Queering Decline:

Sexuality, Race, and the Transformation of Twentieth-Century St. Louis

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THESIS

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I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my niece, Mary Jane, and to my partner, Barry, with love and with hope.

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SUMMARY

The decline of many United States cities is a central theme in twentieth-century urban history. This dissertation queers "decline" by reinterpreting the history of St. Louis, a city that is an iconic and unusually stark example of the phenomenon. Focusing its analysis on the intersection of sexuality and race, the dissertation argues that St. Louis's decline in large part amounted to a reorganization of metropolitan space jointly structured by heteronormativity and whiteness. Moreover, the dissertation queers the concept of "urban decline" itself, along with its putative opposite, "urban renewal." Through the lenses of sexuality and race, it argues that "decline" and "renewal" were subjective, mutable, and political categories, and that the processes that they describe were often ambiguous in their consequences.

The dissertation is composed of an introduction, which serves as Chapter I, and six subsequent chapters. The chapters are thematic, each examining a different dimension of St. Louis's decline at the intersection of sexuality and race. While there is some temporal overlap across the chapters, the overall arc is chronological.

The first chapter following the introduction, "'The Decadence of Cities,'" explores the origins of the concepts of suburb, slum, and blight in the era of urban growth in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It argues that ideas about normative and deviant sexuality, both entangled with race, shaped conceptions of decline from the start. The next chapter, "'In Defense of the Home,'" considers the rise and fall of Jim Crow in early- and mid-twentieth century St. Louis. Many white St. Louisans' support for segregation was tied to their aversion to interracial sexuality. These attitudes had profound implications for St. Louis's social geography during the era of mass suburbanization. Chapter IV, "'We Walk Warily as in a Jungle,'" discusses perceptions of crime and their connections to neighborhood change, race, and gender during the

SUMMARY (continued)

high tide of white flight in the 1950s and 1960s. Chapter V, "'A Showcase of Deviant Behavior,'" traces the development of St. Louis's "gay ghetto" in the middle decades of the twentieth century and situates its history amidst the region's shifting racial and sexual boundaries. "'The Church on the Urban Frontier,'" the sixth chapter, looks at how some liberal Protestant churches in the city—most notably the Central West End's Trinity Episcopal Church—developed racially mixed and gay-affirming congregations by the 1960s and 1970. This development evidences the complex and contradictory results of the processes perceived as neighborhood decline. Finally, chapter VII, "'We Save Neighborhoods,'" examines how in the 1970s and 1980s some queer St. Louisans began to redefine their communities as agents of urban revitalization rather than causes of neighborhood decline. In the process, however, they effectively conflated gayness with whiteness.

I. INTRODUCTION

A.   Prologue

At the start of the 1970s, Laud Humphreys—a pioneering sociologist and closeted gay man—wrote an ethnographic description of a part of St. Louis that he called the "gay ghetto." Located in the Central West End neighborhood near the geographic heart of the city, this area of some sixty blocks was "packed with apartment houses, ranging from steel-and-glass high-rises to decaying tenements." These structures housed a "bohemian community," including a "high proportion of homosexual residents." The gay ghetto was a regionally important hub of queer social life, especially for white gay men. It featured a half-dozen of St. Louis's "more popular" gay bars. The neighborhood was also the location of Trinity Episcopal Church, a racially integrated congregation that hosted meetings of the Mandrake Society—St. Louis's first locally based gay and lesbian rights group—in its parish hall.

Humphreys implied that the "gay ghetto" occupied a unique place in the St. Louis region's metropolitan social geography. The gay ghetto, he asserted, was characterized by "high social and racial diversity." However, immediately to its north and east lay "an all-black community, with the city's highest crime rate." To its south was the Daniel Boone Expressway, a band of concrete that sliced through the urban fabric and allowed commuters to pass back and forth between downtown St. Louis and the almost entirely white suburbs of west St. Louis County. In contrast to the Central West End, Humphreys mentioned, the suburbs had "no facilities set aside for homosexuals."[1]

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[1] Laud Humphreys, *Out of the Closets: The Sociology of Gay Liberation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 80-82. On Humphreys's life and work, see John F. Galliher, Wayne H. Brekhus, and David P. Keys, *Laud Humphreys: Prophet of Homosexuality and Sociology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

The story that historians tend to tell about St. Louis and many other American cities in the second half of the twentieth century is one of decline. This perspective is epitomized by Colin Gordon's *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City*.[2] Gordon's study powerfully argues that government policies and the practices of the real estate industry contributed to depopulation and economic stagnation in St. Louis's urban core while also perpetuating racial segregation and inequality throughout the metropolitan region. The essence of Gordon's narrative is loss and failure. Notably, *Mapping Decline*'s analysis almost entirely overlooks sexuality, gender, and the family.

Laud Humphreys' firsthand dispatch from the city of St. Louis during what is often remembered as the height of its urban crisis offers an illuminating alternative perspective, one that has inspired this project. Gordon *mapped* decline, offering visualizations of quantitative data to present decline as an objective fact, entangled with race but ostensibly unrelated to questions of sexuality. This dissertation, however, *queers* decline by reinterpreting St. Louis's shifting social geography at the intersection of race and sexuality. It argues that racial and sexual categories and the division of metropolitan space into varieties of space such as slum, suburb, and blighted area were all constructed in relation to one another.

By queering decline in this way, the dissertation suggests the limits of framework of "decline" itself. In the decades after the Second World War, St. Louis's population count undoubtedly shrank, and many observers were convinced that the city was changing for the worse. But these same observers varied in their understanding of the nature, causes, and possible solutions for St. Louis's decline. Their views on these matters were often shaped by their

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[2] Colin Gordon, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

preconceptions about race and sexuality. Moreover—as Humphreys's account suggests—the social history of St. Louis in this era is not a one-dimensional story of loss and failure. What were viewed as declining areas of the city sometimes presented their inhabitants with new possibilities for creative change; they could foster community-building within and sometimes across divisions of race and sexuality. In sum, queering reveals "decline"—as well as "renewal," its putative opposite—were subjective, mutable, and political categories, and the processes that these terms described were often ambiguous in their consequences.

B.   The Demographics of Decline: St. Louis and Urban America

Decline is a central theme in the twentieth-century history of the American city. Since the 1980s, historians have produced a substantial literature that examines the transformation of metropolitan America in the second half of the twentieth century. They have gone a long way toward explaining the rise of the suburbs and the concurrent decline of cities, and they have shed light on the economic, governmental, and cultural forces that tended to draw whites out of urban areas and kept blacks and other people of color in them. These historians have considered how these developments contributed to the persistence and even exacerbation of racial inequality and the continued segregation of metropolitan space since the civil rights era. Furthermore, they have

drawn connections between the fortunes of the American city and the trajectory of national politics, particularly the rise of conservatism.[3]

The standard narrative presents the early decades of the century as a heyday of urbanity, defined by density and vibrant growth. Then, after about the end of the Second World War, the great cities of the Midwest and Northeast set off on a downward trajectory. The old urban cores faced plummeting population numbers and mounting social and economic crises, even as their suburbs expanded and prospered. Many American cities counted more than a hundred thousand fewer residents in 1960 than in 1950, and then more than a hundred thousand fewer again in 1970, 1980, and 1990. This extraordinary population loss was accompanied by the literal desertion and ruin of once thriving sections of these cities, resulting in vistas that Thomas J. Sugrue described as "eerily apocalyptic."[4]

Race is generally understood to be a central facet of these processes. The growing suburbs were overwhelmingly white, in large part because of "white flight" out of the cities. In turn, discrimination and limited economic opportunities largely confined blacks to the urban centers, so that they came to make up ever increasing portion of the population that remained there. By the closing years of the twentieth century, many American cities had attained or nearly

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[3] Key monographs on these themes and salient works of synthesis include Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford, 1985); Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 2nd ed; Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Jon C. Teaford, *The Metropolitan Revolution: The Rise of Post-Urban America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).
[4] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3.

attained black majorities. This demographic transformation was tied to the persistent segregation of metropolitan space.

St. Louis was an iconic and unusually stark example of post-World War II urban decline. Not only did St. Louis seem to decline in its own right, but also as compared to other American cities.[5] Throughout the nineteenth century, St. Louis's grew, often explosively, as it assumed its place as one of the chief urban centers of the Mississippi Basin. At the start of the twentieth century, with a population of 575,238, it was the fourth largest city in the country—just behind New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia. Host of the 1904 World's Fair and the first Olympic Games on American soil, it was a formidable hub of industry and commerce and enjoyed a high international profile.[6] St. Louis's population first shrank from one decennial U.S. Census to another in the 1930s, but an influx of war workers set the city back on a trajectory of growth in the 1940s. The 1950 US Census St. Louis's population reached its highest ever population count: 856,796. It remained eighth most populous city in the nation.

St. Louis's demographic trajectory definitively shifted in the 1950s as the city commenced a period of startlingly rapid population loss and a plummeting position in national rankings. From 1960 to 1990, each decennial US Census counted more than 100,000 fewer people in the city than the last. Over the course of forty years, the city's population had contracted by more than half. With fewer than 400,000 residents in the year 2000, fewer people lived in St. Louis at the start of the twenty-first century than in 1880. At the same time, St. Louis had fallen to thirty-fourth place in population size among US cities. This was a result of its

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[5] The most extensive historical treatment of St. Louis's post-World War II decline is Gordon, *Mapping Decline*. Also see, Colin Gordon, "St. Louis Blues: The Urban Crisis in the Gateway City, *Saint Louis University Public Law Review* 33, no. 1 (2013): 81-92; Joseph Heathcott and Máire Agnes Murphy "Corridors of Flight, Zones of Renewal: Industry, Planning, and Policy in the Making of Metropolitan St. Louis, 19401980," *Journal of Urban History* 31, no. 2 (January 2005): 141-189.

[6] On the growth of St. Louis through the nineteenth century, see James Neal Primm, *Lion of the Valley: St. Louis, Missouri, 1764-1990*, 3rd ed. (St. Louis: Missouri History Society Press, 1998).

extraordinary population loss, even as compared to many other shrinking cities, as well as the

growth of cities in the Sunbelt of the South and West.

TABLE I
POPULATION AND NATIONAL RANKING OF CITY OF ST. LOUIS, 1840-1990[a]

Census Year	Population of the City of St. Louis	National Ranking
1840	16,469	24
1850	77,860	8
1860	160,773	8
1870	310,864	4
1880	350,518	6
1890	451,770	5
1900	575,238	4
1910	687,029	4
1920	772,897	6
1930	821,960	7
1940	816,048	8
1950	856,796	8
1960	750,026	10
1970	622,236	18
1980	453,085	26
1990	396,685	34

[a] US Census Bureau, "Table 25. Missouri – Race and Hispanic Origin for Selected Large Cities and Other Places: Earliest Census to 1990," US Census Bureau, https://uscensus.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/MOtab.pdf

In this era, St. Louis was widely regarded as particularly striking case of the national problem of urban decline. In 1978, *The New York Times* declared St. Louis "the premier example of urban abandonment in America" and a "ghost of its former self." The same article recounted "the darkened hulks of abandoned apartments buildings along Pershing near the lovely Forest Park, the disastrous West End 'Urban Renewal' area, mile upon mile of boarded up factories along Olive, the desolation of the North Side."[7] In 1986, historian Donald J. Olsen called St. Louis an "anachronism" and an "embarrassing relic," positioning it as globally significant example of a city past its prime.[8]

Contemporaneous with the decline of the population of the city of St. Louis was the growth of its suburbs. Just as the population of city of St. Louis continuously shrank through the second half of the twentieth century, suburban St. Louis County—which surrounded but was legally distinct from the city of St. Louis—grew continuously. This was a result both of in-migration, principally from the city, and births. A milestone was reached in 1962, when St. Louis County's population for the first time exceeded the city of St. Louis.[9] From 1950 to 1970 alone, the population of St. Louis County more than doubled, from around 400,000 to more than 950,000. St. Louis County's population count increased relatively slowly thereafter, but continued on a trajectory of growth through the remainder of the century, taking up an ever larger share of the metropolitan total vis-à-vis the city.

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[7] *The New York Times*, July 9, 1978.
[8] Donald J. Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1986), 5.
[9] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 15, 1962.

TABLE II
POPULATION OF ST. LOUIS CITY AND ST. LOUIS COUNTY, 1950-1990[a]

Census Year	Population of St. Louis City	Population of St. Louis County
1950	856,796	406,349
1960	750,026	703,532
1970	622,236	951,353
1980	453,085	973,896
1990	396,685	993,529

[a] US Census Bureau, US Census, St. Louis County, Missouri and St. Louis City County, Missouri, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, Prepared by Social Explorer.

The plummeting population of the city of St. Louis and the extraordinary growth of its suburbs was accompanied by a similarly dramatic transformation of the region's racial demography. At midcentury, whites formed a substantial majority of the city's population—82 percent—while blacks made up just under 18 percent. (Those of other races accounted for only about a tenth of a percent.[10]) By 1970, however, the white population had shrunk dramatically in both absolute terms and as portion of the total, falling to 59 percent; meanwhile, the black

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[10] This dissertation of race focuses on the black/white binary. Asian-Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and members of other racial groups of lived in St. Louis and shaped its history. However, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, their numbers were small as compared to black and white residents of the region. The US Census counted fewer than 1,000 in 1950; although their absolute and proportional numbers increase in subsequent decades, even in 1990 they made up less than 3 percent of the total population of the region. People who were neither black nor white are also largely absent from the archival record as it pertains to perceptions of St. Louis's decline and the transformation of its neighborhoods during this era. One noteworthy exception is St. Louis's downtown Chinatown, which was demolished as part of an urban renewal program in the early 1960s. See Huping Ling, *Chinese St. Louis: From Enclave to Cultural Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004); Huping Ling, "'Hop Alley': Myth and Reality of the St. Louis Chinatown, 1930s-1960s," *Journal of Urban History* 28, 2 (2002), 184-219.

population had grown, rising to 41 percent. This contrasted sharply with St. Louis County, where in 1970 blacks made up only about 5 percent of the population.

After 1970, the black population of the city of St. Louis began to decrease as well. This was partly because migration from the rural South to St. Louis largely ceased and partly because some blacks began to move to parts of suburban north St. Louis County, including the municipality of Ferguson.[11] The black portion of the total population of the city of St. Louis continued to increase after 1970, however, and by start of the twenty-fist century St. Louis had become a black-majority city.

TABLE III
BLACKS AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION
OF ST. LOUIS CITY AND ST. LOUIS COUNTY, 1950-1990[a]

Census Year	St. Louis City	St. Louis County
1950	17.9%	4%
1960	28.6%	2.7%
1970	40.9%	4.8%
1980	45.6%	11.3%
1990	47.5%	14.0%

[a] US Census Bureau, US Census, St. Louis County, Missouri and St. Louis City County, Missouri, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, Prepared by Social Explorer.

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[11] Gordon, *Mapping Decline*, 25.

C.   <u>**Queering "Decline"**</u>

The demographic history outlined above certainly evidences that St. Louis changed dramatically over the course of the second half of the twentieth century. Its population had massively decreased, and it was less populous and prominent than it has been in relation to both to its suburbs and to other American cities. In these senses, at least, its "decline" was straightforward—the direction of the line that appears when the city's population count is plotted decade by decade on a graph.

The "decline" of a city, however, rarely referred only to population numbers. The concept has long been laden with multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings, tied to morality, race, politics, economics, and other social concerns. More than a detached description of demographic trends—a question of relative *quantities*—it is also often an evaluation of *qualities*—a judgment about the changing character of a city and the people who live in it.[12] "Decline," after all, can by synonymous with "decadence, "degeneracy," "decay," and "degradation."

For much of the twentieth-century, contemporary observers believed that St. Louis, or certain neighborhoods within St. Louis, were self-evidently in decline or in danger of decline— conditions often subsumed under the term "blighted." But what exactly that meant varied. Among other things, it could be falling population numbers; falling property value; deteriorating or abandoned buildings; concentrated poverty; perceptions of rising crime and heightened danger; impressions of dirtiness or disorder; the flight of residents, businesses, factories, or community institutions; immorality and vice; or the mere presence of non-white people. These different facets of decline were deployed in a variety of combinations and connected and conflated with one another in a variety of ways. Perceptions of decline also tended to reflect the

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[12] Beauregard offers a useful history of the trope of urban decline in Robert A. Beauregard, *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003).

values, interests, and aspirations of the observer. As George Lipsitz observed in *The Sidewalks of St. Louis*, "All too often, the narrowly focused interests of elites are presented as synonymous with the welfare of entire cities."[13]

In an important article, S. Paul O'Hara makes a similar case for histories of Gary, Indiana. Analyzing several accounts of the city's decline, he demonstrates the imprecision of the term and its varied ideological implications. "Every story had its own turning point," O'Hara argues. "For some it was the moral decay of the 1950s, for others it was the rise of black power and politics in the 1960s, for still others it was the white backlash against civil rights in the 1970s. … The source of decline, the origins of the urban crisis, and thus the parameters of the crisis itself were largely in the eye of the beholder."[14]

Examining St. Louis's history at through the lenses of sexuality and race is an illuminating means of complicating standard notions of decline. It undermines monolithic conceptions of whiteness and blackness and in particular helps to explain a countercurrent of white urbanism in the age of white flight.[15]

Queering decline also allows us to see that metropolitan St. Louis experienced a reshaping of its sexual geography through the post-World War II era, as evidenced by the table below. While the percentage of the adult population that was married fell consistently in both the city of St. Louis and St. Louis County after 1950, the former far outpaced the latter, and the gap between the two widened through the post-World War II decades. By 1970, fewer than half of

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[13] George Lipsitz, *The Sidewalks of St. Louis: Places, People, and Politics in an American City* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991).

[14] S. Paul O'Hara, "'The Very Model of Urban Decay': Outsider Narratives of Industry and Urban Decline in Gary, Indiana," *Journal of Urban History* 37, no. 2: 137-138.

[15] This dissertation primarily, although not exclusively, focuses on the ways that white St. Louisans—both sexually normative and queer—understood and enacted racial difference. Further research on the perspectives and experiences of black St. Louisans will yield a more comprehensive view of the intersection of race and sexuality in the city's history.

the adult residents of the city were married—a milestone that suburban county had still not reached as of the end of the century. Moreover, the part of the city of St. Louis with the lowest population of married adults was the Central Corridor, running east-west through the center of the city. The gay ghetto described by Laud Humphreys was located here. It was also a racially liminal area—a coincidence whose origins and significance this dissertation seeks to clarify.

TABLE IV
PERCENTAGE OF ADULT POPULATION MARRIED, CITY OF ST. LOUIS
AND ST. LOUIS COUNTY, 1930-1990[a]

Census Year	St. Louis City	St. Louis County	Difference
1930	58.74%	63.74%	-5
1940*	[61.27%]	[67.28%]	
1950	63.80%	70.81%	-6.01
1960*	[56.83%]	[68.44%]	
1970	49.86%	66.06%	-16.20
1980	40.10%	59.93%	-19.83
1990	34.75%	57.36%	-22.61

[a] US Census Bureau, US Census, St. Louis County, Missouri and St. Louis City County, Missouri, 1930, 1950, 1970, 1980, 1990, Prepared by Social Explorer.
*Relevant data not available for 1940 and 1960. Figures for these years are extrapolated.

D. **Sexuality, Race, and the American City**

This study draws on a large theoretical and historical literature that demonstrates the co-constitutive nature of race and sexuality. Throughout much of American history, this scholarship finds, whites tended to associate blackness with sexual deviance and danger and maintained taboos and sometimes outright legal prohibitions against sex and marriage across the color line. At the same time, black women were peculiarly vulnerable to furtive sexual exploitation by white men, who rarely publicly recognized children produced by such encounters. These practices had profound economic implications as the intergenerational transmission of wealth and class status hinged on legitimate marriage.[16] Sexuality also suffused subjectivities of anti-black prejudice, which, as Gunnar Myrdal argues, subsumed "sexual urges, inhibitions, and jealousies."[17] In sum, the material and psychic structures of "sexual racism" served as bulwark of white supremacy both before and after emancipation and into the twentieth century.[18] In turn, African American struggles for freedom and equality have been in part directed against sexual racism, as evidenced by efforts to resist sexual victimization and to assert black respectability in

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[16] Important works on the origins of sexual racism in the context of slavery include Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) and Joshua D. Rothman, *Notorious in the Neighborhood: Sex and Families across the Color Line in Virginia, 1787-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). On the evolution of sexual racism in the aftermath of emancipation and during the rise of Jim Crow, see, for example, Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008) and Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1999). On the taboos and legal prohibitions against interracial relationships and marriage, see Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law an the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Renee C. Romano, *Race Mixing: Black-White Marriage in Postwar America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[17] Quotation from Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and American Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1944), 59. For his landmark discussion of the "anti-amalgamation doctrine" and the sexual dimensions of anti-black racism, see Myrdal, 53-60.

[18] I owe this term to Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), *xvii*.

the face of stereotypes of sexual immorality.[19] Meanwhile, the same logic that presumed the

licentiousness of blacks often tied white racial identity to expectations of sexual restraint and

familial responsibility. [20]

Meanwhile, there is a well-developed literature exploring the relationship between the

history of sexuality and nineteenth- and early twentieth-century urbanization.[21] A small but

important body of scholarship focuses especially on the role of sexual racism in this era. These

works suggest that in the decades before World War II, parts of cities where non-whites were

permitted to live often overlapped with those where illicit sexual commerce was tolerated. This

spatial coincidence led many whites to conflate ghettoes and vice districts and reinforced the

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[19] An important work that puts the struggle against sexual victimization at the center of the history of the postwar black freedom movement is Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010). On the "politics of respectability" in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century African-American history, see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), esp. chapter 7; Victoria M. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African-American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001),esp. chapters 1 and 2; and Cynthia M. Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), esp. chapter 6. Another current of the literature, however, explores how rejecting standards of respectability could be an expression of autonomy and the potential basis of resistance. See especially Robin D.G. Kelly, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Cathy J. Cohen, "Deviance as Resistance: A New Research Agenda for the Study of Black Politics," *Du Bois Review* 1, no. 1 (2004): 27-45; and Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability*, esp. chapter 3.

[20] An important discussion of the relationship between white racial identity and the construction of sexual normality is Julian B. Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). On the relationship of race to the discursive and legal construction of homosexuality and of heterosexism, see, for example, Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Kevin J. Mumford, "Untangling Pathology: The Moynihan Report and Homosexual Damage, 1965-1975," *Journal of Policy History* 24, no. 1 (2012): 53-73; Siobhan B. Somerville, "Queer *Loving*," *GLQ* 11, no. 3 (2005): 335-370; and Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

[21] See, for example, Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin'*; George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994); Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*; Heap, *Slumming*; Mumford, *Interzones*; Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-oft-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

popular equation of racial otherness and sexual deviance.[22] These were features of pre-World War II St. Louis much as in other large industrial cities.[23]

This dissertation joins a growing body of other works that traces the intersection of race, sexuality, and metropolitan space in the post-World War II era.[24] It argues many of the people who migrated to suburbia were united by a conjoined sense of their shared whiteness and of their shared sexual normality. A number of forces pulled white St. Louisans toward suburbia, but the demise of racial restrictive covenants and of de jure racial segregation in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s cemented many whites' decision to leave. The specter of interracial sexuality contributed to their aversion to integration, especially on the part of white parents of schoolchildren.[25] Unlike the post-Jim Crow city, the suburbs promised racially homogeneity and an environment that was otherwise deemed well suited to raising families.

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[22] On the intersecting roles of race and sexuality in the spatial organization of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American cities, see Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin'*; Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); and Mumford, *Interzones.*

[23] James Wunsch, "Protecting St. Louis Neighborhoods from the Encroachment of Brothels, 1870-1920," *Missouri Historical Review* 104, no. 4 (July 2010): 198-212.

[24] Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Kwame A. Holmes, "Chocolate to Rainbow City: The Dialectics of Black and Gay Community Formation in Postwar Washington, D.C., 1946-1978," Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011; Clayton Howard, "Building a 'Family-Friendly' Metropolis: Sexuality, the State, and Postwar Housing Policy," *Journal of Urban History* 39, no. 5 (2013): 933-955; Clayton Howard, *The Closet and the Cul-de-Sac: The Politics of Sexual Privacy in Northern California* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); Josh Sides, *Erotic City: Sexual Revolutions and the Making of Modern San Francisco* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Robert O. Self, "Sex and the City: The Politics of Sexual Liberalism in Los Angeles, 1960-1984," *Gender and History* 20, no. 2 (August 2008): 288-311; Bryant Simon, "New York Avenue: The Life and Death of Gay Spaces in Atlantic City, New Jersey, 1920-1990," *Journal of Urban History* 28, no. 3 (March 2002): 300-327; Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

[25] Some works that demonstrate the sexual dimensions of resistance to desegregation include Eileen Boris, "'You Wouldn't Want One of 'Em Dancing with Your Wife': Racialized Bodies on the Job in World War II," *American Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (March 1998): 77-108; Jane Dailey, "Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after *Brown*," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 1 (June 2004): 119-144; David W. Southern, "But Think of the Kids: Catholic Interracialists and the Great American Taboo of Race Mixing," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 16 (1988): 67-93.

Meanwhile, many of the people who continued to reside in the urban core or who moved into it were racial and sexual outsiders. As the suburbs boomed, queer white St. Louisans and blacks of all sexualities, as well as their community spaces, remained concentrated in the urban core.[26] The changing conditions of the postwar city also affected the consciousness and lived experience of straight white residents of the city, some of whom held political or religious commitments that led them to envision more expansive terms of community than had typified the prewar city. In this context, the urban core nurtured some sites of relative inclusivity, including the consequential example of Trinity Episcopal church. St. Louis in the era of its putative decline was a place where the racial and sexual bounds of community were contested and reformulated, the substance of which is explored in the pages below.

E.   Plan of the Dissertation

Following this introduction, which serves as chapter I, the dissertation is composed of six chapters. The chapters are thematic, each examining a different dimension of St. Louis's decline at the intersection of sexuality and race. While there is some temporal overlap across the chapters, the overall arc is chronological. The dissertation begins in around the start of the twentieth century, when St. Louis was ostensibly at its height. This was a time characterized by a densely populated urban core and de jure Jim Crow. Next, the dissertation considers the mid-

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[26] There were of course many St. Louisans who were both African American *and* queer, whose distinctive experience will be discussed in chapter V. For the purposes of this dissertation, I primarily use "queer" to refer to people who engaged in same-sex sex or gender-crossing, including people who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. However, some heterosexual and cisgender people also in some sense transgressed heteronormativity and could also be understood as "queer," e.g., sex workers and unmarried mothers. Further research might more fully integrate an expansive understanding of queerness into an analysis of St. Louis's history. Important theoretical interventions on queerness and sexual normativity include Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics," *GLQ* 3 (1997): 437-465; and Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 3-44.

twentieth-century decades of desegregation and white flight, a period when the city of St. Louis

became increasingly black and queer vis-à-vis its rapidly growing suburbs. It concludes in the

late twentieth century, when a dramatically depopulated St. Louis was on the cusp of becoming a

black-majority city, and an influential gay and lesbian community had emerged. While a

prevailing pattern of racial segregation and metropolitan decentralization persisted, decline had

also fundamentally transformed St. Louis's social and political order.

The first chapter following the introduction, "'The Decadence of Cities,'" explores the

origins of the concepts of suburb, slum, and blight in the era of urban growth in the nineteenth

and early twentieth century. It argues that ideas about normative and deviant sexuality, both

entangled with race, shaped conceptions of decline from the start. The next chapter, "'In Defense

of the Home,'" considers the rise and fall of Jim in early- and mid-twentieth century St. Louis.

Many white St. Louisans' support for segregation was tied to their aversion to interracial

sexuality. These attitudes had profound implications for St. Louis's social geography during the

era of mass suburbanization. Chapter IV, "'We Walk Warily as in a Jungle,'" discusses

perceptions of crime and their connections to neighborhood change, race, and gender during the

high tide of white flight in the 1950s and 1960s. Chapter V, "'A Showcase of Deviant

Behavior,'" traces the development of St. Louis's "gay ghetto" in the middle decades of the

twentieth century and situates its history amidst the region's shifting racial and sexual

boundaries. "'The Church on the Urban Frontier,'" chapter VI, looks at how some liberal

Protestant churches in the city—most notably the Central West End's Trinity Episcopal

Church—developed racially mixed and gay-affirming congregations by the 1960s and 1970. This

development evidences the complex and contradictory results of the processes perceived as

neighborhood decline. The final chapter, "'We Save Neighborhoods,'" examines how in the

1970s and 1980s some queer St. Louisans began to redefine their communities as agents of urban

revitalization rather than causes of neighborhood decline. In the process, however, they

effectively conflated gayness with whiteness.

II. "THE DECADENCE OF CITIES":

SLUMS, SUBURBS, AND THE INVENTION OF BLIGHT

A.   <u>Introduction</u>

This dissertation is principally concerned with the post-World War II era, when the city

of St. Louis experienced continuous population loss and when many considered the city's decline

to be self-evident. However, the processes of neighborhood change—and their connections the

city's shifting and entangled sexual and racial geographies—began to unfold in the nineteenth-

and early twentieth-century age of urban growth. Moreover, the discourse of "decline" first

emerged in the early twentieth century. This chapter considers this essential historical

background, demonstrating that ideas about normative sexuality, constructed in relation to race,

shaped views of the city and conceptions of urban decline from the start.

The chapter begins by considering the origins of St. Louis's contentious social geography

in the context of the rapid urbanization of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. During this

period, St. Louis grew explosively, metamorphosing from a frontier village to an industrial-

capitalist metropolis and one of America's largest cities. This led to the dramatic transformation

of the built environment, heightened socioeconomic inequality, and the multiplication of distinct

ethno-racial and sexual subcultures (including an underworld of illicit sexual commerce and

queer sociality).

Against this backdrop, new kinds of urban space—the "slum" and the "suburb"—

emerged in a dichotomous relationship with one another. From the start, "slum" and "suburb"

were defined by contrasting sets of racial, sexual, and class characteristics. Slums—located in the

older eastern part of the city—were typified by relative ethno-racial heterogeneity, perceived

sexual deviance and familial dysfunction, and widespread poverty. Meanwhile, suburbs—located on the urban periphery and moving outward as the city expanded—were typified by racial exclusivity, sexual and familial respectability, and relative affluence. As St. Louis grew, however, the boundaries of slums and suburbs blurred and shifted, resulting in struggles for control over the city's neighborhoods.

Next, the chapter examines how urban planners and social scientists first began to perceive, analyze, and respond to the threat of urban decline. It considers the hugely influential career of Harland Bartholomew, who served as St. Louis's chief city planner from 1915 to 1950. Bartholomew was the first to predict St. Louis's impending demographic decline and to expound the concept of "urban blight," i.e., the spread of slum conditions to new neighborhoods. Bartholomew's writings make clear that notions about sexuality and family life were foundational to his thinking on these subjects. He believed that the city's unsuitability for childrearing drove many residents to suburbs beyond the city limits, while slum and blighted areas generated degeneracy and social instability.

Finally, the chapter considers social scientists, such as Washington University's Stuart Alfred Queen, who extensively researched and mapped social conditions in St. Louis in the 1930s. Their work purported to demonstrate that some neighborhoods exhibited interlocking social pathologies, often pertaining to sexual deviance and familial dysfunction and sometimes associated with racial otherness. These social scientists' findings provided evidence for Bartholomew's concept of blight and appeared to substantiate fears about St. Louis's imminent decline.

B.   **The Age of Growth: Urbanization, Social Change, and the Origins of the Divided City**

In 1830, St. Louis was a frontier village with only a few thousand inhabitants. In 1920, after ninety years of dramatic and almost constant growth, it was at the center of a metropolitan region of more than one million people. This dramatic growth led to myriad physical and social transformations and generated sharp and persistent conflicts over civic belonging and the uses of urban space. These developments laid the groundwork for St. Louis's later history.

St. Louis's experience paralleled that of much of the rest of contemporary urban America. Urbanization was among the most important dimensions of American history during the nineteenth and early twentieth. Fueled by mass immigration and the rise of industrial capitalism, the population of many cities grew enormously in these years. The density and dynamism of these urban centers were catalysts for wide-ranging social change, affecting class formation, ethno-racial identity, and sexuality and the family. While always overshadowed by New York and eventually outpaced by its longtime rival Chicago, St. Louis's meteoric rise was matched by few other nineteenth-century American cities.[1]

Between the time of its founding in 1764 and about the 1830s, St. Louis was essentially a pre- or proto-urban village, albeit one with a somewhat cosmopolitan character. Founded by Franco-Louisianans and their black and Indian slaves, for its first several decades St. Louis served as a trading post and administrative center for a succession of empires—first Spain, then briefly Napoleonic France, and finally the United States following the Louisiana Purchase in

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[1] An enormous literature explores the many facets of urbanization in nineteenth and early twentieth century America. A classic title that offers a panoramic view of these processes is Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Urban Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). On St. Louis and Chicago's rivalry, see William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 295-309.

1804. Located just south of the strategic confluences of the Mississippi River with the Missouri

and Illinois rivers, it was a vital node in a globe-spanning commercial network that connected the

Indians of the North American interior with the markets of the Eastern Hemisphere. Merchants,

missionaries, soldiers, and settlers filtered through St. Louis as they traveled up and down the

Mississippi River and back and forth from the West. These factors gave early St. Louis a

polyglot, multiracial, and religiously diverse population from the start. During this period,

however, St. Louis's permanent population was quite small. In 1830, the earliest surviving US

Census of St. Louis counted only 4,977 residents. At the time, the settlement extended less than a

mile from the riverfront; at a brisk pace, one could walk in minutes from one end of St. Louis to

the other. Neighborhoods as such hardly existed, and, in so far as they did, they were not clearly

differentiated by class, race, or even economic function. Moreover, as historian Jeffrey S. Adler

asserts, as late as the 1830s "St. Louis was small enough that outsiders were easily recognizable

and wanderers continued to be viewed with suspicion."[2] Before the boom times of the mid-

nineteenth century, St. Louis's inhabitants formed a single, relatively cohesive community whose

members tended to be known to one another and were often bound together by familial ties and

personal economic relationships. Village-like in size, early St. Louis was also village-like in its

social character.[3]

St. Louis transitioned from village to city in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

During this period, it grew at a rate rivaled by few contemporary American cities. From 1830 to

1870 alone, St. Louis's population increased more than sixty times over, jumping to 310,864. As

the United States completed its conquest and intensified its exploitation of the Deep South and

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[2] Jeffrey S. Adler, "Vagging the Demons and Scoundrels: Vagrancy and the Growth of St. Louis, 1830-1861," *Journal of Urban History* 13, no. 3 (November 1986): 6.

[3] On the social history of early St. Louis, see James Neal Primm, *Lion of the Valley: St. Louis, Missouri, 1764-1980*, 3rd ed. (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1998), chapters 1-3.

the trans-Mississippi West, St. Louis benefited from its superb location as mid-continental hub of river transport. During this period, St. Louis also become a center of manufacturing and resource processing, and the city developed a bustling riverfront business district. Migrants from elsewhere in the United States and from Europe came in droves in search of work in St. Louis's wharves, warehouses, factories, and offices.[4]

St. Louis's population continued to grow, if not at quite so spectacular a rate, in the later part of the nineteenth century and into the first decades of the twentieth century. With every decennial US Census from 1880 to 1910, the city's population increased by more than 100,000. By 1920, 772,897 people lived in the city—a number nearly 2.5 times what it had been in 1870. Counting the suburbs outside the city limits, the St. Louis metropolitan region's population had surpassed 1.3 million by 1920 as well. Some of this was the result of natural population growth, but large-scale in-migration also continued. Many newcomers were immigrants from Europe, while others were black and white migrants from the rural America, particularly the South. Ongoing industrialization helped stimulate this population expansion, with the 1874 completion of the Eads Bridge across the Mississippi River cementing the city's place as one of the nation's leading rail centers. During the few decades spanning the turn of the twentieth century, many locals reasonably thought of St. Louis as being in the top tier of American cities in terms of size, economic and cultural clout, and national prominence. According to the US Census of both 1900 and 1910, St. Louis was the fourth most populous city in the country—behind only New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia. No city in the vast regions of the United States to St. Louis's south or

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[4] Primm, *Lion of the Valley*; Jeffrey S. Adler, *Yankee Merchants and the Making of the Urban West: The Rise and Fall of Antebellum St. Louis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). On St. Louis's growth in the context of US continental expansion, see Henry W. Berger, *St. Louis and Empire: 250 Years of Imperial Quest and Urban Crisis* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015). For St. Louis historical demography, see US Census Bureau, "Table 25. Missouri – Race and Hispanic Origin for Selected Large Cities and Other Places: Earliest Census to 1990," US Census Bureau, https://uscensus.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/ MOtab.pdf

west was larger. In 1904, St. Louis hosted a World's Fair and the first Olympic Games on American soil, which for many civic boosters confirmed their city's status as a globally significant metropolis. At the start of the twentieth century, St. Louis was one of the great exemplars of American industrial urbanity.[5]

The overall pattern of St. Louis's history from the early nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, then, is one of dramatic growth as the city shifted from frontier village to major industrial-capitalist metropolis. Much as in other American cities of this era, urbanizing St. Louis was characterized by ceaseless, sometimes frenzied change. St. Louis inhabitants—firsthand witnesses to this extraordinary growth—were forced to adapt to the city's ever larger and more variegated population, the metamorphosis of many once familiar neighborhoods and community institutions, and the myriad effects of expanding industry and commerce on daily life. Longtime residents of the city judged many of these developments to be undesirable, and the stage was set for conflict.

Perhaps the most obvious changes in this era were to St. Louis as a physical space. In the form of a waxing half-circle, the built-up area of the city expanded north, south, and west from its original nucleus along the riverfront. Mile after mile of what been woods, fields, and farmland was transformed into St. Louis's distinctive red-brick cityscape.[6] Large, multi-story buildings proliferated, especially in the downtown business district, and by the closing years of the nineteenth century true skyscrapers had appeared, such as the iconic Wainwright Building (completed in 1891). As the permanent population of the city swelled and transients streamed in and out of the city via the river and railroads, St. Louis's streets grew crowded. Photographs of

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[5] Primm, *Lion of the Valley*, 384-395.
[6] Eric Sandweiss, *St. Louis: The Evolution of an American Urban Landscape* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

everyday scenes in downtown St. Louis in the early years of the twentieth century show streets

thronged with pedestrians, horse-drawn wagons, and streetcars. Moreover, smoke from many

thousands of coal-burning furnaces and exhaust from factories polluted the urban environment.

Waste produced by the city's hundreds of thousands of inhabitants produced unpleasant odors,

drew rats and other pests, and were thought to contribute to the spread of contagious diseases.

While many people were attracted by the economic and cultural opportunities that urbanizing St.

Louis afforded, many observers complained that much of the growing city was noisy, dirty,

smoggy, smelly, ugly, and unhealthful.[7]

Along with these physical transformations, St. Louis's growth also had profound social

implications. For one thing, socioeconomic stratification and class conflict became more

pronounced. From the start a city of both slaves and masters, disparities of wealth and power

were not new to St. Louis. As the city began to generate enormous wealth, however, these

differences were heightened. By the Gilded Age of the late nineteenth century, a small elite of

industrialists, merchants, and financiers had accumulated vast fortunes, while a significant

portion of the population lived in destitution. Between the two extremes was a wide swath of

middle-class professionals, small-business owners, and working people. [8] On and off through the

decades spanning the turn of the twentieth century, simmering class tensions turned St. Louis's

streets and workplaces into the settings of strikes and sometimes violent confrontations between

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[7] Andrew Hurley, ed. *Common Fields: An Environmental History of St. Louis* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1997).

[8] On class stratification and class conflict in other contemporary American cities, see Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Robert Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003). On St. Louis's turn-of-the-century upper class, see Alexander Scot McConachie, "The 'Big Cinch': A Business Elite in the Life of a City, St. Louis, 1895-1915" (PhD diss., Washington University in St. Louis, 1976). For a revealing biography of one member of St. Louis's Gilded Age elite, see Harper Barnes, *Standing on a Volcano: The Life and Times of David Rowland Francis* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001).

employers and employees, such as during the General Strike of 1877 and the Street Car Strike of 1900.[9]

Similarly, St. Louis's increasing population and the arrival of newcomers from throughout the United States and from overseas increased the city's ethno-cultural complexity and diversity. St. Louis had always been host to varied cultures, with Catholic Franco-Louisianans, Protestant Anglo-Americans, blacks, and Indians of various tribal affinities among its early inhabitants. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, however, waves of immigrants from Europe planted a variety of new ethnic communities in the city, including Germans, Irish, Bohemians, Italians, Poles, Greeks, and Central and Eastern European Jews. Even as these groups in varying degrees assimilated into the white American mainstream, they also maintained distinct identities and institutions, such as synagogues and ethnically oriented Catholic churches.[10] Throughout the era of urbanization, St. Louis was also home to a substantial black population—before Emancipation, composed of both free people and slaves. A local community grew as black migrants from the rural South arrived in the years after the Civil War. Like their European counterparts, these newcomers came in search of work and security, although they faced more limited options due to a racially discriminatory job market. St. Louis's black community was divided along lines of class, as a relatively prosperous segment of business owners and professionals—often from families with longstanding ties to the city—sometimes

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[9] On labor disputes and class conflict in nineteenth and early twentieth century St. Louis, see such works as David T. Burbank, *The Reign of the Rabble: The St. Louis General Strike of 1877* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966); Dina M. Young "The St. Louis Streetcar Strike of 1900: Pivotal Politics at Century's Dawn," *Gateway Heritage* (1991): 2-17.

[10] On European immigrant communities in America's nineteenth and early twentieth century cities, John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Indiana University Press, 1987). On specific European immigrant communities in nineteenth and early twentieth century St. Louis, see William Barnaby Faherty, *The St. Louis Irish: An Unmatched Celtic Community* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2001); William Barnaby Faherty, *St. Louis German Catholics* (St. Louis: Reedy Press, 2004); Gary Ross Marino, *Immigrants on the Hill: Italian-Americans in St. Louis, 1882-1982* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002); Walter Ehrlich, *Zion in the Valley: The Jewish Community of St. Louis*, 2 vols. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002).

clashed with working-class and poor people, who were often more recent arrivals.[11] While the

US Census reports that the vast majority St. Louisans were either white or black throughout the

era of urbanization, there was also a small Chinese population in the city, centered in St. Louis's

small downtown Chinatown—popularly called "Hop Alley"—starting in the 1880s.[12]

In St. Louis, as in other cities, urbanization also had profound effects on sexuality and

family life. Indeed, the growth of the industrial-capitalist city in the nineteenth and early

twentieth was crucial to the advent of sexual modernity across the United States, as many

historians of argued.[13] To a great extent, this development was tied to the prevailing anonymity

of urban life. When St. Louis was a village of only a few thousand inhabitants, neighbors

generally knew one another, and that someone was an outsider or a newcomer tended to be

readily apparent. However, as it grew into a metropolis of hundreds of thousands of people,

many of them transients or recent arrivals, St. Louis became a city of strangers.[14] Some St.

Louisans noted this development with alarm. In 1894, for instance, a reporter for the *St. Louis

Post-Dispatch* observed, "In the country village the business of one in a certain sense is the

business of all, inasmuch as everyone knows the occupation of others and is free to comment

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[11] On St. Louis's the wealthier segments of St. Louis's black and mixed-race population in the nineteenth century, see Julie Winch, *The Clamorgans: One Family's History of Race in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011).
[12] On the history of St. Louis's Chinese community, see Huping Ling *Chinese St. Louis: From Enclave to Cultural Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004) and Huping Ling, "'Hop Alley': Myth and Reality of the St. Louis Chinatown, 1860s-1930s," *Journal of Urban History* 28, no. 2 (January 2002): 184-219.
[13] For an overview of these processes, see John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freemdan, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). Important titles that explore different facets of the relationship between urbanization and sexual change in particular local contexts include Cynthia Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).
[14] Jeffrey S. Adler, "Vagging the Demons and Scoundrels: Vagrancy and the Growth of St. Louis, 1830-1861," *Journal of Urban History* 13, no. 3 (November 1986), 3-30.

upon the same as long as the bounds of propriety are maintained. In a metropolis, however, affairs are different. In numerous localities one citizen does not even know his neighbor by name and has no conception of his occupation, not does he care to know. … The communities in St. Louis where one does not know his neighbor are too numerous to mention."[15] As residents of the city were generally strangers to one another and often indifferent to one another's affairs, engaging in stigmatized sexual behaviors and forming non-normative households was far easier than it had been in the relatively cohesive communities of farm and village. The characteristic anonymity of city life also facilitated deviant behavior more generally, while also stimulating fears of disorder.

The rise of impersonal economic exchange and the decline of the relatively self-sufficient household economies of earlier times were also enormously consequential. The appearance of rooming houses, apartment buildings, restaurants, and department stores, along with increased opportunities for wage work, made it far easier than before to live outside of the family. Consequently, the number of unmarried men—and, to a lesser extent, women—living in the city expanded through much of the period of urbanization. These single adults—and their possibly deviant sexual habits—worried some moralizing social activists and academic observers in St. Louis and in other cities.[16] The expanding reach of the market also led to the proliferation of sometimes erotically charged sites of commercialized leisure, including dancehalls, bawdy theatres, and "low saloons" serving women as well men.

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[15] July 15, 1894, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

[16] See Chauncey, *Gay New York*; Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Joanne Meyerowitz, "Sexual Geography and Gender Economy: The Furnished Room Districts of Chicago, 1890-1930," *Gender and History* 2, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 274-296; Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

The rise of prostitution was perhaps one of the most important manifestation of urbanization's effects on sexuality. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, sex work was a prominent—although always controversial—feature of life in St. Louis, as it was in many other American cities.[17] Prostitution first makes a clear appearance in the historical record in St. Louis in the 1830s—just as it was transitioning from village to city—and brothels, parks frequented by streetwalkers, and whole vice districts were all present by the 1850s.[18] By 1878, in their vividly written *Tour of St. Louis*, journalists J.A. Dacus and James W. Buel reported that St. Louis had become a "great seething, sinful city where shameless bawds are enumerated by the thousands."[19] As in other contemporary American cities, St. Louisan who engaged in prostitution appear to have often been poor or working-class women and girls without financial support from male relatives who turned to sex work to make ends meet in the face of limited opportunities in a gender-segregated labor market.[20] Dacus and Buel suggested that many were young newcomers to the city, part of the same current of in-migration that led to St. Louis's population boom. "Some of them, perhaps a majority, come from the country," they wrote. "At

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[17] Important titles on prostitution in other American cities during this period include Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin'*; Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*; Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); Sharon Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

[18] Jeffrey S. Adler, "Streetwalkers, Degraded Outcasts, and Good-for-Nothing Huzzies: Women and the Dangerous Class in Antebellum St. Louis," *Journal of Social History* 25, no. 4 (Summer 1992): 737-755; Katharine T. Corbett, *In Her Place: A Guide to St. Louis Women's History* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1999), 124-127.

[19] J.A. Dacus and James W. Buel, *A Tour of St. Louis; or, the Inside Life of a Great City* (St. Louis: Western Publishing Company, 1878), 442.

[20] As in other cities, it appears that the vast majority of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sex workers in St. Louis were female, and sources virtually always take for granted that prostitutes were women. However, males certainly did sometimes accept payment in return for sexual favors in St. Louis during this period. For example, I have located a newspaper article that reports that there had been a brothel in St. Louis staffed by "effeminate looking fellows … where the tastes of depraved men were catered to," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 22, 1895.

almost any time may be found fresh-cheeked country girls who have but lately left the rural

scenes of their girl-life to enter the swirling eddies of sin and shame in the great city."[21]

The social and economic change wrought by urbanization also led to the appearance of a

queer subculture in St. Louis by the late nineteenth century. While same-sex desire was

stigmatized by the dominant culture, the dense population, impersonal economic relationships,

and prevailing anonymity that characterized urban life permitted furtive queer social networks to

emerge in St. Louis and other American cities in these years. Some participants in this mostly

hidden world were unmarried adults who lived away from potentially disapproving relatives;

others lived with their families, but secretly pursued their same-sex desires away from home,

sometimes in distant parts of the city.[22]

A few sources offer glimpses at the beginnings of queer community life in the midst of

urbanizing St. Louis. One is the memoir *The Story of a Life*, written in 1901 by a man using the

pseudonym Claude Hartland. Born in the rural South in about 1870, Hartland was conscious of

his femininity and sexual desire for other men from an early age. In 1899, feeling socially

isolated and sexually frustrated, he boarded a train and moved to St. Louis, a city where he knew

no one. Renting a room of his own and finding employment as a ladies' tailor, Hartland soon

encountered other queer people on busy downtown streets and at the theatre. Some became his

friends and lovers. "I met a young man one evening on the corner of Sixth and Olive streets, who

was affected as I am and we knew each other on sight," Hartland recounted. "I spent the night at

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[21] Dacus and Buel, *A Tour of St. Louis*, 447.
[22] On the emergence of queer communities in nineteenth and early twentieth century American cities, see Chauncey, *Gay New York*; D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*; Leila J. Rupp, *A Desired Past: A Short History of Same-Sex Love in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Peter Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

his house and we had a most delightful time."[23] In an account from 1907, St. Louis psychiatrist Charles Hamilton Hughes suggests that specifically queer sites of commercialized leisure had also appeared by about the turn of the twentieth century. Hughes reported that St. Louis police had arrested a group of "black perverts" and "white degenerates." They had gathered at a "dive and dance hall," where one could find "male negroes masquerading in women's garb and carousing and dancing with white men." Significantly, this "dive" frequented by a racially mixed, queer clientele was located in the riverfront Levee district, an area which the *Post-Dispatch* described as a hotbed of vice where "social inequality is unknown and color proves no bar." According to Hughes, many of the arrested men worked as domestic servants in the West End, suggesting that they had traveled several miles across the city to reach the site of their Levee "rendezvous."[24]

The physical and social transformations brought about by St. Louis's rapid urbanization also remade the city's spatial organization. The small village of the early nineteenth century lacked clearly defined neighborhoods or obvious patterns of segregation. The expansive metropolis of the later nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, was characterized by a complex and dynamic human geography shaped by social divisions and hierarchies. Whole sections of the city became defined by the class status or ethno-racial identity of their inhabitants, and zones associated either with sexual respectability or deviance emerged.

In their *Tour of St. Louis*, Dacus and Buel wondered at these developments, which were apparent to them in the 1870s. "It is a singular fact, often noted but never satisfactorily

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[23] Claude Hartland, *The Story of a Life: For the Consideration of the Medical Fraternity* (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1985). For a useful effort place Hartland in the context of turn-of-the-century social change, see Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865-1905*, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2015), 148-149.
[24] Editor [Charles Hamilton Hughes], "Homo Sexual Complexion Perverts in St. Louis: A Note on a Feature of Sexual Psychopathy," *Alienist and Neurologist* 28, no. 4 (November 1907): 487-488. On contemporary representations of the Levee, see, for example, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 31, 1896.

explained, that certain localities, in all large cities, without apparent cause, become the haunts of

vice," they observed in regard to the parts of St. Louis's were prostitution flourished. "What

geographical or ethical reasons exist for the condition of Almond, Poplar, and a section of South

Main Street? Why should Sixth Street from Elm to Spruce streets prove so favorable for the

home of the vicious?" Tellingly, their meditation on St. Louis's sexual geography abruptly

shifted to an analogous discussion of the geography of race and ethnicity. "Can anyone explain,"

they asked, "why there are certain districts in the city people almost exclusively by Africans,

while there are other districts in which the population is almost exclusively Bohemian, while we

come to another region in which German people predominate, and still in another locality we

discover the inhabitants to be almost exclusively Irish in nationality and descent?"[25]

By the mid-nineteenth century, two distinct kinds of urban space—the "slum" and the

"suburb"—would emerge in St. Louis as a result of the city's increasingly complicated and

contentious social geography. As both material realities and ideological constructs, slums and

suburbs would powerfully influence St. Louis's subsequent historical development. Meanwhile,

as will be discussed in chapter III, attempts to bring spatial order to the city through policies of

segregation came to the fore by the turn of the twentieth century.

C.   **The Birth of the Slums**

When it was a frontier village, St. Louis's residents generally thought of their settlement

as island of order and security amidst the sparsely inhabited and poorly governed territory that

surrounded it. In so far as it existed, criminal and disreputable activity tended to occur on St.

Louis's periphery, at a distance from the center of the community and the watchful eyes of St.

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[25] Dacus and Buel, *A Tour of St. Louis*, 406-407.

Louis's small number of permanent residents. However, a crucial shift occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, as St. Louis was flooded with new arrivals, the population grew rapidly, and anonymity increasingly prevailed on city streets and in other public spaces. More and more, rather than being viewed as a site of relative security and order, the city was considered a place of danger and disorder—and the city's bustling, crowded core was regarded as the most dangerous and disorderly part of all. As Jeffrey Adler argues, by about 1850, "Geographically and symbolically, the city's new dangerous class migrated from the margins of the city and of society to the heart of St. Louis.[26]" This inversion laid the foundation for the emergence of two distinctive types of urban spaces whose entangled histories would shape St. Louis's future—the slum and the suburb.

The slums of nineteenth and early twentieth century St. Louis must be understood in terms of their proximity to the city's business district. Also called "downtown" or the "central business district" at different times in its history, the central business district was the functional core of metropolitan St. Louis throughout the era of urban growth. This was not located precisely in the physical center of the city, but in the east-central section near the Mississippi River. The business district's eastern edge along the riverfront had been the original site of settlement, where in the eighteenth century St. Louis's founders disembarked after having come upriver from New Orleans and laid out the city's first streets. While the importance of river traffic receded in the later part of the nineteenth century, for much of the era of urbanization the "Levee district" hummed with activity as ships came and went laden with goods and people. By the later part of the nineteenth century, several railroads also converged in the central business district, thanks in part to the river-spanning Eads Bridge. The east-central part of the city contained

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[26] Jeffrey S. Adler, "Vagging the Demons and Scoundrels: Vagrancy and the Growth of St. Louis, 1830-1861," *Journal of Urban History* 13, no. 3 (November 1986): 9.

sprawling railyards, as well as St. Louis's majestic Union Station, which opened in 1893. Due to this vibrant river and rail traffic, the business district served as a sort of gateway between St. Louis and wider world. It was a natural location for commerce and one of the major economic centers of a wide swath of the central United States. In these years, St. Louis's business district was crammed with the headquarters of business firms, government offices, banks, warehouses, factories, and stores. To meet the needs of the people who came to work, shop, and do business there, this part of the city also contained many lodging places, entertainment venues, and dining and drinking establishments. These ranged from luxurious places for the well-to-do to cheap, crude ones serving a clientele of cash-strapped transients. Loud, polluted, densely built, and crowded with people from near and far, the business district was to a great degree St. Louis's economic raison d'etre during its age of growth. It was a physical embodiment of the dynamic forces fueling the growth of the industrial-capitalist city.[27]

While the business district was the engine of St. Louis's growth, starting in the mid-nineteenth century St. Louisans of means more and more chose to reside at a distance from it. As will be discussed in greater depth the next chapter section, these proto-suburbanites made their homes and raised their children well away from what they regarded as the objectionable features of life in St. Louis's urban core. This phenomenon can be traced at least as far back as 1850, when the exclusive Lucas Place development was laid out at what was then the western edge of the city. This outward movement of St. Louis's relatively well-off continued decade by decade as the business district expanded and the city's population continued to grow. By about the turn of the twentieth century, the eastern part of the city in the orbit of the business district had largely

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[27] NiNi Harris, *Downtown St. Louis* (St. Louis: Reedy Press, 2015). For a national perspective on the history of central business districts, see Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2001).

been abandoned by families of means. The relatively affluent—a population that was also overwhelmingly white and in general outwardly respectable—were now likely to live in newer, primarily residential neighborhoods in the part of the city of St. Louis beyond Grand Avenue called the "West End," although some also lived in the northern or southern reaches of the city or even beyond the city limits. In these years, the men of these household often continued to make a daily trek to the business district to work. The women might also go to the business district to shop at department stores or engage in other activities. But by nightfall both husband and wife returned home to neighborhoods at a remove from the urban core.

Many people, however, continued to live in the neighborhoods near the business district in the eastern part of St. Louis—indeed, these were some of the most densely populated parts of St. Louis up until the mid-twentieth century. This part of the city—sometimes called the "East End" in analogy with the proto-suburban West End—contained St. Louis's first "slums."[28] As the business district expanded and the neighborhoods surrounding it were abandoned by the relatively affluent and respectable, formerly single-family homes were often subdivided and converted into tenements, rooming houses, and other sorts of multi-family structures. Located near the bustle, noise, and smoke of the business district and often intermixed with commercial or industrial facilities, these residences were widely regarded as undesirable places to live. Consequently, the people who lived in the eastern part of the city tended to be poorer than the more affluent residents of outlying, proto-suburban neighborhoods. There numbers included many immigrants from Europe, as well as blacks—many of whom were themselves recent

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[28] The term "West End" remains in circulation in twenty-first century St. Louis, although the more precise "Central West End," referring just to the area of the West End in the city's "Central Corridor," is perhaps more common. The term "East End," however, is no longer used. No single term is now used to describe the section of the city that once encompassed the "East End," although it roughly corresponds to what now tends to simply be called "downtown." I suspect that the term "East End" fell out of use because mid-twentieth-century slum clearance, urban renewal, and residential abandonment in the "East End" so thoroughly changed the area's physical appearance and social makeup. For a particularly striking example of the West End/East End distinction, see *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 12, 1910.

arrivals to St. Louis from the rural South. Native-born whites were also present, though they tended to also be newcomers without roots in the city.[29]

The earliest references to impoverished, slum-like neighborhoods just north and south of St. Louis's business district appear in the 1840s, in the midst of the great mid-nineteenth century urban boom. As far as I have been able to determine, the earliest use of the word "slum" to describe these parts of St. Louis date to the 1870s.[30] The term was used frequently thereafter, and in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century these areas became clearly defined in civic consciousness. The exact boundaries of the "slums" was imprecise and subjective, and in any case moved little by little over the years as formerly residential areas were converted to industrial or commercial uses and the socioeconomic and ethno-racial character of particular blocks shifted.

From the start, "slums" were associated with a range of interrelated characteristics. They were often described by outside observers as dirty, disorderly, and unattractive, with their buildings crowded together and in disrepair. Equally important were the social characteristics of the population who resided in them. Their most obvious feature was their relative poverty. Many inhabitants of the slums worked for low wages in downtown factories, on the riverfront, in the railyards, or in construction sites around the city. Large numbers of black male "roustabouts" worked on the riverfront and in the late nineteenth century were stereotypical inhabitants of the Levee district and nearby slum neighborhoods. Other residents of the slums supported

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[29] This process essentially follows the general pattern described in David Ward, *Poverty, Ethnicity, and the American City, 1840-1925: Changing Conceptions of the Slum and the Ghetto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). On the ethnic mix in St. Louis's eastern neighborhoods in this period, see Primm, *Lion of the Valley*, 338-340.

[30] Prim, *Lion of the Valley. St. Louis Post*, July 6, 1874. For a national perspective on the origins of the concept of the "slum," see Ward, *Poverty, Ethnicity, and the American City*.

themselves through informal economy that encompassed theft, confidence games, gambling, and prostitution.[31]

The slums were also often home to people whose ethno-racial identity set them apart from the white mainstream. These include blacks, who, as will be discussed below, faced severe discrimination in the city's housing market and often had little recourse but to live in undesirable areas. Other slum residents were recent immigrants, especially starting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century from Southern and Eastern Europe. As many historians of immigration and ethno-race have argued, these people were legally and culturally at the margins of white racial identity, often regarded by Anglo-Americans as racial distinct from themselves.[32] In the first decades of the twentieth century, for instances, the slum neighborhoods north of the business district were the site of the "ghetto" where most Eastern European Jewish immigrants in St. Louis lived in close proximity to their community institutions and businesses, such as synagogues and kosher butcher shops.[33] Recent immigrants were attracted to St. Louis's slum neighborhoods in part because they tended to be have limited economic resources and could only afford housing there. On another level, however, many were also drawn to the vibrant ethnic communities in these neighborhoods. In her report on the slum neighborhoods north of downtown, civic reform advocate Charlotte Rumbold noted with surprise that for many immigrants, "Low rents are the first attraction to such a neighborhood as this; then a colony is

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[31] See Dacus and Buel, *A Tour of St. Louis*, for an evocative description of these practices in the 1870s. On this informal economy in other urban contexts, see Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin'* and Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *A Pickpocket's Tale: The Underworld of Nineteenth Century New York* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), or, for a slightly later period, Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African-American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).
[32] The literature on the ambiguous racial status of Southern and Eastern European immigrants in this period is extensive. See, for example, David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).
[33] Ehrlich, *Zion in the Valley*.

formed and another attraction is added, the social."[34] While members of particular ethno-racial

groups sometimes concentrated themselves in given sections of slum neighborhoods, what is

striking about the slum districts of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century St. Louis is their

racial heterogeneity, with people of different groups—and even blacks and whites—living in

relatively close proximity to one another.[35] This situation contrasted sharply with the much more

racial segregated proto-suburban areas of the contemporary West End.

Along with physical decay, poverty, and the presence of ethno-racial others, the "slums"

of the eastern part of St. Louis tended to have associated them with what were regarded as

disreputable activities and blatant sexual immorality. In fact, among earliest uses of term "slum"

to describe St. Louis neighborhoods that I have found, most explicitly connect these places to

sexually deviant behavior, particular prostitution, and indeed "slum" was sometimes used

essentially synonymously with "vice district" to mean a section of the city with a high

concentration of brothels. Perhaps appearance of the word "slums" in the *St. Louis Dispatch*

(predecessor to the *Post-Dispatch*) is in an article about a woman sex worker who, after being

released from the city's Social Evil Hospital for treatment for a sexual transmitted disease, "had

gone back to the slums" and taken up residence in a brothel on Almond Street.[36] Dacus and Buel

write of the "the fallen women of the *slums* of Christy Avenue and Almond and Poplar streets,"

which were well-known vice districts. "In these neighborhoods the low saloons are kept open

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[34] Charlotte Rumbold, *Housing Conditions in St. Louis: Report of the Housing Committee of the Civic League of St. Louis* (St. Louis: Civic League of St. Louis, 1908), 63.

[35] On the ethno-racial mix of slum neighborhoods in late nineteenth and early twentieth century St. Louis, see Dacus and Buel, *A Tour of St. Louis*; Rumbold, *Housing Conditions in St. Louis*; Primm, *Lion of the Valley*; Joseph Heathcott, "The City Remade: Public Housing and the Urban Landscape in St. Louis, 1900-1960" (PhD diss., University of Indiana, 2003).

[36] *St. Louis Post*, July 6, 1874. This is the earliest appearance of the word "slum(s)" in the word-searchable ProQuest Historical *Post-Dispatch* database.

from sunset to sunrise," Dacus and Buel wrote. "These are the plague spots of the proud

metropolis, and those who dwell there are moral lepers."[37]

Interracial socializing and sexuality were a recurrent theme in descriptions of East End

"slums" in newspaper coverage and accounts by moralizing outside observers. Given the

strength of the anti-miscegenation taboo in these years, these associations had special potency.

This is already apparent in Dacus and Buel's account from the late 1870s. In a chapter titled

"Life among the Lowly," they describe the tenement houses of the Near North Side, located just

north of the business district and one of St. Louis's longest-lasting slum areas. "White and black

people are mixed up promiscuously," Dacus and Buel write. The inhabitants of one tenement

were "as hard a lot of men, women and children … of all nationalities and colors, as can be

found anywhere. … Negro roustabouts, white vagrants, white and black women without

decency, live crowded together." During the heat of the summer, Dacus and Buel write, the

inhabitants of these tenements often slept outdoors. "Sometimes hundreds of them may be seen,

representing both sexes and both the white and black races, slumbering in promiscuous groups

on the house-tops, and in the court-yards and alleyways."[38]

Similar descriptions can be found in sensationalistic articles in the local press describing

St. Louis slums. In an 1882 *Post-Dispatch* article titled "Haunts of Vice," a reporter narrated his

exploration of "Clabber Alley," an impoverished neighborhood of "negro and white hovels"

located on Seventh Street and Eight Street for several blocks Biddle and Franklin Streets.[39] This

was in the midst of one of the Near North Side. The reporter described the inhabitants of the area

in dehumanizing terms—"like a pack of coyotes"—and, in a tone of shock and revulsion, wrote

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[37] Dacus and Buel, *A Tour of St. Louis*, 445. Emphasis mine.
[38] Dacus and Buel, *A Tour of St. Louis*, 413-415.
[39] Franklin Street corresponds with what is today the eastern part of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

of encountering scenes of interracial sexuality. Entering one tenement, he saw "reclined in beastly drunkenness several negro men and women and three white women, the latter in a half-nude condition." For the reporter, this scene was a "repelling sight" of "abject horror." Elsewhere, he saw "huddled together a repulsive-looking Italian woman … a negro girl, and a raft of children, black, yellow, and white."[40]

By about the turn of the twentieth century, the East End was dominated by multi-family dwellings. Some of these were tenements occupied by poor and working families with children. However, there were also in this section of the city many rooming houses that made the area suitable for unmarried and childless men and women, many of them low-wage workers. Other unmarried adults took up residence as boarders with cash-strapped families in search of additional income. As in other contemporary US cities, these single people often participated in sexual cultures that alarmed moralizing civic reformers in St. Louis.[41] Writing in the late 1910s, St. Louis sociologist and Christian social activist George B. Mangold warned that many self-supporting women in St. Louis lived in an "environment which debases and degrades." According to Mangold, the low wages these women received forced them to live in "accommodations none too good and often only too close to an uncongenial and morally hazardous environment. … It is not low wages so much as the bad surroundings which such low wages impose that cause so many girls to become immoral."[42]

Mangold also warned of the social conditions of immigrants who lived in the overcrowded slums of the East End. Of particular concern, he said, was the "excess of males"

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[40] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 26, 1882.

[41] For parallel developments in Chicago, see Joanne Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago* and Joanne Meyerowitz, "Sexual Geography and the Gender Economy: The Furnished Room Districts of Chicago, 1890-1930." For a national perspective, see Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture*

[42] George B. Mangold, *The Challenge of St. Louis* (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1917), 100-101.

among some immigration groups, who lived in "cheap lodging-houses or in overcrowded, stuffy rooming houses." These conditions fostered sexual deviance, Mangold warned. "When such disproportions exist, wholesome family life becomes impossible. Many immigrants enjoy no opportunity whosoever for female companionship, while chances for marriage there are none. Must we not expect perverted leisure and recreation and immorality in most serious forms? … Single men must find an outlet somewhere or in some way. Parties of Greeks and others may carry on a dance without the presence of a single woman."[43]

By the turn of the twentieth century, the perceived social and physical deterioration of the eastern parts of the city had come to concern local Progressive reformers, such as those associated with the Civic League of St. Louis. This group was responsible for issuing St. Louis's first comprehensive city plan in 1907—one of the earliest such plans for a US city. In 1907, the Civic League also published a report titled *Housing Conditions in St. Louis*. Authored by social worker Charlotte Rumbold of the Civic League's Housing Committee, the book is a focused study of the Near North Side slum around Carr Square. Along with a vivid description of the squalor of the neighborhood and the physical deterioration of its buildings, Rumbold painted a picture of an urban space defined by its unsuitability for normative family life. Small, overcrowded apartments there limited privacy and encouraged children to play outdoors without supervision. "The parents are glad to have the children out of the house at night; even the little ones are on the streets," Rumbold wrote with alarm. As these apartments lacked toilets, residents of the area, including children, often relieved themselves in the restrooms of nearby saloons and brothels, which was a source of special worry for Rumbold. She further noted that families living in the area often took in boarders, who might share sleeping spaces with the children. Besides

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[43] Mangold, *The Challenge of St. Louis*, 58-59

contributing to the problem of overcrowding, this practice was "another difficulty in the way of keeping children clean-minded—and clean-bodied."[44]

D.   From Lucas Place to the City Limits: The Beginnings of Suburbanization

At the start of the twentieth century, the slums of St. Louis's East End stood in sharp contrast to the suburban West End. Their histories of these two parts of the city, however, unfolded in dynamic relationship with one another.

In the mid-nineteenth century, as it crossed the threshold from village to city, St. Louis first developed neighborhoods that were both distinctly residential and defined by their social exclusivity. This is when St. Louis's history of suburbanization begins. People of means increasingly chose to live near the edge of the city—far enough to be at a spatial and psychic remove from what they regarded as the undesirable features of urbanization while also near enough to be able to take advantage of the opportunities that the city afforded. This basic pattern reflects a trend present in many contemporary American cities.[45]

Historian Rick Rosen persuasively argues that the residential development called Lucas Place should be considered the start of suburbanization in St. Louis. Wealthy landowner James Lucas laid out Lucas Place in 1850 in what was then on farmland near the city limits, a little more than a mile west of the Mississippi River. Before the 1840s, St. Louis's well-to-do had not

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[44] Rumbold, *Housing Conditions in St. Louis*, 20, 39, 44.

[45] On the beginnings of suburbanization in American cities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004); Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); John R. Stilgoe, *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820-1939* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1990).

clearly laid claim to any particular part of the still small city. "There had been neighborhoods in the city which had a greater-than-average concentration of wealthy and prominent residences," Rosen writes, "but these were not homogeneous—they included large numbers of people from all socio-economic backgrounds, and the housing stock varied from humble dwellings to grand mansions."[46] Lucas Place, however, was, according to Rosen, St. Louis's "first clearly defined spatial expression of class consciousness," designed with homogeneity and exclusivity as its central aims. "At Lucas Place," Rosen writes, "the perceived pathology of the riverfront—with its transients, its low life, its immigrants, and its disease, as well as the dangers inherent with the technology of river transportation—could all be left behind for a new order."[47]

James Lucas and early homeowners in Lucas Place pioneered a number of techniques for controlling urban space that would persist for generations in St. Louis suburbs. For one thing, Lucas Place was the first of the city's many "private places"—a phenomenon particularly associated with St. Louis.[48] Unlike most city streets, which were municipal property and thus in principle public places open to all, the street running through Lucas Place was the private property of the homeowners, who could legally bar the entry of unwelcome outsiders. Moreover, deed restrictions limited the types of buildings that could be constructed in Lucas Place. Commercial and industrial establishments were prohibited. Breaking with St. Louis's earlier convention of attached row houses, all of the homes in Lucas Place were either detached single-family residences or designed so as to appear as detached from one other. This gave an impression of spaciousness and was suggestive of how Lucas Place residents—largely first-

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[46] Rick Rosen, "Saint Louis, Missouri, 1850-1865: The Rise of Lucas Place and the Transformation of the City: From Public Spaces to Private Places" (master's thesis, University of California-Los Angeles, 1988), 95.

[47] Rosen, "Saint Louis, Missouri," 93.

[48] David T. Beito and Bruce Smith, "The Formation of Urban Infrastructure through Nongovernmental Planning: The Private Places of St. Louis, 1869-1920," *Journal of Urban History* 16, no. 3 (May 1990): 263-303. See also Katharine T. Corbett and Howard S. Miller, *Saint Louis in the Gilded Age* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1993), 86-87.

generation urbanites born in rural areas—felt about the bustling, densely populated city growing around their sheltered private street. The single-family detached home also suggests the nuclear family as the foundational social unit for St. Louis's elites.[49]

As St. Louis continued to grow, other elite residential developments modeled on Lucas Place, such as Lafayette Square and Benton Place, appeared elsewhere along the edge of the city. However, the rapid expansion of the city soon made this first generation of proto-suburban districts obsolete as a refuge from the undesirable elements of urban life. In a pattern that repeated itself several times over succeeding generations, St. Louis's affluent largely abandoned these residential areas for new developments farther to the west, at the edge of the growing city.

By 1870, the year Vandeventer Place was laid out, new proto-suburban residential development had largely moved past Grand Avenue, some three miles west of the riverfront. "Already signs of beauty and elegance show themselves, especially in the direction of the West End," Dacus and Buel observed in 1878.[50] For the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, St. Louis's affluent would for the most part make their homes in the "West End" of the city, stretching from about Grand Avenue west for about three miles to the city limits set in 1876.

The residents of the proto-suburban West End of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were both upper class and some of a more middling sort. The West End included a number of private places, some featuring palatial mansions, where St. Louis's wealthiest lived. There were also large areas of more modest but still substantial homes, where many of the city's middle-class families resided. "While the elite and wealthy seek this end of the city," Dacus and Buel said of the West End, "there are advantages here for those in moderate circumstances.

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[49] Rosen, "St. Louis, Missouri."
[50] Dacus and Buel, *A Tour of St. Louis*, 337.

Many good rows of buildings have been erected and are for rent on moderate terms."[51] One longtime resident of a neighborhood in extreme north of the West End recalled that the families who moved into the area when it was first developed were people of modest means "who wanted homes at little expense and for little outlay of cash—many building to a great extent, their own homes with their own hands."[52] Despite the relative range of wealth, the residents of the West End in these years were united by a shared values—the single-family, detached home, the pursuit of privacy and security, and a desire to project an image of respectability.

In a statement attached to the 1919 *Zone Plan for St. Louis* (1919), wealthy attorney and lifelong St. Louisan Isaac Lionberger (1854-1948) provided a striking example of the westward migration of St. Louis's elite by listing the sequences of westward moves that he had made through the course of his own life, from boyhood to the cusp of old age. "First [I lived] at Sixth and Chestnut streets," he began, describing a home that was only a short walk from the riverfront. He next listed a series of moves over the following decades: "Ninth and Chestnut, then at Sixteenth and Olive, then at Thirty-second and Washington Avenue, then at Thirty-sixth and Delmar Avenue, and at present in Westmoreland Place." This last location, Westmoreland Place (fist laid out in 1888), was a private place located in the west of the West End, far from the riverfront and nearly to the city limits. In his statement, Lionberger noted that this cycle of westward migration was still unfolding. He noted that Westmoreland Place, "twelve years ago a charming, clean and quiet retreat," was beginning to lose its appeal to him. Meanwhile, a member of the next generation, Lionberger's nephew, had set up his home still farther west,

[51] Dacus and Buel, *A Tour of St. Louis*, 371.
[52] *North-West Civic News*, August 25, 1931, Beimes-Schloemann Family Papers, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

finally across the city limits in the St. Louis County suburb of Brentwood.[53] While the Lionberger family might present an exceptionally stark case, during this period a great many of other St. Louis families of means followed a similar path.

Why did so many St. Louisans of means choose to abandon residential neighborhoods in the older, eastern part of the city and to move to new residential developments in the West End or even beyond the city limits? Of course, each household's decision was to some degree personal and based on their peculiar situation, and multiple factors were at play. In general, however, it was because suburban or proto-suburban areas promised to shelter their residents from what they regarded as the many objectionable features of life in a large and growing industrial city. (Robert Fishman and others have noted that, ironically, the things that elites saw as objectionable about the city were byproducts of the same processes of industrial capitalist urbanization that had generated their wealth.[54]) In 1878, Dacus and Buel described suburban homes as a refuge from bustling urban core:

> As in all large cities, the soot and smoke, the din and dust, are to be avoided if possible. Homes should be as remote as possible from all that continuously reminds us of the slave-toil part of life. Where trees and birds and fresh air can be gained, there the family and the toiler's life should reap all the good attainable.[55]

Notably, a particular vision of gender and family life figure centrally into Dacus and Buel's description. Each home, they assume, will be inhabited by a bread-winning man and his family.

The explicit reason that nineteenth-century migrants from the East End to the West End gave for their moves encompass both what might be regarded as "physical" features of the city and also "social" ones (although the distinction between the two is always clear). Explaining his

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[53] *Zone Plan of St. Louis* (St. Louis: Nixon-Jones Printing Co., 1919), 60-61. See also Isaac Lionberger's unpublished reminiscences, I.H. Lionberger, "Glimpses of People and Manners in St. Louis, 1870-1920," n.d., Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.
[54] Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias.*
[55] Dacus and Buel, *A Tour of St. Louis*, 374.

six westward moves through the course of the second half the nineteenth century, Isaac

Lionberger said, "The causes which induced these various removals were simple: coal, smoke,

dirt, dust, noise, the intrusion of various retail establishments, livery stables, saloons and other

objectionable businesses, and the wish to live under comfortable conditions."[56] Lionberger's

emphasis on what might be judged to be "physical" features might distract from the fact that

elsewhere he also seems to suggest that "social" characteristics of the eastern part of the city also

repulsed him. In a 1915 newspaper article, he lamented that the section of the city between the

West End and the downtown business district, where he had once lived, had now been

"abandoned to the rats, the negroes, and the poor" and "could never be reclaimed" by its well-to-

do and white former inhabitants.[57] A man who moved to the northern part of the West End in

about 1907 said, meanwhile, recalled years later, "The cleanliness, the air, the character of the

district, and *the type of residents*, have played an important part in the conclusion that it was a

good place to live."[58] Other sources put the matter more bluntly. Writing about the changing

character of a neighborhood on the Near North Side, a *Post-Dispatch* reporter wrote, "Crowds of

lawless and brutal negroes terrorize the entire neighborhood. Women and young girls were afraid

even in the day time to pass along Carr street between Sixth and Seventh. The better class of

people had thus been forced to leave the locality, whose apartments were retaken by the lower

element."[59] The East End, then, was regarded as an undesirable place to live for many migrants

to the West End both because of its physical features and because of the kind of people who

lived there and frequented its streets.

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[56] *Zone Plan of St. Louis*, 60.
[57] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 17, 1915.
[58] *North-West Civic News*, August 25, 1931, Beimes-Schloemann Family Papers, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.
[59] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 26, 1882.

The decision to relocate to the West End was not always easy, and in some case residents

of the area initially tried to resist social change in their neighborhood rather than fleeing outright.

The minutes of the Carr Place Protective and Improvement Association offer a window into

these dynamics. In 1904, the Carr Place Protective and Improvement Association was founded

by a small group of homeowners in that section of the city, which was located in the East End

within blocks of one of St. Louis's "slum" districts and one of the city's segregated vice districts.

According to that year's city directory, members of the organization were mostly independent

professionals or proprietors of small businesses, including a physician and the owner-operators

of a funeral parlor, a grocery store, and confectionary.[60] While not in the upper strata of St.

Louis's elites—who by this point had almost entirely relocated to the West End— they were

people of relative means and, it may safely be assumed, were all white and outwardly

respectable. The neighborhood "protective and improvement" association—one of many such

groups founded in St. Louis around in the years spanning the turn of the twentieth century—was

founded with the explicit aim of policing the social character of the neighborhood.[61] The minutes

of the first meeting of the organization read: "It was decided to take steps to resist the

encroachment of all obnoxious persons who attempted to locate in this neighborhood, and in

order to accomplish this, it was unanimously decided to form a permanent organization."[62]

While similar neighborhood protective associations, especially in later years, were primarily

concerned with enforcing racial segregation, the sort of "obnoxious persons" that Carr Square

association concerned themselves with were people who violated norms of sexual and familial

respectability. Meeting minutes, for instance, reveal complaints about a "gang of loafers who

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[60] Gould's Directory, 1905, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

[61] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 17, 1895.

[62] Minutes of the Carr Square Protective and Improvement Association, November 15, 1904, Alewel Family Papers, Box 8, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

accosted women on the street" and "children who played on the sheds in the alley … throwing

missles [sic] and otherwise annoying tenants of said block."[63]

The "encroachment" of sex workers into the neighborhood, however, was a "nuisance"

that the association addressed repeatedly and with special urgency. The minutes of the December

1905 meeting of the association, for instance, include the following passage: "Mr. Thomas

Ferrenbach called the attention of the association to the presence of prostitutes in the houses on

the west side of 18th St. north of Lucas Ave. who had recently located there, and as this was

deemed dangerous to the neighborhood and to prevent the further encroachment of this class of

persons the Secretary was instructed to place the matter before the Chief of Police."[64] Despite its

efforts, the association had little success in "protecting" their neighborhood from undesirable

persons, and its members seem to have given up on it. Several monthly meetings in the second

half of 1906 were canceled for lack of a quorum, and in December 1906 the association's

members voted to discontinue regular meetings.[65]

E.   Harland Bartholomew, the Invention of Blight, and the Specter of Decline

The period from the late 1910s to the early 1930s saw the beginnings of a civic

conversation about St. Louis's impending decline. While all through living memory St. Louis

had only grown, for the first time St. Louisans began to take seriously the possibility that the

city's fortunes might shift and its population might shrink. Read alongside other contemporary

sources, city planning documents from this period suggest the importance of the era's conjoined

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[63] Minutes of the Carr Square Protective and Improvement Association, June 5, 1906, Alewel Family Papers, Box 8, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

[64] Minutes of the Carr Square Protective and Improvement Association, December 5, 1905, Alewel Family Papers, Box 8, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

[65] Minutes of the Carr Square Protective and Improvement Association, December 4, 1906, Alewel Family Papers, Box 8, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

racial and sexual politics to suburbanization and urban decline, as well as to how civic leaders

began to understand these processes and envisioned policies to address them.

Harland Bartholomew was a key player in these discussions. A man who lived for a

century, Bartholomew was among the most consequential individuals in the history of St. Louis

and in the development of modern American urban planning. In 1915, Bartholomew—not yet

thirty years old—left his native Northeast and arrived in St. Louis to take a job with the City Plan

Commission. In 1917, he was named St. Louis's first ever Engineer of the City Plan

Commission—essentially becoming St. Louis's chief planning official—and he completed work

on *Problems of St. Louis*, the first of many major planning documents he produced for his

adopted city. Bartholomew held his position for more than thirty years, until 1950, and for

decades afterward remained head of the urban planning firm of Harland Bartholomew &

Associates, headquartered in St. Louis. Bartholomew was a careful analyst of St. Louis's

evolving social and economic geography, and he powerfully influenced public policy as the city

adjusted to the automobile, pivoted from a pattern of population growth to population decline,

and embarked on a program of large-scale slum clearance and public-housing construction.

Thanks to his widely read publication, leadership in professional organizations, and extensive

consulting work for other cities, Bartholomew also made a deep imprint on urban planning

nationwide.[66]

When Bartholomew arrived, St. Louis was a large and growing urban center whose

residents were engaged in searing conflicts over the racial and sexual ordering of metropolitan

space. The year before Bartholomew moved to St. Louis, police had closed the last of the city's

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[66] Sandweiss, *St. Louis*, 212-213; Harland Bartholomew obituary, December 5, 1989, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. On Harland Bartholomew and his impact on American urban planning, see Joseph Heathcott, "The Whole City Is Our Laboratory: Harland Bartholomew and the Production of Urban Knowledge," *Journal of Planning History* 4, no. 4 (November 2005): 322-355.

quasi-official vice districts, and the year after St. Louis voters passed by referendum an

ordinance mandating residential racial segregation (to be discussed in depth in the next

dissertation chapter). Then, in 1917, Bartholomew began his work as Engineer of the City Plan

Commission in the shadow an outbreak of horrific racial violence directly across the Mississippi

River in the industrial suburb of East St. Louis. In what historian Charles Lumpkin has called an

"American pogrom," white rioters brutally killed dozens of blacks and burned down the homes

of hundreds more. Fleeing for their lives, refugees crossed the iconic Eads Bridge on foot to find

shelter in St. Louis.[67] These events almost certainly shaped Bartholomew's understanding of the

St. Louis region and its needs.

In the years after he began work at the City Plan Commission, Bartholomew produced a

series of reports and policy proposals that addressed many of the entwined concerns that would

be at the center of his professional life for the next several decades: the causes and consequences

of suburbanization, the pressing danger of "blight," the persistent problem of the slums, and the

specter of urban decline.

As Bartholomew took stock of his adopted city, he came to a prescient insight: St. Louis

and many of America's other great cities were headed down a path toward decline. Of course, he

was aware of St. Louis's long history of growth. "For more than a century," he observed, "the

industry, the population, and the size of St. Louis have increased steadily." In the late 1910s, few

people expected that this would change, and in 1917 Bartholomew himself said that St. Louis

was a "growing city … rapidly approaching the one million population mark." Yet, looking

farther into the future, Bartholomew predicted that they day might come when St. Louis's growth

would end. Decades before the start of the post-World War II urban crisis, Bartholomew warned

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[67] Charles Lumpkins, *American Pogrom: The East St. Louis Race Riot and Black Politics* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008).

that if corrective actions were not taken, "future generations" would confront "the decadence of cities."[68] Bartholomew identified two interrelated processes that he feared in the long run might lead to stagnant growth and "economic disaster" for St. Louis: 1) hurried, speculative growth on the suburban periphery; and 2) spreading depopulation, disinvestment, and social disintegration in the older parts of the city—a set of conditions subsumed under the new concept of "urban blight."

In regard to the first point, Bartholomew was aware of the long-running expansion of the city, as well as the cyclical "westward movement" of the St. Louis's proto-suburban neighborhoods. He correctly predicted that this outward migration would continue indefinitely and that the locus of growth in the metropolitan region would soon pass the city limits. As early as 1916, Bartholomew noted with alarm that "approximately 100,000 people live in the suburban communities immediately adjacent to St. Louis." Bartholomew recognized that this westward population drift—and especially the movement of the affluent past the city limits into suburban St. Louis County—threatened to reverse St. Louis's trajectory of population growth and posed a grave danger to the city's long-term economic and social stability. For one thing, Bartholomew thought, this rapid, unplanned growth led to inefficient land use and necessitated costly infrastructural investments (to a great degree, this anticipated future critiques of "urban sprawl). Furthermore, if the well-to-do moved past the city limits to St. Louis County, they also slipped beyond the grasp of the city's taxing authority and could not be counted in city's population figures. The former imperiled the city's finance, while the latter was of great concern to civic

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[68] "The Plan of St. Louis," 1-2, n.d. [1916?], series 10, sub-series 1, box 1, folder 1, Harland Bartholomew and Associates Collection, Washington University Archives, St. Louis; City Plan Commission, *Problems of St. Louis: Being a Description, from the City Planning Standpoint, of Past and Present Tendencies of Growth with General Suggestions for Impending Issues and Necessary Future Improvements* (St. Louis: Nixon-Jones Printing Co., 1917), xvi, 24, 28.

boosters who saw St. Louis's size as an important measure of its success vis-à-vis other major cities. Considering the growth of suburbs in St. Louis County, Bartholomew lamented that "the city is failing to benefit from the increase in local population which it has helped to create."[69]

Bartholomew noted that St. Louis's status as an independent city exacerbated this situation. From 1822 (the year of St. Louis's incorporation) to 1876, the city's municipal boundaries were pushed out five times to keep up with the expansion of urbanized space. When the city limits were extended in 1876, however, the city of St. Louis also split itself from surrounding St. Louis County, which at the time was mostly rural. In so doing, St. Louis became an independent city, for financial, legal, and nearly all other purposes operating at once as a municipal and county-level government, wholly separate from St. Louis County. Remembered as the "Great Divorce," this split also froze the city limits as they were in 1876, where they remained through Bartholomew's tenure and have remained until the present day. As Bartholomew observed in 1917, "The new boundaries should soon if ever be outgrown was scarcely realized, and unfortunately the boundaries became so firmly established by law that to extend them now as needed is an exceedingly difficult procedure."[70] This development confined the city of St. Louis to an unusually small area—61.9 square miles—as compared to many other major American cities, whose municipal boundaries generally continued to expand through the late nineteenth century and beyond. That Bartholomew expressed misgivings about the Great Divorce as early as the 1910s is another instance of his prescience. The effects of the city-county split reverberated through subsequent generations, as St. Louis's constrained municipal

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[69] "The Plan of St. Louis," 3.
[70] City Plan Commission, *Problems of St. Louis*, xvii.

boundaries exacerbated the post-World War II urban crisis and magnified the demographic

consequences of suburbanization and white flight.[71]

While he was disconcerted by the possible long-term consequences of this migration to

suburbia, Bartholomew interpreted it as the result an understandable desire of families to escape

the unpleasant conditions of the inner city. "That the great city has disrupted home life is

generally conceded," Bartholomew reflected.[72] Indeed, he contended that a primary driver of the

westward movement of the city's population was an "inability of individuals to secure a

permanently satisfactory environment for home and family" within the urban core.[73] The

congested population of the inner city, he led to "a great increase in disease, in immorality, in

juvenile and adult crime."[74] It was natural, he suggested, that many people would choose to

relocate to parts of the metropolitan region where "disease and crime will not thrive" and where

they could enjoy "privacy, [a] sufficient number of rooms, [and] yard and garden space."[75]

Bartholomew's prototypical suburbanites were sexually normative, i.e., a married couple who

aspired to respectability and wished to live a detached, single-family home, regarded as well

suited to raising children. Given the prevalence of housing discrimination in new residential

developments in St. Louis, these prototypical suburbanites could also be presumed to be white.

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[71] For a detailed discussion of politics behind "the Great Divorce," see Primm, *Lion of the Valley*, 297-309. On the long-term consequences of the separation of St. Louis city and St. Louis County and an analysis of the larger issue of political fragmentation in the region, see Colin Gordon, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 39-68.

[72] Harland Bartholomew, "Some Principles of Land Subdivision," 1-4, n.d. [c. 1925], series 10, sub-series 1, box 1, folder 1, Harland Bartholomew and Associates Collection, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.

[73] Harland Bartholomew, "To Rebuild Are Cities," n.d. [c. 1925?], series 10, sub-series 1, box 1, folder 1, Harland Bartholomew and Associates Collection, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.

[74] Harland Bartholomew, "Zoning: The Best and Cheapest Investment a City Can Make," 1920, 3, series 10, sub-series 1, box 1, folder 1, Harland Bartholomew and Associates Collection, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.

[75] Harland Bartholomew, "Some Principles of Land Subdivision," 1-4, n.d. [c. 1925], Harland Bartholomew and Associates Collection, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.

For Bartholomew, rapid and unplanned suburbanization went hand in hand with the second problem that he saw facing the city—"blight." This was an important conceptual innovation. Before the 1910s, "blight" was primarily an agricultural or botanical term meaning an unsightly infection on the surface of a plant. Occasionally, the word was also used to refer to diseases of human skin or figuratively to any other sort of malady or unpleasant condition. It was only in the 1910s, however, that Americans began to use the expression "blight" to describe a particular kind of urban space. As a prominent city planner and for years the head of the nationally influential Urban Land Institute, Bartholomew did a great deal to theorize and popularize the concept of "urban blight," activities which would have long-lasting consequences for America's cities.[76]

As historian Robert Fogelson has argued, from the start "urban blight" was a "vague concept" with a protean definition. Bartholomew himself observed, "A city is a complex organism and blighted districts are a complex by-product, the result of a combination of numerous opposing forces." Elements of blight could indicate declining property values, a high rate of vacancy, dilapidated buildings, or an essentially subjective appearance of decay, disorder, or dirtiness. A "blighted district" could also be defined, implicitly or explicitly, by the disreputable character of the people who lived in it. As Bartholomew himself asserted, the "character of tenancy" was a key contributor to blight. Specifically, he warned of changes in what sorts of household forms predominated in an area and in the racial composition of the population. "Once a residence district becomes invaded by boarding houses," he warned, "its future, as a desirable residence area, is generally doomed." As perilous as boarding house were,

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[76] Fogelson, *Downtown*, 317-381; *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, "Blight."

he asserted that "the worst forms of blighting are usually those of racial invasions, most particularly of the colored race."[77]

In many ways, then, the idea of a "blighted district" resembled that of the "slum," and the terms were often conflated. The principle difference, however, is that "blight" emphasized that the space in question had up until recently been more attractive, more respectable, or more economically valuable, but since had "declined." "Blighted districts" were often understood to be formerly desirable neighborhoods that were in the process of becoming "slums." Frequently turning to metaphors of cancer or contagion, Bartholomew and others warned that by its nature "blight" spread. This raised the disturbing possibility that ever larger parts of the city would fall into "decline," thus endangering the wellbeing of the metropolis as a whole.[78]

Bartholomew's analysis of one of St. Louis's first "blighted districts" reveals how he understood the relationship between blight and suburbanization and is suggestive of the entwined economic, racial, and sexual dimensions of the idea of neighborhood "decline." In a 1918 report to the City Plan Commission, Bartholomew described a large swath of the central part of St. Louis situated between the downtown business district and Grand Avenue. This included the almost exclusively black Mill Creek Valley neighborhood, as well as mostly white and racially mixed neighborhoods along its northern edge. Bartholomew noted that a few decades before, this had been one of St. Louis's "finest residential districts." Indeed, through most of the second half of the nineteenth century, this area had contained many mansions of the well-to-do. But, as Bartholomew asserted, "St. Louis has probably suffered more from a shifting of large residential

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[77] Harland Bartholomew, "Can Blighted Urban Areas Be Rehabilitated?" 1930, 18, series 10, sub-series 2, box 1, folder 4, Harland Bartholomew and Associates Collection, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.
[78] Fogelson, *Downtown*. For similar assessments from other historians, see Gordon, *Mapping Decline*, 188-220; Themis Chronopoulos, "Robert Moses and the Visual Dimension of Physical Disorder: Efforts to Demonstrate Urban Blight in the Age of Slum Clearance," *Journal of Planning History* 13, no. 3 (August 2014): 207-233.

districts than any other great American city." The affluent had almost entirely abandoned this area for newer developments in the West End or the suburbs. Bartholomew said that the formerly attractive homes of this now "blighted" area had become "monotonous rows of flats and tenements and converted mansions." "In that great residential district to-day," he lamented, "are nothing but boarding houses, vacant property, and a large colored residential district."[79] Thus, for Bartholomew the area's decline—its transition from a "fine residential district" to a "blighted district"—could be seen in large part through its changing social makeup, i.e., the presence of blacks and also of whites who lived in multi-family dwellings rather than single-family homes.

Other contemporary sources suggest that other St. Louis elites likewise saw this same blighted district's changing social character as an intrinsic part of its decline. For example, wealthy attorney Isaac Lionberger, who had resided in the neighborhood before relocating to a private place in the West End, declared in the *Post-Dispatch* that the district "must be abandoned to the rats, the negroes, and the poor, because it can never be reclaimed."[80]

Meanwhile, in 1917 sociologist and Christian civic reformer George Mangold described the deviant sexual behaviors and domestic arrangements that prevailed in the "large rooming house district east of Grand Avenue." This coincided with the blighted district identified by Bartholomew. Mangold warned that the many unmarried white men and women who lived there inhabited "decadent communities where church facilities are poor and opportunities for profitable companionship are few." "Is it any wonder," Mangold asked, "that few persons from this locality are found in any church, that wild, rough and reckless young Americans abound, that

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[79] Harland Bartholomew and Franz Herding, "A Model Housing Plan for the District East of Grand Avenue, St. Louis, Mo.," n.d. [1918?], 3, series 10, sub-series 1, box 1, folder 1, Harland Bartholomew and Associates Records, , Washington University Archives, St. Louis. Bartholomew identified the residential district east of Grand Avenue as "blighted" in "Plan of St. Louis," n.d. [1916?].
[80] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 17, 1915.

many of the women accept the vice that constantly offer itself before them, and that moral degeneration occurs?"[81]

Mangold's worries about the lifestyle of the residents of the rooming house district reflected widespread concerns of the time. As historians such as Joanne Meyerowitz and George Chauncey have argued, for many urban Americans of the early twentieth century, rooming houses facilitated life outside of the nuclear family and expanded possibilities for personal autonomy and sexual self-determination. These conditions provoked considerable anxiety among moralizing elites of the day.[82]

Mangold's assertion that "vice" flourished in the neighborhood is also significant. Although not directly referenced in his report, it is noteworthy that the area that Bartholomew identified as the "blighted district" became one of St. Louis's main centers of prostitution around the turn of the twentieth century—a shift that overlaps chronologically with its perceived "decline." Falling property values and the flight of relatively affluent and hence politically influential residents made it a relatively hospitable part of the city for sex workers. Indeed, before its closure in 1914, the Lucas Street segregated vice district had been located in the bounds of this "blighted" district.[83]

Bartholomew's description of the blighted district east of Grand Avenue concluded with a proposed solution to the problems that afflicted the area. Despite his negative assessment of the district, Bartholomew contended that it might be possible to make it attractive again to the sort of people who otherwise preferred to live in more recently developed areas farther away from downtown St. Louis. The only way to "rehabilitate" the area for them, however, was "to create a

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[81] Mangold, *The Challenge of St. Louis*, 50-51..

[82] Meyerowtiz, *Women Adrift*; Chauncey, *Gay New York.*

[83] James Wunsch, "Protecting St. Louis from the Encroachment of Brothels, 1870-1920," *Missouri Historical Review* 104, no. 4 (July 2010): 198-212.

thoroughly new environment … by tearing down existing buildings and through the reconstruction of a portion of the district with new types of homes having good surroundings."[84] Bartholomew's proposal thus anticipates the "slum clearance" programs of later years and most specifically the 1959 demolition of the Mill Creek Valley.

Bartholomew also viewed residential racial segregation as an important tool to limit the spread of blight. On the whole, Bartholomew's published works and surviving papers are remarkable for their silences around race and segregation. However, in a 1930 address to the National Association of Real Estate Boards, he effectively endorsed residential racial segregation. "Various legislative efforts to limit and fix the boundaries of both white and colored races have consistently been declared invalid by the courts and there is very little hope of ever dealing with this question by municipal or legislative action," he lamented. "In numerous cases, however, agreements have been reached by leaders of opposing racial elements and definite areas for each agreed upon. In St. Louis, the Real Estate Exchange a very valuable service of this character."[85] Some other city planning documents produced under Bartholomew's supervision also reflected St. Louis's Jim Crow practices. For example, a 1917 report called for organized public recreation to combat the "untoward influences" and "other evils which have everywhere characterized urban development. The same report called for separate, segregated playgrounds for black and white children—a formal policy that would remain in force until the post-World War II civil rights era.[86]

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[84] Bartholomew and Herding, "A Model Housing Plan for the District East of Grand Avenue, St. Louis, Mo.," 4.
[85] Bartholomew, "Can Blighted Urban Areas Be Rehabilitated?", 18. Bartholomew also clearly endorses residential racial segregation in Harland Bartholomew, "A Report on Population Density and Distribution in St. Louis, 1910-1920-1930," 8, series 1, box 18, folder 5, Harland Bartholomew and Associates Collection, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.
[86] City Plan Commission, *Recreation in St. Louis* (St. Louis: s.n., 1917), 12.

Through the relatively prosperous 1920s, however, Bartholomew's call for the demolition and reconstruction of slums and blighted areas remained on the drawing board. Instead, St. Louis's main strategy to halt neighborhood decline and to slow flight to the suburbs was an experiment in municipal zoning—another policy devised by Bartholomew. However, this approach proved largely ineffective, as suburbanization in fact accelerated during this decade, as did the apparent "decline" of the eastern part of St. Louis.

F.   Geographies of Deviance: Mapping Blight in the 1930s

The 1930s proved to be an important turning point. In this period, it became increasingly clear to a wide spectrum of the city's elites that St. Louis was on the verge of the demographic and economic crisis that Bartholomew had predicted. Indeed, the 1940 US Census proved their fears correct by reporting that, for the first time, St. Louis's population had shrunk over the course of the previous decade. In the 1930s, discussions about the problem of "urban blight" entered the mainstream of civic life, and debates over the ideas of slum clearance and public housing became heated. The decade concluded with St. Louis's first major slum clearance project—the demolition of a "blighted district" on the central riverfront that, decades later, became the site of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial and the Gateway Arch. These developments must also be considered against the backdrop of the Great Depression. The economic crisis of these years undermined the model of the patriarchal nuclear family, led to an increase of survival sex work among poor and working-class women and girls, and exacerbated fears sexual immorality and the family breakdown.[87]

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[87] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 331-349.

A particularly important development during the 1930s was a flowering of locally focused social science research on slums, blight, and neighborhood decline. The Department of Sociology at Washington University in St. Louis played a central role in this, due in large part to the contributions of University of Chicago-trained sociologist Stuart Alfred Queen and his students. In 1939, Queen and his Washington University colleague Lewis Thomas published a tome titled *The City*, an overview of current sociological thinking on urban life. The book extensively drew on examples from St. Louis and included numerous maps of the city, tying Queen's abstract sociological theorizing to St. Louis's concrete social geography.[88]

Another important outlet for local social science research was the journal *Social Studies of St. Louis*, a monthly publication distributed to social service providers and civic group. With articles, graphs, and maps produced by local social scientists and their students, it minutely documented St. Louis's changing demography and shifting conditions in the city's neighborhoods.[89]

St. Louis's City Plan Commission also began to collaborate with social scientists in a much more substantial way than it had previously, especially as it attempted a comprehensive survey the social geography of the city. All of these efforts produced a profusion of maps, which were widely circulated among civic elites. Cumulatively, these maps made a powerful visual argument that St. Louis's supposed social pathologies were overwhelmingly concentrated in the slums and blighted districts. This gave an air of expert legitimacy to the preconceptions of the city's leading decision-makers and added urgency to calls for slum clearance.

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[88] Stuart Alfred Queen and Lewis Francis Thomas, *The City: A Study of Urbanism in the United States* (New York: McGraw-Hall, 1939).

[89] The full run of *Social Studies of St. Louis* is available at the Central Branch of the St. Louis Public Library.

The social science research of the 1930s helped clarify that blight was at least as much a matter of the social makeup of a neighborhood as it was a question of property values or the physical state of the housing stock. As Queen asserted, "The blighted area [contains] many of the city's problems in their most acute forms. … The mores of various groups are in conflict, detached individuals are little affected by any moral codes, vice and crime are rampant, social control is mechanical and weak."[90] For Queen, the social pathologies that were said to typify blight were often related to sexual deviance and familial dysfunction, and he specifically listed "prostitutes" and "homosexuals" as among the "human types" that characterized blighted areas. Washington University sociologists, City Plan Commission employees, and contributors to *Social Studies of St. Louis* mapped rates of venereal disease, marriage, illegitimate births, juvenile delinquency, single- versus multi-family dwellings, and other comparable phenomena. Data that seemed to indicate that residents of an area strayed from heteronormative ideals of familial respectability and sexual restraint were presented as evidence of neighborhood decline and "blight."

In March 1938, *Social Studies* identified the "Problem Areas of St. Louis" where these maladies were most concentrated. A map on the front cover of that issue highlighted parts of the city corresponding to the old "slum" neighborhoods surrounding downtown, as well as a section of "blight" in the Central Corridor extending west from downtown.[91] The local press picked up the story, communicating the *Social Studies* findings to the wide and varied readership of the city's daily newspapers. The *Post-Dispatch* announced that the researchers had identified the "sources of social infection" in the city—perhaps intentionally using a phrase that also served as a euphemism for sexually transmitted diseases. In these "downtown and midtown

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[90] Queen and Thomas, *The City*, 346-347.
[91] *Social Studies of St. Louis* 28 (March 1938).

neighborhoods," the *Post-Dispatch* reported, "is found a disproportionate concentration of unemployment, dependency, sickness, delinquency and vice." The article also noted that despite only making up 34 percent of St. Louis's population, residents of these "problem areas" were responsible for "75 percent of all the city's illegitimate births," "66 percent of the city's delinquents," and "64 percent of all deaths from syphilis," among other concerns.[92] This reporting on *Social Studies*' finding likely contributed to a common sense among many St. Louisan's that sexual immorality was associated with particular parts of the city and that these same parts of the city were in the midst of dangerous social deterioration.

While they generally presented their research in a tone of academic detachment, Queen and other social scientists in St. Louis sometimes asserted that their findings demanded action. In *The City*, Queen asked his readers, "Can cities afford to permit part of their people to live under the conditions which commonly obtain in blighted districts? Do we, the general run of citizens, know what is the long-time cost of tolerating these centers of disease, vice, and crime, of bringing up children in the slums?"[93] By the start of 1940s, civic elites by and large had come to agree with Queen and had determined St. Louis's best hope lay in an aggressive program of "slum clearance" and urban renewal. In subsequent years, this led to the demolition of large swaths of the city, largely areas that had been home to black or racially mixed populations of poor and working people. Not coincidentally, many of St. Louis's lesbian and gay bars and centers of heterosexual sex work were near the zones set aside for demolition.

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[92] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 1, 1938.
[93] Queen and Thomas, *The City*, 356.

G.   **Conclusion**

St. Louis's population first fell in the 1930s—seeming to confirm Bartholomew and other's fears of the impending decline. In the 1940s, however, St. Louis's population grew again as the city became a major center of industrial production for the Second World War. This turned out to only be a brief reversal, however, as the city's demographic decline began in earnest in the aftermath of the war.

St. Louis's post-World War II population contraction was contemporaneous with and intimately related to the breakdown of de jure Jim Crow in the same period. In the early twentieth century, a system of overt, legally sanctioned segregation had ordered St. Louis's racial geography. Fierce debates that accompanied the construction and dismantling of Jim Crow in St. Louis reveal how race was entangled with ideas about normativity sexuality and struggles over the social character of the city's neighborhoods. We will explore these developments in the next chapter.

III. "IN DEFENSE OF THE HOME":

THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF RACIAL SEGREGATION

A. **Introduction**

In February 1956, an anonymous mother wrote a letter to Mayor Raymond Tucker of St. Louis to express her concerns about racial integration—a principle that the mayor cautiously supported. At the time, de jure Jim Crow was in retreat in St. Louis, as it was in much of the United States. A year before, St. Louis's public schools had integrated, and more and more formerly segregated public spaces were officially opening to blacks and whites on an equal basis. These changes were deeply unsettling to many white St. Louisans.

The woman who wrote to Mayor Tucker discussed with unusual bluntness what she coarsely termed the "nigger question." "If you could be out among them like we poor people," she told Tucker, "you would see at once why we don't want the low-down things coming up with our children." She recounted examples of when she claimed that she had personally witnessed black men and boys aggressively courting the attention of white women and girls at Fairgrounds Park and at the baseball stadium. She insinuated that if these men and boys failed to convince the objects of their desire to join them for a date, they might instead follow them home and attempt to assault them there. Here was the cliched specter of the black man as sexual predator of white women, conjured in the setting of desegregating St. Louis.

The woman's letter also suggested that she feared that integration could promote consensual interracial intimacy, especially among young people. "The whites know if they let their children grow up with niggers, they will learn to like them," she wrote. "Eventually many

will think, 'Well, I grew up to like him even if he is black, then why can't we marry.'" For this worried constituent of Mayor Tucker, marriage across racial lines would be an "awful tragedy."[1]

This letter, with its unpolished prose and unself-conscious racism, puts on stark display widespread and consequential attitudes. Throughout its modern history, racial segregation was a foundational characteristic of the St. Louis area's social landscape, and taboos and anxieties around interracial sexuality were foundational to segregation. This dissertation contends that racial divisions evolved in relation to the region's shifting sexual geography. Racial segregation was not simply a matter of where white and black St. Louisans respectively lived and gathered; it was also linked to ideas about family life, respectability, and the physical and moral wellbeing of women and children in particular. In the minds of many white St. Louisans, the preservation of the "home" depended on maintaining a psychic and spatial remove from blacks, who were widely believed to be naturally inclined toward violence, disease, uncleanliness, and immorality (all concepts with sexual associations). These attitudes contributed to conflicts over urban space and the rise of mass suburbanization. They also entangled white supremacy with normative heterosexuality.

This chapter focuses on how the co-constitutive nature of race and sexuality illuminates the rise and fall of Jim Crow in St. Louis. Here "Jim Crow" refers to the system of explicitly mandated racial segregation by government, business, and other institutions that emerged in the aftermath of the abolition of slavery and endured until the mid-twentieth century. St. Louis, a major city located in the border state of Missouri, exhibited a form of Jim Crow that mixed typically Southern and Northern features. St. Louis was also a nationally important setting for

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[1] Anonymous to Mayor Tucker, February 6, 1956, series 1, box 2, folder 6, Raymond R. Tucker Records, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.

struggles over racial segregation—perhaps most notably as the place of origin of the landmark *Shelley v. Kraemer* US Supreme Court case.[2]

Racial segregation in St. Louis originated in the context of slavery, but it took a new form during the Reconstruction era and after. In 1875, the new Missouri state constitution officially barred racially integrated public education, and interracial marriage was banned. (The locally powerful Roman Catholic Church followed suit, maintaining Jim Crow in its elementary schools, high schools, colleges, and universities.) Novel forms of Jim Crow segregation emerged in the context of rapid urban growth, large-scale black in-migration from the rural South, and the creation of new kinds of municipally operated public spaces. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the racial segregation of residential neighborhoods became enforced by restrictive covenants, and in 1916 St. Louis voters overwhelmingly approved a plan that effectively created legally mandated ghettoes for the city's black residents. In the meantime, municipal playgrounds and swimming pools—fruits of Progressive reforms meant to improve the quality of life in densely populated inner-city neighborhoods—were segregated by race according to official government policy. Moreover, while not required by law and sometimes inconsistent in implementation, many businesses practiced racial discrimination in service—refusing to serve black customers or restricting them to out-of-the-way corners of an establishment—and in

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[2] There is a voluminous literature on the rise and fall of Jim Crow nationally and in myriad local settings. On Jim Crow and civil rights activism in St. Louis and Missouri specifically, see Priscilla A. Dowden-White, *Groping toward Democracy: African American Social Welfare Reform in St. Louis, 1910-1949* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2011); Keona Ervin, *Gateway to Equality: Black Women and the Struggle for Economic Justice in St. Louis* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2017); Mary Kimbrough and Margaret W. Dagen, *Victory without Violence: The First Ten Years of the St. Louis Committee of Racial Equality (CORE), 1947-1957* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000); Clarence Lang, *Grassroots at the Gateway: Class Politics and Black Freedom Struggle in St. Louis, 1936-75* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009); George Lipsitz, *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

employment—either by refusing to hire blacks or relegating them to menial, poorly paid positions.[3]

Jim Crow in St. Louis was not as extensive as it was in much of the South. Public libraries and public transportation, for instance, were never formally segregated—an important point of contrast with cities such as Jackson, Mississippi, or Birmingham, Alabama, where the desegregation of these spaces was the focus of major civil rights struggles. In addition, black St. Louis enjoyed the franchise, and black community leaders exercised a modicum of influence in municipal and state politics thanks to their ability to deliver votes in competitive elections.[4] In the face of Jim Crow, black St. Louisans maintained a vibrant community life and a network of black-owned businesses and institutions. On the whole, however, Jim Crow in St. Louis effectively kept the region's Black inhabitants spatially contained, economically exploited, and marginalized in civic life.[5]

Jim Crow in St. Louis, as in the rest of the country, was not monolithic, static, or accepted without question. To the contrary, it was constantly being challenged, reworked, and debated, as black St. Louisans sought to expand their access to metropolitan space and economic opportunity, sometimes with the support of whites who were either opposed to Jim Crow on principle or who out of self-interest preferred that it take less obvious forms.[6] The referendum on the 1916 segregation ordinance was a subject of fierce debate, and after its passage it faced almost immediate legal challenge (and was thrown out thanks to the related 1917 US Supreme Court ruling in *Buchanan v. Warley*). During the interwar years of the 1920s and 1930s, Jim

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[3] On the contours of Jim Crow in St. Louis, see Joseph Heathcott, "Black Archipelago: Politics and Civic Life in the Jim Crow City," *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 3 (Spring 2005): 705-736.
[4] Lana Stein, *St. Louis Politics: The Triumph of Tradition* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2002), chapter 7.
[5] Heathcott, "Black Archipelago."
[6] On ongoing resistance to racial segregation, see Dowden-White, *Groping toward Democracy* and Lang, *Grassroots at the Gateway*.

Crow mostly escaped legal challenge locally and was grudgingly accepted by most black community leaders. In these years, Jim Crow was resisted in subtle ways, as black St. Louisans demanded that the promise of "separate but equal" be met and slowly pushed against the boundaries set by restrictive covenants. Then, in the two decades or so after the end of World War II, the edifice of de jure Jim Crow was torn apart piece by piece in St. Louis and nationwide. Civil rights activists, engaging in protest and civil disobedience, pushed for an end to discriminatory practices, and courts and legislatures at the local and federal level threw out explicitly segregationist laws and prohibited outright racial discrimination by business and government.

Racial segregation, especially in residence, outlasted the demise of de jure Jim Crow and persists even to the present day. The period of de jure segregation set patterns that would endure, even if its laws and policies were no longer technically in force. Moreover, the Jim Crow era is of special significant because it was a time when racial segregation had numerous frank, articulate, and influential public advocates. The merits of segregation were debated and rationales for the separation of the races were voiced. In later times, while segregation remained an obvious and defining feature of the St. Louis region's social landscape, few public figures defended it per se—in fact, most civic leaders bemoaned the persistence of segregation, even if they might do little in practice to undermine it (or even supported policies that effectively perpetuated it).[7]

This chapter will examine public controversies around Jim Crow in St. Louis at a few pivotal times in its history, when it was either being expanded or solidified, on the one hand, or

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[7] On the decline of overt racism in the context of persistent racial inequality, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 3rd ed.

challenged and dismantled, on the other. These were instances that would be of decisive

significance to metropolitan St. Louis's racial order.

The chapter argues that these debates makes clear the sexual underpinnings of racial

segregation. Fears of interracial sexuality on the part of whites were used to justify Jim Crow,

and it will explore the ways that white racial identity was tied up with normative heterosexuality.

It builds on an ongoing scholarly investigation of the sexual dimensions of racism and racial

segregation. I am inspired by a large theoretical and historical literature that demonstrates the co-

constitutive nature of race and sexuality. Throughout much of American history, this literature

finds, whites tended to associate blackness with sexual deviance and danger and maintained

taboos and sometimes outright legal prohibitions against sex and marriage across the color line.[8]

Sexuality also suffused subjectivities of anti-black prejudice, which, as Gunnar Myrdal argues,

subsumed "sexual urges, inhibitions, and jealousies."[9] In sum, the material and psychic

structures of "sexual racism" served as bulwark of white supremacy both before and after

emancipation and into the twentieth century.[10] In turn, African American struggles for freedom

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[8] Important works on the origins of sexual racism in the context of slavery include Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) and Joshua D. Rothman, *Notorious in the Neighborhood: Sex and Families across the Color Line in Virginia, 1787-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). On the evolution of sexual racism in the aftermath of emancipation and during the rise of Jim Crow, see, for example, Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008) and Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1999). On the taboos and legal prohibitions against interracial relationships and marriage, see Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Renee C. Romano, *Race Mixing: Black-White Marriage in Postwar America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). Works that highlight the sexual dimensions of resistance to desegregation include Eileen Boris, "'You Wouldn't Want One of 'Em Dancing with Your Wife': Racialized Bodies on the Job in World War II," *American Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (March 1998): 77-108; and Jane Dailey, "Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after *Brown*," *Journal of American History* (June 2004): 119-144.
[9] Quotation from Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and American Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1944), 59. For his landmark discussion of the "anti-amalgamation doctrine" and the sexual dimensions of anti-black racism, see Myrdal, 53-60.
[10] I owe this term to Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), *xvii*.

and equality have been in part directed against sexual racism, as evidenced by efforts to resist

sexual victimization and to assert black respectability in the face of stereotypes of sexual

immorality.[11] Meanwhile, the same logic that presumed the licentiousness of blacks often tied

white racial identity to expectations of sexual restraint and familial responsibility. [12]

B.   Advocating Jim Crow: The 1916 Segregation Ordinance Referendum

The 1916 referendum on the so-called Segregation Ordinance was a pivotal and

nationally significant moment in St. Louis's racial history. On February 29 of the leap year 1916,

the city's voters went to the polls to decide on a piece of municipal legislation that would bar any

black person from moving into a block of the city where two-thirds or more of the residents were

white, and vice versa. As many at the time recognized, it would effectively result in the creation

of a handful of legally mandate ghettoes—small sections of the city where blacks would be

required to live. When the votes were counted the next day, the proposal had been approved with

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[11] An important work that puts the struggle against sexual victimization at the center of the history of the postwar black freedom movement is Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010). On the "politics of respectability" in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century African-American history, see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), esp. chapter 7; Victoria M. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African-American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001),esp. chapters 1 and 2; and Cynthia M. Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), esp. chapter 6. Another current of the literature, however, explores how a rejection of the standards of respectability could be an expression of autonomy and the potential basis of resistance. See Robin D.G. Kelly, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Cathy J. Cohen, "Deviance as Resistance: A New Research Agenda for the Study of Black Politics," *Du Bois Review* 1, no. 1 (2004): 27-45; and Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability*, esp. chapter 3.
[12] On the relationship between white racial identity and the construction of sexual normality is Julian B. Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). On the relationship of race to the discursive and legal construction of homosexuality and of heterosexism, see, for example, Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Kevin J. Mumford, "Untangling Pathology: The Moynihan Report and Homosexual Damage, 1965-1975," *Journal of Policy History* 24, no. 1 (2012): 53-73; Siobhan B. Somerville, "Queer *Loving*," *GLQ* 11, no. 3 (2005): 335-370; and Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

74 percent of votes in favor. This decisive win for segregation is even more impressive given that black men, who appear to have been overwhelmingly opposed to the ordinance, could also vote.[13] St. Louis's white men overwhelmingly endorsed the principle of a racially segregated city.

St. Louis's 1916 ordinance was exceptional as the first and only time that legislation mandating residential racial segregation was passed by referendum in a major American city. However, the passage legislation of this sort was widespread in former slave states in the 1910s. The first such ordinance was passed by the city council of Baltimore in 1911. Similar legislation was passed in numerous other cities, including Winston-Salem, Richmond, and Louisville.[14] It must be understood in the context of heightened black urbanization. In St. Louis, the black population grew dramatically in both absolute and relative terms after 1900, jumping from 35,516 in 1900 to 69,854 in 1920—an increase of 197 percent. The new arrivals were typically poor migrants from the rural South in search of the economic and social opportunities offered by city life.[15]

In St. Louis, the debate over the segregation ordinance also coincided with urban growth reaching the city limits—the city was rapidly running out of undeveloped land. This was also the city's elites first becoming conscious of the appearance of "blight," decline, and "flight" from the older, socially heterogeneous eastern part of the city. The need to manage the city's social geography took on a new urgency.

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[13] Daniel T. Kelleher, "St. Louis' 1916 Residential Segregation Ordinance," *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* (April 1970): 239-248. James Neal Primm, *Lion of the Valley, St. Louis, Missouri, 1764-1980* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press), 410-414.

[14] Gretchen Boger, "The Meaning of Neighborhood in the Modern City: Baltimore's Residential Segregation Ordinance, 1910-1913," *Journal of Urban History* 35, no. 2 (January 2009): 236-258.

[15] Heathcott, "Black Archipelago"; Katharine T. Corbett and Mary E. Seematter. "No Crystal Stair: Black St. Louis, 1920-1940," *Gateway Heritage* 16, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 82-88.

By about 1910, neighborhood protective associations were already beginning to write race restrictive language into neighborhood covenants. Sites of conflict—where white residents were most concerned about black "invasion"—were mostly in the newer, more residentially focused, family-centered half of the city west of Grand Avenue. After the 1914, following the implementation of a new city charter that allowed municipal legislation to be passed by initiative referendum, about two dozen neighborhood associations, with the assistance of the St. Louis Real Estate Exchange, banded together under the banner of the United Welfare Association. Their goal was to fight for the passage of a residential segregation ordinance modeled on the one passed by the Baltimore city council a few years previously. Starting in July 1915, the organization began the publication of the *Home Defender* to advocate for the ordinance and to promote segregation. Its publishers aimed to reach every registered voter in the city. Reportedly, several neighborhood associations had subscribed their entire membership to the newsletter.[16]

St. Louis's ordinance would have long-lasting implications. Many individuals who were involved in the struggle over the 1916 ordinance would remain consequential figures locally and nationally for decades to come, including social workers and civic reform advocate Roger Nash Baldwin (who later went on to found the American Civil Liberties Union) and George L. Vaughn (in 1916, counsel for the local branch of the NAACP and, in the 1940s, attorney for the Shelleys in *Shelley v. Kraemer*). The influential city planner Harland Bartholomew began his thirty-five-year career in St. Louis in late 1915, just as debate over the ordinance was reaching fever pitch.[17] For a generation of St. Louisans, the referendum provided powerful evidence that the city's white inhabitants were overwhelmingly in favor of the spatial containment of the city's black

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[16] *Home Defender*, October 16, 1915.

[17] Eric Sandweiss, *St. Louis: Evolution of an Urban American Landscape* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 213.

residents. While the ordinance itself was invalidated by the US Supreme Court in the 1917 case

of *Buchanan v. Warley* (notably, a decision based on questions of property rights, not equal

protection or racial justice), it set the foundation for the segregationist order that reigned in

subsequent decades. Essentially, the ordinance gave residential segregation popular imprimatur.

The debate over the 1916 ordinance is also important because it was when the most

robust, sustained, and wide-ranging public debate about residential racial segregation occurred,

and when the strongest, fullest case was made for the separation of the races. The issue was

discussed in the city's newspapers, the *Home Defender*, and pamphlets produced by both sides. It

was a subject of heated conversation at churches and union halls, saloons and street corners.

"The separation of the races will soon be the most talked of matter in St. Louis," the *Home*

Defender declared in August 1915. The prediction seems to have been proven correct. By late

February 1916, one letter writer to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* complained, "Oh, let us let up on

this segregation matter! Every man, woman, and child now knows all about it."[18] These give us

the best picture we have of the intellectual and sentimental basis for residential segregation—the

structures of thought that sustained it and the ways its advocates believed that segregation might

be an answer to the problems that they faced in their lives.

What comes through clearly via an analysis of the rhetoric in the debate is the centrality

of questions of sexuality. The specter of interracial sexuality and the paranoia about black men's

potential sexual victimization of white women suffused the debate. Moreover, advocates of the

ordinance focused on the argument that the ordinance would preserve the security of the

"home"—the seat of the white family—and the neighborhoods where they were located in the

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[18] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 23, 1916.

face of the danger, uncleanliness, and immorality which many believed inevitably accompanied black residents.

Other scholars who have studied St. Louis's 1916 ordinance and similar legislation elsewhere have emphasized a financial rationale for the legislation. They suggest that the main motivation was a dollars-and-cents concern for property value on the part of white homeowners and realtors. One local historian asserts that the segregationists' "basic appeal … was economic."[19] Financial concerns do appear prominently in segregationist literature and were certainly of vital concern to many white St. Louisans. The *Home Defender* frequently reported instances of the "enormous depreciation of home values" suffered by white homeowners who found themselves in racially transitioning neighborhoods, and similar stories were shared by letter writers to the *Post-Dispatch* and other local newspapers. However, this should not be understood to negate the importance of sexuality. For one, it only pushes the explanation back a step—*why* should property values fall? Addressing a mass meeting at St. Alphonsus Church, segregation advocate Chilton Atkinson offered a simple explanation: "For several years [the United Welfare Association] has been working on the alarming problem of property depreciation in residence neighborhoods in this city. A large factor in that problem was found to be the unwillingness of white persons to continue their residence in districts where colored persons had taken up their dwelling place, whether it should be one or many."[20] The reason that property values were assumed to fall in the wake of "Negro invasion" of a white neighborhood was the presumption that white St. Louisans powerfully objected to living near blacks.

Furthermore, the home as an economic asset and investment was imbedded in dominant perceptions of respectability, familial cohesion and stability, and the role of the male household

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[19] Kelleher, "St. Louis's 1916 Residential Segregation Ordinance," 240.
[20] Segregation Scrapbook, 9, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

head as provider and protector for his wife and dependent children. The very name that the United Welfare Associated selected for their publication—the *Home Defender*—reflect how central the idea of home and, by extension, the nuclear family was to their argument for segregation. As the editors of the publication said, they selected "a name symbolical of its mission." The publication's inaugural issue announced on the front page, "The campaign by home owners of St. Louis to pass laws separating negroes and whites … IS a campaign IN DEFENSE OF THE HOME, in defense of man's most necessary, most highly appreciated and most sacred inanimate possession—his home."[21]

Even besides, however, many of the arguments put forth in favor of the proposed segregation ordinance were not directly related to economic questions—instead they drew on more visceral negative attitudes about blacks, typically tied to revulsion at the possibility of interracial sexuality and fears about the supposed licentiousness and sexual aggressiveness of black men. These ideas were closely related to ideas about childhood innocence and the desire for home and neighborhood to be safe spaces for white children.

Discussion of the specter of interracial sexuality was a widespread feature in the *Home Defender*. Some assertions were subtle and seemed to have likely been based on everyday examples from St. Louis. Others were sensationalistic and paranoid. One issue of the *Home Defender*, for instance, included an over-the-top history of the Haitian Revolution, depicting the black rebels against French rule as bloodthirsty, sex-crazed monsters, characterized by animalistic savagery. "Whites upon scattered plantations were ruthlessly murdered," the *Home Defender* reported, "The most horrible atrocities were perpetrated upon white women and children. … [The negroes'] standard was the body of a white child impaled on a spear."[22] Rather

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[21] *Home Defender,* July 3, 1915.
[22] *Home Defender*, September 4, 1915.

than a dry, detached discussion about the price of homes, here was an argument in favor of

segregation that centered on a belief in blacks' essential depravity. The implication was that

blacks possessed violent tendencies that might erupt forth if blacks were not carefully contained.

Visions of revolutionary Haiti aside, contributors to the *Home Defender* typically focused

on everyday life in St. Louis. Advocates of segregation expressed fear that whites living near to

blacks would inevitably lead to undesirable interracial socializing. "There have been thousands

of parlors and dining rooms in St. Louis that have been entered by neighbors unbidden. …

Thousands of unwelcome visitors are permitted and tolerated because the mistress of the house is

possessed by too much delicacy to refuse them admittance. No rational person can truthfully say

that juxtaposition of homes of white and colored people will not induce commingling in home

life."[23] This socializing across the color line, the *Home Defender* warned, would have many

nefarious consequences.

A recurring theme in the arguments of proponents of segregation was that permitting

racially integrated neighborhoods would lead naturally to interracial marriage and interracial sex,

even arguing that intermarriage with whites was the conscious aim of blacks who moved into

white neighborhoods. For example, one page of the *Home Defender* featured a montage of

newspaper clippings to illustrate possible negative consequences of "negro invasion." It included

nods at interracial marriage and the Jack Johnson case.[24] The *Home Defender* also published a

letter signed by "A Victim of Negro Invasion," which purported to be a true, first-person account

of the former resident of a "west end street" that in a matter of months had transitioned from

being almost entirely white to almost entirely black. The correspondent reported that since

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[23] *Home Defender*, October 16, 1915.
[24] On the celebrity of Jack Johnson and contemporary attitudes against miscegenation see Mumford, *Interzones*, 3-16 and Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 163-204.

blacks' "voices are naturally loud," during the hot summer months, when windows were left open, "it was no trouble" to hear his black neighbors speaking among themselves, supposedly revealing their true intentions. "To begin with what a negro means by 'equal rights only,' but in addition to this, they want residence and social rights, even going as far as INTERMARRIAGE WITH THE WHITE RACE."[25] There was also the implication that the threat of miscegenation might be an issue that could unite all whites, even the more affluent whose expensive neighborhoods seemed less likely to undergo neighborhood racial transition in the near future. This was an attractive approach advocates of segregation to take as wealthier white St. Louisans tended to be more reluctant to back legally mandated residential racial segregation. "A Victim" wrote, "When some of the 'city fathers' get weak kneed, ask them how they would like (at some point in the distant future, if the negro is no curbed) to have a negro demand, as the price of a city office, the hand of the white office seekers' daughter as the price of the votes the negro can control." Wayne Wheeling, secretary of the United Welfare Association and the St. Louis Real Estate Exchange, discussed the topic of intermarriage in depth in an essay he penned for the *Home Defender.* Attempting to refute the charge that the proposed ordinance would create an un-American system of social "castes," Wheeling argued, "Is it not a fact that social equality between race would eventually result in promiscuous intermarriage between the races …? Such things are now prohibited by legislative enactment in Missouri and in other states. Do those who say that we are breeding a caste system in this country advocated the repeal of our laws against intermarriage between the races?"[26]

One letter published in the *Home Defender*, possibly fabricated, is suggestive of the simmering anxiety over interracial sexuality that was very much part of the conversation around

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[25] *Home Defender.* September 4, 1915. Capitalization in the original.
[26] *Home Defender*, October 2, 1915.

segregation. Apparently written by a black woman—or someone posing as a black woman—it seemed to suggest that St. Louis was in the grips of an epidemic of interracial lust. "Instead of spending so much time trying to keep the negroes and whites from living in the same neighborhood, you would do a great deal more good if you would try to keep your sons and daughters out of the bed with negroes," it declared. "Your women are insane over negro men. … We can't keep a husband for them. You can find them around negro rooming house and garages and every place where there is a negro man, and they can slip in without being seen."[27] This letter spoke to anxieties among white male readers that their wives and daughters might not only be the unwilling victims of sexual assault by black men, but also willing participants in interracial liaisons right under their noses. This further supported a desire to segregated blacks and to keep white women and children at a remove from blacks.

Another vein of argument in favor of segregation that was the insistence that blacks were undisciplined, dirty, and immoral—habits all tied to sexuality. The correspondent "A Victim" reported what he claimed was his first-hand experience with living near black neighbors (whom in the same letter he referred to as "wenches" and "bucks"): "The negro has moved into the West End, but he has not adopted the west end manners or methods of living, but has brought the slum way of living with him," he wrote in a letter prominently published in the *Home Defender*. "He (or rather they, women as well as men) are careless of clothing, they are noisy, destructive, improvident, lacking in modesty, and indifferent to sanitary rules. … Although they have moved among the whites they continue to live like 'niggers,' nor do they care to change." Advocates of segregation argued that the presence of blacks would detract from a neighborhood's respectability and degrade the quality of life there.

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[27] *Home Defender*, September 18, 1915.

It is important to recall that the examples discussed above were not opinions expressed by a fringe element, but in the professionally produced publication of the principal organization advocating for the ordinance. Dozens of St. Louis's neighborhood associations and the Real Estate Exchange itself were willing to associate themselves with this publication, as was Wayne Wheeling, the secretary of the Real Estate Exchange, who worked from the organization's downtown office in the prestigious Wainwright Building. These opinions published in the *Home Defender* were essentially respectable sentiments, expressed openly on a widely distributed publication, and they were presumably designed to move the average St. Louis voter. These arguments were apparently persuasive, given the great success of the referendum. The need to segregate the races in the interest of protecting the "home" and maintaining sexual order was the common sense of a substantial majority of white male St. Louisans at this crucial point in the city's history.

C.   **"A Decent Home to Rear the Children": The *Shelley* Case**

In the wake of the US Supreme Court ruling in *Buchanan* in 1917, the residential segregation ordinance passed by referendum in St. Louis was invalidated. But a system of strict residential racial segregation, which almost entirely prevented blacks from renting or buying housing outside a few ghettoes, remained in force and effectively achieved what the advocates of the ordinance had intended. Instead of explicit, citywide legislation, this system of residential racial segregation was operated largely through two complementary methods: 1) race restrictive covenants and 2) the policies and practices of the Real Estate Exchange, the trade organization of St. Louis's white relators.[28]

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[28] Colin Gordon, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), chapter 2.

Restrictive covenants first emerged in St. Louis in the late nineteenth century and were designed to protect neighborhoods from a range of undesirable aspects of urban life—so-called "nuisances."[29] Among these where slaughterhouse and other sorts of noisy or malodorous industrial facilities, the construction of homes to be offered for sale below a certain price, or—most crucially—rental or sale to blacks and sometimes members of other ethno-racial groups. Restrictive covenants became increasingly common in the early 1910s, at the same time segregationists were lobbying for a residential segregation ordinance, and especially in the aftermath of the *Buchanan* when they seemed like the best legal solution against neighborhood racial transition. By the start of World War II, large swaths of the city of St. Louis were covered by race restrictive covenants. These were located primarily in newer, relatively affluent residential neighborhoods in the southwest of the city and in a large "quadrangle" on the northside surrounding the Ville, a black enclave in the northwest of the city. Restrictive covenants legally prohibited black occupancy in the covered area, with violators facing the possibility of being evicted by court order. Restrictive covenants were not always entirely effective—coverage of some blocks could be spotty, and they only had force if parties to the covenant took note of its violation and chose to pursue legal action. At the same time, however, St. Louis's Real Estate Exchange also explicitly barred its members from selling or renting to blacks outside a specified "unrestricted area." Realtors who broke this rule face censure and revocation of their license.[30]

Restrictive covenants and the policies of the Real Estate Exchange together largely prevented the expansion of the areas open to black residency for nearly three decades after 1916.

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[29] For a national perspective on the history of restrictive covenants, racial and otherwise, see Robert M. Fogelson, *Bourgeois Nightmares: Suburbia, 1870-1930* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2005).
[30] Gordon, *Mapping Decline*, 83-84.

At the same time, however, St. Louis black population continued to grow—not just due to natural increase, but also because of continued in-migration from the rural South. This growth spiked especially during World War II, which saw a large-scale influx of blacks coming to work in war industries. By 1950, 153,766 blacks lived in St. Louis, accounting for 17.9 percent of the city's population. At the same time, the area open to black residence barely increased from the 1910s to the late 1940s. This led to inflated housing prices in black neighborhoods, overcrowding, and overextended schools and other public services. This exacerbated many of the very conditions that led Harland Bartholomew, Stuart Queen, Aloys Kaufman and others to declare these areas to be "blighted districts" or "slums."[31]

The *Shelley* case emerged in this context of overcrowded ghettoes and intractable residential racial segregation. A few black families in St. Louis had attempted to move into restricted properties before them, sometimes successfully and sometimes not. The Shelleys' move was of enormous consequence, however, as it sparked a legal battle that ended in the US Supreme Court and was responsible for a decisive ruling against the validity of racially restrictive covenants.[32]

At least as they were represented in court and in the press, the Shelleys were an ideal couple to serve as the face of a challenge to restrictive covenants. They had been married for nearly two decades and were raising four children when they purchased the house on Labadie Avenue. J.D. Shelley was a modest, responsible blue-collar worker. Ethel, a custodian at a factory, was devoutly religious and active in her church, was known to keep a meticulously clean

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[31] Gordon, *Mapping Decline.* Historians have uncovered similar processes at work in other American cities of this era. See, for example, Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, 2nd ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

[32] The classic legal history of *Shelley* is Clement E. Vose, *Caucasians Only: The Supreme Court, the NAACP, and the Restrictive Covenant Cases* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959). See also Jaime Graham, *Shelley vs. Kraemer: A Celebration, May 1988* (St. Louis: St. Louis Chapter, Girl Friends Inc., 1988).

home, and disapproved of dancing and alcohol. Photographs of the Shelleys published in local newspapers show a neatly dressed, carefully groomed black family. The Shelleys themselves seemed somewhat uncomfortable with the attention that the case brought them, and they had no prior reputation for political activism. Ethel herself told the *Post-Dispatch*, "For the land's sake, if I'd known all the court fight that was coming, we'd have run like rabbits."[33] The Shelleys thus implicitly countered the stereotypes of black immorality, listlessness, and familial dysfunction— instead, they exuded respectability. Their opponents in court voiced no objections to the Shelleys besides their race in and of itself.

The Shelleys, who had migrated to St. Louis from Mississippi in 1930, had previously lived near 9th Street and Biddle Street, in a "slum" area just north of the downtown business district. They cemented their decision to leave after Leatha, one of their daughters, "narrowly escaped criminal attack while returning from school." The home they chose to purchase was located at 4600 Labadie Avenue, a modest two-story duplex on a residential street just outside of the Ville, about three miles northwest of their former neighborhood. Ethel Shelley later testified that they had seen a black child playing on the block, leading them to believe that they would be allowed to move there without trouble.

The Shelleys, however, did almost immediately face trouble after moving to their new home in September 1945, days after the Japanese surrender and the formal end of the Second World War. The property was in fact covered by a restrictive covenant, and the entire area was monitored by the Marcus Avenue Improvement Association, a group of white homeowners. Restrictive covenants had not been entirely effective in keeping the vicinity all-white, and some blacks had lived on the same block for at least fifteen years before the Shelleys arrived. In this

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[33] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 4, 1948.

case, however, the Marcus Avenue Improvement Association took action. The association was then led by Emil Koob, a Catholic German-American who owned a small local chain of bakeries and resided in a house just blocks away from the Shelleys.[34] Founded in the 1910s, the association had become active again in the late 1930s following a years-long hiatus. Its members were not exclusively concerned with preserving the racial character of the neighborhood. For example, in 1941 they successfully lobbied the city to fill in a dangerous open quarry pit in the area where two boys had drowned. But their primary concern was keeping neighborhood's character as white and preventing black residential expansion westward from the Ville. In 1944, they fought to prevent the neighborhood Cote Brillante elementary schools from being converted from white to black—a transition proposed by the St. Louis School Board because of the rapidly increasing number of black children in the Ville and nearby. When leaders of the association caught wind of the Shelleys' move into the neighborhood, they chose to sue to enforce the covenant. They turned to Fern Kraemer—a woman who lived on the block and whose parents had been original signatories to the covenant—to serve as plaintiff. Kraemer was not deeply personally invested in the case, however, and would later express regret for having participated.[35]

Local civil rights advocates saw the case as an exceptional opportunity to challenge restrictive covenants and to strike a blow against Jim Crow housing. George L. Vaughn took charge of representing the Shelleys. Vaughn was a talented attorney and had been involved in St. Louis politics for decades, having been the counsel of the local chapter of the NAACP during the controversy over the 1916 Segregation Ordinance. Vaughn's involvement evidences important continuities between the 1910s and 1940s. Many men and women who had been involved in the

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[34] Koob obituary, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 24, 1981.
[35] Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 102-113. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, December 28, 1944.

1916 debate were still involved in public life in the era of the Shelley decision. For example, Martin C. Seegers, president of the Marcus Avenue Improvement Association until 1942 and Emil Koob's immediate predecessor in the position, was already in his fifties in 1916.[36]

It is noteworthy that Vaughn did not only argue against restrictive covenants purely in terms of law or Constitutional rights. He also made a sociological argument, much as attorneys in other successful civil rights cases, such as *Brown v. Board of Education*. Vaughn contended that restrictive covenants led to racial segregation and overcrowding in black neighborhoods, and further argued that this overcrowding produced "immorality," crime, and juvenile delinquency. (In this discourse, of course, immorality often implied *sexual* immorality, especially prostitution.) Vaughn thus essentially accepted the logic of Harland Bartholomew and other analysts of St. Louis's "slums," who argued that densely populated neighborhoods naturally generated social pathologies. However, rather than connecting black residence to slum conditions per se, Vaughn suggested that the black families were victims of slum conditions and that the slums themselves were products of segregation. Thus, he argued that residential desegregation was a cure for slums and associated social pathologies. Similarly, the Shelleys themselves framed their desire to move into the house on Labadie Avenue in terms of their values as respectable parents. "All we wanted was a decent place to rear the children," Ethel Shelley told a *Post-Dispatch* reporter in the wake of the decision.[37] Essentially, Vaughn and his clients endeavored to decouple normative heterosexuality from whiteness.

Kramer's attorneys, led by Gerald Seegers (nephew of Martin Seegers, former president of the Marcus Avenue Improvement Association), narrowly argued that restrictive covenants had been established as constitutional and that court's enforcement of them were a straightforward

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[36] Martin C. Seegers died in 1949 at the age of 84. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 20, 1949.
[37] Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 115. St*. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 5, 1948.

matter. St. Louis Circuit Judge William K. Koerner ruled for the Shelleys—although on the narrow grounds that the covenant was invalid because it had already failed in its intended purpose of maintaining the racial homogeneity of the surrounding neighborhood. However, there is evidence to suggests that Koerner was also moved by Vaughn's sociological argument and broader civil rights concerns.[38]

For the Marcus Avenue Improvement Association, white St. Louis relators, and other advocates of segregation, Judge Koerner's ruling set off a crisis. They believed that it endangered other restrictive covenants and undermined the legal foundation of residential racial segregation in St. Louis, perhaps opening the floodgates of black residential expansion throughout much of North St. Louis and beyond. In September 1946, they formed the Council for Community Preservation. The organization's very name was suggestive of the gravity with which they approached the matter. For them, the possibility of blacks moving into their neighborhoods threatened the integrity of their communities. The group first met in the Fairgrounds Hotel, facing Fairgrounds Park (less than a year later, the site of the Fairgrounds Park race riot). A notice published in the *Post-Dispatch* urged "all organizations and citizens interested in community welfare … to attend this meeting. Speakers will discuss matters of vital concern[,] particularly the restrictive convents or agreements which are widely used in North, West, and South St. Louis neighborhoods."[39] About one-hundred people representing ten different neighborhood associations attended the inaugural meeting. They elected Emil Koob as president, and they began efforts to coordinate and finance the legal efforts to overturn Judge Koerner's ruling and to remove from office judges who did not uphold race restrictive

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[38] Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 116..

[39] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 4, 1946.

covenants.[40] Meanwhile, St. Louis's black community organized in defense of the ruling, raising funds for Vaughn's legal team and holding mass meetings of their own. The Shelley case thus became a major civic concern and dramatized the larger issue of residential racial segregation.[41]

The case was appealed to the Missouri Supreme Court, which in December 1946 sided with Kraemer's attorneys. The decision again revolved around the question of whether the agreement was invalid because it had not succeeded in entirely preventing black encroachment in the area, although the court in this case took the opposite view of the St. Louis judge. Moreover, citing precedent, Judge James Douglas denied claims that the enforcement of restrictive convents violated rights protected by the constitutions of Missouri and the United States, and he dismissed Vaughn's sociological arguments as irrelevant to questions of law.[42]

The case then went on to the US Supreme Court, where it was tied to similar cases originating in Detroit and Washington, DC. Vaughn, working with the NAACP and supported by the American Civil Liberties Union and other civil rights organizations, led the Shelleys' legal team. The court ruled in favor of the Shelleys and the other plaintiffs and, following Vaughn, held that government enforcement of race restrictive covenants violated the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution.[43]

Many nationwide hailed the US Supreme Court decision in *Shelley* as a major civil rights victory. The black *Pittsburgh Courier* announced that the Supreme Court's message to African Americans was "Live Anywhere You Can Buy."[44] The *Post-Dispatch* reported that it affected 416 blocks in St. Louis and that it was "potentially as far-reaching as the Dred Scott decision."[45]

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[40] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 6, 1946, October 24, 1946.
[41] Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 119-121.
[42] Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 117-119.
[43] Vose, *Caucasians Only*, 205-210.
[44] Vose, *Caucasians only*, 212.
[45] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 4, 1948.

The *Shelley* decision was indeed a landmark in the struggle over the racial segregation in housing. However, Jim Crow extended far beyond housing, and the civil rights struggle included contests over a wide variety of other public spaces. Battles to integrate these also reveal interconnections between race, sexuality, and the organization of urban space.

D.   The Fairgrounds Park Race Riot and the Desegregation of Public Recreation

At the start of the 1940s, Jim Crow extended into many sites of public recreation in St. Louis—most notably, the city's municipally operated swimming pools and playgrounds. These sites were significant because they were favored places of leisure for the city's children and young people and important settings of casual socializing. During the oppressive heat of the St. Louis summer, white children and teenagers—and not a few adults—gathered by the hundreds and thousands at Fairgrounds Park and other public swimming pools. In this era, however, black St. Louisans were barred from entry and instead had to swim in a few segregated indoor pools of inferior size and amenities. In the late 1940s and 1950s, agitation by civil rights advocates and ordinary black St. Louisans, plus the intervention of the federal judiciary, led the formal desegregation of these spaces. Efforts to integrate these spaces, however, met with stiff resistance from many white St. Louisans—most significantly, sparking the 1949 Fairgrounds Park Riot, the most serious outbreak of racial violence in the region since the East St. Louis pogrom of 1917. Moreover, while by law and official policy St. Louis's municipally operated leisure space were entirely desegregated by the mid-1950s, they remained effectively segregated in the wake of white flight.[46]

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[46] I draw heavily on Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Though national in scope, Wiltse devotes significant attention to St. Louis and recognizes controversies over the Fairgrounds Park pool as an especially telling examples of the interplay of race and sexuality in the history of public recreation. For a broader discussion of racial segregation and

The history of segregation and desegregation in St. Louis's swimming pools and other sites of public recreation offers a revealing look at the interplay of race and sexuality and their relationship to the organization of metropolitan space. Pools of course were potentially sexually charged spaces, with partly undressed men and women frolicking together in the water. Therefore, anxieties over interracial sexuality were especially pronounced when it came to the integration of these spaces. They were also significant as shared community spaces, and ones especially popular with children and young people. Friends and strangers alike from both neighborhoods surrounding the pool and farther afield gathered together in often intimate proximity to relax, play, and socialize. Changes over what sorts of people were and were not allowed in the pool, therefore, had powerful implications for understandings of community belonging, safety, and ownership over urban spaces.

Municipally operated bathing facilities first appeared in St. Louis in 1907, during the era of Progressive civic reform. Initially, these took the form of public bathhouses, and they were intended as to promote hygiene and healthfulness among working-class and poor St. Louisans. Of great significance, these earliest bathhouses were *not* segregated by race, but rather by sex, with men and women using separate changing rooms, showers, and other facilities and even sometimes using different entrances.[47]

The opening of the Fairgrounds Park pool in the summer of 1913 was a pivotal development in the history of public recreation, not only in St. Louis but nationwide. St. Louis, unlike many of America's other great cities, lacked a nearby body of water that lent itself to recreation. (The Mississippi River was too dirty and dangerous for all but the strongest and

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desegregation in American public recreation, see Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).
[47] Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 78-79.

bravest swimmers.) St. Louis's long, hot, humid summers could also make many inhabitants miserable, leading most of the city's more affluent residents to leave town for long stretches of the summer to vacation in Wisconsin, New England, or other cooler, waterside destinations. The Fairgrounds Park pool was designed to bring the sea to St. Louis. It was an enormous, circular basin—a poor design for swimming laps for exercise, but ideally suited for wading and play. A sandy "beach" was even constructed along the perimeter of the pool, and there was sloping, "zero-depth entry," allowing visitors to wade into the water. Unlike earlier municipal pools, which were ostensibly intended to promote exercise and health, civic leaders were upfront about the Fairgrounds Park pool's primary purposes—leisure for the masses. It was the first municipal pool of its kind in the United States and a salient example of how St. Louis's elites in this era of urban apogee were willing to invest in the construction of lavish public spaces.[48]

Along with this innovative approach to public recreation, the Fairgrounds Park pool also sharply diverged with earlier rules regarding admission. For the first time, the pool was not segregated according to sex—girls and boys, men and women, were allowed to enter the pool at the same time and to intermingle mostly as they pleased. This was an example of the rise of gender-integrated leisure spaces throughout much of the United States in this era.[49] It also reflected that the pool was intended to serve as a sort of substitute for beaches, which usually had been gender integrated even in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the Fairgrounds Park pool also attracted a wider range of St. Louis's socioeconomic spectrum that the city's bathhouses. The bathhouses had been primarily intended to meet the needs of poor and working people whose owned residences lacked adequate bathing facilities, and they were located in the midst of

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[48] Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 79-81.
[49] Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn of the Century New York*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.

slum neighborhoods in the eastern part of the city. St. Louis's middle and upper classes generally had no need or desire to visit them. The Fairgrounds Park pool, however, was a unique leisure destination that offered amenities otherwise unavailable to all but the very wealthiest St. Louisans. Moreover, it was located in the midst of a large public park—setting it apart somewhat form the surrounding neighborhood—and it was located at a fair distance from the "slums" near downtown. As St. Louis Mayor Henry Kiel observed, it was intended "for rich and poor alike."[50]

Along with gender and class integration, however, came racial segregation. While black and white men and black and white women, respectively, had been allowed to mix in bathhouses, blacks were barred categorically from the Fairgrounds Park pool. As historian Jeff Wiltse argues, "It was precisely because city officials viewed the pool as a sexually charged public space that they excluded black Americans…. The thought of black men interacting with white women at a municipal pool—where erotic voyeurism, physical contact, and making a date were all possible—heightened [fears about interracial sexuality] and compelled city officials to officially exclude black swimmers."[51] Gender integration was itself a source of controversy, with many complaining about the possibility for immorality. Strict rules were set in place regarding modest swim wear, and lifeguards were instructed to eject any couples who engaged in "petting" or otherwise acted in an untoward manner. Officials charged with supervising the pool recognized the erotic undercurrents of mixed-gender swimming, and they saw the possibility of interracial sexuality at the pool as unacceptable. The connection between gender integration and heightened racial segregation in urban public space, brought about in large part over fears of interracial

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[50] Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 81-82.
[51] Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 85-86.

sexuality, was widespread phenomenon in the United States in this period, as scholars such as

Kevin Mumford have argued.[52]

Racial segregation remained the rule in Fairgrounds Park and other municipal swimming

pools for the next twenty-five or so years. Black St. Louisans occasionally challenged the ban,

sometimes attempting to join the admission line and to enter the pool. However, they were

always denied. For the most part, however, pools remained gender integrated. Occasionally,

certain days or times of the day were limited to men or to women. But, by and large, males and

females of the same race were permitted to swim together. At the same time, St. Louis's public

playgrounds were also racially segregated—largely preventing black and white children from

playing together and fostering a connection between family, home, neighborhood and racial

segregation.

The city abruptly reversed course on the question of racial segregation at Fairgrounds

Park pool in the summer of 1949. There had been an uptick in black St. Louisans efforts to

access this and other municipal swimming pools. This was of a piece with a climate of more

assertive civil rights activism, stemming in part from the fallout of World War II. This

development was also related to the dramatic increase of black residents in the city of St. Louis

in this period, brought about in large part by the influx of war workers. This led to overcrowding

at already insufficient Jim Crow public facilities. Black residential areas had also been expanding

in the area near Fairgrounds Park. Finally, recent civil rights victories—such as the *Shelley*

decision and the integration of parochial schools—raised expectations of what was possible.

In spring of 1949, Joseph Darst was elected mayor. A Democrat, he ended eight years of

Republic administration under mayors William Becker and Aloys Kaufmann, initiating a major

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[52] Mumford, *Interzones*.

turnover at the highest levels of city government. He appointed his own campaign manager, John J. O'Toole, to serve as head of the Department of Public Welfare, which supervised public recreation. Pressed by officials who asked him how to respond to black demands for the integration of municipal swimming pools and playgrounds, O'Toole made the decision—apparently without consulting the mayor—to abandon the policy of segregation starting that summer. Reporters for local papers heard news of the decision, and on June 21, the day the pools were to open, the *Globe-Democrat* announced in a frontpage banner headline that "Pools and Playgrounds opened to Both Race."[53]

That afternoon, about thirty black boys and about two-hundred white patrons, almost all male, swam at Fairgrounds pool. At the same time, a crowd of hundreds of white youths—some armed with bats, knives, and other weapons—began to gather outside the pool and shout threats. Police were called the escort out the black swimmers, who were required to walk through what amounted to a "gauntlet." Some of the black boys were struck as they left. So began hours of rioting, eventually involving what were estimated to be thousands of people, mostly white teenagers and young men. Lasting late into the night, rioters chased after and assaulted blacks who were in the park and nearby neighborhoods. In the end, twelve people—ten black and two white—were hospitalized for injuries as severe as stab wounds and broken bones. Police, who had not been notified in advance of the desegregation order, were criticized for responding inadequately to the riot and focusing excessively on blacks who fought back instead of the white rioters who initiated the violence. Only eight arrests were made through the course of the riot—

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[53] Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 166-169; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, June 23, 1949.

and five of the detained people were black.[54] It was the most dramatic incident of racial violence to take place in the St. Louis region since the 1917 East St. Louis pogrom.

In the aftermath of the riot, Mayor Darst ordered St. Louis's municipal swimming pools closed to all for the remainder of the summer and convened a Human Relations Council to study the issue. In the face of negative press coverage nationwide, many civic leaders argued that the rioters were either hoodlums or part of a fringe element—perhaps associated with political extremism—and out of step with prevailing opinion in the city. The editors of the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, however, contended otherwise: "The violences [*sic*] at Fairgrounds Park were precipitated by whites. That they were rash and thoughtless youths … does not mean that within the city generally cannot be found numbers of more sober whites who seriously object to indiscriminate bathing by whites and Negroes."[55]

As the summer of 1950 approached, Darst—with the support a slim majority of the membership of the Human Relations Committee—chose to keep the pools segregated into the indefinite future, claiming that they feared further outbreaks of violence. In response to the mayor's decision to maintain Jim Crow in public recreation, the St. Louis chapter of the NAACP filed suit in federal court. After hearing arguments from lawyers representing the NAACP and the city of St. Louis, Judge Rubey Hulen of the US Circuit Court ruled in favor of integration. His ruling, praised by Thurgood Marshall, was a cutting-edge takedown of the principle of "separate but equal" and a harbinger for other upcoming legal victories against Jim Crow.[56]

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[54] Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 169-174; George Schermer, *The Fairgrounds Park Incident: A Study of the Factors which Resulted in the Outbreak of Violence as the Fairgrounds Park Swimming Pool on June 21, 1949, an Account of What Happened, and Recommendations for Corrective Action* (St. Louis: St. Louis Council on Human Relations, 1949).

[55] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, June 23, 1949, quoted in Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 175.

[56] Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 176-179.

Mayor Darst's response to the ruling was telling. He chose to accept the judge's decision and to racially integrate the pool—but, at the same time, he also ordered that gender segregation be imposed. If the federal government insisted that blacks and whites be allowed to swim together, Mayor Darst concluded that the best strategy for maintaining peace was to keep men and women apart. As Wiltse argues, "Darst no doubt sensed that most whites still harbored the same sex-based prejudices that led the city to racially segregated the pools in the first place."[57]

Darst's approach mostly managed to prevent further violence at the pools—but it also led whites to largely abandon public pools in the city. Dramatically fewer people came to the Fairgrounds Park and other municipal swimming pools. Some 313,000 entries took place at Fairgrounds Pool in 1948, the last year of racially segregated swimming. In 1950, there were only 60,000, and in 1951, a mere 10,000. This trend continued in subsequent years. A 1954 annual report of the parks and recreation division concluded, "It appears likely that the failure of the large outdoor pools to draw the huge numbers of swimmers that were attracted in the past may be a reflection of passive resistance to inter-racial swimming."[58] The desegregation of public recreation in St. Louis accelerated white flight, especially among those residents of the city with children and who most feared the possibility of interracial sexuality. The city and its public spaces were more and more inhospitable to whites who insisted on raising their children at a distance from blacks, encouraging a flight to the still predominantly segregated suburbs. That this preoccupied many who fled from the city is suggested in a 1964 story in the *Globe-Democrat*. It reported that many suburban St. Louis County swimming pools had recently converted from being public or semi-public to being membership-only clubs. This allowed them to screen applicants and to charge large annual membership fees. Some of the pool operators

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[57] Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 179.
[58] Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 180.

were upfront about the fact that fears of being legally required to integrate had prompted the decision. "Dangerous situations can develop, due to the intimate association of swimmers," said Carl Brooks, operators of the Sunset Hills Swimming Pool. "We have no gripe against Negroes, but how are we to handle it? We're in business, trying to make a living. It could kill us."[59]

E. "Training Grounds for Intermarriage": Desegregating Education

1. Background

One of the most dramatic and consequential facets of desegregation in St. Louis was the integration of education. In a span of hardly more than a decade—from 1944 to 1956—a dramatic transformation took place. In 1944, Jim Crow was that rule at St. Louis schools. Virtually without exception, every educational institution at every level was segregated—public, Catholic, Lutheran and nonsectarian elementary schools, high schools, colleges, and universities. This pattern of segregation, for the most part, had been in place throughout the city's history, although it was of greater importance by the mid-twentieth century than before as secondary education became the rule. Public education was segregated by law; private schools were segregated sometimes by official policy, sometimes informally. By the autumn of 1956, however, all these educational institutions officially no longer discriminated on the basis of race.

Schools desegregation in St. Louis was by and large imposed from beyond the city's borders. For many years, some civil rights advocates, both black and white, had pushed for integrated education in St. Louis. These dissidents, however, met with little success until the mid-1940s, and they were vastly outnumbered by white St. Louisans who took for granted the rightness of segregated schools. The integration of public education would only come to pass

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[59] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 11, 1964.

because of the actions of the federal government, most especially in the *Brown* ruling. Catholic schools were only integrated because of the actions of Archbishop Joseph Ritter—a man who had no ties to St. Louis before he was appointed head of the diocese and who ultimately answered to the Vatican, not his flock in St. Louis. White St. Louisans—especially those whose children would attend significantly racially mixed schools as a result of integration—often strenuously objected to desegregation, organizing, protesting, and even engaging in acts of violence. In the end, however, white St. Louis parents who were opposed to having their children in classrooms with black children had most effectively resisted through their choice of residence—they could move to almost entirely white areas in south St. Louis city or in suburban St. Louis County. Thus, the desire of white parents to avoid integrated education accelerated suburbanization and reconstituted segregation across metropolitan St. Louis.

Much as the debate over the 1916 residential segregation ordinance, responses to school desegregation open a window on whites' racial attitudes and their own understandings of why racial segregation was desirable. Once again, they reveal that support for racial segregation was deeply tied about with anxieties about interracial sexuality and powerfully felt ideas about home, family, and childhood innocence. Schools were of special concern, as they were places where children spent much of their waking lives, were socialized and brought into the community, and often developed bonds of friendship and—by high school years—romantic love. St. Louis Jesuit priest William Markoe—a rare pre-World War II example of an outspoken white Catholic advocate of civil rights—noted that schools struck a nerve with parents who worried about miscegenation because of the "semi-family life" that they cultivated.[60] Schools also have special significance to the relationship between sexuality and family life, race, and the social

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[60] David W. Southern, "But Think of the Kids: Catholic Interracialists and the Great American Taboo of Race Mixing," *US Catholic Historian* 16 (1988): 81.

organization of space in the metropolis. This is because for both public and parochial schools, parents were usually required to send their children to the nearest school. This reinforced the notion that where one chose to live and the character of one's neighborhood was of great importance to the wellbeing of one's children.

2. <u>Catholic School Integration</u>

Catholic education in St. Louis was desegregated before public education. This was significant given the prominence and power of the Roman Catholic Church there. St. Louis was in its eighteenth-century beginnings a Catholic city, thanks to its origins in French and Spanish colonialism. While Protestantism took root in the nineteenth century, St. Louis remained unusual among major cities in the Jim Crow South in being both a heavily Catholic city and one in which Catholics were more or less smoothly integrated into the city's political and economic elites. There were also a fair number of black Catholics in St. Louis—some families with deep roots in the city, some migrants from Louisiana or other pockets of Catholicism in the South, and some converts brought into the church by urban mission activity by the Jesuits and others.[61]

In the 1940s, Catholic St. Louis was racially segregated to an extent that mirrored the rest of the city. Catholic churches, elementary and high schools, institutions of higher learning, and youth athletics and recreation were all segregated—basically limited to whites, with a few Jim Crow options for St. Louis's black Catholics.[62] In the mid-twentieth century, white American Catholics, like white Americans generally, overwhelmingly disapproved of interracial marriage. Outside a few dissident voices, the local Catholic hierarchy largely went along with this

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[61] Madeline Barni Oliver and William Barnaby Faherty, *The Religious Roots of Black Catholics of Saint Louis* (Florissant, MO: St. Stanislaus Historic Museum, 1977).
[62] Donald J. Kemper, "Catholic Integration in St. Louis, 1945-1947," *Missouri Historical Review* 73 (October 1978), 9.

opposition, when pressed typically either citing the necessity of obeying civil law and avoiding social conflict.[63]

Early twentieth century Catholic history in St. Louis was dominated by Archbishop (later Cardinal) John Glennon, who headed the archdiocese of St. Louis from 1903 until his death in 1946. Scholars have studied the matter agree that Glennon was a supporter of Jim Crow policies both within and outside the Catholic Church and held prejudiced views against blacks. A particularly revealing incident in this regarded took place in 1944, when a mixed-race St. Louis woman name Jane Kaiser succeeded in obtaining an audience with the archbishop to discuss the admission of blacks to segregated parochial elementary schools. Glennon, who assumed the fair-skinned Kaiser was white, frankly expressed his belief that blacks were prone to immorality, including violence and sexual license, and expressed his disapproval of interracial marriage and support for Missouri's anti-miscegenation law.[64]

The first steps toward ending Catholic Jim Crow in St. Louis took place in 1944, when Saint Louis University changed its admissions policy to permit the acceptance of black students. (As a concession to those who felt uneasy about interracial socializing, however, university-sponsored students dances initially remained segregated.) Saint Louis University was at the forefront of this shift because, as a Jesuit university, it lay outside the direct authority of the local archbishop, was not as vulnerable to objections from area residents, and was led by priests of a cosmopolitan outlook vis-à-vis the literally and figuratively parochial diocesan clergy. Serving relatively small numbers of students, all adults, and financially out of reach of most African

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[63] Southern, "But Think of the Kids."

[64] R. Bentley Anderson, "Prelates, Protest, and Public Opinion: Catholic Opposition to Desegregation, 1947-1955," *Journal of Church and State* 46, no. 3 (summer 2004), 617-644; Kemper, "Catholic Integration in St. Louis, 1945-1947"; Southern, "But Think of the Kids"; Florence Shinkle "'Go Write Your Letters,'" *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 22, 1997.

Americans, integration at SLU generated relatively little public controversy.[65] (Meanwhile, Washington University, St. Louis's other major institution of higher learning at the time, integrated gradually from 1947 to 1950.)

Major controversy did erupt, however, in 1947, when the archdiocese of St. Louis promptly desegregated its parochial elementary schools and high schools. Cardinal Glennon died while abroad in 1946, and Pope Pius XII appointed Joseph Ritter, bishop of Indianapolis, to replace him as head of the archdiocese of St. Louis. Ritter had no prior connection to St. Louis, having otherwise lived most of his life in Indiana. In stark contrast to Glennon, he objected to racial segregation as both a matter of theology and personal conviction. In addition, in the context of the post-World War II revulsion at the consequences of Nazi racism, the rise of Soviet power, and the beginnings of the collapse of European colonial empires, the Catholic hierarchy was taking a harder line against American Jim Crow. There is evidence to suggest that Ritter might have been instructed by the Vatican from the start of this episcopate to desegregate Catholic institutions in St. Louis. In any case, less than a year after his installation as bishop, Ritter announced that the diocese's parochial schools be open to all Catholic students, regardless of race, in a pastoral letter read at Mass in churches across the diocese on August 26, 1947.[66]

Many Catholic parents objected vehemently to the prospect of integrated education. Historian and Jesuit priest R. Bentley Anderson's research in the archives of the St. Louis archdiocese suggest again that the specter of interracial sexuality was a central concern. He cites a letter to Archbishop signed by five dozen women from just one parish. "These women feared what might happen if racial groups were brought together, especially as they believed that adolescence was 'definitely a dangerous age for this sort of mixing,'" Anderson writes. "If the

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[65] Kemper, "Catholic Integration in St. Louis," 11-13.
[66] Kemper, "Catholic Integration in St. Louis," 1-2, 17-19.

archbishop did not reconsider his decision, these women … were prepared to withdraw their children from the Catholic school system and send them to public schools in order 'to avoid their intermingling with the colored.'"[67]

Some parents of children in Catholic schools quickly organized in opposition to Ritter's order. Within days of the announcement, a group of parents from St. Edward's Parish met and founded the Catholic Parents Association of St. Louis and St. Louis County, electing lay parishioner John P. Barrett to serve as chairman and spokesman for the group. St. Edward's parish was located in northwest St. Louis, not far from the Shelley house and the Ville. (Barrett himself live on Labadie, the same street as the Shelley house, although eleven blocks farther west.) The parents' concern presumably related to the fact that St. Edward's parish school would have been among those most likely to be immediately affected by the Ritter's order.[68]

The Catholic Parents Association expressed their concerns to the bishop and requested an audience, while meanwhile growing in size and strength as members of other area parishes joined. On Sunday, September 14, the group held a mass meeting at St. Louis Hall, located in Lafayette Square on the near south side. Some seven-hundred people representing forty-three parishes attended (an additional 150 or so were turned away as the hall was already at capacity). The group expressed their outrage at the archbishop's decisions and debated how best to resist. Some suggested a mass withdrawal of students from the Catholic schools, with parents instead enrolling their children in the still segregated public schools. However, the assembled parents instead determined to pursue legal action against the archbishop, seeking an injunction to halt his order. The vote in favor of this course of action was overwhelming—697 to three.

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[67] Anderson, "Prelates, Protest, and Public Opinion," 621.
[68] Anderson, "Prelates, Protests, and Public Opinion," 621-622; Kemper, "Catholic Integration in St. Louis," 1-4; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 18, 2011.

Approximately $400 was collected from parents that night to the group's legal fund. Soon after, two attorneys offered their services to the group free of charge. Given that US Catholic culture in the mid-twentieth century tended to emphasize obedience to ecclesiastical authority, the group's willingness to confront the bishop so directly and to even seek the intervention of secular authorities to halt his desegregation order is remarkable and evidences how vigorously they objected to the prospect of integrated education.[69]

Archbishop Ritter's response to the Catholic parents' threats of legal action was swift and decisive. One week later, on Sunday, September 21, priests throughout the diocese read a letter from the archbishop at Mass. Along with a defense of racial equality in terms of Christian faith, the letter threatened automatic excommunication to any Catholic who sought "to interfere in the administrative office of their Bishop by having recourse to any authority outside the Church." For faithful Catholics, this was a consequence of an enormous gravity. As Anderson put it, "the possibility of being cut off from the sacraments, denied a Christian burial, and made an outcast in heaven and on earth was not a fate one wished to suffer." Essentially, Ritter demanded that the protesting parents choose between acquiescing to his desegregation order or imperiling their immortal souls.[70]

Some eight-hundred members of the Catholic Parents Association gathered again on October 5 to determine a path forward. Barrett, chastened by Ritter's order, abandoned the legal strategy and declared that he wished to disband the group. "My religion comes first," he told the assembled parents. "If it gets to the point where I have to sit beside the Negro to keep my religion, I'll do it." Some responded to Barrett's declaration with boos or calls for his resignation

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[69] Anderson, "Prelates, Protests, and Public Opinion," 622; Kemper, "Catholic Integration in St. Louis," 4; *St. Louis-Post Dispatch*, September 15, 1947. $400 in September 1947 approximately equates to $4,300 in June 2018 (per the US Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation online calculator).

[70] Anderson, "Prelates, Protest, and Public Opinion," 623-625; Kemper, "Catholic Integration in St. Louis," 4.

as chairman. Heated debate continued, as many argued that the association should organize the mass withdrawal of students from Catholic schools or boycott donations to the church until the bishop reversed his decision. Eventually, after much emotional debate, the group voted to disband.[71]

So ended an organized response by white Catholic parents to the racial integration of parochial schools. Their fierce resistance, however, demonstrated how strenuously many white St. Louisans objected to the prospect of desegregation—especially when it might lead to the intermingling of black and white children. Ritter's policy of integrated Catholic education would also have a limited practical effect, as the church's system of geographically grounded parishes meant that schools would only be as integrated as their surrounding neighborhoods. As white flight accelerated—driven in part by white parents' desire to resist integrated education—many Catholic schools remained effectively segregated.

3. <u>Public School Integration</u>

In May 1954, the US Supreme Court issued its ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. The court declared that the racial segregation of public education violated the Constitution of the United States, effectively invalidating laws requiring segregated education in former slave states, including Missouri. The leadership of the city of St. Louis's public school district and other civic leaders had anticipated the court's ruling in *Brown* and acted fairly quickly to implement it. The government of the city of St. Louis and the state of Missouri did not experience the sort of foot-dragging our outright resistance from government officials that sometimes characterized the initial stages of desegregation elsewhere." [72]As Clarence Lang and

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[71] Anderson, "Prelates, Protest, and Public Opinion," 625-625; Kemper, "Catholic Integration in St. Louis," 4-5.
[72] For a general survey of the background and consequences of *Brown*, see James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Trouble Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

others have noted, St. Louis's elites on the whole strived to project an image of racial "civility" and sometimes explicitly differentiated the city from what they cast as the backward racism of the Deep South.[73] In the autumn of 1954, the school district combined the two racially segregated teachers' colleges (Harris and Stowe) and integrated special schools for the handicapped. In the spring semester of 1955, the regular high schools were integrated, and finally in the autumn of that year elementary and technical high schools were integrated.[74]

For the most part, white St. Louisans did not engage in "massive resistance" to the racial integration of schools. Given how segregated St. Louis area was, initial effects were mostly limited to those schools in the frontier areas between predominantly white and black neighborhoods. The integration of these schools was a powerful motive for white parents to relocate to elsewhere in the city or to suburban St. Louis County, speeding the racial transition o much of North St. Louis from white to black. The suburban exodus was thus its own form of "massive resistance."[75]

That is not to say that public school integration was met by no more than a quiet exodus to the suburbs. There were incidents of violence, often involving students themselves. For example, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported a series of confrontations at Beaumont High School, adjacent to Fairgrounds Park, in the weeks following the start of the spring 1955 semester. Scuffles, sometimes involving knives being drawn, took place between black and white students, among other incidents. On the morning March 2, Philip J. Hickey, superintendent of St. Louis public addressed the assembled students of Beaumont to plead for calm. In response,

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[73] Lang, *Grassroots at the Gateway*.

[74] League of Women Voters of St. Louis, "St. Louis Integrates Its Schools," January 1955, series 1, box 15, folder 10, Raymond R. Tucker Records, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.

[75] On the relationship between desegregation and suburbanization in another metropolitan context, see Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

"about 200 white students, the majority of them older boys," staged a demonstration chanting

and threatening to walk out of school, only returning to class when they were threatened with

being charged with absences.[76]

Why did so many white St. Louisans object to the racial integration of public schools?

One of the most compelling and revealing sources on this topic is the film *A City Decides*

(1956).[77] This was a 27-minutes documentary film produced by Charles Guggenheim and

Associates, then headquartered in St. Louis, and the filmmakers had been involved in KETC, St.

Louis's recently launched public television station. *A City Decides* dramatized events

surrounding the integration of St. Louis public schools, focusing especially on Beaumont High

School, and featured an all-local cast. It was produced in cooperation with several area

organizations, including the Urban League of St. Louis, the local chapter of the National

Conference of Christians and Jews, and the West End Community Conference.[78] Many of the

people who appeared in the film played themselves, including M. Leo Bonaham, executive

secretary of the Urban League of St. Louis. Financed by the Fund for the Republic, a liberal

think tank with national reach, the film sought to showcase St. Louis's experience with school

desegregation, essentially framing it as a success story (perhaps an immature judgment given that

production began only months after integration had taken place).[79] The film, which was

nominated for an Academy Award, was broadcast locally in St. Louis and also nationally via

NBC, while also being screened at conferences.[80]

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[76] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 2, 1955. This is one of multiple comparable incidents that I have uncovered from this period. A version of this story appears in *A City Decides*.
[77] *A City Decides*, directed by Charles Guggenheim, Charles Guggenheim and Associates, 1956. The film is available to view online at Archive.org.
[78] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 17, 1957.
[79] Martin Quigley to Mayor Tucker, June 8, 1956, series 1, box 12, folder 10, Raymond R. Tucker Papers, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.
[80] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* February 17, 1957.

The most revealing scene in *A City Decides* is a scene in which a parents' meeting at Beaumont High School is reenacted. Meetings such as this—open forums in which parents of students in the St. Louis public schools were invited to raise their concerns—occurred in the weeks leading up to integration. Experts featured in this scene were the principal of the Beaumont High School, the school physician, a school psychologist employed by the St. Louis School District, Executive Secretary M. Leo Bonaham of the Urban League of St. Louis, and a representative of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Including this scene allowed the filmmakers to bring up what they thought were the most common worries parents had about school integration and to offer authoritative responses to ease these worries. Significantly, the scene features comments from a voiceover narrator who explains the "real" worries hidden in the parents' questions. "The real questions are the ones people don't like to talk about in public," the narrator observers, "but they come out one way or another."

Significantly, the worries expressed by the parents—and the responses offered by the "experts"—suggests that anxieties about integration largely related to anxieties about interracial sexuality and related fears about the integrity of homes and neighborhoods. At one point, a young father—holding his infant son—stands up and says, "I'd like to know what our school plans on doing about things like social dancing." The voiceover narrator quickly clarifies: "He's worried intermarriage." Executive Secretary Bonaham of the Urban League responds to the question as follows:

> So, you're worried because you think high school social functions might cause intermarriage. Well, you needn't be. The long experience of integrated public school education in American communities bears out the contention that integrated public school education is neither lonely hearts clubs nor training grounds for intermarriage.

Bonaham's answer is striking in that he does not attempt to defend interracial marriage (still

illegal in Missouri and throughout much of the United States) or love and intimacy across the

color line. Instead, as one of the leading black community leaders and civil rights advocates in

St. Louis at the time, he flatly denies that integrated schools would lead to interracial marriage at

all. He also sidesteps the question of what the public schools would do about the possibility of

racially integrated school dances or other functions that might lend themselves to romance or

sexually charged socializing. The camera then returns to the father who asked the question. He

leans over and whispers in the ear of a woman—presumably his wife—who is sitting beside him

and holding another baby. The narrator then observes, "He still wants to know if these men want

their children to marry into other races." The experts on the panel never offer a clear answer to

this question—reflecting the reality that St. Louis's public school administrators had no effective

response to the belief that integrated education might open up new possibilities for interracial sex

and romance

Bonaham's denial that integration would lead to miscegenation was not limited to his

appearance in *A City Decides.* A few years later, for instance, the *Post-Dispatch* reported that

while sitting on a panel on racial discrimination at the conference of the Missouri Association for

Social Welfare, Bonaham said, "Personal privilege has nothing to do with the rights of a citizen.

I have no right to go uninvited to a white man's home. The question of intermarriage between

whites and Negroes is a matter of very personal privilege and has nothing to do with a citizen's

right"[81] This was of a piece with a pattern noted by historian Peggy Pascoe of many black

leaders of this era who demanded civil rights while ignoring the question of miscegenation or

even denying outright that they sought to legalize interracial marriage. This suggests that while

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[81] *St. Lois Post-Dispatch*, October 26, 1960.

there may have been a political opening to push for economic and political rights for blacks, the possibility of interracial sexuality continued to face far more intense opposition.[82]

Another telling exchange in the film revealed the how white parents' anxieties over school integration could lead to "white flight." Another man rises at the meeting and says, "I don't want to start any rumors, but I've heard said that some parents are not a-gonna send their children to a mixed school." The principal of Beaumont High School responds, "If you want to take your family and move them out of this district into an all-white district, you can do that. But the school board has ruled that children in a district will attend a school in that district, and I'm sure they're going to enforce that rule." This is a striking exchange. For one, it acknowledges that in the wake of school desegregation, moving from the St. Louis school district to avoid integrated education was a commonsense option for many white parents. Moreover, the principal does not attempt to dissuade the parent, but rather seems to endorse moving to an all-white district—such as one in St. Louis's outlying suburbs—as a sound option for parents' who did not want to send their children to "mixed schools." In the years after *A City Decide* was produced, many white St. Louis parents made that choice.

F.   **Conclusion**

The gradual dismantling of de jure Jim Crow in St. Louis continued in the aftermath of public school desegregation. In 1961, after eight prior attempts dating back to 1954, the St. Louis Board of Aldermen passed an ordinance prohibiting discrimination in public accommodation. The debate over this measure was also punctuated by insinuations about black men as sexual threats, fears over interracial sexuality, and suggestions that integration would provoke white

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[82] Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 202-204.

flight. Civil rights activism in St. Louis, meanwhile, took an increasingly militant turn as local activist targeted discriminatory employers with campaigns of non-violent civil disobedience, most notably the Jefferson Bank sit-ins of 1963.

For the most part, efforts to desegregate St. Louis's neighborhoods and public spaces did not lead to enduring integration. The *Shelley* decision did not end residential racial segregation nationwide or in St. Louis. Local realtors still as a matter of course discriminated by race, steering buyers to certain parts of the region according to their race. While the area of black residence in the city expanded in the wake of *Shelley*, the general pattern was complete racial transition from white to black, transforming the social geography of much of the city of St. Louis. Substantially racially integrated residential areas did emerge, as we shall see, but were exceptional. It would be years before fair housing legislation was passed in St. Louis city, St. Louis County, the state of Missouri, or at the federal level, and it was not until the 1968 ruling in *Jones v. Myers* ruling (which also originated in metro St. Louis) that the US Supreme Court clarified the constitutionality of government regulation of private real estate transactions to prevent racial discrimination.

The end of Jim Crow was entwined with a massive transformation in St. Louis's racial demography. In 1940, only 17.8 percent of the city's population was black. By 1970, it was 40 percent, and, by the close of twentieth century, St. Louis had become a black majority city. Whereas blacks were once mostly limited to a few small areas and kept out of many public spaces, the entire city of St. Louis increasingly became seen as a black space—and, vis-à-vis the overwhelmingly white suburbs, it was. As will be explored in next in chapter IV, this racial turnover was related to gendered fears of rising crime and perceptions of the decline of many of the city's neighborhoods.

Of course, not all whites left the city—many remained behind, or even moved into the city, in the era of desegregation and white flight. This chapter has demonstrated the many ways that whiteness and opposition to integration was tied up with normative sexuality. As we shall see, white St. Louisans who remained in the urban core in this era often lived outside the bounds of heteronormativity. In chapter V, we will consider this in more detail through an exploration of the history of St. Louis's queer geography and particularly the emergence of a "gay ghetto" in the Central West End in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

IV. "WE WALK WARILY AS IN A JUNGLE":
CRIME, GENDER, AND NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE

A.   **Introduction**

On February 14, 1960, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* published a piece titled "Women in Danger on City Streets." The author was Adèle Chomeau Starbird, who served as Dean of Women at Washington University and for more than three decades wrote a regular weekly column for the *Post-Dispatch*. From a well-to-do and influential family—her father had laid out the town of Clayton, seat of St. Louis County—Starbird was among the most respected female voices in St. Louis's civic life at midcentury.[1]

In her Valentine's Day column, Starbird focused on what she regarded as grave and growing problem facing St. Louisans—the danger posed by violent crime, especially to women and girls. She recounted a discussion she had had with group of "substantial, level-headed" women, all "tax-paying property owners." They shared their fears about being assaulted while going about the city, and they talked about miniature tear-gas bombs, ju-jitsu, and other forms of self-protection. Bemoaning these developments, Starbird asked, "What kind of civilization is this, where a citizen no longer feels safe in his home or on the street … where women sit around and exchange methods of self-defense as they used to exchange recipes?"

Starbird suggested that fears of crime marked a departure from the past and evidenced a disconcerting new trajectory in St. Louis's social life. "We used to know … sweet security on our own city's streets. We didn't know the meaning of fear," she asserted, contrasting that past sense of security with the new "terror" of urban living. While Starbird's column did not

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[1] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 14, 1960. Adèle Chomeau Starbird, *Many String to My Lute* (Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1978). Adèle Chomeau Starbird obituary, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

explicitly address the race of the victims or perpetrators of crime in St. Louis, it is a clear subtext. As discussed in the last dissertation chapter, the decade or so previous to the publication of the column in 1960 had seen the dismantling of much of the edifice of de jure Jim Crow, with the old system of restrictive covenants, segregated education, and whites-only public spaces officially relegated to the past. Starbird's piece suggests that fears of crime were connected to some white St. Louisans' sense that the city was becoming a strange and foreboding place in the wake of desegregation. "We might as well be living in the Casbah. … The streets of American cities are becoming as dangerous as those native quarters in foreign lands which the police forbid you to enter," Starbird quoted one "indignant" young woman as saying. For her part, Starbird wrote that lately "we walk warily as in a jungle." It is striking that Starbird and her interlocutor both tied St. Louis's urban landscape to the "Casbah" and the "jungle," places associated in the white American popular imagination with dark-skinned, uncivilized racial others and an undercurrent of sexual danger.[2]

Starbird's column encapsulates widespread and consequential attitudes linking perceptions of crime and disorder with race, sexuality, and urban decline. As Harland Bartholomew and others had predicted as early as the 1910s, St. Louis's population plummeted in the decades after World War II even as the suburbs boomed. At the same time, the black portion of St. Louis's population increased dramatically, and large swaths of the city that had previously been almost entirely white transitioned to being almost entirely black in a matter of years. A widely held belief that crime was also on the rise in the city of St. Louis's was contemporaneous with and linked to these developments. For many St. Louisans, increasing crime was a crucial dimension of the city's decline, at once evidence of the deterioration of the

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[2] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 14, 1960.

city's neighborhoods and itself a force that pushed what they regarded as desirable—i.e., white and heteronormative—citizens out of the urban core and to the suburban fringes.[3]

Largely beyond the scope of this chapter is the question of to what degree perceptions of rising crime in the post-World War II era corresponded to objective reality.[4] Sadly, it is of course true that many St. Louisans, black and white, were victims of horrific crimes during this era. Fear of crime was not entirely unreasonable or rooted solely in racial prejudice. Statistics collected by the St. Louis Police Department also support the idea that the rate of major crimes generally increased from World War II through the 1970s. However, violent crime had always been a feature of urban life in St. Louis, and the belief that the early twentieth century was a time of "sweet security" on the city's streets, as Adèle Starbird suggested, was a nostalgic distortion of the past. Indeed, that St. Louis was the setting of the classic murder ballad "Stagger Lee," dating to around the turn of the twentieth century, is suggestive of city's long-established reputation for violence.[5] Moreover, the homicide arrest rates in St. Louis in the 1920s were generally higher than the 1950s and 1960s.[6]

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[3] Although crime is frequently central to popular understandings of post-World War II white flight and urban decline in St. Louis and elsewhere, it is largely absent from many of the major scholarly works on the subject, e.g., Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, 2nd ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005; Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003; Colin Gordon, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). An important exception is Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004. Thompson calls for placing crime and policing at the center of post-World War II American history and connects these topics to urban decline in Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History," *Journal of American History* 97, no. 3 (December 2010): 703-734.

[4] For a useful analysis of historical shifts in homicide rates in St. Louis from 1865 to 2000, along with a discussion of the challenges in interpreting this data, see Scott H. Decker, Jeffrey J. Rojek, and Eric P. Baumer, "A Century—or More—of Homicide in St. Louis," 257-274, in Brady Baybeck and E. Terrence Jones, eds., *St. Louis Metamorphosis: Past Trends and Future Directions* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2004).

[5] Cecil Brown, *Stagolee Shot Billy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[6] Decker, et al., "A Century—or More—of Homicide in St. Louis," 267.

Even in the post-World War II era, a few well-informed voices expressed skepticism that crime in the city was far worse or more worrisome than it had been in earlier times, and they suggested rising crime rates might be in large part a statistical artifact. "Some veteran police officers doubt that crime in St. Louis is worse than it was years ago, when reporting of crime was far less formal and complete," reporting the *Post-Dispatch* in 1965. The same article also noted that even with less thorough crime reporting, records showed that there were in fact more auto thefts, homicides, and robberies in St. Louis in the first half of the 1930s than the first half of the 1960s. Inspector James Shea—whose long career with the St. Louis police included roles as district commander, chief of detectives, and chief of field operations—told a reporter that "crime was probably just as bad as when he began walking the beat in 1926 as it is today." Even in 1969, when fears of urban crime were near their peak, one police sergeant told the *Post-Dispatch* that he believed crime in downtown St. Louis was "not high in relation to the number of persons who flocked there every day." Speaking of those who feared for their safety going downtown, the sergeant asserted, "It's all in their heads."[7]

Similarly, there is reason to doubt to what degree and why blacks formed an outsize portion of the perpetrators of crime. Official statistics in St. Louis, as with most other American cities, seemed to suggest that blacks committed crimes at substantially higher rates than whites. In the post-World War II era, both white social scientists and lay people tended to explain this as a result of the relative impoverishment of black communities or the deficiencies of African American culture, especially as it pertained to family life and childrearing. Sometimes this data could also be used to justify more straightforwardly racist beliefs about blacks' inherent tendency toward violence or immorality. However, as Elizabeth Hinton argues in *From the War*

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[7] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 31, 1969.

on Poverty to the War on Crime, "Flawed statistical data overstated the problem of crime in

African American communities and produced a distorted picture of American crime as a whole.

The FBI's Uniform Crime report failed to measure beyond the point of arrest, and thus did not

account for whether or not suspects were eventually convicted"—a significant fact, since the

crimes for which blacks were especially likely to be arrested were also the least likely to face

prosecution. Moreover, Hinton asserts, "The FBI data emphasized street crime to the exclusion

of organize and white collar crime. As such, the figures … reflected crimes committed by low-

income and unemployed Americans," whose numbers were disproportionally black, while

obscuring the crimes committed by relatively affluent whites.[8] Moreover even in so far as

statistics suggested that blacks made up a disproportionally large number of the perpetrators of

violent crime in St. Louis and in other American cities, they also suggested that blacks also made

up a disproportionally large number of the victims. In a 1965 feature of racial disparities in crime

rates, *Post-Dispatch* reporter Richard Jacobs noted, in the previous year, blacks accounted for 70

percent of arrests for major crimes in St. Louis, despite only being about half as numerous as

whites. Yet he also noted that with the exception for robberies, data showed than nine out of ten

of the victims of crimes against persons committed by black perpetrators were themselves black.

The same data that seemed to indicate rising crime and disproportionate numbers of black

lawbreakers also showed that, relatively speaking, whites were rarely victims of black

criminals.[9]

  Regardless of to what degree crime was rising and whether blacks constituted a

disproportionate number of the perpetrators, it is clear that—despite a few dissenting voices—

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[8] Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2016), 24.
[9] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, December 28, 1965.

many St. Louisans believed that their city was becoming an increasingly dangerous place through the post-World War II decades. This rising crime rate was often linked to what St. Louisans understood as the decline of their city—in terms of both the city's falling population and the racial turnover and physical and social deterioration of its neighborhoods. The chapter analyzes perceptions to and responses to crime at the interception of race and sexuality.[10]

The first chapter section begins by exploring how journalists, social scientists, and other elite opinion-makers wrote about crime in St. Louis from the late 1940s through the early 1970s. Both sensationalistic newspaper reporting and the soberer scholarship of publicly engaged academics, especially at Washington University, presented crime a central problem of civic life and both a causes and consequence of St. Louis's postwar demographic crisis. These writings assumed that deviations from heteronormative family life, especially among black St. Louisans, were a major source of crime. Moreover, the press sometimes recycled the long-established racist stereotype of black men as sexual predators of white women and girls. A particularly revealing example is racially inflammatory reporting on a 1960 incident in which a young white woman claimed to have been abducted and sexually assaulted by a group of five black men—an allegation which turned out to be a fabrication.

Next, the chapter considers Women for City Living and its successor organization, the Women's Crusade Against Crime. Founded in 1969 by well-to-do, white Central West End housewife Delphine McClellan, Women for City Living explicitly linked the struggle to reverse St. Louis's decline with a mission of suppressing crime and urban disorder. The organization's all-female membership framed their work in terms of their roles as wives and mothers, thus

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[10] A recent work that explores similar themes in the context of one especially infamous crime is Marcia M. Gallo, *"No One Helped": Kitty Genovese, New York City, and the Myth of Urban Apathy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

attempting to extend a regime of heteronormative domesticity beyond the home and into their

neighborhoods. The group understood crime expansively and concerned themselves with sex

work and black radicalism along with petty theft and littering. While founded by and principally

composed of white women, Women for Living and Women's Crusade against Crime had some

prominent black members and collaborated with black churches and women's organizations.

These efforts evidence an attempt to reorient their racial politics at the dawn of the post-civil

rights era, accepting an ethic of interracialism mediated by heteronormativity. McClellan's

neighborhood activism reveals an entangled politics of sexuality, race, and crime in a changing

city.

B.   "Crime Cauldrons": Perceptions of Crime in the Era of White Flight

As in much of the rest of urban America, St. Louis's demography was transformed in the

decade after World War II due to white flight to the suburbs and the in-migration of blacks from

the rural South. In 1950, nearly 900,000 people lived within St. Louis's city limits, 18 percent of

whom were black. By 1970, the total population had dropped by 27 percent, sinking to a little

over 600,000, while the black portion had risen to 40.9 percent. As we have seen, many

regarded the city to be in crisis and on a lamentable downward trajectory. At the same time,

activists for civil rights and black empowerment were engaging in militant protests in St. Louis

and other American cities—developments which some whites associated with disorder and

violent unrest.[11] Against this backdrop, many St. Louisans took as fact that the city that crime

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[11] Clarence Lang, *Grassroots at the Gateway: Class Politics and Black Freedom Struggle in St. Louis, 1936-1975*
(Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

was an urgent and growing problem facing the city, and they linked crime to the city's perceived decline.

As early as the mid-1950s, some St. Louisans were beginning to send concerned letters to the mayor regarding what they believed to be increasing crime and its connection to the city's demographic trajectory. "I've lived in St. Louis a long time but never before seen such a crime wave," wrote one city resident to Mayor Raymond Tucker in July 1953. "It seems like thug or two lurking on every alley or dark street. No one is safe." The same correspondent tied rising crime to the rush to the suburbs: "I know families who are buying homes in the county because they're *afraid* to live in St. Louis."[12] Similarly, Katherine Miller, the adult daughter of a retired Central West End businessman, wrote to Mayor Tucker in 1954 expressing dismay over a "wave of terrorism" facing the city. She complained that the nurses who came to care for her ailing father were "in constant danger not only of being robbed, but deliberately attacked and injured," and added that "a greater number of robbers are Negroes."[13]

While these letters offer evocative glimpses of everyday St. Louisans fears about crime, the pronouncements of civic leaders, social scientists, and the editors and reporters for the city's major daily newspapers also demonstrate that crime was a central concern during this period. The *Post-Dispatch* and, to a greater degree, the more politically conservative *Globe-Democrat* both regularly reported on what they presented as rising crime rates.[14] By 1968, in address to the Board of Aldermen, Mayor A.J. Cervantes said "crime in the streets was the main problem of St.

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[12] M.H. to Mayor Tucker, July 12, 1953, series 1, box 2, folder 6, Raymond R. Tucker Records, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.

[13] Katherine Miller to Mayor Tucker, November 20, 1954, series 1, box 10, folder 12, Raymond R. Tucker Records, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.

[14] See the Crime and Low Life Scrapbooks, vols. 1-2, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

Louis in the eyes of its citizens."[15] This sentiment was echoed the mayor's wife, Carmen

Cervantes, who in 1969 told the *Post-Dispatch* that "crime in the streets is our worst problem."[16]

Expert commentators in this era of white flight tended to explain rising crime in relation

to the shifting demography and social geography of the metropolitan St. Louis—processes that

were associated with neighborhood decline. In 1956, James Connor, operating director of the St.

Louis Crime Commission, outlined this perspective in a public address: "This city is

experiencing a tremendous migration of the so-called better people to the suburbs. Their void is

being filled by a great inflex of persons mainly coming from semi-rural areas of the south. Many

of these individuals are of inferior education and social development." He then noted that

transformation of many "mansions that formerly housed a single family" into "crowed

apartments"—a shift in the spatial organization of private life that not only undercut

heteronormative ideals but also epitomized a neighborhood's perceived downward trajectory.

The result of these changes, Connor argued, was a "'witch's brew' of thefts, conflicts and

strife."[17] In 1965, the editors of the *Globe-Democrat* similarly referred to St. Louis's rapidly

changing urban neighborhoods as "crime cauldrons."[18]

Journalists and other public voices spoke of crime in St. Louis in terms that resembled

and often converged with more generalized rhetoric of urban decline. As with other perceived

indices of neighborhood deterioration, they often discussed crime using metaphors of disease and

infestation and emphasized its tendency to spread from one neighborhood to the next. The

Globe-Democrat, for example, announced that St. Louis faced a "cancer of lawlessness" that had

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[15] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 16, 1968.

[16] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, n.d., 1969, St. Louis and Missouri Womanhood Scrapbook, vol. 8, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

[17] James Connor to Jeremiah O'Connell, September 20, 1956, series 1, box 10, folder 12, Raymond R. Tucker Records, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.

[18] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, February 12, 1965.

"spread over a wide section" of the city, while the *Post-Dispatch* described how slum conditions "tend to infect adjacent blocks," bringing crime in their wake.[19] The exact mechanism of this menacing capacity for crime to expand was usually left unspoken, although sometimes this was explained in concrete terms. For example, a *Globe-Democrat* report noted that criminals could "literally 'walk to work" from their homes in the slums to nearby neighborhoods.[20] Much like the idea of "blight," many public voices warned that the high crime zone might continue to expand indefinitely, setting more neighborhoods on a path toward decline and threatening the wellbeing of all of St. Louis. In 1959, a *Globe-Democrat* report observed that high-crime districts "can now be found now in areas that only a few years ago were fine, dignified residential sections, but are being groomed for tomorrow's slums."[21] By 1965, the editors of the *Globe-Democrat* warned that the "crime infestation" was "reaching tentacles" farther and farther across the city, then baldly warned that "the blight will spread, its venom rise" unless drastic action was taken.[22] In a feature about crime in downtown St. Louis, the *Post-Dispatch* quoted a storekeeper who predicted, "Pretty soon, you're going to have a ghetto down here, too."[23]

Related to the idea of crime's link to neighborhood decline was the notion that fear of crime was a primary impetus for neighborhood abandonment and flight to the suburbs. In 1963, *Globe-Democrat* put the matter succinctly: "'As crime increases, the residents become concerned about their safety and property.' And when the concern becomes acute, the residents move out."[24] City residents who left for the suburbs because of what they regarded as rising crime were invoked to explain falling property values, foreclosures on rental buildings, and vacant

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[19] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 17, 1964; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, February 11, 1965.
[20] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 23, 1959. Also, for example, in August 13, 1969, the *Post-Dispatch* reported that criminals operating downtown could "flee into the surrounding slums."
[21] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 23, 1959
[22] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, February 12, 1965
[23] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 13, 1969.
[24] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 21-23, 1963.

homes and apartments. By the close of 1960s, the *Post-Dispatch* described a transformed urban landscape: "The fear crime can be seen everywhere. Vacant buildings damaged by vandals line many streets, mute testimony to the flight of their owners." [25]

Throughout the 1960s, *Globe-Democrat* and *Post-Dispatch* also frequently reported on urban businessowners whose stores were shuttered because customers refused to patronize their establishments for fear of crime. A significant example of this is coverage of the failure of Gaslight Square, popular entertainment district in the Central West End. With bars, nightclubs and restaurants that survived in large part on patronage from suburbanites who crossed the city limits for a night out, the area's businesses had mostly folded by the mid-1960s. Newspaper reports connected the area's decline to rising crime and violence in the city. The *Post-Dispatch* quoted Richard Mutrux, one bar-owner who was relocating his establishment because "it's the only thing we can do." Mutrux explained, "Most people have been reluctant to come into this area in the last year. They are frightened by crime on the streets. … When the riots came last year, people just stayed out in the suburbs and shivered."[26] This evidences the widespread perception that crime was on the rise, exacerbating the division between city and suburb, and changing St. Louis for the worse.

It is illuminating to analyze perceptions of rising crime and its connection to urban decline at the intersection of race and sexuality. Sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly, newspaper reportage and sociological writing asserted that black men and boys were the most likely perpetrators of crime, and heightened crime in one neighborhood of the city was often linked to the process of racial transition there or in nearby areas. Commentators often explained racial disparities in crime as a result of the pathologies of black families, particularly poor

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[25] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 21, 1969.
[26] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 21, 1965; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 15, 1968.

parenting and absent or distant fathers. This contributed to a tendency to contrast the city with the orderly homelife of the suburbs. Sensationalistic press reports also tended to present white women and girls as the most alarming victims of urban crime—especially sexual assault—and to frame flight to the suburbs in terms of a desire to protect the safety of families in the face of growing crime.

A 1969 *Post-Dispatch* feature titled "Growing Exodus from the City" suggests how fears of crime, racial anxiety, and heteronormativity could be entwined in narratives of white flight. It profiled Floyd and Alma DePew, a white married couple who were "among a growing number of Americans who are literally fleeing from metropolitan areas." In 1966, they moved from their longtime home on in the Fox Park neighborhood of south St. Louis to Piedmont, Missouri, a small town about 100 miles southwest of the city. Floyd DePew explained that he choice to leave the city because he feared his wife might fall victim to criminals. "My wife was afraid to get out on the streets" or even staying home alone, DePew said. Now that he lived away from the city, however, DePew said that he knew his wife would be "safe." His decision to move from St. Louis was thus framed as a husband's action in defense of his wife. While the article does not quote DePew directly on matters of race, his former residence of Fox Park was significant, as this area was undergoing racial transition in the 1960s. Moreover, the author of the feature noted that the residents of Piedmont frankly said that "they would rather not have blacks living in their community and that they would discourage a black from moving there." The reported noted that a desire to live in all-white communities was the "reason that a number of whites are moving to small towns."[27]

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[27] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 15, 1969.

Many commentators connected rising crime to neighborhood racial transition and linked the geography of crime to changing patterns of racial segregation. "Crime rates have been climbing sharply," the *Globe-Democrat* lamented, "as the overflow from the blighted districts" moved elsewhere in St. Louis. As we have seen in the previous chapter, most of the major features of de jure Jim Crow were scrapped in St. Louis in the late 1940s and 1950s, including legally enforceable race restrictive covenants, segregated public and parochial schools, and whites-only municipal swimming pools and playgrounds. At the same time, housing discrimination largely kept blacks from moving beyond the city limits to the suburbs, and large numbers of new black migrants from the rural South arrived in St. Louis in the years following World War II. As a result of these developments, whole sections of the city experienced extraordinarily rapid racial turnover during these years.[28]

The West End was an area of the city that received particular attention as an epicenter of rising crime. It was also a section of the city that underwent especially dramatic racial transition. Bound by Delmar, Kingshighway, Natural Bridge, and the city limits, this black portion of the population of this area increase from only about 2 percent to more than 70 percent from 1950 to 1960. In 1959, the *Globe-Democrat* reported that these "huge shifts in population" was "creating havoc" and that crime in the area had increased by a "staggering" 600 percent. "This sort of population change is not unique to St. Louis," the *Globe-Democrat* pointed out. "It has been affecting all large cities in America, particularly since World War II and, even more so, since the Supreme Court handed down its segregation decisions in 1954"—thus linking desegregation, racial transition, and rising crime. The same article placed blame for rising crime mostly on the "flood of culturally deprived Negroes from the South."[29]

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[28] Colin Gordon, *Mapping Decline*, 22-35; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, March 16, 1961.
[29] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 23, 1959

While some reporting highlighted neighborhood particularly affected by crime, it is significant that local papers occasionally discussed parts of the city that were presented as remaining relatively safe and peaceable. In 1963, for example, an article in the *Globe-Democrat* announced that "Large Areas of the City Found Free of Crime." The piece specified that most of South St. Louis and the northern reaches of the city past Natural Bridge and Salisbury fell into this category—areas which at the time remained predominantly white. The headline's claim that these areas were "free of crime" was a telling hyperbole. The text of the article itself clarified that this was only a "comparative absence" of crime as measured by arrest statistics, and that violent crimes had in fact taken place there. Yet crime in those white neighborhoods was dismissed as insignificant.[30]

Underlying much discussion of race and crime in this era was the assumption—seemingly confirmed by arrest statistics—that blacks were more likely than whites to commit crimes. This belief has a long history, going back to the emergence of modern racial categories in colonial American society and crystalized in the generation after emancipation, when it was given an aura of expert legitimacy by some early sociologists.[31] These attitudes were well-established among both ordinary and elite white St. Louisans at the start of the post-World War II era. In 1949, George C. Smith—railroad executive and president of the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce—wrote in *St. Louis Commerce* that it was a "well-known fact that certain races are more given to such crimes as aggravated assault, rape, purse snatching, robbery and other classes of crime." Smith went on to argue that St. Louis's high crime rates as compared to some other cities could be explained by its relatively high nonwhite population. "The statistician may argue

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[30] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 21-22, 1963.
[31] Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

with some merit, that cities cannot be compared when they have racial differences," he wrote.[32] In later years, local newspapers sometimes referenced racially disparate rates of arrest of violent crimes, tending to insinuate that blacks' tendency toward criminality was assumed by their predominantly white readerships. In 1969, in an article on how crime was affecting daily life in the city, a reporter for the *Post-Dispatch* observed, "The scope of fear is tied closely to the explosive issue of race … Whites point to this glaring statistic: 76.7 per cent of the criminal acts in St. Louis are committed by blacks."[33]

Reporters who covered crime and the sources they quoted used dehumanizing language to describe the perpetrators crime or those who they supposed were likely of committing crimes. They were said to "live like animals," "act like an animal," and to "prey" on their victims "like animals." The particularly inflammatory editorial "Crime Cauldrons" in the *Globe-Democrat* referred to "young hoods preying upon the neighborhood … often traveling in packs."[34] As exhibited in Adèle Starbird's column at the start of this chapter, press coverage also sometimes cast supposedly crime-ridden—and racially transitioning—neighborhoods as exotic and dangerous place, inhabited by dangerous dark-skinned others. In 1965, the *Globe-Democrat* described the West End as both "a virtual jungle of lawlessness" and as "the Wild West."[35]

During the era of white flight, explanations proffered in St. Louis's mainstream press for rising crime and its disproportionate presence in certain neighborhoods tended to emphasize familial dysfunction. Criminality was seen in large part as a failure of childrearing—an explanation that connected crime to sexual politics and perpetuated attitudes that linked blackness and urban space to dysfunctional family life. To a great degree, this was a continuation

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[32] *St. Louis Commerce*, March 9, 1949; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 18, 1943.
[33] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 10, 1969.
[34] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 29, 1959 and February 12, 1965; *Kansas City Star*, March 3, 1965.
[35] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, February 11, 1965 and February 12, 1965.

of a line of thinking going back to the early twentieth century, when—as discussed in the first

chapter of this dissertation—slums and blight were defined in part through high rates of

illegitimate births, venereal disease, and other deviations from normative sexuality. These ideas

persisted as the post-World War II era began. In a 1949 editorial on crime in St. Louis, George

Smith—president of the regional chamber of commerce—asserted, "I believe there is a close

relationship between crime and poor housing and its disturbing influence on family life."[36] In

1959, one article on young offenders also squarely blamed criminality on familial dysfunction:

"The home conditions of such children as a rule almost defies description … Would you

condemn a boy whose mother has 16 children from 10 'fathers'—each without the benefit of

marriage?" The same article quoted a St. Louis judge who opined, "The big problem today is the

lack of moral character in parents. … Think of the home environment of these children—they are

your adults of tomorrow."[37]

These attitudes were given an aura of expert legitimacy thanks to the work of publicly

engaged social scientists. During this era, scholars working in the field operated nationwide and

had powerful influence on public discourse and policy at all levels of government.[38] St. Louis,

however, was a particularly noteworthy and consequential center of this activity, thanks in large

part to Washington University's prestigious and innovative Department of Sociology. Working

closely with City Hall and the police, sociologists created the Social Science Institute in 1956,

with a "purpose to bridge the gulf between gown and town, research and practice."[39] Sociology

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[36] *St. Louis Commerce*, March 9, 1949.

[37] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 24, 1959.

[38] Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Kevin Mumford, "Untangling Pathology: The Moynihan Report and Homosexual Damage, *Journal of Policy History* 24, no. 1 (2012).

[39] Pittman, David J., ed., "Crime and Delinquency Records in Missouri and the U.S.A.: Uses, Misuses, and Need Improvements," May 20-21, 1960, box 1, folder 8, Social Science Institute Records, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.

faculty and students turned St. Louis into their laboratory and focused on analyzing what were viewed as St. Louis's pressing social problems, particularly among poor black residents of the urban core. Their findings were not only circulated in scholarly circles, but on the pages of local newspapers and the St. Louis Police Department's employee newsletter.[40]

Much of the research of Washington University's sociologists tended to focus on gender roles, parenting, and family life, tying sexual politics to issues of urban poverty, racial segregation, and the decline of the inner city. For example, one study—based on thousands of hours of interviews with parents and children living in a high-crime "zone of transition" near downtown St. Louis—found that youthful criminality emerged from "mixed-up" sex roles, overbearing mothers, and weak or absent fathers.[41] With its emphasis on delinquents' gender confusion and nonconformity and aversion to normative heterosexuality, the report all but equated youthful criminality with queerness. It is also noteworthy that Washington University sociology graduate students Laud Humphreys and Ethel Sawyer both engaged in pioneering research on St. Louis's queer subcultures in this era; their work will be discussed in the next chapter.[42]

An especially important product of Washington University sociologists' work on St. Louis was Lee Rainwater's *Behind Ghetto Walls: Family Life in a Federal Slum* (1970). This influential study was based on extensive ethnographic investigation that he and his students and colleagues conducted at the almost entirely black Pruitt-Igoe public housing complex on St.

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[40] See, for example, *Police Journal* 16, no. 9 (September 1963). The *Police Journal* can be found at the library of the St. Louis Police Academy, among other locations.

[41] Robert L. Hamblin, Mark J. Abrahamson, and Robert L. Burgess, "The Technical Report on the Diagnostic Study and the Baseline Survey of the St. Louis Delinquency Control Project," box 2, folder 15, Social Science Research Institute Records, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.

[42] Laud Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places* (Chicago: Aldine, 1970); Laud Humphreys, *Out of the Closets: The Sociology of Gay Liberation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972); Ethel Sawyer, "A Study of a Public Lesbian Community" (honors essay, Washington University in St. Louis, 1965).

Louis's north side.[43] To a great degree, Rainwater explained the crime and violence that characterized life in and around Pruitt-Igoe as a result of the breakdown of heteronormative family life there. In 1968, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported that Rainwater's research revealed that there was a "lack of community order" at Pruitt-Igoe "because of the proportion of families without adult males." The article asserted that more peaceable communities are "self-regulating." "Such communities require men … to discipline boys and provide models of proper behavior," Rainwater told the *Post-Dispatch*. "But in Pruitt-Igoe, for every adult male, there are three women and six children."[44]

C. "As Bad as the Congo!": White Women and the Specter of Sexual Violence

In addition to the notion that crime stemmed from family dysfunction, much discussion of crime in St. Louis during the era of white flight suggested that women—implicitly white women—were the most likely and alarming victims of crime, particularly sexual assault. In a 1959 article on the spread of crime to previously safe neighborhoods, a *Globe-Democrat* reporter asserted, "There are many neighborhoods here where no woman dares walk alone at night." These areas of special danger to women included deteriorating West End neighborhoods, "midtown slums," and the city's public housing projects, which the reporter described as "rape-traps."[45] An article from the following year explicitly linked what it asserted were increasing numbers of sexual assaults with changing social conditions in St. Louis neighborhoods: "St. Louis's changing population in some areas …, which is causing sharp gains in the number of people of low moral standards, is partly responsible."[46] Another article from 1959 announced

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[43] Lee Rainwater, *Behind Ghetto Walls: Family Life in a Federal Slum* (Chicago: Aldine, 1970).
[44] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 26, 1968.
[45] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 23, 1959.
[46] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 25, 1960.

that "vicious assaults on women" were "chief problem" in St. Louis and becoming "more prevalent and alarming," then asserted that "nothing concerns a community more than the safety of its womenfolk." The author of the piece went on to point out that St. Louis city counted 153 incidents of forcible rape the previous year, while there were only four in unincorporated St. Louis County, where there "no serious crime problem as yet."[47] The implication was that women were in far greater danger of sexual assault in the urban core than in the suburbs—an impression communicated in other reportage through the 1960s. A 1969 feature in the *Post-Dispatch*, for instance, implied that sexual assault was a routine occurrence in the city's apartment buildings. "Fear of crime is a growing reality" for apartment residents, the article asserted. "They hear windows break nightly. Women are raped in the next apartment and screams are heard." The article suggested that the dire situation left many city apartments vacant, even while "many new apartment buildings" were being built in the safety of "greener sections of St. Louis County."[48]

In September 1960, one incident powerfully illustrated connections between race and fears of white women's vulnerability to sexual assault on the streets of St. Louis during the era of white flight. On the evening of Sunday, September 18, concerned residents of the predominantly white South St. Louis neighborhood of Carondolet called the police after discovering a distraught nineteenth-year-old woman on the street. Under questioning, Wanda Landis—a mother of three whose serviceman husband was stationed abroad—told police that she had been abducted the previous Saturday day afternoon while waiting for a bus in the Soulard neighborhood. She said that she was held captive and repeatedly raped by a group of five young black men. Through the following week, local newspapers published almost daily articles reporting on the developing case, including Landis's detailed descriptions of her assailants. The incident was also extensively

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[47] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 22, 1959.
[48] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 21, 1969.

covered by local radio and television news outlets. In the meantime, police prioritized the investigation, taking in hundreds of black men for questioning and holding at least one in jail. Then, on Sunday, September 25, the story changed completely—after police noticed glaring inconsistencies in her account, Landis admitted that she had fabricated it entirely. Landis had invented the story to explain her absence from her family over the weekend, which she had spent with a white man with whom she was having an affair.[49]

Reactions to Landis's story in the heated week after the initial report are revealing. While reports of a woman's abduction and rape understandably provoked widespread fear and outrage, the particulars of the response indicate that many white St. Louisans viewed the incident through the lens of race. In a critical review of media coverage of the incident, the editors of the *St. Louis Argus*, a local black-owned newspaper, wrote "We recall no similar sensationalism in news reporting … where racial differences are not in issue."[50] The *Globe-Democrat* made the assailants' race central to their coverage, for instance prominently referring to them as "Negro rapists" in the opening sentence of one article.[51] The *Globe-Democrat* also editorialized on the incident in a piece headlined "AS BAD AS THE CONGO!" "The attackers, she said, are Negroes. She is white," the editorial asserted, then argued, "This bold and brutal crime is as bad as any committed during the recent rioting in The Congo." This reference to foreign events not only underlined the racial otherness of purported assailants, but also equated the sexual assault to political violence associated with the breakdown of European colonial rule in Africa—a loaded comparison in the context of desegregation era St. Louis.[52] A few days later, to accompany a

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[49] George Lipsitz, *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1988), 71; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 19, September 22, September 26, October 29; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25; Negro Scrapbook, vol. 1, 116-117, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

[50] Negro Scrapbook, vol. 1, 117, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

[51] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 21, 1960.

[52] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 22, 1960.

letter from a reader calling for the death penalty for the perpetrators, the *Globe-Democrat* printed a cartoon of a noose with the caption "Justice for Rapists"—an image whose association with lynching was noted by the editors of the *Argus*.[53]

As the *Globe-Democrat* asserted, before the truth came out, Landis's story "triggered a chain reaction of resentment that has been building here for months"—apparently crystalizing a widespread fear that white women and girls were increasingly vulnerable to sexual assault in St. Louis.[54] In its coverage of the incident, *The Argus* suggested that many St. Louisans responded to the incident with "hysteria."[55] In their September 22 piece, the editors of the *Globe-Democrat* asserted that a lesson of Landis's abduction was that young women "can be grabbed off any intersection in St. Louis."[56] Police even received reports of other attempted abductions of white girls by black men matching Landis's fictitious descriptions.[57] On September 23, attendees at a League of Women Voters' forum made Landis's assault the focus of the event, demanding that candidates for Missouri state attorney-general explain how they would prevent further attacks. Circuit attorney Thomas Eagleton (later a US Senator and Vice Presidential nominee) told the crowd that St. Louis was "on fire" over the incident and that "women here fear being on the streets," but warned against "panic."[58] On the same day, the *Globe-Democrat* started a fund to raise money to pay a reward for information leading to the conviction of the Landis's rapists.

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[53] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 25, 1960; Negro Scrapbook, vol. 1, 116, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis. As recently as 1942, a black man in Missouri had been lynched after allegedly sexually assaulting a white woman. See Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., *The Lynching of Cleo Wright* (University of Kentucky Press, 1998).

[54] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 25, 1960.

[55] Negro Scrapbook, vol. 1, 116-117, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis. .

[56] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 22, 1960.

[57] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 22, 1960; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 23, 29160.

[58] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 24, 1960; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 24 and 25, 1960.

$2637 were raised in less than twenty-four hours, with large donations from area businessmen and physicians.[59]

D. **"We Stayed to Fight for City Living": Delphine McClellan and the Women's Crusade Against Crime**

For most of her nearly century-long life, Delphine McClellan made her home in the Central West End. As a girl in the 1910s and '20s, McClellan inhabited what was then a an almost entirely white neighborhood with many well-to-do and respectable families. Great-granddaughter of a state legislator, judge, and banker and daughter of a physician, she—like many of her neighbors—could trace her family's prominence in St. Louis back generations. At midcentury, McClellan and husband James, a successful lawyer, settled into "a fine family home" on Lindell Boulevard across from Forest Park. By her own account, she "was primarily a homebody, minding [her] children" for the better part of the 1950s and '60s.[60]

During those years, the social character the city beyond the walls of McClellan's fenced-in mansion changed. Shifts in her census tract—which straddle part of the Central West End and the West End neighborhood the north—were particularly striking. In 1950, only 55 of the 7,174 inhabitants of McClellan's census tract were black—less than one percent. In 1970, the tract's population had dropped slightly, to 6,731 people—but 77.4 percent were black.[61]

For McClellan, disconcerting changes in daily life accompanied this demographic transformation, including the flight of many longtime residents and businesses and what she

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[59] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 23, 1960.

[60] Delphine McClellan, *We Stayed to Fight for City Living: How St. Louis Women Sparked a City Renaissance* (St. Louis: City Living Press, 1987), 2-3, 134; obituary of Delphine S. McClellan, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 22, 2011.

[61] *Census of Population and Housing: 1970*, 3, 28; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population: 1950*, Vol. III, *Census Tract Statistics*, Chapter 47 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952): 7-8.

perceived as growing danger on the streets. As McClellan recounted in her memoir, by 1969 "militant Black Nationalists, in their wide-brimmed black hats, were walking the streets of the neighborhood. … Most merchants had fled. I had watched them leave in a slow, steady, bleak procession, and [I] worried about disappearing services. Gone were the grocery and hardware stores, the jewelry and lamp repair shops, the corner pharmacy, and gas stations." Meanwhile, "purse snatching, vandalism, house burglaries, assaults, and car thefts began to plague residents," and the police district captain said that "crime rates in all categories are higher now than they had ever been." Attending a meeting at St. John's Methodist Church "in the heart of the west end," McClellan noted that "not many church members were expected as most had fled to the suburbs, leaving the adjoining ancestral homes to all manner of occupants, prostitutes, transient boarders, interspersed with sturdy old timers who refused to leave." Surveying a neighborhood that she increasingly found inhospitable, McClellan concluded, "the time had come for us to face the issues or move to the suburbs."[62]

Unlike so many other white people of means in St. Louis and similar cities across the nation, McClellan and her husband made "a decision to remain in the city, staying and fighting." In her middle age, this "white west end Republican woman," by her own description "a somewhat staid, convent-bred housewife," began a career as a community activist and "lady crime-fighter." In 1969, she helped found and lead a new organization—Women for City Living—and dedicated herself to "saving" the Central West End and St. Louis. Making combating crime central to its mission, the organization was rebranded as the Women's Crusade Against Crime shortly afterward.

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[62] McClellan, *We Stayed to Fight for City Living*, 1-2, 4, 15.

While many white St. Louisans abandoned the city for the suburbs during this era, McClellan and other members of Women for City Living articulated a defense of urbanity. In her memoir, Delphine McClellan, who had deep roots in her neighborhood, recalls that in the late 1960s she despaired at the thought of leaving the Central West End. Thinking of the area's beautiful mansions—"solid specimens of outstanding architecture"—she found it "incredible that we would have to abandon such treasures in this unique place." "Our ancestors in addition left a heritage of magnificent churches, schools, hospitals, and cultural institutions for the descendants to use, treasure, and enjoy," she wrote. "How could we abandon this splendid city and witness the final desertion of the treasures [that] our forefathers had passed on to us?"[63] McClellan also described an economic motivation for staying put: "What of our economic investments? If residents kept fleeing to the suburbs as fear engulfed them, the value of our homes would certainly plummet." McClellan remembered that the "staid, highly conservative men" who sat on the board of the Central West End Association "knew that saving the west end and their own personal investments was crucial."[64]

A preference for living within a dense urban area seems to have encouraged some supporters of Women for City Living to avoid a move to the suburbs. In a letter to the editor in *Post-Dispatch*, ten female Central West Enders chided the newspaper for making too much of crime in their neighborhoods. "Those who choose city life are well aware of the crime problem," they wrote. "However, we are not as incapacitated by fear as you would have your readers believe. Many families and individuals find convenience and gracious living in the West End, in spacious homes and apartments and in smaller efficiencies ideal for the students and elderly for whom accessible public transportation is a factor." These women suggested that despite the

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[63] McClellan, *We Stayed to Fight for City Living*, 2-3, 5.
[64] McClellan, *We Stayed to Fight for City Living,* 5, 7.

area's dangers, they were committed to maintaining their urban community in the face of white flight. "The negative tenor your series fails to indicate the very positive feelings of the vast number of aware, determined, forward looking citizens who love the city life we find in St. Louis," they told the editor. "We wish to be heard."[65] In a recruiting letter sent to households in the Central West End, McClellan, writing as president of Women for City Living, wrote, "The central area is the heart of our town, surrounding Lindell Boulevard [one St. Louis's principal east-west streets] and leading downtown. … This is in the unique, delightful, diverse area we have chosen, and where so many of us want to live."[66]

While most of members of Women for City Living were white, McClellan also recognized the "obvious necessity" of including African Americans because of their large numbers in the city. Indeed, she and other white Central West Enders collaborated with their middle- and working-class black neighbors and coreligionists on efforts to address a variety of mutual worries: what they saw as flagrant sexual commerce on the neighborhood's streets; deteriorating and sometimes abandoned buildings owned by absentee landlords; inadequate and unresponsive city services; and criminals who targeted black victims as well as a white.[67]

McClellan and Women for City Living thus made at least a rhetorical commitment to racial diversity and touted the Central West End's racially mixed character as one of its advantages. In her personal notes from a 1969 planning meeting for the organization that would become Women for City Living, McClellan wrote that both "white and colored" were to be

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[65] Letter to the Editor, "Alive and Unafraid," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, n.d. (c. 1969), news clipping, box 2, folder 13, Women for City Living Scrapbooks, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.
[66] To "Saint Louisan" from Mrs. James S. McClellan, 1969, Box 1, Folder 1, Women for City Living Scrapbooks, MHS.
[67] McClellan, *We Stayed to Fight for City Living*, vii, 7, 29, 35, 84, 287.

included in volunteer crime patrols.[68] A year later, in response to the suggestion that her

opposition to locating new public housing projects in the Central West End was racially

motivated, McClellan wrote, "There is no desire to exclude blacks from the west central section

of the city. On the contrary, this is a well integrated neighborhood, one of the few in St. Louis,

and all of us—black and white—are determined to keep it that way."[69] In the Central West End

women's letter to the *Post-Dispatch* mentioned above, the letter-writers noted that they were part

of a "biracial organization." Similar wording is scattered throughout materials produced by

Women for City Living and its successor organization, Women's Crusade Against Crime. A few

years later, a pamphlet co-produced by the Women's Crusade Against Crime promoted one

district of the Central West End as a "very special place to live and work" where "people come

in all ages, colors, and economic levels." The pamphlet includes drawings of students on

graduation day, children playing and riding a school bus, and adults strolling down a crowded

sidewalk—all these featuring a mix of black and white faces. That the area was "diverse" had

become a selling point.[70]

A support for interracial neighborhood organizing was more the entirely rhetorical. At

least one of the founding members of Women for City Living, Anna Busch, was a black woman.

McClellan credits her with coming up with the group's name.[71] In the 1970s, black women

would also play a prominent role in interracial neighborhood campaigns to demand building

code enforcement and a police crackdown on sex workers who walked up and down Washington

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[68] "Del's notes on a PROPOSAL TO FORM A WOMEN'S AUXILIARY TO THE CENTRAL WEST END ASSOCIATION," May 28, 1969, box 2, folder 13, Women for City Living Scrapbooks, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

[69] To the Editor of the *Post-Dispatch* from Delphine McClellan, November 13, 1970, box 2, folder 13, Women for City Living Scrapbooks, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

[70] Pamphlet, "Park Forest: A Very Special Place to Live and Work," n.d. (c. 1975), box 1, folder 3, Women for City Living Scrapbooks, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

[71] McClellan, *We Stayed to Fight for City Living*, 8; to "Saint Louisan" from Mr. James S. McClellan, 1969, box 1, folder 1, Women for City Living Scrapbooks, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

Avenue near the northern boundary of the Central West End. These efforts were a result of the shared interest of many black and white Central West Enders in creating what they thought would be a safer, more respectable, and more physically attractive neighborhood.[72]

McClellan and her white peers' racial attitudes seem to have been complex and changing. It is perhaps important to keep in mind that McClellan spent her first three decades living in a Jim Crow city and almost certainly had few opportunities to interact with black people as equal until well into her adulthood. The only black person to appear in her memoir is "Harrison, [a] big, black congenial waiter" at a restaurant she frequented as a teenager.[73] Other hints of her racial psychology are present in her memoir. McClellan describes her black collaborators as "attractive," "meticulously groomed," and "lady-like," while she never describes any white women in similar terms.[74] This suggests that to her respectability seemed noteworthy in black women, but could be taken for granted in white women.

McClellan seemed to distinguish between what she considered to be law-abiding, family-oriented, religious, and financially secure black people—with whom she expressed an eagerness to collaborate—and what she saw as poor, crime-prone, or politically radical black people, whose presence in the Central West End she frankly wanted to keep to a minimum. For her, St. Louis's militant black nationalists were a "gang," and their visibility in the Central West End was the "last straw" in her decision to become a neighborhood activist. As indicated in McClellan's defensive letter to the *Post-Dispatch*, some of her white contemporaries detected racism in the opposition of some white Central West Enders to locating new public housing in the area. McClellan vigorously disagreed that this was a racial issue per se, instead insisting that

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[72]McClellan, *We Stayed to Fight for City Living*, 48, 66-70.
[73] McClellan, *We Stayed to Fight for City Living*, 21.
[74] McClellan, *We Stayed to Fight for City Living*, 28, 67, 92.

young men and boys who live in subsidized housing—often the children of single mothers—

were a source of crime in the neighborhood. "We had had our share of subsidized housing

programs in our area," she wrote.[75] In her memoir, McClellan explains that middle- and

working-class blacks could be brought on board efforts to prevent new public housing projects

from being located in the neighborhood. Three white Central West End men "took up the fight,"

she writes:

> They attended meeting after meeting, and Mike [one of the men] says he bluntly
> told the black residents that they were the ones who would have to speak up
> otherwise fighting [the new public housing project] would be called "racist." And
> Virgil Wright did. He was a fine black postman, active in the Skinker-DeBaliviere
> Association [a neighborhood organization], who lived on Pershing Avenue with
> his family, and he could see how these undisciplined children were hurting the
> neighborhood. Many letters were mailed to HUD administrator George Romney
> and his cohorts in the nation's capital.[76]

Their efforts to keep out additional public housing projects suggest that for some white

Central West Enders, tolerance of racial difference had limits. They were willing to live and

collaborate with respectable, middle-class black neighbors, but they were far less willing to

whose living situations they regarded as disreputable and given to criminality. Thus, shared

heteronormativity could be a basis for a degree of community-building across race, while also a

means of condemning those who fell outside of it.

E.   Conclusion

Fears of rising crime undergirded the widespread perception that many St. Louis

neighborhoods were in decline during the era of post-World War II white flight. Moreover, they

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[75] McClellan, *We Stayed to Fight for City Living*, 56.
[76] McClellan, *We Stayed to Fight for City Living*, 54-55.

were a key part of the entwined racial and sexual anxieties that accompanied St. Louis's shifting social makeup.

As the activism of Delphine McClellan and the Women for City Living show, fear of crime not only triggered white flight to the suburbs, but also some determined organizing to combat what was seen as St. Louis's decline. These efforts necessitated the development of a new racial and sexual politics, one that was tentatively interracialist while still prioritizing familial propriety.

Delphine McClellan's Central West End stood out among St. Louis's neighborhoods because of its racial liminality and pronounced social heterogeneity. These were key features that nurtured a vibrant, although racially divided, queer community there in the mid-twentieth century. The experiences of queer St. Louisans during the era of white flight and the rise of the "gay ghetto" in the Central West End are the topics of the following chapter.

IV. "A SHOWCASE OF DEVIANT BEHAVIOR":
THE RISE OF THE GAY GHETTO

A.   <u>Introduction</u>

In 1969, Lee Maynard, a white gay man, graduated from high school in St. Louis. Struggling with his attraction to other men, Maynard left home and rented an apartment of his own in the Central West End. He met several gay neighbors, one of whom suggested he visit Potpourri, a nearby gay bar at the corner of McPherson and Euclid avenues. Nineteen-year-old Maynard "didn't quite feel comfortable" at the bar, so he went across the street for a coffee at Balaban's, a restaurant popular with queers. There Maynard saw a physically affectionate lesbian couple sitting across from him. "I'd never seen this before, and I just felt there was something intriguing," Maynard recalled. "At the same time, coming to grips with my sexuality, [I] thought, 'Why can't I get a girl?' Then it sort of soaked in: well, that's not what you're searching for."

Following this moment of clarity at Balaban's, Maynard immersed himself in queer life in St. Louis. He attended parties at apartments and mansions, frequented gay bars, and began to appear in drag as "Gypsy Lee." Specializing in numbers by Cher, Maynard became one of the most prominent female impersonation artists in St. Louis in the 1970s, even performing at fundraisers for the Mandrake Society, St. Louis's first locally based gay and lesbian political organization.

Reading Maynard's coming out story with attention to metropolitan space is revealing. Almost all the sites that he associated with queer visibility and sociality were in the St. Louis region's urban core. One neighborhood, the Central West End, played an especially important role. Indeed, in 1972 sociologist Laud Humphreys identified this area as St. Louis's "gay

ghetto," characterized by a "high proportion of homosexual residents" and many queer gathering places, such as Potpourri and Balaban's. The suburbs, on the other hand, had "no facilities set aside for homosexuals," according to Humphreys. For his part, Maynard remembered suburban St. Louis County as devoid of queer community life. "Everything happened in St. Louis. There was no county," Maynard recalled. "The gays came in from their families to be in St. Louis. … Anybody that was gay in the county was only gay when they were in the city, not out there."[1]

Both Maynard's first-person recollections and Humphreys's sociological analysis evidence a crucial point: queer white St. Louisans experienced urban decline differently from their straight counterparts. This insight in turn supports the central contention of this dissertation, that sexuality and race must be considered in tandem in order to understand St. Louis's transformation across the twentieth century.

As white families fled to the region's booming suburbs, a growing portion of the city's population was made up of blacks and of whites who deviated from heteronormativity. "White flight" to the suburbs was not a flight of whites generically, but by and large of white St. Louisans who had the means and desire to purchase detached, single-family homes, to marry, and to raise children in what they regarded as a safe and wholesome environment. White St. Louisans who were unable or unwilling to pursue these aims tended to remain in the city or even to relocate there from elsewhere, reversing the typical trajectory of white flight. Often, these white St. Louisans were queer.

The city of St. Louis's increasing queerness was not just a matter of a disproportionately large queer residential population vis-à-vis its suburbs. The public spaces where queer

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[1] Maynard, "Gypsy" Lee, interview with author and Steven Louis Brawley, July 2, 2013. Transcript in author's possession. Laud Humphreys, *Out of the Closets: The Sociology of Homosexual Liberation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 80-81.

community life took place—the bars, cafés, bathhouses, and meeting places of social and political groups—were located almost without exception in St. Louis and East St. Louis, typically in racially marginal areas.[2] These sorts of queer social spaces were almost nonexistent in suburban St. Louis County throughout the twentieth century.[3]

St. Louis's evolving queer geography is suggestive of the complexities of urban decline. A heightened queer presence in a neighborhood was often contemporaneous with and causally connected to its perceived decline. The same conditions that meant an area was "blighted" sometimes also meant that queers encountered less resistance to their presence than they had before. Thus, the processes associated with urban decline were productive as well as destructive; the abandonment of a neighborhood by one population could open space and create new possibilities for others.[4]

This chapter traces the relationship between queer St. Louisans and the city's decline from the early twentieth century through the post-Stonewall gay liberation era. It focuses especially on the rise of a predominantly white "gay ghetto" in the Central West End, placing this neighborhood's history in the context of the metropolitan region's shifting racial and sexual boundaries.

The chapter begins by considering the beginnings of an outsize queer presence in the Central West End in the decades before the Second World War. The section is anchored by the life of Mabel Thorpe Jerrold, a nightlife entrepreneur. In this period, the Central West End was

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[2] Being an independent municipality, East St. Louis is in some sense a "suburb" of St. Louis. It is an exception that proves the rule, however, as it is an old industrial city whose post-World War II history was characterized by white flight and population loss.

[3] Much of my understanding of the history of St. Louis's queer geography comes from my work on the collaborative Mapping LGBTQ St. Louis project. A presentation of the project's findings, including interactive maps, can be found online at http://library.wustl.edu/map-lgbtq-stl

[4] Similar arguments can be found in Bryant Simon, "New York Avenue: The Life and Death of Gay Spaces in Atlantic City, New Jersey, 1920-1990," *Journal of Urban History* 28, no. 3 (March 2002): 300-327.

transitioning from an elite residential district to a blighted area. Its many rooming houses and apartment buildings and its racially and socially liminal character made it a fertile, if sometimes contested, setting for queer community building. These dynamics were exemplified by the Great Depression era success of Thorpe's Central West End "pansy" club, as well as her struggle to keep the club open despite objections from disgruntled neighbors and anti-vice crusaders.

Next, the chapter examines how St. Louis's queer geography was reconfigured in the decades of mass suburbanization following the Second World War. It draws especially on research conducted by pathbreaking Washington University sociologist Laud Humphreys in the 1960s. Humphreys's work reveals a sharpening distinction between suburb and city, defined respectively by whiteness and heteronormativity and by racial and sexual otherness. As documented by Humphreys, closeted suburban men crossed these boundaries as they commuted across the metropolitan area in search of sexual satisfaction in "tearooms."

As the following chapter section shows, other queers were building increasingly visible and complex urban communities just as many white St. Louisans were leaving the city for the suburbs. This phenomenon can be seen most clearly in the Central West End. Queer whites tended to be indifferent or even attracted to many of the features that repelled white families with children from the area, including changes associated with the changing racial demography of the area. In this context, a concentrated queer residential population and array of queer social spaces emerged, laying the foundation for the rise of an organized gay and lesbian movement.

Finally, the chapter considers racial divisions among queer St. Louisans in the era of white flight. While white queers often lived and gathered in racially marginal areas, queer social spaces and networks tended to be segregated. Moreover, because of racial discrimination in housing and employment, black queers faced more constrained options and were less able to take

advantage of the possibilities presented by urban decline than their white counterpart, and St. Louis's black social geography was less clearly separated into distinct zones of heteronormativity and sexual deviance.

B.   Mabel Thorpe Jerrold and the Prewar Origins of the Gay Ghetto

Laud Humphreys christened the Central West End as St. Louis's "gay ghetto" in 1972. However, an outsize queer presence in the neighborhood can be traced back almost a half century earlier. The area's emergence as an epicenter of queer community life was tied to dramatic changes in the built environment and social makeup of the neighborhood in the decades preceding the Second World War—changes that some observers regarded as harbingers of neighborhood decline.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the Central West End was a quasi-suburban refuge of St. Louis's wealthy white families. The area's orderliness, affluence, and respectability distinguished it from the older, more densely populated eastern parts of the city. By the 1930s, however, the neighborhood's rows of stately mansions were intermixed with apartment buildings and rooming houses that sheltered a large numbers unmarried and childless adults. Sex workers, once largely limited to east of Grand Avenue, had become a common sight on some streets, and crowds gathered at nightclubs featuring bawdy "female impersonation" shows—forerunners of the gay bars of later years. Meanwhile, the adjacent Mill Creek Valley had become a black neighborhood, turning the eastern portion of the Central West End into a racial borderland. As far as city planners were concerned, the Central West End was headed in the wrong direction, and in 1941 Harland Bartholomew went so far as the describe the area as "blighted."

One character looms large in the early history of St. Louis's gay ghetto—a bold, resourceful, and stylish woman named Mabel Thorpe Jerrold. In the 1930s, she operated the Blackstone Hotel, located on the 4000 block of Olive Street. Living in inexpensive rooms rented by the week, the hotel's residents exemplified the social character of the nascent gay ghetto. On the premises, Thorpe ran a nightclub whose main attraction was performances by female impersonators. While some St. Louisans objected to Thorpe's business, but she managed to keep the club's doors open for years in the face of legal challenges and police raids. Her resilience helped lay the foundation for a constellation of queer social spaces that appeared in St. Louis after the Second World War.

Before returning to the story of Thorpe's embattled nightclub, we will take a closer look at the history of the Central West End in the first several decades of the twentieth century. The Central West End's perceived decline during these years overlapped with changes that went hand in hand with a heightened queer presence.

Starting in the 1880s, the Central West End was a bastion of St. Louis's well-to-do. Attracted by the area's distance from the bustling central business district to the east, people of means built their mansions in the neighborhood's grand private places. Seeking to control the processes of urban change, they employed restrictive covenants to keep out people and activities they regarded as undesirable.[5] For a time, they succeeded. Through about the end of the 1920s, the Central West End was imminently respectable and fashionable among St. Louis's white elites.[6]

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[5] Tim Fox, ed., *Where We Live: A Guide to St. Louis Communities* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1995), 134. David T. Beito and Bruce Smith, "The Formation of Urban Infrastructure through Nongovernmental Planning: The Private Places of St. Louis, 1869-1920," *Journal of Urban History* 16, no. 3 (May 1990): 264-303.
[6] James Neal Primm, *Lion of the Valley: St. Louis, Missouri, 1764-1980*, 3rd ed. (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1998), 347.

However, the Central West End's character gradually changed through the early twentieth century as some social groups left the area and others arrived in their place. Starting in about the 1910s, many affluent St. Louisans relocated from the Central West End and similar neighborhoods to new homes in St. Louis's first automobile-oriented suburbs, such as Ladue. The population beyond the city limits in suburbanizing St. Louis County grew dramatically in in the 1920s and 1930s. This contrasted with the city of St. Louis itself, where growth slowed in the 1920s, and the population decreased for the first time from one census to another in the 1930s.[7] "One must … appreciate the suburban growth that has characterized St. Louis County in recent years," the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* reported in 1934. "More and more have men with the financial means necessary provided for themselves and their families sumptuous retreats in the country where, removed from turmoil of the city, they may enjoy a bucolic life, although their business interests remain in St. Louis."[8]

At the same time that many well-to-do families were leaving the Central West End, multifamily housing increasingly came to characterize the neighborhood. Many apartment buildings were constructed, and some large, formerly single-family homes were converted into rooming houses. "Apartment hotels," as they were called, came more slowly to St. Louis than New York and some other major cities, with only a few constructed in the nineteenth century.[9] After 1900, however, something of an apartment boom hit St. Louis's Central Corridor,[10] with

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[7] Primm, *Lion of the Valley*, 445.

[8] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, February 18, 1934. For the history of St. Louis's prototypical elite automobile suburb, see Charlene Bry, *Ladue Found: Celebrating 100 Years of the City's Rural-to-Regal Past* (St. Louis: Virginia Publishing, 2011).

[9] For the history of apartment hotels in other US urban settings, see Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern Urban Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Paul Groth, *Living Downtown: A History of Residential Hotels in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[10] The Central Corridor is the middle section of St. Louis, running east-west, containing downtown, the Central West End, and neighborhoods in-between, including the now demolished Mill Creek Valley.

many building projects undertaken through the 1920s. These apartments tended to be built along Lindell, Olive, Washington, and Delmar—east-west thoroughfares running from downtown toward the city limit. These roads were traversed by streetcars line, allowing for quick and easy travel to and from workplaces and commercial establishments in the central business district.[11] In 1916, William Marion Reedy, editor of *Reedy's Mirror* and an astute observer of local events, declared that St. Louis was in the midst of an "Apartment Craze."[12]

Some local commentators were perplexed by the demand for apartments and concerned with their possible social consequences. This confusion partly resulted because the apartment dwellers of the Central West End apartments were often perceived to be relatively financially comfortable, unlike impoverished people who had no choice but to live in tenements. "That people should pile atop one another in apartment houses in a city where there is so much unoccupied land is an anomaly," Reedy asserted. "Why don't they buy land and build homes? … What has become of the old passion for a home?" Reedy also noted perceived characteristics of apartment dwellers—such as their tendency to move frequently and their lack of interest in getting to know their neighbors—which has saw as exemplifying the negative features of urban life. "It requires no particularly piercing vision to behold these structures in the not too distant future as slums," Reedy wrote.[13] Similarly, in 1919 the *Post-Dispatch* reported with a tone of incredulity that a new "apartment house district" in the Central West End, running along Pershing Avenue for three blocks from Union Boulevard to DeBaliviere Avenue, had a population of 1000 persons per acre, "more than the city's poorest slums."[14] It was difficult for

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[11] Ralph Carr Fletcher, Harry L. Hornback, and Stuart A. Queen, *Social Statistics of St. Louis* (St. Louis: School of Business and Public Administration, Washington University, 1935), 55.

[12] W.M.R. [William Marion Reedy], "The Apartment Craze," *Reedy's Mirror* September 22, 1916, 599.

[13] W.M.R. [William Marion Reedy], "The Apartment Craze," *Reedy's Mirror* September 22, 1916, 600.

[14] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 12, 1919.

many observers in St. Louis to see dense, multi-family housing as anything but a generator of social pathologies and engine of neighborhood decline. They were not incorrect, insofar as they associated decline with conditions straying from heteronormative ideals.

The outward drift of affluent white families and the rise of apartments and rooming houses altered the social makeup of the West End, leading to a growing proportion of childless and unmarried adults among the area's residents. In their 1939 tome *The City*, Washington University social scientists Stuart Queen and Lewis Thomas included a map based on data from the 1930 US Census that showed a band characterized by low average family size stretching east to west across the middle of St. Louis. This included not only the old "blighted" rooming house district east of Grand Avenue, identified by city planner Harland Bartholomew in the late 1910s, but also the Central West End. "In general, large families are most often founding in outlying parts of the city, small families near the center," they wrote. "[The Central Corridor] is a part of the city that is undergoing fairly rapid change—from private residential, to rooming house, to commercial. … It is losing population to the north and south sides and to the suburbs." Queen and Lewis noted that the western half of this belt was an area of "fairly high economic status" as opposed to the "eastern, or near-downtown half." Despite this, "the whole belt is one of multiple dwellings, some of them erected as such, others old residences converted into tenements." [15] In the 1930s, other social scientists noted that a band running through the center of the city also contained the census tracts with the lowest proportion of married adult men (in some cases as low as 18.2 percent of the adult male population), while the western part of the Central Corridor

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[15] Stuart Alfred Queen and Lewis Francis Thomas, *The City: A Study of Urbanism in the United States* (New York: McGraw-Hall, 1939), 102-103.

contained the city's census tracts with the lowest portion of married women (as low as 34.1 percent of the adult female population).[16]

Thus, much of the Central West End was increasingly characterized by a larger-than-average presence of unmarried and childless adults. This was in part because of the availability of apartments and rooming houses—residential options well suited to the needs of singles. In fact, some apartment buildings even specifically advertised to this market, referring to themselves, for example, as "bachelor hotels."[17] Moreover, single men and women without children tended to be less concerned by features of urban life that parents found objectionable and contributed to their decision to move to the suburbs or outlying parts of the city.

The changing housing stock and social makeup of the Central West End went hand in hand with shifts in St. Louis's sexual geography. Sex work—previously mostly confined to east of Grand Avenue—developed a visible presence in some parts of the Central West End. In the aftermath of the closure of the segregated vice districts in the mid-1910s, prostitution did not simply disappear from St. Louis. As advocates of segregated vice had warned, it moved elsewhere—typically to those neighborhoods where police were most willing to tolerate it. In other contemporary cities, this often meant black neighborhoods and white "rooming house districts," with their large populations of transient, single adults. St. Louis seems to have fit this pattern. Already in 1916, soon after the closure of the vice districts, a correspondent for the *Chicago Defender* in St. Louis reported, "Residence districts, especially the one east of Grand Avenue, have been more or less infested with these loose white women ever since the police placed a ban on the segregated Lucas avenue section. Some of them have secured flats in and

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[16] Ralph Carr Fletcher, Harry L. Hornback, and Stuart A. Queen, *Social Statistics of St. Louis* (St. Louis: School of Business and Public Administration, Washington University, 1935), 43-44.
[17] See, for example, *St. Louis Star*, December 22, 1912.

bordering on the portions of the city where members of the Race live." Moreover, the correspondent related, "a number of these lewd women had taken up their residence in the fashionable West End."[18]

After the closure of the vice districts, sex workers and their clients adopted new practices that allowed for greater discretion and mobility in the face of the police's efforts at suppression. Brothel prostitution became less common. Instead, sex workers tended to operate independently, finding their clients through intermediaries, such as hotel employees or taxi drivers, or meeting places such as cafes, theaters, or street corners. They also tended to perform their services in hotels, apartments, or rented rooms.[19] The built environment of the Central West End lent itself to this new pattern of prostitution. In 1925, about a decade after the closure of the vice districts, St. Louis sociologist George Mangold wrote that in St. Louis "commercialized vice is carried on mainly in cheap hotels and furnished rooming houses. … The disorderly resorts are principally located in the neighborhood of the chief street-car lines running from downtown to Kingshighway."[20] Thus, according to Mangold, sex work had moved deep into the Central West End and was taking place amid the area's many apartment buildings and rooming houses.

This period also saw the appearance of queer social spaces in St. Louis's Central Corridor and the first evidence of queer residential concentration in the area. Historians such as George Chauncey and Joanne Meyerowitz have documented the emergence of queer social networks in early twentieth-century urban neighborhoods that, like the Central West End, drew large

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[18] *Chicago Defender*, October 14, 1916.

[19] On the movement of prostitution after the demise of segregated vice and its relation to racial segregation, see Cynthia M. Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn of the Century Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Kevin Mumford, *Interzone: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[20] George B. Mangold, *The Challenge of Our City* (St. Louis: Board of Religious Organizations, 1925), 19.

numbers of residents who lived outside of nuclear families.[21] The prevailing anonymity of that

characterized these areas permitted their residents freedom to live unconventionally.

A suggestive account appears in a sensationalized *Post-Dispatch* article from 1929. The

newspaper reported that a young woman named Rose Dickburn took her own life in the rooming

house where she lived on the 3900 block of Washington Boulevard in the Central West End.

Soon after, authorities discovered that Dickburn had been keeping a secret from her landlady:

while growing up in rural Kentucky, Dickburn had been raised as a boy and had been called

"Stanley." She began going by "Rose" and to dress consistently in women's clothes after moving

by herself to St. Louis about a year before her death. For a time, Dickburn had roomed with a

forty-year-old woman who was separated from her husband. The two had met by chance at a

grocery store and decided to room together to share expenses. A neighbor interviewed by a *Post-*

Dispatch reporter asserted that Dickburn had "had young men callers several nights a week."[22]

Beyond the tragedy of her premature death, Dickburn's story offers a glimpse of the Central

West End's rooming houses as a setting of queer life in this era.

After the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, queer nightlife began to make a clear appearance

in the historical record in St. Louis. The handful of identified establishments that predate US

entry in the Second World War were all located in the Central Corridor. These spaces gave queer

people residing living nearby public spaces to meet and socialize with others like themselves,

thus serving as important settings of community formation. Several of these establishments were

in business downtown, including the Question Mark, noted by the police in 1939 as a tavern

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[21] Chauncey, *Gay New York*; Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Joanne Meyerowitz, "Sexual Geography and Gender Economy: The Furnished Room Districts of Chicago, 1890-1930," *Gender and History* 2, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 274-296
[22] March 8, 1929, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

"frequented by morally degenerate men."[23] Dante's Inferno and the Red Dragon—two nightclubs featuring female impersonation shows and remembered as queer gathering places— were in operation on the 3500 block of Olive, where the Central West End bordered the Mill Creek Valley.[24] Mabel Thorpe Jerrold's nightclub in the Blackstone Hotel, meanwhile, was located several blocks farther west on Olive, well within the neighborhood.

This story of Thorpe's nightclub encapsulates the larger history of the Central West End in this era. It is suggestive of the ways that shifting neighborhood conditions could open up new possibilities for queer people and also how queerness could be at the center of conflicts over urban change.

Born about 1892, Mabel Thorpe grew up in fairly modest circumstances in a white, working-class neighborhood in north St. Louis. As a young woman, she worked as a "Hello Girl" telephone operate for the Bell Telephone Company downtown, and in 1913 she was arrested and jailed during a telephone operators' strike for disturbing the peace and allegedly having "hissed and talked back" to a police officer."[25] This incident suggests that she had already developed a self-assured and rebellious disposition that she seems to have maintained for years to come. In the 1920s, while she was in her late twenties and thirties, Thorpe remained unmarried and developed a national reputation as a dog fancier, earning a living by running a kennel and breeding prize-winning Boston terriers.[26]

Thorpe's life changed in the early 1930s, when she began to manage the Blackstone Hotel. This apartment hotel and its residents were prototypical of the emerging social world of

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[23] Albert B. Wetzel to John H. Glassco, November 18, 1939, Records Division, St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department.
[24] *St. Louis Star-Times*, March 28, 1936.
[25] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 2 and July 11, 1913.
[26] *St. Louis Star-Times*, March 24, 1923.

the "gay ghetto." It first opened for business at about the time of the 1904 World's Fair, just as

the boom of apartment house construction was taking off in the area. The Blackstone was located

within a few blocks of some of the Central West End opulent private places and along a major

east-west streetcar line, making it readily accessible from downtown St. Louis. A number of

other residential hotels were located on within a few blocks. A 1924 advertisement for the

Blackstone claimed that it was an "ideal place to live" and "15 minutes from anywhere."[27]

The 1940 US Census also gives a glimpse of the tenants of the Blackstone Hotel in the

years that Thorpe managed the hotel. They mostly men, and but some were women, and they

ranged in age from their twenties to sixties. Some were single, some were widowed, some were

divorced, and some were married but living apart from their spouses. No children or cohabitating

married couples appear to have lived there. The tenants largely worked in relatively low-status

service jobs such as waiter, cook, and bartender. While mostly white, a few Filipino men also

resided there. In 1936, the hotel had 95 rooms and an equal number of beds.[28] It is of course not

clear how many of the residents were queer, but living in the Blackstone offered a degree of

privacy and tolerance for unconventional behavior that likely made it an unusually hospitable

place for people living outside the strictures of heteronormativity.

The Blackstone Hotel also sat on a stretch of Olive that by the 1930s had developed a

reputation as a place where authorities tolerated both risqué nightlife and prostitution.[29] For

example, in 1936 a man wrote a letter to the *Star-Times* complaining about "the activities of

immoral women in the Olive-Vandeventer-Sarah district"—the block on which the Blackstone

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[27]*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 2, 1924
[28] US Census Bureau, Population Schedule, S.D. No. 11, E.D. No. 96-575, April 8, 1940,
1940uscensus.archives.gov; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 6, 1936.
[29] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 24, 1935. Harry B. Wilson to Dixon Terry, January 5, 1958, box 3, folder 4, St.
Louis History Collection, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

Hotel sat. "Several months ago," he wrote, "several property owners got together and succeeded in having some arrest made." However, he continued, "the trial of those arrest was a farce. … Fine were ostensibly assessed against the women (and most likely never paid) and so far as appearances are concerned, nothing further was done by the police. The police, and most everyone else knows that that is not an effective means of stopping this vice, because the fines, even if paid, are looking upon as a license and the thing goes on as usual." The letter writer then insinuated that the police had effectively come to treat that section of the Central West End as a vice district.[30] This at least intermittent tolerance that the police extended to sex work on the block seems to have also extended to other forms of vice, such as cross-dressing.

In 1935, Thorpe secured a liquor license for a nightclub she opened in the basement of the Blackstone. It offered liquor for sale and floorshows by female impersonators, as well as gender-bending "pansies." This may have been partly related to Thorpe's personal affinity for female impersonators—her nephew recalled that for years friends of Thorpe attended family Thanksgiving dinners in full drag.[31] It was also good business as she found a ready market for this sort of entertainment. Given the nationwide "pansy craze" of the era, some of her customers were likely curious straight "slummers." However, as with pansy clubs in other cities, some of Thorpe's customers were also probably queer themselves and saw the Blackstone as a site of validation, visibility, and community.[32]

From the start, however, Thorpe's nightclub in the Blackstone seems to have also attracted negative attention from the police and some neighbors. After the repeal of Prohibition

[30] *St. Louis Star-Times*, February 29, 1936.
[31] Cooperman, Mal, interview with Jeannette Batz Cooperman, September 1999. Transcript in author's possession.
[32] Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounter in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

in December 1933, the state of Missouri and the city of St. Louis adopted new regulations governing the sale of liquor. The police monitored liquor-dispensing establishments for infractions, such as sale on Sundays and after midnight. This enforcement could be selective, however, and whether and how harshly to penalize violations were political questions decided both in the courtroom and behind closed doors in city hall. Given the nature and location of her business, as well as her personal connections to some of the city's movers-and-shakers, Thorpe's liquor license became exceptionally contentious.

In May 1936, St. Louis Excise Commissioner Thomas L. Anderson revoked Thorpe's liquor license after an undercover officer testified that he had purchased a beer at her nightclub after midnight. The officer further reported that while at the club he had witnessed "about 100 persons watching three female impersonators provide entertainment."[33] While the license was soon reinstated on a technicality, in August Anderson refused to renew Thorpe's liquor license when it expired. Rather than accept his decision, Thorpe responded by suing Anderson, claiming that he had acted "arbitrarily, unreasonably, and without warrant of law."[34] While Anderson and Thorpe waited to face off in court, the *Star-Times* reported that Thorpe's nightclub "has remained open daily and continues to enjoy a rushing patronage," despite her not having a current liquor license.[35]

In October, Anderson and Thorpe, along with a number of other witnesses, testified before Circuit Judge John W. Joynt. Anderson asserted that Thorpe had failed to receive the required number of signatures approving her application from nearby property owner, and he

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[33] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, May 12, 1936; *St. Louis Star and Times*, May 1, 1936, May 12, 1936, May 23, 1936, April 10, 1937; *Thorpe v. Anderson*, Circuit Court of St. Louis, May 11, 1936. Thomas L. Anderson to John J. McCarthy, May 1, 1936, in police file, clarifies date of revocation.

[34] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 27, 1936; *St. Louis Star-Times*, August 27, 1936; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, August 27, 1936.

[35] *St. Louis Star-Times*, September 4, 1936.

suggested that she was "not a proper person" to run a tavern. To support his case, he called Arthur B. Wilton, who owned a home on the 4000 block of Westminster, one block south of the Blackstone Hotel. Wilton complained of the "noise emanating" from the club and the "indecent songs sung by entertainers." The witnesses for Thorpe, meanwhile, offered evidence to support her attorney's contention that "the entertainment" provided by female impersonators "was entirely respectable"—suggesting that the issue of cross-dressing was central to whether Thorpe should receive her license.[36] After the hearing, Judge Joynt delayed ruling on the matter for some six months—all the while Thorpe's nightclub apparently remained in business. Finally, in April 1937, he ruled in favor on Anderson, explaining that "the law invested the office of Excise Commissioner with discretionary power."[37]

Rather than accept defeat, Thorpe kept the doors of her nightclub open and continued to offer female impersonation shows to eager audiences. Without a liquor license, she officially only offered "set-ups," selling soda and bowls of cracked ice to customers who brought their own liquor. However, liquor licensing officials expressed skepticism that a nightclub could operate at a profit without selling alcohol. Over the next two years, police—sometimes working undercover—monitored the club and on one occasion arrested Thorpe and some of her employees after being sold drinks while a female impersonation show was underway. Thorpe was soon released from police custody, however, and managed to avoid prosecution.[38]

Thorpe repeatedly attempted to obtain a liquor license for her nightclub through intermediaries—first her employee George Bentley, then her sister Lydia Cooperman, and finally

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[36] *St. Louis Star-Times*, October 1, 1936; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 2, October 4, 1936; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, October 2, 1936;

[37] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 10, 1937; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 10, 1937.

[38] Police reports, April 3 and April 10, 1938; *St. Louis Star-Times*, April 4, 1938; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 4, 1938; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 4, 1938.

her much younger husband Patrick Jerrold, whom she married in a small civil ceremony in April

1939. All were refused, however. The queerness of Thorpe's establishment seems to have been a

major source of opposition to granting the liquor license. According to the *Globe-Democrat*,

Excise Commissioner Lawrence McDaniel, Anderson's successor, explicitly refused

Cooperman's application "because police records had shown female impersonators were

employed at the night club."[39] On hearing news of Jerrold's application in May 1939, two

locally prominent conservative Christian activists publicly urged Excise Commissioner

McDaniel to reject it because of the "past reputation" of the Blackstone Hotel. P.A. Tate,

superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League of Missouri, "pointed to the objectionable

entertainment, including female impersonators, at the hotel and said that issuance of another

license … would only mean a continuation of the objectionable entertainment." Meanwhile, Rev.

Mary Ellis, a "vice crusader" who had previously spoken out against female impersonation

performances at St. Louis nightclubs, reminded the excise commissioner that cross-dressing was

illegal in St. Louis and, thus, that the entertainment at Thorpe's nightclub was against the law.[40]

That Tate and Ellis would publicly speak out against granting the new liquor license on these

grounds suggests the degree to which the Blackstone Hotel had developed a reputation as a queer

space—and it is suggestive of the ways this could draw negative attention.[41]

In the end, it would take the involvement of the federal government to finally close the

nightclub. In the early hours of Sunday, September 10, 1939, while entertainment was underway,

undercover police officers purchased alcohol at the Blackstone Hotel nightclub, then arrested

Mabel Thorpe Jerrold, her husband, and several of the employees. Evidence was presented to the

[39] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, May 2, 1939.
[40] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, May 2, 1939 and May 3, 1939. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, December 5, 1938.
[41] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, May 2, 1939. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 11, 1939.

federal district prosecutor, who brought charges against Thorpe and Jerrold for selling alcohol without paying federal taxes.[42] In January 1940, Thorpe pled guilty, and US District Judge John Caskie Collet sentenced her to three months in jail and fined her $100. When Thorpe expressed surprised that "charges of such a minor nature should have been brought to the attention of a Federal grand jury," Collet responded, "If this had not been an unusual case, it never would have been called to the attention of the grand jury, for the offense itself is not serious, but the background of the defendant is terrible. … The type of establishment you operated, to put it tolerantly, was very poor."[43]

After her incarceration, Thorpe remained proprietor of the Blackstone (rebranded the "King Hotel") for several years. However, the female impersonation shows there seemed to have ended after 1939. While Thorpe's opponents had managed to shut down one queer establishment, the queerness of the Central West End remained. In fact, the Blackstone was not Thorpe's last business venture in the area. From 1951 until about the time of her death in 1957, Thorpe owned a nightclub called the Latin Quarter, located near Grand and Delmar near the northeastern corner of the West End. In an oral history, lesbian St. Louisan Georgia King remembered this as a queer gathering place.[44] Thus Thorpe's career bridges the divided of the Second World War—she had a hand both in the beginnings of queer nightlife in soon after the repeal of Prohibition and then in the scene as it was being reconstituted in the postwar decades.

The dramatic changes to the Central West End's built environment and social makeup epitomized by the Thorpe's Blackstone Hotel—and were intertwined with—the westward drift

[42] *St. Louis Star-Times*, September 11, 1939. *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 12, 1939. *US v. Jerrold*. Police report, September 11, 1939.
[43] *St. Louis Star-Times*, January 8, 1940. *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, January 9, 1940. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 8, 1940.
[44] King, Georgia, interview with Nan Sweet, June 18, 1988, CLEAR Collection, State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center, St. Louis.

of what city planners regarded as "blight." When he first mapped out St. Louis's "blighted

districts" in the 1917, Harland Bartholomew asserted that they extended no further west than

Grand Avenue. By 1941, soon before US entry into World War II, Harland Bartholomew

announced on the pages of *St. Louis Commerce*—a publication widely read by the city's business

and professional elites—that blight had spread all the way to the western city limits,

encompassing the Central West End.[45] For Bartholomew and others, this expanding zone of

blight was powerful evidence of St. Louis's incipient decline. Considered in light of the West

End's contemporaneous social history, however, it is also suggestive of the ways the concept of

"blight" was tied up with shifts in the city's sexual geography—processes that only accelerated

after the Second World War.

C.   Laud Humphreys and the Metropolitanization of Queer Sexuality

As the preceding chapter section shows, a "gay ghetto" had already begun to take shape

in St. Louis's Central West End in the years before World War II as a result of the sexual

dynamics of suburbanization and neighborhood decline. After World War II, these processes

accelerated as St. Louis's suburbs grew explosively, while the population of the city's itself

plummeted. The population that remained behind in the city were increasingly likely to be black

or, if they were white, to live outside of heteronormative nuclear families, including queer

people.

Before we examine the history of white queer people who lived and gathered in St. Louis

in the era of white flight, we will consider the many white men who lived closeted lives in the

suburbs but who drove to the city to find sexual satisfaction in "tearooms." Documented in

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[45] Harland Bartholomew, "Reconstruction and Rehabilitation for St. Louis," *St. Louis Commerce* (February 12, 1941), 5, 11.

fascinating detail by sociologist Laud Humphreys, this largely secretive practice reveals how St. Louis's sexual geography was refashioned in the era of white flight.

In 1965, Laud Humphreys—a married father of two and an Episcopal priest—moved to St. Louis from Oklahoma to begin graduate study in sociology at Washington University. Over the next several years, he conducted thorough ethnographic research on St. Louis's queer male social scenes. He visited the area's thirteen or so gay bars, patronized a bathhouse, attended private parties and a drag ball, and spent dozens of hours in "tearooms"—public restrooms where men met each for anonymous sex. It was one of the most extensive social science investigations even to have been conducted on the homosexual subculture of a single American city. More than a passive witness, Humphreys also became a key figure in St. Louis's queer history himself, helping in 1969 to found the Mandrake Society, one of the city's first gay and lesbian political groups, and playing an important role in a momentous early confrontation between the organization and the police. His research resulted in the pathbreaking dissertation-turned-monograph *Tearoom Trade* (1970) and the lesser-known but pioneering textbook *Out of the Closets* (1972). The latter contains a vivid description of the Central West End gay ghetto and provides a first-person narrative of Humphreys's involvement in gay and lesbian activism.

Through all of this, Humphreys maintained a pretense of straightness among his colleagues and family and claimed that he only "pass[ed] as a deviant" as necessary while conducting his fieldwork. This was despite his own self-understanding as a gay man and intermittent participation in tearoom sex himself. He only came out as gay in a dramatic episode at the 1974 meeting of the American Sociological Association, after he had left St. Louis and started teaching at Pritzer College in California. By coming out, he became one of the first publicly gay academics in the United States. As his biographers have described him,

Humphreys's remarkable career as a scholar and activist make him a "prophet of homosexuality and sociology."[46]

Humphreys' work contrasts the significance of city and suburb in the identities and social and sexual behavior of queer men.[47] Humphreys describes a bifurcated white queer male world. On the one hand, those who only sought occasional male-male sexual release but otherwise lived straight lives typically lived suburban existences, only commuting to the city tearooms for brief and wordless sexual encounters. On the other hand, those who integrated their queerness more substantially into their social identities were more likely to spend considerable time in the city and even to reside there, especially in the Central West End gay ghetto.[48]

This sharp distinction between the experiences of white queer people in city and suburb is reflected in other sources. Indeed, it comes across as the common sense among queer St. Louisans who lived during these years. "Everything happened in the city. There was no county," recalled "Gypsy" Lee Maynard, who came out as a young man in St. Louis in 1969 and was a popular drag performer at area bars in the 1970s. "There wasn't any gay outside of [the city of] St. Louis. The gays came in from their families to be in St. Louis. … Anybody that was gay in the county was only gay when they were in the city, not out there."[49] Maynard's phrasing is remarkable evidence of the way that sexual identity was tied to divisions in metropolitan

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[46] John F. Galliher, Wayne H. Brekhus, and David P. Keys, *Laud Humphreys: Prophet of Homosexuality and Sociology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 78. Laud Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places* (New York: Aldine, 1970), 25. Laud Humphreys, *Out of the Closets: The Sociology of Homosexual Liberation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972). Laud Humphreys, "The Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places," PhD dissertation, Washington University in St. Louis, 1968. See special expanded issue dedicated to reassessing Humphreys's legacy in *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 24, nos. 3/4/5 (2004).

[47] For the purposes of this section, I refer to all men who engaged in male-male sex as queer, regardless of their self-identification or whether they were involved in heterosexual relationships as well.

[48] While St. Louis and Detroit are often regarded as both being epitomes of post-World War II white flight and urban decline, they are distinct in terms of the historical development of their queer geographies. Retzloff describes a substantial degree of suburban gay and lesbian activism and even suburban gay and lesbian bars in Detroit that have no analogue in contemporary St. Louis: Timothy Ford Retzloff, "City, Suburb, and the Changing Bounds of Lesbian and Gay Life and Politics in Metropolitan Detroit, 1945-1985," PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2014.

[49] Maynard, "Gypsy" Lee, interview with author, July 2, 2013. Transcript in author's possession.

geography. As he recalled, crossing the city limits made the difference in whether or not someone *was* gay—a queer person "was only gay in the city," but not gay "out there" in suburbia.

City and suburb together encompassed a single sprawling metropolitan sexual geography. In the decades after World War II, it became normal for white suburbanites to cross municipal boundaries and traverse many miles of expressway on a daily passage back and forth from home to work. Likewise, urban zones of sexual transgression were put at a distance from the respectable and domestic confines of the family home; commuting to them required the automobile. As we have seen, St. Louis's variegated sexual geography—its division into respectable and disreputable areas—was nothing new; these patterns first emerged at least as early as the beginnings of urbanization in the mid-nineteenth century. But because of automobility and metropolitanization, they now played on a far larger stage than ever before.

Much of what Humphreys's work can tell us about the relationship between city and suburb for queer men in this period is revealed through his study of tearooms. His research was mostly but not entirely based on fieldwork conducted in Forest Park, an expansive urban park located in St. Louis's Central West End and adjacent to Washington University. As an ethnography of tearoom sex, Humphreys's study still has no parallel in terms of thoroughness and detail. From the spring of 1966 through the summer of 1967, and without identifying himself as a researcher, he posed as a "voyeur-lookout" and watched the men as enacted the rituals of tearoom encounters. He carefully noted the patterns of mostly silent interaction that preceded and followed each encounter, and he kept track of the apparent social characteristics of participants. Moreover, he noted the licenses plate numbers of the men who, as most did, arrived at the tearooms by automobile. He then used a license registry to obtain the names and addresses of

these men and, under the misleading pretense of a "social health survey," interviewed one

hundred of them about their work, family, political and religious affiliations, and a variety of

other topics (but not about their encounters in the tearooms). Humphreys asserted that these one-

hundred men made up a more or less representative sample of the tearoom participants he

observed.[50] As the vast majority of his subjects did not provided informed consent, Humphreys's

work was and remains quite controversial and, for many commentators, is an emblematic case of

unethical social science research. However, it also provides a unique window into the lives of

men who engaged in tearoom sex, a topic that otherwise had been shrouded in prejudice,

misunderstanding, and conjecture.

Tearoom Trade illuminates how mass suburbanization and automobility shaped sexual

behavior. Historians have shown that "cruising" for quick, anonymous sex in restrooms and

other public places has a long history.[51] However, the rise of automobile transformed the

practice. Humphreys estimated that only a "small percentage" of the men he observed had

walked to the tearooms; the rest drove and parked their vehicles nearby.[52] "In keeping with the

drive-in craze of American society," Humphreys wrote, "the more popular facilities are those

readily accessible to the roadways."[53] This dependence on the automobile reflects of the overall

ascendance of this mode of transport in St. Louis by this point in history.

While his sociological analysis was usually ahistorical, Humphreys acknowledged the

relatively recent development of the sort of automobile-dependent tearoom sex that he described.

He quoted at length an older respondent of his—one of the few interviewees who had consented

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[50] For an extended discussion of his research methods, see Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, 16-44 and Humphreys, "The Tearoom Trade," 38-73.
[51] Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 195-201; Steven Maynard, "Through a Hole in the Lavatory Wall: Homosexual Subcultures, Police Surveillance, and the Dialectics of Discovery, Toronto, 1890-1930," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 2 (October 1994): 207-242.
[52] Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, 39.
[53] Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade,* 3.

to be interviewed knowing the true nature of Humphreys's research. This man had been "active in the homosexual subculture for more than forty years," and so he could speak from personal experience about how queer life in St. Louis had changed since about the early 1920s. "I suppose there has been activity since the invention of plumbing," he said of tearoom sex. "But the real fun began during the depression [of the 1930s]. … The automobile was really getting popular about then. … Suddenly, it just seemed like half the men in town met in tearooms."[54] Humphreys himself compared tearoom sex to other ways that the rise of automobile culture had changed Americans' sexual habits. "Anyone who has had sex in the back seat of an auto can point out that the construction of drive-in theaters should be include with the development of the internal-combustion engine as factors influencing the development of pre-marital sex over the past 50 years," he mused in the introduction of his dissertation.[55] In a "more pedestrian age," he suggested, the "clientele" of tearooms "frequented [restrooms in] the great buildings of the inner cities" rather than roadside tearooms.[56]

Not only did Humphreys find that most of the men who participated in tearooms drove there, but he also discovered that a majority in his sample—54 percent—were married men, nearly all of whom were living with their wives.[57] Moreover, a solid majority of his sample—58 percent—lived in suburban St. Louis, despite the fact that the parks from which the sample was taken were all located within the city limits. He observed that "homosexual activity in suburban parks and small ones in the city is very rare."[58] The main locus of activity was a handful of large

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[54] Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, 5-6.
[55] Humphreys, "The Tearoom Trade," 9. On the relationship between the automobile and queer sexuality, see Timothy Retzloff, "Cars and Bars: Assembling Gay Men in Postwar Flint, Michigan," in *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories*, ed. Brett Beemyn (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).
[56] Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, 3.
[57] Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, 105.
[58] Humphreys, "The Tearoom Trade," 11, 165.

city parks, "located close to major thoroughfares and freeways. … All others in which any noteworthy amount of activity was observed were located within five minutes' driving distance of the expressways that circle and cross the entire city"[59] Forest Park, the principle focus of Humphreys's research, was directly bordered on the south by the Daniel Boone Expressway (also called Highway 40 or Interstate 64), a freeway only completed in 1959 that connected downtown St. Louis with the city's most affluent suburbs to the west. It was a favored commuter route for downtown office workers.

Humphreys's prototypical tearoom participants were "home-ward bound commuters on the freeway" who exited the highway and parked near a public restroom for quick, anonymous sexual release.[60] "Many suburban housewives may think their husbands delayed by traffic when, in reality, the spouses have paused for a tearoom encounter," he asserted.[61] Their visiting the tearooms could become a part of their daily routine as they traversed metropolitan space. "Men will become to known as regular, even daily, participants, stopping off at the same tearoom on the way to or from work," Humphreys observed.[62] Humphreys takes his subjects' living in the suburbs as a trait that exemplified their tendency to mask their "covert deviance" with outward respectability. Reflecting on why he chose to misrepresent the real nature of his project when interviewing his subjects, Humphreys wrote, "Clearly, I could not knock on the door of a *suburban* residence and say, 'Excuse me, I saw you engaging in a homosexual act in a tearoom last year, and I wonder if I might ask you a few questions.'"[63] The expectation that suburbia was

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[59] Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, 6.
[60] Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, 1.
[61] Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, 78.
[62] Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, 10.
[63] Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, 41. Emphasis mine.

a place where the appearance of sexual propriety was more greatly prioritized than in the city was implicit in his analysis.

It is may be useful to juxtapose Humphreys's description of tearoom sex with roughly contemporaneous accounts of heterosexual prostitution in St. Louis. There are noteworthy similarities. An in-depth feature on prostitution in St. Louis, published in *St. Louis Magazine* in 1975, describes married men who met with female sex workers on their evening commutes from downtown St. Louis to the suburbs. Rather than go to restrooms in public parks, these men headed to the street corners and cheap hotels of "the Stroll" in the northern part of the Central West End. In both cases, however, automobile-fueled metropolitanization permitted suburban men who aspired to respectability an opportunity to covertly engage in stigmatized sexual behavior.[64]

According to Humphreys, "nearly all" of men whom engaged in queer sex in St. Louis's tearooms were "quite secretive about their deviant activity." They seemed to have hidden their participation in tearoom sex from most of their relatives, friends, and colleagues, including their wives. Furthermore, they seem not to have self-identified as gay, at least not publicly, and they generally "shun[ned] involvement in any form of gay subculture."[65] In general, they projected a public image of heterosexuality that was of a piece with their tendency to live in suburbia. Using data from his interview on political and religious affiliation, among other factors, Humphreys theorized that many of these men in fact donned what he called a "breastplate of righteousness"—that is, they compensated, perhaps sub- or semiconsciously, for their secret deviance by "assuming a shield of superpropriety. … The cover deviant develops a presentation

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[64] Cash Lockhart Clay, "Prostitution in St. Louis: Coping with the Oldest Profession," *St. Louis Magazine* 7, no. 5 (May 1975), 34-43.
[65] Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, 41, 116

of self that is respectable to a fault. His whole lifestyle becomes an incarnation of what is proper and orthodox."[66]

These men's compartmentalization their male-male sexual activity from the rest of their lives explains much of the logic of the tearoom. As Humphreys noted, silence tended to prevail in these spaces, with participants rarely speaking to one another and virtually never exchanging names or engaging in casual conversation. It also explains why most men who regularly participated in tearoom sex, according to Humphreys, typically did not visit other queer social spaces such as bars or coffeehouses. For one thing, these sorts of places were less readily available as "they are only open at night and may be located in out-of-the-way parts of the city."[67] Moreover, discovery at a gay bar or bathhouse—for instance, in case of a police raid—would be almost impossible for a closeted man to explain away: only queer men, after all, were likely to go to such unambiguously queer spaces. A public restroom located along one's normal route home from work, however, offered an "instant alibi" for a man who might be seen there.[68]

Most of Humphreys's research subjects, then, were queer in their behavior but not in their social identities. Their queerness was typically limited to their furtive, often wordless forays to the tearooms. Naturally, they often tended to spend most of their time outside of work in the suburban zone of heteronormativity, where they cultivated a public image of sexual respectability. However, a small portion of the tearoom participants identified by Humphreys, including some of his interviewees, were described by Humphreys as "truly gay." They self-consciously understood themselves as queer, and to a great degree their social lives took place in specifically queer spaces, especially bars. Humphreys noted that this group only slightly

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[66] Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, 135.
[67] Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, 152.
[68] Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, 97.

overlapped with the larger population of tearoom users. "Of the bar crowd in gay (homosexual) society, only a small percentage would be found in park restrooms," he wrote. "But this more overt, gay bar clientele constitutes a minor part of those in any American city who follow a predominantly homosexual pattern."[69]

While Humphreys's typical tearoom participant was suburban, his description of the "truly gay" participants suggests an urban orientation. "Ricky," Humphrey's representative example of this subset, lives in a "midtown apartment" with his male lover, rather than a suburban single-family home with a wife and children like the other men profiled in the same chapter. Ricky also sometimes socialized in St. Louis's gay bars—none of which were located in suburban St. Louis County. Instead of going to the tearooms for brief sexual encounters during a commute from work, he visits them before or after socializing with "other homosexual friends" in the park.[70]

Ricky's story is suggestive of ways besides the tearooms that queer men were taking advantage of changing metropolitan landscape during the decades of postwar urban decline in St. Louis. During the same years that "covert deviants" from the suburbs were furtively stopping for brief sexual encounters in Forest Park, other queer men were creating a "gay ghetto" in the Central West End. This was discussed in Humphreys less well-remembered second book, *Out of the Closets*, and is the subject of the next chapter section.

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[69] Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, 11.
[70] Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade*, 122-125.

D.   "That's Where All the Fags Lived": Queering White Flight

   1. The Central West End as Gay Ghetto

In a chapter titled "Organizing for Change" in *Out of the Closets* (1972), Laud

Humphreys offered a critical, first-person account of the early history and internal politics of the

Mandrake Society—a St. Louis's gay and lesbian activist group that he had helped found in the

spring of 1969. The group's founding meeting and many of its initial activities were held in the

"gay ghetto"—an area that corresponds to the Central West End east of Kingshighway.

Humphreys noted that this area was characterized by "a high proportion of homosexual

residents" and by St. Louis's "half-dozen more popular gay bars." Humphrey's also mentioned

that in the heart of the neighborhood sat Trinity Episcopal Church, a gay-friendly congregation

that hosted meetings of the Mandrake Society in its parish hall and supported the group

financially by purchasing ad space in its monthly newsletter.[71]

While Humphreys found that the gay ghetto's character as a queer neighborhood was

already well established in the late 1960s, its queerness became even more pronounced during

the 1970s gay liberation era. A wide range of spaces that were specifically queer or deliberately

welcoming to queer people were located in the neighborhood and nearby in these years. Several

other gay and lesbian bars opened, as well as gay or notably gay-friendly restaurants and shops.

Herbies' disco was an especially noteworthy neighborhood institution. Located at the busy

intersection of Maryland and Euclid in the heart of the neighborhood, it had large, street-level

windows. A gay bathhouse, part of the Clubs Bath franchise, ran out of the basement of the

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[71] Humphreys, *Out of the Closets*, 80-82. Humphreys did not include the western portion of the Central West End in his definition of the "gay ghetto," likely because this section was somewhat wealthier and had less in the way of nightlife. However, other contemporary observers viewed the entire Central West End as a gay neighborhood. See, for example, Marvin Kabakoff, "Being Gay in St. Louis," *Prime Time* (March 1977). Copies of *Prime Time* are archived in the Mid-Continent Life Service Corporation Records, State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center, St. Louis.

Washington Hotel on Kingshighway. In 1974, the gay and lesbian Metropolitan Community

Church purchased an old home on Waterman Boulevard and converted into a worship space and

de facto gay community center. Not long after, a secular gay community center also opened in

the neighborhood. Trinity Episcopal Church attracted a substantial number of gay congregants,

and several other neighborhood houses of worship adopted relatively welcoming policies toward

queer people. Through much of the 1970s, it was possible for a gay man living in the Central

West End to drink at a gay bar, dine at a gay-friendly restaurant, dance at a gay disco, shop at a

gay-owned bookstore, worship at a gay church, socialize at a gay community center, and cruise

at a gay bathhouse, all without walking more than a few blocks from his apartment.[72] This

sharply contrasted with the situation in St. Louis's suburbs, where queer social spaces were

mostly absent and at best scattered and hidden.

The Central West End's status as a "gay ghetto" was not just a matter of a high

concentration of queer social spaces. A disproportionately large number of queer people also

resided in the neighborhood. Precisely quantifying the queer population in any given area is a

notoriously difficult task, and all the more so when dealing with historical demography.

However, ample evidence suggests that for much of the twentieth century, the Central West End

an outsize queer residential population. For one thing, this is was the assertion of several careful

and knowledgeable observers, including sociologist Humphreys and Marvin Kabakoff, editor of

the local gay and lesbian publication *Prime Time*.[73] Oral histories also provided suggestive

anecdotal evidence. After coming out as a young man in 1971, suburbanite Richard Trennepohl

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[72] On the gay and lesbian community institutions of the Central West End in the 1970s, see Rodney C. Wilson, "'The Seed Time of Gay Rights': Rev. Carol Cureton, the Metropolitan Community Church, and Gay St. Louis, 1969-1980," *Gateway Heritage* (Fall 1994): 34-47; Wilson, "The Central West End: Its Role in the Life of Post-Stonewall Gay St. Louis," unpublished graduate paper, 1995 (copy in author's possession).
[73] Marvin Kabakoff, "Being Gay in St. Louis," *Prime Time* (March 1977).

frequented gay bars and attended gay house parties in the Central West End. Finally, in the early

1982, he moved there himself because, he explained, "that's where all the fags lived."[74]

Similarly, Diana Colvin, a lesbian who lived in the Central West End in the 1970s, rented an

apartment in a building named the Greystone but, she recalled, known to its residents as the

"Gaystone." "Everybody who lived there [was] gay," she remembered. While almost certainly an

exaggeration if taken literally, Colvin's statement still attests to the remarkable numbers of queer

people who made their home in the neighborhood at the time.[75]

While historical data from the US Census does not directly document the numbers and

distribution of queer people, it does offer some suggestive information that seems to corroborate

the assertion that the Central West End had an unusually large concentration of queer residents.

We can say at the very least that it was a part of the St. Louis metropolitan area whose residents

were much less likely than elsewhere to live the heteronormative ideal of cohabitating with an

opposite-sex spouse and raising children. Many people who fit this description were of course

unmarried heterosexuals, but some were queer. In 1970 a substantial majority of households in

suburban St. Louis County—78.1 percent—were defined as "husband-wife families," in which a

married man and woman lived together. The percentage in the city of St. Louis was smaller, but

husband-wife families still made up a slight majority of households—51.2 percent. In the four

census tracts that correspond with Humphreys's definition of the gay ghetto, however, only 27.4

percent of households were husband-wife families. Instead, a comfortable majority—59.8

percent—of households in the gay ghetto census tracts were composed of male or female

primary households, i.e., a man or woman either living alone or living with non-relatives (which,

before the legalization of same-sex marriage, would have included a same-sex partner). At the

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[74] Trennepohl, Richard, interview with author, April 2010. Transcript in the author's possession.
[75] Colvin, Diane [Paxton James], interview with author, August 9, 2011. Transcript in the author's possession.

time, male or female primary households made up a mere 13.5 percent of those in St. Louis County and 30.9 percent of those in the entire city of St. Louis.[76]

Beyond the quantifiable matters of a clustering of queer social spaces and a concentrated queer residential population, the Central West End's status as "gay ghetto" in the postwar decades was related to subjective sense of safety and belonging for some queer people. For example, on Halloween night 1969, the police arrested a group of nine people on suspicion of "masquerading' outside the Onyx Room, located on the strip of gay and lesbian bars on the 3500 block of Olive near Grand at the eastern edge of the gay ghetto. This was the event that precipitated the Mandrake Society's first serious confrontation with the police and played a significant role in the politicization of St. Louis's gay and lesbian community at the start of the gay liberation era.[77] The police report from that night includes a remarkable quotation from one of the arrestees, a 24-year-old who had been born in Illinois but now resided in St. Louis. "In this part of the city all the fellows are Gay," he told the police. "And we can have fun together without the police bothering us."[78] While his subsequent arrest on charges of masquerading demonstrates that the police did sometimes "bother" queer people in the Central West End, the threat of policing was, or at least seemed, less stifling there than elsewhere. His assertion that "all the fellows [were] Gay" in that part of the city, meanwhile, is suggestive of the degree to which he and others had come to identify the area as a queer space. In 1977, in an article titled "Being Gay in St. Louis," Marvin Kabakoff wrote, "Same-sex couples can walk hand-in-hand and even kiss in the West End"—implying that queer people enjoyed a freedom to publicly

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[76] US Census Bureau data prepared by Social Explorer.
[77] Humphreys, *Out of the Closets*, 84-90.
[78] Complaint No. 412758, November 1, 1969, St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, Records Division.

express their desires in the Central West End in a way that they could not elsewhere in the metropolitan area.[79]

While queer people had a significant presence in the Central West End, they appear to have generally not been present and visible to such a degree that they seemed to outnumber straight people, at least outside of certain specific businesses and apartment buildings scattered throughout the neighborhood. Other than 3500 block of Olive, there was no single strip composed primarily of specifically queer-oriented businesses. Gay St. Louisan Richard Trennepohl, who frequented the Central West End in the 1970s and moved there in the early 1980s, had an opportunity to compare the neighborhood to the Castro when he visited San Francisco in 1979. Unlike the Castro, the Central West End was never in Trennepohl's perception "one-hundred percent" gay. In St. Louis, "there wasn't a whole sidewalk of gay restaurants and bookstores or novelty shops or clothing stores," which he recalled seeing in the Castro.[80] Similarly, in a 1973 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* column, Jake McCarthy (an apparently heterosexual man) included queer people in a list of the social types a suburban slummer might see in the Central West End: "the hippies and the blacks and an occasional gay and some literati."[81] While one wonders how capable McCarthy actually was of recognizing queer people on sight—and whether the categories he mentioned were mutually exclusive, as he seems to imply—his observations still suggest that while visibly queer people were common enough to merit mention as constituent part of the Central West End's distinct social mix, they were not so common as to make the neighborhood seem predominantly gay to the eyes of a straight outsider. Perhaps what made the Central West End remarkable was not that it was truly a "gay *ghetto*" in

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[79] Marvin Kabakoff, "Being Gay in St. Louis," *Prime Time* (March 1977).

[80] Trennepohl, Richard, oral history interview with author, 2010. Transcript in the author's possession.

[81] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 21, 1973.

the sense of an urban space where queer people were segregated from others. Instead, it was an area that interrupted the prevailing heteronormativity of the region and where queer people and institutions were visibly integrated into the neighborhood's larger social fabric.

2. **The Gay Ghetto in Context**

In *Out of the Closets*, Humphreys's offers brief but intriguing observations about the "ecological" context of the gay ghetto, i.e., its relation to the St. Louis larger social geography. He notes that the gay ghetto's population is characterized by "high social and racial diversity"— a remarkable feature, in light of the prevailing segregation of metropolitan St. Louis— but he further states that immediately to the gay ghetto's north and east was "the all-black community, with the city's highest crime rate."[82] Humphreys's sociological intuitions were correct— suburbanization and racial segregation are essential to understanding the history Central West End's role as St. Louis's gay ghetto, as well as white queer people's distinct relationship with the urban spaces vis-à-vis their straight counterparts. A variety of push/pull factors drew white families with children out of the Central West End and to the suburbs, while having the opposite effect on white queers.

The Central West End's demographic history in the post-World War II decades in some ways mirrors the overall pattern in St. Louis, but has a number of distinctive and consequential features. Like the city of St. Louis as a whole, the area saw a marked decrease in its total population during this period. In 1950, 41,300 people lived in the four census tracts that corresponded with the Humphreys's definition of the gay ghetto. By 1970, 24,869 did, and in 1980 only 17,243 remained—a drop of 58 percent over the course of three decades. (The

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[82] Humphreys, *Out of the Closets*, 80-81.

population of the area has remained relatively stable since then.) This figure resembles the overall drop in the city of St. Louis's population, which fell by 47 percent from 1950 to 1980.[83]

This population loss was related what was widely regarded as the decline of the area during the postwar decades, which was of a piece with what was regarded as the decline of the entire city of St. Louis. As we have seen, this process had already begun by the 1930s, it accelerated after World War II. In 1964, the City Plan Commission observed of the neighborhood, "Deterioration of commercial, as well as residential accommodations, has been fairly widespread … Except for private residential places and new apartments, housing conditions range from fair to substandard."[84] Neighborhood groups like Women for City Living, meanwhile, declared that the area was in crisis by the close of the 1960s, citing rising crime, shabby buildings, trash-strewn streets, and the exodus of many longtime residents to the suburbs.[85]

The Central West End's population loss from 1950 to 1970 was largely due to a net out-migration of white residents. During the same period, the area's black population increased substantially in both absolute and proportional terms. In 1950, African Americans made up some 16.4 percent of the total, while by 1970 they made up 41.9 percent. This was of a piece with a general transformation in St. Louis's racial demography as the city's African American population continued to grow during these decades even as the overall population shrank, resulting in a dramatic increase in the black portion of the total. At the same time, the area of the city open to African American residence expanded, growing from a few small enclaves to most of the northern half of city. Often, this resulted in extraordinarily rapid and almost complete

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[83] US Census Bureau data prepared by Social Explorer.
[84] St. Louis City Plan Commission, *Central West End* (St. Louis: City Plan Commission, 1964), 3-4.
[85] Delphine McClellan, *We Stayed to Fight for City Living: How St. Louis Women Sparked a City Renaissance* (St. Louis, City Living Press, 1987).

neighborhood racial transition, with some census tracts shifting from being more almost entirely

white to almost entirely black over the course of a single decade.[86]

The tracts of the Central West End, however, exhibited a somewhat different pattern of

racial change. The black portion of the population increasing gradually through the 1950s and

1960s, topping off at a little more than 40 percent in 1970, and then remaining basically stable

for the remainder of the twentieth century. Thus, the Central West End was an extraordinary

example of a relatively racially mixed residential area. Given that in metropolitan St. Louis,

nearly all census tracts were either overwhelmingly white or black, the fact the tracts of the

Central West End were substantially mixed for decades is remarkable. To a degree, this was

perhaps less racial *integration* than racial *liminality*—a consequences of the Central West End's

location on the border of predominantly black and predominantly white areas of the city.

Moreover, while the tracts as whole were substantially racially mixed, this does not seem to have

generally been true of individual blocks or apartment buildings (although there were exceptions).

Black and white Central West Enders, even though they might live near one another, also could

move in very different social circles and live different sorts of lives (as we can see when census

data on income, family structure, etc., is broken down by race for these census tracts). However,

the Central West End was still remarkable as a rare part of the St. Louis metropolitan area where

a black person might have many white neighbors, or where a white person could live within a

few minutes' walk of an almost entirely black neighborhood.

The Central West End's post-World War II history was also distinctive because a large

subset of relatively affluent white people was always present in the neighborhood. In 1955, a

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[86] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, March 16, 1961, in Negro Scrapbook, volume 1, and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 15, 1963, in Negro Scrapbook, volume 2, Missouri History Archives, St. Louis. Also see Colin Gordon, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 22-35.

report by the city planning firm of Bartholomew & Associates mentions the many neighborhood institutions that contributed to the area's relative stability—the Washington University medical complex; many high-quality, high-rent apartment buildings; private places; and the Catholic cathedral.[87] Some of the relatively affluent whites who stayed were longtime residents, especially of the neighborhood's stately private places. Some of these other affluent whites, however, were new arrivals, often newcomers to the St. Louis region who chose to live in the area because of the availability of high-quality apartments or its proximity Washington University's medical school. In 1964, the St. Louis City Plan Commission reported, "Based on the 1960 Census, portions of the residential areas in the Central West End received a disproportionately high percentage of the total in-migrants to the City of St. Louis. The new residents, as a group, are characterized by high levels of education, better than average income, and jobs of a professional nature." The report noted the "preservation" of high-quality apartments in the Central West End was "in the major interest of the city" given that these sorts of arrivals to the Central West End typically opted for this sort of housing.[88]

The possibility that the black portion of the neighborhood's population might continue to rise and that the area would undergo complete racial transition, as did many parts of north St. Louis, seems to have played a role in the growth of a queer presence in the area during the post-World War II decades. In a 1955 report on the Central West End for a New York department store firm Gimbel Brothers, the St. Louis city planning firm of Bartholomew & Associates observed, "The trend in the location of this race [African Americans] is one of the major threats to the subject area. There is no legal way in which a southward expansion could be prevented.

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[87] Harland Bartholomew & Associates, "A Report Upon the Maryland-Euclid Shopping District, St. Louis, Missouri," December 30, 1955, series 1, box 8, folder 10, Bartholomew & Associates Records, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.

[88] St. Louis City Plan Commission, *Central West End* (St. Louis: City Plan Commission, 1964), 5.

No definite assurance can be given that it will not occur." While ultimately concluding that "if any portions of our older urban areas to be maintain their character, this particular area should be able to do so," the reported warned that the "general trend toward blight and the depreciation in older center such as this and … the potential encroachment of Negro residents" were "major threats to the future economic life" of the area. [89] The possibility that the area might undergo complete racial transition likely tended to depreciate property values and made entrepreneurs interested in a clientele of respectable, family-oriented white people less likely to invest in the neighborhood. Landlords might be more willing than otherwise to rent apartments or commercial spaces to disreputable white people in these circumstances.

Evidence suggests that discrimination could keep white queer out of some suburban areas, while pushing them toward city neighborhoods such as the Central West End. A 1977 article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* recounts several examples of gay men being turned away from apartments for rent and another who was denied a home loan in St. Louis County, although he was able to obtain one in the city. "When discrimination does occur on the basis of homosexuality, there is no legal recourse," the *Post-Dispatch* noted. "The result is that homosexuals often live in places that are there fourth or fifth choices."[90]

Another dimension to the Central West End becoming home to a disproportionately large number of queer white residents during the age of white flight was the aversion of many white parents to raising children in the city. Throughout the postwar era, the number of households composed of married couples raising children declined. This transition was noticed with alarm by some contemporary observers. Rev. Thomas F. Durkin, administration of the Saint Louis (or

[89] Harland Bartholomew & Associates, "A Report Upon the Maryland-Euclid Shopping District, St. Louis, Missouri," December 30, 1955, 7, 17, series 1, box 8, folder 10, Bartholomew & Associates Records, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.
[90] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 19, 1977.

"New") Cathedral—the parish whose parochial elementary school served many of the Central West End's Catholic residents—wrote several letters to City Hall regarding this issue in the spring and summer of 1956. "During the past school term, ten families with several children have moved from our part of the neighborhood, and ten more, at least, are moving this summer," he wrote to William Coibion, director of the city plan commission. "The reason is always the same—this is not a neighborhood in which to rear children."[91] In other letters, Durkin wrote that the lack of playgrounds in the area was one reason that families found the area unsuitable for children, although he acknowledged that providing such recreation "is not the only solution to our problems." He expressed concerned that the outmigration of families with children was having a deleterious effect on the social makeup of the neighborhood. The families that were leaving, he wrote, "are families that the neighborhood can ill-afford to lose because they are interested in their homes, in their children, and in their neighborhood. Their 'replacements' are not likely to be the asset that they have been." He hoped that stemming the tide of families moving out of the neighborhood would help curb the problem of "big homes that are deteriorating or are occupied by, in some cases at least, irresponsible roomers instead of stable families."[92]

A number of sources support the idea that the area not generally being regarded as an appropriate place to raise (white) children was related to the outsize presence of white queer people in the Central West End. In his 1977 piece "Being Gay in St. Louis," gay journalist Marvin Kabakoff states that (implicitly white) gay people were drawn to urban neighborhoods like the Central West End in part because of their "not usually having children and the need for

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[91] Thomas F. Durkin to William Coibion, June 15, 1956, series 1, box 22, folder 8, Raymond R. Tucker Records, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.
[92] Thomas F. Durkin to Mayor Raymond Tucker, June 14, 1956, series 1, box 22, folder 8, Raymond R. Tucker Records, Washington University Archives, St. Louis.

quality schools."[93] Similarly, an extensive 1974 urban planning report on the Central West End asserted that "the public school system in portions of St. Louis not providing an adequate level education nor meeting the needs of many of the St. Louis residents." However, the authors of the report discovered only a small portion of the neighborhood residents they surveyed considered the neighborhood's poor education options a problem. They concluded that this was because "a great majority of the residents did not have children of school age, and therefore they were not concerned about educational problems."[94] In an oral history, meanwhile, Richard Trennepohl recalled that "children [were] a novelty in the West End back in the old days" when he frequented the neighborhood as a young man in the 1970s.[95] A 1972 study that polled landlords in the neighborhood found that owners of better maintained apartment buildings found that most of their tenants "enjoyed city living but had no children as yet, had children away at school or with their own homes, or were divorced."[96]

Statistical data offers some interesting corroboration to these sources as far as the idea that the Central West End was not a neighborhood where many residents raised children. However, it also becomes clear that there was definite racial component to this phenomenon. In 1970, the closest Census to when Humphreys described the area as a gay ghetto in *Out of the Closets*, 18.8 percent of the area's population was under the age of eighteen. This is decidedly smaller than the percentage of the population under age eighteen in suburban St. Louis County (35.1 percent) and the city of St. Louis (31.9 percent). However, there is a stark difference when the figures for gay ghetto census tracts are broken down by race. The percentage of the black

[93] Marvin Kabakoff, "Being Gay in St. Louis," *Prime Time* (March 1977).
[94] Douglas Burns, *Interface: A Planning and Design Strategy for a Transitional Area in the St. Louis Central West End* (St. Louis: Washington University Medical Center, 1974), 66.
[95] Trennepohl, oral history interview with author, April 2, 2010. Transcript in the author's possession.
[96] Team Four, Inc., *Multiple Family Feasibility Study/C3 Redevelopment Project* (St. Louis: Team Four, 1972), 3.

population in the gay ghetto under eighteen was 35.6 percent—a portion nearly identical to that

of the overall population of St. Louis County. However, only *6.6 percent* of the white population

of the gay ghetto census tracts was under the age of eighteen. Meanwhile, some 79.5 percent of

the children who resided in the gay ghetto census tracts were black, despite African Americans

only make up 41.9 percent of the population overall.[97] Clearly, it was not precisely correct to say

that the gay ghetto was a place where few residents raised children; instead, it was a place where

few *white* residents raised children. Surely, many of these childless white residents were

heterosexual, but a significant portion were also queer. The area's reputation as a place poorly

suited to raising (white) children was linked to its disproportionate queerness. (We might assume

that many black residents of the Central West End would have preferred to have raised their

children elsewhere, perhaps in the suburbs, for many of the same reasons as white parents;

however, due to housing discrimination and generally more limited economic opportunities, they

were less able to move than their white counterparts.)

A number of commentators noted a spirit of relative tolerance for diversity in the Central

West End was related to its status as a gay ghetto. Humphreys himself said that the area was a

"showcase of deviant behavior" and, in sociological terms, "highly anomic." He also stated that

the conclusions of Howard S. Becker and Irving Louis Horowitz's then cutting-edge, now classic

sociological essay on gays and hippies San Francisco, "The Culture of Civility," could be

extended to the Central West End.[98] Some explicitly contrasted this tolerance for diversity in the

Central West End with conditions in St. Louis's suburbs. Marvin Kabakoff said that "gay

people" had been attracted to city neighborhoods in part because they were "fearful of their

acceptance in the suburbs." In contrast to the homogeneity of the suburbs, he said, "the Central

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[97] US Census Bureau data prepared by Social Explorer.
[98] Humphreys, *Out of the Closets*, 81-82.

West End [has] a mixture of rich and poor, Black and white, gay and straight. … It is a friendly, tolerant area, where gay can hold hands and even kiss in the street without fear."[99] The area, as we shall see in a subsequent, was also home to mainstream institutions that by the mid-1960s were taking relatively progressive stances on the question of homosexuality, most notably Trinity Episcopal Church.

E.   Queer St. Louis in Black and White

In significant ways, the urban orientation of St. Louis's white queer social world scrambled the dominant pattern of white flight, subverting the equation of the suburbs with whiteness and the city with blackness. However, black queers—whose use of metropolitan space was circumscribed both by their race and sexuality—experienced the consequences of urban decline differently from their white counterparts. Given that segregation severely limited the ability of black St. Louisans to live in the suburbs, they had less opportunity to divide their social geography into distinct zones of sexual respectability and sexual deviance. In other words, spaces defined by white queerness and by black heteronormativity partly overlapped. Because of this, black queer people in St. Louis tended to be less able to set their queer lives at a spatial and psychic distance from their straight families and acquaintances than their white counterparts. Moreover, St. Louis's queer social spaces itself to a great degree mirrored the segregation of larger community, with blacks and whites tending to gather separately. These dynamics demonstrate the vital importance of considering race and sexuality together in tracing St. Louis's evolving social geography across the twentieth century.

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[99] Marvin Kabakoff, "Being Gay in St. Louis," *Prime Time* (March 1977).

As discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation, prior to civil rights victories of the post-World War II era, many public spaces in St. Louis were overtly segregated by race. Most bars, restaurants, and nightclubs openly refused service to black customers. The Board of Aldermen did not pass legislation barring racial discrimination in public accommodations until 1961. In the Jim Crow era, commercial establishments catering to queers seem to have mostly reflected this pattern.

There are hints that some of the earliest queer gathering places may have permitted a racially mixed clientele. In his 1907 account of "homo sexual complexion perverts in St. Louis," psychiatrist Charles Hamilton Hughes describes a police raid on a riverfront tavern where "male negroes [were] masquerading in woman's garb and carousing and dancing with white men."[100]

The queer nightlife destinations to emerge after the repeal of Prohibition in the 1930s, however, appear to have been racially segregated. According to the 1940 US Census, no blacks resided in Mabel Thorpe's Blackstone Hotel. Nor are any African Americans mentioned in extensive newspaper coverage and police and court records about Thorpe's conflict with the excise commissioner, save for one "Negro" arrested along with Thorpe and several other of her employees in a September 1939 raid.[101] Similarly, a 1937 photograph of the interior of the Red Dragon—another nightclub specializing in female impersonation performances—shows an entirely white audience and white entertainers, save for uniformed black men playing musical instruments. This resembles circumstances in other St. Louis nightclubs of this era, such as the nearby Club Plantation, which prominently advertised musical entertainment by black artists while specifying that it catered to "white patronage only."[102]

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[100] Editor [Charles Hamilton Hughes], "Homo Sexual Complexion Perverts in St. Louis: A Note on a Feature of Sexual Psychopathy," *Alienist and Neurologist* 28, no. 4 (November 1907): 487-488

[101] *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 12, 1939.

[102] Club Plantation souvenir fan, c. 1935, The Griot Museum of Black History, St. Louis.

Outright discrimination against black customers characterized the gay and lesbian bars of the early post-World War II period. In an oral historian, Georgia King—a white lesbian who lived in St. Louis in the early 1950s—remember that the bars she frequented were "all white." She recalled that when she once tried to bring a "black girl" into Shelly's, a lesbian bar near Grand and Olive boulevards, "the owner nearly had a stroke" "He didn't mind," King remembered, "but he said all the customers would get up and walk out."[103] This incident is remarkable because Shelly's was located on the edge of the Mill Creek Valley. Despite being beside a segregated black neighborhood, home to thousands of African Americans and many of their community institutions, this queer gathering place still rejected black customers. Similarly, police records from August 1954 raids on three downtown gay bars—the Entre Nous, Uncle John's, and Al's—show that all twenty-one arrested that night were white—strongly suggesting that these bars, too, were usually limited to white patrons, although they were also in a part of the city that was at a distance from segregated white neighborhoods.[104]

After the civil rights movement had achieved its major legal and legislative victories at the local and national levels, racial discrimination in St. Louis's gay and lesbian commercial establishments became less overt. However, gay and lesbian nightlife remained largely racially polarized in St. Louis through the gay liberation era and afterward. Travel guides intended for white gay men, such as *Damron*, *Guild*, and *Ciao!*, reflect this. To help visitors navigate St. Louis's scene, guides in the 1960s and 1970s indicated if a bar was frequented by African Americans, variously called "colored" or "black." The racial character of predominantly white

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[103] King, Georgia, interview with Nan Sweet, June 18, 1988, CLEAR Collection, State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center, St. Louis.
[104] Complaint Nos. 86134, 86147, and 86156, August, 27, 1955, Records Division, St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department.

establishments, however, went unmarked.[105] Bouncers arbitrarily demanding multiple forms of ID, disrespectful service from bartenders, and unfriendliness from fellow customers all communicated to black patrons that their presence was unwanted and effectively keep spaces segregated.[106]

In the face of the racial segregation of the region's queer social world, queer black St. Louisans forged spaces of their own through at least the second half of the twentieth century. St. Louis native Keith Boykin, born in 1965, eloquently captures the need for these spaces in his landmark work *One More River to Cross: Black and Gay in America*: "I found racism and racial ignorance in the white gay community, and homophobia and heterosexim in the black community. Only in the black gay community did I find a group with which I felt completely at home."[107] In this context, queer black spaces could be vital refuges and sites for community building.

An early example of such a space is Bill's Bar and Grill, located on Easton Avenue (later renamed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue). In the early 1960s, this was a favorite gathering place for a group of friends who became the primary informants for Washington University sociology graduate student Ethel Sawyer. Her research there led to the groundbreaking essay "A Study of a Public Lesbian Community," the first known academic work on an African American lesbian community anywhere in the United States.[108]

Numerous other bars and nightclubs that mostly attracted queer black patrons were in business in St. Louis through the 1960s and in the decades that followed. Their geography led to

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[105] *Ciao!*, June 1974.

[106] Williams, Erise, Jr., interview with Elizabeth Eikmann and TK Smith, spring 2017. Video recording in author's possession. Nicole Brown, "The Utopian Bar," *Gay News-Telegraph*, January 1988.

[107] Keith Boykin, *One More River to Cross: Black and Gay in America* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), 25.

[108] Ethel Sawyer, "A Study of a Public Lesbian Community" (honors essay, Washington University in St. Louis, 1965).

important differences in the experience of black and white queers in St. Louis. As we have seen, white gay and lesbian bars were located almost without exception in the urban core, often in racially liminal areas that were widely perceived as dangerous and avoided by many white St. Louisans. They were at a spatial and psychic remove from the growing suburban communities and relatively stable and affluent neighborhoods in more affluent parts of southwest St. Louis city, areas where a substantial majority of the region's white population lived. Local author Jerrold Rabushka, a white gay man, captured this dynamic in his description of Nites, a mostly white gay men's bar in business the eastern part of the Central West End in the 1980s. Its location, Rabushka wrote, "strikes fear in the heart of white folks. You hardly ever seen any down there." However, white gay men flocked to Nites, even crowding in the sidewalks in front of the bar after last call. "Everyone knows … down there at night on that block that two guys who aren't black are probably gay," he wrote.[109]

Like their white equivalents, black gay and lesbian bars were located in the urban core. Due to the racial segregation of metropolitan space in St. Louis, however, this meant that these bars were in or near in many of St. Louis major black residential neighborhoods, including those where many relatively affluent and respectable black families lived and where important black community institutions were located. Bill's Bar and Grill, for instance, was located on a major commercial thoroughfare on the boundary of Lewis Place and the Ville, two important enclaves of St. Louis's black professional class. Black queers in St. Louis were less able than their white counterparts to keep their social spaces apart from the areas where they encounter disapproving family members or acquaintances. This may have had a dampening effect on public activism among St. Louis's black queers, while also helping to explain why private parties-being more

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[109] Jerrold Rabushka, *Vandeventer Nites: A Tale of Gay Life in the Midwest (and a Party You Won't Want to Miss)* (St. Louis: New Universe Productions, 1988), 1-2.

discreet than bars—seem to have played an especially important role in prominent role in the black queer social scene.[110]

Miss Fannie's Ball exemplifies how the boundaries between queer and respectable spaces were sometimes blurry for black St. Louisans. Held each year around Halloween starting in the late 1950s, Miss Fannie's Ball featured performances by female impersonators and the selection of one as "queen." From its beginnings through the 1970s, it was held at the Prince Hall Masonic Lodge on Olive Street in the Central West End. This masonic hall was an important mainstream institution in black St. Louis, attracting many prominent community members and hosting important events, such as a 1959 speech by Malcom X.[111] The annual ball attracted a mix of revelers—male and female, black and white, queer and straight—although it was a special opportunity for visibility and affirmation for queer black St. Louisans. Local black newspapers such as *The American* covered the ball, even publishing photographs of performers along with playful captions.[112]

F.   **Conclusion**

Queer St. Louisans built vibrant social worlds in the urban core during the era of white flight, evidencing that the transformation associated with urban decline were complex in their consequences. Queer St. Louisans' experiences also demonstrate that attention to both sexuality and race are necessary to make sense of St. Louis's shifting social geography in this era.

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[110] John Victor Soares, "Black and Gay," in *Gay Men: The Sociology of Male Homosexuality*, ed. Martin Levine (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 263-274.

[111] John A. Wright, *Discovering African American St. Louis: A Guide to Historic Sites*, 2nd ed (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2002), 54

[112] *St. Louis American*, November 1, 1971. For more on the history and significance of Miss Fannie's Ball, see Andrea Friedman, "Beyond Gender Binaries: The View from LGBTQ St. Louis, 1945-1992," Mapping LGBTQ St. Louis, http://library.wustl.edu/map-lgbtq-stl

As St. Louis's white queer community moved from the margins and became more visible and cohesive in the decades after World War II, struggles for gay and lesbian recognition and inclusion began to make inroads into some mainstream neighborhood institutions. These developments were contemporaneous with and in complicated ways related to struggles for race equity and integration. A particularly powerful and consequential example of these processes took place at the Central West End's Trinity Episcopal Church, whose history is the focus of the next chapter.

VI. "THE CHURCH ON THE URBAN FRONTIER":
LIBERAL PROTESTANTISM IN THE WAKE OF WHITE FLIGHT

A.   <u>Introduction</u>

In the early 1950s, Trinity Episcopal Church in St. Louis's Central West End was at a crossroads. Founded nearly a century before, Trinity had always been an exclusively white congregation, and its members had tended to be respectable professionals, often well-to-do. In the years after World War II, however, this Anglo-Catholic city parish found itself in the midst of a neighborhood that was being transformed both by an exodus of white families to suburbia and by a growing population of African Americans and unmarried, childless, and often queer whites. Faced with plummeting attendance and uncertain prospects, Trinity's lay leadership "was ready to call it quits." During this era, many similar congregations dissolved or followed their members to the suburbs. But Trinity took a different path.

One Sunday in July 1953, many of the parish's remaining members met to make a decision about Trinity's future. After hours of deliberation, they determined to keep Trinity in place and moreover to reestablish it as a "neighborhood parish."[1] Over the next decade and a half, members of Trinity in large measure achieved this aim—and in the process they embraced a more inclusive understanding of who belonged in their community. First, the parish became racially integrated, with about a third of congregation made up of African Americans by the mid-1960s.[2] Later, it also began to welcome openly gay men. By the early 1970s, not only were many

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[1] Elizabeth B. Platt, "History of Trinity Church, St. Louis, 1855-1955," 1955, Trinity Episcopal Church Parish Archives, St. Louis; Charles F. Rehkopf, "Trinity Church, St. Louis: A Congregation That Loves," *The Living Church*, July 18, 1965; Arthur E. Walmsley to Jennifer [M. Phillips], October 18, 1999, Trinity Episcopal Church Parish Archives, St. Louis.
[2] Rehkopf, "Trinity Church."

white gay men attending Trinity, but the church was also providing crucial support to St. Louis first locally based lesbian and gay political organizations.[3] In 1971, one local gay activist told the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, "Trinity accepts people for what they are."[4]

Much of the historiography of the declining American city focuses on social and spatial divides. So far, this dissertation has also largely argued that that the processes associated with urban decline reproduced St. Louis's segregated social landscape. However, there is an important countercurrent. The processes associated with urban decline in some cases generated creative responses and forged connections across social boundaries. Frontiers between neighborhoods defined by racial or sexual difference were sometimes sites of encounter and cooperation where community was reimagined in more inclusive terms. This chapter argues that the liberal Protestant response to urban decline led some congregations to rework their politics of race and sexuality. The chapter focusses especially on the example of Trinity Episcopal Church, an influential St. Louis parish whose transformation across the post-World War II decades was particularly dramatic and consequential.

Along with urban history, this chapter is a contribution to the history of American religion and, as such, attends to theology and the internal politics of churches. The chapter joins other works that seek to take account of liberal (or ecumenical) Protestantism's often overlooked impact on contemporary American history. In his 2011 Presidential Address to the Organization of American Historians, David Hollinger noted that scholars have been "slow to see" that role that ecumenical Protestantism played in forging a "more widely dispersed and institutionally

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[3] Laud Humphreys, *Out of the Closets: The Sociology of Gay Liberation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 80-82.

[4] *Mandrake*, May 1971, 2. Surviving copies of *Mandrake* are archived in the Laud Humphreys Papers, Coll2007-012, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles, California.

enacted acceptance of ethnoracial, sexual, religious, and cultural diversity." Hollinger especially

credited ecumenical Protestants' "egalitarian impulses and the capacities for self-interrogation"

as drivers for these changing attitudes.[5]

The role of religion in struggles over racial segregation and integration in twentieth-

century America is the subject of a vast literature, although it is less commonly considered in

terms of social history of individual urban parishes.[6] Meanwhile, historians have devoted

relatively little attention to the role of religion in queer history. In his trailblazing account of

lesbian and gay political organizing in the 1950s and '60s, for example, John D'Emilio only

peripherally considers the sympathetic response of some Protestant clergy to the emergent

homophile movement. He documents early instances of cooperation between ministers and

activists, most notably the founding of the Council on Religion and the Homosexual in San

Francisco in 1964.[7] More recently, Heather Rachelle White's *Reforming Sodom* reveals debates

between liberal and fundamentalist Protestants over the morality of homosexuality,

demonstrating that many Christian thinkers were important defenders of the early gay and

lesbian movement.[8] However, much of the historiography either overlooks religion or casts it in

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[5] David Hollinger, "After the Cloven Tongues of Fire: Ecumenical Protestantism and the Modern American Encounter with Diversity," *Journal of American History* 98, no. 1 (June 2011): 48.

[6] See the thorough bibliographical essay in David L. Chapell. *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

[7] John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983): 192-195, 199-200, 214-215.

[8] Heather Rachelle White, *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015). Other notable works on queer religious history include John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), chap. 6; Kevin J. Mumford, "The Trouble with Gay Rights: Race and the Politics of Sexual Orientation in Philadelphia, 1969-1982," *Journal of American History* 98, no. 1 (June 2011): 49-72; Mark Oppenheimer, "'The Inherent Worth and Dignity': Gay Unitarians and the Birth of Sexual Tolerance in Liberal Religion," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7, no. 1 (July 1996): 73-101; and Heather Rachelle White, "Proclaiming Liberation: The Historical Roots of LGBT Religious Organizing, 1946-1976," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emerging Religions* 11, no. 4 (May 2008): 102-119.

an adversarial role, perhaps reflecting popular linking Christian faith and opposition to the lesbian and gay movement.[9]

This chapter offers a new perspective by considering ecumenical Protestant affirmation of sexual and racial diversity at the grassroots. Instead of emphasizing heady theological debates or controversies at the highest levels of denominational leadership, it looks at changes at the congregational level. In so doing, it seeks to build on Hollinger's suggestions about the impact of ecumenical Protestantism by suggesting the importance of ecumenical Protestantism in modern American social history. In St. Louis, some ecumenical Protestant congregations were substantially racially integrated while nearly all other religious institutions were effectively segregated. Some of these same congregations also provide crucial moral and material support to the region's fledgling lesbian and gay movement while most other local institutions remained indifferent or hostile. In the communities constructed around these churches, white and black and gay and straight congregants came to know each other as friends, neighbors, and fellow Christians. These everyday experiences rippled beyond these churches, affecting St. Louis's social and political history.

The inclusive character of these congregations was a product of a social world that came into being in the context of the urban crisis of the post-World War II decades. During this period, the few St. Louis churches that developed racially mixed or attracted openly gay and lesbian members were located almost without exception in the urban core. In the midst of postwar white flight, some mainline Protestant congregations in racially transitioning areas either dissolved or moved to suburbia. Because of a commitment to their neighborhoods and to what they regarded

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[9] See, for example, Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

as a Christian imperative to embrace human diversity, members of other congregations chose to keep their churches in place. By staying put, these congregants came into contact with the city-centered communities of white queers who were becoming more concentrated and conspicuous in these years. These congregations came to welcome gay members and to aid the lesbian and gay movement by extending the ethic of inclusion and neighborhood engagement that had guided their decision to remain in the inner city.

One crucial dimension of Trinity's sexual and racial politics must be kept in mind: gay and black were, with rare exceptions, non-overlapping categories in parish life through the end of the twentieth century. In an exchange during a 2011 oral history interview, Ellie Chapman, longtime parishioner and widow of pastor Rev. Bill Chapman, recalled that at Trinity in the 1970s, "There were certainly no black gays." Chapman's fellow congregant and parish archivist Etta Taylor responded, "That we knew about, anyway—that were open about it."[10] To a certain extent, the equation of gayness and whiteness at Trinity reflected the prevailing invisibility of queer people of color in American culture, a phenomenon discussed by historians and social theorists.[11] However, it also evidences how black and white queers experienced the social changes associated with neighborhood decline differently. Perceptions of neighborhood deterioration and racial transition produced spaces were whites sometimes had more opportunity to be publicly queer than blacks. Despite many liberal Protestants' support for an expansive inclusivity, the boundaries of community at churches like Trinity were still limited by race and sexuality.

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[10] Ellie Chapman and Etta Taylor, interview with author, July 25, 2011. Transcript in the author's possession.

[11] Allan Berube, "How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White It Stays," in *My Desire for History: Essays in Gay, Community, and Labor History*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 202-232.

The first chapter section situates Trinity's experience in national and local contexts. In the post-World War II decades, liberal Protestants grappled with the upheavals wrought by mass suburbanization and urban decline and took a fresh look at questions of racial justice and sexual morality. In St. Louis, members of some predominantly white denominations evangelized in what were regarded as slums and blighted districts and debated how to respond to the demands of the ascendant black freedom struggle.

The next section considers the history of Trinity Episcopal Church, located in St. Louis's racially liminal "gay ghetto." In the 1950s, the congregation voted to stay in the changing Central West End rather than relocate to the suburbs. Committing itself to ministering to the surrounding neighborhood, the parish attracted increasing numbers of black and openly gay white congregants. (Significantly, openly gay black congregants seemed to have been all but absent from Trinity at this time.) While not without controversy, Trinity's became a setting where neighborhood community life was reconstituted in the midst of the dramatic social changes of the era.

The last section details Trinity's role as a consequential setting of black power and gay and lesbian organizing in the 1960s and 1970s. The church's multiracial leadership saw this activism as complementary to Trinity's theology of inclusion. Along with a few other local liberal Protestant churches, such as St. John's Episcopal, Trinity played a crucial role in the rise of St. Louis's gay and lesbian movement in the 1970s and beyond. Organizing that took place at Trinity and allied churches had a long-lasting impact on St. Louis's history.

B. **Evangelizing the Inner City: The Protestant Establishment Responds to the Urban Crisis**

Trinity's decisions to remain in the urban core and to welcome the new black residents of its neighborhood was one example of a national phenomenon. During the era of mass suburbanization, many ecumenical Protestant clergymen and some lay people were preoccupied with taking a stand in the cities and making new converts there. They persuaded their denominations to invest considerable resources toward reaching out to "unchurched" city-dwellers and maintaining congregations in the urban cores. "One of the most exciting missionary opportunities of our age lies open to the Church in the inner city," concluded a panel of Episcopal priests from across the country in 1959. "The inner city," they declared, had become "the new missionary country."[12]

Ecumenical Protestant evangelism in inner cities had multiple, intertwined aims. On the one hand, members of missionizing churches sought to uplift dispossessed city-dwellers by providing them with cultural and educational opportunities. At the same time, these churches also sought to win souls for Christ and to shore up their respective denomination's influence in the urban cores.

In some ways, these urban churches resembled Protestant city missions and religiously affiliated settlement houses of the early twentieth century.[13] During the postwar decades, however, inner-city missionizing differed from previous eras in at least two important respects. First, the postwar liberal idea of toleration pointed to a more sympathetic posture toward cultural

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[12] G. Paul Musselman, *The Church on the Urban Frontier* (Greenwich, Connecticut: Seabury Press, 1959), 1-2.

[13] For a discussion of Episcopal and Presbyterian urban missions in nineteenth-century St. Louis, see Bard, *A History of Second Presbyterian Church, 1838-1938* (St. Louis: Second Presbyterian Church, 1987), 3, 6-7; Elizabeth B. Platt, "A History of Trinity Church, St. Louis, 1855-1955," 5-6, 9, in Trinity Episcopal Church Parish Archives, St. Louis.

diversity. In particular, with the rise of the civil rights movement, these congregations vigorously condemned of white supremacy and racial segregation, disavowing an earlier history of segregated houses of worship and complicity in Jim Crow.[14] Second, the demographic upheavals of the postwar era seemed to put mainline Protestant churches' very presence in the inner cities in jeopardy and infused the project of urban evangelism with great urgency. "Those of us who have studied and worked in the urban-industrial church are painfully aware of the crisis at hand," wrote Episcopal G. Paul Musselman in his 1960 call-to-arms, *The Church on the Urban Frontier*. "We feel that the Church must speak out soon and plainly if it is to save dozens of parishes which are becoming paralyzed by economic and sociological change." For Musselman, the Church was in "a race against time … to engage all its forces in what might well be a life or death struggle for many parishes." Meanwhile, the panel of Episcopal priests also warned, "Unless dioceses make a radical reassessment in their attitude toward [urban evangelism], our Church will lose the whole city."[15]

By the early 1950s, the Episcopal Church in St. Louis had already concluded that the declining population and changing racial makeup of the city required a sustained program of neighborhood evangelism. In November 1953, on the heels of Trinity's service of rededication, Rev. Joseph G. Moore, director of the Unit of Research and Field Study of the National Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church, directed St. Louis's urban churches to reach out to their neighbors. Moore listed seven inner-city congregations, Trinity among them, where "an intensive program of evangelism" in the surrounding neighborhood was "vital" and three others in or near the city where such efforts "would be useful." He recommended that priests at these churches

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[14] Hollinger, "After the Cloven Tongues of Fire," 26, 30-32. See also Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., *Episcopalians and Race: From Civil War to Civil Rights* (University Press of Kentucky, 2003) and William R. Hutchison, ed., *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).
[15] Musselman, *The Church on the Urban Frontier*, iii-iv, 1.

organize committees of parishioners to "study the needs of their communities so that new neighborhood families can be brought into these congregations." Moore suggested a number of ways that Episcopalians in the inner city might attract new members: adult education programs; discussion groups; and parish-based programs for "the aged," "the underprivileged," and other "segments of the community" that lacked organizations of their own.[16]

Through the next decade and a half, the efforts of urban congregations to win converts and address inner-city social problems were of great concern to local Episcopal leaders. The Missouri edition of the national Episcopal newspaper *Forth* published a regular column called "Church's Work in the City … Everyone's Problem and Responsibility." Alongside its headline was a sketch of the face of Christ set amidst the St. Louis skyline. In the February 1955 installment of the column, a priest from one of the "town and country" parishes explained why suburban and rural Episcopal congregations should help finance the diocese's City Mission Society. "The whole shifting patterns of the cultural scene finds our cities becoming jungles of factory slums and waste-places over-housed with desperate people who have lost all hope," he wrote. "Their help must come from those who live outside … [from] those who can obey Christ's injunction concerning even the least of our brethren, and manifest their concern for those stranded on the wasting beaches of our big city streets."[17] The priest's comments suggest a dual strand in the Episcopal Church's inner-city, which sought to alleviate the material poverty of city-dwellers while also ministering to their spiritual needs.

The 1956 film *The World Within* showcased the Episcopal Church in St. Louis's inner-city missionizing efforts as they were getting off the ground. Filmed on location and based on an

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[16] Rev. Joseph G. Moore, "St. Louis Parishes Advised to Evangelize," *Forth*, November 1953, Missouri edition.
[17] "Church's Work in the City … Everybody's Responsibility," *Forth*, February 1955, Missouri edition.

"original story" by a local parish worker, it tells the story of George, a white teenage boy growing up in "deep downtown St. Louis." Every day after school, George takes "a shortcut through the alley, past lidless garbage cans, overflowing ashpits, and through the aroma of backyard outhouses." At the end of his journey, he makes his way "up three flights of rickety steps" that cling "desperately to [the] worn brick wall" of a tenement house. George tells the viewer that this is "home—four families, thirteen kids, one outhouse. This is how my people live."

Stifled by poverty, tempted by crime, and bored by a life spent "on the street corner," George finds purpose, community, and faith at St. Stephen's House, an Episcopal congregation in the near south side. Invited in one day by a friend, George begins to come to St. Stephen's regularly, taking part in handicraft classes and amateur theater and developing a passion for photography in the church's darkroom. "From the start, they treated me like an individual, someone important enough to care about," George says of the adult congregants. "Here I counted as someone, with a personality of my own."

At St. Stephen's, George is also introduced to Episcopalism. While attending Mass there and listening to the Gospel, he feels "wonderfully moved." Later, he is baptized and confirmed. After receiving the Blessed Sacrament, George "sense[s] that [he is] part of a worldwide communion, dedicated to building a better world in [Christ's] name." At the conclusion of the film, a grown-up George—smartly dressed in a suit and with carefully combed hair—returns to St. Stephen's to teach Sunday school to a new crop of boys from the neighborhood. "You know

about institutions that have run away from the inner city," George observes, "but you know that St. Stephen's won't run away." [18]

It is difficult to say how accurately *The World Within* captured the perspectives and experiences of the neighborhood youths who came in contact with St. Stephen's in the 1950s and '60s. It does, however, offer a clear picture of the hopes that ecumenical Protestants bore for the program of urban evangelism centered on in St. Louis during the 1950s and '60s. *Now*, the diocesan newspaper, boasted that the "inspired Churchmen" of St. Stephen's were "following God's people where they go—bringing the Church and the good news of Jesus Christ!"[19]

In 1957, St. Stephen's set up a mission on the Near South Side near the Darst Apartments, a newly constructed public housing project where hundreds of poor black and white were intended to reside. The mission was also near two other large public housing projects. The new mission at first took the form of a three-room chapel located in a converted corner flat, which had been renovated by volunteers. It opened its doors "for neighborhood use" in February, with its first weeknight fellowship meeting.[20]

By May, members of St. Stephen's and the congregation's "new friends" in the neighborhood had begun to march through the streets to "bear witness to their Church and to their Lord and Savior." Every Sunday, congregants paraded along a winding, nine-block route from the congregation's mission near the Darst Apartments to St. Stephen's House itself. They carried banners and a processional cross, and along the way "the group [made] its rounds,

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[18] *The World Within*, directed by Jack Alexander, National Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 1956, VHS at the Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri, St. Louis, Missouri. See also "Episcopal TV Series Starts Sun., September 9, On KSD-TV," *Now in the Episcopal Church, Diocese of Missouri* [henceforth *Now*], September 1956.

[19] "St. Stephen's Chapel Brings Episcopal Church to Projects," *Now*, February 1957.

[20] "St. Stephen's Chapel Brings Episcopal Church to Projects," *Now*, February 1957.

stopping to call for friends at their home[s]." This weekly procession, reported *Now*, "acquaints people with their neighborhood, St. Stephen's parish and the Episcopal Church. It also serves as an icebreaker." A photograph accompanying *Now*'s article on the processions featured a group of marchers—black and white and adults and children—filling a sidewalk. At its close, the article noted, "Episcopalians are not used to witnessing on street corners—some of us do not find it easy." But in light of the pressing demands of urban evangelism, it concluded, "there are things the Church ought to be doing—at St. Stephen's House they are trying." [21]

Like Trinity during the same period, St. Stephen's succeeded in bringing African Americans into its congregation. A 1958 photograph of some members of that year's confirmation class suggests the church's racial mixture and ability to win new members. Of the sixteen people pictured, five are white, and ten are black. Most of the students preparing to enter the Episcopal Church are children; however, of the five adult initiates to the church, all are black.[22]

Overcoming racial divisions, however, was not a simple task for congregations in changing urban surroundings. For example, the priests and congregants of the Episcopal Church of the Ascension struggled to relate to residents of its racially transitioning neighborhood. Founded in 1888, Ascension had long been "one of the city's best known parishes" and a fixture in the West End of St. Louis, in the neighborhood north of Trinity. Postwar "white flight" transformed the character of the neighborhood, however, and the formerly white community had become "almost entirely Negro" by 1960. While there was "a strong nucleus of both old and new members in the nearby area of the church," most congregants had moved to the suburbs. Few of

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[21] "Street Corner Witness in South St. Louis," *Now*, May 1957.
[22] *Now*, December 1958.

the new residents of the now "highly transient" neighborhood seemed interested in the parish. *Now* reported that the remaining members of Ascension had come to see that the parish's situation was of a piece with "the most critical issue facing the American church today—the battle line of the Inner City." In an effort to "grapple in new and dramatic ways with the challenges before it," Ascension's members launched a "crash program of neighborhood evangelism" that sought to make the parish "relevant to its neighbor." At an "Institute on the Inner City" held at Ascension in January 1961, the Rev. Dr. David Cox asked the assembled parishioners to consider, "Why does the Church become separated from the people who live in the community?"[23]

Congregations that survived in the midst of the urban crisis tended to prioritize overcoming racial barriers. By the early 1960s, for example, St. Stephen's had begun to emphasize interracialism in its urban missionizing efforts. In May 1963, for example, the congregation initiated "the most extensive door-to-door evangelistic endeavor ever conducted in [its] eighty-one year history." The "theme" of the project was "In Christ's Name We Meet Our Neighbors." Over three days, forty-eight volunteers from St. Stephen's and seven other St. Louis area Episcopal congregations visited hundreds of apartments in three predominantly black public housing projects near the parish. "The goal of the callers," reported *Now*, "was to discover the names of persons in the immediate parish community who were unchurched, lapsed in their Christian commitments or seriously looking for a more meaningful experience with another Christian [denomination]." Of the 1,250 households that were contacted, "approximately 300 families and individuals indicated to Churchmen an interest to learn more about St. Stephen's

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[23] "Inner City Homecoming," *Now*, February 1961; "Parish Plans Fall Crash Program of Neighborhood Evangelism," *Now*, June 1960.

and the Episcopal Church." *Now* noted that the dozens of volunteers who knocked on doors in the public housing projects "sought face-to-face contact with God's people of many racial, cultural, economic, and national backgrounds." The volunteers themselves, meanwhile, were both white and black and from suburban and inner-city parishes.[24]

St. Stephen's concern with diversity and efforts to overcome social divisions were widespread in contemporary ecumenical Protestantism. George Cadigan, the bishop of the diocese of Missouri, captured this spirit of inclusion in a 1963 pastoral letter: "It must be made clear that our churches are open to every child of God." He then quoted a recent message from the national Episcopal Church's Presiding Bishop William Lichtenberger (formerly bishop of Missouri): "Discrimination within the Body of the Church itself is an intolerable scandal. Every congregation (and every church organization) has a continuing need to examine its own life and to renew those efforts to insure its inclusiveness fully."[25] Although Cadigan's pastoral letter was prompted by the March on Washington and "the present racial crisis," it is noteworthy that its call for inclusion was not framed in specifically racial terms. Instead, it called for universal fellowship in Christ—"*every* child of God" was to be welcomed in the church.

Episcopalians were not the only liberal Protestants in St. Louis grappling with the changes triggered by white flight and neighborhood decline. For example, in early post-World War II years, Second Presbyterian Church was also struggling to decide how to respond to the departure of many of its members to the suburbs and to the rapidly changing character of its urban surroundings. According to church historian Mary G. Bard, Second Presbyterian's minister "welcomed the few blacks who ventured into the church and exhorted the church members to do

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[24] "Eight Parishes Aid Door-to-Door Survey," *Now*, May 1963
[25] George L. Cadigan, "Our Goal: Reconciliation! What You May Do to Help," *Now*, September 1963.

the same." However, Bard writes, "since most church members had never met a black person in a social situation, they were as nervous and embarrassed as the visitors they were trying to welcome and put at ease."[26]

As the 1950s came to a close, the remaining members of Second Presbyterian debated whether to keep the church in place; to move to the far western edge of the city, an area so far insulated from racial transition; or to abandon the city entirely for suburban St. Louis County. In 1961, the matter was put to a vote. Members rejected a move to the St. Louis County by a three to one margin, but the option of staying in the heart of the Central West End won by only eleven votes. "It was scarcely a mandate for the future," Bard writes. But, Second Presbyterian's congregants had elected to stand against the tide of white flight. As the 1960s progressed, some black Central West Ender began regularly attending services at the church. In 1967, Second Presbyterian adopted a new mission statement in light of its evolving identity: "The mission of Second Church is to be the Body of Christ in the diversified metropolitan community near and distant so that the love of Christ many be known to people of the entire community …. It is to speak His message of concern and love and reconciliation to people of the suburbs and people of the central city, to the privileged and deprived, to the young and the elderly."[27]

C. "A Church in the Neighborhood": Reconstituting Community at Trinity Episcopal Church

Founded in 1855, Trinity moved from near downtown St. Louis to the corner of Euclid and Washington avenues in the Central West End in 1935. As we have seen, at the time the neighborhood had already begun to shift from an elite residential area to what was sometimes

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[26] Bard, *A History of Second Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri*, 57.
[27] Bard, *A History of Second Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri*, 2, 62-64.

regarded as a blighted district.[28] These processes accelerated after the end of World War II, when many more of the neighborhoods remaining well-to-do white residents relocated to the suburbs. They were replaced by newcomer, both white and black, many of whom moved into large single-family homes that had been converted into rooming houses.

Rev. Arthur Walmsley, the Trinity's rector during in the early 1950s, remembered that "attendance was down [and] changes in the West End of St. Louis were drastically affecting Trinity and nearby congregations." "I recognized the crunch which the West End faced because of blockbusting tactics by real estate interests," Walmsley recalled, "practices which hurried white flight to the new suburbs and imposed unrealistic financial obligations on a majority of the colored … new residents of the neighborhood." The parish was in crisis.[29]

In 1952, the Rt. Reverend Arthur C. Lichtenberger, bishop of the Episcopal diocese of Missouri, asked Trinity's remaining members to keep the church in the Central West End and moreover to "expand its program, particularly with reference to the neighborhood." The parish remained in limbo for some time as its lay leadership considered Lichtenberger's request. Then, in July 1953, Walmsley, another priest from a nearby parish, and "some thirty or forty" congregants—then nearly half of the parish's active members—assembled at the diocesan retreat center to consider the question, "What is the role of Trinity today?" At the end of the day, they decided to take up Lichtenberger's challenge and to renew their commitment the Central West End and its inhabitants. In September 1953, Lichtenberger held a "service of re-dedication" at Trinity to celebrate the launch of its new mission.[30]

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[28] Platt, "History of Trinity Church," n.p.
[29] Elizabeth Gentry Sayad, "Euclid and McPherson," *St. Louis Magazine*, June 1963, 55; Walmsley to Phillips.
[30] Platt, "History of Trinity Church"; Charles F. Rehkopf, "Trinity Church, St. Louis: A Congregation that Loves," *The Living Church*, July 18, 1965, 8.

Soon afterward, some black Episcopalians who had moved to the neighborhood began attending early-morning Mass at Trinity. "As their comfort level grew," Walmsley recounts, they asked to join the parish. While several members of Trinity were active in local civil rights struggles and Walmsley himself had participated in Committee of Racial Equality sit-ins at downtown dining establishments, other congregants were reluctant to integrate the church. "At a highly-charged vestry meeting," Walmsley recalls, "I stood firm on the principle that we did not count membership or communicant standing on the basis of race. To the everlasting credit of the people at Trinity, no one left over the matter."[31]

Having decided to remain in the inner city in 1953, Trinity became as a neighborhood church in the postwar decades, even as the Central West End became racially mixed and a hub of the region's predominantly white lesbian and gay community life. Its success depended on the congregation's capacity to expand its vision of acceptable human difference and to adopt an inclusive vision of community. "Daily the church must service the people who are here," Rev. Anthony Morely, then Trinity's rector, told a reporter for *St. Louis Magazine* in 1963. "Our job is not to determine who they shall be." The reporter observed that Trinity's communicants were indeed "a microcosm of the diverse community" of the Central West End.[32]

By 1958, five years after Trinity's lay leaders had voted to stay in the Central West End, about a quarter of the parish's members were black.[33] While many of the new congregants at Trinity were black Episcopalians who had approached the church on their own initiative, Trinity joined other inner-city Episcopal parishes such as St. Stephen's in a program of evangelizing in

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[31] Walmsley to Phillips.

[32] Sayad, "Euclid and McPherson," 56.

[33] Walmsley to Phillips. Reports on the relative numbers of black and white congregants at Trinity during these years vary slightly. In May 1960, *Now* said that 80 percent of parish's communicants were white. According to Sayad, "Euclid and McPherson," 24 percent of the congregation was black in 1963.

the surrounding community. "The theology is this: we are a church in this neighborhood," Morely, who had replaced Walmsley two years before, told *Now* in 1960. "What can we do in it, with it, for it?" After conducting a "neighborhood survey," a committee of parishioners discovered that some seventy black children lived within one block of Trinity and perhaps two hundred within two blocks of the church. The committee members determined that "a non-religious supervised recreation program … was needed, even strongly desired, by the Negro families living literally next door to the Parish." Volunteers from the parish organized a program of activities for neighborhood children, including ball games at nearby Forest Park and movie screenings, story hours, crafts, and games at the church.[34] Later, study halls, after-school tutoring sessions, and other programs were introduced.[35] Dozens of children participated in these activities at the church, which, according to *Now*, served as a site of "inclusive community life" in an area that otherwise had "very little" of it.[36]

As with the Episcopal Church's other efforts in the inner city during the 1950s and '60s, Trinity's outreach to neighborhood youths seems to have been motivated both by a concern about the children's poverty and a desire to recruit new members. On the one hand, the church sought to "broaden the horizons of the underprivileged," and, according to Charlotte Brown, a parish historian, "the church maintained a definite policy not to proselytize since many of the neighborhood families belonged to other denominations." However, Brown cheekily noted, "Whenever Fr. Morely took the little boys to the bathroom, he took them through the church and

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[34] "One Block from the Altar … 70 Kids!" *Now*, May 1960.
[35] Sayad, "Euclid and McPherson," 56; Rehkopf, "A Congregation that Loves," 9; Charlotte V. Brown, editor, "History of Trinity Church, St. Louis, 1955-1975," Trinity Episcopal Church Parish Archives, St. Louis.
[36] "One Block from the Altar … 70 Kids!" *Now*, May 1960.

taught them to genuflect!" Meanwhile, in its coverage of Trinity's programs, *Now* referred to the neighborhood children as "potential parishioners."[37]

In any case, Trinity did attract some of its black neighbor to the church. Trinity's success at surviving in the midst of a changing urban neighborhood and at integrating its congregation drew accolades from outside St. Louis. In July 1965, *The Living Church*, a national Episcopal, named Trinity a "Distinguished Congregation" and published a cover story on the parish. Trinity had been nominated for the honor by an "out-of-town visitor" who had attended Mass there one Sunday morning. "It was one of the most inspiring experiences I have had," the visitor attested. "This is a completely integrated congregation that truly lives in its church." According to *Now*, "Careful investigation and research bore out the truth of [the visitor's] statement."[38]

The article in *The Living Church* reported that nearly a third of the parish's members were black, "with children equally divided racially." By the time of the article's publication, black members of the congregation had served on the lay leadership board, and Yolanda Williams, a black woman who lived near the church, had taken charge of the church's after-school tutoring program. Photographs accompany the article show black and white members of the congregation standing beside each other in pews at Mass. According to *The Living Church,* Trinity's congregation was also diverse in terms of class, occupation, and way of life:

> There are rich and poor, professionals and middle class of both races. In the parish are the principal of a high school in the wealthiest suburban school district, a couple of physicians engaged in research at Barnes hospital, a Negro psychiatric social worker recently honored by a St. Louis newspaper as a "Woman of Achievement," another Negro who operates a one-man print shop, and many disadvantaged of all ages.

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[37] Brown, "History of Trinity Church"; "One Block from the Altar … 70 Kids!" *Now*, May 1960; Sayad, "Euclid and McPherson," 56.

[38] Rehkopf, "A Congregation That Loves," 8; "National Recognition for Trinity Church, St. Louis," *Now*, September 1965.

"In short," the article concluded, "a description of the 'face' of the parish would read like a description of the 'face' of its community."[39]

The diversity of Trinity's neighborhood not only resulted from a remarkable degree of racial integration. It also had to do with the rise of St. Louis's predominantly "gay ghetto" in the same part of the city. Going back to even before Trinity first moved to the Central West End in 1935, there was a noteworthy presence of queer whites in in the surrounding area. In a 1999 reminiscence on his years as Trinity's rector, Walmsley recalled, "Trinity proved to be a remarkably resilient and creative community. We even had our own 1950s version of the blessing of same-sex unions when I was asked to preside at house blessings of a number of parishioners living in committed relationships; it's clearly inappropriate not to bless *all* the rooms in a house or apartment."[40] This statement suggests that during his tenure at Trinity, Walmsley was not only aware that there were homosexuals among his parishioners, but was also willing to affirm the holiness of their "committed relationships" by blessing their shared living spaces. At this point, however, these seemed to have been only tentative and private gestures.

As explored in the previous chapter, the neighborhood around Trinity solidified its reputation as St. Louis's "gay ghetto" in post-World War II period. About sixty blocks in size, the area was described by sociologist Laud Humphreys as a "bohemian community of high social and racial diversity" with a "high proportion of homosexual residents." A half dozen gay bars operated in the neighborhood, including some so popular that they "lock their doors before midnight because they have reached the maximum number of customers allowed by fire-

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[39] Rehkopf, "A Congregation That Loves," 8-9, 12.
[40] Walmsley to Phillips,

department regulations."[41] In 1969, a man arrested for dressing in drag near Trinity told a vice officer, "In this part of the city all the fellows are Gay."[42] While an exaggeration, the man's comment is indicative of the degree to which St. Louis's gay community had rooted itself in the neighborhood during the 1960s.

Trinity's neighborhood evangelism attracted white gay men living in the Central West End for the same reason that it attracted heterosexual black families in the area. Indeed, much of the language used by Trinity's outreach was not framed in specifically racial terms, and a majority of the residents of Trinity's census tract remained white in the 1950s and '60s. "We must be willing to explore new ways of attracting the interest of people who live in our neighborhood," Rev. Morely told *Now* in 1963. "We want them to know who we are and why we're here. It's important to us that we find different ways of making it possible for them to discover the meaning of the worship we would share with them." To this end, Trinity organized adult discussion groups, musical performances, and theatrical productions at the church. In January 1963, Trinity held a "jazz mass" with a full band and children's choirs. "Special invitations to participate in this service [were] extended to all residents of the Trinity Church area," *Now* reported. A guest preacher from the diocesan cathedral was also invited to deliver a sermon at the service directed to non-Episcopalians who might be in attendance. "[Rev.] Morely and I are convinced that many people will come to this service out of curiosity who might otherwise never darken the doorway of Trinity Church, even though it is just around the corner from them," the preacher told *Now*.[43]

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[41] Humphreys, *Out of the Closets*, 80-81

[42] Police Report, Complaint No. 412758, November 1, 1969, 4, Records Division, St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, St. Louis, Missouri.

[43] "Modern Mission Jan. 25," *Now*, January 1963.

There was even a place where gay nightlife in the Central West End intersected with ecumenical Protestants' urban evangelism. In 1964, a coalition of St. Louis churches opened a coffeehouse called The Exit. It was located at Westminster Place and Boyle Avenue, six blocks east of Trinity in an entertainment district called Gaslight Square. It was near a number of gay and gay-friendly bars and cafés. Open at night, staffed by volunteers from area churches, and hosting poetry readings and folk music performances, *Now* reported that The Exit attracted "hordes" of patrons, including many of the neighborhood's "Bohemian residents." "By flickering candlelight over cups of steaming coffee or tea or cocoa," *Now* reported, "they come together to talk, sit, listen heckle, stare, make out, argue, quarrel in the knowledge the some care, care who they, cares what they are!" The Exit was a "Christian adventure" whose purpose was to introduce "students, beats, artists, drifters, the cautious and the curious" to "Christian people who … want to communicate the Gospel in meaningful new symbols." It was be "the Church in the world" and "a stage where we can allow the Holy Spirit to act."

The Exit of public discussions on controversial social and political issues of the day, including homosexuality. It also apparently attracted a large number of queer patrons. In 1966, *The Phoenix*, a Kansas City-based publication that called itself as "the Midwest Homophile Voice," described The Exit as "half gay and half straight."[44] While at its core an evangelizing enterprise, The Exit also suggests how ecumenical Protestant churches of the era were willing to broaden their conception of morality and the limits of their community. Rev. Ed Stevens, one of the coordinators of The Exit, said that the patrons of the coffeehouse were teaching him and his staff "about what is common between us—that we share a humanness in which we all stand." *Now*'s reporting on The Exit does not condemn the "stimulating off-beat people" who frequented

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[44] *The Phoenix* 1, no. 4 (August 1966),

the coffeehouse.[45] It is likely that some visitors to The Exit found their way to Trinity, a half a mil.

Trinity's engagement with queer community in the surrounding neighborhood reached an important turning point in the autumn of 1969, when the church played a key role in the emergence of gay and lesbian activism in St. Louis. Soon after midnight on November 1, 1969, officers of the St. Louis Police Department's Vice Division arrested a group of nine men who were wearing wigs, evening gowns, women's earrings, and high-heeled shoes. The arrests took place outside the Onyx Room, a gay bar in the Central West End. The men were charged with violating a municipal anti-masquerading ordinance, which prohibited cross-dressing, and were taken to the jail at police headquarters downtown. According Humphrey's first-person account of the night's events, the plainclothes officers had been waiting outside the bar where the men had gathered after a Halloween night drag ball.[46]

The Mandrake Society, "St. Louis's homophile organization," had been founded that April in an apartment near Trinity in the Central West End. Its purpose was to "equalize the status and position of the homosexual with the status and position of the heterosexual." Mandrake sprang into action that Halloween night. Outraged by the arrests, a group of "about two dozen homosexuals" congregated in the lobby of police headquarters to protest. Members of Mandrake were notified through a telephone chain that had been organized for such an occasion. Soon the group's president and Humphreys were on the scene to negotiate with the police and to help raise bail.[47]

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[45] "A Coffee House Gospel … Modern Expression of God's Love," *Now*, December 1964.

[46] Police Report, Complaint No. 412758, 1-2, 4; Humphreys, *Out of the Closets*, 85, 89.

[47] Humphreys, *Out of the Closets*, 85, 87-88; "Presenting the Mandrake Society," n.d. [ca. 1969], box 1, [St. Louis] Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History Project, sa1038, State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center, St. Louis, Missouri.

In the following months, Trinity would offer critical assistance to Mandrake. The arrests deeply concerned many queer St. Louisans and attracted many new members to Mandrake. While only about twenty-five people had attended Mandrake's October 1969 gathering before Halloween, some 150 were at the first meeting after the arrests. One was the woman owner of a gay coffeehouse who was "concerned about the welfare of some of her boys … who had been arrested." Mandrake helped finance the arrested men's legal representation, and, three months after the arrests, the group's attorney succeeded in convincing a judge to drop the charges. By early 1970, Mandrake counted more than 100 dues-paying members.[48] Throughout all of this, Trinity invited the Mandrake Society to hold its meetings in the church's parish hall, effectively making the church the administrative center of the city's nascent gay and lesbian movement.

D.   Gay Liberation, Black Power, and Liberal Protestantism

Ellie Chapman recalls that when she moved to the Central West End in the fall of 1969, she was "really struck by the diversity, because it was something new to me." Chapman had previously lived in rural Kennett, Missouri, where her husband Rev. Bill Chapman, an Episcopal priest, had served as rector of a small, all-white congregation. While the Chapmans were personally committed to racial equality and social justice—their first date had been at a NAACP rally—the parishioners in Kennett chafed at civil rights activism. When Bill began to serve as co-rector of Trinity the following year, Ellie discovered something remarkable about this inner-city congregation. "Here we come to Trinity Church, St. Louis," she remembers. "There were a lot of blacks. … There were a lot of gays. A very active—I don't want to say 'cohort' of gay people,

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[48] Humphreys, *Out of the Closets*, 84, 90; *Mandrake*, March 1970, 1.

because they weren't a group as far as I could see. Just part of the congregation." Two members of the elected lay leadership board were openly gay men in the early 1970s, and Trinity had developed a reputation as the diocese of Missouri's "gay church."[49]

In this environment, Bill Chapman flourished as a priest and as a sort of community organizer. Through most of the 1970s, he served as part of a three-person Team Ministry along with Father Richard Tombaugh, a white academic with ties to nearby Washington University, and Father John Mason, a black pastoral counselor.[50] Under their watch, Trinity attracted growing numbers of white gay men while also serving as neighborhood anchor and hub of black power and gay liberation organizing.

For several years after the 1969 Halloween night arrests, Trinity remained perhaps St. Louis's most important sites of lesbian and gay political organizing. It received coverage in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* for its "open door policy" toward homosexuals and also served as a meeting place and social center for St. Louis's student-led Gay Liberation Front.[51] Chapman encouraged gay congregants to become involved in the life of the church by joining the choir or running for election to the parish's lay leadership board.[52] In these years, Trinity became a space where heterosexual Christians met, got to know, and worshipped alongside out gay men. While this was sometimes a source of friction, members of the parish recall that this everyday mingling led many congregants to become newly sensitive to the concerns of lesbians and gay men and supportive of their movement.[53]

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[49] Ellie Chapman, interview by author, St. Louis, July 15, 2011.
[50] Baker and Taylor, *A History of Trinity Church*, 18.
[51] *Mandrake*, May 1971, 2.
[52] Ellie Chapman, interview with author, July 1, 2013; Jim Pfaff, telephone interview with author, March 25, 2014.
[53] Martha K. Baker and Etta Taylor, "A History of Trinity Church, St. Louis, 1975-2005," 2005, 33-41, Trinity Episcopal Church Parish Archives, St. Louis; Ellie Chapman and Etta Taylor, interview with author, July 15, 2011; Ellie Chapman, interview with author, July 25, 2011.

In the early 1970s, Trinity provided financial support to the Mandrake Society by purchasing regular advertising space in its newsletter, which was distributed in many of St. Louis's queer gathering places. Most of the other advertisers were local bars, cafés, and bathhouses that lured queer patrons with the promise of a good time. The Onyx Room, for example, tempted readers of *Mandrake* with "drinks," "dancing," and "friends," while the after-hours Golden Gate Coffee House declared that "for fun and frolic," it was "the late-night place to be."[54] Trinity, however, used its advertising space to invite lesbian and gay St. Louisans to join an inclusive spiritual community. In March 1971, for example, a full-page ad listed its weekly schedule of Masses, which on Sundays were followed by refreshments and socializing. The ad announced that the church was "open daily for private prayer, meditation, and visits before the Blessed Sacrament." "All people[,] including each of you," the ad proclaimed to *Mandrake*'s readers, "are invited to attend all services in this historic Anglo-Catholic parish church whose special mission is to serve the entire community. You are invited to help in this mission."[55]

During the 1970s, Trinity not only served as a center lesbian and gay activism, but also of African American and interracial community life and political organizing. This was exemplified by the collaboration between Bill Chapman and Jesse Todd. As young man in the 1960s, Todd cut his teeth as an activist in the Zulu 1200s, a St. Louis black power group. In the late 1960s, Todd helped lead a campaign by the group to stage sit-ins in St. Louis area churches demanding that they take responsibility for their role on facilitating white supremacy. The Catholic cathedral in the Central West End was among the targeted houses of worship. When Todd entered Trinity's sanctuary to stage a sit-in during a Sunday morning service, he was invited to address

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[54] *Mandrake*, March 1971, 3; *Mandrake*, February 1971, 14.
[55] *Mandrake*, March 1971, 4.

the congregation to discuss his concerns. Shortly afterward, Trinity hired Todd to run some of

the church's neighborhood programs, and he later became a member of the congregation

himself.[56]

For several years, Todd served as director of the Concerned Citizens Community Center,

which was located in a building adjacent to the church that Trinity rented. This facility held

African dance classes, adult education classes, and meetings of a prison visitation program

operated by the Black Panthers. The same space also featured pool and ping-pong tables, and for

a time Trinity's Sunday school met there as well. In the mid-1970s, Chapman allowed Todd to

use Trinity as the headquarters for an extended protest campaign against city hall in the face of

cutbacks to community services. The campaign culminated in non-violent civil disobedience and

arrests.[57]

Fr. Chapman was conscious of Trinity's unusual identity as a congregation that was both

racially mixed and welcoming to gays, and he encouraged parishioners to think through how this

fit into their lived experience of faith. In Lent of 1976, for example, he led a weekly series of

discussions of "Christian Perspectives" on the following topics: "Sexuality and Vocation,"

"Sexuality and Ordination," "Race and Identity," "Race and Power," and "Race and

Community."[58]

Trinity's support for both racial and sexual minorities emerged out a common framework

rooted in ecumenical Protestantism and neighborhood engagement. However, black power and

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[56] Jesse Todd, interview with author, August 16, 2011, in St. Louis; Jesse Todd, interview with author, September 19, 2011.
[57] Jesse Todd, interview with author, August 16, 2011, in St. Louis; Jesse Todd, interview with author, September 19, 2011; minutes of Concerned Citizens Community Center, April 28, 1976 (copy in author's possession); Baker and Taylor, *History of Trinity Church*, 4.
[58] "Lent—1976," n.d., Trinity Episcopal Church Parish Archives, St. Louis.

gay liberation activism at Trinity largely ran along parallel tracks, and queer people of color were largely invisible in the church. This likely reflected the relative sexual conservatism of many black members of the parish, as well as the racial segregation of St. Louis's queer social worlds.

St. Louis's 1980 gay pride march illustrates both the contours—and the racial limits—of gay liberation activism in St. Louis. On a bright, warm Sunday in April 1980, some five-hundred people marched through the streets of the Central West End, St. Louis's "gay ghetto." Carrying banners and chanting slogans, the marchers made their way down Lindell Boulevard along the northern edge of Forest Park. Finally, they arrived at the gates of Washington University and staged an exuberant rally there for the cause of lesbian and gay liberation. That day's march and rally concluded a week of gatherings around the city that together made up what organizers called the St. Louis Celebration of Lesbian and Gay Pride. While not strictly speaking the first pride celebration in the St. Louis region—smaller-scale pride events had occurred through 1970s—the unprecedented size and visibility of the 1980 pride week made it a momentous turning point for the local community.

The 1980 celebration noteworthy because of prominent presence urban, liberal Protestant congregations. Lesbian-and-gay-affirming religious leaders and religious institutions played key roles in making the pride celebration a reality, and they were a prominent presence at many of the week's events. In fact, the Magnolia Committee—the ad hoc group that took charge of planning the march—held its meetings at St. John's Episcopal in the Tower Grove South neighborhood. Michael Allen, an Episcopal priest and dean of Christ Church Cathedral downtown, worked closely with the Magnolia Committee and was even remembered as its "chaplain." Meanwhile, the leadership of the lesbian and gay Metropolitan Community Church (MCC)—founded in the Central West End in 1972—helped coordinate preparations for the pride

celebration, and the MCC hosted one of the week's largest events. Finally, Dean Allen of Christ Church Cathedral spoke at the rally after the march. Clad in black and wearing a clerical collar, Allen's address in effect aligned his church with the movement for lesbian and gay rights.[59]

Another remarkable feature of the march was its overwhelming whiteness. Photographs, video footage, and the recollections of participants from that day agree that virtually all of the marchers were white, despite taking place in a city whose population was nearly 46 percent black in 1980. While St. Louis's urban liberal Protestant congregations played a vital role in the rise of the city's gay and lesbian movement and produced important interracial spaces, they did not transcend the fundamental logic at the intersection of race and sexuality that divided St. Louis's queer social world and produced distinct experiences for queer St. Louisans of different races.

E.   Conclusion

The history of Trinity Episcopal Church in the post-World War II decades of white flight demonstrate the complex consequences of the processes associated with urban decline. Rather than leave in the face of the changing social character of their neighborhoods—as did so many other institutions in St. Louis—the congregants stayed and adapted. In the process, they reworked the racial and sexual boundaries of community, forging an important and consequential site of racial integration and queer affirmation. However, the apparent absence of queer people of color at Trinity during this period—and the sharp racial divide in early gay and lesbian

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[59] My description of the 1980 St. Louis Celebration Lesbian and Gay Pride and the organizing that preceded it draws on contemporary press coverage and the articles, documents, and interviews compiled online by local historian Jim Andris: *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 21, 1980; *No Bad News*, July 1980; Jim Andris, "The First Walk for Charity in St. Louis, Missouri, Sunday, April 20, 1980 and First Celebration of Lesbian and Gay Pride, April 12-20, 1980," *GLBT History in St. Louis* (website), n.d., accessed March 30, 2015, jandris.ipage.com/history/h80.2.html.

organizing in St. Louis—show the far-reaching effects of segregation and further evidence that need to consider sexuality and race in tandem.

Trinity's experience suggests how some long-established institutions changed in the face of St. Louis's shifting demographics. As will be discussed in the next chapter, these developments refashioned local politics and invited residents to rethink the meaning of their city's decline and to imagine new paths toward renewal.

VI. "WE SAVE NEIGHBORHOODS":
QUEERS AND URBAN RENEWAL

A. <u>**Introduction**</u>

In January 1984, *No Bad News*—St. Louis's "news and entertainment guide for the gay community"—asked in a banner headline on its front page: "Are Gays Being Pushed Out of the Central West End?" In the accompanying article, Roger Blase, owner and editor of the paper, offered evidence to support the idea that for some of St. Louis's movers-and-shakers, gays were an "undesirable" presence in the neighborhood. He discussed "rumors of anti-gay policies in the management of the Maryland Plaza Redevelopment Corporation," the group charged with overseeing urban renewal efforts in the neighborhood's most important commercial corridor, and cited several examples of gay bars and restaurants being denied the renewal of their leases or liquor licenses. During the "zenith of the nationwide urban exodus" of the 1960s, Blase asserted, "gays were prominent among the small group who braved the perceived danger of a declining area and moved in" to the Central West End. In light of the hostile treatment they were subject to now, however, another "exodus" was underway—"an exodus of gay-owned businesses and other establishments that are perceived to attract gays" from the Central West End.[1]

Apparently following up on these concerns, the July 1984 issue of *No Bad News* featured a striking cover photo. Above the headline "Gays on Parade," there was an image of marchers from St. Louis's annual pride march through the streets of the Central West End to Forest Park. A group of marchers held a banner that was "a new one this year." In large, bold letters, it read: "WE SAVE NEIGHBORHOODS." Behind the banner, another marcher carried a sign that

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[1] *No Bad News*, January 1984.

looked like an old St. Louis brick rowhouse—likely a nod at the many homes of this type that had been purchased and restored by gay men. While the article made no mention of the racial or gender makeup of the participants in the parade, all of the nineteen or so marchers visible in the photograph—including those holding the banner—appear to be white, and almost all appear to be male.[2]

First published in the spring of 1980 to cover with St. Louis's first regular gay and lesbian pride march, *No Bad News*, along with the *Gay News-Telegraph*, was one of two queer newspapers being published in St. Louis in the early 1980s. Both were published out of offices in the Central West End, heavily relied on advertisers from the neighborhood, and focused much of the coverage on neighborhood goings-on. (The lesbian-feminist magazine *Moonstorm*, was also being published in St. Louis in these years. It was headquartered in south St. Louis.) *No Bad News* itself was originally owned and edited by Suzanne Goell, a heterosexual woman who in 1972 had been one of the founding contributors to the *West End Word*, a boosterish neighborhood newspaper.[3] It is telling that St. Louis's gay community could support two separate gay newspapers in these years, and it is telling these publications could attract enough advertising money to keep themselves afloat and find enough to cover to fill their pages every month. It is also noteworthy that someone of Goell's background and sensibilities would see putting out a gay newspaper as a good business opportunity and a way to further her project of promoting the wellbeing of the Central West End.

By about close of the 1970s, after a decade of gay liberation activism, St. Louis's queer communities were more organized and visible than ever before. Whereas there were few

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[2] *No Bad News*, July 1984.
[3] On the history of *No Bad News*, see Jim Andris, "No Bad News," Saint Louis LGBT History Project (website), n.d., http://www.stlouislgbthistory.com/topics/media/no-bad-news.html

community institutions beyond bars in 1969, there were now multiple social, political, and religious groups and a range of businesses that specifically targeted gay customers. While this activity occurred in different parts of the city—Lafayette Square, Soulard, and Tower Grove had all recently earned reputations as "gay neighborhoods"—the Central West End remained the region's preeminent center of queer community life and political organizing in the early 1980s.

Gay St. Louisans increasing visibility, as well as perceptions of the Central West End's "rebirth" through the 1970s and 1980s, however, raised new questions. Going back at least to the 1930s, when Mabel Thorpe first battled the Excise Commissioner to keep her liquor license. respectable homeowners, city officials, police, and others sometimes saw sexual disreputability in general and queerness in particular as a symptom and cause of neighborhood decline. As *No Bad News*'s coverage attests, even in the early 1980s, some powerful St. Louisans were still of the same mind and thought that sustained "renewal" in the Central West End required the removal of the area's visible queerness. While attitudes were changing, an understanding of queerness as criminal and pathological was still widespread, and these were still understood to be features of the social deterioration associated with "blight."

By the mid-1970s, however, a counterargument to this logic began to appear in St. Louis, articulated by some queer St. Louisans and sympathetic heterosexuals. Rather than being symptoms or causes of decline and blight and an "undesirable" element in the neighborhood, gays could actually "*save*" neighborhoods. By their willingness to live, work, and spend money in neighborhoods that their heterosexual counterparts had largely chosen to abandon, gays were in fact model urban citizens and crucial contributors to the "renewal" or "revival" of old urban neighborhoods—or so the argument went. While this line of thinking was not immediately or wholly embraced by St. Louis's elites, it did gain some traction, and ultimately would play an

important part in the rising political clout of the city's gay community through the 1980s and

early 1990s. However, by framing gays as respectable homeowners—and implicitly as white and

often male—this argument also obscured class, race, and gender divisions among queer people in

the city. While offering a chance for some queer people to participate equitably in civic life, it

did not undermine the fundamental social inequalities embedded in discourses of urban decline

and renewal.[4]

B.   The Central West End's "Rebirth" in the 1970s and 1980s

Many commentators, both in contemporary sources and latter-day retrospective pieces,

regarded the 1970s through the 1980s as a period of "rebirth" or "renewal" in the Central West

End. In 1986, for instance, long-time resident and neighborhood activist Delphine McClellan,

contrasting the current state of the area with that of the late 1960s, gushed, "Our West End has

come back to life! … I watched it happening every day! I am still in wonderment over the

miraculous change."[5] As a central contention of this dissertation is that urban decline and

renewal are not straightforward, objective, and apolitical descriptors, as they are often presented,

but in practice have fuzzy, shifting definitions and are in fact subjective and deeply political

categories. This was true both of the Central West End's perceived decline and its perceived

rebirth. Even the basic timeline of the area's (near) death and "rebirth" varies considerably, with

different sources from the mid-twentieth century to the present day offering different

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[4] The role of queers in gentrification in the late twentieth century and the racial politics thereof have as of yet received limited attention from historians. Pioneering contributions include Kwame Holmes, "Chocolate to Rainbow City: The Dialectics of Black and Gay Community Formation in Postwar Washington, D.C., 1946-1978," PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011; Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).
[5] Delphine McClellan, *We Stayed to Fight for City Living: How St. Louis Women Sparked a City Renaissance* (St. Louis: City Living Press, 1987), 288.

interpretations of when exactly the Central West End began its decline, when and how its renewal began, and whether and when its renewal was ever definitively complete.[6]

That being said, there are some relatively concrete reasons that the 1970s and especially 1980s do mark a turning point in area's history. Most significantly, the period saw the stabilization of the area's demographic character, at least after several decades of rapid and dramatic change. The population still decrease substantially from 1970 to 1980, as it had since 1950, but afterward it remained relative stable. The black portion of the population also ceased to grow after 1970, when it peaked at 41.9 percent in the four "gay ghetto" census tracts. It inched down in subsequent decades, but remained 37.8 percent in 1990.[7] The prices of single-family homes in the neighborhood, meanwhile, began to increase after 1970 after having fallen in previous several decades. Some old mansions that had been vacant were renovated and occupied by new owners, and some others that had been converted into rooming house were repurposed once again as single-family homes. Of special significance to these changes was the Washington University Medical Redevelopment Corporation and the Maryland Plaza Redevelopment Corporation's efforts to encourage and coordinate investment in the neighborhood and to refurbishes the area's image through positive publicity.[8] The activities of the Central West End Association was also significant—for example, its annual tradition, beginning in 1972, of Central West End Home and Garden tours, which helped to counteract images of an imperiled, decaying neighborhood with one of elegance and charm.[9]

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[6] Two popular histories of the neighborhood that exemplify discourses of decline and renewal are Suzanne Goell, ed., *The Days and Nights of the Central West End: An Affectionate Look at the Last Twenty Years in the City's Most Exciting Neighborhood*, (St. Louis: Virginia Publishing, 1991) and Candace O'Connor, *Renaissance: A History of the Central West End* (St. Louis: Reedy Press, 2017).
[7] US Census Bureau data prepared by Social Explorer.
[8] Goell, ed., *The Days and Nights of the Central West End*, 30-45.
[9] "Missouri Baptist Hospital Auxiliary Presents a Golden Age House Tour of St. Louis West End Private Places," 1972, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 9, 2019.

C.   Queers as Obstacles of Urban Renewal

Queer people fit awkwardly into the Central West End amidst this period of "renewal." While in many ways the "gay ghetto" was at its height during the 1970s, there was also friction between forces of "redevelopment" and queer people and businesses in the neighborhood. In 1971, the Board of Aldermen declared that the area around Maryland Plaza was "blighted," and in 1973 former Mayor A.J. Cervantes and former owner of the nearby Chase-Park Plaza hotel complex took charge of the Maryland Plaza Redevelopment Corporation, "dedicated to redeveloping the area in concert with private developers for the public interest."[10] An early planning document produced by the corporation asserted, "This commercial area is marginal and can go up or down—if something is done, it will go up; if nothing is done, it will go down." The plan also said that three sources of "potential customers" were envisioned for new commercial developments in the area: Central West End residents, who it asserted were "generally affluent"; visitors from other parts of the St. Louis region; and "tourists and conventioneers" from elsewhere. Notably, less well-to-do inhabitants of the neighborhood were absent from the list, and the current types of businesses in operation in the neighborhood—including many that significantly catered to queer people—were regarded as inadequate.

In his 1984 *No Bad News* piece, Roger Blase had asserted that there had long been "rumors" that the Maryland Plaza Redevelopment Corporation was specifically interested in implementing "anti-gay policies" in its efforts to revamp the neighborhood. He wrote that "one of the first signs of homophobia was in the mid-70's when a restaurant called Ginger's at Maryland and Euclid … was denied a renewal of liquor license when local residents declined to sign the necessary documents, alleging that the restaurant was catering to homosexuals and that

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[10] *Days and Nights of the Central West End*, 121.

the proliferation of businesses catering to gays had to be stopped." This seems to have taken place at about the same time there was an effort more generally to rein in the number of bars in and near Maryland Plaza, whose presence, some neighborhood residents alleged, had contributed to the area having "deteriorated drastically."[11]

A more consequential example cited by Blase was the 1979 closure of Herbies', a very popular, predominantly gay restaurant, bar, and disco located in prime real estate in Maryland Plaza. This business had been in some sense a flagship of the gay liberation era Central West End. With its large, street-level windows, elegant art deco interior, and positive coverage in the mainstream local press, it was the most visible and sophisticated gay-oriented establishment St. Louis had had up to that point. It was also, according to the *Post-Dispatch*, "the most popular attraction" in Maryland Plaza.[12] During the mid- to late 1970s, it was also the epicenter of the Central West End's Halloween street parties, which attracted thousands to the neighborhood and also allowed for an unusual degree of queer visibility, with many revelers dressed in sexually suggestive or gender-bending costumes.[13]

In 1979, however, owners Herb and Adelaide Carp learned that Cervantes would not renew their lease. The Carps attempted to sell the Herbies' to Michael Napolitano, who planned to keep the disco open. However, Cervantes and the Maryland Plaza Redevelopment Corporation intervened to block the sale and to keep Napolitano from obtaining a liquor license for the location under his name. In a *Post-Dispatch* article on the controversy, Cervantes asserted that "it was his policy as the area's redeveloper to 'pass judgment' on who should be allowed to operate

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[11] *No Bad News*, September 1984.

[12] Dan Bischoff, "Cruizin' the Singles Bars," *St. Louis Magazine*, September 1978; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 7, 1979.

[13] On the Central West End's 1970s Halloween street parties, see Goell, ed., *The Days and Nights of the Central West End*, 3-5.

businesses in the area." Napolitano, the would-be new owner of Herbies', reported that Joyce Littlefield, an officer in the Maryland Plaza Redevelopment Corporation and a member of Women's Crusade Against Crime, "had used scare tactics to get business owners to withdraw their names from his petition for a liquor license" One of the business owners, the proprietor of a nearby flower shop, told the *Post-Dispatch* that Littlefield had warned her not to sign the petition because "Napolitano would turn Herbie's [sic] into a wild disco that would be bad for the neighborhood." Under pressure, the shop owner assented to Littlefield's request, but later told the *Post-Dispatch* that she had regretted her decision because she thought that "Herbie's [sic] has been good for the area, and I would like to see it continue."[14] Herbies' closed soon afterward and was replaced by a series of innocuous restaurants, not marketed to a queer clientele specifically.

In his article, Blase also discussed the "more recent example" of another Central West End establishment called Brandy's. The bar and restaurant, he said, "had been languishing as a straight establishment," so its owners began to "seek a gay clientele in the summer of 1980." Perhaps in part because Brandy's helped fill the void left the closure of Herbies', "gays responded enthusiastically to this new dance bar in the Central West End," and the establishment "flourished for well over a year." Its success backfired, however, as "many residents became alarmed at the spillover into the street. It became apparent that the bar's days were numbered." In September 1982, Brandy's closed after the Maryland Plaza Redevelopment Corporation refused to renew its lease. Afterward, Blase wrote, "a surprising amount of public opposition arose" after two other Maryland Plaza area restaurants applied for a dance license. "Objections cited were the dangers of attracting the 'wrong element,' often specified as gays and blacks," Blase reported. "Brandy's was given as an example of a dance establishment that 'turned' gay."[15]

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[14] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 7, 1979.
[15] *No Bad News*, January 1984.

It is difficult to interpret the actions of the Maryland Plaza Redevelopment Corporation. It actions certainly led to the closing of a number of gay establishments in the Central West End and diminished the queer character of the neighborhood. Moreover, the editor of *No Bad News* at least suggested that they were motivated by homophobia and does offer compelling evidence to that effect. However, neither Cervantes nor any other members of the corporation made any clear public pronouncements about the queer element of the neighborhood specifically. During his own mayoralty, meanwhile, Cervantes himself had on at least once patronized the French Market, a gay bar featuring drag performances in the Soulard neighborhood of St. Louis. It was also a favorite hangout of his wife, Carmen.[16] Cervantes seems to have thought that gay bars might be appropriate business in the "blighted" of neighborhoods, as Soulard was at the time, but not in neighborhoods that had the potential of becoming showcases for St. Louis's renewal, like the Central West End.

Joel J. Pesapane, former owner of a gift shop called Pseudonym located near Maryland Plaza, wrote to complain about *No Bad News*'s coverage. "Please do not make the mistake of thinking of Maryland Plaza Redevelopment Corporation as The Central West End," he argued. "I can tell you that the Central West End in general is not anti-gay." However, probably referring the crowds of gay customers gathered outside of Brandy's, he asserted that Central West End residents and business owners were opposed to "activity that spills onto the streets."[17]

It is noteworthy that while the Maryland Plaza Development Corporation's ostensible goal was the bring lucrative commercial establishments to the neighborhood in order to increase property values, its targeting of gay-oriented establishments actually led to the closure of what had been successful businesses and regionally important entertainment destinations for queer

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[16] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 11, 1973.
[17] *No Bad News*, March 1984.

people. Homophobia played a role in their decision-making along with detached economic calculus.

Outside of the apparent efforts of the Maryland Plaza Redevelopment Corporation and others to close gay-oriented establishments in the Central West End, there were other ways that queerness was still seen as a factor inhibiting a neighborhood's "revitalization" in this era. Crucially, it is important to remember that despite some early success by the local gay and lesbian movement, homosexuality and gender non-conformity were still in at best legally murky territory. While St. Louis's "east side" suburbs—including East St. Louis—had legalized same-sex sex along with the rest of Illinois with the reform of the state's penal code in 1961, a sodomy statute was in force in Missouri until the US Supreme Court invalidated all such statues nationwide with its 2003 decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*. Cross-dressing, meanwhile, was prohibited by a city ordinance in St. Louis until the ACLU of Eastern Missouri successfully convinced a US Court of Appeals to overturn the provision in 1986. Men were regularly arrested for lewdness in Forest Park tearooms through the 1970s and 1980s. Meanwhile, while it seems that police harassment and raids of gay and lesbian bars and other establishments seemed to have been rare in St. Louis after the 1960s, they had not ceased all together.[18] In 1978, for instance, police raided the St. Louis location of the Club Baths chain, at the time located in the basement of the Washington Hotel on Kingshighway in the Central West End. The manager, an attendant, and four customers were arrested for lewd and lascivious conduct.[19] In 1982, meanwhile, police raided The Bowery, a gay bar on Tower Grove Avenue near the Botanical Heights

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[18] On the history of the criminalization and policing of queer people in metropolitan St. Louis, see Miranda Rectenwald, "Divided by Violence: Crime and Policing in LGBTQ St. Louis, 1945-1992," Mapping LGBTQ St. Louis, http://library.wustl.edu/map-lgbtq-stl
[19] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 2, 1978.

neighborhood, and arrested six men for lewd and lascivious conduct.[20] As late as 1984 (in what seems to have been the last of such raids in St. Louis's history), Uncle Marvin's, a downtown bar, was raided by the police and at least eight drag queens arrested. One of the drag queens was charged with violating the St. Louis's ordinance against cross-dressing and with lewd and lascivious conduct, reportedly for a result of a performance in which he "had use whips and fake monkeys for props, and had engaged in overt or stimulated sex acts."[21] These were to a great degree remarkable cases, and it seems that most gay and lesbian establishments in the city of St. Louis—including those in the Central West End—were generally tolerated by the police during the 1970s and 1980s. However, these incidents are a reminder that queer people in St. Louis to a certain extent could still be categorized as part of a criminal class, contributing to the idea that they or their gathering places could not make for respectable additions to a neighborhood.

Similarly, while many noted a relative degree of tolerance toward queerness among many of the inhabitants of the Central West End at least, it is important that a widespread atmosphere of homophobia among St. Louisans that was also an obstacle to queer people being integrated into a "revitalized" neighborhood. Writing on the Central West End in 1972, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* columnist wrote that suburbanites visited the neighborhood in order to "gawk" at "homosexuals," along with the other unconventional inhabitants of the area. Returning to the subject in in 1976, he offered readers a tour of neighborhood following "resurgence of Maryland Plaza." "On the corner" of Euclid and McPherson, he wrote, "is Potpourri, a center for St. Louis gays who live here, too. They like to keep to themselves and only ask the same of you." McCarthy's tone anticipates conflict between the Central West End's queer inhabitants and

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[20] *No Bad News*, January 1982.
[21] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 16, 1985.

straight and homophobic suburban visitors.[22] Meanwhile, also in 1976, a telling opinion piece

was published in the *St. Louis Review*, the official newspaper of the Catholic Archdiocese of St.

Louis, widely distributed among the St. Louis region's Catholic households. In it, Monsignor

Joseph W. Baker wrote in defense of recent police crackdowns of "many persons in Forest Park

on suspicion of committing homosexual acts." (It might be note that in addition to its tearooms,

parts of Forest Park were also popular gathering place of non-sexual socializing by queer

people.) Baker contended, "The fact that homosexuals have established an enclave in Forest Park

automatically renders that area off-limits to the majority of the populace, thereby restricting their

legitimate freedom," which for him justified police efforts to suppress homosexual activity. [23]

While Baker was referring to Forest Park and not the adjacent Central West End, his logic could

easily be extended to any place where queer people where were known to gather and have

established an "enclave." For him, such a place was "automatically … off-limits" to

heterosexuals, presumably because he assumed that as a matter of course heterosexuals would

want to avoid encountering queer people or queer sex. As a spokesperson for the St. Louis area's

largest religious denomination, Baker likely discouraged many locals from visiting the Central

West End. This, of course, would complicate efforts at revitalizing the area. For her part,

Delphine McClellan—a long-time resident of the neighborhood and a leading activist in efforts

to "bring back" the neighborhood in the 1970s and early 1980s—stated in her memoir that as a

conservative Catholic, she did not endorse "the new liberality … sanctioning homosexual

behavior."[24]

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[22] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 21, 1972, January 30, 1976.
[23] *St. Louis Review*, March 5, 1976.
[24]McClellan, *We Stayed to Fight*, 31, 100.

Most urban renewal efforts in the Central West End in the 1970s and 1980s did not involve "slum clearance" projects of the sort that had reshaped St. Louis from the 1930s to 1960s. Those who identified themselves as champions of the neighborhood's revitalization typically preferred to restore old buildings, rather than demolish them. For example, the restoration and reopening of the Fox Theatre in 1982, following several years of it being shuttered and threatened with demolition, was hailed as one of the great triumphs of the era of the Central Wes End's renewal during this era.[25] However, it is noteworthy that there was a substantial demolition-for-redevelopment project in the Central West End during these years— and it focused on the 3500 block of Olive at Grand Avenue. There had been an almost continuous presence of gay and lesbian nightlife establishments on this block at least since the opening of Dante's Inferno in 1936, and by the late 1970s these bars and cafes had been part of the bedrock of the Central West End's queer social scene for generations. They even survived the massive slum clearance project in the Mill Creek Valley in 1959-1960; the border of the demolition zone had been located just one block to the south. As late as the mid-1970s, several gay bars were in business along the block. However, by 1980, they were all gone—most demolished to make way for a new state government office building, part of a plan coordinated by the City Center Redevelopment Corporation to revitalized what the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* described as a "long-neglected area."[26] Bill Cherry, a gay man writing for *No Bad News*, lamented the passing of this district: "From my office window I have recently watched the landmarks of dear remembrances fall beneath the wrecking ball and bulldozed into oblivion. The

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[25] *The Days and Nights of the Central West End*, 105-106.
[26] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 25, 1980. On the history of the Grand and Olive nightlife district, see Ian Darnell, "'All the Fellows in This Part of the City Are Gay': Exploring the History of LGBTQ Nightlife at St. Louis's Grand and Olive," Mapping LGBTQ St. Louis, August 1-3, 2016. library.wustl.edu/stl-grand-olive-1/

Olive Street row has been gradually disappearing. The Onyx has long since been torn down. But during the last few months the shells of the Golden Gate Coffee House and Gus' Midway have been de-bricked and shoveled into their basements. Progress!"[27]

D.   Queers as Agents of Renewal

As we have seen, there were a number of factors that worked against queer people being included in the "revitalized" Central West End of the 1970s and 1980s. To a great extent, this was only a latter-day incarnation of the long-running pattern of queerness being regarded as a form of deviant sexuality, inimical to the wellbeing and respectability of a neighborhood. What was new in this period of St. Louis's history, however, is that some queer people and their allies had begun to articulate a different interpretation of the relationship between queerness and urban space. Rather than being agents of a neighborhood's decline, this new vision proposed that queer people—or at least specific kinds of queer people—could be agents of its renewal.

In his 1977 piece "Being Gay in St. Louis," gay journalist and activist Marvin Kabakoff put forward an early example of this argument. A former Washington University graduate student, Kabakoff was one of the founding members of St. Louis's Gay Liberation Front in 1970 and was involved in local gay and lesbian activism through the 1970s. In these years, he was involved in St. Louis's first gay community center, which was located in a converted duplex in the Central West End. The article appeared *Prime Time*, a publication of St. Louis's gay community center, and was meant to serve a guide to gay and lesbian life in the city, apparently directed at queer newcomers and visitors and perhaps also locals who had recently come out and

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[27] *No Bad News*, September 1980.

were just acclimating themselves to the scene.[28] Thus it could be surmised that Kabakoff's

opinions on the matter were widely held by other gay activists in St. Louis, and that he wished to

promote these views among with the wider gay and lesbian community.

In this piece, Kabakoff reflected the widespread perception that at least some St. Louis

neighborhoods, such as the Central West End, were experiencing a revival. "After a long decline

in both price and condition," he observed, "these neighborhoods are on the way up again, as

people discover the joys of city living: low costs, beautiful architecture, community, walking."

He credited gays with being central to the improving fortunes of some St. Louis neighborhoods.

"Gay people have been at the forefront of this movement," he contended. "Gays have worked to

restore and beautify [the areas where they live]. Thereby gays heave helped raise property values

and fostered the re-emergence of the city as an exciting and meaningful place to live." In

addition to their role in "saving" the Central West End, Kabakoff also credited gays with being

instrumental in the revival of two other St. Louis neighborhoods—Soulard and especially

Lafayette Square. In fact, he contended that gay men formed a "majority" of the people who

bought and restored the old homes of Lafayette Square starting in the late 1960s. Kabakoff

acknowledged that efforts to "improve" these residential neighborhoods had cause housing

prices to "skyrocket" in the Central West End and Lafayette Square (although, he said, housing

still tended to be less expensive in these neighborhoods than the suburbs). He noted that in

Soulard, with its "combination of gays and straights, and middle class and poor whites," some

"neighborhood people … fear[ed] displacement" because of the specter of rising housing price.

Indeed, he seems to have concluded that there was a predictable pattern of gays taking up

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[28] "Being Gay in St. Louis," *Prime Time*, 1977. Marvin Kabakoff, interview with Jim Andris and author, March 2015. Transcript in the author's possession. On the history of St. Louis's first gay community center and associated activism, see Rodney C. Wilson, "'The Seed Time of Gay Rights': Rev. Carol Cureton, the Metropolitan Community Church, and Gay St. Louis, 1969-1980," *Gateway Heritage* (Fall 1994): 34-47.

residence in a neighborhood, a perceived improvement in conditions, and a rise in prices. For instance, he noted that the Shaw neighborhood, where housing prices were "still more than reasonable," was likely to following this process. "Gays are just now beginning to move into this area," he wrote, "and a rapid increase in property values should begin shortly."[29]

In his 1984 piece in *No Bad News*, Roger Blase offered an analysis similar to Kabakoff's, but one that more overtly serves as a response fears that gays were "Being Pushed Out of the West End" because of redevelopment efforts. Like Kabakoff, his narrative consists of gays entering declining urban neighborhoods, buying and restoring old homes, and playing a central role in "turning around" these areas of the city. "Gays were prominent among the small group who braved the perceived danger of a declining area and moved in," he wrote. "Gays recognized the beauty of the old homes and were more than willing to expend the necessary time and energy and make the financial commitment to rehabilitate the houses—and the neighborhood. … Gays were instrumental in making the West End the lively, exciting[,] cosmopolitan area that it is." Emphasizing gay people's presence as a potential economic asset, he suggested that efforts to revitalize the area might flounder if gays were to be excluded from the neighborhood. "If we are an 'undesirable' element," he contended, "we can certainly take ourselves, our business, and our *dollars* into other areas of the city."[30] Soon after the publication of Blase's piece, gay activists took an argument like his to the streets of the Central West End when they marched with their "WE SAVE NEIGHBORHOODS" banner during the 1984 pride march. As the march wound its way through the Central West End, any passers-by in the neighborhood would have gotten the message.[31]

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[29] Marvin Kabakoff, "Being Gay in St. Louis," *Prime Time*, 1977.
[30] *No Bad News*, January 1984. Emphasis in original.
[31] *No Bad News*, July 1984.

There is evidence that the idea of gays as agents of renewal was not just a rallying point of some local gay activists, but had also been adopted by some of their sympathetic heterosexual neighbors. Alderman Mary Stolar, who represented the Central West End, was willing to go on the record on this point in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. A 1977 feature on gay and lesbian life in St. Louis contrasted widespread discrimination against queer people in housing in the region with Stolar's welcoming attitude. "St. Louis Alderman Mary Stolar considers the gay people who live in her Twenty-Fifth Ward to be an asset," the article reported. "Mrs. Stolar says that gay persons have restored a lot of decayed housing in the ward."[32]

Similar attitudes were present among some of the contemporaneous "urban pioneers" of Lafayette Square. For example, in her memoir Barbara Slater matter-of-factly included gay men among the middle-class "Crazies," who, like her, had chosen to purchase and restore old homes in Lafayette Square. She contrasted these "Crazies" with the "Aborigines," a racially tinged expression to refer to the "prostitutes, drunks, and derelicts" who lived in the neighborhood's rooming houses. Slater even half-jokingly suggested that a male-male pair of "physically strong homosexuals" might have an advantage over heterosexual couples when it came to rigorous home improvement tasks. "Homosexuals often make more progress than heterosexuals because there are two males to life heavy things," she wrote. "Many times I'd seen Ron [her husband] looking at them with a twinkle in his eye. I knew what he was thinking. All he had was me to help carry up sheets of plywood. If he had Daryl, the plywood wouldn't be a problem."[33] Meanwhile, beginning in the 1970s, the annual Lafayette Square house tours also suggest how queer people to a degree had managed to integrate themselves into the ranks of the "urban pioneers." Paralleling similar annual events in the Central West End, these tours were designed

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[32] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 19, 1977.

[33] Barbara Slater, *The Ceiling Is in the Cereal* (St. Louis: Sunrise Publishing Company, 1981), 14-15, 134, 246.

to showcase how the neighborhood had improved and to promote it (to skeptical white, middle-class suburbanites) as a desirable place to live. At least as early as 1973, some homes owned and restored by same-sex couples were featured and even identified as being occupied by two men in booklets provided to the tour-goers.[34]

E.   Conclusion

The narrative of gays as being on the forefront of efforts to improve St. Louis neighborhoods like the Central West End and Lafayette Square could be a potent retort to the persistent association of queerness and neighborhood decline. However, it also depended on a misleading understanding of the history of the queer presence in these neighborhoods and an exclusionary vision of who constituted the "gay community." The historical sequence put forward by Kabakoff and Blase begins with a post-World War II decline of St. Louis's inner city, which they imply was unconnected to queer people. It was at the "zenith of the nationwide urban exodus in the late 1960's," as Blase puts it, that gays began to return to the city.[35] This narrative, of course, erases the fact than an outsize presence of queer people and the presence of queer social spaces had actually been conterminous with "decline" of the Central West End from the start, going back at least as far as the 1930s. Queer people did not appear on the scene when the neighborhood had reached its supposed nadir—they had always been there, and in fact their presence had been intimately related to processes associated with neighborhood's decline all along.

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[34] "Lafayette Square House Tour Welcomes You," 1973 and "Lafayette Square House Tour," 1978, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.
[35] *No Bad News*, January 1984.

Furthermore, the narrative of gays-as-neighborhood-assets also focused almost entirely on gay homeowners. This overlooked the many—in fact, probably substantial majority—of queer people in the Central West End who were rented their housing, either in apartment buildings or rooming houses. Some of these renters were actually relatively affluent and, perhaps, could have purchased homes instead of renting if they had preferred. Many others, however, might not have the financial means to buy their own homes. Thus, there was an implicit class exclusion built into the standard narrative of gays as agents of urban renewal. Moreover, that narrative was also of a piece with the persistent and widespread notion among many St. Louis civic elites, going back at least to Harland Bartholomew, that single-family, owner-occupied homes were intrinsically more desirable than other housing arrangements and apartment dwellers and renters generally were less than preferable residents of a neighborhood.

Finally, and crucially, there was also significant racial dimension the narrative of gays as neighborhood revitalizers. Neither Kabakoff nor Blase discuss race in the context of their narratives of gays' role in neighborhood change and urban renewal. This is remarkable given the prevailing whiteness of the suburbs during these years and the dramatic increase in the absolute and relative number of African Americans in the Central West End and the city generally. Blase's assertions that "gays were prominent among the small group brave the perceived danger of a declining area and … were a part of the neighborhood when almost no one else wanted to be" is hard to square with simultaneous influx of African Americans into the neighborhood. In any case, the racial segregation of much of St. Louis's gay scene—and the whiteness of its more prominent activists and spokespeople and of the most visible gay "urban pioneers"—meant that the argument that gays could be agents of urban renewal was tied up with the assumption that these gays were *white*.

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Theses and Dissertations

Heathcott, Joseph. "The City Remade: Public Housing and the Urban Landscape in St. Louis, 1900-1960." PhD dissertation, University of Indiana, 2003.

Holmes, Kwame. "Chocolate to Rainbow City: The Dialectics of Black and Gay Community Formation in Postwar Washington, D.C., 1946-1978." PhD dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011.

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McConachie, Alexander Scot. "The 'Big Cinch': A Business Elite in the Life of a City, St. Louis, 1895-1915." PhD diss., Washington University in St. Louis, 1976.

Retzloff, Timothy Ford. "City, Suburb, and the Changing Bounds of Lesbian and Gay Life and Politics in Metropolitan Detroit, 1945-1985." PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2014.

Rosen, Rick. "Saint Louis, Missouri, 1850-1865: The Rise of Lucas Place and the Transformation of the City: From Public Spaces to Private Places. Master's thesis, University of California-Los Angeles, 1988.

Sawyer, Ethel. "A Study of a Public Lesbian Community." Honors essay, Washington University in St. Louis, 1965.

VITA

<u>IAN DARNELL</u>

<u>EDUCATION</u>

PhD, Department of History, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2019
Dissertation: "Queering Decline: Sexuality, Race, and the Transformation of Twentieth-Century St. Louis"
Adviser: Jennifer Brier

MA, Department of History, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2013

Honors BA, *summa cum laude*, Saint Louis University, 2009

<u>PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE</u>

Museum Assistant, The Griot Museum of Black History, January 2018 to present.

Volunteer, St. Louis LGBT History Project, 2009 to present.

Senior Research Associate, Mapping LGBTQ St. Louis (digital history project), Divided City Initiative, Center for the Humanities, Washington University in St. Louis, April 2016 to October 2017.

Editorial Coordinator, *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, Labor and Working-Class History Association, 2012-2014.

Teaching Assistant, UIC, 2011-2012 and 2016-2017.

<u>PUBLICATIONS</u>

Friedman, Andrea and Ian Darnell, "Queer History in the Divided City: A New Approach to Digital Mapping," *Notches: (Re)Marks on the History of Sexuality* (blog), April 24, 2018. notchesblog.com/2018/04/24

Lead Author, "The Impact of Segregation: Race in LGBTQ St. Louis, 1945-1992" *Mapping LGBTQ St. Louis* (website), October 11, 2017. library.wustl.edu/map-lgbtq-stl

"A Snapshot of St. Louis in the Era of Gay Lib," *Mapping LGBTQ St. Louis* (blog), November 2, 2016. library.wustl.edu/st-louis-ciao-magazine/

"'All the Fellows in This Part of the City Are Gay': Exploring the History of LGBTQ Nightlife at St. Louis's Grand and Olive" (a three-part series), *Mapping LGBTQ St. Louis* (blog), August 1-3, 2016. library.wustl.edu/stl-grand-olive-1/

"Project Uncovers Records of 1950s Raids on St. Louis Gay Bars," *St. Louis LGBT History Project* (blog), September 10, 2015. stlouislgbthistory.com

Review of Phil Tiemeyer, *Plane Queer: Labor, Sexuality, and AIDS in the History of Male Flight Attendants* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), in *Committee on LGBT History Newsletter*, Spring 2015.

"A Historic Halloween: Remembering the Origins of the LGBT Movement in St. Louis," *St. Louis LGBT History Project* (blog), October 31, 2014. stlouislgbthistory.com

"Sexual Histories, Scholarly Communities: A Dispatch from the John D'Emilio Symposium," *Notches: (Re)Marks on the History of Sexuality* (blog), October 16, 2014. notchesblog.com/2014/10/16

HONORS & AWARDS

Graduate Scholarship, Chancellor's Committee on the Status of LGBTQ People and Allies, UIC, 2016

Marion S. Miller Dissertation Fellowship, Department of History, UIC, 2015-2016

University Fellowship, UIC, 2010-2011 and 2014-2015

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

"Decadent Districts: Sexuality, Race, the Origins of 'Blight' in St. Louis, 1915-1945," Urban History Association Conference, Chicago, October 2016.

"St. Louis's Queer History in the Context of Urban Growth and Decline," Missouri Conference on History, Columbia, March 2016.

"Queerly Faithful: Evaluating the Role of Religion in a Local Struggle for Lesbian and Gay Equality," Annual Meeting of the Organization of American Historians, St. Louis, April 2015.

"Expanding the Bounds of Community: The Life of William Chapman, Episcopal Priest, Civil Rights Activist, and Gay Rights Pioneer," Whose Beloved Community? Black and LGBT Rights Conference, Atlanta, March 2014.

"'A Special Mission to Serve the Entire Community': An Ecumenical Protestant Congregation in St. Louis's Gay Ghetto," Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, New Orleans, January 2013.

"Remaking an Urban Community in the Age of White Flight: Sexuality, Race, and Respectability in St. Louis's Central West End," Missouri Valley History Conference, Omaha, March 2012.

"The Labor of Deception: Toward a Queer Labor History of Postwar America," Windy City Graduate History Conference, Chicago, November 2011.

GUEST LECTURES & COMMUNITY EVENTS

Panelist, "Finding Lost Histories in the Modern LGBTQIA+ Alphabet," Missouri History Museum, St. Louis, October 2018.

"Risky Refuges: Gay and Lesbian Bars in St. Louis, 1930s-1960s," Missouri History Museum, St. Louis, April 2018.

"The Queer History of St. Louis's Central West End: A Walking Tour," St. Louis LGBT History Project, St. Louis, May 2010, October 2015, June 2016, and October 2017.

"The Sexual Politics of Slum Clearance: Race, Deviance, and the Specter of Decline in St. Louis," Gender and Women's Studies Graduate Student Brown Bag Lecture, UIC, February 2016.

"The Queer History of St. Louis's Central West End: A Walking Tour," Annual Meeting of the Organization of American Historians, St. Louis, April 2015.

Response to Fransely Robles, "Affirming Faith-Based Spaces for LGBTQ Youth," Lavender Research Forum, UIC, April 2014.

"'To Be the Body of Christ in the Diversified Metropolitan Community': Sexuality, Race, and Liberal Protestantism in the Era of the Urban Crisis," Department of History Brown Bag Lecture, UIC, May 2013.

"Queer St. Louis, 1893-1993," LGBT History Month Lecture, St. Louis LGBT History Project, October 2011.

"A Queer Oral History Workshop," LGBT Community Center of Metropolitan St. Louis, August 2011.

PROFESSIONAL & COMMUNITY SERVICE

Member, LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee, Missouri Historical Society, February 2019 to present.

Consultant and Guide, "LGBTQ History Tour" bicycle ride, Trailnet, September 2015

Organizing Committee Member, Midwest Labor and Working-Class History Colloquium, 2013-2014

Coordinator, Gender and Women's Studies Graduate Student Brown Bag Series, UIC, 2012-2013

Organizing Committee Member, Windy City Graduate History Conference, UIC, 2011-2012