. Most of the people in this sector were not wealthy, or even moderately well-off; many . . . exist[ed] on very small salaries. In one sense they formed an intelligentsia, in that they took pride in being the most cultured sector of the community, although they were not part of the ruling class. They attached so much importance to culture because they had no other valuable and valued possessions to hold on to . . . . [I]n the circumstances of nineteenth-century Trinidad . . . education was the only field in which they appeared at an advantage in the society.<sup>20</sup>

By 1907, when Gomez completed his last year of high school, the household's economic circumstances were so reduced that his father sold coal to support the family. Gomez had little opportunity to continue his education in Europe, or at one of the elite high schools in the colony. He found employment as a low-level clerk in a hat maker's shop, but his mother was determined to see him further his education. His uncle, James, who had migrated to New York earlier, invited Gomez to move there and offered assistance in settling in the city. His father borrowed money to finance the journey and so Gomez left Trinidad for the United States in July 1908.<sup>21</sup>

The support Gomez received from his family was crucial to emigration. A kinship network provided valuable assistance at the point of origin and during his journey in a number of ways. In addition to the financial support given, relatives who supplied information about traveling and who had knowledge of the new environment provided other forms of assistance. One of his father's cousins, George deSilva, who had traveled to New York previously, accompanied Gomez on his voyage and saw to it that he made contact with James on arrival in the city.<sup>22</sup>

His uncle, James, shared his apartment, acquainted him with the city, and supported him until he found a job. It is clear that his uncle acted as a fundamental connection in the process of chain migration that facilitated settlement in unfamiliar surroundings. Later, Gomez would play the same role and assist other members of his family in emigration from Trinidad.<sup>23</sup>

In spite of the help given Gomez, he had to overcome various obstacles in his pursuit of an education. He needed to obtain additional credits to make his diploma valid, so he enrolled in a neighborhood school. Although school officials considered his

education insufficient, he found the academic program at the public school he attended in New York far less rigorous than the schools in Trinidad. For two years he attended classes and worked part-time as a waiter as he tried to save money to attend college after graduation. His uncle suggested he contact their cousin who had emigrated from Antigua, William Benjamin Derrick, a bishop in the AME church, to solicit financial assistance for tuition. Derrick, a broker of the black vote for the Republican political machine, rebuffed Gomez and refused to offer assistance of any kind.<sup>24</sup>

If Gomez's kinship with the bishop failed to assist him in his educational endeavors, friendship with AME minister Reverdy Ransom proved very helpful. In time, Ransom became a surrogate father to Gomez and guided his course through the AME hierarchy, which culminated in a bishopric in later years. The two men met in September 1908 when Gomez attended a service at Bethel AME where Ransom had served as pastor. Both men were new to the city, with Ransom being assigned to the church the year before Gomez arrived. Through his friendship with Ransom, he met New York's black stage performers and the members of the city's lowest classes. Ransom objected to the AME churches catering to the black middle class and taught Gomez that the underclass deserved the same consideration as the middle class, if not more so. As a member of the Niagara Movement and its successor, the NAACP, Ransom introduced Gomez to W. E. B. DuBois, whose writings made a deep impression on him, but Gomez found DuBois's elitism unappealing. Through his friendship with Ransom, Gomez also met prominent AME officials, including Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, whose religious conviction and political activism soon convinced Gomez to pursue a career in the church, rather than in medicine as he intended initially.<sup>25</sup>

When Gomez completed the high school courses he required, Ransom appealed successfully to church officials to secure Gomez a scholarship. In 1911, he left New York to attend Payne Theological Seminary at Wilberforce in Ohio, his mentor's alma mater. His uncle provided him with a small amount of cash to meet his expenses and accompanied him to the train station. Perhaps to reflect the changes in his life, he changed the spelling of his name from "Gomes" (a Portuguese spelling) to Gomez (a Spanish spelling) and dropped his middle names.<sup>26</sup>

He did well in his studies and his instructors considered him an excellent student. He met students from across the United States, Africa, Canada, South America and the Caribbean. During his time at Wilberforce he met one of his lifelong friends, J. D. Smith, who was from the British colony of Bermuda. This connection of shared culture as British colonials formed the basis for a bond between the two men. In addition, he met the woman he would marry, Hazel Thompson. The two wed in 1914, the year Gomez graduated. He became a naturalized United States citizen the same year. Hazel accompanied him to New York to complete his naturalization papers and was welcomed by James on behalf of the extended family. The Ransoms received her in the same way they accepted Gomez into their family as a surrogate son.<sup>27</sup>

Shortly after obtaining citizenship, Gomez was assigned to a church in Shelly Bay, Bermuda. His friend, J. D. Smith, led one of the ten churches in the colony and was among the ministers who greeted the Gomezes on their arrival. At a conference held the week of Gomez's arrival in Bermuda, church officials transferred Smith to Barbados. The transnational structure of the church kept West Indians like Gomez connected to the Caribbean.<sup>28</sup>



Bermuda, as a British colony, was immediately affected by World War I. The British government sent Gomez a letter in August 1914 that stipulated that the church where he was pastor be used for military purposes. He convinced the bishop of the district to fight the demand, and the British never used the church during the war.<sup>29</sup>

The war brought areas of racial discontent into sharp focus. Providing comfort to the families whose sons were fighting in Europe became one of his major pastoral duties during the war. Because of his protests against segregation in the local rifle corps, police watched Gomez closely and listened to his sermons and speaking engagements, in hopes they could charge him with sedition. He protested as unreasonable the property qualifications required for enfranchisement, which prevented the majority of blacks from voting in elections as well. Blacks in the colony warned Gomez to tone down his condemnation of the racial policies of the British, as they feared the repercussions of such blunt verbal attacks.<sup>30</sup>

The vagaries of war also brought Gomez into closer contact with his family. His younger brother, James, had enlisted as a soldier in the British Army and his company had a brief stopover in Bermuda. This gave Gomez an opportunity to reestablish family ties and hear news from home. James would remain a link to events and incidences in Trinidad throughout Gomez's life. His close family ties encouraged transnational ties.<sup>31</sup>

Gomez stayed in Bermuda until 1917, when his bishop transferred him to Canada, to lead St. Paul AME in Hamilton, Ontario. Like his first pastoral position, his next charge was also part of the British Empire and the Canadians to Gomez "seemed very British with their emphasis on formality and correctness in their daily lives and worship."<sup>32</sup>

In September 1919, the bishop transferred Gomez again, this time to Bethel AME in Detroit. Established in 1841, Bethel stood as the second oldest church and had the largest congregation of the African American churches in Detroit. When church officials announced Gomez as the new pastor, some felt his youth, foreign birth, and his previous placements in churches outside the U.S. made him unsuited to lead one of the cornerstones of the city's black community. Contentious from the beginning, he had an eventful tenure at Bethel, but one that created a lifelong position of leadership in Detroit.<sup>33</sup>

Although several middle-class blacks attended the church, members of the lower class comprised much of the congregation. As southern migrants joined the church, Bethel assisted their settlement in the city through the Dorcas Sisterhood and the St. Mark Brotherhood, social service programs Gomez established or reorganized. The members, in turn, contributed their wages to the development of the "Greater Bethel" he sought to bring into reality. Before long, Detroiters recognized Gomez as a dynamic leader and during his first year, reporters claimed "a great awakening" had occurred "in every department of the . . . church."<sup>34</sup>

He began his pastorate with a focus on the economic circumstances of the church. One of his first acts was to "ask the [Stewards'] board to recommend to[the] trustee board the purchasing of a safe." He advised the implementation of a new policy to collect fifty-cent dues from every church member, "each Sunday whether present or absent, sick or well."<sup>35</sup> Gomez proved adept at raising funds for the church and kept it financially solvent. He organized rallies where "every member of the church must subscribe . . . [and] each person would be privileged to pay his or her subscription."

Soon after he assumed leadership of the church “Bethel was crowded to the doors” on Sunday mornings and often required a church elder to hold an additional service in the church lecture room. On some Sundays, both services were full “and many turned away unable to even get in the overflow. The overcrowding of the church convinced Gomez a new building was needed to house the growing congregation.”<sup>36</sup>

By the end of his first year as pastor, Gomez had begun to speak of acquiring a new church with Bethel members contributing over thirty-four thousand dollars toward the goal. Early in 1921, he had “mentioned” to the church stewards that the site at St. Antoine and Frederick Streets was available for the price of forty thousand dollars. In May, Gomez purchased the property and plans for a new church commenced in earnest. Still, the funds to build the church needed to be raised. Ultimately over \$25,000 went to building the new church, with \$70,000 contributed in 1925 alone, the year of its completion.<sup>37</sup>

One of the most tenacious fund raising groups at the church was known as the “Silent Workers,” a quasi-secret organization composed initially of thirteen women. Established by Gomez in February 1921, the Silent Workers served as a “pastor’s aid” society, which staged fundraising “socials” and donated the proceeds to the church. Gomez wanted the Silent Workers exclusively to organize church fundraising efforts.<sup>38</sup>

Personal loyalty to their pastor, exclusivity, and a pretext of confidentiality motivated the members of the Silent Workers. Their “club song” illustrated their devotion: “We are the women of the Silent Workers band/Ready and ever willing to lend a helping hand/To our beloved leader Gomez at his command/With loyal hearts and true.” The group had a limit of twenty-five members and Gomez “hoped . . . that their

efforts . . . [could] be attained silently, but with great results.” When the women disregarded the rule of confidentiality, they were “reprimand[ed] . . . for exposing the club’s business” and officers of the group “impressed it deeply on the members to keep the business of the club [secret].” Any breach of confidentiality resulted in suspension from the organization.<sup>39</sup>

The financial efforts of the Silent Workers paralleled the work of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew at St. Matthew’s. Whereas Everard Daniel utilized this group of men in spearheading fundraising efforts of his church, Gomez organized women to the same end. Although Gomez himself paid weekly dues as a member and other men attended its meetings in various capacities, in its earliest form, married women comprised the overwhelming majority of the organization. As an ardent advocate of political and economic rights for women, he supported their ordination as ministers and their election to administrative positions in the church. He also supported women’s suffrage. Under his auspices, the Bethel Nurses Guild organized in 1926 to care for members during church services, but also offered free services and nursing classes to the wider community. Gomez applied his theoretical beliefs in the leadership qualities of women to practical matters concerning Bethel and the African American community. His stance toward equal rights for women was advanced for the era.<sup>40</sup>

Many perceived Gomez’s choice of location for the new church as radical as well. The old church, located at the intersection of Hastings and Napoleon Streets, stood in the heart of Black Bottom. The new site selected by Gomez was located in a segregated white area and the move commenced as violence over racial boundaries rocked the city. The Ku Klux Klan threatened Gomez’s life and deacons of the church carried arms to

protect him when he delivered his sermons. Gomez refused to be intimidated by the threats. When the congregation moved into the new church on Frederick and St. Antoine Streets in June 1925, a cross was burned in the yard and several of the stained-glass windows broken by bricks thrown through them. Again the church deacons brought arms into the church to offer protection as he presided over the service and the police called in to disperse the violent crowd gathered outside the building. The police made no arrests, but no further violent episodes occurred. Gomez was considered militant by some people for his decision to choose contested ground as the site of the new church and his choice of armed defense.<sup>41</sup>

When a mob attacked the home of Dr. Ossian Sweet in September 1925, Gomez knew first-hand how the experience felt. Sweet, who had attended Wilberforce during the same period as Gomez, met a violent mob who threatened the home he had purchased on Garland Avenue in a white neighborhood on the city's lower east side. With Sweet arrested for murdering one man and wounding another after shots were fired from the Sweet home, the case became a symbol of nationwide residential segregation. Gomez, who had successfully resisted violent intimidation when he relocated his church, immediately galvanized black leaders in support of Sweet. Named as president of the City-Wide Sweet Fund Committee, Gomez just as quickly ran afoul of the top leadership of the NAACP.<sup>42</sup>

As the head of the national organization, James Weldon Johnson dispatched his assistant secretary, Walter White, to Detroit to use the Sweet case to dramatize the racial violence accompanying residential segregation across the nation. Intending to use the Sweet experience as a test case, Johnson and White wanted to dismiss the local black

lawyers hired by Sweet and his ten co-defendants and hire instead a high-powered white attorney. The national leadership of the NAACP expected the Detroit branch field secretary, William Pickens, and the new branch president, Robert Bradby, to acquiesce to their defense strategy, which they did.<sup>43</sup>

In his chronicle of the Sweet case, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age*, historian Kevin Boyle fails to identify the complex interactions between the leaders of the three most powerful churches in Detroit's African American community. The intersection of race, class, and ethnicity increased the probability of discord among local leaders in a situation with as much political significance as the Sweet case. Boyle notes that Everard Daniel joined Gomez's committee, but overlooks the fact that both men were biracial, well-educated, professional West Indian immigrants. They both disliked and competed with Bradby. The intersection of these factors produced complex dynamics and resulted in protracted wrangling between various local and national interests.

Gomez objected to the dictates of the NAACP brass and as head of the City-Wide Committee, the president of AME Ministerial Union, and the leader of one of the city's largest black churches, his objections carried weight. Gomez wanted to act independently and intended the City-Wide Committee to function "as a local organization, uncontrolled by outside policies." However, the local committees had "no desire whatever to interfere with the organization which is now handling the case [the NAACP] but simply to strength[en] its efforts." But because of his desire to act independently, Gomez had differences and disagreements many of those involved in the Sweet case.<sup>44</sup>

Gomez attempted to obtain a position on the Executive Board of the local NAACP branch and Bradby's opposition to the appointment left the two men as adversaries. That the NAACP "national office . . . [was] depending on . . . [Bradby] to help in raising the necessary funds for the most adequate defense of Dr. Sweet" exacerbated the tension that existed between Gomez and Bradby. As a Detroit branch official, Bradby had the responsibility of insuring "that no other fund should be created regardless to who wants it," and that Gomez controlled the rival fund certainly created contention between them. A professional rivalry certainly existed between Gomez and Bradby as well, as a colleague noted that the Second Baptist pastor was "of a very jealous nature and . . . afraid that something might be said that would be of a praiseworthy nature about someone else." Gomez possibly meant Bradby when he told field secretary Pickens "he [did] not like the leadership of the NAACP," but he opposed other leaders of the organization as well.<sup>45</sup>

Gomez had a known dislike of DuBois, whom he had met as a young man under Ransom Reverdy's tutelage. Pickens claimed Gomez "hate[d]" DuBois and was "unreasonable" in his actions with the NAACP because of his attitude, but Pickens's assertions might not have been entirely accurate. Although Gomez believed DuBois was an elitist, he admired him intellectually, and in any case, DuBois, as editor of the *Crisis*, had very little to do with the day-to-day operations of the organization. Gomez did have differences with local NAACP personnel and Walter White, but these differences related to professional rivalry and the autocratic methods employed in the control of the legal battles of Ossian Sweet.<sup>46</sup>

Gomez raised several hundred dollars for the legal and personal needs of Sweet and the other defendants. Pickens, White, and Johnson wanted the money relinquished to the national office, while Gomez felt it his right to disburse the money as he saw fit. Those working with the NAACP, such as Judge Ira Jayne, claimed “Gomez [was] starting trouble to the future of the organization.” Money helped fuel the conflict between Gomez and the NAACP.<sup>47</sup>

Gomez had access to the one necessary item the NAACP lacked—hard cash. The same fundraising expertise Gomez used to assemble the exorbitant sums needed to build a new church he directed now toward the Sweet defense fund. For the NAACP “there ha[d] been difficulty in raising funds” which, according to Moses Walker, Detroit NAACP branch vice president, was “because of dissatisfaction on the part of the public with the present [black] attorneys and because no white lawyer ha[d] been retained.” More accurately, the public as represented by Gomez and the City-Wide Committee resented both the implication that local black lawyers were unqualified, that the NAACP had usurped control of the case, and that the organization had appropriated the money raised locally.<sup>48</sup>

The incident at the Sweet home occurred September 9, 1925 and a month later, Gomez had raised five hundred dollars. By October 23, Gomez had two thousand dollars that the NAACP desperately needed to pay Clarence Darrow, who had agreed to defend the Sweets at the reduced fee of five thousand dollars, and Arthur G. Hays as co-counsel, who asked for the token fee of three thousand dollars. The NAACP set out to “win over Gomez” in an effort to “induce” him to contribute the money he had raised to their



coffers. Gomez proved just as steadfast in his endeavors to maintain some local management of the case.<sup>49</sup>

He continued to insist “that he was not fighting the Association,” but maintained persistently that the City-Wide committee would operate as a self-governing organization in control of its finances and that contradicted NAACP policy. Pickens “suggested” that City-Wide turn over funds to the NAACP, or failing that “write checks to our lawyers, to be checked off against our debts.” Pickens and White spoke at Bethel on October 25, where they attempted to “influence the destiny” of the money Gomez had collected. The two organizations reached a compromise and agreed to form a six-member committee, with three representatives for each side “to disperse[sic] their money.” White considered the matter “settled,” but two weeks later, he still “[was] making an effort to get . . . Gomez’s crowd to pay off the bulk of the lawyers’ fees.”<sup>50</sup>

NAACP officials struggled to minimize Gomez’s role in the Sweet case, while they continued to require the funds he had solicited. They denied his authority as they acknowledged “[i]t would be disastrous . . . to have the colored people pulled in different directions,” and realized Gomez had the influence to cause just this type of divisiveness. Their actions illustrate that they believed that some truth lay in Gomez’s assertion that “he got money that the Association could not have got,” but they still acted in a condescending manner.<sup>51</sup>

Pickens suggested that Gomez’s relinquishing financial control would “save the name and face of . . . [his] organization” and he believed “[c]onfidentially,” City-Wide “[was] cornered. If they do not come across decently, they will get a black eye and will get it soon.” Pickens spoke at Bethel, but with “reluctance,” and attempted to distance

himself from Gomez, about whom he felt ambivalent, comparing him unfavorably to a “jackass.”<sup>52</sup>

When Walter White secured passes from Frank Murphy, the trial judge in the case, for Gomez and Daniel to keep order among African American spectators in the courtroom he chose the men for their status, but expected “the little favor w[ould] serve to hold them in line.” As representatives of the middle-class and elite sectors of black Detroit, Gomez and Daniel had undeniable influence, but White’s comments indicate he could accede to their authority only in the most backhanded manner.<sup>53</sup>

White’s manipulation failed and he consulted James Weldon Johnson in an effort to resolve the situation with Gomez. Johnson responded he

believe[d] . . . Gomez’s committee had about \$1600 left in their treasury, and you [White] suggested that a good dispensation of that amount would be to have them pay \$500 to [Walter] Nelson [a local white attorney chosen by Darrow] and \$1000 to Darrow. I agree with you that they ought to pay this money out directly on the case and promptly, but I think a better dispensation would be \$500 to Darrow and the rest of the money divided among the colored lawyers. It is better to leave Darrow and Hays to us and have them shoulder the responsibility of the local lawyers as far as possible. I judge after the City-Wide Committee have expended what they have on hand they will hardly be able to raise any more funds. That will dispose of them in the easiest manner.<sup>54</sup>

White’s response to Johnson revealed the derision for Gomez that permeated the NAACP. He trivialized the Gomez committee’s assumption of expenses such as the Sweet’s mortgage payment, defendant Leonard Morse’s car payment (an expense for which Moses Walker had rebuked Bradby for attempting to pay with NAACP funds), and “meals at the jail for the defendants,” but disparaged Gomez as petty when he was “unable to . . . understand that the transcript of testimony is a necessary thing and a legitimate item of expense.” Gomez undoubtedly recognized the necessity, but resented

paying for something of which the NAACP would take for their benefit. White chided Gomez for what he called an attempt “to ease himself on the [NAACP] bandwagon.” White also alerted Johnson that black attorney Cecil Rowlette “[was] going all over town saying that if it hadn’t been for the Gomez crowd all the money would have gone to the white people.” For White, when Rowlette lauded Gomez, it became an “additional reason it would . . . [have been] most unwise to have Gomez pay out their balance to the colored men.”<sup>55</sup>

Gomez recognized and resisted the blatant financial exploitation by the NAACP officials and their attempts to deny his role as an influential and legitimate leader of Detroit’s African American community. NAACP leaders expressed concern about Gomez causing divisions over funding the Sweet defense, but they remained unaware how their conduct exacerbated racial, ethnic, and class tensions present already in black Detroit. Gomez struggled to strike a balance in his political identity as a black middle-class West Indian that neither ignored nor emphasized one aspect at the expense of the others. But throughout his life he identified himself as a West Indian.

Gomez remained in close contact with people and events in the West Indies. The era witnessed a period of improved relations between the U.S. and the Caribbean owing to better transportation and communication technologies, increased migration to the United States and Detroit. All of these factors contributed to the transnational perspective Gomez represented. He remained connected to the Caribbean through letters and telephone calls, visits, and remittances to family members. He also traveled to the Caribbean for AME annual conferences and used the occasions to visit his family. His

kinship ties as well as the multinational character of the AME Church gave a transnational stamp to Gomez' life.<sup>56</sup>

In the same manner by which a kinship network had facilitated his migration to the United States, Gomez aided his youngest brother Walter's move to Detroit in 1920. His sister, Violet, came in 1923 after Gomez went to Trinidad earlier in the year to see his ailing mother. His brother James never migrated to Detroit, but had lived in New York briefly in 1920 to acquire the funds to open a very successful import business and a profitable farm. He frequently visited and once stayed with Gomez after recuperating from an illness and returned for ceremonies, weddings, and other social events of his brother's family. James served as his host when Gomez visited Trinidad, holding parties where he met local politicians and other colonial dignitaries. Frequent communication as well as movement to and from the Caribbean maintained and fostered a link with his West Indian origins.<sup>57</sup>

Several of his colleagues in the AME church were West Indian and travel to church conferences where he was reacquainted with his friends also allowed Gomez to keep contact with his origins. Noted West Indians in the AME church who Gomez befriended included Haitian John Hurst, bishop of 16<sup>th</sup> District (West Indies); John. D. Smith from Bermuda, who mentored Gomez as a student at Wilberforce; D. O. Walker from St. Vincent, pastor of St. James AME in Cleveland and later president of Wilberforce; and Frederick Talbot of British Guiana. Gomez's attendance at AME conferences in Bermuda, British Guiana, and Jamaica also kept him in contact with the Caribbean.<sup>58</sup>

In 1925, thirteen leaders of the black community founded Detroit Memorial Park as a response to the segregation at local cemeteries. Gomez was one of three founders and members of the board of directors of West Indian origin. Others included Jamaican James M. Gregory, a dentist who later became a practicing lawyer, and Vollington Bristol from Barbados, who owned a funeral parlor on Joseph Campau and Macomb. Business activities with others from the Caribbean reinforced a broad sense of West Indian ethnic identity, which cut across national boundaries. As minorities in the wider African American community, West Indians were still too few to form organizations based on their common ethnicity for more than another decade.<sup>59</sup>

Gomez faced ethnic discrimination in his rise through the AME ranks and his association with other West Indians may have lessened his frustrations. His efforts to become a bishop failed initially “because of his West Indian background,” and his origins had prevented his selection. When he campaigned again unsuccessfully for the position, his West Indian extraction was cited as the reason for his rejection. When two seats in the episcopate opened, many thought either D.O. Walker or Gomez would receive a position, but it was unlikely two West Indians could win. The two men were close friends and their shared West Indian identity cemented their friendship. To the surprise of many, delegates elected both men, but their Caribbean outlook continued to be viewed as a negative factor, especially among those from the southern districts.<sup>60</sup>

African American delegates undoubtedly resented the comparative success of West Indian immigrants. David J. Hellwig examined the attitudes of urban African Americans toward West Indian immigrants in the 1920s and found conflict and tension in the relationship between the two groups. Hellwig noted

“[w]hile white Americans largely ignored the presence of West Indians as they persisted in the self-serving delusion that all Negroes were the same, blacks were hypersensitive to nationality differences. Each group found much to fault in the norms and values of the other. Conflicts rooted in ethnocentrism, were exacerbated by poverty, racism, color-consciousness, and competition from white immigrants and southern black migrants.”

These types of issues evidently caused conflicts in AME church politics as well.<sup>61</sup>

Gomez does not appear to have consciously curbed his West Indian characteristics in an effort to advance professionally. In his examination of leadership in New York’s West Indian community, Philip Kasinitz suggests that immigrant leaders of Gomez’s era subdued their ethnicity to gain influence in the African American community. That Caribbean identity continued to prevent Gomez from reaching his professional goals within the AME church hierarchy implies that he chose not to submerge characteristics of his ethnic identity. He chose instead to “emphasize West Indian distinctiveness . . . in terms of culture . . . [if not] group interests,” even when it hindered him.<sup>62</sup>

Concurring with Kasinitz, Nancy Foner, writing about New York states, “the first cohort of West Indian immigrants played down their ethnic distinctiveness in the public arena. Entering America at the height of racial segregation—and when they were a much smaller community—West Indian New Yorkers immersed themselves in the broader African American community. . . . [I]ndeed, they deliberately muted their West Indianness in public life as they appealed to, and were largely supported by, a predominantly native African American electorate.” Gomez was more concerned with church politics prompted by the international nature of the AME church, and he demonstrated little of the muting of ethnicity noted by Foner.<sup>63</sup>

Named a bishop in 1948, Gomez would become one of the most prominent AME officials of the twentieth century, holding positions as chancellor of Paul Quinn College in Waco, Texas before becoming bishop of the 4<sup>th</sup> District in 1956, which included Detroit and led Gomez back to the city. He would remain one of the most influential leaders of Detroit's African American community until his retirement in 1972 and advanced age and deteriorating health caused him to move to Ohio where he was cared for by his daughter, Annetta. According to her account, during the final months of Gomez's life, he often wistfully wished he could spend his final days in Trinidad and passed hours reminiscing about there and Antigua. At his death on April 28, 1979 at the age of 89, many thousand people attended his funeral service, with several traveling from abroad to Detroit, where the rites were held. He was buried in the cemetery he helped to found, Detroit Memorial Park. In his honor, an AME church in Barataria, Trinidad named one of its buildings after Gomez.

Ethnicity clearly played a paramount role in Gomez's experiences and from his childhood in Antigua and Trinidad he was conscious of how it affected and shaped his life. His life could serve as a paradigm of the success story of West Indian immigrants writ large: Migration to complete his education, a meteoric rise to a position of leadership of one of the nation's largest African American communities, and the triumphant achievement of a position of influence and prestige in an influential and esteemed international religious organization. During his early tenure in Detroit, he became renowned for his bold actions in an era of racial conflict and violence. His valiant responses to racial intimidation can be attributed to a radicalism often associated by North Americans with West Indians. But Gomez was no quixotic reformer. He exhibited

a decidedly conservative and pragmatic approach to the economic realities that his adversaries underestimated. His attention to practical financial concerns may have stemmed from the economic reverses of his childhood, which precipitated his first migration experience.

Gomez's experience of migration demonstrates a pattern characteristic of West Indians of the era. Aided by kin networks that provided financial backing, assistance with travel from Trinidad, and housing, education, and employment when he arrived in the U.S., Gomez's life illustrates the migration process that thousands of West Indians undertook in the World War I era. His life (relationships with family in the Caribbean, remittances to them, and professional and leisure travel to the islands) are transnational practices that kept Gomez linked to the West Indies and reinforced a West Indian ethnicity. In Detroit, personal and business relationships with other West Indians solidified these patterns, perpetuating the ethnic identity on which they rested. His identification as a West Indian and his deep-seated ambition led to competition with other Caribbean-born leaders, as well as African Americans, both in Detroit and on a national stage in Gomez' role as a prominent figure in the AME church and in the fight against racial discrimination.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Weisbrot, *Father Divine and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 38. The stereotype of the West Indian radical has persisted from the era when Kelly Miller, the dean of Howard University, defined a radical as "an overeducated West Indian without a job." See Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1998) and Dennis Forsythe, "West Indian Radicalism in America: An Assessment of Ideologies," in *Ethnicity in the Americas*, ed. Frances Henry (Chicago: The Hague, Mouton, 1976), 301-332. The militancy of Anglophone West Indians is noted also in Ira De A. Reid, "The Negro in the British West Indies," *Journal of Negro Education* 10, no. 3 (1938): 528. Reid stated that the "Negroes in the West Indies . . . [are] intensely preoccupied with obtaining political rights."

<sup>2</sup> Richard W. Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It: Building Black Community in Detroit, 1915-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 178.

<sup>3</sup> Annetta Louise Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God: The Life of Joseph Gomez, a Bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1998), 1-7. Gomez-Jefferson's biography of her father provided a wealth of detail on the subject throughout his long and



distinguished life. I rely heavily on her information pertaining to Joseph Gomez's early life prior to his immigration to the U. S. For example, the elder Antonio Gomes emigrated with his wife, Antonia, their children and other family members from Madeira to Antigua in the 1860s when Joseph Gomez's father, Manoel, was a small child. Antonio came to the island as an indentured laborer and chose to work under a task system as opposed to earning an hourly wage, which allowed him to work fewer hours and after a few years to save the money to open a dry-goods store in an area called Seaton Village where other members of his family lived. According to Stanley Engerman in "Contract Labor, Sugar, and Technology in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Economic History* 43, no. 3 (Sept. 1983): 635-659, Portuguese islanders came as contract laborers to the British West Indies beginning in 1835 and this migration continued until the first decades of the twentieth century. Over 8,000 Portuguese migrated to the British colonies during this period. Gomez's maternal grandfather, Richard "Bojo" Joseph (who later changed his name to Joseph Richardson) was descended from emancipated slaves who owned land and other property in Willikies Village, an area carved out of old estates by former slaves. With patriarch David, a skilled mason, at the head of the family, the Josephs maintained a comfortable middle-class lifestyle, unlike most of the villagers.

<sup>5</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 7-10.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 7-10.

<sup>7</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 8, 260, 10-13, 60; Ira De A. Reid, *The Negro Immigrant: His Background, Characteristics, and Social Adjustment, 1899-1937* (New York: AMS Press, 1939), 108. Sociologist Reid characterized many of the stereotypical traits African Americans perceived West Indians possessed in his study of black immigrants in New York. It is significant to note that Gomez's (American-born) daughter conveyed many of these stereotypes in depictions of her father.

<sup>8</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 10-11.

<sup>9</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 13, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 2-3, 7, 8, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 8-9.

<sup>12</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Kathleen Valtonen, "Bread and Tea: A Study of the Integration of Low-Income Immigrants from Other Caribbean Territories into Trinidad," *International Migration Review* 30, no. 4 (1996): 995, 998; Bridget Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad, 1870-1890* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 110.

<sup>14</sup> Valtonen, "Bread and Tea," 998; Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1981), 95, 199, 201; Howard Johnson, "Barbadian Immigrants in Trinidad, 1870-1897," *Caribbean Studies* 13, no. 3 (1973): 6-9.

<sup>15</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, 14; Brereton, *Race Relations*, 116.

<sup>17</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 14; Richard B. Sheridan, "The Rise of a Colonial Gentry: A Case Study of Antigua, 1730-1775," *Economic History Review* 13, no. 3 (1961): 345, 349; Stanley Engerman, "Contract Labor, Sugar, and Technology in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Economic History* 43, no. 3 (September 1983): 642-643, 649.

<sup>18</sup> Brereton, *Race Relations*, 10, 34, 110.

<sup>19</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 14; Brereton, *Race Relations*, 208-209, 94.

<sup>20</sup> Brereton, *Race Relations*, 94.

<sup>21</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 16.

<sup>22</sup> Eugene Litwak, "Geographic Mobility and Extended Family Cohesion," *American Sociological Review* 25, no. 3 (June 1960): 386-387; Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Tilly and C. Harold Brown, "On Uprooting, Kinship, and the Auspices of Migration," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 8, no. 139 (1967): 144-146; Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 28. Derrick, son of an Antiguan planter, migrated to the United States during the Civil War. He enlisted in the U.S. navy and fought in the battle between the *Monitor* and the *Merrimac*. In 1864, he became a minister in the AME church and in 1879 was given charge of a church in New York City and made a bishop in 1896. Associated with New York Senators Thomas Platt and Roscoe Conkling, Derrick was considered "pompous" and "belligerent" by rival Reverdy Ransom. Derrick fell from political grace around the same time Gomez migrated to New York.

<sup>25</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 22-26; see Reverdy C. Ransom, *The Pilgrimage of Harriet Ransom's Son* (Nashville, Tennessee: Sunday School Union, 1949). Ransom, like Gomez, had a mother whose determination to see her son educated resulted in upward mobility. Born in Ohio in 1861, he enrolled at Wilberforce in 1881 and graduated in 1886. He served as pastor to churches in Pittsburgh (1888), Springfield (1890) and Cleveland (1893), Ohio, Chicago (1896), and Boston (1905). He was elected bishop in 1924. In his support of Gomez, Ransom was unwavering and his tutelage guided Gomez through the often perilous web of AME politics. In 1949, Ransom deeded to Gomez his summer cottage at Woodland Park in Bitely, Michigan. Woodland Park, located near Idlewild, was a less high-toned retreat of the black middle class. Ransom died with Gomez at his bedside on April 22, 1959 and Gomez delivered the eulogy at Ransom's funeral as well.

<sup>26</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 30. His name before he legally changed it was Joseph Antonio Guminston Gomes.

<sup>27</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 37-38, 49.

<sup>28</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 51, 53. Methodist churches in Bermuda were originally part of the British Methodist Episcopal (BME) Church, which also included Canada and the West Indies. In 1884, the BME merged with the AME Church. The church where Gomez served was called Bethel like the church in Detroit to which he later received an assignment.

<sup>29</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 54-55.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 54-55.

<sup>31</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 55.

<sup>32</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 65-66. St. Paul was one of the most prominent of the Canadian AME churches. After emancipating himself, Josiah Henson served as a deacon at St. Paul in the 1840s. Until 1885, black Methodist churches in Canada, like those of Bermuda, belonged to the British Methodist Episcopal Church. When the Canadian churches merged with the AME church, the unification was signaled by St. Paul hosting the district's first Annual Conference.

<sup>33</sup> David M. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 18; Richard Thomas, *Life for Us*, 180; Forrester B. Washington, "The Negro in Detroit: A Survey of the Conditions of a Negro Group in a Northern Industrial Center during the War Prosperity Period, 1920" (Public Associated Charities of Detroit, 1920, mimeographed), 21; Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 68, 71, 73. One of Gomez's first contentious actions was to allow "radicals" such as fellow West Indian Chandler Owen and A. Philip Randolph to speak at Bethel on March 16, 1920.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Thomas, *Life for Us*, 176, 179; *Detroit Contender*, Nov. 13, 1920; Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 73, 81.

<sup>35</sup> *Detroit Contender*, 13 November 1920; Stewards and Trustees Minute Book, 1915-1925, Oct. 2, 1919, Box 1, Bethel AME Church Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Bethel Papers).

<sup>36</sup> Stewards and Trustees Minute Book, Dec. 2, 1920, Bethel Papers; *Detroit Contender*, May 7, 1920.

<sup>37</sup> *Detroit Contender*, 13 November 1920; Stewards and Trustees Minute Book, 31 March 1921; 119<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Bethel AME Church, Box 1, Folder 3, Bethel Papers; Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 81.

<sup>38</sup> Silent Workers of Bethel AME Church Minute Book, 1921-22, 28 February 1921, 11 March 1921, Bethel Papers.

<sup>39</sup> Silent Workers Minute Book, 22 April 1921, 8 April 1921, 18 March 1921, 15 April 1921, Bethel Papers. The necessity of keeping the group's work confidential can only be presumed. That Gomez had indicated somewhat untruthfully that the Silent Workers were the only group involved in fundraising might have led to his encouragement of the secretive nature of the organization. The notion of confidentiality may have resulted from a desire to conceal the amount the group contributed. Additional research is required to thoroughly explain the covert nature of the group's activities. However, it is clear they were organized as the fundraising division within Bethel.

<sup>40</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 58, 90, 148; Richard Thomas, *Life for Us*, 179.

<sup>41</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 86-87.

<sup>42</sup> Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), 74; *Detroit Independent*, 2 October 1925.

<sup>43</sup> Boyle, *Arc of Justice*, 212-213, 222-225; Walter White to Robert Bradby, 15 September 1925, The Campaign against Residential Segregation, 1914-1955, reel 2, part 5, Papers of the NAACP (hereafter referred to as the NAACP Papers).

<sup>44</sup> *Detroit Independent*, 25 October 1925.

<sup>45</sup> Boyle, *Arc of Justice*, 223; Walter White to Robert Bradby, 19 September 1925; Moses Walker to Walter White, 22 September 1925; William Pickens to James Weldon Johnson and Walter White, 25 October 1925, The Campaign against Residential Segregation, 1914-1955, reel 2, part 5, reel 3 part 5, NAACP Papers.

<sup>46</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 25; William Pickens to James Weldon Johnson and Walter White, 25 October 1925, The Campaign against Residential Segregation, 1914-1955, reel 2, part 5, reel 3 part 5, NAACP Papers.

<sup>47</sup> Ira Jayne to Walter White, 1 October 1925, The Campaign against Residential Segregation, 1914-1955, reel 2 part 5, NAACP Papers.

<sup>48</sup> Moses Walker to Walter White, 7 October 1925, The Campaign against Residential Segregation, 1914-1955, reel 2, part 5, NAACP Papers.

<sup>49</sup> Boyle, *Arc of Justice*, 168, 239; Moses Walker to Walter White, 7 October 1925, reel 2, part 5; William Pickens to James Weldon Johnson and Walter White, 23 October 1925, reel 3, part 5, The Campaign against Residential Segregation, 1914-1955, NAACP Papers.

<sup>50</sup> William Pickens to James Weldon Johnson and Walter White, 25 October 1925; Walter White to James Weldon Johnson, 31 October 1925; Walter White to James Weldon Johnson, 10 November 1925, The Campaign against Residential Segregation, 1914-1955, reel 3, part 5, NAACP Papers.

<sup>51</sup> William Pickens to Robert Bradby, 9 October 1925; William Pickens to James Weldon Johnson and Walter White, 25 October 1925, The Campaign against Residential Segregation, 1914-1955, reel 3, part 5, NAACP Papers.

<sup>52</sup> William Pickens to James Weldon and Walter White, 25 October 1925, The Campaign against Residential Segregation, 1914-1955, reel 3, part 5, NAACP Papers.

<sup>53</sup> Walter White to James Weldon Johnson, 31 October 1925, The Campaign against Residential Segregation, 1914-1955, reel 3, part 5, NAACP Papers.

<sup>54</sup> James Weldon Johnson to Walter White, 12 November 1925, The Campaign against Residential Segregation, 1914-1955, reel 3, part 5, NAACP Papers.

<sup>55</sup> Moses Walker to Walter White, 22 September 1925, reel 2, part 5; Walter White to James Weldon Johnson, 16 November 1925, The Campaign against Residential Segregation, 1914-1955, reel 3 part 5, NAACP papers. White was particularly unfair to black lawyers Cecil Rowlette, Julian Perry, and Charles Mahoney. He stated “[t]he very worst thing that could be done would be to have the City Wide Committee pay any more to the colored lawyers. They have each received \$600 and the public is sore and resentful for it is generally known they have done nothing at all in the case.” Kevin Boyle suggests White’s contempt for Rowlette stemmed from the lawyer’s dark complexion and his humble beginnings. White either ignored or was unaware that the legal strategy adopted by Arthur Garfield Hays and Walter Nelson had been initially designed by Rowlette.

<sup>56</sup> Raye R. Platt et al., *The European Possessions in the Caribbean Area: A Compilation of Facts Concerning Their Population, Physical Geography, Resources, Industries, Trade, Government, and Strategic Importance* (New York: National Geographic Society, 1941), 39-40. By 1940, transportation and communications throughout the Caribbean and beyond facilitated transnational ties and “[t]hrough the Pan American Airways, Trinidad ha[d] regular passenger and mail connections with the United States, Mexico, the whole of the Caribbean area, and both the east and west coasts of South America.” All the major steamship companies operating in the southern Caribbean “ma[d]e regular stops there” as well. Telegraph systems were widely available as was “wireless communication.” Nancy Foner, ed., *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 7-9. Foner states “transnational practices refer to the way migrants sustain multistranded social relations, along family, economic, and political lines, that link their societies of origin and settlement.” Gomez clearly established these transnational practices.

<sup>57</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 268.

<sup>58</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 54, 98, 318, 57. Hurst was bishop of the 16<sup>th</sup> District from 1913-1916 and Gomez answered to him during this period. Dougal Ormonde Walker was pastor of St. James AME from 1926-1937 and founder of the prestigious St. James Literary Forum, where local and

national leaders debated the issues of the day. He was president of Wilberforce University from 1936-1941. His daughter is the first woman to serve as the president of Wilberforce. Frederick Talbot would speak at Gomez's funeral in 1979.

<sup>59</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 93; *Michigan Chronicle*, 5 May 1979; *Detroit Tribune Independent*, 8 June 1935; James C. Fleming and Christian E. Burckel, eds., *Who's Who in Colored America*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Christian E. Burckel & Associates, 1950), 54. Gomez knew Vollington Bristol from the Sweet trial as well. Bristol, who encountered racist violence when he and his family attempted to occupy a home he owned on the west side of city, was a friend of Sweet's as well and testified for him at the trial of the horror of his experience.

<sup>60</sup> Gomez-Jefferson, *In Darkness with God*, 167, 182, 197-198; *Michigan Chronicle*, 8 December 1956, 15 December 1956, 5 May 1979; *Detroit Free Press*, 1 May 1979; *Cleveland Call and Post*, 5 May 1979.

<sup>61</sup> David J. Hellwig, "Black Meets Black: Afro-American Reactions to West Indian Immigrants in the 1920s," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (Spring 1978): 206.

<sup>62</sup> Philip Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 160.

<sup>63</sup> Foner, *Islands in the City*, 6.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Raising the Red, Black and Green: West Indian Leadership of the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Detroit**

West Indian immigrants clearly sought to elevate themselves to positions of leadership in the Detroit's local Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), the Black Nationalist organization founded by Marcus Garvey. The organization was international in scope and people of many different backgrounds served as leaders. However, several leaders of the Detroit UNIA had Caribbean origins. As with previous West Indian in positions of authority in black Detroit, their better educations and professional qualifications led to the view that they were more capable as leaders than many of the African Americans who comprised the rank-and-file membership of local divisions. Garvey himself perceived West Indians as better qualified as leaders and chose them for key positions within the UNIA, which caused ethnicity to act as a divisive factor within the association.

Marcus Garvey's UNIA developed in the Caribbean and spread throughout Africa and the African diaspora and became one of the most significant black political movements of the twentieth century. The organization was based on a platform of Pan-African political thought and Black Nationalist capitalism and its members in the Caribbean and Central America established divisions in Garvey's native Jamaica, British Guiana, Trinidad, Cuba, Costa Rica, Panama, and British Honduras (Belize). Africans founded branches in several locations, including Cape Town, South Africa; Lüderitz and Windhoek, South West Africa (now Namibia); Accra, Gold Coast; Freetown, Sierra Leone; and Lagos, Nigeria. Colonial officials frequently blamed Gaveyism for anti-

colonial resistance and banned the UNIA publication, the *Negro World*. Even with Garvey's imprisonment for mail fraud in 1925 and his deportation to Jamaica in 1927, his movement continued to resonate with black people for its messages of unification of the black race, racial pride, and African repatriation. The red, black, and green flag created by Garvey as a symbol of Black Nationalism continues to hold significance even today.<sup>1</sup>

It was among blacks in the United States where Garvey found his largest following. Garvey arrived in the United States in 1916 and spoke in Detroit within the year. In May 1919, when Garvey began to establish his steamship company, the Black Star Line, Detroit's African American population was rapidly expanding and in June Garvey came to the city to induce black workers to purchase five-dollar stocks and invest in the business. A year later, when a division of the UNIA was organized in Detroit, West Indians stood at the forefront.<sup>2</sup>

The UNIA gained a significant following in Detroit and was considered one of the most active branches of the organization. Large sums of cash were collected for a variety of causes, donated by the four thousand members the organization claimed in the city. Garvey frequently visited; and immediately prior to his arrest, he and his wife, Amy Jacques Garvey, were in Detroit. During his incarceration, Garvey kept in close contact with key UNIA leaders in the city, at least one of whom visited him in the federal penitentiary in Atlanta. In August 1925, the year Garvey went to prison, Detroit was one of the cities to stage a local convention at Garvey's request. Amy Jacques Garvey stayed at the Liberty Hall on Russell Street for part of 1926 and in August of that year, Detroit hosted the UNIA convention. When the federal government accused a loyal Garveyite, Esau Ramus, of the murder of James Eason, a former follower, Garvey told Ramus to

hide at Detroit's Liberty Hall, the meeting place of the UNIA at 1516 Russell Street. Federal agents kept Detroit under watch for suspicious "Negro activities" and paid close attention to Garveyites in the city. At the time a federal judge issued the bench warrant for his arrest, Garvey was in Detroit. Even in 1927, after Garvey's deportation, the Detroit UNIA controlled assets worth \$50,000.<sup>3</sup>

Although African Americans comprised the rank and file of the organization in Detroit, as in the New York division and the parent body, much of its leadership was West Indian. Worldwide, between 1921 and 1933, at least 48 percent of UNIA leadership was from the Caribbean. Scholars of the Garvey movement such as E. David Cronon, Tony Martin, and Robert A. Hill note the significance of the Detroit division to the parent body of the UNIA and recognize the role Detroit UNIA leaders played in creating a viable chapter of the organization. In his article, "Garveyism in Idlewild, 1927-1936," Ronald J. Stephens explores the role of the Detroit UNIA in the development of a rural chapter in the resort community of the black middle class in western Michigan. Historian Richard Thomas in his study of Detroit's African American community examines Garveyism as a response to the Great Migration and also the role Garveyite leaders played in the creation of black Detroit. Scholars such as Jeannette Smith-Irvin and Judith Stein and journalist Paul Lee note the West Indian origins of the leaders of the UNIA in Detroit. However, these scholars fail to emphasize the significance of ethnicity to the cadre of West Indian immigrants who comprised the leadership of the UNIA in Detroit.<sup>4</sup>

Richard Thomas notes, "that the members of the black professional and business classes played a leading role in running the affairs of the Detroit UNIA. The black

working class most probably played little or no major role in the leadership positions.” Thomas fails to call attention to the West Indian ethnic backgrounds of many of those leaders. As Garvey “expected locals to be led by educated men and women especially after 1921, when the UNIA was desperate for funds and required bridges to more affluent blacks,” the West Indian leadership in Detroit possessed the education and professional skills he required. An important part of UNIA meetings concerned the reading aloud of the organization’s newspaper, the *Negro World*. Ostensibly, reading the paper aloud made it available to those who could not afford to buy the paper, but the low rate of literacy among the UNIA rank and file was a more accurate reason.<sup>5</sup>

The leaders of the Detroit UNIA shared also an ethnic identity with Garvey and this common ethnicity contributed to their ability to gain chief positions within the organization. A government agent who infiltrated the association observed “Garvey seemed to think the West Indian better than the American negro” and tension between the two groups simmered always within the UNIA. “Not only has this movement created friction between Negroes and whites, but it has also increased the hostility between American and West Indian Negroes,” noted a government official. Garvey had a UNIA secretary rebuke the head of the New Orleans division for speaking out against West Indians, asking “what is there against a West Indian Negro?” and asserted “[a] West Indian Negro is just as good as a black person of America.” In the murder of the former Garveyite mentioned previously, one of his major criticisms that led to his departure from the UNIA was “that Garvey thought West Indians superior to American blacks” and all three of his accused assailants had West Indian origins. At the 1924 convention, Garvey considered it “noteworthy” that UNIA delegates “were able to conduct a convention for



29 or 30 days without even finding it necessary to appoint a sergeant-at-arms . . . to keep order.” The expected source of disorder was “the fact that the delegates and deputies came from different parts of the world—the South meeting the East, the East meeting the West, the West meeting the North, the man from Barbados meeting the man from Jamaica.” When Garvey’s legal troubles became more pressing, his treatment of key African Americans in the movement led to the observation that he “want[ed] to get rid of all the Americans, [and] stat[ed] they cannot be trusted.” Obviously, ethnicity played a divisive role and generally worked to the advantage of West Indians.<sup>6</sup>

While none of the Detroit leadership migrated from Jamaica as Garvey had, most of the West Indians had shared the experience of migrant workers, albeit highly skilled workers, but in search of higher wages and opportunities unavailable in the colonies. In his study of Garvey, Theodore Vincent notes the mobility of “many Garveyite leaders [who] were world travelers . . . many West Indians in the UNIA had simply migrated directly to America, but most Garveyite leaders had traveled widely. Most of the members within [and from] the Caribbean basin had done extensive island-hopping.” Garveyites noted that travel and migration provided UNIA members with invaluable experience. West Indian members benefited from this experience in a way less well traveled African Americans had not. In a keynote address at the 1924 convention, a prominent African American UNIA leader remarked, “the American Negro had done little or no traveling, while of the West Indian the opposite was true.” The West Indian leaders of the Detroit UNIA certainly demonstrated a tradition of migration prior to their arrival in the city. F. Levi Lord, a West Indian leader of the Detroit UNIA, noted that he had “traveled throughout the United States and in a great many islands in the West Indies

and elsewhere.” Most of them knew Garvey personally and, in one instance, had met him prior to immigrating to the United States. Their West Indian origins attracted them to the movement and ethnicity was a factor in their leadership roles in the organization as well.<sup>7</sup>

Their responses to Garvey’s deportation in 1927 ranged from continued loyalty to opportunism. Charles Zampty, a West Indian from Trinidad, kept a division of the Detroit UNIA operating for sixty years, but it existed largely as an anachronism. Much of the focus of Zampty’s leadership was black economic nationalism and the establishment of black businesses in the city. As we will see, Joseph A. Craigen, another key West Indian leader used his experience in the organization as a point of entry to state politics within the Democratic Party and renounced his former commitment to Pan-African ideals . Both of these responses indicate the bourgeois orientation characteristic of Garvey and his fellow West Indians leadership positions in the UNIA.

The bourgeois orientation of many of the West Indians selected by Garvey to administer his organization is apparent in their advanced educations and professional employment. The economic programs Garvey implemented were hardly radical, and those who assisted him in their organization, like Garvey, espoused a form of Black Nationalist capitalism. Even his Back-to-Africa movement touted what becomes only another migration to the highly mobile cadre of West Indians who served Garvey and who expected to become a new elite once settled in Liberia.

Many of the characteristic advantages of class as it related to ethnicity are seen in the West Indian leaders of the Detroit UNIA. Scholars of the Garvey movement credit F. LEVI LORD with the founding of the first branch, Division #125 (later Division #407), of the organization in Detroit in 1920. An educator from Barbados, Lord also had

training as a shoemaker and migrated to the Bahamas to work on the police force when refused a promotion in the school system because he belonged to the wrong religious denomination. He immigrated to Brooklyn in 1918 and found work in a shoe factory, as well as studying accounting. He later put his knowledge of accounting to use to establish a credit union. He heard Garvey speak and offered his skills in shorthand, a self-taught ability, which allowed Garvey's speeches to appear in the *Negro World*. He attended the 1920 UNIA convention, where Garvey offered him the job of founding a division in Detroit, for less money than he earned working in the shoe factory. Lord took the position, however, because it allowed him to travel in the country and assist the organization.<sup>8</sup>

Lord held several key positions in the UNIA and was considered a "high official of the association. In addition to founding the first Detroit division, he served as the division's executive secretary until 1925. This position brought Lord to the attention of federal agents in the city, as the government built its case against Garvey for mail fraud. A mixture of loyalty and dishonesty among some UNIA members, as well as increasing criticism from other black leaders contributed to the organization's problems. In the Eason murder case, one of the accused said that Ford held a large arsenal of guns, an unsubstantiated charge, but one that hints at the prominence of Lord as a leader of a major UNIA division. Appointed by Garvey as auditor general at the 1924 convention, Lord left Detroit the following year to serve as the executive treasurer for the parent association. In the reorganization of the UNIA after Garvey's incarceration, Garvey considered Lord a "logical" choice for leadership, regarded him as a "clean executive," and let it be known that "retaining" Lord "would meet" with his "approval." Lord was

elected chancellor, the manager of all the finances of the organization, for the “new administration” at the 1926 UNIA convention held in Detroit and when the UNIA opened Liberty University the same year, Lord served on the board of trustees as treasurer.<sup>9</sup>

Even after his appointment to the parent body, Lord retained ties to Detroit. He returned to address the local division in Garvey’s absence and spoke at a “Garvey Day” celebration shortly after the leader’s arrest. As a founder of the division, Lord kept a close relationship to the Detroit UNIA.<sup>10</sup>

When Garvey was initially imprisoned, many believed in the imminent collapse of his movement. In weekly meetings held at the New York division’s Liberty Hall, Lord strove to reassure Garvey’s followers that the movement remained viable. Three months after Garvey left for Atlanta, Lord asserted confidently that despite the absence of their leader, “members of the organization had stuck to it with a tenacity that . . . exploded the theory that if the shepherd is struck, the sheep will be scattered.” According to Lord, far from destroying the UNIA, “Garvey’s imprisonment had had the effect of bringing the members closer together and they . . . [were] determined to remain together until his return.” Lord also appealed to members “for the financial aid of the organization” at an “International Rally,” where he stated the goal of \$50,000 in contributions.<sup>11</sup>

When a major conflict emerged between the New York local and the parent body, Garvey selected Lord as one of three leaders to maintain control of the UNIA. As part of “the ruling triumvirate,” Lord sharply criticized the hostile actions of the New York division. In support of Garvey, Lord accused the disloyal faction of “a conspiracy to defame the . . . leader of the people and disrupt the great organization he founded.” His loyalty to Garvey and the UNIA secured his position during the myriad of difficulties that

arose after Garvey's conviction and his reputation as "a very level-headed officer" increased his standing within the organization.<sup>12</sup>

But Lord ran into difficulties because of his relationship with Garvey. When the New York division sued Garvey in September 1926 for control of the organization and its Liberty Hall, Lord, as an executive officer, was named as a co-defendant. The UNIA division presidents questioned Lord's integrity as auditor and demanded "an independent audit of the books," and at the 1926 Detroit convention Amy Jacques Garvey interrogated Lord about inconsistencies in his financial reports. These questions about his integrity led Lord to resign as auditor, but the Detroit division executive secretary pushed his election as chancellor. However, Garvey expected him to help subdue the renegade New York division by closing the office during the convention and urged Lord's reelection, an indication of his value to the organization. By September 1927, however, when Garvey reincorporated the university, he intended the move to oust Lord from the board of trustees. Garvey was adamant that "Lord must not be included."<sup>13</sup>

After leaving the UNIA, Lord obtained a civil-service position in New York and later established a lucrative credit union in Brooklyn. As characteristic of the West Indian leadership of the Detroit UNIA, Lord used his education, professional skills, and aptitude he brought to the organization to become upwardly mobile once the UNIA failed. This pattern of upward mobility can be seen in the experience of many West Indians active in the leadership of the organization in the city.<sup>14</sup>

Another West Indian associated with founding the Detroit UNIA, JOHN CHARLES ZAMPTY met Garvey before either man immigrated to the United States. Zampty was born in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, in 1889 where he was educated in Catholic

schools and went briefly to England to study in a seminary. He decided to pursue training as a skilled tradesman and in 1909 found employment with the Trinidad Oil Company and the Trinidad Sanitary Inspection Corporation. His job as a sanitary inspector led to his working in Lagos, Nigeria, but requested to return to Trinidad when his expected salary fell short of the amount stated when he was hired. When the ship docked in Panama, Zampty saw the opportunity for employment and quickly obtained a job as a skilled mechanic with the Isthmus Canal Commission, where he worked from 1912 until 1918. He met Garvey his first year in Panama when Garvey addressed the Colon Federal Labor Union. Garvey left Panama, but the two men became reacquainted when Zampty immigrated to the United States.<sup>15</sup> During the First World War, Zampty contacted Ford Motor Company in search of employment. Ford accepted his application and in 1918, Zampty and his wife migrated to New York, where they stayed with his sister's husband. He joined the fledgling UNIA in New York before moving to Detroit in 1919. Zampty helped organize Division #407 and served as auditor general, a position in which he traveled extensively with Garvey in 1922. As auditor-general, Zampty "monitored attendance figures for all public meetings of the divisions and accounted for collections taken up at the meetings." During his tenure, Zampty supplied confirmation of the "financial irregularities" that Garvey charged Eason with that led to his expulsion from the UNIA. Again Garvey assigned an important position of trust to a West Indian in the Detroit UNIA and like others so appointed, he had the characteristic high level of education and skills associated with ethnicity.<sup>16</sup>

Zampty and Garvey's close relationship put the two men in dangerous situations. When they attended a UNIA meeting at Longshoremen's Hall in New Orleans in 1922,

the chief of police confronted Garvey and attempted to disband the 6,500 people assembled. Garvey refused to back down and Zampty claimed this refusal was due to armed guards posted in their lodgings across from the hall. No violence ensued, but the experience left Zampty well aware of its potential because of his proximity to Garvey.<sup>17</sup>

Zampty shared with Garvey a political consciousness developed through experiences as black migrant workers. When Zampty discovered a pay differential between black and white workers employed on the Panama Canal, it led him to conclude blacks “should be self-supporting and independent and ...should be accepted as equals—not to integrate, intermingle, or change our racial entity, but to become . . . economically independent.” His dismissal from the Isthmus Canal Corporation for his political activities also emphasized Garvey’s doctrines as did his inability to obtain a civil service position with the British West Indies Regiment. When he left New York to come to Detroit to begin the job at Ford, he was informed that the company did not hire blacks for managerial positions, although the company conceded he had more than adequate qualifications. He did find employment as a carpenter, but for much less money than he expected and less than whites employed in the same capacity. These cases of discrimination made Zampty an ardent Garveyite and he remained active in the Detroit UNIA until his death in 1980.<sup>18</sup>

J. MILTON VAN LOWE, a native of St. Kitts, studied in Canada and England before attending the University of California, where he served as assistant editor for the *Pacific Times* (San Francisco). He later attended the University of Pennsylvania. He earned a law degree from the Detroit College of Law in 1922 and opened his own law practice, located at 911 Gratiot Street on the lower east side of the city. White legal

professionals knew him for “his appearances in court, his scholarly references and oratory,” which “always drew packed courtrooms.” He attended Bethel AME, a stronghold of the city’s black middle class, whose pastor, Joseph Gomez, supported Garvey. Van Lowe had a prominent leadership role in the Detroit UNIA as attorney for the division. However, his position within the organization reflected the middle-class values of Garvey and his officials.<sup>19</sup>

Robert Poston, editor of the pro-Garvey *Detroit Contender* and a favorite of Garvey’s, influenced Garvey’s opinion of Van Lowe. Poston heard Van Lowe give a speech that concerned the persecution of “colored leaders” who struggled “for the freedom of . . . [their] people” which impressed Poston as “one thing that interested him particularly” at a Detroit division meeting.<sup>20</sup>

Garvey selected Van Lowe to serve as secretary to a three-person delegation to Liberia in December 1923, charged with revitalizing plans for emigration to the country. He led a mass rally for Van Lowe and other delegates the night before they sailed to Africa. Van Lowe acted as one of “the chief figures” at a rally in Madison Square Garden when the delegates returned and spoke also at the 1924 UNIA convention held in New York. Van Lowe spoke to convention delegates and in his speeches revealed a revived Pan-African economic plan through the establishment of a new shipping line, the Black Cross Trading and Navigation Company, as successor to the failed Black Star Line. In support of economic nationalism, he “stressed the importance of acquiring ships, showing how the possession of a merchant marine had contributed to the greatness of nations, ancient and modern, and the lack of it had kept certain nations in obscurity.” Like its



predecessor, the Black Cross Company purchased ships but could not successfully operate them.<sup>21</sup>

Because the negotiations with Liberia disintegrated and “there had been quite a lot of propaganda” implying the delegates “were not wanted there” and “would not be welcome,” Van Lowe sought to demonstrate that Liberians’ response initially had been encouraging. The people of Monrovia greeted Van Lowe and the other delegates warmly and they “were met by a great number of members and friends of the UNIA.” The well-traveled attorney could not “recall a reception so cordial or enthusiastic,” or “a welcome so endearing as . . . [they] had on their arrival.” According to Van Lowe, not only the masses in Monrovia supported the UNIA, but “many high officials of Liberia.” His testimony opposed the charges that Liberians did not support the UNIA in its plans for Africa.<sup>22</sup>

Van Lowe reported on his meeting with the Liberian president, Charles D. B. King, regarding Garvey’s proposed emigration of thousands of West Indians and African Americans as colonists to the country. The capacity in which Van Lowe served as UNIA emissary indicates his standing in the organization. According to Van Lowe, King regarded the goals of the organization “with zeal, enthusiasm, and an appreciation that could not have been excelled by the Hon. Marcus Garvey himself.” King appointed a committee comprised of the country’s vice president, chief justice, two ex-presidents, and comptroller. Van Lowe’s report stated the African leader did permit him to lease a building from one of the king’s relatives and gave other signs of his alacrity. When “[t]he plans were drawn up and signed,” it indicated to Van Lowe the success of the negotiations. King denied having any connection with the UNIA, and his duplicity “made

his . . . acts all the more inexcusable and high-handed.” As a direct participant in the negotiations, Van Lowe clearly had first-hand knowledge related to Garvey’s designs in Africa.<sup>23</sup>

Van Lowe belonged to the pro-Garvey faction that emerged in the reorganization of the UNIA after Garvey’s incarceration. When the Detroit division convened “its first local convention,” Van Lowe was one of the key officials involved in the event. Shortly after the convention, he joined in the protest of the shooting death of a young black man by a white police officer. He spoke often at division meetings and made moving appeals to local UNIA members, professing his “whole soul” to the association, which “boil[ed] when . . . [he] came into contact with enemies of Marcus Garvey.”<sup>24</sup>

Like other key figures, Van Lowe contended after Garvey’s arrest that the UNIA still functioned as a thriving organization and that members “owe[d]” both Garvey and the association “so much.” When the Detroit division hosted the 1926 convention, Van Lowe played an important roll in the proceedings and welcomed delegates by reading the announcement Garvey issued from jail. When F. Levi Lord called a series of meetings in Detroit in April 1927, Van Lowe functioned as a key participant in the event.<sup>25</sup>

In May 1927, Van Lowe acted as a chief organizer of a rally and procession held in the city to protest Garvey’s imprisonment and made a keynote address at the event. But when the Detroit division splintered in 1929, due in part to a growing affiliation with the Democratic Party, Van Lowe remained a Republican. His political affiliation may have put him at odds with the changing objectives of the local division and he stayed loyal to the pro-Garvey faction of the Detroit UNIA. Van Lowe continued his affiliation with the organization until his premature death in 1933 at the age of forty.<sup>26</sup>

JOSEPH A. CRAIGEN engineered the disintegration of the Detroit division when he tried unsuccessfully to establish a rival division of the UNIA that replaced Garvey as leader. Born in 1896 in Georgetown, British Guiana, Craigen migrated from the colony when offered a position as a Spanish interpreter for the United States Navy during World War I in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. His fluency in Spanish derived most likely from Guyana's proximity to Venezuela, where the language is spoken, and he employed his bilingualism to his advantage, using his second language as a means of emigrating from British Guiana.<sup>27</sup>

When the war ended, Craigen left Alabama and in 1918 arrived in Detroit, where he found work at Ford. While verifying his earliest exposure to Garveyism requires additional research, in August 1921 he attended the UNIA convention in New York and felt confident enough to oppose Garvey's efforts to obtain control of UNIA and Black Star Line finances. In March 1924, he participated in the mass rally Garvey held in Madison Square Garden and in April, Garvey appointed him general secretary of the Detroit division. Craigen replaced F. Levi Lord as executive secretary of the Detroit division when Lord left the city to work for the parent body in New York in 1925. Significantly, the position was transferred from one West Indian to another.<sup>28</sup>

At the UNIA convention held in New York in August 1924, Craigen was ubiquitous. He led the parade on opening day and he was among those selected to deliver the closing address of the convention. UNIA officials conferred honors on Craigen and others who had rendered the organization exceptional service during a special ceremony.<sup>29</sup>

He proposed several measures and served on a number of committees. One such commission deliberated on the manner that the UNIA could best aid in liberating Haiti from the control of the United States. The conclusion of the committee, that black voters organize a Universal Negro Political Union, founded by Garvey to help win the support of white politicians favorable to Garvey and the UNIA, foreshadowed Craigen's later involvement in partisan politics, which demonstrated his conviction that the political process would ultimately benefit blacks more than Garvey's economic nationalism.<sup>30</sup>

He also used politics within the organization to further his advance in it. His strategic position on the 1924 UNIA convention committee that addressed the duties of executive officers prefigured that of an official of the parent body fashioned after Garvey's arrest for mail fraud as a result of the irregularities in the financial affairs of the Black Star Line. Delegates voted in overwhelming favor for the chain of command developed by Craigen that made executive officials accountable only to Garvey and ultimately gave him that prerogative.<sup>31</sup>

As the eloquent leader of a major UNIA division, Craigen acted as a key spokesperson during the event. He prepared a petition to the Firestone Rubber Company that requested the company halt their attempts to purchase land in Liberia, although such an action stood little chance of success. When other matters detained Garvey and he had to cancel a speech in one of the evening sessions, Craigen was among those selected to fill in for him as a speaker.<sup>32</sup>

Craigen vehemently expressed his views concerning the organization's financial transactions and proposed a system of fiscal accountability for executive officers of all UNIA divisions. Because the government challenged the legality of Garvey's financial

dealings and later disputes arose between Craigen and Garvey over mutual charges of fraud, Craigen's attention to monetary matters is noteworthy. He also tried to quell the haggling over salaries by UNIA officials. He "emphasized that sacrifice on the part of officers was necessary, referring to his personal sacrifice in refusing a \$100-a-week job to accept a third of that working for the Universal Negro Improvement Association."<sup>33</sup>

The month before Garvey's arrest, he praised Craigen and "pa[id] tribute to the splendid services rendered" by him and other division leaders. After Garvey's arrest, "Craigen was one of the leaders of the larger divisions that Garvey entrusted to maintain the UNIA until his release," and Craigen became "one of Garvey's most trusted lieutenants."<sup>34</sup>

A month after Garvey's incarceration Craigen turned again to politics, this time when he tried to use the threat of withholding the black vote to pressure a congressman to use his influence to obtain Garvey's release. Since the formation of a political arm at the 1924 convention, Garveyites had used the organization to sway elections toward candidates favorable to the UNIA. Significantly, Craigen completed the process for naturalization and citizenship in 1925, as Garvey had commanded UNIA members to do after his trial. He addressed Congressman Clarence McLeod for "the members of the Universal Negro Political Union of Detroit," who had "engaged [them]selves actively" in McLeod's campaign and election. In return for their support, Craigen petitioned the congressman to help "to secure Executive clemency for . . . [their] leader."<sup>35</sup>

In an attempt to hold the movement together while jailed, Garvey encouraged local divisions to have local conventions in 1925 in lieu of one hosted by the parent body in New York. Craigen played a main role when the "Detroit Division celebrated . . . its

first local convention,” and made an opening address to begin the event. Tragedy cut short the celebration, when a policeman killed a member marching in the UNIA parade. Craigen and other division leaders called for “an indignation mass meeting” in protest of the shooting. In his speech, Craigen bitterly denounced the racism that caused the cavalier deaths of blacks. “Laws are made for the killing of birds; they can be killed only in season,” he lamented, “[b]ut the Negro can be killed spring, summer, fall, or winter—just any time the white man desires.” He demanded “a petition to be sent to the mayor,” which he read to the assembly.<sup>36</sup>

In a later attack on racism, Craigen promoted Pan-African solidarity through the UNIA as the solution to racial discrimination. The political philosophy he espoused also contained elements of imperialism. He warned “if Negroes refuse[d] to join [the UNIA] now the white man w[ould] soon force him to join.” As the speech was given during the racial violence centered on blacks moving into white residential areas in Detroit in the summer of 1925, his warning sounds much more ominous. “Public sentiment is against us,” he continued, “and every one that doesn’t look like us is against us. If the white race wants America for their race, we, as Negroes of the Universal Negro Improvement Association want Africa for the Negroes of the world.” The battle raging in the city over integration fueled Craigen’s rhetoric of racial separatism in which black colonists from the Americas would replace the white colonial powers in Africa.<sup>37</sup>

In October 1925, the executive council of the UNIA held a conference in New York to discuss the organization’s future. As an officer of a major division, the council elected Craigen to a four-member delegation that went to Atlanta to present the resolutions of the conference directly to the imprisoned Garvey. These four delegates, as

the “Committee of Presidents” replaced the existing leadership of the parent body. This elected body signaled the reorganization of the UNIA Garvey’s absence.<sup>38</sup>

In January 1926, Craigen visited Garvey in prison and the two discussed an upcoming meeting the committee had in Washington, D. C., concerning Garvey’s appeal. A month later the committee issued a call for a convention in Detroit held March 14 to March 31 to address two officials who refused to resign as part of the reorganization of the UNIA. Members were to send all inquiries and donations to Craigen. “All roads,” proclaimed an advertisement for the event, “must lead to Detroit.”<sup>39</sup>

After his election to the Committee of Presidents, Craigen pledged his support for Garvey. He affirmed his loyalty and stated

the UNIA will continue to march and Garvey will continue to lead. Garvey’s program is the only program and situation for the Negro’s problems. Garveyism cannot be destroyed. There can be obstructions put in the way of the association to delay its progress, but the association will never be destroyed. We have made up our minds that we will follow Garvey and his program. Garvey’s sufferings and sacrifices shall not be in vain.<sup>40</sup>

Garvey acknowledged Craigen and the other members of the committee as “loyal sons of Ham” and entrusted him with even greater responsibilities. Garvey and the committee considered the New York division leaders traitors and Garvey warned Craigen of their treachery. “Do not allow Executive officers of New York to intrigue you into sending them money, nor to compromise your stand,” Garvey cautioned Craigen, “otherwise you will jeopardise [sic] people’s interest and nullify import of Convention.” Garvey instructed his protégé to “act intelligently in dealing with those tricky men who are supported by tricky lawyers.”<sup>41</sup>

In an effort to promote the irregular March convention Craigen visited the Chicago division. As the executive secretary of the Committee of Presidents and the most influential UNIA leader in the Midwest, Craigen drew the expected large crowd. The success of the convention rested largely on his shoulders and he was “indefatigable” in his constant activity on behalf of the UNIA. For his efforts, the *Negro World* acknowledged Craigen’s “invaluable service to the organization and to the race.”<sup>42</sup>

Craigen dominated the conference. The first day he cabled Garvey “pledging undivided loyalty, love and goodwill” to the jailed leader, which delegates unanimously supported. He presented a letter from the New York executive officers requesting funds to attend the conference, as earlier Garvey had warned him. Garvey entrusted Craigen with advancing a petition to the Virginia state legislature to support repatriation to Africa. Craigen received the nomination for the office of secretary general of the parent body, but declined, as he preferred the position on the Committee of Presidents for its direct link to Garvey. In with his steadfast belief in the political process, he sponsored a message to “various state legislatures,” probably to plead for Garvey’s release. Craigen was among the signers of a petition sent to the federal commissioner of immigration to prevent or delay Garvey’s deportation.<sup>43</sup>

Delegates addressed the issue of how to proceed with the remaining ship of the Black Star Line. Garvey had expressed the concern that the disloyal officials who wished to see the ship sold “[we]re after” Craigen to permit the transaction. Craigen reported to delegates on the ship’s condition and advocated retaining the vessel, but during the convention, federal marshals sold the ship at a public auction. The “new administration,”



consisting of Craigen and others officials still loyal to Garvey attended the sale, but was unable to outflank those officials now out of Garvey's favor.<sup>44</sup>

Because of the commendations given Craigen for the success of the convention, Garvey kept him busy. In May, he went to New Orleans, where he "render[ed] service for the parent body." He continued as the executive secretary of both the Committee of Presidents and the Detroit division and organized the division's second annual local convention in August. Like F. Levi Lord, Garvey appointed Craigen to the trustee board of Liberty University and he went to New York to tackle the ousted UNIA members who challenged the new administration's control of the school.<sup>45</sup>

Craigen and the others on the presidents' committee met with Garvey in October, as "friends on business," part of a "steady stream of visitors and countless correspondents to pressure politicians for a pardon." But according to Craigen, he "was privileged to visit him [Garvey] in Atlanta more regularly than any other person." Garvey evidently considered Craigen both loyal and highly competent to entrust him with his most pressing legal concerns. Craigen's charismatic personality proved invaluable in maintaining UNIA cohesion and he had the good judgment or allow his ambition to influence him to claim glory for himself. He remained outwardly humble and continued to give Garvey full credit.<sup>46</sup>

Craigen, an articulate and well-traveled college graduate, was known for his intelligence and the UNIA began to rely on his expertise and knowledge. During a visit to Garvey in March 1927, he took a visit through the South and to Nassau, Bahamas and reported on his experiences in the *Negro World* and gave two lectures on the topic in Detroit, which listeners found "historical and educational" as he "filled the audience with

new inspiration and courage to forge ahead” against the condition of the race on “this continent.” Fred Toote, the acting leader of the UNIA in Garvey’s absence, said without Craigen’s tour, he “did not know what the organization would have done.” Craigen’s travels supplied him with knowledge of the broader world less mobile members of the UNIA lacked, but could gain access to through him and “his services to the cause” in this manner, “were invaluable.”<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps because of Craigen’s education, Garvey relied heavily upon him in matters involving Liberty University. Craigen had the responsibility of selling the school to UNIA members and getting them to contribute funds to acquire the building. The school served as a location, he told members, where “safe from white psychology,” black students would “be taught Negro history and culture,” i.e. “the glories of Africa” and thus they would provide the next generation of UNIA members. He arranged the purchase of the school and he traveled to Atlanta to finalize the details of the transaction with Garvey.<sup>48</sup>

Craigen’s 1924 electoral strategy to secure Garvey’s release through political means produced the expected results. In the 1924 election, the Universal Negro Political Union supported Republican candidates. By 1927, efforts to have Garvey freed were gaining ground. That year, at a May rally staged by Craigen, a judge from Cincinnati, Ohio and Detroit’s mayor, John W. Smith, protested against Garvey’s continued imprisonment. Smith also telegraphed President Calvin Coolidge and the U. S. attorney general “praying for Garvey’s release.” Clearly, Craigen understood how to manipulate the political process and gain access to whites in power to secure Garvey’s release, which prepared him for later participation in government positions.<sup>49</sup>

Garvey's conditional release demanded his immediate deportation. In December 1927, Garvey was taken to New Orleans to board the ship the *S.S. Saramacca* to return to Jamaica. Craigen was among the UNIA leaders who met with Garvey before he left the country.<sup>50</sup>

Craigen was instrumental in keeping the UNIA functioning after Garvey's deportation and Garvey relied heavily on his expertise in the type of political maneuvering for which Craigen later became known. In recognition, Garvey, who was still making gestures at leadership, in 1927 appointed Craigen the parent body's special representative to Florida and in 1928 made Craigen the district leader for the states of Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.<sup>51</sup>

Garvey's backing of Democratic presidential candidate Alfred E. Smith in the 1928 election had a far-reaching impact on Craigen's future. His earlier forays into the political arena, largely in the effort to secure Garvey's release, became a means by which he exercised his own ambitions. While Alfred E. Smith's defeat illustrated black voters' continued reluctance to relinquish support for the Republican Party, it pushed Craigen out of the UNIA and toward the Democrats.<sup>52</sup>

The relationship between Craigen and Garvey quickly soured after his mentor's exile to Jamaica. When Garvey held a UNIA conference at his Jamaican headquarters in Kingston in August 1929, Garvey questioned Craigen at length to determine his support for Garvey's continued leadership of the UNIA while he was in exile. Craigen did participate in a religious panel, but his usual omnipresence was lacking. During the conference, Craigen and other staunch Garvey supporters resigned. Stein suggests that

these resignations occurred after they drew Garvey's ire by refusing to use local divisions to finance Garvey's operations in Jamaica.<sup>53</sup>

Upon Craigen's return to Detroit, he attempted to found a rival organization, but failed. Local members accused him of a plot to repudiate Garvey and his ideas. By December 1929, Craigen had left the UNIA and "there . . . [was] nothing left of the old Detroit division."<sup>54</sup>

What remained of the division reorganized as the "Ever Ready Club" and it spawned another group of West Indian leaders. Several of these men later became prominent members of the city's black middle class and members of the early West Indian ethnic associations. Their participation in the Garvey movement demonstrates how their West Indian ethnicity encouraged their participation in an organization rapidly losing cohesion. Their tenacious loyalty to the movement during the period following its decline as well as during the Great Depression, which "dealt the final blow to the UNIA's route to racial progress," illustrates the continued attractiveness of the organization to West Indian immigrants in Detroit.<sup>55</sup>

Some, like Grenadian O'BRIEN BRISTOL, had long associated with the UNIA. Bristol served as treasurer for the Detroit UNIA. A native of Grenada, he had migrated to New York in 1919 when he was twenty-five years old. After moving briefly to Pittsburgh, he followed his older brother, Vollington, to Detroit around 1920. When he listed his race as "Ethiopian" on his draft registration card, Bristol clearly demonstrated his affiliation with the tenets of Garveyism. By 1923, he had become a leading member of the Detroit UNIA and he worked closely with other West Indians who held executive

positions. His role in the division became more prominent as a result of the 1929 fracture, but he was a consistent presence in the organization throughout the decade.<sup>56</sup>

When the Detroit division played host to locals from Indiana, Milwaukee, and Gary, Indiana, and two divisions from Chicago, Bristol opened the meeting with a reading from the front page of the *Negro World*. The public recitation gave illiterate members access to Garvey's message and was a custom at UNIA meetings. At the division's second local convention, he participated in the program as the announcer. After Bristol served as treasurer, the executive committee appointed him chairman of the finance committee. When the Detroit division split, Bristol joined the pro-Garvey "Ever Ready" faction, and his loyalty earned him an expanded role within the organization.<sup>57</sup>

. The bitter infighting that caused the split resulted in members praising Bristol as "[a] hundred percent Garveyite," and a "well-meaning young man [who] live[d] up to the standard of Garveyism." Unlike those who recently had sought to malign Garvey, Bristol proved loyal to him and Detroit members commended Bristol for being "sincere."<sup>58</sup>

Bristol brought prominent West Indians into the organization, hoping to continue the large financial contributions made by the division under Craigen. Jamaicans CANUTE C. CONSTABLE, a physician, and JAMES M. GREGORY, a dentist who also held a law degree, were two well-respected members of Detroit's black elite who became active in the "Ever Ready" division and served as frequent speakers at Liberty Hall.<sup>59</sup>

ERNEST C. MITCHELL, British Guiana, b. 1895. Mitchell, prominent in the "Ever Ready" division, attended the Guiana's Queens College, an elite government-run boys' high school. He went to London to study law and during World War I, worked in the Glasgow and London defense industries. He also passed the bar in 1919. He

migrated to the United States in 1920, after which he came to Detroit and began practicing law.<sup>60</sup>

Mitchell shared a law office with UNIA attorney Milton Van Lowe until he took over the practice of attorney Robert C. Barnes of the prominent black firm, Barnes and Stowers in 1928. His education and professional success made him attractive to the members of the recently reorganized division. Widely traveled, Mitchell had seen much of Europe, the Middle East, and parts of Africa. Clearly, his participation in the Detroit UNIA supports the notion that even with the reorganization of the local chapter, educated, West Indian professionals continued to serve at its helm.<sup>61</sup>

During the Depression, Mitchell remained active in the UNIA. He presented mock courtroom battles at division meetings and spoke in support of the organization and told members that “[t]hey could call on him any time for help and he would be ready.” He continued to proclaim the rhetoric of racial economics in spite of its obvious failure. His own legal career would afford him prosperity, however, and he became a founding partner in the firm of Mitchell, Martinez, Dent, and Dudley. As he became more involved in building a successful law practice, his participation in UNIA activities decreased, but he remained committed to the ideals of the organization and he acted as an important part of the transitional leadership between the original chapter and the “Ever Ready” division.<sup>62</sup>

One of the original divisions of the Detroit UNIA, #407 still exists today. Their headquarters is located in a local community center on the city’s east side. Except for the Marcus Garvey celebration they host each August, the division is much reduced in membership and almost forgotten. However, in its heyday, the Detroit division could

boast one of the largest memberships in the nation and made great financial contributions to the international organization. The West Indian leadership of the Detroit division illustrates the role that ethnicity played both in the organization and within the city's black community as well. As a West Indian, Garvey often selected West Indians as his highest officials to administer his organization and the significance of the Detroit division required he choose very trusted and capable leaders. These requirements led him to choose leaders of similar ethnic origin.

In addition, the West Indian leadership of the Detroit UNIA belies the common perception that, at the upper echelon at least, those who became Garveyites were the marginalized members of society. Like many West Indian immigrants of the era, leaders of the Detroit division were well educated, seasoned travelers, who had high-paying professions. The UNIA may have served as a substitute for the lack of access they had to status mobility in white America, as well as a means to protest this situation. However, some West Indian leaders of the local division would use the skills in administration and the political experience they gained in connection with the operation of the UNIA as a springboard to influential and lucrative professional careers and political positions. In the 1930s, when blacks support for the Democratic Party increased substantially, former Garveyites used their leadership and organizational skills that they used to advance in partisan politics.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. 9 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), xlvii; Frank Andre Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 76, 88, 98; Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s-1930s* (New York: Macmillan, 2007), 248.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Lee, "Garveyism in Michigan: The Early Years," *Michigan Citizen*, 7 September 2002; Theodore G. Vincent, *Black Power and the Garvey Movement* (San Francisco: Ramparts Press, 1972), 100; Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 230.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald J. Stephens, "Garveyism in Idlewild, 1927 to 1936," *Journal of Black Studies* 34, no. 4 (March 2004): 469; Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), 14, 35; Hill, *The Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 6 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 151, 310, 344, 389, 392; 458; United States Department of Justice Records, Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917-1925): The First World War, the Red Scare, and the Garvey Movement (hereafter referred to as Department of Justice Records), Andrew M. Battle to U.S. Department of Justice, 26 August 1922, 2 March 1923, reel 2, Joseph G. Tucker to U.S. Department of Justice, 19 April 1924, reel 1, William J. Barns to J. Edgar Hoover, 26 December 1922, reel 2, William I. Barns to F. H. Hessler, 15 January 1923, reel 2; James E. Amos to Department of Justice, 6 February 1925, reel 3.

<sup>4</sup> Vincent, *Black Power and the Garvey Movement*, 152; See E. David Cronon, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); Martin, *Race First* and *The Pan-African Connection: From Slavery to Garvey and Beyond* (Dover, MA: Majority Press, 1983); Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*; Stephens, "Garveyism in Idlewild"; Richard W. Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It: Building Black Community in Detroit, 1915-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 194-201, 230; Jeannette Smith-Irvin, *Marcus Garvey's Fightsoldiers of the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1989); Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey*, 148; Lee, "Garveyism in Michigan."

<sup>5</sup> Thomas, *Life for Us*, 197; Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey*, 227; Vincent, *Black Power*, 128.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Justice Records, Andrew M. Battle to United States Department of Justice, 4 April 1923, 1 July 1923, reel 3, Letter to Harry M. Daugherty, United States Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 15 January 1923, 24 January 1923 reel 2; Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey*, 148; Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, UNIA Convention Report, 29 August 1924, 819.

<sup>7</sup> Vincent, *Black Power*, 153; Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, UNIA Convention Report, 15 August 1924, 27 August 1924, 745, 791.

<sup>8</sup> Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey* 231; Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 5. 629; Stephens, "Garveyism in Idlewild," 469.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas, *Life for Us*, 196; Department of Justice Records, P. H. Dupuis to Department of Justice, 24 February 1923, reel 4; Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, Fred A Toote and F. Levi Lord to Amy Jacques Garvey, 24 April 1926 and Marcus Garvey to Fred A. Toote, 18 March 1926, Report by Special Agent Mortimer J. Davis, 10 May 1923, 299 and Report on the UNIA Convention Opening, 1 August 1924, 616, vol 6, September 1924-December 1927, 419, 393, 396, 415; 429; Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey*, 233, 253, 178.

<sup>10</sup> *Negro World*, 20 June 1925.

<sup>11</sup> *Negro World*, 23 May 1925, 27 June 1925.

<sup>12</sup> Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey*, 253; *Negro World*, 26 June 1926.

<sup>13</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 6, 440, 593, 250, 266, 367, 350; *Negro World*, 27 March 1927.

<sup>14</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, 629; Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey*, 233.

<sup>15</sup> *Michigan Chronicle*, 24 May 1980; Smith-Irvin, *Fightsoldiers*; Martin, *Pan African Connection*, 64.

<sup>16</sup> Smith-Irvin, *Fightsoldiers*, 40, 8; Martin, *Pan African Connection*, 64 and *Race First*, 318.

<sup>17</sup> Martin, *Race First*, 189, 210.

<sup>18</sup> Smith-Irvin, 40-42, 37; *Michigan Chronicle*, 24 May 1980.

<sup>19</sup> Detroit Independent, 10 June 1927; Thomas Yenser, *Who's Who in Colored America: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Living Persons of African Descent in America, 1930-1932*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Thomas Yenser, 1932), 434; *Detroit Free Press*, 9 February 1933; Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, 510

<sup>20</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, xxxvi, 507, 510, 573, 742; *Negro World*, 23 August 1923.

<sup>21</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, xxxvi, 507, 510, 573, 742. Poston and Henrietta Vinton Davis were the other to members of the delegation; Department of Justice Records, Joseph G. Tucker to US Justice Department; 1 March 1924, reel 1; Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol.5, 806; Cronon, *Black Moses*, 121-122, 126, 131; Marcus Garvey, *Philosophies and Opinions of Marcus Garvey: Or Africa for the Africans*, (London: Routledge, 1967), 367.

<sup>22</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, 788, 789.

<sup>23</sup> Garvey, *Philosophies and Opinions*, 367; Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, 786, 789, 790, 805. In her report to the convention, Henrietta Vinton Davis, another key UNIA officer, noted King, the Liberian president was a second-generation West Indian immigrant, as his father was born there (although no island



was mentioned) and migrated to Sierra Leone and later Liberia. It is significant that Davis would stress King's connection to the West Indies in her report.

<sup>24</sup> *Negro World*, 15 August 1925, 5 September 1925, 17 October 1925, 5 December 1925.

<sup>25</sup> *Negro World*, 23 January 1926, 27 March 1926, 30 April 1927.

<sup>26</sup> *Negro World*, 3 April 1926; Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 6, 385, 553; *Who's Who in Colored America*, 434; *Detroit Free Press*, 9 February 1933.

<sup>27</sup> *Detroit News*, 23 June 1962; *Detroit Free Press*, 23 June 1962, *Michigan Chronicle*, 30 June 1962.

<sup>28</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 23 June 1962; Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey*, 231; Thomas, *Life for Us*, 196; Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 3, 1921 Convention Report, 693 and vol. 5, Report of 1924 Convention, 668.

<sup>29</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, Report of 1924 Convention, 819, 762.

<sup>30</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, 766.

<sup>31</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, 782.

<sup>32</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, Report of 1924 Convention, 806, 764.

<sup>33</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, Report of 1924 Convention, 777, 779, 813; Lee, Garveyism in Michigan."

<sup>34</sup> *Negro World*, 12 July 1924, 17 January 1925; Lee, "Garveyism in Michigan"

<sup>35</sup> James c. Fleming and Christian E. Burckel, *Who's Who in Colored America, 1950*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. ( New York: Christian E. Burckel & Associates, 1950) 126; Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 6, 33. According to Robert Hill, the Universal Negro Political Union (UNPU) had backed both Republican and Democratic candidates in the November 1924 elections. Those officials elected with UNPU support were then asked to assist in freeing Garvey. The UNPU claimed one million members in 1925 and a number of politicians attributed their elections to the group. Clarence J. McLeod was one such politician. A Republican from Michigan's Thirteenth Congressional district, he served in 1920-1921 and again from 1923 to 1937, after the Republican Party fell out of favor with African American voters.

<sup>36</sup> *Negro World*, 23 May 1925, 15 August 1925, 5 September 1925.

<sup>37</sup> *Negro World*, 26 September 1925.

<sup>38</sup> *Negro World*, 24 October 1925, 20 February 1926, 6 March 1926; Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol 6, 250. The other delegates who went to see Garvey in prison were Fred A. Toote, William Ware, and Samuel Haynes.

<sup>39</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 6, 310, 344.

<sup>40</sup> *Negro World*, 6 March 1926.

<sup>41</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 6, 353, 367.

<sup>42</sup> *Negro World*, 13 March 1926, 3 April 1926, 10 April 1926.

<sup>43</sup> *Negro World*, 20 March 1926, 27 March 1926; Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 6, 388, 391-392.

<sup>44</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 6, 359; *Negro World*, 27 March 1926, 3 April 1926.

<sup>45</sup> *Negro World*, 29 May 1926, 14 August 1926, 28 August 1926, 25 September 1926.

<sup>46</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 6, 459; Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey*, 205; *Negro World* 25 December 1926, 24 December 1927.

<sup>47</sup> *Negro World*, 19 March 1927, 30 April 1930, 4 June 1927.

<sup>48</sup> *Negro World*, 25 June 1927, 9 July 1927; Hill, *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 6, 568.

<sup>49</sup> Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey*, 205; *Negro World*, 14 May 1927, 21 May 1927.

<sup>50</sup> *Negro World*, 24 December 1927.

<sup>51</sup> *Negro World*, 9 July 1927; Lee, "Garveyism in Michigan.

<sup>52</sup> *Negro World*, 28 July 1928.

<sup>53</sup> *Negro World*, 24 August 1929, 7 September 1929, 5 December 1931; Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey*, 234, 259.

<sup>54</sup> *Negro World*, 5 December 1931.

<sup>55</sup> *Negro World* 5 December 1931, Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey*, 5.

<sup>56</sup> Department of Justice Records, Report of P. H. Dupuis, 24 February 1923, reel 4; Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, New York Passenger Lists, 1919, Microfilm roll T715; *Polk's Detroit City Directory*, 1921-1922; *Detroit News*, 9 February 1957; World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918.

<sup>57</sup> *Negro World*, 26 November 1925, 28 August 1926, 9 January 1932.

<sup>58</sup> *Negro World*, 9 January 1932.

<sup>59</sup> *Negro World*, 9 January 1932.

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<sup>60</sup> *Negro World* 30 January 1932; Thomas Yenser, *Who's Who in Colored America: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Living Persons of African Descent in America, 1941-44*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: Thomas Yenser, 1944), 368; *Detroit Times* 14 July 1955; *Detroit Free Press*, 14 July 1955.

<sup>61</sup> Joseph J. Boris, ed., *Who's Who in Colored America: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Living Persons of African Descent in America, 1928-1929*, 2nd edition (New York: Who's Who in Colored America Corporation, 1929), 268-269. Walter Stowers and Robert C. Barnes founded the prominent black law firm of Barnes and Stowers in 1905. Barnes initially practiced with D. Augustus Straker until 1893, when he opened his own firm.

<sup>62</sup> *Negro World* 30 January 1932; *Detroit Times* 14 July 1955; *Detroit Free Press*, 14 July 1955.

## **Chapter 8**

### **“The Foreign Blacks, in Many Cases, Have Been an Inspiration to Americans:”**

#### **The Nascent West Indian Immigrant Community in Detroit**

West Indians exit from the core African American neighborhoods of Detroit where the majority of working-class blacks resided related to the connection between class status and ethnic characteristics that led to these immigrants assuming leadership roles in prominent organizations. Their physical and psychological ties to the Caribbean illustrate the significance of national identity to West Indian immigrants and their distinctiveness from African Americans. They incorporated into the city's emerging black middle class, since they were unable to separate themselves racially from the African Americans, but sought to distinguish themselves from their American-born counterparts on a basis of class and ethnicity.

West Indian immigrants came to Detroit in a comparatively small but continual stream during the interwar period, initially settling in the same poor neighborhoods as African Americans. By 1930, 2,262 immigrants from the Caribbean had settled in Michigan, and comprised roughly 1.9 percent of the African American population. However, because many of the immigrants had better education and more training and were highly skilled, they soon obtained more stable and better paying employment, which provided them with wages to find better housing in other areas of the city. These immigrants thus were part of the vanguard that moved first into West Side neighborhoods, where violence frequently erupted as whites sought to keep out newcomers, whether African Americans or West Indians. This vanguard helped precipitate a change in the

spatial patterns of black neighborhoods within the city and led to the development of a new black residential area.<sup>1</sup>

Several well-educated and well-paid West Indian professionals became leading figures in the African American community, as black institutions such as hospitals, insurance companies, and medical, dental and law offices emerged to serve the expanding black community. This group maintained the social standards associated with the Old Guard black elite, who they largely supplanted as the upper echelon of black society. Their affluence also provided them with greater opportunity to engage in transnational patterns through frequent visits and other contacts with their countries of origin. While involved in the process of incorporation into the city's African American community, they remained highly conscious of and promoted their ethnic distinctiveness.

This focus on ethnic identity led West Indians to organize an ethnic organization in about 1940. Called variously the West Indian Social League, the West Indian Society, the Detroit Caribbean Club, and later the West Indian American Association (WIAA), the organization was pan-Caribbean in nature, but largely comprised of Anglophone West Indians. It also acted as a precursor of the national organizations that emerged after the 1960s as larger numbers of immigrants arrived and formed organizations based specifically on national origin.

#### WEST INDIANS and CHANGING SPATIAL PATTERNS in DETROIT

Several studies have examined the settlement of African Americans on Detroit's Lower East side. The Great Migration of southern migrants created what whites perceived as "the danger in a too-rapid influx of Negroes" and led to "deplorable" conditions in Black Bottom. Other black neighborhoods emerged in the North End and

Hamtramck, both located on the city's East Side. Other scholars have described the racial violence that erupted in the city when blacks attempted to leave the confines of the areas of the city where they had traditionally resided.<sup>2</sup>

The most celebrated case of racial violence related to residential integration, that of Ossian Sweet in 1925, involved an East Side neighborhood, but similar events occurred first on the West Side of the city, although none that resulted in the arrest of black homeowners on murder charges. According to one report, "[f]ew [white] Detroiters kn[e]w of the other class of Negroes, those who own[ed] their own homes and keep them up in the better residential sections." One of the more affluent neighborhoods, located near Tireman Avenue and West Grand Boulevard, became a contested space, as higher income blacks, some of whom were West Indian immigrants, faced mobs under the auspices of a group known as the Tireman Avenue Improvement Association. Tireman Avenue served as the northernmost boundary of the neighborhood, and blacks were frequently attacked or arrested for crossing it.<sup>3</sup>

By 1920, a few West Indian families resided on the neighborhood's southern border, near Scotten and McGraw Streets. The neighborhood was home to many native-born whites, as well as Polish, Russian, German, Greek, and Italian immigrants. Of the six West Indian households located on the Lower West Side and listed in the 1920 census, half rented or boarded while the other three owned their homes. Occupations of the men included two factory workers, a machinist, a carpenter, and a pastor. Only one woman in the six households held employment outside the home, in this case, as a servant, but she had migrated to the United States only in the previous year. These stay-at-home wives suggest the financial solvency of these West Indians. In addition, none of the West

Indian households remained a decade later, most likely the result of continued upward mobility.<sup>4</sup>

The area long had had “several thousand Negroes” who lived in an “enclave [which] was prosperous and stable,” and the whites who surrounded it never had seen it as threatening. The boundaries between blacks and whites in the neighborhood “were clear enough” but “had also been somewhat porous.” West Indians comprised a distinct substratum of this enclave, and were among the earliest homeowners in the neighborhood.<sup>5</sup>

By early 1925, whites began to mount violent protests to blacks expanding from their traditional area. Grenadian Vollington Bristol, brother of UNIA official O’Brien Bristol, faced a mob when he attempted to occupy the West Side home he owned. Vollington had immigrated to the U. S. in 1908 and was a close friend of Ossian Sweet, whom he met about 1912 when they worked as bellhops at the Fairfax Hotel in Detroit. He became the proprietor of a funeral parlor on Joseph Campau and owned rental properties. He, like Sweet, was attacked when he tried to move into a home he had long owned in a predominantly white neighborhood at 7804 American Avenue on Detroit’s West Side in July 1925, two months before Sweet’s experience. When Vollington, who had previously rented the house to white families, chose to rent it to a black family, whites in the neighborhood under the guise of the Tireman Avenue Improvement Association became hostile. Bristol chose then to occupy the home himself and requested police protection, and the city provided two officers who were posted in front of the house. He spent an uneventful first night in his home, but the next night a mob overwhelmed the six police officers guarding the house. They fired warning shots into

the air and the mob returned the fire, which brought police reinforcements who managed to force the mob to disperse.

After the news of the unrest spread to the city's black community, armed men arrived at the Bristol home to provide protection, but were stopped by police. With twenty-four-hour protection of the house, police prevented further violence. The mob, however, had succeeded in intimidating Bristol, who barely left his home because of repeated death threats and an unsuccessful attempt to run him over with a car. When his friend Ossian Sweet's purchase of a home in a white neighborhood was protested with mob violence, Bristol advised him to defend his home at all costs and to notify police of his plans to do so. In the ensuing events of the Sweet trial, Bristol testified to the violence he had encountered at the hands of the whites on the west side. His attainment of a middle-class standard of life had been hindered by racism and although black immigrants were familiar with racism in the Caribbean, they frequently found the American version more virulent. West Indians countered this particular social ill in a variety of ways. In Bristol's case, he maintained his right to live on the property he owned by demanding armed protection against a mob. His testimony in court affirmed both his rejection of the racist practices he encountered in America as well as the status he had attained in his adopted country.<sup>6</sup>

While several hundred West Indians who arrived in the city remained residents of the Third and Seventh Wards, comprised largely of African Americans, by 1930 hundreds of West Indians had moved to the West Side neighborhood. Several West Indians frequently resided on certain streets in the area, as a result of a chain migration that led to informal networks that provided information on available housing. For

example, West Indians occupied twelve houses in a three-block strip on Beechwood Avenue, with several others clustered on Scotten Avenue, Vancourt, Vinewood, and Stanford. Quite a few other streets in the vicinity had two or three West Indian families living in proximity, including Begole, 28<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Streets, and Hartford, and Milford Avenues.<sup>7</sup>

The relative wealth of Jamaican immigrant David Stewart made him somewhat atypical of West Indian residents of the neighborhood. Stewart, a dentist, had migrated to the United States in 1900 and arrived in Detroit about 1918, where he opened an office on St. Antoine Street in Black Bottom. By 1930, he and his wife, Emma, had purchased an \$18,000 home on the West Side, located at 5242 Vinewood, although Stewart kept his dental practice in his former neighborhood. Unlike many of their less prosperous



Map 1. West Side Neighborhood bordered by Tireman Avenue and West Grand Boulevard, 1918. Source: City Clerk's Office, Detroit



neighbors, the Stewarts were able to manage their household finances without taking in boarders, a common practice during the period. In 1934, he purchased a home on Tireman and moved his practice to an office on West Warren. Stewart, clearly upwardly mobile, would purchase another West Side home on McKinley Street by 1940.<sup>8</sup>

As an affluent and “prominent dentist,” Stewart became “well known in Detroit medical and social circles.” His affluence also facilitated a transnational pattern that later allowed Stewart to spend long periods in Jamaica, at times for more than half the year. Stewart built a large home in Jamaica, where often he spent many months caring for his ailing mother. With a higher than average income, Stewart was able to make a comfortable living in both the United States and the West Indies.<sup>9</sup>

Edward Sayers and his family were more typical of the West Indians of the neighborhood. Born in Georgetown, British Guiana in 1891, Sayers migrated to the United States in 1916. He and his wife Elizabeth had four children whom they educated in church schools on his salary as a waiter at a local hotel. The family moved to the West Side in 1926 and purchased a home on Stanford Avenue worth \$7,800. Both a relative and a boarder lived with the family to help defray expenses. The family represented the lower middle-class stratum of immigrants, in contrast to professionals like David Stewart, but many second-generation family members would obtain graduate degrees and white-collar employment.<sup>10</sup>

West Indians in the Tireman-West Grand Boulevard neighborhood played active roles at St. Cyprian’s Episcopal Church, founded in 1919 as an alternative to St. Matthew’s as more blacks moved to the West Side. St. Cyprian’s provided social activities for children

and adults alike and supplied space for a myriad of community events. Church leadership roles gave “simple folks with ordinary jobs and lifestyles” a way “to be extraordinary.”<sup>11</sup>

The first senior official of St. Cyprian’s Bishop’s Committee, Able Steele Cockfield, was one of the former West Indian parishioners at St. Matthew’s of West Indian descent who “form[ed] the nucleus” of the new church. Cockfield had immigrated to the U. S. in 1909 and by 1920 had purchased a home on the West Side, where several relatives shared his living quarters. His employment as a letter carrier for the Roosevelt Street post office meant a substantial and steady income, supplemented by his kin who resided in the household.<sup>12</sup>

Cockfield served the church in many capacities, for example, as one of the first three vestrymen, as a member of the first choir, and as a lay reader until the arrival of a new rector in 1924. His efforts to make the church a viable institution clearly consumed a considerable portion of Cockfield’s time and provided a means by which he expressed his ethnic identity. His wife, Mary Anne, also had an active role in the church and served as the secretary of the Women’s Auxiliary board. Living among West Indian neighbors who also participated in the establishment of the church would have reinforced ethnic affiliations as well.<sup>13</sup>

Fred Ernst, a West Indian of mixed race, purchased a home on Detroit’s West Side and also helped found St. Cyprian’s. Ernst migrated to the country in 1867 and about 1910 came to Detroit, where he and his wife, Alice, a white woman, resided in Black Bottom along with Ernst’s mother. Like Cockfield, he initially attended St. Matthew’s,

but purchased a home on Stanford Street around 1920. After Ernst moved his family to the West Side, he became active in the establishment of the new church.<sup>14</sup>

Arthur J. Tomlinson served as the secretary of the church's Bishop's Committee during the 1930s. He emigrated from Jamaica in 1914, when he settled for a period in Pennsylvania before he moved to Detroit where he and his wife, May, lived as boarders in the home of fellow Jamaicans Charles and Elethia Josephs, who owned their house located at 5786 Beechwood Street. The cohabitation of compatriots suggests the existence of a network among West Indian immigrants, which provided assistance for housing and matters related to settling in the city. Tomlinson obtained employment at the Roosevelt Street post office and by 1940 had purchased his own home in the West Side neighborhood, located at 6368 Northfield Street.<sup>15</sup>

Donald Shillingford served as another church official, as a member of the Bishop's Committee on which he held the position as the supervisor of church maintenance. Born in Dominica, Shillingford migrated briefly to Middlesex, Ontario, where, in 1923, he married an African Canadian woman, Muriel Taylor, prior to settling in Detroit the same year. Initially, the Shillingfords lived in Black Bottom and Donald found employment as a stove mounter. Later, the couple moved to the West Side and boarded with a family from Barbados, the DeWeevers, in their home at 6400 Hartford Avenue. The homeowner, Christopher DeWeever was Donald Shillingford's brother-in-law as well, who had married Shillingford's sister, Irma. Again, the residential pattern indicated the use of kinship networks by West Indians who settled in the city.<sup>16</sup>

By the mid-1930s, the Shillingfords moved to a home located at 306 East Warren Avenue. Donald had obtained employment with Ford Motor Company and worked at the

company's River Rouge plant. He also applied for U.S. citizenship, and perhaps the promise of greater job stability led to his decision to naturalize, as he did so during the Great Depression when non-naturalized immigrants may have felt extremely vulnerable in matters of job security.<sup>17</sup>

The vice-chairman and senior instructor of the Usher Board at St. Cyprians, Edgar Nathaniel Jim, also emigrated from the West Indies. Born in Jamaica, he migrated to Detroit in 1910 and purchased a home on the West Side at 94 Stanford Avenue. By 1930, he owned another home at 6054 Stanford Avenue. As with other West Indian immigrants in the neighborhood, Jim's purchase of homes indicates the intention to settle permanently and points to a stake in the community. Jim's decision to become an U.S. citizen demonstrates further the interest of middle-class West Indians in assimilating into American society.<sup>18</sup>

Several West Indian families were members of St. Cyprian's congregation by 1940. The church became a central focus in the lives of many of the West Indians who resided on the West Side and served as a location where ethnic traditions continued, even as the immigrants assimilated into the wider African American community and American society. West Indian parents viewed the church as a familiar and secure organization where they found reinforcement of their ethnicity and cultural values, which they passed on to their children and included higher education, professional employment, and upward mobility.<sup>19</sup>

Frank Lake and his family were typical of the West Indian congregants of the church. Born in Antigua, Lake and his wife Drina came to the U. S. in 1919 and 1920, respectively, when they settled in New York and had three children. The family moved

to Detroit in 1924 and rented a home on Boxwood Avenue, where two more children were born. By 1930, they rented a West Side home on Moore Place for \$39 a month. Frank worked as a pipe fitter in an auto plant, while Drina was a homemaker. No one boarded with the Lakes, as the family of seven would have found space a prime concern. The Lakes moved several times to different houses they rented on the West Side before purchasing a home on Hazlett Avenue in 1935.<sup>20</sup>

Jamaican immigrants Albert and Rose Richards attended St. Cyprian's with their large family as well. The elder Richards left Jamaica and moved to Canada, where four of their five children were born. They came to Detroit in 1923 and rented a home on Beechwood Avenue, where another son was born in 1929. Their daughter, Joyce, became very active in the church's youth programs and planned events with friend Mavis Bonney of Jamaica, who had immigrated to Detroit with a guardian when she was three years old.<sup>21</sup>

Mae Coote emigrated from Jamaica in 1920 and her brother-in-law, John Fisher, left the colony a year later. Soon after, Charles Coote and Martha Coote Fisher followed in 1922 and 1924, respectively. Clearly, kinship networks played a decisive role in their pattern of immigration. The four relatives shared a rented home on Boxwood Avenue with two American-born boarders. Both Charles Coote, who had trained as an electrician, and John Fisher worked as general laborers in auto factories, while Mae was employed as a servant and Martha did not work outside the home. Charles joined St. Cyprian's, one of the growing numbers of West Indians in the neighborhood who found others of similar ethnic backgrounds at the church.<sup>22</sup>

Another member of the family, John Strout Coote, also settled on the city's West Side, where he resided on Vancourt Avenue. After he emigrated from Jamaica, he lived for a time in Toronto before he moved to Detroit in 1918. He found employment in an auto factory and in 1923, married another Jamaican immigrant, Margaret Dandie, who came to Detroit a year after John. They had a close relationship with St. Cyprian's Arthur Tomlinson and his wife, Mabel, as shown by the couple acting as witnesses for John and Margaret when they became citizens in 1935 and 1942, respectively.<sup>23</sup>

Other members of the Coote family would emigrate from Jamaica. Thomas E. Coote migrated in 1919 and settled in Highland Park. His wife Icilda and son Thomas Grove Coote followed in 1920. When Martha Coote Fisher left Jamaica in 1924, she brought the couple's daughters, Kathleen and Alice. Significantly, the school-aged Thomas Grove came to the country earlier than his younger sisters who, like their older brother, migrated when they reached the age to attend primary school. West Indian immigrants valued education for their children and the couple evidently stressed academic achievement as their children's college educations indicate. In addition, Thomas Grove later became prominent in the field of education in the Detroit Public School system.<sup>24</sup>

As with their adherence to values that stressed education, the family also attached importance to their Anglican faith that exemplified many West Indian immigrants. Family members attended both of the black Episcopal churches in the city. Charles joined St. Cyprian's, while his wife Mae, John Strout, Margaret, Thomas and Icilda attended St. Matthew's. Although most of the family attended the older and well-established church, they knew and socialized with members of St. Cyprian's, which

further suggests the churches served to link West Indians and acted as important institutions in the development of a West Indian subculture in the city.<sup>25</sup>

If the Cootes shared many of the cultural markers of a West Indian ethnic identity, they nonetheless also sought incorporation into American society. Like John Strout and Margaret Coote, Thomas and Icilda both became citizens, although they did so at different times, with Thomas naturalized in 1928 and Icilda in 1942. The men in the family may have sought citizenship earlier as a means to facilitate employment. Margaret's decision to become a citizen may have influenced her sister-in-law, Icilda, to do the same as the two women completed the naturalization process within one month of each other. The nationalism associated with World War II may have inspired the women as well. Margaret returned to live in Jamaica after John Strout's death, while Icilda remained in Detroit in a senior's residential complex on the Lower East Side.<sup>26</sup>

The Alleyne family of Georgetown, British Guiana also attended the church. Preston Alleyne had immigrated in 1912 and lived in Philadelphia for several years, where he worked on the wharves as a stevedore. He moved to Detroit about 1926 and rented a home on Stanford and found employment as an auto mechanic. Two years later, Alleyne and his wife Estelle rented a home at 5681 Woodrow and operated a small store. Next door, at 5687 Woodrow, lived George Meyers of Barbados and his wife, who like Alleyne's wife, Estelle, came from North Carolina. Undoubtedly, close relationships formed between the two families.<sup>27</sup>

The effect of the Depression on Alleyne is evident in the variety of odd jobs he took throughout the 1930s. These jobs included his employment as a chauffer, a florist, a salesman, and a nightclub manager. His wife often worked as a house cleaner, at one

time as a live-in servant for a wealthy white family on Boston Boulevard. At some point after 1940, Preston returned to British Guiana and spent the war years there, but he returned to Detroit after the end of the conflict.<sup>28</sup>

In 1930, Preston's brother Byron emigrated from British Guiana with his soon-to-be wife, Carmen Chambers. For much of the Depression the two families lived together in the house on Woodrow, most certainly a method of defraying the cost of housing in a period of economic difficulty. Byron may have also found difficulty in practicing as a pharmacist, the profession for which he had trained in British Guiana. He at times had no employment, but perhaps Carmen's skills as a milliner provided them with sufficient income. By 1941, however, Byron had found employment in a factory and he and Carmen moved out of the home on Woodrow and rented a home on Scotten Avenue. Employment in the city's defense industry evidently was more profitable than a more prestigious position in a pharmacy. Byron and Carmen eventually purchased a home on 25<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>29</sup>

While the West Side became home to many well-known West Indian families, other West Indian immigrants became recognized members of the city's wider African American community. Like the immigrants who resided on the West Side, they typically were well educated and employed in fields that provided relatively high incomes. Often they were viewed as community leaders and active in many businesses and social institutions, some that they helped to found and that became cornerstones of black public life. Many were well-seasoned travelers and either had visited many parts of the world or established a transnational pattern between the Caribbean and the United States. They interacted with other prominent West Indian immigrants in professional and social circles.



James Mahew Gregory became well known in the black community for his dual professional degrees in both dentistry and law. Born in St. Catherines, Jamaica in 1888, Gregory migrated to Detroit in 1909. He married Canadian-born Gertrude Morris about 1919. Initially, he, his wife, and young son lived with his in-laws on Catherine Street. He attended the University of Michigan, obtained his degree in dentistry in 1915, and received a law degree from the Detroit College of Law in 1923. He opened a dental office on St. Antoine in the late 1920s and later moved his practice to 519 E. Forest. Gregory purchased an \$18,000 home some blocks up the street from his wife's parents. In 1933, as he began to commute between New York and Detroit and he kept his local office, as well as one in New York. He became very ill and in 1934 sailed to Jamaica in effort to improve his health.<sup>30</sup>

Gregory clearly established a transnational pattern by the late 1930s, as he began to spend more time in Jamaica than in Detroit. By 1940, his main residence was in Jamaica, but he kept a home in Detroit as well. He continued to work on behalf of the St. Antoine YMCA, where he had served as first chairman of the provisional committee. He and his brother Bertram often came to Detroit from Jamaica to preside over YMCA or YWCA events. For example, Bertram went on an extended trip through the Bahamas, Bermuda, and Jamaica. Returning to Detroit with James, they made a presentation at the Lucy Thurman YWCA to describe the racial conditions in the British West Indies. James returned from Jamaica to act as the principal speaker at the fiftieth anniversary of the St. Antoine YMCA. He later returned to live on the city's East Side, where he resided until his death. He also chose Detroit as his burial place.<sup>31</sup>

Another prominent West Indian physician in Detroit was Robert Greenidge, who also fit the paradigm of the well-educated and professional immigrant. Born in Georgetown, British Guiana in 1888, Greenidge immigrated to Battle Creek, Michigan in 1909 with the assistance of the church he attended in the colony. He had the promise of employment at the Battle Creek Sanitarium where he worked as a waiter and attended Battle Creek College. Working in the hospital inspired Greenidge to want to study medicine, so he moved to Detroit to enter the Detroit College of Medicine and graduated in 1915.<sup>32</sup>

The segregated setting of Detroit's hospitals led Greenidge and other black physicians to found Dunbar Hospital in 1918, the second hospital established by blacks in the city. As historian Richard Thomas notes, "[b]etween World War I and the Great Depression, black hospitals in Detroit emerged as major self-help institutions. They developed in response to the rising medical needs of the expanding black community and also provided an institutional base for black medical professionals." As in the case of Robert Greenidge and others, many of these black medical professionals were West Indian immigrants.<sup>33</sup>

In the early 1920s, Greenidge specialized in the new field of radiology and by 1927 had established Eastside Medical Laboratory to provide x-rays and other technical services to patients in the black community. He became involved in several facets of the medical industry. For example, when Great Lakes Mutual Life Insurance Company was founded in 1928, he acted as both vice president and medical director for the organization. The same year Greenidge became an American citizen, perhaps as result of his growing professional success. "He enjoyed the company of other businessmen," and he associated

with several West Indian immigrants. Greenidge worked with Joseph Gomez and others to establish Detroit Memorial Park, the city's first black cemetery. In 1930 he, Rupert Markoe, another West Indian physician, and American James McClendon founded Fairview Sanitarium, located in the 400-block of Ferry Street. Greenidge was made first president and remained head of the hospital until his death in 1966.<sup>34</sup>

Rupert Markoe played a leading role at Fairview as well. Markoe, born in St. Croix in 1898, received his education at the University of Puerto Rico and the University of Michigan. He graduated in 1924 and during much of the 1930s served as medical director of Fairview. Markoe had his own private practice, and also became one of the first black members on the staff at Herman Kiefer hospital. Known as "a widely recognized authority on tuberculosis," Markoe found many opportunities to develop his specialty owing to the prevalence of the disease in black Detroit. In fact, Fairview itself had emerged as a response to overcrowding in the segregated wards at Herman Kiefer. Markoe, like Greenidge, became a medical examiner for a black life insurance agency. Black Detroiters of the era knew Markoe as a professional and social leader.<sup>35</sup>

Markoe retained a close connection with the West Indies by visiting during the Christmas holidays and entertaining guests from the Caribbean in Detroit. His uncle, Claude Markoe, met and married his wife in Detroit while visiting Rupert. After Rupert returned from trips to St. Croix, he sought to illuminate his African American neighbors and friends about the culture and history of the Virgin Islands in lectures held at the St. Antoine YMCA. Clearly, his interest in ethnicity was facilitated by a transnational pattern made possible by his affluent lifestyle.<sup>36</sup>

Other prominent West Indian physicians were associated with Parkside, which had emerged out of the old Dunbar Hospital. Like the doctors at Fairview of similar ethnic backgrounds, they became recognized leaders amongst blacks in the city. They, too, should receive credit for their roles in creating “some of the more stable and permanent . . . self-help institutions even in the midst of a depression.”<sup>37</sup>

Physician Anthony Featherston emigrated from British Guiana in 1914 to attend Howard University, where he received a degree in medicine in 1925. He joined the staff at Parkside as a resident in the same year and specialized in obstetrics and gynecology. He continued his education in medical technology and received national recognition for his pioneering work in open-heart surgery. Featherston founded and served as president of the Detroit Medical Society, a professional organization for black physicians in 1931. His renown in Detroit led to a distinguished career in public health in Philadelphia and Harlem.<sup>38</sup>

Canute Constable migrated to the United States from Jamaica in 1920 to attend Howard University. He graduated in 1925, came to Detroit, and began working at Parkside in 1928. He served on the board of directors of the Friendship Insurance Company as well as examining physician for a local workers’ group.<sup>39</sup>

He, like James Gregory, played an active role in the St. Antoine YMCA. In Constable’s leadership of the 1940 membership drive, Vollington Bristol’s wife, Agnes, assisted him in obtaining a record number of new members. The YMCA was more than a social organization; a political agenda was operative as “organized labor” became “interested in the success of the 1940 St. Antoine membership campaign.” The active role West Indians played in the leadership of the YMCA and similar organizations

indicates that as naturalizing immigrants, they sought to assimilate into American society and to hold positions of leadership in the African American community, while they valued their ethnic identities as West Indians as well.<sup>40</sup>

Constable and his wife Viola returned to Jamaica on a few occasions and entertained guests from the island as well. Robert Greenidge and Bertram Gregory both attended an affair hosted by the Constables in honor of O. E. Anderson, the former mayor of Kingston, Jamaica who visited the Constables in Detroit. This social event illustrates how West Indian professionals maintained both local and transnational connections and may have used these to enhance their own status in the Detroit black community.<sup>41</sup>

Another prominent West Indian physician associated with Parkside was Josephus (or Joseph) Wills. Born in Georgetown, British Guiana in 1879, the youngest of five children, Wills struggled to stay in school beyond the compulsory age of fourteen after his father died. He first trained as a teacher, but when he grew discouraged by the low wages he received, he became an apprentice at a foundry to learn engineering. Still dissatisfied, he turned to the ministry, but financial constraints prevented him from studying in England as he wished. He instead immigrated to New York in 1906, where he initially received work at an engineering firm, but quickly was fired because of racial discrimination. Wills, like other West Indian immigrants, was “shock[ed]” by “his first taste of discrimination in America” and “soon discovered that there were many intellectuals from his native home” relegated to menial labor. He, too, took on a series of menial jobs before he decided he wanted to attend medical school.<sup>42</sup>

In 1908, Wills entered the University of Michigan and went on to receive a medical degree from the Detroit College of Medicine in 1919. He supported himself by

working as a waiter on the pleasure boats which sailed the Great Lakes in the summer months. In 1923 went to Scotland to further his education by specializing in gynecology. A year later, he joined the staff at Parkside.<sup>43</sup>

Wills visited British Guiana in 1926, with the purpose of purchasing a home for his mother. He had sent remittances since first coming to New York and for the remainder of his life sent financial contributions to his family. Wills's efforts to maintain an ethnic identity through local and transnational ties would have significant impact in Detroit. By his invitation, his niece Millicent migrated to Detroit, where she became the prime organizer in the first West Indian ethnic association in the city.<sup>44</sup>

Although the West Indian immigrants discussed in the previous section were members of the medical profession, they had representation in other professions as well. The legal profession had its best representative in Ernest C. Mitchell of British Guiana, where he attended the government-run Queen's College before studying law in London. Mitchell worked for various private corporations in England and Scotland during World War I, which took him to "France, Italy, Morocco, Egypt, Arabia, and East Africa," and he traveled throughout the West Indies as well. In 1920, he came to the United States and after moving to Detroit, Mitchell replaced Robert C. Barnes of the prestigious black law firm Barnes and Stowers in 1928. He later opened his own firm with three other attorneys and Mitchell as senior partner, a position he retained until his death in July 1955.<sup>45</sup>

The field of education had prominent West Indian representatives as well. Thomas Grove Coote came from Kingston, Jamaica to Detroit in 1920 when he was five years old. He attended school in Highland Park and later worked in an auto factory and

as a page at the public library. He attended West Virginia State College and received a master's degree from Wayne State University. After a stint in the military, he became a teacher in the Detroit Public School system. He became an assistant principal and later was appointed principal of one of the city's elementary schools.<sup>46</sup>

Millicent Wills, one of the few immigrant women who have provided a detailed account of their experiences, was another well-known West Indian educator in Detroit. Wills, niece of physician Joseph Wills, received her elementary education first in the Anglican Church school in the village of Friendship, Demerara, British Guiana, where she was born in 1900. She continued her primary education in Islington, Berbice, British Guiana, where she and her two siblings attended the Stanleytown Anglican School. When her mother and stepfather moved to Anna Regina plantation in Essequibo in a failed search to secure higher wages, they were unable to provide shoes for her and she was forced to leave school when about fourteen years old. When the family returned to Berbice, she became a tailor's assistant and educated herself by using the small libraries of her employer and their friends and neighbors.<sup>47</sup>

When Wills went to the capital, Georgetown, to live with her paternal grandmother, her opportunities increased. There, in a more cosmopolitan environment, she met young women like herself who had immigrated to the United States and returned to the colony for holiday visits. These meetings, as well as the success of her uncle, Joseph, who had migrated to Detroit in the early 1900s, intensified Wills interest in emigration from British Guiana. Economic considerations hindered her desire to migrate, however.<sup>48</sup>

She financed the \$98 second-class steamship passage by holding a fundraising party and a raffle of handcrafted items. With the success of these ventures, Wills could

“visualize . . . walking on a street in America, working in a dress factory, sending aid to my mother, and attending night school,” an unambiguous expression of the typical goals of many of her fellow immigrants. Her pursuit of her aims began in April 1923 when she left the colony.<sup>49</sup>

Will, upon landing in New York after a seventeen-day journey, was sent by immigration officials to Ellis Island, as she had migrated with no sponsor who could vouch for her when she arrived in the U. S. When an official asked her if she knew anyone in the country and she mentioned her uncle, by some odd coincidence, he and the immigration officer had attended school together, and the official allowed her to enter. She rejected the offer of two Guyanese women to stay with them and work in New York, as she preferred to proceed directly to Detroit.<sup>50</sup>

Unfortunately, her uncle had left Detroit to study in Europe when she arrived in the city, but his friends greeted Wills and found her a room at the Lucy Thurman YWCA. A few days later, physician Robert Greenidge, a friend of her uncle and a fellow Guyanese immigrant, invited her to stay with him and his family. In the year during which her uncle remained abroad, Mills found employment as a live-in house cleaner and with his return to the city, she refused his offer of financial support and continued as a domestic while she attended evening classes at Highland Park High School.<sup>51</sup>

Her description of how she met her husband indicates that an active West Indian community existed by the early 1920s, with a clearly established Pan-Caribbean social network in place by the time. She became acquainted with an elderly widow from Antigua named Adelaide Edgehill, “an accomplished pianist and a former aristocrat on



her native island, but [who in Detroit] . . . did laundry work in her home for a livelihood.”

According to Wills

[m]ost of us foreign born in Detroit, who had no homes of their own, met at Mrs. Edgehill's, especially on Sunday. Among them was a bachelor from St. Kitts, British West Indies, twelve years my senior. Not long after our meeting, he proposed marriage to me. Naturally, I revealed the news to Mrs. Edgehill, asking her opinion. She objected, giving many reasons why such a marriage would be unfortunate. I replied by trying to explain to her how much the man and I had in common. In the first place, he was a World War I veteran and seemed interested in history and travel, my favorite subjects. We were both also interested in music. In addition, he knew that my ambition was to complete my education, and he assured me that he was heartily in favor with my desire. After . . . [Edgehill] realized that her advice was to no avail, she appealed to my uncle to use his influence. Uncle pointed out the fact that the fellow had no ambition. He had lived many years in the United States and had done little to improve his life. He added that although a good tailor, the man had never held a steady job. I . . . interpreted my uncle's resentment toward the man as the result of his preferance [sic] for Peter Belfast, a younger man from British Guiana, who was studying dentistry at Meherry Dental College.<sup>52</sup>

As with her ability to find housing on her arrival in Detroit, Wills's West Indian connections allowed her to find a prospective mate of a similar ethnic background.

Wills and her husband operated a cleaning business, but when the business declined during the early years of the Depression, Wills took the opportunity to further her education. She finished her early education at Sherrard Junior High School and graduated from Cass Technical High School in 1935. She used the money given by her uncle as a graduation present to register at Wayne University, initially as a social work major. Wills impressed a supervisor with her talents, who recommended she receive a position as a clerk with the Lawyers' Research Bureau, a Works Progress Administration program. Shortly after she began her new duties, she changed her major to education, and began to work with the school's adult education program, where she taught classes in the Brewster Projects until federal funding decreased and the program was suspended.<sup>53</sup>

Wills began her studies as a full-time student and obtained both a bachelor's and master's degree from Wayne University in 1942 and 1946, respectively. She taught at several Detroit Public schools during her long thirty-year career, including Higginbotham Elementary near Eight Mile Road and Wyoming Avenue on the city's northwest side. She taught at Northern High School until her retirement in 1972.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to her career in education, Wills also had an interest in her British Guianese ethnicity and the promotion of West Indian culture. Wills' visits to British Guiana resulted in presentations and lectures about her native country, like the Gregory brothers and Rupert Markoe. She established a program to donate books and school supplies to village schools in British Guiana in an effort to provide a better educational experience for children there and forged transnational connections among Detroiters and Guianese students in the process.<sup>55</sup>

Wills perceived a distinction between West Indians and African Americans, which she believed caused tension and conflict between the two groups. According to Wills, African Americans would do well to emulate successful West Indian immigrants. She noted

[t]here was, and still is, an underlying resentment on the part of many American blacks against blacks of foreign origin. The American brothers and sisters deem them a threat to their own success. On the contrary, there are opportunities for many if they were willing to grasp them, practicing thrift, they could become economically independent. Besides, the foreign blacks, in many cases, have been an inspiration to Americans. The contributions they have made to cultural and economic life cannot be minimized. But in several instances, the plight of the foreign blacks has been multiplied [by the jealousy of African Americans].<sup>56</sup>

Wills's desire to promote her ethnicity led her to help establish one of the first West Indian social organizations in Detroit, the West Indian League. The organization

had a Pan-Caribbean membership, but immigrants from the British West Indies figured prominently. Most of the members also came largely from the professional and middle class, as did Wills. Vollington Bristol and Joseph Craigen, for example, both joined the organization. The first president of the organization was a West Indian physician. The members evidently made substantial financial contributions, for by 1940, they purchased a building at 545 E. Canfield to house the institution.<sup>57</sup>

Overall, the members stressed ethnicity, while at the same time they shared an equally strong goal of full participation in American society as naturalized citizens of the United States. They felt keenly the effects of racial discrimination, especially in light of the excellent educations and professional positions they held. A tendency to fault African Americans for not achieving a more secure and substantial stake in American society had resulted from their failure to “be perpetually vigilant” and tended “to forget that full equality can only be attained and kept by accepting full responsibilities.” West Indian immigrants in Detroit perceived themselves as “higher than those of their race of less fortunate advantages” because they adhered to “the cultivation of good habits, clean living, a well-rounded education, hard, work, thrift, and other essentials that made for a productive life.”<sup>58</sup>

West Indians’ perception that they possessed these advantageous characteristics that African Americans lacked contributed to the founding of their ethnic organization. The events sponsored by the organization likewise were geared to middle-class West Indians who sought to assimilate into American society. Wayne University professors presented lectures and led discussions. Noted West Indians who visited the city also made presentations, as when a former mayor of Kingston, Jamaica addressed the league.

A transnational network of immigrants between Detroit and the West Indies, from its nascent origins in the late nineteenth century, had emerged fully by 1940. It formed the nucleus of a West Indian community that expanded beginning with the passage of the Hart-Celler Immigration Act of 1965 that led to a new influx of immigrants into the city. Many of the West Indians who comprised this later wave of immigrants were from working-class backgrounds and lacked the education and skills of the earlier arrivals.<sup>59</sup>

An increased awareness of and interest in Caribbean culture and ethnicity among African Americans proved another result of the transnationalism of West Indian immigrants in the city. As noted, several immigrants made presentations concerning their native lands and these events and the ever-growing number of West Indians in the city led in turn to African Americans' greater knowledge of the region. During WWII, the presence of migrant workers in the state and around the country through a federal program for temporary contract labor employing West Indians brought African Americans an increased awareness of people of the Caribbean as well. Throughout the 1940s, Detroit's black newspapers featured special interest stories about the Caribbean. The *Detroit Tribune* sent reporter Mary Penick to Kingston, Jamaica. Penick said she chose to investigate the country because it "was recommended by Jamaicans whom she met in her hometown [Detroit]." The social pages of local African American newspapers continued to announce visits to Detroit by prominent West Indians and travel to the Caribbean by financially successful immigrants who lived in the city. However, no West Indian newspaper emerged until the 1980s, when the immigrant community became large enough to support an ethnically-based publication. In addition, the previous cohort of

immigrants, who belonged largely to the middle class, sought to exert influence over the majority of working-class West Indians who arrived in the later period.<sup>60</sup>

In the late 1960s, another pan-Caribbean organization, the West Indian American Association (WIAA), emerged to replace its predecessor, the West Indian League. The new organization acquired a new building at its present location of 2015 East Seven Mile Road. The independence of many West Indian colonies from their European overlords beginning in the 1960s and increased immigration to Detroit led to the formation of nationally-based organizations in the 1970s and 1980s, such as the Jamaican Association of Michigan (JAM), the Trinidad and Tobago Association, the Bahamian Association, the Guyana Association, and other national and cultural organizations that represented West Indian immigrants in the city and often affiliated with regional or national groups.<sup>61</sup>

As the older Black Bottom neighborhood became overpopulated and living conditions deteriorated steadily, blacks sought to move to neighborhoods with better housing stock, less congestion, and more public services. White residents often resisted and acted violently when blacks' search for better living conditions involved their move to racially exclusive neighborhoods. As West Indian immigrants tended to have higher paying employment as skilled laborers and professionals, they were in better economic circumstances to rent or own homes in white neighborhoods, especially the West Side neighborhood located between Tireman Avenue and West Grand Boulevard. Whites in the neighborhood predictably resorted to violence in an attempt to keep out blacks of any ethnic background or social strata.

Middle-class African Americans and West Indians persevered and began to occupy and own homes on the city's West Side by the 1920s. West Indians established

kin networks, and a pattern of chain migration brought several hundred immigrants to the neighborhood. These West Indian immigrants were crucial to the establishment of St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church and comprised a significant proportion of the church's membership.

Several West Indian immigrants became prominent leaders in the city's African American community during the interwar period. As middle-class professionals, they were well known and respected figures whose names appeared frequently in local black newspapers. With above average incomes, they established transnational patterns and introduced the Caribbean to African Americans through lectures and visits from other prominent West Indians to their homes. The growing number of West Indians who migrated to Detroit increased African American awareness of the cultural distinctiveness of the two groups, as well as led to West Indians formation of their own pan-Caribbean cultural institutions by 1940, which they began to organize around national interests in the 1970s. In addition to their focus on ethnic identity, West Indian immigrants also concentrated on naturalizing and incorporating into a maturing African American bourgeoisie.

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<sup>1</sup> Ira De A. Reid, *The Negro Immigrant: His Background, Characteristics, and Social Adjustment, 1899-1937*, (New York: AMS Press, 1939), 249. Reid lists Michigan as one of the 13 states that had over 500 black immigrants in 1930. While some of these immigrants may not have been West Indians, no census data separated black immigrants by any qualifier other than race.

<sup>2</sup> *The Detroider*, 16 July 1923; See Forrest B. Washington, *The Negro in Detroit: A Survey of the Conditions of a Negro Group in the Northern Industrial Center during the War Prosperity Period* (Detroit: Associated Charities of Detroit, 1920); David M. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973); David Allen Levine, *Internal Combustion: The Races in Detroit, 1915-1926* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> *The Detroider*, 16 July 1923; Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 150, 153; *Detroit News*, 30 May 2001.

<sup>4</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Reel 813, Enumeration District 82-431, ED 82-432, 1920.

<sup>5</sup> Boyle, *Arc of Justice*, 150; U. S. Bureau of the Census, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Reel 813, ED 82-430, ED 82-433, ED 82-434, 1920.

<sup>6</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 1044, ED 82-320, 1930; Boyle, *Arc of Justice*, 84, 114 153-156, 162, 254, 287.

<sup>7</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 1049, ED 82-426, 82-427, 82-428; Roll 1053, ED 82-513, 82-515, 1930. On the East Side, a similar pattern existed, with West Indian families occupying several houses along a block. For example, West Indians lived in several houses located between the 3100 to the 5700 blocks of St. Antoine, and West Indian families occupied the 500 to 600 blocks of Hendrie, E. Palmer, Theodore, E. Warren, Canfield and Hancock Streets. These households typically had many more members, both relatives and non-kin as residents, creating a greater concentration of immigrants and a West Indian character undoubtedly permeated this part of the neighborhood.

<sup>8</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 1049, ED 82-426, 1930; *Polk's City Directory Detroit*, 1918, 1930, 1934, 1939, 1940.

<sup>9</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 13 July 1946.

<sup>10</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 1049, ED 82-428, 1930; Westsiders, *Remembering Detroit's Old Westside: 1920-1950: A Pictorial History of Westsiders* (Detroit, MI: self-published, 1997), 229.

<sup>11</sup> Westsiders, *Remembering Detroit's Old Westside*, 159.

<sup>12</sup> *St. Cyprian's Souvenir Dedication Program*, 1919-1938, Malcolm G. Dade Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, St. Cyprian's Church History, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library. The idea for a new church was first conceived in 1917, when St. Matthew's parishioner Nellie Warren, who lived on 30<sup>th</sup> Street, made a request to Robert Bagnall to open a church nearer to West Side residents, as it was difficult for her to take her disabled son, Francis, to Sunday school. When Warren and several other women approached the rector of St. James, a small white Episcopal church on West Warren and 28<sup>th</sup> Street, he initially said they could hold services in the church after the whites had left services. But when the black Episcopalians showed up for the regular service, they were refused entry at the white church. St. Cyprian's services were held then in the homes of members, until they obtained a building on Stanford Avenue (now called John E. Hunter Drive), which they occupied until they built a small, simple church on 28<sup>th</sup> and Milford Streets. U. S. Bureau of the Census, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Reel 811, ED 82-365, 1920.

<sup>13</sup> *St. Cyprian's Souvenir Dedication Program*.

<sup>14</sup> *St. Cyprian's Souvenir Dedication Program*; U. S. Census Bureau, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 681, ED 40, 1910; U. S. Census Bureau, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 813, ED 82-432, 1920. No extant records provide information of Ernst's birth country, other than stating his was born in the West Indies. Nor could I ascertain exactly when he arrived in Detroit, but he is listed as a resident of the city in the 1910 Census.

<sup>15</sup> *St. Cyprian's Souvenir Dedication Program*. In 1950, Tomlinson became one of the six members to incorporate the church as a parish from its status as a mission, which it had held since 1938; U. S. Census Bureau, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 1053, ED 82-513, 1930; U. S. Treasury Department, Internal Revenue Service, Application for Social Security Account Number, 27 March 1940

<sup>16</sup> *St. Cyprian's Souvenir Dedication Program*; Ontario, Canada, Registration of Marriages, 1857-1924, MS932, 1923; Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Detroit, Michigan, Detroit Border Crossings and Passenger and Crew Lists, 1905-1957, M1478, Record Group 085; U. S. Census Bureau, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 1049, ED 82-428, 1930.

<sup>17</sup> U. S. Treasury Department, Internal Revenue Service, Application for Social Security Account Number, 24 November 1936; U. S. Naturalization Records Indexes, Naturalization Petitions for the U. S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, Southern Division, Detroit, 1907-1995, Series M1917. Under circumstances I have not ascertained, Shillingford resided at the U. S. Consulate in Bridgetown, Barbados at the time of his death in June 1985.

<sup>18</sup> *St. Cyprian's Souvenir Dedication Program*; U. S. Census Bureau, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 813, ED 82-431, 1920; U. S. Census Bureau, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 1049, ED 82-427, 1930; U. S. Naturalization Records Indexes, Naturalization Petitions for the U. S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, Southern Division, Detroit, 1907-1995, Series M1917.

<sup>19</sup> *St. Cyprian's Souvenir Dedication Program*.

<sup>20</sup> *St. Cyprian's Souvenir Dedication Program; Polk's City Directory, 1924, 1926-1927, 1931-1932, 1935;* U. S. Census Bureau, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 1049, ED 82-428, 1930.

<sup>21</sup> *St. Cyprian's Souvenir Dedication Program;* U. S. Census Bureau, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 1053, ED 82-515; Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, New York Passenger Lists, Series T715, Roll 3307, 1923.

<sup>22</sup> *St. Cyprian's Souvenir Dedication Program;* U. S. Census Bureau, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 1049, 82-ED 428, 1930.

<sup>23</sup> U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Naturalization, Certificate of Arrival, 6 November 1931, 23 December 1941; U. S. Department of Labor, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Petition for Citizenship, 13 October 1934, 10 July 1942; U. S. Department of Labor, Naturalization Service, Declaration of Intention, 11 February 1935.

<sup>24</sup> U. S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Petition for Naturalization, 1 September 1942; U. S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Certificate of Arrival, 15 January 1942; U. S. Department of Labor, Immigration Services; Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Baltimore Passenger Lists, List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States, Roll 117, 7 September 1920; New York Passenger Lists, 28 May 1924; *Detroit Tribune*, 15 April 1944; *Michigan Chronicle*, 8 September 1962.

<sup>25</sup> *St. Cyprian's Souvenir Dedication Program;* "St. Matthew's Church News," 29 September 1929, Joyous Christmas Vesper Service, 1942, Newsletters and Bulletins, Box 2, St. Matthew's and St. Joseph's Episcopal Church Records, 1884-1997, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Petition for Naturalization, 1 September 1942; "The Recorder," October 1966, "I Am the Resurrection and the Life," April 1970, St. Matthew's and St. Joseph's Papers.

<sup>27</sup> *St. Cyprian's Souvenir Dedication Program;* U. S. Bureau of Census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Philadelphia County, Roll 1629, ED 82-850, 1920; *Polk's City Directory (Detroit) 1926-1927, 1927-1928;* U. S. Bureau of Census, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 1053, ED 82-513, 1930.

<sup>28</sup> *Polk's City Directory*, (R. L. Polk & Company, 1929-1930, 1930-1931, 1931-1932, 1932-1933, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939, 1940, 1941); Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Detroit, Michigan, Detroit Border Crossings and Passenger and Crew Lists, 1905-1957, Series M1478, RG085, 1941.

<sup>29</sup> Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957, Roll 4801, 18 Aug 1930; U. S. Bureau of Census, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 1053, ED 82-513, 1930. *Polk's City Directory*, 1930, 1934, 1935, 1941; *Detroit Times*, 6 February 1959.

<sup>30</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 25 July 1960; *Michigan Chronicle*, 30 July 1960; U. S. Bureau of Census, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 808, ED 82-224, 1920; U. S. Bureau of Census, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 1038, ED 82-180, 1930; *Detroit Peoples' News*, 28 December 1930; *Detroit Tribune*, 14 October 1933, 9 December 1933, 10 March 1934.

<sup>31</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 4 March 1939, 30 March 1940; *Detroit Free Press*, 25 July 1960; *Michigan Chronicle*, 30 July 1960.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Isaac Greenidge, Reading Room File, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library; *Detroit News*, 11 July 2001; *Detroit Free Press*, 21 May 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Greenidge, Reading Room File; *Detroit News*, 11 July 2001; *Detroit Free Press*, 21 May 2006; Richard W. Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It: Building Black Community in Detroit, 1915-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 180.

<sup>34</sup> Greenidge, Reading Room File; James C. Fleming and Christian E. Burckel, eds., *Who's Who in Colored America, 1950*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Yonkers, NY: Christian E. Burckel & Associates, 1950), 226; *Detroit News*, 11 July 2001; *Detroit Free Press*, 21 May 2006.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph J. Boris, ed., *Who's Who in Colored America, 1928-29*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Who's Who in Colored America Corp., 1929), 226; *Detroit Tribune*, 12 April 1941; Fleming and Burckel, *Who's Who in Colored America, 1950*, 353.

<sup>36</sup> Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, New York Passenger Lists, Series T715, Roll 6401, RG085, 1938; Claude Markoe, Reading Room File, BHC; *Detroit Tribune*, 28 May 1938, 11 June 1938, 13 January 1945. African Americans' curiosity about the Virgin Islands had increased with the appointment of William H. Hastie as District Court judge for the U. S. Virgin Islands. Detrouiter's considered Joe Craigen as a serious contender for the position, but Roosevelt appointed Hastie.



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<sup>37</sup> Thomas, *Life For Us Is*, 282.

<sup>38</sup> Fleming and Burckel, *Who's Who in Colored America, 1950*, 183; U. S. Bureau of Census, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne County, Roll 1036, ED 82-124.

<sup>39</sup> Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Baltimore Passenger Lists, Roll 116, RG085, 1920; *Detroit News*, 27 July 1951; *Michigan Chronicle*, 23 July 1949.

<sup>40</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 28 September 1940, 19 October 1940, 26 October 1940.

<sup>41</sup> Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, New York Passenger Lists, Series T715, Roll 6403, RG085, 1939; *Detroit Tribune*, 14 October 1939, 20 September 1941.

<sup>42</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 19 September 1951; Millicent Wills, *My Journey into the Past* (Detroit: Self-published, 1977), 55-58.

<sup>43</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 19 September 1951; Wills, *My Journey*, 55-58.

<sup>44</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 19 September 1951; Wills, *My Journey*, 55-58.

<sup>45</sup> Boris, *Who's Who in Colored America*, 267; *Detroit Free Press*, 14 July 1955; *Detroit Times*, 14 July 1955; Edward Littlejohn and Gerry M. Doot, "Detroit's Exclusive Social Clique," *Detroit Legal News* (October 1995): 20. Walter Stowers and Robert C. Mitchell were members of nineteenth-century Detroit's black elite and close associates of D. Augustus Straker, William Ferguson, and Robert Pelham. Stower was one of the founders and editors of the *Plaindealer*, a weekly newspaper, which focused on Detroit's black community. He attended law school and passed the bar exam in 1895. Tutored in politics by Michigan senator, Merrill Palmer, Stowers served as Wayne County deputy sheriff, a county assessor, and in 1922, was elected county commissioner. Barnes, after moving from Ohio, began to practice law in Detroit in 1889. He initially partnered with Straker and this association continued until 1893. In 1905, Barnes and Stowers founded their law firm, with Ernest Mitchell later replacing Barnes. Stowers remained active in the firm until his death in 1932.

<sup>46</sup> Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Baltimore Passenger Lists, List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States, Roll 117, 7 September 1920; *Polk's City Directory*, 1939, 1940, 1941; *Detroit Tribune*, 15 April 1944; *Michigan Chronicle*, 8 September 1962.

<sup>47</sup> Wills, *My Journey*, 1, 20, 34, 45-47.

<sup>48</sup> Wills, *My Journey*, 52, 60.

<sup>49</sup> Wills, *My Journey*, 60-63. Significantly, Wills made no use of the system of revolving credit common in the West Indies, known as "partner" in Jamaica, "susu" in Trinidad and other regions of the eastern Caribbean, or "box" in Guyana.

<sup>50</sup> Wills, *My Journey*, 65-67.

<sup>51</sup> Wills, *My Journey*, 70-75.

<sup>52</sup> Wills, *My Journey*, 77-78.

<sup>53</sup> Wills, *My Journey*, 78-84; *Detroit Free Press*, 5 March 1988.

<sup>54</sup> *Detroit News*, 4 March 1998; *Detroit Free Press*, 5 March 1988.

<sup>55</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 14 May 1949; Wills, *My Journey*, 99-102, 107-112; *Detroit News*, 4 March 1998; *Detroit Free Press*, 5 March 1988.

<sup>56</sup> Wills, *My Journey*, 90-91.

<sup>57</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 3 June 1944; *Detroit Tribune*, 16 August 1941; Fleming and Burckel, *Who's Who in Colored America, 1950*, 54, 126.

<sup>58</sup> Wills, *My Journey*, 221; D. Augustus Straker, *A Trip to the Windward Islands: Or Then and Now* (Detroit: Press of & James H. Stone & Company, 1896), 72.

<sup>59</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 3 June 1944; *Detroit Tribune*, 16 August 1941; Reed Ueda, *Postwar Immigrant America: A Social History* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1994), 44, 71-73.

<sup>60</sup> *Michigan Chronicle*, "West Indian Holds High Gov't Position," 20 June 1942; "Florida Use of Bahama Farm Workers," 20 March 1943, "More Bahamians May Arrive," 12 June 1943, "Negro Life in the Tropics," 18 September 1943, "Jamaican Workers in Illinois," 25 September 1943, "Jamaican Farm Workers Leave New Jersey," 11 December 1943; *Detroit Tribune*, "Jamaica Prices Up," 26 September 1942, "MPS Use Fire Hose on Jamaican Hell Ship," 29 May 1943, "Underpaid Jamaicans Stranded in Country," 7 August 1943, "Hoosiers Mob 25 Jamaicans in Town to Pick Apple Crop," 21 August 1943, "Jamaicans Protest," 20 May 1944, "900 Farm Workers Due from Barbados," 10 June 1944 "Tribune Reporter in Jamaica," 20 January 1945, "61 Imported Jamaicans Sick in Chicago from Improper Living

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Quarters,” “Jamaican Powder Keg Subject to Explosion,” 10 November 1945. One of the first Caribbean newspapers in Detroit was published and edited by a Jamaican named Clifton Chambers in the early 1980s.

<sup>61</sup> *Caribbean- African Source News* (Detroit), September 2006. The WIAA was organized and the purchase of the association’s hall financed largely through the efforts of Vincent Carr, a Jamaican immigrant, who came to Michigan during the 1940s as a migrant farm laborer. Carr also founded the Jamaican Association of Michigan (JAM).

## **Chapter 9**

### **“I Have Made Good As a Stranger in Your Lands:” Joseph A. Craigen and African American Politics in Detroit**

West Indian immigrants commonly viewed racial identicalness with African Americans as problematic and sought to distinguish themselves from American-born blacks. As they assimilated into American society and integrated in the black middle class, ethnicity became less significant publicly, although ethnic origins remained salient to identity. West Indian immigrants recognized leadership roles in black Detroit ultimately were grounded in the connection between race and class, which made ethnicity less significant and greater emphasis was placed on the similarities between blacks from the Caribbean and American Americans. Had the black community of Detroit been comprised of a proportionately larger number of West Indians, perhaps ethnic leaders would have emerged. The competitive edge West Indians perceived in their origins and class status decreased as the number of American blacks continued to surpass the number of Afro-Caribbean immigrants in the city. More blacks of both ethnic groups began to enter the middle class and class status became less connected to West Indian ethnicity.

Joseph Craigen exemplifies naturalizing West Indian immigrants' awareness of ethnic identity as they incorporated into the maturing middle-class African American community in Detroit. Craigen turned to a career in Democratic politics with the division and collapse of the Detroit UNIA in late 1929. The seven years he spent as an official of the UNIA gave Craigen skills in organization and administration, which served him well in later years. The Great Depression and the burgeoning interest of African Americans in the Democratic Party contributed to Craigen's success as a career politician as well. His aptitude for political

maneuvering, which he developed while concentrating on Garvey's legal difficulties, propelled him into the center of the African American political arena for the next four decades. While his ethnicity contributed significantly to Craigen's position in the UNIA he downplayed his West Indian origins later in his professional life. Craigen's racial identity had more significance than his ethnic identity, although his West Indian ethnicity continued to have meaning in his private life. While his ethnic background helped define his experience as an immigrant assimilating into both the African American community and into the broader American society, Craigen's ethnicity became less relevant publicly and professionally.

Significantly, Garvey had become involved in American politics in 1924 when he founded the Negro Political Union. While Craigen served as executive secretary of the Detroit division, the UNIA entered the city's political fray with the 1925 mayoral race in support of Democratic candidate Charles Bowles, who also had the support of the Ku Klux Klan. While Judith Stein suggests the UNIA backed Bowles largely because Detroit's black elite favored incumbent John W. Smith, a Republican, Craigen undoubtedly influenced the UNIA's support of Bowles.<sup>1</sup>

With his support of Bowles, Craigen simply may have followed a trend initiated by Garvey, or he could have acted independently. At all levels of government, African Americans across the nation consistently voted for Republican candidates because of their loyalty to the Republican Party as the party of Abraham Lincoln and emancipation. As West Indians, neither Garvey nor Craigen subscribed to an outmoded belief in the political myths nor felt bound by the political loyalties of the African American majority. As noted by Nancy J. Weiss, historian of black politics in the era of FDR, "[m]ost blacks who voted in 1932 were loyal to the Republicans as the party of emancipation" and did not vote for candidates of the Democratic Party until 1936.

However, Samuel O'Dell disagrees with Weiss's argument. O'Dell suggests the economic crisis of the Great Depression had some influence on the shift in African American voting patterns as blacks rejected Republican candidates. However, he proposes that blacks had begun to consider the Democratic presidential candidate Alfred E. Smith as a possible alternative to Republican Herbert Hoover as early as the 1928 election. Craigen himself campaigned for Smith in Michigan. His support for the Democrat Bowles or for Alfred E. Smith, while possibly a reaction to local politics, illustrated Craigen's willingness to step outside of African Americans' conventional political patterns.<sup>2</sup>

As Stein notes, "[t]he course of the Detroit UNIA illuminates the relationship of black politics in the 1920s with that of the 1930s." According to Stein, the United Automobile Workers (UAW) and a reformed Democratic Party replaced the UNIA as the dominant political force in the African American community. Rejecting the separatist views of Garvey, Craigen positioned himself to fill the political vacuum left by the decline of the UNIA by entering local partisan politics, and in 1931, he ran successfully for the position of constable in the predominately black Seventh Ward.<sup>3</sup>

Craigen and African Americans Harold Bledsoe and Charles Diggs, Sr., founded the Michigan Federated Democratic Clubs (MFDC) in 1930 and incorporated the organization in 1933. As the Depression hit black workers in Detroit to an unusual extent, Craigen and the others objected to "the fact that state jobs, paid for by their own tax dollars, were closed to able and anxious workers because of their race." Canvassing the state, they advocated for the election of Democratic candidate Murray "Pat" VanWagoner as the most promising contender for the position of highway commissioner, since VanWagoner promised to employ blacks if elected. When VanWagoner kept his word, the MFDC gained members in earnest, "the majority of them

either former Republicans or non-voters . . . who set about the task of becoming skilled in . . . politics.”<sup>4</sup>

The political leadership of black Detroit remained solidly in the Republican camp, however. The tenacity required to oppose this Old Guard elite underlines the MFDC’s reputation as “one of . . . [the] most politically courageous and socially aware organizations.” In spite of blacks’ overwhelming shift to the Democratic Party in the 1936 federal elections, in local elections political leaders often urged African American voters to “keep Detroit non-partisan” or rather to actively support Republican candidates. This frequently frustrated the efforts of the MFDC. Political infighting within the club itself as well as among the African American Democratic leadership in general added conflict.<sup>5</sup>

African American attorney Harold Bledsoe became the first president of the MFDC, with Craigen as executive secretary and Diggs as general organizer. Initially, the club had its headquarters at 632 Livingstone Street, but the fledgling organization aroused opposition and they “were constantly pushed out of meeting places because . . . [they] were Democrats.” In spite of financial difficulties, the MFDC later acquired a permanent meeting hall at 628 E. Warren.<sup>6</sup>

The organization’s governing body eventually would consist of a president and three vice-presidents assisted by a treasurer, a corresponding secretary, a financial secretary, and an executive secretary. A board of directors and a House Committee completed the executive staff. The Election Committee supervised yearly elections and candidates campaigned vigorously. The MFDC leadership stressed the organization’s “[f]inancial and membership records . . . [were] kept in meticulous order.” A politically active Women’s Division performed the more traditional

female duties associated with entertaining at social events, but also performed important fund-raising functions as well.<sup>7</sup>

Craigen, known for his oratorical abilities, often acted as spokesman for the MFDC on various political issues. In early December 1933, the Webster Hall Hotel suddenly dismissed seventeen African American service workers and replaced them with whites. Craigen objected to “the wholesale dismissal of Negroes from various places of employment in Detroit” by employers who sought to pay the higher wages dictated by the National Recovery Act (NRA) to white rather than black workers.<sup>8</sup>

Craigen proved instrumental in the MFDC’s 1933 endorsement of candidate Harry H. Mead in Detroit’s mayoralty race. He helped William L. Sherrill, then-president of the UNIA, obtain an appointment as tax clerk in the Wayne County Treasurer’s office in 1934. In 1938, the bipartisan Committee on Negro Registration and Voting elected Craigen its chairman to encourage African Americans to exercise their right to vote. Craigen stated that while “[t]housands of dollars are being spent by the NAACP and other organizations to secure the franchise for Negroes in the South, . . . thousands of the Negroes in Detroit are content to sit supinely by and fail to exercise their privilege of voting.” After a series of mass meetings and direct-mail campaigns, Craigen concluded that the work of the committee showed signs of success indicated by “the large number of persons visiting City Hall to register.”<sup>9</sup>

In 1940, Craigen and Diggs visited Benton Harbor, Kalamazoo, Battle Creek, Jackson, and Vicksburg, Michigan where they campaigned for presidential candidate Franklin Roosevelt and gubernatorial candidate Murray VanWagoner. While Craigen and Diggs spoke largely at black churches to all black audiences, an exclusively white audience attended the rally held in Vicksburg, just south of Kalamazoo. VanWagoner’s candidacy loomed large for blacks who

hoped his election would “insure a square deal to the Negro competitors for civil service jobs” which “could only be won by competitive examinations.” When VanWagoner emerged victorious, his position as governor of the state became crucial to Craigen’s political advancement.<sup>10</sup>

Craigen urged voters to inform themselves about the political platforms of candidates running for elective offices. He served as chairman of the MFDC membership campaign and pointed out that notables such as national Democratic committee leader Clara Van Auken, Murray VanWagoner, Wayne County sheriff Thomas C. Wilcox, Probate judge Patrick O’Brien, Senator Prentiss M. Brown, and Judge James Jeffries all possessed lifetime memberships in the organization. The membership drive, which began in February 1940, sought to add one thousand new members. Its success led to Craigen continuing the drive until February 1941, with a goal of adding five thousand members to the MFDC roster.<sup>11</sup>

As with other West Indians examined in this study, Craigen pursued higher education, attending first Wayne University and the Detroit College of Law beginning in 1933. He became the first black member of the college’s debate team, a further example of his rejection of the separatist ideals of Garvey and his insistence on integration that would allow Craigen to carve a political niche in the New Deal era. As a nontraditional student with years of experience in the running the affairs of an organization, he saw law school as a means of establishing the credentials needed to facilitate his entrance into mainstream partisan politics. Craigen became a Wayne County deputy court clerk for Republican Circuit Judge Guy A. Miller and clerked for Miller for five years. During this time, he became very active in the Democratic Party and formed connections to key party members.<sup>12</sup>



Craigen's professional successes related directly to his ability to forge alliances with white politicians. For example, his election as secretary to the First Congressional district in September 1934 resulted from Congressman George Sadowski's proposal to black Detroiters "that members of all races should hold executive offices." After Craigen passed the bar exam in June 1937, Governor Frank Murphy appointed him deputy labor commissioner, a position *Detroit Tribune* columnist Russ Cowan compared to the one held by D. A. Straker, the other West Indian immigrant prominent in Detroit politics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Murphy later expressed how he felt "deeply grateful" to Craigen whose fine "record as Deputy Commissioner . . . fully justified [governor Murphy's] expectations."<sup>13</sup>

Craigen understood the necessity of having broad political support. He had clerked for a Republican judge. As labor commissioner, he addressed the Polish community through a radio broadcast on station WMBC in June 1938. His speech, entitled "Problems Confronting the Department of Labor of the State of Michigan," showed a willingness to seek support in white ethnic communities. He also made evident his concern for fellow West Indians in Detroit. His decision to award damages to the widow of a West Indian sanitation worker whose death the city claimed resulted from pneumonia rather than a work-related injury, was viewed by many as controversial. Craigen's judgment warranted front-page news in the *Detroit Tribune* because of the strong defense put up by the city government.<sup>14</sup>

Craigen announced he would run for the United States Congress as a candidate from the Thirteenth District in the 1938 election. He felt that he could win the election because the heavily African American First and Third wards comprised part of the Thirteenth District. However, he did not win the nomination, coming in third in the primaries.<sup>15</sup>

Undaunted by his loss, Craigen assured supporters that his “failure . . . [would] not be the death-knell of . . . [his] being used as the spear-head to arouse Negroes to do their civic duty.” He noted that he won in all wards with large populations of African Americans, proving that blacks “[were] increasingly becoming racially conscious.” He admonished Detroit’s eighty thousand registered African American voters to exercise their right to the franchise. Craigen emphasized the importance of redistricting the city for blacks to have political success at the federal level and asserted “the fight for Negro representation in Congress from Detroit ha[d] just begun.”<sup>16</sup>

As deputy labor commissioner, Craigen had the highest rating in the civil service examinations in 1939. Frank Murphy served as attorney general at the time and suggested Craigen resign as commissioner to accept a federal position. In April of that year, it was rumored that Craigen would lose his position. When Frank Murphy lost his bid for re-election as governor, the Civil Service law under which Craigen had initially obtained his post was repealed by Republicans and Craigen was dismissed.<sup>17</sup>

A bipartisan committee formed to protest his dismissal to Luren D. Dickerson, governor of the state at the time. Several notable figures comprised the committee, including Robert L. Bradby and Horace White, pastors of Second Baptist and Plymouth Congregational Church, respectively. Carlton Gaines of the Booker T. Washington Trade Association and Detroit branch NAACP president James McClendon also served on the committee as did civil rights leaders William Sherrill and Snow Grigsby. Labor Commissioners Charles Mahoney and Daniel Knaggs “strenuously opposed” Craigen’s dismissal and Mahoney threatened to resign if officials did not hire another black man to fill the position.<sup>18</sup>

In May 1939, Ingham County Circuit Court issued a temporary injunction against Craigen's firing. Craigen, who sought to appeal the Labor Commission's decision earlier in the month before the Board of Commissioners and the governor, found no redress in this manner and then petitioned the court to halt the dismissal. This effort also proved unsuccessful, but in June Patrick O'Brien, Probate Court Judge, gave Craigen a new appointment as probate registrar. His appointment marked the first time a black man had held the position with its four-thousand-dollar-a-year salary, then considered an exorbitant amount.<sup>19</sup>

In May 1941, VanWagoner re-appointed Craigen to his former post as deputy labor commissioner, the position he would keep until the end of his life. When voters re-instated the civil service law, which had been repealed by the Republican-controlled state government, those who had successfully taken the exam again became eligible. Because Craigen had the highest score, his "name was therefore place[d] at the top" of the list of eligible candidates and his association with the governor guaranteed he would regain the position. Wynne Garvin, another black attorney, replaced him as probate registrar.<sup>20</sup>

In 1943, the black leadership of Detroit Democrats would experience a long-running conflict, which resulted in factions forming within the MFDC. The rift began in the fall the year before when Democrats lost heavily in the elections. A committee headed by Charles Diggs, Sr., then-president of the MFDC, proposed changing the name of the club to reflect the new nonpartisan nature of the organization. The Diggs faction chose the name the Moroccans "because of its historical background in relation to the mothers and fathers of the American Negroes." Diggs and his supporters clearly lacked any knowledge of the African origins of people of African American descent. Perhaps the group led by Diggs was attempting to invent a colorful and exotic heritage for itself by calling itself the "Moroccans" and its African American

members in reflection of Craigen's foreign-born origins in British Guiana. Craigen and Harold Bledsoe opposed the new name and the new doctrine the Diggs faction sought to implement. Members chose by a one-vote majority to become the Moroccans, victorious over the Craigen forces who "opposed . . . changing the organization's name."<sup>21</sup>

Craigen, Bledsoe, Treasurer William Ware, and others filed an injunction in the circuit court, preventing the transfer of the club's assets to another club. Craigen, suspecting a more "sinister motive" behind Diggs's actions, declared

[t]his gang of hustlers are attempting to destroy the purpose of the democratic club. Many members who have invested heavily in the organization refuse to permit the purpose to be destroyed by a few newcomers who have not contributed one cent to the organization's assets . . . [n]o notice of the meeting was ever sent to the members and a notice is a primary requisite of the laws when the name of a corporation is to be changed . . . The Michigan Federated Democratic club is a Michigan corporation and has played a large part in the growth of the Negroes' activity in the Democratic party in Michigan.

Craigen also noted that only forty-three members, the majority of them not acting as members in good standing, participated in the vote that resulted in the name change.<sup>22</sup>

Diggs responded by calling Craigen "a persistent and known individualist" who "cater[ed] to the Democratic officials in an attempt to retain his 'spring board' to 'bounce' into a federal position." He further charged Craigen participated in the club "bi-annual[ly] in campaigns only [in] which jobs of importance were handed out." Yet one of Diggs's primary complaints leading to the controversy concerned Wayne County prosecutor William Dowling, "who allegedly disregarded the advice of . . . [the] Diggs faction in passing out patronage to Negroes in the county."<sup>23</sup>

Craigen issued a scathing reply. He readily admitted using the MFDC to further his political career, asserting the purpose of such clubs existed "to gain political advances." He

pointed out that Diggs had used the organization as well, his funeral home obtaining a \$30,000 contract with a local state hospital and twice seeking election on Detroit's Common Council. Indeed, one of the main purposes of the club "was [its] use to get placed in political positions . . . hundreds of intelligent young women and men during the Democratic regime."<sup>24</sup>

Craigen further took Diggs to task for suggesting he owed his political success to him, retorting that it was he, Craigen, "who took . . . [Diggs] to . . . [his] first Democratic assembly" and acquainted him with the political power brokers. Diggs claimed to want the club to become nonpartisan, hence the change in name. Craigen emphasized he had brought Henry Montgomery, the first Republican, into the club resulting in the appointment of five blacks to state offices. The name of the club did not restrict it to only partisan interchanges.<sup>25</sup>

Diggs had sought to cast aspersion on his opponent by stressing his immigrant background and suggested Craigen may not have remained in the country legally. Craigen's caustic comments show his disgust at the pettiness of this tactic:

Why mention my coming to this country? Is it to create geographical prejudice? Well, everybody who knows me knows that I was born in South America, even the Government knows it; they brought me to this country as a linguist. They helped to educate me . . . I became a citizen as soon as I was old enough and believe me, Senator, I think I have made good as a stranger in your lands. Don't you?<sup>26</sup>

Diggs's attack on Craigen highlighted the tension between well-educated, successful West Indian immigrants and the rising native-born African American middle class. In pointing out Craigen's immigrant origins, Diggs desired to portray Craigen as a foreign "other" and cast doubt on his loyalty as an American citizen. What makes Diggs's accusations significant is his perception of ethnicity as a liability and a deficit. Craigen clearly recognized Diggs's attempts to disparage his West Indian ethnicity and make of it a divisive issue. He countered Diggs by

expressing both pride in his Guianese birth and in his becoming a naturalized citizen. As an immigrant, “a stranger,” he assumed overlapping racial, ethnic, and national identities. He had “made good” by successfully integrating these identities and incorporating himself into American society.<sup>27</sup>

In many ways, Craigen exemplified the stereotypical West Indian immigrant.: Well educated, well-traveled, Anglican, and an upwardly mobile professional, but the reason he could rise above leadership of a minor immigrant substratum was because the relative liberalism of the 1930s and the 1940s gave Craigen political access within the broader society. Although the 2,262 West Indians who resided in the state were still relatively few in number when compared to Detroit’s 120,000 African Americans, they were numerous enough that Craigen could have become the leader of the city’s Caribbean immigrants with the demise of Garveyism. The collapse of the Garvey movement created a vacuum that a charismatic leader like Craigen could have filled in the West Indian immigrant community. Craigen perceived a grander opportunity. Instead of becoming involved in ethnic political affairs, he embraced American politics. His awareness of ethnic identity did not point to leadership of an ethnic community, but led instead to a position of influence in the African American community.

Nor did he actively participate or publicly express interest in the labor organizing and political independence upheavals that rocked the Caribbean after World War I. According to Gerald Horne in his study of the response of the United States to these movements in the British West Indies, “British Guiana had long been in the vanguard of the movement for sovereignty and labor rights.” Craigen emigrated from British Guiana in 1918 during the emergence of organized labor in the colony. Through his leadership role in the Garvey movement, Craigen would have been well acquainted with labor struggles in the Caribbean. Garvey had initially organized the

UNIA because of what he witnessed of the conditions of laborers, and Garveyites worked closely with unions throughout the region. But Craigen did not use his position as labor commissioner to facilitate what Gerald Horne calls a “transnational organizing of black labor.” While he may have acknowledged a common struggle between labor organizers in Detroit and those in the West Indies, he did not address the issue overtly. He chose to participate solely in American partisan politics and eschewed involvement in and remained silent publicly about political upheavals in British Guiana and elsewhere in the Caribbean.<sup>28</sup>

Although Craigen claimed that he became an American citizen when he was “old enough,” he actually did not become naturalized until he was in his late twenties and after he had resided in the country for seven years. His decision to do so probably was influenced by Garvey’s forays into American politics with the formation of the Negro Political Union. The timing of his actions suggests political expediency as his motive and clearly indicates his growing awareness of how influence and power could result from participation in mainstream politics. Horne describes “a pragmatic culture of migration” in which West Indian immigrants become naturalized citizens in order to further the interests of their home countries, but Craigen used American citizenship to involve himself more fully in the American political process.<sup>29</sup>

Diggs’s attack on Craigen’s ethnicity becomes more alarming when placed in the context of the control of political spoils. Diggs implied that because Craigen was an immigrant, he was not entitled to the political positions he held. As noted in Chapter 5, clearly ethnicity affected the distribution of economic patronage in the conflict between Everard Daniel and Robert Bradby. No evidence exists that Craigen attempted to have West Indians employed at the expense of African Americans, nor that he made specific appeals to them to naturalize and become involved in the political process so he could deliver votes to party bosses.

The role of the U. S. government in his migration to America as an interpreter for the navy made Craigen's experience different from the majority of West Indian immigrants. He did not rely on a kinship network to facilitate migration or to assist him in finding housing or employment. To an extent, his involvement with Garveyism may have taken the place of a West Indian social network once he arrived in Detroit, and although he clearly identified himself as a West Indian, when he was no longer associated with the movement, he did little to differentiate himself from African Americans in the city.

He did make at least one recorded voyage back to the colony, but Craigen followed no transnational pattern. In 1962, he made a six-week visit to British Guiana but only after he became securely entrenched in the African American community and was a nationally recognized leader. Nor does any evidence exist that he remitted any of his substantial income to relatives living in the colony or contributed to any ethnic mutual aid societies. In his role as a political leader of an African American community, his racial identity became "more salient" than his ethnic one in these "particular contexts and circumstances." This fluidity in identity allowed Craigen to assume a position of leadership in the African American community, while still identifying as a West Indian immigrant.<sup>30</sup>

With the waning influence of Garveyism, Craigen made an obvious choice to submerge his West Indian ethnicity to assume a broader identity as an assimilated American citizen. In this manner he gained wider recognition and authority in the African American community. Influence in African American society evidently took precedence over leadership of the group of disparate West Indian immigrants that would not begin to coalesce until the 1940s. When a formal West Indian organization did emerge, Craigen became a member.<sup>31</sup>



West Indians in Detroit were not numerous enough to organize along ethnic lines, so Craigen played significant roles in various institutions conventionally associated with the black middle class. In time, he had positions of leadership in these organizations as well. Two such organizations were the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity and the Idlewild Lot Owners Association. (Later, Craigen served as vice president of the local NAACP branch, as well as president of the Wolverine Bar Association)

In addition to his control of the MFDC, Craigen would assume positions of leadership and influence in the local and national Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity. Craigen joined the organization while a student at the Detroit College of Law. Under Craigen's direction, Kappa Alpha Psi, the nation's second oldest African American fraternity, would act as a political as well as a social club. Craigen served as polemarch, or district leader, for several years and later was elected Grand Polemarch, or national leader. He served as chairman of fundraising for the purchase of the house located at 269 Erskine Street, known as Kappa Kastle, and as an officer on the organization's grand board of directors. Craigen's ubiquitous role in the Detroit chapter would earn him the sobriquet, "Mr. Kappa."<sup>32</sup>

Active in the fraternity's annual "Guide Right Week," which sought to mentor young black men and prepare them for professional careers, Craigen also served as a delegate and occupied a "prominent" role at local and national conferences. Prior to the purchase of Kappa Kastle, Craigen frequently hosted fraternity-related events at his refined home located at 286 King Street. He encouraged the general public to attend these events and those held at Kappa Kastle in an attempt to make the fraternity accessible to the wider African American community.<sup>33</sup>

Like his leadership of a black fraternity, his leadership of the Idlewild community reflected Craigen's identity as middle-class African American rather than as a British Guianese immigrant. Located in Yates Township in western Michigan's Lake County, the resort community had long existed as the playground for the black middle class, "where the men were idle and the women were wild."<sup>34</sup>

Idlewild became a mecca for the black bourgeoisie. According to one study of the resort,

[t]he dream of Idlewild as a "Black Eden" in Michigan reverberated throughout the black communities, especially in the Midwest. The constant ringing of Randolph 2315, the telephone number of the company's office . . . in Chicago, proved that the developers had reached an untapped desire by many middle-class professionals for a black resort. Solicitation campaigns were so successful that trains departing from urban areas such as Detroit were often crowded with passengers bound for Idlewild, in search of lots for purchase.<sup>35</sup>

Between 1917 and 1930, a thriving summer economy grew as a business district developed, with hotels, motels, restaurants, shops, nightclubs, and small factories. In turn, the economy of Lake County benefited. Black entrepreneurs found a ready market for a variety of goods and services at the resort. The economic growth of the resort "made Idlewild the destination of choice for many African Americans, with its heyday between 1940 and 1965."<sup>36</sup> In 1927, Garveyites at Idlewild formed a local division and Craigen, still a leading UNIA official, would visit the resort as well as interact with the division's president. Thus, his first exposure to the Idlewild community as UNIA official was in a very different context than later as the leader of the African American elite. Once he left the organization, he had no further interaction with the Idlewild UNIA division. He did, however, play an important role as a civic and social leader among black professional residents at the resort.<sup>37</sup>

Craigen played an instrumental role in the creation of Idlewild as a paradise for blacks not only throughout the Midwest, but also across the country. As the founder and sometime president of the Idlewild Lot Owners Association, he possessed “the expertise and business acumen needed to sustain the development of the resort.” He organized projects to improve the infrastructure of the resort as well as make it more aesthetically appealing. Under his direction, the resort became a major venue for the era’s top black entertainers hosted by several notable nightclubs there. Considered one of the “significant movers and shakers” who led the resort community during the peak of its success, Craigen epitomized the successful middle-class residents of Idlewild.<sup>38</sup>

His leadership of the resort community not only increased his influence among blacks in Detroit but nationally as well. At its peak, almost 25,000 vacationers visited the resort between Memorial and Labor Day. He assumed a number of civic duties to make the resort functional and many knew Craigen as a gracious and dynamic host. His large summer home was frequently the site of lively parties, where often guests from out-of-town would stay. The social milieu at Idlewild made Craigen a well-known figure to middle-class African Americans nationwide and this recognition undoubtedly contributed to wide support for his later bid for a federal judgeship.<sup>39</sup>

Craigen remained a significant participant in Democratic politics in Michigan and continued as a highly visible public figure throughout the 1940s and 1950s. His friends and allies included Governor G. Mennen Williams and other noted Democrats, such as national committee leader George Fitzgerald, state chairman Hicks Griffiths, state representative Martha Griffiths, and judges Gerald O’Brien and Carl Weideman.<sup>40</sup>

In spite of determined opposition from the Republican black elite, the Craigen leadership of black Democrats had emerged out of the conditions of Depression-era Detroit, “root[ing] itself in the premise that the dignity of a job is a human right and that [having] one guarantees . . . dignity.”<sup>41</sup>

The skills he acquired as a leader in the UNIA and his professional career as a lawyer served him well as a partisan politician. By 1930, largely under Craigen’s direction, the MFDC acted as an organization to encourage African American inclusion in the Democratic Party and the programs and policies of the New Deal. Several years before black voters turned to Democratic candidates nationally, Craigen was locally at the forefront of the massive political change that would occur among blacks by 1936.

Although Craigen was very conscious of his ethnicity and his immigrant origins, after he departed from the UNIA, his political affiliation was strictly with the Democratic Party. His membership in the West Indian Social League reflects Craigen’s ethnic identification as largely communal, rather than political in nature. When challenged about his status as an immigrant as a political ploy, he acknowledged readily his origins in the West Indies, but stressed his American citizenship with equal alacrity. As an adopted citizen who chose assimilation into broader American society instead of a more limited and limiting West Indian ethnic identity, Craigen played a preeminent role in African Americans’ association with the Democratic Party and led for decades some of the most socially active institutions of the city’s black middle class.

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 231-232; Adolph Edwards, *Marcus Garvey, 1887-1940* (London: New Beacon Publications, 1967), 16; E. David Cronon, *The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 103, 188-190, 195, 222, 225; David Allan Levine, *Internal Combustion: The Races in Detroit, 1915-1926* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), 100-101, 138-141; *Detroit Free Press*, 2 November 1925; *Detroit News*, 2 November 1925.

<sup>2</sup> Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), xiii, 4; Samuel O’Dell, “Blacks, the Democratic Party, and the Presidential Election of 1928: A Mild Rejoinder,” *Phylon* 48, no. 1 (1987): 1-11; *Michigan Chronicle*, 11 December 1948.

<sup>3</sup> Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey*, 229, 232, 256.

<sup>4</sup> *Michigan Chronicle*, 25 February 1956; Obituary, n. d., Harold E. Bledsoe, Reading Room File, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library; Thomas, *Life for Us*, 267. Thomas erroneously gives Charles Diggs, Sr. sole credit for the founding of the MFDC.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas, *Life for Us*, 263; Levine, *Internal Combustion*, 51; *Michigan Chronicle*, 25 February 1956; *Detroit Tribune*, 10 November 1934, 18 September 1937, 30 October 1937; *Detroit Tribune Independent*, 30 March 1935; 6 April 1935.

<sup>6</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 23 September 1933; *Michigan Chronicle*, 25 February 1956.

<sup>7</sup> *Michigan Chronicle*, 25 February 1956.

<sup>8</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 2 December 1933. Earlier that year, Craigen, while a freshman at Detroit College of Law, had come in second place in an oratorical contest, beating out nine upperclassmen. He was also the only black participant in the contest.

<sup>9</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 23 September 1933, 19 February 1938, 2 April 1938, 11 June 1938; *Detroit Tribune Independent*, 28 July 1934.

<sup>10</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 26 October 1940, 2 November 1940, 21 December 1940, 3 May 1941.

<sup>11</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 16 July 1938, 3 February 1940, 7 December 1940.

<sup>12</sup> James C. Fleming and Christian E. Burkel, eds., *Who's Who in Colored America, 1950*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: Christian E. Burkel & Associates, 1950); *Detroit Tribune*, 18 November 1933; *Detroit Tribune*, 10 June 1933, 22 July 1933, 18 November 1933, 10 March 1934; *Detroit Tribune Independent*, 30 March 1935; *Michigan Chronicle*, February 25, 1956, 30 June 1962; *Detroit News*, 23 June 1962; *Detroit Free Press*, 23 June 1962.

<sup>13</sup> *Detroit Tribune Independent*, 29 September 1934; *Detroit Tribune*, 12 June 1937, 30 April 1938, 17 December 1938.

<sup>14</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 11 June 1938, 29 January 1938.

<sup>15</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 9 October 1937, 17 September 1938. Republican Clarence J. McLeod won the election.

<sup>16</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 24 September 1938.

<sup>17</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 14 January 1939, 29 April 1939, 3 May 1941.

<sup>18</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 6 May 1939.

<sup>19</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 20 May 1939, 10 June 1939; *Michigan Chronicle*, 22 January 1949.

<sup>20</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 3 May 1941, 7 June 1941.

<sup>21</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 16 January 1943, 23 January 1943, 6 February 1943, 13 March 1943. Although slightly outside the timeframe of this work, the conflict that emerged between Craigen and Charles Diggs over control of the MFDC illustrates so well the clash between race and ethnicity that I have chosen to include the episode in this chapter. By February 1943, Diggs had resigned as president of the MFDC taking with him the president of the Women's Division, Mamie Richardson, and Robert Walker, the club's executive secretary. William Sherrill nominated Emmett Cunningham to replace Diggs and he ran successfully for president. The year prior, Cunningham had led the fight against corruption in Wayne County government, which led to a grand jury investigation resulting in the dismissal of certain county officials. Late in 1943, Diggs, then a state senator, was accused of accepting money in exchange for his vote. Found guilty in August 1944, he appealed the verdict and remained free on bail until the statute of limitations ran out as the prosecutors key witness refused to testify. In December 1948, Diggs began a short sentence in Jackson Prison. Prior to his conviction, he again challenged Craigen and Bledsoe for control of the MFDC, this time seeking to rename the club Ebony Hall and support Republican candidates.

<sup>22</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 16 January 1943, 23 January 1943.

<sup>23</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 16 January 1943, 23 January 1943.

<sup>24</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 30 January 1943.

<sup>25</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 30 January 1943.

<sup>26</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 30 January 1943.

<sup>27</sup> Nancy Foner, ed., *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>28</sup> Gerald Horne, *Hot War in a Cold Zone: The United States Confronts Labor and Independence Struggles in the British West Indies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 15, 17-19. Horne examines the wave of labor unrest that swept the Caribbean beginning in the 1930s, with strikes and riots occurring throughout the region in Trinidad, St. Vincent, St. Lucia, St. Kitts, Jamaica, as well as British Guiana. See also W. F. Elkins, "Black Power in the British West Indies," *Science and Society* 33, no.1 (Winter 1969): 71-75; and Brinsley Samaroo, "The Trinidad Workingmen's Association and the Origins of Popular Protest in a Crown Colony," *Social and Economic*

*Studies* 21, no. 2 (July 1972): 205-222; Tony Martin, "Revolutionary Upheavals in Trinidad, 1919: Views from British and American Sources," *Journal of Negro History* 58, no. 3 (July 1973): 313-326.

<sup>29</sup> Fleming and Burckel, *Who's Who in Colored America, 1950*, 126; Horne, *Hot War in a Cold Zone*, 8. Craigen's awareness of the power of political influence no doubt was affected by the sympathetic response of politicians to his appeals on Garvey's behalf.

<sup>30</sup> *Michigan Chronicle*, 8 February 1947, 1 March 1947; Foner, *Islands in the City*, 13.

<sup>31</sup> *Who's Who in Colored America, 1950*, 126; *Detroit News*, 23 June 1962; *Michigan Chronicle*, 30 June 1962.

<sup>32</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 13 December 1941, 23 December 1944, 6 December 1947, 8 April 1944, 15 April 1944, 1 December 1945; *Michigan Chronicle*, 20 January 1962, 30 June 1962, 14 January 1950.

<sup>33</sup> *Detroit Tribune*, 16 April 1938, 6 April 1940; *Michigan Chronicle*, 18 September 1943, 27 November 1943.

<sup>34</sup> Lewis Walker and Ben C. Wilson, *Black Eden: The Idlewild Community* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2002), 24. Development of the resort began in 1912 as a response to segregation and the refusal of whites to allow access to even well-to-do blacks at white resorts. Established by three white investors for \$125,000, by 1920 the black salesmen that the corporation employed had done so well black lot owners in the community claimed \$900,000 in property. Pamphlets and advertisements in black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender* attracted blacks in the Midwest to purchase property as well as rent summer houses at Idlewild.

<sup>35</sup> Walker and Wilson, *Black Eden*, 24-25. By the late 1920s, such notable resort property owners included entrepreneur Madame C. J. Walker, heart surgeon Dr. Daniel Hale Williams (who died at Idlewild in 1931), attorney and novelist Charles Chesnutt, Chicago politician Oscar DePreist, and educator Mary McLeod Bethune.

<sup>36</sup> Walker and Wilson, *Black Eden*, 43, 47-48, 51. Many members of the resort community followed the self-help paradigm of racial uplift as promoted by Booker T. Washington. This attitude toward racial progress was reflected also in the presence of a large Garveyite community at the resort in the 1930s.

<sup>37</sup> Ronald J. Stephens, "Garveyism in Idlewild, 1927 to 1936," *Journal of Black Studies* 34, no. 4 (March, 2004), 463, 465, 470. Stephens stresses that the Idlewild UNIA division existed as an anomaly, in that it emerged after Garvey's deportation and was active during the 1930s rather than the 1920s. He criticizes Walker and Wilson's *Black Eden* for concentrating on the black middle-class residents of the resort and ignoring Garveyites who were more likely residents with working-class backgrounds. However, the book does discuss the caste system in effect and describes the lower-class and successful underworld figures who populated the resort on weekends, black soldiers, and other groups distinguished from the black elite.

<sup>38</sup> Walker and Wilson, *Black Eden*, 141, 71, 79. Venues at the resort such as the Paradise Club, the Flamingo Club, and Club El-Morocco, and the Idlewild Clubhouse featured such acts as Louis Armstrong, Julian "Cannonball" Adderly, William "Count" Basie, the Mills Brothers, Cab Calloway, Billy Eckstine, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, and others. Many celebrities, including Joe Louis and Dinah Washington, owned property at the resort as well. The authors suggest that Craigen's death in 1962 contributed to the downward spiral of the resort, which after the mid-1960s never regained the success it had had during Craigen's era.

<sup>39</sup> *Michigan Chronicle*, 16 October 1948; *Detroit News*, 3 November 1948; *Detroit Free Press*, 19 December 1948. In October 1948, a bipartisan committee comprised of "Democrats, Truman Republicans, and Labor leaders" joined to have Truman appoint Craigen to a vacancy on the Federal bench. Key members of the committee included Thomas Orum, Emmett Cunningham, and William Sherrill. Victor L. Hicks, secretary of the Democratic County Committee of Wayne and Geneva Cassey of the Democratic State Central Committee also played a key role in the efforts to have Craigen appointed as a federal judge. The committee hoped to gain an advantage from Truman's civil rights program and implementation of the FEPC in Michigan. Their efforts centered on first obtaining endorsements from well-known Democratic leaders. These included vice-chairman of the Democratic National Committee, William L. Dawson of Illinois and Democratic State Committee leader, George Fitzgerald. Supporters sent Truman and Tom Clark, the United States Attorney General, a petition with over three hundred signatures on it, both Democrats and Republicans. Craigen received the endorsements of the Wolverine Bar Association and National Negro Council. He was, however, unsuccessful in his bid for a federal court position and his efforts to obtain a circuit court judgeship in 1949 proved equally disappointing.

<sup>40</sup> *Michigan Chronicle*, 20 May 1950, 3 June 1950.

<sup>41</sup> *Michigan Chronicle*, 20 May 1950, 3 June 1950.

## **Chapter 10 Conclusion**

### **West Indian Americans**

As indicated by the quote used in the title of this study, “Higher than Those of Their Race of Less Fortunate Advantages,” West Indians who migrated to Detroit, as well as to other locations in the United States, perceived themselves as distinct from and “higher than” African Americans, with whom they shared a racial, but not an ethnic, identity. The “fortunate advantages” of black immigrants included being generally better educated than American blacks and able to obtain professional or skilled employment, earn middle-class incomes, and acquire housing outside of traditionally segregated neighborhoods. West Indian immigrants who resided in existing African American communities, such as the one that existed in Detroit, attempted to distinguish themselves from American blacks, who they disdained for their rejection of white middle-class mores or and their failure to attain middle-class economic status. However, black immigrants faced the same racial discrimination that prevented black Americans from entering the white middle class and that discrimination engendered the desire of West Indians to differentiate themselves on the basis of ethnicity and thus, they sought to weld West Indian ethnicity to middle-class status.

This class-based ethnicity served as a means by which West Indian immigrants in the city chose to distinguish themselves from the black working class. Black West Indian immigrants viewed entrance into the middle class as both a primary goal and their inalienable right as naturalized citizens. To achieve their primary goal and exercise their right to upward mobility, West Indians used this class-and-ethnic construction to assist their assimilation into bourgeois American society. Also, they employed the construction

to explain and rationalize why they obtained relative success while black Americans remained, comparatively, of “less fortunate advantages.” West Indians perceived their success as resulting, then, from the advantages accrued from their ethnicity, from being members of the bourgeoisie, as well as from being good naturalized American citizens.

These three bases of West Indian distinctiveness remained a constant paradigm in each of the eras examined in this research. Beginning in 1885, the study addresses the period preceding the Great Migration when Detroit’s black population was very small. In this period, West Indians such as D. Augustus Straker, Joshua B. Massiah, N. H. McBayne, and Robert Stimpson all epitomized this employment of ethnic and class distinctions as a means of assimilation into American society. As men with some higher education and professional credentials, they were recognized as leaders in the Detroit African American community. Their political and social influence extended beyond the boundaries of the city and brought them recognition in the wider American society as well. Straker and Massiah used their access to the white power structure to advance in American society. McBayne and Stimpson, however, were unable to navigate the racial construction of a segregated America and returned to Jamaica.

Detroit’s small black population of the period gave West Indians room to claim positions of leadership and join the ranks of the city’s African American elite. Straker and Stimpson used their connections to white politicians to further their careers, while Massiah held an esteemed position as the leader of a black Episcopal church, one of the bastions of the African American upper stratum. As would remain the case in later periods, these West Indian immigrants used class and ethnicity to differentiate themselves



from African Americans, while at the same time assimilating into the predetermined racial categories found in American society.

With the exponential growth of Detroit's black community as a result of the Great Migration, the West Indian population of the city also continued to increase. As with the earlier cohort of West Indian immigrants, many of the people who emigrated from the Caribbean after 1915 were also distinct from the mass of southern migrants of "less fortunate advantages." Indeed, the ability of West Indians to emigrate resulted in large part from access to resources in their countries of origin, as well as the kinship networks that facilitated a pattern of chain migration and that helped the immigrants to find housing and employment and further their education once they arrived in the city. As with earlier immigrants, such as Straker and Massiah, who became influential leaders of the African American community later comers Everard Daniel and Joseph Gomez would also become powerful figures in black Detroit in the 1920s and 1930s.

Daniel and Gomez clearly subscribed to the bourgeois mores of the black middle class and followed a pattern of assimilation while maintaining their ethnic identities. In the case of F. Levi Lord, Milton Van Lowe, Charles Zampty, and Joseph Craigen, the association of class, ethnicity, and race is at first obscured by their pivotal role in Marcus Garvey's UNIA. Although Garvey's program promoted a pan-African identity for blacks, he ultimately preferred other West Indians as his closest associates and as officials of the UNIA. These men were leaders of the Detroit chapter of the organization and initially followed Garvey's platform of racial unity, which appealed largely to marginalized blacks. However, by the late 1920s as Garvey faced legal problems and growing opposition from the black middle class, the West Indian leadership of Detroit's UNIA

chapter, and with the possible exception of Zampty, renounced the principle of pan-African racial solidarity in an effort to achieve middle-class status and assimilation into American society.

During the interwar period, West Indians entered the city in a continual wave and joined the thousands of black migrants from the South, which resulted in a scarcity of resources, especially housing. West Indian immigrants who refused to reside in the slum conditions of Detroit's lower East Side neighborhood of Black Bottom helped to redesign the spatial contours of the city. Relatively well educated and employed in higher paid professional or skilled occupations, these immigrants sought out housing in the previously segregated West Side neighborhood bordered by Tireman Avenue and West Grand Boulevard. As in other cases when blacks moved into all-white areas, desegregation resulted in violence but they prevailed and played an instrumental role in the establishment of a second black Episcopal church in the city and a middle-class enclave with a disproportionate number of West Indian households. The existence of this enclave is further evidence of the welding of ethnicity to middle-class status. Its development resulted from an intricate web of kinship networks and chain migration, in several cases with many branches of the same family tree occupying the same household or living within blocks of each other.

Improved methods of transportation by 1940 and the relative wealth of many West Side West Indians allowed many of them to establish transnational patterns, with frequent travel between Detroit and their countries of origin. In some cases, they kept homes in both places or retired to their home countries after living and working several years in Detroit. Other methods that indicate a transnational pattern include frequent

communication with family and friends who lived in the Caribbean, remittance of cash and other forms of economic support, as well as maintaining cultural traditions. This pattern of transnationalism kept West Indian immigrants connected to the Caribbean and while they viewed themselves as permanently migrating to the United States, they nonetheless remained tied to their countries of origin and retained their ethnic identities as they assimilated into American society.

Since many of the West Indian immigrants who lived in the West Side neighborhoods had university degrees and professional occupations as physicians, attorneys, and educators, they deeply resented the racial discrimination they encountered. Like the previous cohorts of immigrants, they tended to regard themselves as “higher” in status than African Americans and linked class to ethnicity. A tension between the two groups is evident as the West Indian population of the city increased and some immigrants expressed their disapproval of African Americans’ unwillingness either to support or inability to achieve middle-class standards.

The distinction West Indians perceived between themselves and African Americans, as well as their desire to preserve their Caribbean identity appeared as clannishness. A good many West Indian immigrants preferred to find mates, attend church, and socialize with those of similar ethnic backgrounds. The relatively small numbers of West Indians in the city as compared to the African American population kept the tensions between the two groups from escalating, but these were present nonetheless. Nevertheless, because West Indian immigrants tried to retain their ethnic identities, African Americans became more aware and more interested in West Indian culture and the Caribbean.

The small number of West Indians in the city also meant that when they formally established an ethnic organization in 1940, it had a pan-Caribbean focus since no one country could boast enough people to warrant the creation of a nationally based organization. While no extant sources are available to provide evidence of more informal ethnic societies organized by national origins, it is highly probable that they did exist in the same manner that informal pan-Caribbean organizations had existed prior to 1940. However, further research is required to substantiate this speculation. In the late 1960s, after the passage of the Hart-Celler Immigration Act of 1965, an increase in the city's West Indian population led to the restructuring of the organization.

With the change in immigration law, the West Indian population of Detroit rapidly increased. As greater numbers of Jamaicans, Trinidadians, Barbadians, Guyanese, and West Indians from smaller islands began to arrive, they placed a greater emphasis on national, as opposed to ethnic, identity and began to establish national organizations in the 1970s. This development coincided with the end of colonialism and the ensuing independence of several Caribbean nations. With the arrival of the newest cohort of West Indian immigrants who tended to have working-class, rather than middle-class backgrounds, tensions emerged as the more established middle-class immigrants attempted to exert control over the newcomers.

Joseph Craigen emphasized ethnic identity and affiliation to a lesser extent than many others and instead stressed race and class as salient features in the process of integration into American society. After an acrimonious split with Garvey, Craigen turned to the Democratic Party as a vehicle to assist him in attaining middle-class status. With the patronage of white politicians in the party, he obtained positions in city, state, and federal

government and became influential in Detroit's African American community. While Craigen maintained privately his ethnic identity as a West Indian, he played down his ethnicity publicly and assimilated thoroughly into the middle-class stratum of the African American community and the broader American society in order to create a wider political base and further his career aspirations. At no point in his long and illustrious career as a politician did he attempt to become a leader of Detroit's small but significant West Indian community.

In spite of his early UNIA "radicalism", other characteristics of Craigen's experience prove anomalous to a focus on ethnic identity exhibited by the West Indian immigrants under study. For example, extant sources provide little evidence of his access to a kinship network facilitating his migration to the United States, for he came to the country under the auspices of the US military during the First World War. Little is known concerning his early years in British Guiana and although he did return for a brief visit later in life, his connection to his birthplace and relationships with family and friends who remained were tenuous at best. Perhaps it was this lack of connection and a sense of being uprooted from his origins that attracted him initially to Garvey. While he did become a founding member of the nascent West Indian association in Detroit, there is little indication of his active participation as with other organizations, for example the Kappa fraternity and the Idlewild association. Craigen emphasized ethnicity to a much lesser extent than other West Indian immigrants in this study and after his rejection of Black Nationalism, chose complete assimilation into the African American middle class, exemplifying a stronger link between race and class than one between class and ethnicity.

Ethnic origins mattered to West Indian immigrants. Ethnicity provided them with an identity and the ethnic community gave these immigrants a sense of place in an unfamiliar world. Ethnicity also helped West Indians to distinguish themselves from native-born African Americans, from whom the immigrants sought to be differentiated on a basis of class as well. Ultimately, however, naturalizing West Indian immigrants were incorporated into the African American community of Detroit. As illustrated by the example of Joseph Craigen, race, in the end, trumped ethnicity as the immigrants were integrated into the upper stratum of the African American community and assimilated into American society. West Indians illustrated the significance of integration and assimilation in the naming of the largest organization they founded in Detroit, the West Indian *American* Association (WIAA). From this perspective, African Americans are just another ethnic group with different class gradations that broadened its scope by accepting West Indians.

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**ABSTRACT**

**‘HIGHER THAN THOSE OF THEIR RACE OF LESS FORTUNATE  
ADVANTAGES’: RACE, ETHNICITY, AND WEST INDIAN POLITICAL  
LEADERSHIP IN DETROIT’S AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY, 1885-  
1940**

by

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**Advisor:** Dr. John Bukowczyk

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This dissertation explores West Indian immigrants in the city of Detroit and their leadership of key institutions in the African American community from 1885 to 1940. This work is divided into two parts, with the Great Migration as the line of demarcation. The research method consists largely of collective biographies and a survey of periodicals, census records, and records generated by the institutions that had West Indian leaders. The dissertation concludes that West Indian immigrants perceived middle-class status and ethnicity as a means of distinguishing themselves from their African American counterparts, but race became a more significant factor as more black Americans entered the middle class.

## **AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT**

Kathryn L. Beard was born in Battle Creek, Michigan on February 2, 1965. I attended primary school in the Utica school district and Southfield secondary schools before attending a local community college. I received a B. A. and M. A. from Wayne State University prior to returning to graduate school to complete my doctoral degree.

My parents, Arthur and Wanda, encouraged intellectualism and placed a high priority on the academic achievements of their five children. This love of knowledge was present in at least four generations on both the maternal and paternal sides of my family. It is my ancestors' living legacy. As slaves, freedmen, southern sharecroppers and migrants to the promised land of the North End of Detroit, any and all education obtained was viewed as its own reward.