

Blacks in Niagara Falls, New York: 1865 to 1965, a survey.

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Niagara Falls, New York is a city 22 miles northwest of Buffalo and 84 miles southeast of Toronto. It is well known that Niagara Falls is famous for its cataracts, and that people historically have traveled there from all over the world and throughout the United States to witness the majestic beauty of the waterfalls. Niagara Falls, after all, is considered one of the seven natural wonders of the world and attracts thousands of tourists daily. However, not much is known about the black community that has historically resided in Niagara Falls.

The black community is a part of the city's history and culture. Blacks settled there, like other Niagara Fallsians, not because of the scenic beauty of the Falls but to earn a livelihood, as the city has historically maintained a thriving tourist industry, electrical plants, and factories that needed a copious labor force. Blacks have gained employment in these and other industries and have been an integral part of the city's labor force since the period of slavery in the United States.

During the Slavery Era, many blacks traveled through Niagara Falls en route to Canada. Niagara Falls was one of the final stations of the celebrated Underground Railroad. Before the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, it was not uncommon for escaped slaves to settle in northern communities, such as Niagara Falls, and become citizens of those communities. However, once the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 became law, there was a mass exodus of escaped slaves to Canada. It is estimated that 30,000 to 40,000 slaves escaped to Canada during the nineteenth century, many of them passing through Niagara Falls on their way to freedom. This aspect of Niagara Falls' black history is well known and well documented; however, the period after 1865 is not.

The aim of this paper is to survey and introduce the history of blacks in Niagara Falls, New York from 1865 to 1965, focusing on such themes as employment, population expansion, community development, leadership and racial conflict. Black Niagara Fallsians, like other black American residents in their respective communities, strove to be part of the mainstream of the city of Niagara Falls as well as to maintain their own cultural identity. Job and educational opportunities, access to political power and available housing are a few of the major issues that were of concern to them. Surveying and introducing this important history will hopefully encourage others to conduct further research.

The historical experience of blacks in Niagara Falls is similar to that of other black northern

urban communities. (1) They existed on the fringes of society, never being an influential group within the broader community, and never having a major role in the political, economic or social affairs of the overall community. Their presence was largely tolerated or ignored until their numbers increased significantly, making them more noticeable and more threatening, especially as they attempted to gain more living space. Although racial tensions heightened in Niagara Falls, they never rose to the level that prevailed in larger cities, where they culminated in full-scale race riots.

THE FIRST 35 YEARS AFTER SLAVERY

In 1850, the year the severe fugitive slave law was enacted and well before racial tensions became detectable, 41 blacks were residing in Niagara Falls. (2) In 1860 two hundred and forty-two blacks were living in Niagara Falls. (3) Due to the proximity of Canada to Niagara Falls, many of those individuals were probably escaped slaves who resided in the United States and at times in Canada, depending on where they could find steady employment. By 1865, the year that slaves were emancipated, 126 blacks were living in Niagara Falls. (4) Many of those who were in Niagara Falls in 1860 probably returned to regions in the South to be with family members and other loved ones.

After slavery Niagara Falls was a relatively safe place for blacks to reside. No longer did blacks have to fear one of their race might be returned to slavery or that a free person might be seized and sold into bondage. (5) No longer did they have to keep abreast of the local debates between proslavery and antislavery factions and fear their consequences. Moreover, they did not have to be conscious of or concerned about the views and behaviors of the numerous southerners who frequented Niagara Falls to enjoy its natural scenic beauties. Those former slaves that had escaped to Canada were free to remain in Canada or return to the United States. A new day had dawned.

During this early period of freedom and beyond, the percentage of blacks residing in the Niagara Falls area was small. In 1865 they comprised 2.0 percent of the population. In 1890 they were about 1.5 percent of the population, and in 1920 they were 1.0 percent of the population. Black Niagara Fallsians usually amounted to about 2.0 percent of the population or less, never exceeding this level except during the 1870s, 1880s and World War II and thereafter. Table I below displays this pattern. (6)

Black Niagara Fallsians, besides being a small part of the Niagara Falls population, were mainly concentrated in low-skilled jobs. This is evident from the beginning. They were laborers, servants, laundresses, hack men, drivers, porters and hotel workers. This situation prevailed not only during Reconstruction but also throughout the entire timeframe of this study. Of the 126 blacks that resided in Niagara Falls in 1865, for example, census takers recorded that only 22 of them were employed. Most of them were low-skilled workers, eight being listed as servants, nine as laborers, and one as a drayman. (7) There were four skilled tradespersons: a tailor, a mason and two barbers. The census takers for 1870, 1880 and 1892 and thereafter recorded an expanding number of black workers, reflecting an increasing stability among the black Niagara Fallsian population. These censuses continued to show that blacks were predominantly low-skilled workers.

A popular type of employment that was open to black Niagara Fallsians was hotel work, which was plentiful because Niagara Falls was a major tourist attraction. Their presence in this field harkens back to the days of slavery, when they were cheap laborers who performed the daily menial hotel functions as waiters, cooks, bellboys, servants and janitors. The hotels would hire them for the summer and fire them during the winter. (8) Many of the black hotel workers often "lived in the basements of the hotels and worked all day long and into the night." (9) They continued to labor in hotels beyond the slavery period. The Town and Village 1865 Census for Niagara Falls, for example, listed four blacks working in a hotel, which is, most likely, an undercount. The 1870 Census listed 40, the 1880 Census 57, and this pattern continued throughout the Niagara Falls Town and Village censuses that recorded occupation and are now open to the public.

Two of the oldest and most prominent hotels in Niagara Falls were the Cataract House and the International Hotel. The Cataract House was built in 1825 and the International Hotel in 1853. (10) These hotels housed and entertained such notable guests as Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, Millard Fillmore, William "Boss" Tweed, and Li Hung Chang, a Chinese diplomat. President William McKinley had lunch at the International House an hour or so before he was assassinated in Buffalo. These hotels also employed an extensive black workforce. (11) It has even been written about the Cataract House (and probably held true for the International Hotel as well) "that rich southerners who patronized this hotel before and after the Civil War were made to feel at home by the colored help." (12) The black employees at the Cataract House, when suddenly needed during their breaks, were often summoned by a great bell that hung above the hotel. During their breaks, the black workers would often congregate near and around the hotel, which was surrounded by a scenic wooded area. (13)

Patrick Snead, an escaped slave who had fled from Savannah, Georgia in 1851, worked at the Cataract House during the summers. He had done this for two years. In 1853 he had been identified as a fugitive slave and was arrested at the Cataract House by five constables from Buffalo. After his arrest, he was rescued by a group of black waiters, also from the Cataract House, who assisted him in getting on a ferry to cross over to Canada, with the constables in hot pursuit. (14) The constables called for the ferry drivers to bring their boat ashore, which they did, and Snead was again apprehended, taken to Buffalo, jailed for nine days and finally brought before a judge. Fortunately for Snead, he obtained good representation resulting in his release, and upon being freed, he immediately fled to Canada. (15) Although Snead treasured his freedom, he regretted that he had lost his opportunity to earn the much-needed wages that he could have earned at the Cataract House. (16)

Unlike the concrete work history of black Niagara Fallsians documented by census records, information on the activities of the small black community is sketchy for the first 35 years following the Civil War. This is due to several reasons. First of all, since the black community was so small and on the fringes of society, few records remain and still less information was written. As Table I above indicates, in 1870 one hundred and forty-nine blacks were recorded as living in Niagara Falls. In 1880 one hundred and fifty were recorded, and lastly in 1890 one hundred and fifty-nine. As mentioned before, these population figures for each decade represented a small percentage of the entire Niagara Falls population. Secondly, the census for

these early years revealed a large number of individuals labeled as mulattoes, (17) which could mean that they saw themselves as part of the larger community since one of their parents was white. Thirdly, available evidence seems to indicate that no distinctive black church existed during this time or at least there was no physical church edifice that brought black community member together to worship.

Regardless of these matters, signs of community are evident. In 1872 the Colored Republicans scheduled a meeting for September 26 at Grant's Hall. (18) William H. Johnson of Albany, who was chairman of the Colored Republican State Committee and William F. Butler of New York City were slated to speak. Moreover, the Colored Glee Club was on the program, and it was expected that they would sing some of their favorite campaign songs. Twenty years later, the Colored Republicans held a meeting at Allen's Hall. (19) They were then called the "Wide Awake Colored Republican Club." The Colored Glee Club was also on the program. The keynote speaker for the meeting was a physician from Buffalo, Dr. H. H. Lewis, who spoke for about an hour and a half and kept his large audience's attention, with seriousness, anecdotes, and humor. (20) "At the conclusion of Mr. Lewis's remarks the Glee Club rendered another selection and all united in three hearty cheers for Harrison and Reid." (21)

Five years later the "Colored '400' Dance" was held at Crick's Hall. (22) Invitations had been sent out some weeks in advance. Guests came from Canada, Buffalo, Lockport, and other cities, and as far away as Cleveland, Ohio. An orchestra played for at least 36 dances, from 9:00 p.m. to 12 a.m. Mrs. Anderson Fayette of Niagara Falls, whose husband was the proprietor of a local hotel, was nominated "belle of the ball." (23) The Dance was dubbed a great success and one of the best-managed affairs ever held in Niagara Falls. Credit was given to the committee that was in charge.

During the decade that the Dance occurred, more blacks were migrating to Niagara Falls. By 1900, 344 blacks were recorded as living in the Niagara Falls area. Compared to the 1890 population figure, this was not only an increase of 185 individuals but also a percentage increase of 116 percent. For the period of this study, this population growth represents the first major influx of blacks into Niagara Falls, and employment constructing the Tunnel is what brought them to the area. (24)

The Tunnel was a passage from the Edward Dean Power Plant under the City of Niagara Falls to land below the cataract. The purpose of this tunnel was to divert water from the Niagara River through the tunnel to a point beyond the Falls to generate electricity at the Edward Dean Power Plant. The construction of the Tunnel began in 1890 and was finished before 1900. Many workers from various ethnic backgrounds worked on the Tunnel, 200 in the first phase of its construction and 800 in the final phase, with Italians playing a key role in laying the bricks. (25) Blacks also played a significant role in constructing the Tunnel, completing significant portions of its work. One black who worked on the Tunnel Project in Niagara Falls and then worked on a smaller similar project in Niagara Falls, Ontario, compared the treatment of black workers in both places:

when we comes along de street [in Niagara Falls, New York] dey runs in de houses and closes de doahs. So fa' as I can see dey's afraid of us, count some of our fellows got such rep' tation for letting blood on dis side. I has to laff' self sometimes, but

doan't think we looks over good in our dirty oil skins. (26)

On the Canadian side, they were treated with dignity and not stereotyped. (27) They were greeted with a friendly hello. Nonetheless, by 1910, a short time after the Tunnel was complete, the 1910 Census indicates that 266 blacks were living in the Niagara Falls area, which, when compared to the 1900 figure, was a decrease of 78 individuals. This adds credence to the idea that several blacks had migrated to the area specifically to work on the Tunnel Project.

1900 TO THE END OF THE DEPRESSION

By the time the Tunnel had been completed, a black community was strongly evident in Niagara Falls. A black Baptist group was conducting religious services in Crick's Hall and making plans to build their own house of worship. (28) The leaders of this group were the Reverend B. B. Johnson and his wife, who was also an ordained minister. They had a home on Erie Avenue, which was a street in an area where clusters of blacks were settling, and came to be for a long time the main thoroughfare of the black community.

Johnson and his wife first appeared in the Niagara Falls Gazette, the main local newspaper, April 9, 1900. An announcement was made stating that the "Negro Baptists" of the city were going to have service at Crick's Hall followed by the baptizing of 50 persons in "Loop Drive Lake" on the Niagara Reservation. The final part of the announcement stated that the cornerstone for the first black church in Niagara Falls would be laid. (29) The church was to be called the Second Baptist Church of Niagara Falls and was to be located on Twelfth Street. When the actual events occurred, eight people were baptized and about 4,000 people from throughout Niagara County and other areas witnessed the baptisms. (30) The Niagara Falls Gazette labeled this activity a "reform movement for the Negroes of Niagara Falls." (31)

The Reverend Johnson and his wife were clearly leaders in the black community. The next month after the baptismal services, plans were launched to bring Booker T. Washington, D. Augustus Straker and John J. Jones to Niagara Falls to address residents of the city for the Fourth of July. (32) These were major black leaders, Booker T. Washington not only being the most prominent of the three leaders but the foremost leader of his race, a man of great influence. Besides having these speakers inform Niagara Fallsians about the status of African Americans and how national events would affect and were affecting them, Johnson hoped to generate income to pay off the debts of his new church. He had obtained confirmation that each speaker would be present, and he estimated that about 20,000 people from New York State and other locales would attend the Jubilee Celebration.

A little over a month later, before the Jubilee Celebration and eight days before the Fourth of July, the Niagara Falls Gazette carried a report that Johnson would give up his pulpit until the debts of the Second Baptist Church were paid. His wife would assume the pulpit until he had raised the funds to pay off the church's debts and some he had contracted on his personal account. (33) In his own words, Johnson told a Gazette representative, "It is discouraging to stand up in your pulpit and counsel your congregation to lead an honest life and pay their honest debts, and then have a bill presented to you the minute you step down from the pulpit." (34) Johnson, who had labored hard for the improvement of his race in Niagara Falls, wanted to use

the bulk of his energy working toward eliminating the debts of his church. It was hoped and expected that the coming Fourth of July Jubilee Celebration would contribute significantly toward this effort.

The Celebration was not the great success it was expected to be, largely due to the fact that the prominent speakers were unable to attend. Moreover, it rained. Nevertheless, the celebration was a small success. The event was well attended and began with a parade led by Robert Dett of the Keystone Hotel. Dett was the father of the famed Niagara Falls musician, R. Nathaniel Dett. (35) Following Dett was the "Tunnel District Blues Band," led by the Reverend Johnson with his sword and military uniform. At the grounds the Reverend Hatchet of London, Ontario spoke. Then the Declaration of Independence and the Emancipation Proclamation were read, followed by a very patriotic address by Johnson. (36) After the official procedures were over, the visitors enjoyed the games and each other.

A small sum was obtained for the Second Baptist Church. Johnson furnished the Daily Cataract-Journal, another local Niagara Falls newspaper, an accounting of income that was raised by his church for the 1900-1901 fiscal year. (37) In July, the month of the Jubilee Celebration, \$243 was raised. As could be expected, this was by far the most money obtained in any single month. Still, according to Johnson, it was not enough to cover the church's debts. After 1901, Johnson does not appear in any of the Niagara Falls newspapers. Rumor has it that he left town and kept funds raised by his congregation that were slated for the debts of the church. (38)

Besides the Second Baptist Church, other Niagara Falls churches are listed below with the year they were founded, up until 1957, according to the research of the Reverend Franklin Banks (39):

- (1) 1906 St. John's Baptist Church
- (2) 1917 Shiloh Baptist Church
- (3) 1920 Union Baptist Church
- (4) 1925 The Morning Star Church of God and Christ
- (5) 1926 Emmanuel Baptist Church
- (6) 1926 Trinity Baptist Church
- (7) 1929 Second Baptist Church
- (8) 1937 New Hope Baptist Church
- (9) 1946 Mt. Erie Baptist Church
- (10) 1952 Lily of the Valley Baptist Church
- (11) 1953 The Glorious Church of God in Christ
- (12) 1956 The New Jerusalem Revival Center
- (13) 1956 First African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
- (14) 1957 Mt. Sinai Baptist Church

Some of these churches were formed by members of one established church who left it to establish a new one. (40) Union Baptist Church and Mt. Sinai Baptist Church are examples.

After the first 35 years following the Civil War, monumental racial problems did not exist in Niagara Falls, unlike the southern section of the country, which was still experiencing the aftermath of Reconstruction and the wrath of the Jim Crow era. The reason for this was that the black population during the first 35 years (and for a period into the future) was a very small percentage of the overall population, on the fringes of society. In the South, however, where the

majority of them lived, they competed with whites for a livelihood, and in some places made up about one-third or more of the population.

Although there were no monumental racial problems in Niagara Falls by 1900, evidence indicates that black Niagara Fallsians felt a sense of unfairness when they saw how they were treated in society. A 1901 Niagara Falls Gazette article was titled "Negroes Object." This article reported that blacks in Niagara Falls and Buffalo were incensed with the treatment that was accorded President McKinley's assassin, Leon Czolgosz. "Had a Negro shot the President," said a soldier who had fought at San Juan Hill with Theodore Roosevelt, "no power on earth could have protected him from the violence of the mob, and yet here is a man caught red handed in the act and he is protected and will be given a trial and perhaps escape with a sentence of a few years. And why? Simply because he has a white face." (41) These statements reflect how many black Niagara Fallsians were sensitive to the fact that they were on the fringes of society and not considered part of the mainstream, and that a different standard of justice probably would be applied to them in certain situations, even in Niagara Falls. Furthermore, it was said that the fact that a Negro, James B. Parker, had knocked down the President's assassin ought to have done wonders in lifting the prejudice against the black race. (42)

Table I shows that by 1920, nineteen years after the assassination of President McKinley, 509 blacks were residing in Niagara Falls. Compared to the 1910 figure, this was an increase of 243 individuals. What brought more people to Niagara Falls and the rest of Western New York were the jobs created by the defense industry and the decline of immigrants entering the United States because of World War I. In the neighboring city of Buffalo, comparing the population growth of blacks for the same periods, there was an increase of 2,738 individuals. (43) Social scientists have considered these events as results of the First Great Migration, the substantial movement of black migrants from the South to northern urban areas due to World War I. (44) It is estimated that about 500,000 blacks left the South from 1914 to 1918 to work in northern industries. For the first time, the 1920 Census listed some black Niagara Fallsians as factory workers, although most were identified as laborers. (45)

Besides the increase in population, the formation of a community center was one of the greatest single events that benefited black Niagara Fallsians during the Age of Freedom. It is rumored that black Niagara Fallsians who patronized the local YMCA were told to get their own recreational facility. Regardless of who may have made this statement, white patrons or YMCA representatives, black Niagara Fallsians still maintained an ongoing relationship with the local YMCA, which lasted throughout the period of this paper. Nonetheless, during the late 1920s, Eugene Ellis, Benjamin Bolden and Reverend D. B. Barton, who were prominent leaders of the black community, approached the Community Chest, a division of the local Niagara Falls government, about sponsoring some social and recreational facility for the black community. (46)

It was agreed by both groups that a study should be undertaken to determine the precise needs of the black community. John M. Pollard Sr. of the Playground and Recreation Association of America was brought to Niagara Falls from New York City to conduct the study. Pollard, who did some graduate work at the School of Social Work at the University of Chicago (which was heavily influenced by the famous pioneering sociologist, Robert Park) took several months to

complete his study. He administered five hundred questionnaires, made two hundred personal visits, and held six public meetings. Ben Bolden, who was an up-and-coming community leader, assisted him. (47) His findings, which were presented to the Community Chest, conveyed that a community center was needed and would contribute toward the progress of Niagara Falls in general. Furthermore, he envisioned the Center as a place for drama and stories, music and plays, dances, baseball and basketball games, swimming, china painting and hand work of all kinds, forums and debating clubs and study clubs, an employment bureau to seek economic opportunities, and so forth. (48)

There were mixed reactions in the black community to the idea of a separate community center for blacks. (49) One small group felt that separation was counterproductive and that blacks and whites, side by side, had to work out the destiny of America. "They [felt] that to permit separation [was] to admit inferiority and because of bitter experience they [asked] for better economic conditions only, and they [were] content to wait for other social adjustments." (50) Another group, small but larger than the first, felt that, with the right kind of leadership, blacks would integrate into established institutions even if it meant expanding those existing institutions to accommodate them. The overwhelming majority of people, however, felt that a separate community center was needed to address the social and recreational needs of the black community. They also felt that it had to be led by well-trained members of their community of the highest type available.

Pollard's study, which was titled "Why Have a Study," also suggested an initial operating budget for the Center. For its first year, the Center's operating budget was projected to be \$5,107. This amount seemed reasonable to the members of the Community Chest because they accepted it without making any adjustments. The budget that Pollard created and submitted to the Community Chest is listed below (51):

Suggested Budget

Salaries	\$2,000.00
Wages	300.00
Other Compensation	300.00
Total Personal Service	\$2,600.00
Total Services other than personal	120.00
New Equipment	\$1,000.00
Total Equipment	1,000.00
Rent	900.00
	\$4,620.00
Total Materials & Supplies	487.00
Grand Total	\$5,107.00

Most of the funds requested from the Community Chest were projected to cover salaries and equipment. About a fourth of the funds were requested for rent and services other than personal. For reasons unknown, Pollard recommended that a woman begin the work of heading the Center and that men volunteer their help until a budget could be secured to support two people.

Several meetings were held to support the creation of the Center, and to further convince the Community Chest of the worthiness of the project. These meetings were usually well attended, reflecting the majority's view that the center should be separate. (52) Usually, acknowledged

community leaders would lead these meetings, individuals such as the Reverend D. B. Barton, Ben Bolden, Charlotte Dett, a tourist-house owner and the mother of Nathaniel Dett, Bessie Palmer, another respected community leader, and several others.

On October 17, 1928, they met at the Chamber of Commerce to select a name for the new center. "Among the names suggested were: Douglass League (as a tribute to Frederick Douglass, the well-known abolitionist), Dunbar League (in honor of Paul Lawrence Dunbar, famed Negro poet), Pollard Centre (for John Pollard, who made the survey recommending that a social center for the Falls Negroes be established), and Nathaniel Dett Centre, in honor of a native son, a composer and conductor of note, and well known here." (53) Besides these suggestions, the leadership welcomed further suggestions from any source. At the conclusion of this meeting no name had yet been confirmed.

By March 29, 1929, a little over a year after Pollard's study was completed, the Center was not only officially organized but had a name as well: the Niagara Community Center. The objective of the new organization was to promote social, recreational, and cultural activities for the black residents of Niagara Falls, with special emphasis on programs for young people. (54) (As Pollard had envisioned, the Center would eventually grow beyond its role as just a social-cultural organization.) Its first home was at 511 Erie Avenue. However, by October 1931, over a year and a half later, its new location was at 637 Erie Avenue. It was moved to provide larger quarters for its members. It would remain at this location until 1952.

Today many senior citizens still have fond memories of the Center at the 637 Erie Avenue location. Moreover, in accordance with Pollard's counsel that a woman be chosen as the first director of the Center, a Ms. Palmer was elected. She served from March 29 to May 1929. Romania L. Grisby replaced her, serving from May 1929 to September 1931. The third director was John M. Pollard Sr. who had moved to Niagara Falls. His directorship began in October of 1931, a little over three years after his study. Under his presidency the Niagara Community Center was stabilized, continuously expanded and became the heart of the entire black community.

Black Niagara Fallsians, like Americans in general, experienced the effects of the Great Depression during those years. As Table I above shows, 906 blacks were recorded as living in Niagara Falls by 1930 and 975 by 1940. The populations for these two census years, which represent critical years of the depression, were still small compared to the white population, representing less than 1.3 percent of the total. While reflecting on events during the Depression, Theodore Williamson, a funeral home director and longtime resident of Niagara Falls, explained the difficulty of those times:

African Americans in Niagara Falls were poor in the 1930s. Milk and bread were given out. Families picked up metals to sell to Jewish junk dealers during the 1930s in Niagara Falls. (55)

Furthermore, housing conditions for many black Niagara Fallsians were not good. A Works Project Administration housing study completed in 1939 made several negative findings concerning black Niagara Fallsians. (56) For example, it stressed that overcrowding was prevalent in many of their dwelling units. Almost five percent of black families (compared to

2.7% of whites) had more than one and a half persons per room, and the vast majority of blacks were renters and only about 13 percent were homeowners. Furthermore, over 60 percent of a sample of 210 black families were living in substandard dwelling units in need of major repairs or really unfit for use. (This pattern would continue on into the 1960s and beyond, especially as more blacks migrated into Niagara Falls, seeking living space.)

Nevertheless, despite the effects of the Depression, the Niagara Falls Community Center served as a strong pillar. It sponsored continuous recreational activities for youth, which helped them to avoid trouble. One of the first major successful projects that Pollard undertook as the new director was to invite William O. Pickens to Niagara Falls to speak to various groups. (57) Pickens was a scholar, educator and field secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). At an address before black and white students at the senior high school, he spoke extensively on the role of blacks in the making of America, instilling pride and awareness. (58) His addresses were well received according to the Niagara Falls Gazette. Charlotte Dett in 1934 sponsored a program at the Center in observance of Negro History Week. (59) Both Buffalonian and local talent were scheduled to appear on the program. Numerous groups used the Center as a meeting place. Activities such as these were ongoing and usually well attended, making Pollard and the Niagara Falls Community Center important and respected names in Niagara Falls.

THE POST-DEPRESSION ERA TO THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The emergence of World War II not only helped to end the Great Depression but also made the Niagara Falls Community Center even more essential, especially with the growth of the black community. World War II brought on the Second Great Migration, which represented another significant population shift that brought numerous blacks out of the South and into the North, increasing the populations of numerous urban areas. Blacks migrated to the North to work in the war industries. Compared to past decades, from 1940 to 1950 Niagara Falls experienced an even greater influx of blacks. According to the U.S. censuses, 2,610 more blacks had migrated to Niagara Falls by 1950, mostly arriving from Alabama. (60)

Besides satisfying the demand for labor, local opinion maintains that blacks were recruited to work in low-level plant jobs because it was believed that they could best cope with the intense heat generated by local plants, especially near furnaces during summer periods. (61) Recruiting agents were sent South to entice black labor to come to Niagara Falls to work in plants such as Carborundum, Union Carbide, Carbon Corporation, Hooker Chemical, Bell Aircraft, Vanadian Company, and others. Family members and friends would often follow a recruit to Niagara Falls once news of his progress was received. It is even alleged that monetary inducements and the granting of bonds were used to entice potential labor. (62) Bloneva Bond, a longtime resident of Niagara Falls, an outspoken community activist and one of the few black professionals that migrated to Niagara Falls during the war, said, "Local industries chartered buses to bring people from the South to Niagara Falls.... She added that jobs went begging throughout the Buffalo and the Niagara area," offering appealing wages. (63) Moreover, she remembered that when she and her husband (Harwood Bond) moved to Niagara Falls in 1942, Carborundum was paying 52 cents an hour, which was better than the \$100 a month she earned as a teacher in North Carolina. Her husband got a job working at Hooker Chemical Company (now Occidental Chemical

Corporation) and retired in 1980 after 37 years of loyal service. (64)

The expansion of the black population of Niagara Falls placed a heavier demand on the facilities of the Niagara Community Center. It entered its most active period, as the Center began to fulfill even more of Pollard's vision. The Center continued to be an actively used recreational facility and meeting place. However, it expanded its job agency role and social service programs. (65) Pollard, for example, was known to carry around job applications for potential applicants and be ready to issue them at a moment's notice. The Center also helped many job seekers obtain employment, by coordinating interviews with potential employers. It found lodging for many of the new migrants as well. During the war, it even expanded its hours to accommodate those members who worked at night, as attested below:

During the last month a "swing-shift" program has been started by the Girls Work Secretary. It provides a recreational program for defense workers who could not take advantage of the Center's programs at any other time. The swing-shifters enjoy reading in the Center's library, playing ping-pong, playing bridge, listening to the radio, dancing and general socializing. Coffee and doughnuts are served. The executive director is on duty at each of their meetings. They meet each Wednesday night between 11:30 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. It is proving to be very popular. (66)

For those men who were in the Armed Services the Center published a short-lived newsletter on local community affairs and sent it to them, as well as making it available to local citizens. The newspaper was called "Date Data." (67)

Racial problems existed in Niagara Falls prior to the Second Great Migration, but on a small scale, almost to the extent of not being readily detectable. However, a meticulous scanning of the Niagara Falls Gazette from 1860 to 1970 clearly indicates that black Niagara Fallsians were considered distinct and of a lower caste than the general white population. This appears to have just been an acknowledged fact, which is evident from the way blacks were characterized in the newspaper and the types of jobs that were open to them.

Unlike the case with foreign immigrants whose ethnicity was mentioned during their initial settlement but no longer after their assimilation, race was constantly used in distinguishing black Niagara Fallsians. Moreover, menial low-level jobs were the ones that were generally open to them. The U.S census records from 1865 to 1920 support this contention. Subsequently, the black population was perceived as different and largely tolerated because their numbers were small and because they existed on the fringes of society.

As a child in the 1930's, Teddy Williamson remembers talk of a race riot. Supposedly, a black man had offended a white woman and there was talk of retaliation. Williamson also remembers being told to stay in the house. (68) Because of the effects of the Second Great Migration on Niagara Falls, racial tensions heightened, but not to the extent of causing racial violence. Other means would be employed to ensure that black Niagara Fallsians remained on the margins of society.

Housing discrimination was one of the key methods employed to maintain the status quo. A

small number of blacks could be found throughout various sections of the city, especially the old residents who had been in Niagara Falls for years. William Rudolph, who was the first black bricklayer of Niagara Falls, lived on Livingston Avenue. The Hershey Family lived on North Avenue. A few families even lived close to the actual cataract of Niagara Falls. (69) These families, according to Williamson, were homeowners who lived in white neighborhoods during the 1920's, 1930's and beyond when black Niagara Fallsians viewed homeownership as impressive because so few owned homes. (70)

However, before World War II, the majority of black Niagara Fallsians, who were predominantly new migrants, were clustered around four areas of the southern end of the city: (1) the Erie Avenue area, (2) the Buffalo Avenue area, (3) the East Falls Street area, (4) and the Twenty-Fourth Street-Allen-MacKenna Avenue area. (71) Reverend James Banks, who was a Niagara University student and pastor of the Emmanuel Baptist Church of Niagara Falls, explains the area's parameters best:

The first area included that part of Erie Avenue between Eighth Street and Fifth Street. The Second area consisted of that part of Buffalo Avenue between Tenth and Thirteenth Streets. The third area is that part of East Falls Street between Tenth and Thirteenth Streets. The fourth area is bounded on the south by Buffalo Avenue, on the west by Twenty-Second Street, on the north by MacKenna Avenue and on the east by Twenty-Seventh Street. (72)

Of these four areas, Erie Avenue was the main business district and the entertainment center of the black community. (73) The Niagara Falls Community Center was located on Erie Avenue. At least one church was located there. Ann Gabriel and Almed Cheatham had tourist homes on the avenue. Jerry Plato owned and operated a boardinghouse there. Wesley Parker ran a restaurant and boarding house called the Parker House. The Sunset Club, which had New York City style entertainment for people over the age of 21, was there. Murphy's Grill, which had 20 rooms upstairs, was a popular restaurant. A man by the name of Torran operated a poolroom on the avenue, while Emmett Ashford and his wife managed a beauty shop and barbershop. Historic Erie Avenue would be demolished in a later period, however, by an urban renewal project that built the present day Niagara Falls Convention Center.

During and after World War II, many blacks left the above areas and moved to the northern end of the city, such that by 1947 about 61 percent of black Niagara Fallsians resided on the northern end of town. (74) This population shift was due to the building of Hyde Park Village and Center Court Housing, which were both housing projects. The former was built in 1943 and the latter in 1944. Hyde Park Village was originally built to be temporary quarters for black residents and therefore was not an attractively well-built unit. Center Court Housing was more appealing and decent as far as a project unit could be.

The areas mentioned earlier that were considered the black district and the housing projects were not sufficient to accommodate the steadily expanding black population. By 1960 Niagara Falls had experienced its greatest influx of migrants. The United States Census for 1960 listed 7,038 blacks as living in Niagara Falls, roughly about 6.9 percent of the city's population. In comparison to the 1950 census, this was an increase of 3,453 individuals. Most of these new arrivals sought housing in Hyde Park Village or Center Court Housing.

By the mid-1950s, the demolition of Hyde Park Village began. Moreover, realtors would not sell or rent to blacks outside areas that were designated for them, thwarting the natural flow of a growing population throughout the city. Such unlawful practices caused overcrowding and unsanitary living conditions. The Hyde Park Village project became an overcrowded slum area, unfit for human habitation. According to the findings of the Works Project Administration study completed in 1939, blacks were living in overcrowded units because not much else was available to them, particularly in view of the intense competition for the available housing in the restricted areas.

In 1952 twenty-eight residents of Hyde Park Village were granted a 30-day stay by Judge Thomas B. Lee after they had been ordered to vacate their dwellings. (75) Hyde Park Village was being prepared for demolition. Most of the adults who had received eviction notices testified that they had tried in vain to find other accommodations throughout the city, but their efforts were to no avail. The judge was informed by the City Council that there was no housing shortage in the city, and he unhesitatingly informed the black citizens before him of this fact. (76) He was correct, but he apparently was unaware of the fact that realtors refused to sell or rent to blacks in certain sections where housing was plentiful. The majority of the adults that received eviction notices had come from Alabama, because many of them had been enticed by local industries to work for them in the area. These industries had made no efforts to ensure that housing would be made available to their recruited employees.

In addition to their testimonies before Judge Lee, perhaps what helped the 28 evicted tenants receive a stay is that they had support from a Judge J. D. Carr, who was mediator from the Civil Rights League, Inc. of Buffalo, and James A. Lafferty who was the Hyde Park Village project manager. Lafferty told Judge Carr, "The tenants [were] illegally in possession of the units but that it was his view that for these same people there [was] an acute housing shortage." (77)

Once these tenants finally evacuated Hyde Park Village, they generally crowded back into the older areas in the southern end of town or the Center Court Housing project, where a closer watch was kept on tenants to prevent them from allowing relatives and friends to double up in their apartments as many had done in Hyde Park Village, which helped to produce a slum-like-atmosphere. A few were allowed into Griffon Manor, which was an exclusively white federal housing project. There was still an urgent unfulfilled demand for housing among the ever-expanding black population, however.

The leadership of the Niagara Community Center constantly spoke out against the housing discrimination that confronted black Niagara Fallsians. Aaron L. Griffin, who had replaced Pollard as the director of the Niagara Community Center on July 1, 1943, did so, as did his associates. (78) They also supported studies that further underscored the housing problem. By the mid-1950s, their complaints and the studies' findings calling for the development of more housing for black Niagara Fallsians fell upon deaf ears in the City Council (79) and did not even begin to be seriously considered until a fire took the lives of many children housed in an overcrowded, old, dilapidated apartment building.

Aside from the housing discrimination issue, the fact that blacks were expected to exist in certain

spaces at the margins of society is confirmed by another incident. Florence Lovell Dyett, Ernest's mother, who resided in Jacksonville, Florida and was head of the Elementary Education Department at Bethune-Cookman College, in 1946, responded to an advertisement of the DeVeaux School of Niagara Falls. (80) The advertisement declared that the child of a deceased minister, who possessed an outstanding academic record, could qualify for a scholarship at the DeVeaux School. The scholarship was called the Samuel DeVeaux Scholarship and was worth a \$1,000 per year. It paid all charges for board, room, tuition and laundry.

Ernest's mother applied for the scholarship on her 12-year-old son's behalf. Reverend William S. Hudson, who was headmaster of the school, corresponded with Ms. Dyett. Reverend Hudson found Ernest's academic record very impressive, and school officials quickly voted to issue Ernest the esteemed scholarship. More correspondence took place between Ms. Dyett and Reverend Hudson, who earnestly congratulated Ernest on being chosen as a scholarship recipient, as plans were being made to get Ernest to school. Ms. Dyett informed Reverend Hudson that she would not be able to deliver Ernest to school herself but that a friend would do it for her. When Ernest and his chaperon arrived at the school, Reverend Hudson bluntly told them that Ernest could not enter the school because he was "colored." He then escorted them to the train station and paid their fare to Philadelphia.

When Ms. Dyett's friend informed her of what had transpired, she was angry and concerned about the psychological damage that might have been done to her son. In a follow-up letter, Reverend Hudson informed Ms. Dyett that, during their correspondence, he had not been told that Ernest was colored and that had he known he would have spared all parties from the embarrassment. Moreover, he surmised that Ms. Dyett might have assumed that racial prejudice was nonexistent in the North since she lived in the South. He further informed her that parents would withdraw their children if they knew a colored student was at the DeVeaux School. He then subtly reprimanded Ms. Dyett for not informing him that Ernest was colored. (81) In response, she contacted Walter White of the NAACP for advice concerning this matter. (82) White had Franklin H. Williams, one of his aides, contact Reverend Hudson and hint at a lawsuit if Ernest was not allowed entry to the school and his awarded scholarship. (83) Hudson took this matter up with the Board of Directors of his school who decided that, since Ernest had been awarded the scholarship, he should be admitted to the DeVeaux School. This information was conveyed to Ms. Dyett and the NAACP, and it appears that Ernest did attend the school. (84) Knowing that he was not initially welcomed, the psychological damage of attending the DeVeaux School, a private religious institution, may have been even more damaging than his first encounter with the "good" Reverend Hudson.

No records indicate whether the local black community or its leadership was aware of the Dyett case. This may have been a private matter between the national office and the DeVeaux School, although a local branch of the NAACP had been formed by 1942.

Even so, more blacks were steadily migrating to Niagara Falls as indicated in Table I. Their presence placed an even heavier burden on the Niagara Falls Community Center. (85) The house at 637 Erie Avenue was not large enough to accommodate the increasing number of individuals who wanted to patronize the Center. (86) After a request for further assistance from the

Community Chest, another study was conducted to convince the Community Chest of the Center's needs. This study was titled "Survey of the Niagara Community Center Association of Niagara Falls, New York." (87) Edward G. Lindsey conducted the study and completed it in 1948. He found that since the war the paid-up membership had grown from 50 to 1,357. (88) Twenty-nine groups were meeting at the Center, and members had participated 19,302 times in programs. His study supported and promoted the idea of building larger quarters.

To obtain funds to build the new quarters, in May of 1949 the Center launched a \$120,000 fundraising campaign, which was approved by the Community Chest. The leadership of the Niagara Falls Community Center wanted to move it to the northern end of town where about 60 percent of the black community resided, preferably next to the Center Court Housing project where many youths lived. Through the influence of board members, such as a Mr. Van Liew, the City Council and the Niagara Falls Housing authority donated five lots of land adjacent to Center Avenue and 15th Street, (89) which was next to the Center Court Housing project. In 1952, amidst joyous celebration, the Niagara Falls Community Center relocated to its new home and is there today.

Obtaining housing continued to be a major problem for black Niagara Fallsians even after the new community center had been built. (90) As mentioned earlier, this problem was evident from World War II, throughout the timeframe of this paper and beyond. Black Niagara Fallsians persistently searched for dwelling units all over the city but realtors continued to rent or sell properties to them only in certain sections, where a highly observable cluster of blacks had been living and ever expanding in five city tracts. (91)

Due to the persistent influx of blacks, the population densities of those areas increased significantly, creating overcrowded and undesirable conditions. Moreover, there were cases of professional persons who wanted to purchase housing in Niagara Falls and who could not buy in the areas where they desired. (92) Some of these people purchased homes in Buffalo and commuted to their jobs in Niagara Falls.

Reverend H. Edward Whitaker, who was head of the New Hope Baptist Church and a civil rights activist, at a Niagara Falls Christian convention that dealt with community affairs issues, told his fellow clergymen that 50 members of his congregation had to commute from Buffalo to Niagara Falls because they could not find decent housing in the city. (93) The convention members unanimously voted for fair housing for everyone without regard to race, color, creed or national origin.

By 1956 a small number of black families were renting units in Griffon Manor. It had been mentioned in one of the local newspapers that there were 100 vacancies in Griffon Manor, suggesting that there was no housing shortage in Niagara Falls. A desperate and upset phone caller contacted the manager of Griffon Manor and told him that he had read in the newspaper that 100 Griffon Manor units were vacant. He informed the manager that, if he rented any of those units to "colored people," he would be "taken care of." (94) He also indicated that the past housing manager had kept them out and that he represented a group of concerned citizens that had a large investment in property around Griffon Manor. When told to come to the Griffon Manor office to discuss the matter, the caller, who spoke in broken English, refused to comply,

repeating his warning several times to the effect that if the manager did not keep out colored people he would be "taken care of." This threat was reported to the police. (95)

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT UNTIL 1965

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s impacted the entire nation, including the black community of Niagara Falls, influencing its members to speak out and protest such practices as housing discrimination and mistreatment at local stores. (96) As noted earlier, the Reverend Whitaker was a strong and outspoken advocate for fair housing as was Aaron Griffin, Bloneva Bond and several other community members. In 1960 when four North Carolina Agricultural and Technology students sat down at the food counter at a Woolworth Store in Greensboro, the Student Sit-in Movement began, serving to galvanize Americans throughout the nation.

In response to this movement, Whitaker organized the picketing of a local Kresge Store, which was affiliated with the Woolworth Store chain that acquiesced to segregation in the South. A W. T. Grant Store was another local store affiliated with the Woolworth Store chain that would be targeted for picketing. Whitaker, who was also a local NAACP leader, followed the national office's directive to boycott such stores. (97) Under his leadership, black community members picketed the Kresge Store in shifts, carrying signs that read, "Segregation is immoral" and "Support the NAACP," which served to further highlight the injustice that was occurring in the South. The picketing, however, bewildered some white community members. (98) One man claimed that the problem that was being protested existed thousands of miles away and that he could not understand the merit of such an activity in Niagara Falls, which did not adhere to such unfair practices. One teenager yelled that the picketers should be "run off the street." He instead was chased away by a policeman.

A sympathetic store operator stated that the picketers had a legitimate complaint and perhaps needed to picket in order to work out their frustrations. In 1960 Daisy Bates, who was the head of the Little Rock Arkansas local NAACP Branch and the guiding hand behind the desegregation of Little Rock Arkansas's Central High School, was invited to give a few addresses to the general Niagara Falls community. (99) She stressed that in the South blacks were fighting for their constitutional right to vote, but in Niagara Falls blacks could vote but were not taking advantage of their rights and opportunities. (100) She also reprimanded black Niagara Fallsians for not writing their congressmen about the racial injustices going on in America and the lack of any effort by Congress to create a strong civil rights bill. Some Niagara Fallsians hinted that, since she was an outsider, Ms Bates' criticisms of black Niagara Fallsians should not be taken too seriously. However, long after Ms. Bates had left town, members of the black community rushed to her aid to say that her criticisms were legitimate. (101)

Another group entered the Niagara Falls area in about 1961 or 1962, a group that vehemently opposed the Civil Rights Movement. That group was the Nation of Islam. (102) The Niagara Falls Gazette viewed them as fanatics. (103) Members from the Muslim temple in Buffalo, Temple 23, came to Niagara Falls to recruit members into the Nation of Islam and to perhaps establish a temple in the area. Although the majority of black leaders, such as Pollard, Bolden, Bond, and Griffin, had been seeking to integrate black Niagara Fallsians into the mainstream of the community, the Muslims sought, among other things, to convert the black community to

Islam, Islamic separatism and the development of an independent economic base within the black community. The Muslims gained few converts in the area, probably because most black Niagara Fallsians were Baptists or Methodists and vigorously opposed considering any religion other than Christian. (104)

At an NAACP forum on civil rights at the Niagara Community Center, for example, when Bloneva Bond was asked if the NAACP should join forces with the Muslims on a project that could benefit the entire black community, she responded: "No. Ours is a democratic organization operating within the Constitution. We believe in the equality of man, which the Muslims do not." (105) Griffin also did not view the Muslims as a helpful force within the community. (106) They were generally perceived as a cult that impeded the progress of the struggling black community. (107)

Notwithstanding the limited influence of Islam, adherence to some of the Muslim teachings might have benefited black Niagara Fallsians. (108) The Muslims preached community economic development, the pooling of economic resources, and the development of an enterprising mindset. (109) Booker T. Washington had preached these same ideas years earlier, but they were not generally embraced. Accepting some of these principles might have been of tremendous help to the black community, which was struggling economically, especially during the early 1960s when the booming economic effects of World War II had receded.

In 1963, for example, the NAACP conducted a survey of employment of black Niagara Fallsians and found that 17.6 percent of the heads of families were unemployed. (110) Thus, adherence to Muslim economic principles perhaps might have helped to establish a stronger, more advanced economic structure and an enterprising tradition within the black community, which was sorely needed.

With the Muslims operating on the fringes of the black community, black Niagara Fallsians continued to promote and support the strategies and tactics of the Civil Rights Movement, whose influence was not only widespread but also motivational. Taking their cue from national events, such as the Sit-in Movement, the Birmingham Desegregation Movement, the March on Washington and other civil rights protest activities, the leadership continued to voice their concern about housing and employment, making stronger demands.

Before leaving to assume his new ministerial post in his native Virginia, the Reverend Whitaker, in an interview with the Niagara Falls Gazette, continued to emphasize that the housing available to black Niagara Fallsians was limited, and that they were virtually restricted to certain sections of the city. (111) He had been a minister in Niagara Falls for ten years and acknowledged that some racial progress had been made in that period. Because of improvements in race relations, he considered Niagara Falls generally a good place to live, but there was still much work to be done. He said that discrimination was subtle in Niagara Falls compared to the South, where it was more blunt and in the open. He believed that each region had its own styles of racial discrimination, but that through strong leadership, racial problems could be eliminated. (112)

In January of 1963, ten of Niagara Falls's black churches, led by their ministers, participated in planning together to get more blacks hired in local supermarkets and department stores,

preferably in customer-service positions where they would be readily visible to the public. (113) A twofold plan was the result of their discussions. First, they would send fact-finding individuals to specific stores to determine if any blacks worked in them. If no blacks were employed, the individuals would discuss with the owner and manager the importance of hiring black employees, and suggest that a boycott of the store might ensue if no blacks were hired, especially if a significant number of blacks patronized the store. The second phase would be the actual boycott where ministers would tell their congregations to not patronize a specific store until black employees were hired.

It was also assumed that church members would relay the message to their non-church member friends. Although the conditions in Niagara Falls were not as desperate as in the South, the national activities of civil rights organizations had made the ministers determined to effect some improvements within their city, with one minister even predicting marches if concessions were not made to the black community's satisfaction. (114) The planning of these churches did not effect any immediate changes, but it got people thinking more about the importance of action than of rhetoric, as a "take action" attitude began to permeate the black community.

In the middle of this situation, a young aggressive leader by the name of Otis Cowart arose as a black community spokesperson. He was the president of the Niagara Falls branch of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which, among many things, promoted hiring equality and aggressive action when confronting cases of hiring discrimination. Believing that hiring inequality existed at the local W. T. Grant Store, Cowart and other CORE members conducted a four-day survey of the store at 2116 Main Street. (115) They sought to determine how many blacks were employed by the store and an estimate of how many patronized the store.

In their survey, they found that only one black worked at the store and that he worked in the store's warehouse. They also found that 466 blacks had patronized the store, during the four-day period of their study, while 6000 whites had done so. After questioning the black patrons, they found that, within the last year, blacks had spent a total of \$46,381 in the store, many of them having accounts at the store. With this information, Cowart contacted Frank Carmichael, who was the manager of the W. T. Grant store, and informed him of the survey results and stressed that the store should hire five blacks within the next six months or face picketing. It was requested that the blacks be hired in visible customer service roles, such as sales personnel or clerks, and as a good faith gesture, it was also requested that at least two blacks be hired by Monday, three days after these demands were issued.

CORE argued that since January of 1963 several blacks had applied for employment, but none were hired, while two whites were hired permanently and 12 temporarily during the past Christmas season. Cowart informed Carmichael and local authorities that CORE's picketing demonstrations would be nonviolent and that they would not prevent store patrons from entering and exiting the store and that their picket signs would display such messages as "Don't buy where you can't work," "Full democracy is complete freedom," "No quotas," and "No tokenism."

On August 28, 1963, the same day that the March on Washington commenced, the picketing began with about 25 picketers, who started at 10:00 a.m. and continued until the store closed at 5:30 p.m. (116) Arthur Ray, a longtime resident of Niagara Falls, indicated that he participated in

the picketing not only because discrimination was wrong, but also to ensure a better future for his children and grandchildren. (117) By Wednesday 100 individuals were picketing in front of the W. T. Grant Store, and several of them were white, as CORE was a multiracial civil rights organization. (118) Cowart, who had given the picketers workshops on nonviolence and was constantly coaching them as they picketed, had warned store officials that the picketers were determined to stay on until Christmas and beyond, until CORE's demands had been met. In a story on the picketing published in the Niagara Falls Gazette, Cowart acknowledged that the W. T. Grant Store just happened to be the first store chosen for picketing and that there would be other stores involved if unfair hiring practices did not cease. In response, the management of W. T. Grant issued a published statement in which they declared that W. T. Grant was for equal opportunity and hiring equality but that they refused to hire strictly based on race, which they considered discriminatory and contrary to sound personnel policy. (119)

To strengthen their picketing efforts, and in disregard of W. T. Grant's position, at a community rally at Trinity Baptist Church Cowart asked community members who had patronized the store to do four things:

- (1) Not to cross the picket line and buy [at W. T. Grant];
- (2) To turn in their charge plates, if they [had] any there;
- (3) To notify the store that when their current bill [was] paid the account [would] not be reopened, and
- (4) To encourage others not to buy there. (120)

The black community was overwhelmingly supportive of Cowart's request and CORE's crusade to ensure equal opportunities and equal hiring practices in Niagara Falls. Many young blacks were leaving the area due to limited employment opportunities, and the community wanted to support efforts to change this situation. They donated funds toward the endeavor, giving \$108 at one meeting. (121) Their support and unity tremendously aided CORE's campaign because after three weeks of picketing a settlement was reached, in which W. T. Grant agreed to ensure that blacks were given equal employment opportunities at their store. (122) Other details of the settlement were not disclosed to the public. Nonetheless, with the settlement, the picketing was called off on September 21 at 5:30 p.m., and the acceptance of Cowart as a legitimate community leader increased. (123)

Besides the CORE Boycott, the Civil Rights Movement helped motivate black Niagara Fallsians to seek out power and influence within the broader community. For example, the local NAACP Branch conducted a voter registration campaign to increase the political influence of black Niagara Fallsians. (124) In 1963 Joseph H. Profit ran for a seat on the Niagara County Board of Supervisors and won. At the age of 28, he was the first black Niagara Fallsian to serve in such a capacity. (125) Arthur Ray ran for a position on the Board of Education and won in 1964. (126) He was also the first black in the city to hold such a position. The Reverend Whitaker had run in 1959 but lost. Both Profit and Ray had gain considerable white support. Under Cowart, CORE pushed city officials to be more aggressive on race issues, accusing them of not being aggressive

enough, and threatening more picketing. (127)

To promote the Civil Rights struggle and to commemorate the 60th Anniversary Founding of the Niagara Movement, the Educational Committee of the local branch invited Roy Wilkins, the national secretary of the NAACP, to Niagara Falls to give an address. (128) The event was well attended. The Civil Rights Movement compelled black Niagara Fallsians to not only demand equal rights and opportunities but to push even harder to obtain entry into the mainstream of society. (129) Blacks would demonstrate much of this same energy and enthusiasm in attempting to gain power and influence in Niagara Falls for the three remaining decades of the 20th Century.

CLOSING REMARKS

Blacks have lived in Niagara Falls and its surrounding areas since the days of slavery. After the Civil War, employment was the driving factor that attracted them to the region, the building of the Tunnel and the two world wars serving as economy boosters. The black population in the region never really became noticeable and problematic for many Niagara Fallsians until World War II, when their population figures increased by leaps and bounds in less than a decade, most of the migrants relocating from Alabama. Many black Niagara Fallsians who lived in the city before the influx of blacks in the 1940's attest that blacks did not have any major racial problems until the Second World War. Some of them even blamed the rural country habits of the migrants for contributing to racial problems. It was their efforts to obtain living space outside of specific city sections that increased racial tensions between black and white citizens of Niagara Falls.

When the new black migrants naturally sought to spread out to other less crowded sections of the city, white resistance was strong and pervasive. In terms of limiting housing and living space to blacks, Niagara Falls followed the pattern of most northern urban cities that experienced the First and Second Great Migrations. However, Niagara Falls did not entirely follow the trend of other northern urban areas. The black population never increased to the extent of contributing to race riots, at least not during the timeframe of this paper, although there were discussions of rioting.

In further examining the historical lives of black Niagara Fallsians, we find that they created stable families, formed communities, developed institutions within those communities, and served one another as well as the broader community.

The formation of the Niagara Community Center was perhaps the greatest single accomplishment achieved by black Niagara Fallsians, who developed this institute initially to serve as a recreational center, particularly for youth. With the steady flow of blacks into Niagara Falls, it grew to be an all-purpose social welfare center for the community, growing to become not only the core of the black community but a leadership-training center as well. It is still in operation today.

From 1865 to 1965 the black people of Niagara Falls faced obstacles, overcame many of them, lived and loved, and steadily attempted to carve out space for themselves, their progeny and community within the mainstream of their city.

Table I: Black Population of Niagara Falls, New York, 1860-1970

Year	Population	Percentage
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1860	242	3.67
1865	126	2.00
1870	149	4.95
1880	150	4.51
1890	159	1.45
1900	344	1.76
1910	266	0.87
1920	509	1.00
1930	906	1.20
1940	975	1.25
1950	3,585	3.94
1960	7,038	6.87
1970	8,001	9.30

(1) The racial tensions that occurred in Springfield, Ohio in 1904, Springfield, Illinois in 1908, and Chicago, Illinois in 1919 underscore the effects those rapidly expanding African-American populations had on northern urban communities when they attempted to broaden their living space.

(2) The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850 (Washington, D. C.: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853), 102.

(3) Population of the United States in 1860 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1864), 337.

(4) New York State Census of 1865 (Albany, New York: Charles Van Benthuysen, Sons, 1867), 9.

(5) Benjamin Drew, The Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada (Boston: John P. Jewett & Company, 1856), 102-103.

(6) The population figures for the years 1865 were obtained from the Census for New York State. All other data were obtained from the United States Censuses, which are listed in my bibliography.

(7) 1865 Census of the Town and Village of Niagara Falls, 8-100.

(8) "Freedom," Niagara Gazette (Niagara Falls, New York, July 10, 1986), 7A.

(9) Ibid.

(10) "A Famous Old Hostelry," Niagara Falls Journal (Niagara Falls, New York, January 4, 1918), 4: C 1.

(11) This fact is apparent throughout the Town and Village of Niagara Falls censuses for the years 1865 to 1920. These censuses are listed in my bibliography and stored in the Niagara Falls, New York Public Library; "Interesting Reminiscences," Niagara Falls Gazette (Niagara Falls,

New York, October 26, 1927), 4: 2.

(12) Orrin E. Dunlap, "The Cataract House." Local History Hotel Folder 647.94 (Local History Department at the Niagara Falls, New York Public Library).

(13) "Interesting Reminiscences," Niagara Falls Gazette (Niagara Falls, New York, October 26, 1927), 4: 2.

(14) "Excitement at the Falls," The Niagara Courier (Lockport, New York, August 31, 1853), 2: 6.

(15) Patrick Snead does not appear in any Niagara Falls, New York census reports after the slavery era. He may not have been recorded. He may have resided in another American community, or he may have stayed in Canada, as did many former escaped slaves. Consult Michael Power, Nancy Butler, and Joy Ormsby, *Slavery and Freedom in Niagara* (Niagara Historical Society: Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario LOS 1JO, 1993).

(16) Benjamin Drew, *The Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada*, 104.

(17) In my population figures, individuals in the census listed as mulattoes were counted as black.

(18) "Colored Republican Meeting," Niagara Falls Gazette (Niagara Falls, New York, September 18, 1872), 3.

(19) "The Colored Republicans," Niagara Falls Gazette (Niagara Falls, New York, October 19, 1892), 1.

(20) Lillian S. Williams, *Strangers in the Land of Paradise* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 92.

(21) "The Colored Republicans," 1.

(22) "Colored '400' Danced," Niagara Falls Gazette (Niagara Falls, New York, April 4, 1897), 1.

(23) 1900 Town and Village Census for Niagara Falls, Sheet 1; 1910 Sheet 3. Town and Village Census for Niagara Fall,

(24) H. William Feder, *The Evolution of an Ethnic Neighborhood that Became United In Diversity: The East Side, Niagara Falls, New York, 1880-1930* (Amherst, New York: BMP Inc., 2000), 141.

(25) *Ibid.*, 135.

(26) "A Canadian Tunnel" Niagara Falls Gazette (Niagara Falls, New York, August 31, 1892), 1.

(27) Ibid.

(28) "Memorable Day for the Negro Baptists," Niagara Falls Gazette (Niagara Falls, New York, April 9, 1900), 1.

(29) Ibid., 1.

(30) "Salvation of the Negro Citizen," Niagara Falls Gazette (Niagara Falls, New York, April 16, 1900), 1 & 6.

(31) Ibid., 1.

(32) "Negro Jubilee to be Held on Fourth of July," Niagara Falls Gazette (Niagara Falls, New York, May 5, 1900), 1; "Plans for Negro Jubilee are Well Underway," Niagara Falls Gazette (Niagara Falls, New York, May 16, 1900), 1.

(33) "Rev. B. B. Johnson Has Given Up His Pulpit," Niagara Falls Gazette (Niagara Falls, New York, June 26, 1900), 1.

(34) Ibid., 1.

(35) Vivian Flagg McBrier, R. Nathaniel Dett: His Life and Work (Washington, D. C.: Associated Publishers, Inc., 1977), 1.

(36) "Negroes Held Big Jubilee Yesterday," Niagara Falls Gazette (Niagara Falls, New York, July 5, 1900), 1.

(37) "Rev. B. B. B. Johnson Makes Accounting," The Daily Cataract-Journal (January 4, 1901), 5: 3.

(38) James Franklin Banks, "Problems Encountered by World War II and Post World War II Negroes, Who Settled in the Niagara Falls, New York Area." Master's Thesis (Niagara University, 1958), 73. Banks was a minister himself in Niagara Falls and knew much of the African-American religious history of the city.

(39) Ibid., 70.

(40) Ibid., 70-103.

(41) "Negroes Object: Local Men and Buffalo Colored Folk Say if Czolgosz was a Negro His Treatment Would be Summary," Niagara Fall Gazette (Niagara Falls, New York, September 10, 1901), 1.

(42) Ibid., 1.

(43) Lillian S. Williams, Strangers in the Land of Paradise, 221.

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