"The Negroes are There to Stay": The Development of Tampa's African-American Community, 1891-1916

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As the nineteenth century bustled inexorably toward its close in January 1900, the African-American editor of a religious newspaper turned his attention to thoughts of Florida's fastest growing city and of a key component of that emerging municipality's population. "I am safe in saying that Tampa will be Tampa you know," the Jacksonville Florida Evangelist's lead scribe proclaimed. The journalist then turned his attention to the city's sometimes-troubled race relations. "She always," he continued, "has her share of troubles." Whereupon, he declared without qualification, "Nevertheless, the Negroes are there to stay." The editor thereafter added, almost as afterthought, "The colored stores are doing well."1

In those few words the Evangelist's editor neatly summed up facts crucial to understanding Tampa's past, but those facts and the details pertinent to them have come down to us only as whispers and mostly in forms quite misleading. That circumstance recently has been brought home to the authors by the work of a Florida A&M University colleague. We refer specifically to David H. Jackson's insightful biography of Mississippi's premier turn-of-the-century African-American leader, Charles Banks.2

Professor Jackson's point was this. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Banks and his associates built in Mississippi (at Mound Bayou, in Bank's case) communities anchored in vibrant institutions. Their achievements, ones necessarily arising quickly out of the economic destitution of emancipation, included retail businesses, industrial enterprises, schools, libraries, churches, banks, insurance companies, and what have you. What happened to those institutions and the promise they embodied? Here Jackson offered cogent insight. Although white racism supplied plenty of challenge, economic and social changes emerging out of World War One's European commencement and events of subsequent years proved the primary villains. By the mid-to-late 1920s conditions had deteriorated so badly that memory of the achievements already had begun to fade. Soon, most people forgot them.3

The same thing happened at Tampa and in other Florida locales. Until recently, our principal window on that pre-World War One world at Tampa came courtesy of a report prepared in 1927 by J. H. McGrew, Benjamin E. Mays, and Arthur Raper. Although entitled "A Study of Negro Life in Tampa," it subsequently has been known most commonly as "The Raper Report." In chapter after chapter, the authors dissected the community to portray desperate poverty, ailing community institutions, and white disdain.4 Our tendency subsequently has been to assume that, because circumstances ran so dire in 1927, they must have been worse — or, at least, no better — in earlier years.

Fortunately, a number of scholars and local historians recently have begun to rebut that assumption. Among them, in 1979, Otis R. Anthony and Marilyn T. Wade offered their A Collection of Historical Facts About Black Tampa. Anthony revised and updated its content for his 1989 publication, Black Tampa: The Roots of a People. Three important steps forward came in the

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Other publications complemented these initial works. In 1995, for instance, Geoffrey S. Mohlman produced a very helpful master's thesis at the University of South Florida, "Bibliography of Resources Concerning the African American Presence in Tampa: 1513-1995." Finally, in 1997, came the most graphic and popular reminder of Tampa's rich African-American heritage, Rowena Ferrell Brady's *Things Remembered: An Album of African-Americans in Tampa*. Through these decades Tampa-area newspapers, too, presented intriguing glimpses. Most notably, the past's echoes repeatedly found voice in the *Tampa Tribune*’s "History and Heritage" page written by the award-winning journalist Leland Hawes.6

By no means does this listing exhaust recent and helpful works. University of South Florida anthropologist Susan D. Greenbaum and her associates, to mention prominent examples, have explored in depth the origins and evolution of the city's Afro-Cuban community. This pathfinding research has taken its most comprehensive form in the 2002 publication of Greenbaum's national award-winning *More Than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa*, a study of imposing scholarly merit.7

The insights offered by these and other contributors, coupled with the availability of newly discovered primary materials, permits the first overview of Tampa's late nineteenth and early twentieth century African-American community to be offered. In attempting to provide that overview, however, care must be exercised. Particularly, the authors have taken notice (as should readers) of a word of caution shared by Greenbaum. As she has urged all to remember, the lives of thousands of poor and relatively obscure individuals easily are lost or ignored when revisiting achievements on the larger scale.

Professor Greenbaum explained further. "The social organization of [Tampa's] African-American community was . . . complex and fragmented along class lines," she observed. By the 1890s, there were six black churches and several chapters of the Masons and Odd Fellows," she continued. "Membership in these institutions, especially the lodges, was exclusionary and tended to divide the community into defended circles, although there was some degree of connection between these social groupings." Greenbaum sensed that only the stories of these prominent individuals and institutions, if any, ever would be recovered. "The truly poor and transient masses mostly did not belong to lodges," Greenbaum commented in conclusion, "and often not to churches either."8

Having taken that word of caution, let us also take care about what is meant by reference to "Tampa," even though the effort will require a brief and taxing foray into statistics. Through the 1890s, and into the twentieth century, the city's corporate limits remained constricted. While growth within them by 1895 had raised Tampa to the rank of Florida's third largest city (15,634 residents) behind Jacksonville (25,130) and Key West (16,502), actual growth in greater Tampa likely put the municipality in second place.9

Census results for 1900 allow precise clarification. By then the city of Tampa had grown only to 15,839 persons, seemingly suggesting an abrupt halt to area growth. This lowered the city's rank within the state to fourth (behind Jacksonville, Pensacola, and Key West, respectively). Jacksonville and Pensacola, meanwhile, had expanded in line with area growth, while Key West's island continued to define its limits. At Tampa, on the other hand, three additional incorporated municipalities now hemmed the city's borders. These included Fort Brooke (incorporated 1885) to the east of East Street and below Sixth Avenue with a population of 587; West Tampa (incorporated 1895) to the west of the Hillsborough River with 2,355; and East Tampa (incorporated 1897) in the College Hill vicinity with 1,522. Only a few miles distant, Port Tampa City (incorporated 1893) on Old Tampa Bay bumped greater Tampa's population by another 1,367 individuals. As a result, and without taking into consideration the residents of unincorporated areas, greater Tampa at the turn of the new century contained a population of 21,670, easily placing
the urban core second to Jacksonville’s 28,420 total.10

As it turned out, the passage of time served to enhance the confusion as to Tampa’s growth and population. The city in 1905, to further consider the point, claimed 22,823 inhabitants, a healthy 44 percent increase over 1900. Meanwhile, Fort Brooke had swelled to 1,392 (137 percent); West Tampa to 3,661 (55 percent); and East Tampa, 2,657 (75 percent). Port Tampa City, meanwhile, lost population, to 1,049 persons. Not until 1907 was Fort Brooke incorporated into the city. East Tampa remained separate until 1911; West Tampa until 1925; and Port Tampa City until decades later.11

The confusion created by this jumble of competing municipal corporations somewhat has affected, as well, our understanding of the magnitude of the African-American community’s presence and significance. The Raper Report, an influential example, recited population totals applicable only to the city. Specifically, it noted 4,382 black residents in 1900 (27.7 percent of the total population) and 8,951 (23.7 percent) in 1910. Yet, in 1905, the black community at Fort Brooke came to 476 persons (34 percent); at West Tampa to 648 (18 percent); at East Tampa to 375 (14 percent); and at Port Tampa City to 462 (44 percent). By 1910, the totals again had risen. By that time Fort Brooke and East Tampa had been annexed into the city, but West Tampa then held 967 African-American residents (12 percent) and Port Tampa City, 480 (45 percent).12

Legal boundaries, as will be seen, served at times to work a considerable impact on Tampa’s African-American residents, but other divisions also loomed importantly. Professor Greenbaum has spoken to class divisions and, in the case of Afro-Cubans, place of origin as delineating fault lines within the community. The question of place of origin deserves additional comment. Apart from the Afro-Cuban population, black Tampa gained considerably during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century from the arrival of other immigrants from lands not too distant but whose cultures left profound influences.

Ethnographer Viola B. Muse explained the circumstances in a 1936 report prepared for the Federal Writers’ Project. “A small but notable group among Tampa’s Negro population are the British West Indians, of whom there are a few hundred in the city,” she began. “These people came from the Bahamas, Trinidad, Jamaica and other British possessions.” Warming to her subject, Muse continued. “Their habits and customs differ widely from the American, and they have militant, uncompromising natures,” she recorded. “The ‘British subject,’ as they prefer being called, are a more progressive group generally than the American Negroes to be found in Tampa.” Muse concluded, “They guard jealously all the possible rights they can enjoy, are constantly on the alert for civic improvements and force themselves into leadership in any group with which they are connected.”13

The West Indian emigrants left numerous legacies in Tampa, such as St. James Episcopal Church (founded 1891-1892), but the community’s impact ranged far wider than its small numbers would suggest. The experiences of James William and Marion E. Matthews Rogers, and their descendants, offer a useful case study. Each claimed the Bahamas Islands as their native land. On the other hand, they were living at Key West when they met and, in 1893, married. Then, seeing greater chance for prosperity in Tampa’s burgeoning cigar industry than in Key West’s struggling economy, the couple soon relocated to the city’s new suburb of West Tampa. James secured work as a cigar maker. Marion supplemented the family income baking pastries.14

Community involvement came naturally to James and Marion Rogers. “Race pride shown through, with an awareness and determination that the sorry conditions that had developed in the American South did not represent the only possibility for Black men and women,” a descendant recalled. With more time available to contribute than did James enjoy, Marion especially launched herself into worthwhile causes. She pressed issues of community importance, oftentimes alongside teacher and fellow Bahamian Christina Johnson Meacham. They and others donated countless hours and days on behalf of better schools, protection of constitutionally mandated rights, and other concerns.15

Knowledge of their experiences helps us, at least in part, to understand why in the early twentieth century black Tampans would strive to build in their city a southern center for resistance to the encroachments...
of Jim Crow racial discrimination. Not surprisingly, Marion Rogers and Christina Meacham helped, during 1914-1917, to found one of the South's first branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Two generations later, James and Marion's grandson, Tampa-born Robert W. Saunders Sr., championed at the risk of his own life many of his grandmother's causes. He did so as the NAACP's field secretary for the Florida Conference of Branches during 1952-1966, the heart of the state's civil rights era.16

But the civil rights fights of the 1950s and 1960s lay far in a distant and uncertain future to Tampans in the early 1890s. The local African-American community then remained small (in 1890, about 1,600 persons), although it stood on the verge of unprecedented growth. Exact figures are difficult to ascertain, but by 1897 or 1898, the total would triple at least. Tampa as a whole was growing along with the transportation, tourism, cigar, and construction industries, which directly or indirectly offered employment for black workers. Additionally, in February 1895, a terrible freeze wiped out the farms and citrus groves of peninsula residents, both black and white. Significant numbers of persons ruined in Tampa's vicinity soon opted for urban life. "Many were poor people from nearby rural areas," Susan Greenbaum has observed, "drawn by opportunities in the city."18

Several indices graphically portray the resultant community expansion. To cite one, Geoffrey Mohlman calculated from Tampa city directories that the four black-owned businesses mentioned in 1886 had grown to twenty-one seven years later. By 1899, the figure stood at seventy-four, if not higher. At that time, he reckoned, ten or more separate individuals or firms operated restaurants, grocery stores, and barbershops. Similarly, Curtis Welch computed the number of organized churches. The seven mentioned in 1893 (up from four in 1886) included Beulah First Baptist (Harrison St. near Pierce), Bowman ME, South (1008 Constant St.), St. James Mission Episcopal (Constant St. beyond Central), St. Joseph's CME (E. Bay St. corner of Constant), St. Paul AME (1100 Marion St.), and Zion AMEZ [Mt. Sinai AME Zion] (902 Nebraska Ave.). To these six congregations, Welch, for 1899, added Ebenezer Baptist [in 1904 renamed Bethel] (1217 Simmons St.), Primitive Baptist (at the foot of Twiggs St. and Ft. Brooke St.), Tabernacle Baptist (1010 Highland Avenue), and Allen Temple AME (Ybor City).19

The pulsing heart of fights of the 1950s and 1960s lay far in a distant and uncertain future to Tampans in the early 1890s. The local African-American community then remained small (in 1890, about 1,600 persons), although it stood on the verge of unprecedented growth. Exact figures are difficult to ascertain, but by 1897 or 1898, the total would triple at least. Tampa as a whole was growing along with the transportation, tourism, cigar, and construction industries, which directly or indirectly offered employment for black workers. Additionally, in February 1895, a terrible freeze wiped out the farms and citrus groves of peninsula residents, both black and white. Significant numbers of persons ruined in Tampa's vicinity soon opted for urban life. "Many were poor people from nearby rural areas," Susan Greenbaum has observed, "drawn by opportunities in the city."18

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The pulsing heart of this rapidly expanding community lay in the area formerly called "the Scrub," located midway between Ybor City on the northeast and the City of Tampa to the south. What the Raper Report later found to be almost hellish conditions in the vicinity of the Scrub appeared very differently in the early 1890s. "The colored population . . . number about one-thousand, a majority of whom are industrious, thrifty and progressive," the Tampa Journal had reported in 1887. "Many of them own their own homes [and] some are mechanics," the newspaper added. "They have churches, societies, and withal are respectable, orderly and peaceable." Although growth in the 1890s swelled the resident population and added a large contingent of the poor, overcrowding had yet to assume the proportions that it would in later years. African-American leaders still easily could boast about their community's fine qualities. "Tampa is rapidly growing to be the metropolis of the state, [and it] lately bonded for two hundred thousand dollars for public improvements with an ever growing interest in the tobacco industry," one AMEZ official advertised in his church's national newspaper in 1894. "We have the finest and best appointed church edifice in this growing city," he added with understandable pride.20

Developers had begun subdividing the Scrub by the 1870s, laying out regular street grids. While long-time businessmen
such as barber Daniel E. Walker or restau­nateur Steward Jackson might prefer to maintain their premises in the city's downtown, most newcomers in the 1890s opted to open for trade on Central Avenue, the Scrub's principal business street, or else on some nearby way such as Scott or Emery. The locale would remain the heart of black Tampa until its destruction in the mid-1970s. "The area included stores, restaurants, churches, lodges, professional offices, insurance companies, newspapers, and night clubs," one scholar of the neighbor­hood related. "Within this community, business, religious, and civic leaders mobilized resources to achieve common goals, including organizing resistance to segrega­tion and discriminatory laws."21

The Central Avenue scholar did not ex­aggerate. Tampa's black community in the early and mid 1890s drew to it dozens of individuals and families of distinction statewide and nationally. Church leaders included Baptist pioneer preacher Prince McKnight, the guiding spirit behind Beulah Baptist; AMEZ elders and Florida church founders Joseph Sexton, Thomas Darley, and Warren C. Vesta; and AME luminaries such as Robert Meacham and Benjamin W. "Bulley" Wiley. Many of them, including Vesta, Meacham, and Wiley had served honorably in public office. Meacham, a long­time state senator, had come within a hair's breadth of the governor's chair and service in Congress. In fact, at least one local man remained in public office in greater Tampa into the early 1890s. Daniel E. Walker sat on the Fort Brooke town council until his death in 1893.22

Professional men arrived as well. Several attorneys already had offered their services prior to 1890. Researcher Julius J. Gordon named Peter W. Bryant, Sam King, and Thomas McKnight. F.C. Thomas had founded the Southern Progress newspaper in 1886, and four years later was practicing law while operating his People's Real Estate & Loan Agency. Then, in 1892, one-time Monroe County judge and Howard University trained lawyer James Dean arrived in town from Key West. During his sojourn before moving on to Jacksonville, Dean p­ursued his profession before the bar while also serving Harlem Academy as its principal.23

When Zachariah D. Green (sometimes spelled Greene) achieved admission to the bar in 1899, though, the event may have
constituted a milestone for the city's budding professional class. Green not only enjoyed a formal legal education, he remained in the community for years thereafter. The attorney and businessman represented a varied clientele and additionally took a prominent role in civic affairs.  

When it came to licensed medical doctors, the record remains somewhat hazier than for attorneys. Dr. Alexander H. Darnes of Jacksonville and Tallahassee's William John Gunn had established their practices by 1882, with others following in Florida's major towns within a few years. At Tampa Dr. M.J. Anderson, who arrived locally in the mid- to late-1890s, certainly can claim pioneer status. He may not have been the very first African-American physician to practice locally, but, as was true with Green for the lawyers, Anderson proved more durable in his residence and the pursuit of his professional goals than any who may have preceded him.  

The Republicans' return to the White House in March 1897, under President William McKinley, further enhanced the local professional community by allowing at least a few African-Americans to occupy local federal offices, something rarely seen during the 1893-1897 administration of Democratic President Grover Cleveland. The lucrative salaries permitted numerous black families comfortable lives. Lee R. Thomas' situation provides a case on point. Having departed economically depressed Madison County at age nineteen, Thomas had made his way to Tampa in 1884 to find work as a hotel waiter. Active in St. Paul AME Church and local masonic lodges, he particularly stood out for his loyalty to the Republican Party. Thomas's reward came in 1897 with appointment to a position in the customs service, where he remained employed for twelve years. His economic situation and local prestige elevated. Accordingly, in 1899, Thomas was asked to take over from Thomas McKnight as supervisor of the Harlem Academy, the most prestigious of local African-American schools.  

That reminds us not to forget the educators, male and female. Many of the most prominent teachers hailed from old families. Christina Johnson (later Meacham), Charlotte Bryant, Emma Bryant, Iola Brumick, Mamie Brumick, Catherine Hamilton, Lilla Hamilton, Amelia Sally, and Lilla Walker could be numbered among those already serving as educators or preparing to do so. It must be noted, though, that newcomers such as James H. Hargrett had commenced to lend new standards of professionalism to community schools. A native of Wakulla County and graduate of what would become Florida A&M University, Hargrett had begun to practice his craft locally by the mid-1890s.  

That many local students actually were benefitting greatly from the labors of African-American educators seemed evident to those present in the 1890s. Public schools such as Harlem Academy, rebuilt next to the present location of St. Paul AME Church following an April 1892 fire, achieved good results. St. James Episcopal Church had inaugurated a parochial school to compete with Harlem Academy as early as 1892. Two years later area Roman Catholics followed step with the establishment of a "colored school" on the grounds of Tampa's original First Methodist Church on Morgan Street.  

The educational progress, while satisfying within the African-American community, prompted fierce reaction within certain segments of the white population. As also had been the case with Harlem Academy, one or more local whites, angered that blacks enjoyed solid educational opportunities, vented their resentments by burning the Catholic school to the ground soon after it opened. In this instance, as at Harlem, they failed to achieve their ultimate purpose. Within eight months St. Peter Claver school had reopened at 1401 Governor Street with eighty students, most of whom were not Roman Catholic. By 1895, the institution guaranteed a nine-month term. Thanks to the ministrations of Holy Name Sisters who conducted classes, many graduates, such as Blanche Armwood and Jessie Shevere, went on to outstanding careers as educators and community builders.  

The community's determination to rebuild its schools in the face of racist arson spoke volumes about its cohesiveness, sense of purpose, and forward thinking. Iola Brumick — whose shoemaker father Henry Brumick had served on Tampa's town council in 1876-1877, and a decade later on the construction committee for the burned Harlem Academy building — recalled the times. "We had the use of this building barely three years [when] some
unspeakably despicable scoundrel set it on fire and it was completely destroyed in three hours," she related. "We watched our achievement representing years of hard work and self-denial go up in flames and smoke and our hearts were heavy indeed."30

Broken hearts soon gave way to a commitment to rebuild. "The ministers of the Negro churches came to the rescue – they tendered the use of the church buildings, and the offer was accepted by the school board," Brumick explained further. "This arrangement continued three years, until funds had been raised and a new building was erected." She concluded, "We raised $2500 for this building and the school board sold some property and added $1600 to the fund."31

Among those contributing to the rebuilding of Harlem Academy and who helped make up the leadership ranks of the African-American community were skilled workers, artisans, and craftsmen. Many owned small businesses, but others earned the respect of and a modicum of appreciation from white employers. John Robert Hall may not have been typical of them, but his upward mobility illustrates, as did Lee R. Thomas', the opportunities available in rapidly expanding greater Tampa.32

Hall's modest arrival at Tampa occurred about 1897, when the Mississippi native had not yet reached thirty years of age. Attempting to make his way as a laborer and stevedore, he discovered that he possessed a gift for securing foundations for bridges and large buildings by pile driving in shifting local sand and soil. As the years progressed, Hall earned credit for preparing solid foundations for major projects, sometimes after whites had failed at the task. These projects included the Lafayette Street (now Kennedy Boulevard) bridge, the Garcia Avenue bridge, the twelve-story Citizens Bank building, and numerous other projects. With the economic security provided by his labors, Hall immersed himself in community projects, faithfully served local fraternal orders, backed Tyer Temple Methodist Episcopal Church, and forthrightly defended the Republican Party and its candidates. He remained a respected member of the community until his death in 1946.33

Of course, John Robert Hall, and the African-American community generally, encountered numerous obstacles along the way, and it was during the years 1898-1900 that many were put in their path. In 1898, the Spanish-American War and the influx of black troopers destined for service in Cuba brought a deluge of business. Jobs opened up overnight. In turn, the promise of good pay drew to the vicinity hundreds of young men from other locales in Florida who, temporarily, swelled the community's size. One of them, Andrew Jackson Ferrell, left a brief reminiscence. "Our country community of Ocala then had a large contingent of young men at Tampa because of the Spanish-American War (which our country was engaged in at the time)," he recorded. "So all our large boys were attracted to Port Tampa by the 25 cents per hour paid to laborers." Ferrell added, "I first stayed in [Port] Tampa until February 1899, but then went back to Ocala."34

The downside from the move to Tampa were the troopers' reactions to the bitter taste of local discrimination. "Our fellows think it is h__ to have a fight in defense of people who are so prejudiced," one soldier wrote from Tampa. "They are determined to make these crackers 'walk Spanish' while here or else be treated as men." The June 1898 riot that ensued and the events
occurring in its aftermath have been well reported by Willard Gatewood, Brent R. Weisman, and others. Suffice it here to say that saloons, cafes, and other businesses in Fort Brooke and Ybor City suffered damage, while the black community prepared for white reaction.35

A second problem emerged from the fact that the war ended quickly. Those temporarily sojourning in greater Tampa departed at the same time as did many Cuban-born cigar makers who opted to return to their native land. Tampa’s economy, for the time being, dipped into the doldrums. The shock may have wiped out dozens of businesses. Geoffrey Mohlman’s research offers evidence. It revealed only forty-four concerns in operation in 1901, as opposed to seventy-four two years earlier. Contributing to this slump, the city’s principal financial benefactor, Henry Plant, died in 1899. The demise of the man called the “King of Florida” stirred local confusion as his heirs, who mostly felt few ties to Tampa, litigated his vast estate. Within a few years Plant’s magnificent Tampa Bay Hotel had closed, gifting city fathers with the problem of what do to with a now-empty resort made world famous by Spanish-American War correspondents.36

What cloud does not have its silver lining, though? The war had forced the Plant System to upgrade its rail lines, at the taxpayers’ expense of course. This permitted Ybor City and West Tampa cigar factories easier and cheaper access to the national market at a time when cigar smoking reached new levels of popularity. Accordingly, Ybor City’s economy launched itself, given a few ups and downs, on a twenty-year boom with West Tampa benefitting generously from the same dynamics. The resultant prosperity lifted many in the African-American community as the years passed, but it also had an unintended – and especially important – result.37 That result concerned Tampa’s now-longstanding connection with music. Already at the century’s end, the community’s musical heritage stretched back for decades. The churches, of course, had integrated music into their services and ceremonies from the time of their establishment, and St. Paul AME had obtained an organ by 1883. Additionally, bands of various kinds had coalesced, especially within fraternal organizations. The Tampa Colored Orchestra, featuring Jay Gould on the bass viol, entertained, as well, by 1891.38

But, something new loomed on the horizon in 1899. At Jacksonville, a club owner and would-be vaudeville impresario named Patrick H. Chappelle noticed how tobacco was building up his town’s chief competitor. “Tampa is a city which has a number of large cigar factories,” he explained, “their payroll averages about $50,000.00 per week, among Cubans, Spaniards and Americans.” This fact seemed to offer just the opportunity Chappelle had been seeking. In partnership with a Mr. Donaldson, he relocated to Tampa in the late summer or fall. The Indianapolis Freeman, an organ associated closely with the black entertainment business, reported the results in June 1900. “They opened the Mascotte Theatre-Saloon at Tampa, Fla.,” the article revealed. “The performances given soon became town talk and the theatre was crowded nightly.” It continued, “The success made at this house prompted them

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They had seen or heard about Tampa during the war. Following a return to the quieter world at home, though, they found themselves compelled to return to the growing city and to grow with it. Once back at Tampa in 1901, [Andrew J.] Ferrell’s fortunes, not unusually, took a decided turn for the best. “My father . . . worked as a pilot of the steamship Manatee [until] 1905,” daughter Rowena Ferrell Brady recalled. “He became the only Negro in the state of Florida to hold a Master’s license for navigation of steam vessels of unlimited tonnage in inland waters of the United States.” She added: “In 1905, he was named as clerk for the U.S. Customs Service in Tampa and served in the capacity until 1922. During that time he became very active in civic affairs.”
to open the Buckingham Theatre at Ft. Brooke, Fla.” The item concluded, “These theaters have proven themselves to be miniature gold mines.”

The *Freeman* probably did not overstate the situation by very much. Although the Mascotte – located in the city of Tampa at the corner of Pierce and Polk Streets – competed with long-time establishments such as John Saulter’s Central Avenue saloon and Saulter’s brother-in-law William D. Walker’s place on Nebraska Avenue, it did so with a difference. Chappelle’s club immediately drew name acts, including the Mahara’s Minstrel Festival with its featured bandmaster W.C. Handy. The site posed a problem, though, because conservative white city of Tampa officials easily could restrain performances or close the club entirely for perceived moral infractions. So, Chappelle opened his second venue at 416 Fifth Avenue in Fort Brooke, where rules tended to be either nonexistent or enforced with a high degree of flexibility. By March 1900, the Buckingham boomed, thanks to a racially mixed audience that defied the region’s Jim Crow racial restrictions. “The house is crowded to the doors every night with Cubans, Spaniards, Negroes, and white people,” Chappelle boasted. He added, “Business is fine.”

Success pursued Chappelle with alacrity. Maintaining bases at Tampa and Jacksonville, he expanded into music publishing along with his musical director Joseph Levy, specializing at first in “the latest rag-time compositions.” Quickly, he developed touring companies at Tampa that eventually enchanted audiences throughout the nation. So great was his success that, after he died at Jacksonville in 1911, thousands lined the streets for a funeral procession composed of well over five hundred persons. By then, it was said that he was the “wealthiest colored citizen in Jacksonville.” One newspaper remarked, “In city and state and all over the South, the name of Pat Chappelle was familiar.”

Chappelle’s daring and entrepreneurial ability set Tampa in the national spotlight, so far as black vaudeville was concerned, encouraging the establishment of numerous other clubs and bringing to the area most of the nation’s premier African-American entertainers. Jazz and blues resounded through the nights. Local men, in fact, organized the successful combo The Jazzmen about 1910, with The Syncopaters following. Eventually, Central Avenue emerged as the focus of the excitement. Along its length, Henry “Red” Clinton, Cannonball and Nat Adderly, Ray Charles, and many others learned their craft as they incurred a silent debt to Patrick Henry Chappelle.

Another silver lining to the cloud that underlay the century’s-end concerned men such as Andrew J. Ferrell. They had seen or heard about Tampa during the war. Following a return to the quieter world at home, though, they found themselves compelled to return to the growing city and to grow with it. Once back at Tampa in 1901, Ferrell’s fortunes, not unusually, took a decided turn for the best. “My father ... worked as a pilot of the steamship Manatee [until] 1905,” daughter Rowena Ferrell Brady recalled. “He became the only Negro in the state of Florida to hold a Master’s license for navigation of steam vessels of unlimited tonnage in inland waters of the United States.” She added: “In 1905, he was named as clerk for the U.S. Customs Service in Tampa and served in the capacity until 1922. During that time he became very active in civic affairs.”

Ferrell’s return symbolized renewed growth that asserted itself in the early 1900s; and at the same time, his elevation to federal employee status suggested another event of significance to the community that had occurred during the lull following the Spanish-American War. The situation arose when the position of deputy collector of internal revenue for the Port of Tampa came open in 1898. The McKinley administration, casting about for the right man to fill the slot, turned to one of Florida’s most distinguished African-Americans, Joseph Newman Clinton. The job carried immense prestige locally, added to which the new man, Clinton, reported only to another black man, Joseph E. Lee of Jacksonville, who served as collector of internal revenue for Florida.

Clinton’s presence, even absent his title, lent prestige to the community. A son of AMEZ bishop Joseph Jackson Clinton, Henry had graduated from Lincoln University before relocating to Florida, in the mid-1870s, to teach at Gainesville. Quickly delving into Republican politics, he sat in the Florida House of Representatives during its 1885 session and also occupied numerous local political offices in Alachua County. An
inspector of customs at Pensacola by 1889, he embraced the AMEZ ministry and had occupied the role of presiding elder by 1892. Incidentally, Clinton fathered Tampa’s future musical great “Red” Clinton.

Clinton’s tenure as deputy collector at Tampa did not represent a first for African-Americans – Henry W. Harmon and Thomas McKnight both had held the job in the 1870s – but it did serve as a precedent for the prestigious arrival a few years later of Henry Wilkins Chandler. Chandler, a Maine native, university graduate, teacher, and lawyer, also had established a home in Florida in the mid-1870s (in Chandler’s case at Ocala). A Republican activist as well, Chandler adroitly served in numerous local offices and in the Florida Senate, before running in 1888 as the Republican nominee for secretary of state. In 1908, his eyes turned to Tampa where the position of inspector of customs awaited him. He occupied the position until terminated, as was Clinton, by Woodrow Wilson’s administration in 1913.

It turned out that the Tampa community urgently required the political skills possessed by such former officeholders. In the aftermath of the Spanish-American War riot, race relations had remained sensitive at best. This was demonstrated in mid-1899 when editor M.J. Christopher of the Union Labor Recorder was murdered by a white policeman. Joseph N. Clinton helped to lead the resulting protests, while five thousand individuals tried to attend Christopher’s funeral at the Ebenezer Baptist Church. Ugly events followed, leading up to 1903, when one black youth was castrated by whites for embracing a white girl. Several months later another man suffered the same fate before being lynched.

These conditions forced the community to utilize its potential political power to ensure a degree of adequate and fair law enforcement. As had been the case since the early 1870s, many residents turned for leadership to Thomas McKnight, about whom a word or two of background is in order. A Hernando County native (his family had been held in slavery on the Frierson plantation), Tom McKnight had relocated to Tampa within a year or two following the Civil War’s end. Immediately active in Republican Party affairs, he also captained the local black militia company organized in 1870, earning him the continuing title of Captain McKnight. Over the years he served in several significant United States government positions, while immersing himself in political and community affairs. Given changing fortunes as the years progressed, McKnight operated a steamboat and an oyster business, practiced law, served as a hack driver, and labored as a stevedore. Through it all, he remained highly visible as the principal champion of Tampa’s African-American population.

As the community’s traditional leader, McKnight faced serious challenges in those early years of the twentieth century. Social and political reverberations from local labor violence, such as that connected with Ybor City’s 1901 La Resistencia strike, complicated his task, as did white resentment of high black voter turnout. McKnight’s plan, under the circumstances, made sense. He simply backed candidates – especially mayoral candidates – with whom he could bargain regarding African-American needs, particularly as to law enforcement. It appeared as early as 1901 that he had achieved a major success. In those days, prior to the La Resistencia strike, and heightened local divisions, reformers, workers, socialists, and black Republicans could join to elect a mayor. In 1901, the candidate was Frank Wing. Wing, for his part, repaid the support by backing a plan to create an official Greater Tampa by merging East Tampa, West Tampa, and Fort Brooke with the city of Tampa. The initiative also eliminated poll tax payments as prerequisites for voting. The combined and enlarged electorate then would have insured political dominance by the coalition that had backed the mayor, conferring real influence on McKnight and other African-Americans. Much of the local white power structure, led by lawyer and businessman Peter O. Knight, reacted apoplectically. Those men convinced the Florida legislature to kill the measure that, Knight insisted, would wreck and bankrupt the city.

Following this setback and the 1901 La Resistencia strike, McKnight felt constrained to charter a more moderate course. In 1902, he and his Watchman Club associates – including T.C. Williams, Pierce L. Hamilton, Eugene Gill, H.M. Moore, and Richard McCloud – backed mayoral candidate James McKay Jr., a descendant of an old and very well-known family long seen as friendly to African-American and, sometimes,
Republican causes. McKay won. Yet, the mayor’s tenure of office disappointed. Unfortunately, the city police department—all white then for only a few years—seemingly acquiesced to the incidents of racial violence mentioned earlier. This and other factors led to McKay’s retirement from politics and to further searching by McKnight for the right man for the job.50

As he journeyed peripatetically through the mire of Tampa politics, McKnight’s clout and that of the black community mounted impressively. Over twice as many voters turned out in the 1902 election as had four years earlier. By 1904, 22.5 percent of all registered voters in the city were black, and African-American candidates for justice of the peace and city council felt sufficiently optimistic to announce for office. In 1906, the percentage reached nearly one-quarter of the electorate. Businessman William D. Walker seriously considered a run for the city council, and black organizations played a crucial role in electing William Frecker as mayor in what then was billed as “the most hotly contested [election] in the history of Tampa’s municipal politics.”51

Clara Fordham Frye, wife of barber Sherman Frye, had supplemented the family income since her arrival in Tampa six years earlier by working as a nurse, sometimes for the D.B. McKay family and, perhaps, on occasion . . . at McKnight’s hospital. In any event, the urgent need spurred Frye into taking patients into her Tampa Heights home. Quickly, Clara Frye’s “hospital” opened across from her home at 1615 Lamar Avenue. Once McKay became mayor in 1910, Frye received his support, and her hospital emerged as the African-American community’s principal health care facility.

The crest came in 1908, but political disaster followed closely behind. McKnight’s health had begun to fail by then, but others had emerged to fill the leadership vacuum. John R. Hall stood among them, but so, too, did ministers D.A. Perrin, J.L. Moore, and S.J. Johnson, attorney Charles H. Alston, longtime resident James Hamilton, and others. They felt particularly emboldened because, although Mayor Frecker had disappointed them in many respects, he had carried through on a promise to annex Fort Brooke and its black voters into the city. Now, the Negro Protective League showered its support upon McKnight’s old favorite Frank Wing, receiving in return Wing’s commitment, in the words of University of Tampa political historian Robert Kerstein, “that he would not appoint a chief of police who was unsatisfactory to Tampa’s Negro population.” In June, Wing bested Frecker in an election at which voters cast more than four thousand ballots. Meanwhile, lawyer Zachariah D. Green nearly made the race for municipal judge, losing his place on the ballot only after considerable maneuvering on the part of white officials.52

All of this proved far too much for many white businessmen and civic leaders, a fact that produced dire consequences for African-Americans. Led by Donald B. McKay, a nephew of Mayor James McKay Jr., many white leaders organized themselves in August 1908 as the White Municipal Party. As one newspaper put it, they feared that the “purchasable negro vote” would control future elections. Subsequently, their party announced its intention to “prevent the future operation of the Negro vote as a balance of power in municipal elections.” Historian Pam Iorio explained the results. “From that beginning,” she observed, “a primary system for Tampa city elections was designed with the White Municipal Party as the only participating party.” At the 1910 election, with black voters essentially excluded from the meaningful portion of the election contest, McKay narrowly defeated Frecker for mayor and launched himself upon decades of local political power.53

The virtual elimination of African-Americans from political influence at Tampa coincided with growing social rigidity stemming from the spread of legally enforced Jim Crow racial discrimination. This problem had surfaced quite visibly in 1904 and 1905 with the Tampa Electric Company’s off-and-on attempts to segregate riders on its streetcars. Resistance to the attempts came immediately and loudly. One public incident occurred when a white man
complained to a black woman passenger that she was seated improperly. "The female African resented the remark of Mr. [Theodore] Kennedy and began pouring out a torrent of abuse at him and the white people in general," the Tampa Morning Tribune related. "She told him she was as good as he was," the report added, "that the company gave her as much right on the cars as the 'white trash' and that she wouldn't allow any 'cow-faced cracker' to throw off on her." Kennedy then struck the woman, after which both parties were arrested. A police court judge sentenced the woman to pay a $2.50 fine, but doubled the amount for Kennedy, insisting that "no language, under the law, authorized a blow." The Tribune warned, "The decision . . . was taken as a great vindication by the Negroes . . . and will undoubtedly lead to further and probably more serious trouble."54

Nonetheless, Tampa Electric Company backed off its new policy in 1904, thanks to the resistance, but state mandates the following year required separation on streetcars. Interestingly, Peter O. Knight cautioned the company about enforcement. "Their money is as good as ours," he argued, "and we must be careful and not have any boycott of our lines here, which may be precipitated by indiscreet action upon the part of the conductors." Nancy A. Hewitt studied what then occurred. "In the long run," she concluded, "the difficulties of separating out Black and white riders, given the large and militant Cuban population, may have forced Tampa Electric Company to institute a more flexible policy of enforcement in Tampa, lessening the sting of Jim Crow for Blacks as well as Latins."55

Compromises such as Tampa Electric Company's may have marked everyday life in many instances, but the reality of Jim Crow persisted as leaders strove to discover some way for the community to protect and enhance itself while ministering to its own unfulfilled needs. As far as ministering to its needs was concerned, fraternal and masonic lodges, insurance companies such as Jacksonville's black-owned Afro-American Industrial Insurance Company, and mutual benefit associations offered some protection and comfort. Local white officeholders in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had proved especially reluctant, though, to provide health-care services even for whites. Their interest in services for blacks ran even cooler.56

Once more Thomas McKnight came forth to offer leadership in the years of the century's turn, this time for better health care and what later generations would refer to as social security. His labors in that regard had commenced in late 1899, so that by January 1900 a newspaper could report, "The hospital and orphan home for the old folks and orphan children, which is being erected in Tampa, is advancing, and when finished will be a credit to the race and an honor to President T.A. McKnight." The item added, "He is the man for the position." Donald B. McKay recalled in later years that McKnight "erected a three-story building on Nebraska Avenue (still standing [as of 1950]) as a home for aged indigent Negroes."57

McKnight sought funding for the combination hospital, orphanage, and old folks home wherever he could find it. Iola Brumick recalled that many of those who earlier had worked with McKnight to raise funds to rebuild Harlem Academy now aided the new cause. McKnight also took advantage of his political pull to secure at least minimal funding from the city and county. Minutes reveal that, shortly after each election, McKnight petitioned for additional assistance. By 1906, he hoped to erect a new and larger facility "for the care of the aged, decrepit, and the orphans of the colored people." White city council members, increasingly resentful of any requests for support from the black community, nonetheless considered the petition even though they
refused to permit McKnight to appear before them. By early 1907, though, McKnight's deteriorating health and a cutoff of city and county funds spelled the effort's end. "I ran a colored people's hospital for the poor people, which I ran for over five years," McKnight recorded in 1911, "and I sold it about five years ago."

Closure of McKnight's facility left the ever-growing community in a dilemma of deadly dimensions. Even some whites expressed concern. Meanwhile, in May 1907, the Union League Association launched a fundraising campaign for a "hospital and home to relieve the sick and poor." Events soon overtook the initiative. Clara Fordham Frye, wife of barber Sherman Frye, had supplemented the family income since her arrival in Tampa six years earlier by working as a nurse, sometimes for the D.B. McKay family and, perhaps, on occasion—and the record is not clear here—at McKnight's hospital. In any event, the urgent need spurred Frye into taking patients into her Tampa Heights home. Quickly, Clara Frye's "hospital" opened across from her home at 1615 Lamar Avenue. Once McKay became mayor in 1910, Frye received his support, and her hospital emerged as the African-American community's principal health care facility.

The health care crisis vividly pointed out the community's unmet and growing needs as the twentieth century entered its second decade. Those needs clearly required attention, since the opening of Tampa as a deep-water port in 1908-1909 fueled city expansion and promised to swell the African-American community. Sadly, Thomas McKnight's years-long decline, and subsequent death in 1912, created a void, as mentioned earlier, that required others to step forward. As it turned out, two overlapping groups particularly aided in providing the new men and new ideas suited for and required by the new century. They were the Odd Fellows and the federal workforce.

The International Order of Odd Fellows had enjoyed a long history within the community. Founded in 1884, Land of Flowers Lodge No. 2505 listed many of Tampa's leading black ministers, businessmen, and government employees on its rolls or, as one member put it, the lodge encompassed "a large number of our best colored people." The order's national grand secretary explained its principles in 1899. "Odd Fellowship demands the practice of benevolence and charity," C.H. Brooks declared, "and in order to impress these duties upon the mind and furnish incentives to action in those moments of relaxation to which all men are subject, it has instituted solemn ceremonies, ordained frequent meetings, and formed a language of signs—all designed to produce a habit of benevolence, and by educating the moral faculties, promote the well-being of society." Brooks added, "The pecuniary contributions of the members... constitute a fund for the exclusive purpose of relieving the sick, burying the dead, educating the orphan, and protecting and assisting the widow." Associated closely with the lodge in its early years were Joseph A. Walker, William D. Walker, George A. Sheehy, Lee R. Thomas, I.H.N. Smith, and E.M. Roberts.

From about 1889, the lodge's headquarters offered the African-American community a center for activism and an unofficial "city hall." Rebuilt on a grander scale in the early 1900s at the corner of Central Avenue and Scott Street, the edifice represented, according to one observer, "the largest Negro-owned building south of Jacksonville." By then the headquarters building served two lodges, and their combined memberships intended it to be imposing in its grandeur. "The labor was largely donated by members of the lodge," Violet B. Muse recorded, "who were eager to create a monument in the structure." From the new building's doors in 1905, Odd Fellows state convention delegates marched on Tampa's city hall to protest streetcar segregation, with local officers urging voters to pay their poll taxes and vote. This act merely highlighted the lodges' commitment.

By the time the new Odd Fellows hall had reached completion, Tampa's circle of black federal employees had begun to expand. Joseph N. Clinton found positions within the treasury department and customs service for individuals of promise such as Andrew J. Ferrell, while in 1902, the administration of President Theodore Roosevelt allowed postal employment for persons passing a civil service examination. Edwin J. Moore made it on the first try that year, with others to follow.

Meanwhile, the upper strata of Tampa's black society, just the people who would have joined the Odd Fellows or held a
federal position, enjoyed increasing affluence as a result of their labors and investments. One AME Church official found herself surprised by the degree of affluence during a 1909 visit. “The colored people own beautiful homes in this city,” she informed readers of the church’s national magazine, “and may be found in all walks of life.” Marie Carter continued: “I was really entertained in the magnificent home of Mr. and Mrs. W.G. Gordon, 610 Kay St. . . . Mr. Gordon, my kind host, owns and controls a large grocery store and meat market, sending out groceries to all parts of Tampa.”

Large success had come to at least a few, as the story of Rachel Williams and her family illustrates. Widowed, but with some property, five children, and a willingness “to work indefatigably for their welfare and education,” she had relocated from Madison, Florida, to Tampa in the early 1900s. In 1906, with her help, son J. Andrew Williams founded Williams Cigar Company at 1111 Scott Street. Five years later the concern shipped product “all over the United States” and claimed to be “the largest Afro-American cigar company in existence.” When Rachel Williams passed away in 1915, son David Hendricks was “proprietor of the popular ice cream and confectionary store of Central avenue,” son Robert L. Williams was “proprietor of the Scott Street Department Store,” son William F. Williams was “the most trusted cigar maker of Boltz-Clymer Co., a white concern”; and son Joshua Williams also worked as a cigar maker. “Her sons are among the most prominent citizens of Tampa,” her obituary proclaimed.

Not to stray too far from the subject, but Rachel Williams’s personal achievements do raise a significant point. Women labored mightily at many occupations, including running substantial businesses. In 1904, Marie Carter discovered that fact, as well, on one of her visits to Tampa. “I was well cared for at the home of Mrs. Mattie Lee, widow of Mr. William Lee, who owned one of the largest livery, feed and sale stables [and] undertaking and embalming [concerns] in this city,” she observed. “His widow is running the business [now],” Carter concluded, “with great success.”

A growing and increasingly affluent middle class, better educational grounding and opportunities, a framework for networking and organization, and mounting community problems combined to produce a series of organizations and associations not directly intended as political bodies but rather dedicated to improvement of race and living conditions in practical and mostly nonpolitical ways.

The ideology that lay behind many of these practical efforts stemmed directly from Booker T. Washington’s philosophy. The famed educator and race spokesman long had enjoyed popularity at Tampa. In 1895, for example, Mathew McDuffie, rector of St. James Episcopal Church, had led a delegation to Atlanta to hear Washington deliver the Cotton States Exposition speech that proclaimed his great “Atlanta Compromise.” Tampans quickly had supported the Florida Negro Business League following its 1906 establishment, and the previous year Thomas McKnight, D.H. Perrin, Thomas B. Walker, R.D. Lewis, J.L. Moore, and G.K. Ford had backed inviting Washington to speak at the state fair. That dream saw its realization in 1912, when Washington finally addressed eager Tampans. “There is no greater enemy to the state today, be he white or black,” he informed them following postman George S. Middleton’s introduction, than the man who would spend his time and energy in stirring up racial strife.” Afterward, the party adjourned for a “delicious Spanish supper” before its distinguished members enjoyed some of J. Andrew Williams’s fine cigars.

A hint of the future direction of these groups and associations surfaced in early 1909 when local backers organized a Negro State Fair Association at Beulah Baptist Church. Intended to reach throughout the state, the association aimed to offer African-Americans “a chance to show and demonstrate his work and ability to the world.” Robert W. Saunders Sr., whose grandmother Marion Rogers participated in the planning, related her comments that the association’s request for a “Negro Day” at the state fair by no means indicated acceptance of Jim Crow restrictions. “They didn’t want a segregated department,” he remembered, “but used it to show off black accomplishments.” Officers of the association included postman Middleton, Dr. J.B. Green, attorney Charles H. Alston, undertaker C.W. Patterson, and customs inspector A.J. Ferrell.

The next year a similar organization coalesced based upon a small group of postal
workers. They intended to promote literary discussion and presentations, as well as to encourage scholarship. Naming themselves the Paul Laurence Dunbar Literary Society, the group became a sounding board for community concerns and for planning to address those concerns, an eventuality that echoed the experience in numerous other urban communities in the South. Leaders such as Joseph N. Clinton and Henry W. Chandler supported and counseled the gatherings. Mayor D.B. McKay accepted the need to address them as did Young Men's Christian Association executive J.M. Graham.

In the years that followed its creation, and among other projects, the activist group sponsored fund raisers that permitted establishment of a library for the Harlem Academy. Members as of 1915 included Middleton, Joseph McCray, William J. Walker, Daniel Webster Perkins, F.S. Perdoma, J.T. King, Wade Perrin, A.J. Graham, H.F. Lester, and H.W. Daniel.

Tampa women acted in a similar vein, as also had their counterparts in many other southern cities. In February 1912, for instance, the Phyllis Wheatley Art Club organized “to do some new and effective work along the line of uplift work.” Particularly, its members proposed to “promote interest in Negro art and literature and to assist in the uplift of the mental, physical, and moral life of Negro womanhood in Tampa.” Club members entertained Mrs. Booker T. Washington when she visited in March 1913, opened an art school, endeavored to provide financial support for Clara Frye Hospital, and engaged in numerous other initiatives. Geraldine Williams served as their first president, with Rachel Williams, Mattie Norton, Addie Walker, and Charlotte Bryant active as well.

A number of similar clubs and circles followed in the art club's wake. Many formed within churches such as Beulah Baptist, Bethel Baptist, and St. Paul AME, but others stood alone. One of them deserves special mention. Just when the Harriet Tubman Mother's Club came into existence is not known nor are the names of its members. Descriptions of two of its projects have come to light. In March 1914, the group launched a campaign “whereby the Negro woman is to be taught how to keep her yard in first-class condition.” More importantly, and two months earlier, the club opened Tampa’s first African-American kindergarten. Located in the home of Sarah Powell Ferrell (Mrs. A.J. Ferrell), the enterprise was said in its formative stages to be “meeting with much success.”

When the kindergarten opened, a new men’s organization already had begun to establish itself as a major community force. Founded in 1912, by postman Edwin J. Moore, the Afro-American Civic League first vowed to “have the disreputable white-owned houses removed from the Negro section of the city” and to agitate for “a new high school and playground for our children.” The effort picked up support from the Tampa Tribune, which ran columns penned by Moore. Under the club’s auspices, Moore and A.J. Prince also began publishing in January 1915 a community magazine entitled The Afro-American Monthly. M.P. Chappelle, who was endeavoring in his spare time to charter a bank, served as business manager. Geraldine Williams edited the women’s department.

That year, in the late fall, one of the league's first dreams came true. The Hillsborough County High School for Colored
Students opened. “[It] is one of the finest structures of its kind in the state," Geraldine Williams recorded. “It was secured for the colored people through the agitation of the Afro-American Civic League, of which Prof. E.J. Moore was the founder.” She added, “Prof. P.B. Peters recently of Mississippi is the principal.”

Some credit probably also is due to the civic league for encouraging the publication of a new newspaper within the community. Numerous black-owned papers had graced Tampa since the mid-1880s, with the *Intelligencer* and the *Florida Recorder* reaching readers in the early 1910s. All had suspended publication, though, by 1915. To remedy the situation, AME minister Marcellus D. Potter, in April or early May, offered the first issue of the *Tampa Bulletin*, which would continue to inform local readers into the 1950s. By the end of its first decade of service, the *Bulletin* circulated six thousand copies per issue and was considered one of the ten best African-American newspapers published in the United States.

Another key community improvement organization, one tied directly to Dr. Washington and his National Negro Business League, made its appearance in 1914. Perhaps growing out of an investment club known as the Twenty Sons of Progress, the Negro Board of Trade first convened at the Odd Fellows Hall on March eleventh. W.H. Gordon spearheaded the group. “The plan is to unite the negroes of the city in various lines of business, together with the professional men of the negro race, in an organization working for the betterment of their business conditions,” he explained. Gordon added, “After a thorough investigation of the conditions of the city of Tampa, among the negroes, and knowing the good that a negro board of trade can do in alleviating these conditions, we have called the business and professional men of the city together.” Edwin J. Moore, Lee R. Thomas, Walter A. Armwood, Joseph N. Clinton, Dr. George P. Norton, Rev. S.A. Williams, A.W. White, J.J. Hendry, M.P. Chappelle, A.J. Ferrell, Edward McRae, C.W. Patterson, J. Andrew Williams, E.R. Rolf, D.A. Perrin, G.S. Middleton, R.L. Williams, A.E. Ashley, and A.J. Prince assisted.

These were heady times, with new and apparently major business concerns announcing themselves regularly. Walter Armwood’s Gem Drug Store at 1308 Central Avenue, to cite an example, offered black Tampans their first modern pharmacy. Dr. A.H. Attaway, former president of Edward Waters College, inaugurated a large grocery and meat market. Attorney Daniel W. Perkins hung out his shingle, while dentist Dr. Breland Brumick was seen “in our midst again.” Sisters Rowena and Carrie Perrin proved their sense of the times by welcoming customers to their new “$5, 10, and 25-cent store” in the Perrin Building on Central Avenue. Meanwhile, sixteen agents of the Afro-American Insurance Company circulated from its Tampa’s offices. At the “clean and classical” Maceo motion picture theater at Central and Emery, which had entertained ticket buyers since 1911, “Thursday afternoon matinee dances” now beguiled “the younger set.” The Tampa Colored Giants baseball team thrilled fans, as well, during games at Plant Park.

Construction and innovation appeared seemingly at every turn. To offer just a few examples, sanctuaries for St. Paul and Mt. Carmel AME Churches were rising from the ground. At Allen Temple AME Church beautiful new windows greeted worshippers, and Reverend Potter enjoyed the comforts of a new parsonage. Bethel Baptist, with over five hundred members, drew plans for a $30,000 structure “for various purposes.” St. Peter Claver’s chapel on Governor Street neared completion. Additionally, Mrs. Henry Clinton and Mrs. Maymie Rose, having subdivided their acreage at Sulphur Springs and in Seminole Heights, encouraged new home construction. While the hammers pounded, Blanche Armwood Perkins pursued innovation by implementing her famed domestic science program in the public schools. When Armwood could find the time, she and Inez Alston also helped to lead the Florida Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs.

Yet, a number of Tampans realized that business and prosperity for some masked the true problems of the day and proved willing to act upon the concerns in a direct fashion. Some of the impetus came from West Tampa. There in April 1915, the Reverend Charles S. Sturgis inquired how he could convert his chapter of the American Benevolent Association into a branch of the militant NAACP, an organization which then possessed little southern presence. Mail carrier H.E. Lester followed up in June, writing to W.E.B. DuBois and asking for
aid in organizing a branch, but an official who responded cautioned Lester not to move too quickly and advised only "local" affiliation. 78

Some additional part of the impetus may have derived from east of the Hillsborough River, although connections with West Tampa through cigar makers such as James W. Rogers and his wife Marion Rogers may have been involved. The focal group for reform grew from the congregation of St. James Episcopal Church, whose West Indian (especially Bahamian) members were well known for their insistence on greater protection of the law. They organized in 1914 the St. George British Overseas Club of Tampa to provide themselves with a network and mutual support. The club’s numerous activities for member families were presided over by A.J. Williamson, with H.H. Lightborn, G.W. Adderly, Miss L.V. Hall, and Mrs. Gertrude Adderly backing him. 79

It took until 1917 for the NAACP to accede to the 1915 wishes of Tampans, and that event came only after Florida native James Weldon Johnson became the organization’s first full-time field secretary. Johnson returned to Florida early in 1917, visited Tampa, and granted a charter signed by Daniel W. Perkins, president; Dr. Jacob White, vice president; Mrs. Christina Johnson Meacham, secretary, and Joseph N. Clinton, treasurer. Soon, attorney Perkins had gathered 107 members around him, and NAACP secretary Roy Nash had wired, “Heartiest Congratulations. You’ve broken the record for new branches.” 80

The history of Tampa’s African-American community from 1891 to 1916 obviously involves a story far more complex than the one communicated in these pages. Still, the story presented here seems to validate well Professor David Jackson’s thesis of pre-World War One community building and to illustrate vividly that the 1920s Raper Report addressed a community far changed from the one that graced Tampa just a decade earlier. As additional information comes to light, perhaps the lives and events that helped to make Tampa the great and diverse city that it has become can be told with even greater clarity.

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ENDNOTES

The authors appreciate the kind assistance of Professor David H. Jackson, Jr., Department of History and Political Science, Florida A&M University, who read the manuscript and improved it with numerous helpful comments and suggestions.

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17. Regarding Tampa’s African-American community as of 1891 and its development to that point, see Larry Eugene Rivers and Canter Brown, Jr., “Rejoining in their Freedom,” The Development of Tampa’s African-American Community in the Post-Civil


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43. Brady, Things Remembered, 11; Brown and Brown, Family Records, 78-81.

44. Jacksonville Florida Times-Union & Citizens, November 9, 1898.


49. Ibid., 168-70; Ingalls, Urban Vigilantes, 79; Tampa Morning Tribune, May 17, 1901; Robert Kerstein, Politics and Growth in Twentieth-Century Tampa


54. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 16, 21, July 12, 20, 1904.


58. *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, October 29, 1950; *Tampa Weekly Tribune*, February 6, December 4, 1902; City of Tampa City Council Minutes, Book 6, 408, 428, Book 7, 42, 162, 168, 182, 184, 194, 204, City of Tampa Archives, Tampa; Hillsborough County Commission Minutes, Book H, 538, Book I, 24, Hillsborough County Records Center, Tampa; Thomas McKnight affidavit, May 16, 1911, Aaron Bryant military pension record, Veteran's Administration Records, Record Group 15, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


