

**WITHOUT STRUGGLE THERE IS NO PROGRESS:  
AN ETHNOHISTORIC STUDY OF  
ITHACA, NEW YORK'S AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY**

**A Thesis**

**Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Cornell University**

**in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of  
Master of Professional Studies**

**by**

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**January 1994**

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## ABSTRACT

This is a social history of African Americans in Ithaca. It gives an account of how and why African Americans came to Ithaca and, after they settled, how they created and sustained diverse cultural institutions. One of the most notable institutions is the South Side Community Center. By closely examining the Center's evolution, decline, and giving suggestions towards its rejuvenation one gains further knowledge of the cultural dynamics within Ithaca's African American community.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The author was born in Boston and raised in Newton, Massachusetts. The youngest of Gerald and Millicent Hill's three children, she attended Fisk University and Oberlin College. After receiving her B.A. from Oberlin College, in Black Studies, she ventured to Ithaca, New York to earn her M.P.S. Degree from the Africana Studies and Research Center. She plans to pursue a doctorate in African American Anthropology.

To Millicent Norris Hill: my mother, advisor, and friend. Thank you for paving the way and helping me strive for my goals.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to give thanks and praise to god who led me through this project. I am indebted to my family, Dr. William Cross, Dr. Bernd Lambert, Dr. Robert Ascher, and Dr. Robert Harris for their patience, guidance, and constructive criticism. I would also like to thank the community residents who guided my project : Mrs. Ruth Mann, Mrs. Lucy Brown, Mrs. Anita Reed, Mrs. Dorothy Rollins, and Mrs. June Wall Williams. Thank you for sharing your memories and thoughts, I am truly grateful.

Special thanks to Mr. Tom Weissinger and the Africana Studies and Research Center Library staff for appropriately housing the project's archives. I appreciate the financial assistance from Dr. Locksley Edmonson, Director of the Africana Studies and Research Center, for allocating departmental funds toward Camp Imani. Thanks to Mr. Ken Glover, former Chair of the Board of Directors at the South Side Community Center, and Mr. David Smith, Director of Community Relations at the Tompkins County United Way, for the use of their South Side Community Center archives. I also appreciate the help of the South Side Community Center staff, their aid was invaluable.

Last but hardly least, I would like to thank my friends: Egypt Brown, Rhea Combs, Lisa Glymph, Angela Odoms, Stacy Smith, and Tracy Truitt, your support was immeasurable.

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## **Chapter One Introduction**

### **Purpose**

My thesis documents the origins, formative years, and contemporary significance of the South Side Community Center to African Americans in Ithaca, New York.<sup>1</sup> The creation and maintenance of the South Side Community Center represent episodes of community determination. This project analyzes social movements that paved the way for the South Side Community Center to exist and discusses its relationship with the community. The thesis is divided into four parts: the beginnings of the Black Ithacan community (1833-1920); the formative years of the South Side Community Center (1920-1950); and from heyday to chaos (1950 to 1992); summarizing the logic beyond the chaos.<sup>1b</sup> Examining the historical and contemporary relevance of the South Side Community Center allows us to analyze the history of African Americans in Ithaca along a social continuum. Understanding one community institution allows us one lens to view the whole community.

### **Rationale**

I began going to the Center in the fall of 1991 shortly after I matriculated at Cornell. I volunteered as a Girl Scout leader for the only area African American troop. Our troop met at the South Side Community Center twice a month, and usually there was a problem with heating or gaining access to the building. Instead of criticizing the institution, I asked community residents two main questions: "why do these problems persist?" and "what was the Center like before these problems developed?" They gave me their opinions and

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<sup>1</sup> The term African American is used instead of Black or Negro to give an accurate nation state context to people of African descent in the United States.

<sup>1b</sup> The term Black Ithacan is used by elder members of the African American Ithacan community .

positive reflections. They described the Center as an important place and connected its decline to the downturn of the whole community. A plethora of social ills -- drug abuse, underemployment, police brutality, and domestic violence have chiseled away community harmony. After hearing the diverse accounts and observing the decay first hand, I decided to use my thesis project as a medium to explore how the South Side Community Center began, as a cornerstones of the community, grew, and slowly faded in importance to African American Ithacans.

### **Methodology**

While conducting this study, I have used ethnographic techniques common in urban anthropology. Conducting interviews and volunteering at the South Side Community Center enabled me to learn about African American Ithacan history and the contemporary situation from those who have lived it. Volunteering was a natural way to understand how the Center addresses the diverse issues facing the neighborhood it services. I volunteered for four months, starting in May of 1992. Volunteering meant that I did any job needed. I assumed the Directorship of Camp Imani (the South Side Community Center's culturally relevant day camp) because I was the only person who had seen it through from its inception. That was the hardest, yet one of the most enjoyable, parts of understanding the South Side Community Center. On the other hand, finding people to talk to about the history and the contemporary situation was easy. Many people had opinions and were willing to share them with me.

My interviewing experience was fashioned in the spirit of African oral tradition; I became a student of the individuals I spoke with. I attempted to

understand the joy and pain within their testimonies. After meeting with numerous individuals, I selected a few to guide me through my study. I found the most support in five African American women from Ithaca. They shared many memories and insights with me.

One problem I found was that some community members feel exploited by the academic pursuits of college students. In the early 1980s there was one incident when a few African American Ph.D. candidates were collaborating with some community members on a history of St. James A.M.E. Zion Church. Miscommunication occurred, and some materials were lent but never returned.<sup>2</sup> When I was conducting my interviews, I made it very clear that the items I looked at or borrowed would be returned. Basically, I had to eliminate my desire to receive first-hand artifacts (scrapbooks and pictures). When they were given to me willingly, I was thankful. Other than that I did not ask for them.

I used a variety of written materials as secondary sources, such as the materials at the Africana Studies and Research Center Library, De Witt Historical Society, The Ithaca Journal, Tompkins County United Way, and other Cornell University Libraries. Mr. Ken Glover, former Chairperson of the South Side Community Center Board of Directors, lent his South Side archives. I also employed published works pertaining to Ithaca's history and contemporary situation. Using many sources aided me in gathering information about African American Ithacans.

### **Chapter Review**

This thesis divides into four chapters. Chapter Two focuses on the early years (1833-1920) of the African American community. In this period, African Americans came to Ithaca for three reasons: some were enslaved, others

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<sup>2</sup> Betty Burke, personal interview, 14 Sept. 1992.

settled in Tompkins County after they escaped from slavery, and a few were free from birth and came here for advanced opportunities. The early organizations formed by community members reflected their diverse interests. An Underground Railroad station, churches, and social clubs were the organizational strings that tied the early African American community together. The ways in which initial African American Ithacans created organizations and laid the foundation for a community is the focus of this chapter.

Chapter Three (1920-1950) concentrates on the creation and formative years of the South Side Community Center. One women's group thought the community was too dispersed. Understanding that there were already ethnically oriented community centers in Ithaca, the women of the Francis Harper Woman's Club campaigned to start an African American community center.<sup>2b</sup> The initial aim was to bring African American Ithacans together. A secondary objective was to give the community youth a safe place to go and learn about themselves. This chapter is concerned with how the South Side Community Center began and maintained itself.

Chapter Four (1967-1992) is an overview of the years between the formative and the contemporary. The Center shifted from being a community-based organization to an agency struggling to serve a community that had more demands than it could service. No longer was the South Side Community Center the only place community members brought their activities and concerns; instead community members created alternative organizations or attended City run institutions in greater numbers. Without traditional support all aspects of the Center were permeated with mismanagement and

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<sup>2b</sup> Francis Harper was a 19th Century African American poet/activist.

chaos. This chapter also summarizes a logic behind the chaos and suggests solutions.

## Chapter Two The Beginnings of the Black Ithacan Community (1833-1920)

### Introduction:

Africans have been in this region since before Ithaca was Ithaca. Africans helped settle Tompkins County.<sup>1</sup> Most enslaved Africans were brought to Upstate New York from Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina; the population in Tompkins County remained under one hundred until the late 1820s. "The largest number of African Americans settled in the county between 1802 and 1810 as slaves and between 1820 and 1850 as runaways from the South".<sup>2</sup> After July 4, 1827, when New York State abolished slavery, many African Americans in upstate New York migrated to towns and cities that were perceived to have job opportunities and supportive communities. Tompkins County was a growing area, and Africans found a market for their labor.

The initial African American Ithacan community was created by ex-enslaved and free African Americans, who were artisans, crafts people, and day laborers. An A.M.E. church grew from this community. By the 1850s, there was a population spurt. These newcomers established another church and more civic groups. The majority of the newcomers were also from the South, coming via the Underground Railroad. Most did not have the same training as their predecessors.

By the late nineteenth century, African Americans created a vibrant community. Skilled and unskilled, southern and northern, formerly free or ex-

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<sup>1</sup> Tompkins County is north-west of Binghamton and south-west of Syracuse.

<sup>2</sup> Tendai Mutunhu, "Tompkins County: An Underground Railroad transit in Central New York" Afro-Americans in New York Life and History 3 (1979) 15.

enslaved families living, worshipping, working, and sharing similar backgrounds allowed a cohesive community to start.

This chapter examines how African Americans in Tompkins County established and sustained their livelihood. Founding churches, creating an underground railroad station, mobilizing around the Civil War, and developing county wide emancipation celebrations enabled them to build more bases for a community.

### **Initial African American Settlers:**

Five of the earliest African Americans in Tompkins County were Richard Loomis, Prince de Plessis, Peter Wheeler, and Peter and Phyllis Webb. In, 1788, Richard Loomis was brought to what is now Ithaca from Virginia by his owner, Robert McDowell. Loomis is the first recorded African American in Ithaca. He lived with his owners near the present junction of Seneca and Cayuga Streets, in what is now downtown Ithaca.<sup>3</sup> Prince de Plessis, a free African American and veteran of the Revolutionary War, came to Tompkins County in 1796.<sup>3b</sup> Later he became a farmer in Danby.<sup>4</sup>

Peter Wheeler was another early African American in Tompkins County. Born on January 1, 1789 at little Egg Harbor, a parish of Tuckertown, New Jersey, he told his story in 1839 to Charles Mulks, a historian from the town of Caroline a few miles away from Ithaca. Wheeler was taken from New Jersey to New York State on May 9, 1800. Gideon Morehouse paid \$110.00 for him. Wheeler and Morehouse began farming once they reached Henry Ludlow's house in Milton Township.<sup>5</sup> There were many white people in the area who

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<sup>3</sup>Carol U Sisler, Margaret Hobbie, and Jane M. Dieckmann, eds. Ithaca's Neighborhoods: The Rhine, the Hill, and the Goose Pasture. (De Witt Historical Society,) 25-39.

<sup>3b</sup>Tendai Mutunhu, "Tompkins County: an Underground Railroad Transit in Central New York" Afro-Americans in New York Life and History. 3 (1979) 15.

<sup>4</sup>Danby is ten miles south of Ithaca.

<sup>5</sup>Ludowville is a neighboring town of Ithaca.



did not agree with slavery. A few took the opportunity to encourage Peter to escape as is documented in Mulk's transcripts:

Squire Whittlesey, who lived six miles away, where I used to run errands, said to me one day, 'Peter, can I put any confidence in you?' 'Yes, sir' I said, 'You needn't be afraid of me.' 'Well,' he said, 'you're free by law and I advise you to run: but wait awhile and don't run 'til you can make sure it will work and now mind you, don't go away and tell anybody.'

And finally, almost everybody said, 'Run, Pete, Why don't you run?' But I think to myself, if I run and don't make out, it would be better for me not to run at all, so I'll wait. When I run, I'll run for certain. There weren't many slaves in that region, but a good many colored folks lived there, and some of them were pretty decent folks too.

When my master threatened to kill me with a rifle, and I fought back, I made a vow: I swore to Almighty God that the first time I got a chance, I'd clear from his reach, and prayed to the God of Freedom to help me get free.

My life became better, but I still considered myself a slave, and that galled my feelin's. I determined I'd be free or die in the cause: for you see, by this time I'd learned more of the rights of human nature, and I felt that I was a man.

Well, the big eclipse, as they called it, came on the 16th of June, 1806. This eclipse happened on Tuesday, and the next Sunday, I started and determined that if ever I went back to Gideon Morehouse's, I'd go a dead man.

Now I felt that I was really free, although I knew that Morehouse was lurking after me. After this I called no man master, but I knew how to treat my betters. I now began to feel somethin' like a man, and the dignity of a human being to creep over me, and I enjoyed my liberty when I got it, I can tell you.

I didn't go around sneakin' and spirit-broken as I know every man must if he's a slave; but oh! I couldn't help standin' up straight, after I was free. Oh! What a glorious feelin' that is! And Oh! How I pitied my poor brethren and sisters that were in chains.<sup>6</sup>

In 1806, Wheeler escaped after beating his master, which confined Morehouse to bed for two weeks.<sup>7</sup> The exact location where Peter Wheeler settled after he gained his freedom is unknown.

Another early African American in Tompkins County was Peter Webb. Webb chose to settle in Tompkins County after he earned his freedom. Born in Mecklenburg County, Virginia in 1792, Webb was brought to Tompkins

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<sup>6</sup> Tendai Mutunhu, "Tompkins County: An Underground Railroad transit in Central New York" Afro-Americans in New York Life and History 3 (1979)

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

County in 1805 by his owner, John L. Speed. Allowed to hire out his skills, Webb labored as a mill hand and a hired hand on area farms. In December of 1818, Webb was manumitted after paying \$384. Charles F. Mulks documented that Webb and his owner had a cordial relationship. Mr. Speed frequently visited the Webb household. Peter Webb had no problem discussing his relationship to his previous owner with others. There is an instance where Webb and Speed were present at the same abolition and antislavery meeting in Cortland, New York, where Mr. Speed made some remarks in which he favored gradual abolition. He said he had once been a slaveholder and had freed his own slaves. Webb rose and remarked that he had formerly been one of Mr. Speed's slaves and that Mr. Speed had given him his freedom, but not until he paid for it and earned the money with his own hands. Webb's remarks took Speed by surprise. There were no documented consequences for the remarks.<sup>8</sup>

One year after his manumission, Peter Webb married Phyllis in a legal ceremony in Brooktondale, New York. Born in 1794, Phyllis Webb was also from Virginia, where she was owned by General Harper. Sydney Gallwey, a noted African American Ithacan historian, states that Phyllis gained her freedom because her owner kept her in New York State longer than the six-month limit. This particular state law allowed a slave owner to bring his property to New York and take him out, if he did so within six months. Otherwise, the slave became free.<sup>9</sup>

The Webbs were farmers in Caroline. They built a log cabin near the Speed homestead. By 1825 the couple had ten acres, two heads of cattle, one horse, twenty sheep, and two hogs. Peter Webb paid taxes, which gave

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Sydney Gallwey, "Peter Webb: Slave-Freeman-Citizen of Tompkins County New York." De Witt Historical Society of Tompkins County, Inc. Black History Archives.(1960) :12.

him the right to vote. They produced eleven children, some of whom died early in life. Frederick M., James, John H., and Sarah are the four that survived.

### **The Beginnings of St. James A.M.E. Zion Church**

The Webb family sought community ties. In their search they found a small number of African Americans in Ithaca, and journeyed weekly to worship with them. They had originally worshipped with a Methodist Episcopal Church that was strictly segregated. The congregation designated seating for its African members. In protest against the segregated seating the group began to worship at Rev. Henry Johnson's home on the corner of West Green and South Geneva Streets. The Reverend Thomas James, from Conajoharie, New York, had once been enslaved and had established a few African Methodist Episcopal churches in central New York. He came to Ithaca and connected with the faithful parishioners. This group raised the five dollars that was necessary to purchase lot 76 from Richard Varck De Witt. After the purchase, the Webb family and seventeen other African Americans decided to permanently break ties with the Ithaca Methodist congregation. St. James African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church grew from this congregation. Officially founded on December 15, 1833, St. James is the oldest church structure in Ithaca. The one story building was erected in the heart of the African American settlement on Wheat Street.<sup>10</sup>

As a founding family of St. James African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Webbs were a part of the community network that supported the Underground Railroad, initiated the Ebony political party (which supported

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<sup>10</sup>Wheat street was renamed Cleveland Avenue in the early part of the twentieth century. Local historian Carol Kammen has researched the name change and connected it to the Cleveland presidency. Carol Kammen, personal interview, May 1993.

John Quincy Adams, the sixth president),<sup>11</sup> and hosted events with other African American congregations in Oswego and Elmira, New York. In 1848, Frederick Douglass addressed a church sponsored anti-slavery meeting at Ithaca's Village Hall.<sup>12</sup>

The small congregation was made up of ex-enslaved and freeborn Africans. In 1830 there were one hundred and twelve Africans in Ithaca, and by 1840 one hundred and thirty-six. A majority belonged to St. James. Most of the members of the church were a part of Ithaca's developing industries, such as boatmaking; coach and wagon making; glass and metal factories; machine shops; harness and saddlemaking; distilleries; and grist, saw, and textile mills.<sup>13</sup> Other jobs were as cooks, cleaners, farm hands, ditch diggers, road construction workers, woodcutters for the saw mills, and workers on the Ithaca-Owego Railroad.<sup>14</sup>

The artisans and craftsmen were able to acquire posts as brickmakers, blacksmiths, builders, barrel makers, carpenters, cabinet makers, dressmakers, painters, plasterers, printers, tanners, seamstresses, shoemakers, tailors, upholsterers, toolmakers, and woodcarvers.<sup>15</sup> These skills enabled some African Americans to become self employed.

Many put their skills to use inside and outside the church. Once the church was built, officers were elected. Eight of the founders were elected trustees: Francis Collins, John Wilkins, Thomas Jackson, John Shaw, James Collins, Davis R. Williams, James W. Lewis, and William Augustus. Little is

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<sup>11</sup> Carol Kammen, The Peopling of Tompkins County: A Social History. (Interlaken :Heart of the Lake Publishing, 1985) Pp. 121-122.

<sup>12</sup> Carol Kammen, "Creating a Church for themselves: in 1830, Ithaca's Black Methodist Episcopal formed a Separate Church," Ithaca Journal, 22 Feb. 1992, sec. B: 12.

<sup>13</sup> Tendai Mutunhu, "Tompkins County: An Underground Railroad transit in Central New York" Afro-Americans in New York Life and History 3 (1979) 25.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Tendai Mutunhu, "Tompkins County: An Underground Railroad transit in Central New York" Afro-Americans in New York Life and History 3 (1979) 26.

known about these men; the only data that could be found concerned Francis and James Collins, who were father and son.

Francis maintained a seven acre farm within the confines of Ithaca where he owned two heads of cattle, five horses, and four hogs. Seven people lived in his household, and two of the males were eligible to vote. By 1870 the homestead was worth \$800. He and his wife Diana were raised in New York State and were illiterate. By the 1870 census no children were living with them, so it is very likely that their children moved off the farm to pursue other occupations.<sup>15b</sup>

Other church members had similar backgrounds and owned small farms and businesses, which afforded them the ability to help newcomers. The list of people that helped is as long as the desire to aid runaways was great. Believing in the value of self help, the small community organized a support network for fugitives. Members of St. James were instrumental in creating coalitions with other abolitionists to establish Ithaca's Underground Railroad Station.

### **The Underground Railroad's Influence on the Blooming Community**

There were three major routes of the Underground Railroad that passed through Central New York, originating from Baltimore, Maryland and Dover, Delaware. They went from the Susquehanna Valley directly to the town of Elmira. From Elmira the route branched off into two sections, one passing through Ithaca, Auburn, Syracuse, and Rochester and on to Canada, the other through Watkins Glen, Geneva, and Rochester and then to Canada.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15b</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Tendai Mutunhu, "Tompkins County: An Underground Railroad transit in Central New York" Afro-Americans in New York Life and History 3 (1979) 18.

The route that started in Dover passed through other parts of Delaware, Philadelphia, Princeton, New York City, Binghamton, Cortland, Syracuse, and Rochester on the way to Canada. From Binghamton people went to Elmira and Oswego. Some who took this route also ventured through Ithaca.<sup>17</sup> Sydney Gallwey found five routes that ex-enslaved Africans took from Ithaca to Canada. When one route became chancy the organizers created another. The first was across Cayuga Lake. The second through Ludlowville, where the station master was Ben Joy, who sent the slaves to Sherwood and Auburn. The third route followed along the west shore of Cayuga Lake and then to the Hoyt Church, where the former enslaved Africans were sent to Trumansburg, Covert, and Farmer.<sup>18</sup> The fourth route went through Etna, Peruville, and then Auburn. The last documented route went through the village of Lansing and straight through Auburn.<sup>19</sup> Quakers, known for their opposition to slavery were the most helpful organized group in aiding the railroad. It is estimated that at least a couple of hundred fugitives passed through Tompkins County.

Once fugitives got to Ithaca, they were housed in community members' homes in the South Side neighborhood and some white homes in other parts of town. The known addresses were 326 South Cayuga Street, 113 East Seneca Street, and 1457 East Shore Drive. Francis Bloodgood started harboring enslaved Africans in his attic in the 1820s. He gave food, clothing, and money. As one of the early Underground Railroad contacts, he started other hiding places. He arranged with Titus Blum that even after he sold his house it would remain part of the station. Blum hid fugitives in the attic as well as in a room on the second floor of the house.<sup>20</sup> At 113 East State Street the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Farmer was later renamed Interlaken.

<sup>19</sup> Tendai Mutunhu, "Tompkins County: An Underground Railroad transit in Central New York" Afro-Americans in New York Life and History 3 (1979)

<sup>20</sup> Tendai Mutunhu, "Tompkins County: An Underground Railroad transit in Central New York" Afro-Americans in New York Life and History 3 (1979)

runaways were kept in a cellar underneath the ground floor of the house. In the late 1970s, William T. Dean, a Cornell Law Professor, recalled:

About twenty years ago, when I looked at what is now the Stone House Restaurant, the main structure of which was said to have been built around 1840, that the then owner, an elderly lady, told me that the cupola at the top of the house had been used for sheltering escaping slaves and that the Stone House was a stop on the Underground Railroad.<sup>21</sup>

There were also places of business that harbored fugitives. One hiding place was behind Brooks Pharmacy, a downtown establishment, in an eight foot long and six by six foot wide trench. Another was at 214 West State Street, where the runaways were housed in the cellar. The capacity was fourteen people in this hiding place. Abolitionists gave food and shelter and collaborated with station masters in the African American Ithacan community. Some white agents were threatened by proslavery forces, Alexander Murdock, for example, came to this country from Scotland in 1832. His residence in Ithaca was threatened to be burned by slavery sympathizers because of his connections with the Underground Railroad.<sup>22</sup>

African American community and other anti-slavery agents support made the transition from enslaved to free smoother. Once individuals settled, they were immersed in a community that looked out for them. Jasper Woodsin was brought to Ithaca by Harriet Tubman before 1850. Mrs. Elmira Brown said that she and Woodsin's second wife were very close friends.<sup>23</sup> Harriet Tubman settled in Auburn sixty miles north of Ithaca. She, too, attended St. James.

In her book Lives Passed: Biographical Sketches from Central New York,<sup>24</sup> Carol Kammen discusses a young man by the name of William

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Tendai Mutunhu, "Tompkins County: An Underground Railroad transit in Central New York" Afro-Americans in New York Life and History 3 (1979)

<sup>23</sup> Emma Galvin, The Lore of the Negro in Central New York State, diss., Cornell University, 1943, 142. In the early 1940's Dr. Galvin conducted Black History classes at the South Side Community Center. One class focused on oral histories. A few elders from the community spoke at length of their experiences and reasons why they settled in Ithaca.

<sup>24</sup> Carol Kammen, Lives Passed: Biographical Sketches from Central New York

Woodsin. Woodsin graduated from Ithaca High School in 1888 and had his picture taken at the University Art Gallery on East State Street that year. The picture made its way to an antique shop near Durham, North Carolina, where it was purchased by J. Robert Barlow of Ithaca. Barlow found it strange that something from Ithaca would be in the South, so he purchased the piece and kept it for a friend. No one could identify this young man in the picture, even though his name was on the back. Researchers thought the African American youth was a Cornell student. They checked the census materials and Cornell records. Using data which records the African American presence in Tompkins County, researchers were able to track the young man's family. It was finally concluded that William Woodsin was the son of Jasper Woodsin.

In 1870, Jasper Woodsin was 35 and his wife Eliza 31. He worked as a coachman, custodian, and collector for the Internal Revenue Service. Eliza was a cook at Cornell, possibly for a fraternity house. The couple had two children: Cornelia, age two, and William, a baby of nine months. By 1875, the family lived at 86 North Albany Street. By then the couple had a third child, Philip.<sup>25</sup>

In 1894, William Woodsin married Rose Anna Robinson of Syracuse. One child, Clarence Leslie, was born in November, 1895. Settling in Ithaca at 34 Center Street, William was a waiter; Rose Anna's occupation is unknown. The family frequented the Masonic Club dances held in club rooms over the old Corner Book Store, then on Tioga Street. These Saturday night affairs, which featured bands that played the one-step waltz, were very popular with African Americans in Tompkins County. A life-long resident of Tompkins

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(Interlaken: Heart of the Lake Publishing, 1984).

<sup>25</sup> Carol Kammen, Lives Passed: Biographical Sketches from Central New York (Interlaken: Heart of the Lake Publishing, 1984).



County, Mrs. Ruth Reed Bailor, commented in an interview with Carol Kammen that the Woodsin's "were a nice family." <sup>26</sup>

Another early African American Ithacan who was important to the building of the community was Daniel Jackson. Born in Point Rock, Virginia in 1814, Daniel escaped and came to Ithaca via the Underground Railroad. Once he got to Ithaca and located the nucleus of the African American community, he received an employment reference from the pastor of St. James. The pastor referred him to E.S. Esty. Jackson worked as a tanner<sup>27</sup> and drove a bark cart for Esty for almost thirty years. After many years he saved up enough money to buy a home at 143 West Green Street. Jackson always desired to go back to Virginia and bring his mother to live with him and his wife, Martha. In a Ithaca Journal , Letter to the Editor, Esty described the determination Jackson exemplified:<sup>28</sup>

At the close of the Civil War, Daniel came to my office and said that he needed fifty dollars. When I wanted to know from him the reason for his wanting the money, he replied that he had heard his mother was still alive. He desired to bring her to live with him. I told him that I thought it was a needless expense for him to go and suggested that I correspond with the Freedman's Bureau who could send her to Ithaca for little money.

I also told him that his mother must be quite old now. Perhaps she would be feeble and infirm and be quite a burden for him to carry. She might be comfortable and well where she was. In this case, I thought it would be better for her to remain there and for Daniel to send her money when he could. After I had said these things to him, I shall never forget how the tears ran down his cheeks. Through the tears, he said that she was his mother and he must have her with him.

After three weeks, my correspondence with the agent at the Point of Rocks was unable to unravel the red tape to Daniel's satisfaction, so with the needed fifty dollars, he started for Harpers Ferry and the Point of Rocks in Virginia. About a week after he left, I went to meet him at the train station in Candor.<sup>29</sup> He sprang from the cars, took hold of my hand and pulled me into the car. At the same time, he was saying that he had his mother with him and he wanted me to come and see her.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 95 -97.

<sup>27</sup> A person who tans animal hides into leather.

<sup>28</sup> E.S. Esty, "Letter to the Editor"Ithaca Journal 6 July 1889.

<sup>29</sup> A town near Ithaca

And now his mother, who nursed the pastor of Zion church<sup>30</sup> when he was a baby, still survives. The pastor of the Zion church is now 84.<sup>31</sup> She does not know her age, but more than a century has gone since she was born. She may be seen whole and fairly well at the late residence of her faithful son.

In all my life's experiences. I have never known such devotion and affection as well as honorable, conscientious discharge of duty as was exemplified in the life of Daniel Jackson.<sup>32</sup>

Jackson died on July 6, 1889, at the age of 75. The funeral services were held at St. James. He was buried on Block C, Lot 72, east of the lot of Edward Newton, in the Ithaca Cemetery. His mother had purchased the funeral plot for \$5, and the inscription written by E.S. Esty on the grave reads:

1814-1889; Faithful Daniel Jackson; Born a slave. He followed the North Star to Freedom; He returned to bring his aged mother and tenderly cared for her as long as he lived. They were not long parted for she survived him but five days. Daniel was 75 and his mother 103 years of age. This tribute belongs of right to faithfulness and filial affection.<sup>33</sup>

This is just one example of the close family and networking ties early African Americans Ithacans exemplified. There were others that expressed their affinity toward the community by aiding Ithaca's Underground Railroad station.

Two businessmen, Henry Jackson and George A. Johnson, also were active members of St. James and stationmasters on the Underground Railroad. Jackson (no relation to Daniel) owned a clothes-cleaning business and worked as a whitewasher. He was enslaved in Maryland and later married Charlotte Amelia, who was also once enslaved. They had six children, all of whom were born in Ithaca. The family lived at 45 South Plain Street.

George A. Johnson, a free man from Canandaigua, New York, moved to Ithaca with his parents in 1846. The family moved when he was 11 years

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<sup>30</sup> Another name for St. James A.M.E. Zion Church.

<sup>31</sup> The pastor was Reverend James E. Mason.

<sup>32</sup> E.S. Esty, "Letter to the Editor" *Ithaca Journal* 6 July 1889.

<sup>33</sup> Tendai Mutunhu, "Tompkins County: An Underground Railroad transit in Central New York" *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 3 (1979) 23-24.

old to pursue better opportunities. At age 17, he went into business with his father running a barbershop on North Aurora Street, off State Street. As an adult, George became a member of the Republican Party, and a liaison between some white businessmen and African Americans. Johnson had such prominent status because he owned a business that many influential men supported. The shop was more than just a barbershop: it became a central meeting place, where the major topics of the day were discussed and debated. Most of the clientele were African American, but once Johnson's father passed away and renovations were made, a small but prominent white clientele began to frequent the shop.

After the Fugitive Slave Law was passed (1850), Johnson began assisting more in the activities related to Underground Railroad. Using his diverse contacts to support this interest, he was able to collect clothing, shoes, and money for runaway slaves. Working closely with the pastor of St. James, Johnson was able to acquire the necessities for the fugitives and aid them in their settlement in Ithaca or elsewhere by finding jobs or by giving them contact names at other locations further north. Because of his unique position within both communities and his allegiance to the Republican Party, he served for one year (1872-1873) as an appointed employee of the New York State Senate. One influential friend of George A. Johnson was lawyer Ben Johnson. Thomas W. Burns records George A. Johnson's interpretation of his relationship with Ben Johnson:

My father's barber shop adjoined the building on North Aurora Street in which Ben Johnson had his law office. Occasionally, I visited Mr. Johnson in his office and informed him that several runaway slaves had arrived during the previous night by way of the Underground route, and that they must have shoes and clothing and money for their passage toward Canada. He answered that he was a Christian and member of the church, and a lawyer, and a Democrat and therefore a law abiding citizen; that he could not consistently assist in depriving men of their property. No, he could not do such an unlawful act. But he would hand me a five or ten dollar note, and tell me to

take it and buy tickets, and send the runaways back to their masters. He knew that the terror stricken runaways would be aided on their way by being secreted during the night in the steamboat Simeon De Witt to Cayuga Bridge and on toward the North Star.<sup>34</sup>

George A. Johnson helped Ithaca's Abolitionist movement in many ways. He died in February of 1919. His survivors included his two children, Charles Herbert and Jessie. Not much is known about Charles Herbert, but Jessie was a fondly thought of piano teacher.<sup>35</sup>

Free African Americans, like George A. Johnson, made considerable contributions to the Underground Railroad, but newly escaped runaways also had an impact. A notable contributor to the Underground Railroad in Ithaca was Elsie Brooks. Elsie Brooks was known for her speaking ability. The concern about her opinions is evidenced by her inclusion on a July 4, 1863 advertisement that was created to ridicule Africans and others. The individuals that made the ad found her comments important enough to highlight her opinions.<sup>36</sup> She had her picture taken by Jeffrey Beardsley, the notable photographer of the 1870s.<sup>37</sup> In 1845, Elsie Brooks came to Ithaca from the Furniss plantation in Maryland. She was described as a spiritual anchor of the African Ithacan community. One author describes her as aggressive, fearless, and domineering.<sup>38</sup> Her obituary in the Ithaca Journal, on the other hand, describes "Aunt Elsie" as a calm woman with a melodious voice, respected by many.<sup>38b</sup>

### **The Next Generation: The Creation of a New Church:**

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas W. Burns, Initial Ithacans (Ithaca: Ithaca Journal Press, 1904)14.

<sup>35</sup> Lucy Brown, personal interview, 2 September 1992.

<sup>36</sup> Sydney Gallwey, "Early Slaves and Freemen of Tompkins County" De Witt Historical Society of Tompkins County, Black History Archives, Council of Equality.(1962) 6.

<sup>37</sup> For further information about the life and times of Elsie Brooks consult Yvonne Singh's thesis. The name of the information about the text is in the bibliography.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas W. Burns, "Historical References to Some Old Pictures," Ithaca Journal, 28 August. 1915, 12.

<sup>38b</sup> S.P.S., "Obituary" Ithaca Journal, 10 March 1875: 4.

A small number of families found housing on the North Side of Ithaca in the 1850s. These families tended to be newcomers from the South, and they were not highly skilled. Members of St. James A.M.E. had lived in Tompkins County for at least a generation and were mostly skilled laborers. A social division arose, and the newcomers decided to branch off and create their own neighborhood church. Wesleyan Methodist Church (colored) was founded in 1857. Betty Burke, an educator in Ithaca in the 1980s, believed that a skin color dynamic was present within the community in the 1850s.<sup>39</sup> The darker members of St. James felt that they should start their own congregation. Also, differences became evident between the old and the new settlers. By this time there were sets of free African and ex-enslaved Ithacans who had founded a community by working, buying homes, and creating a church. Recent arrivals, on the other hand, consisted of ex-enslaved Africans from the deep and northern parts of the South. There were differences in how the newcomers wanted to worship. They wanted a more spirit driven service while the St. James was less emotional. The color dynamic is one hint of the class division. Most lighter skinned African American had elevated status positions while some darker community residents had less skills. These divisions were flexible. Parts of families worshipped at one church while the other worshipped at the other. By the late 19th century themes became apparent within the community between the African Americans who considered themselves indigenous and the newcomers. As more newcomers came to town, older members of both churches considered themselves indigenous. Outsiders were important to the community but not considered necessary by the older members.

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<sup>39</sup> Betty Burke, personal interview 14 September 1992.

The whole community supported the diverse functions hosted by the churches. Since the churches were the first organizations founded, they served more than a sacred purpose; they housed many secular activities that helped parishioners deal with their everyday obstacles. For example, the Men of Zion sponsored social events and held Tuesday night business meetings. Activities and worship services continued in 1903, even after the members of Wesleyan Methodist (colored) renamed their church Calvary Baptist Church. A small influx of Baptist migrants influenced the infrastructure of the congregation. Even with the denominational change, members continued to direct auxiliaries and rise to leadership positions within the church. In later years, Thursday nights at Calvary were reserved for speeches by the pastor who spoke on the various topics facing African Americans.<sup>40</sup>

### **Abolition and Emancipation:**

With the political climate heating up over the issue of abolition, more and more rallies were taking place in Central New York. In 1848, St. James sponsored an anti-slavery meeting at Ithaca's Village Hall that was addressed by Frederick Douglass.<sup>41</sup> African Americans wanted to be a part of the Civil War because they believed that their participation would elevate their social status and they perceived that playing an active role would earn them equal rights. Frederick Douglas later wrote, "Let the slaves and free colored people be called into service and formed into a liberation army."<sup>42</sup>

The Governor of New York, Horatio Seymour, was reluctant to allow Africans into the military. But the influence and action of the Association for Promoting Colored Volunteers, a group of white New Yorkers, changed

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<sup>40</sup> C.O. Wilson. *The Monitor. Unbiased and Unbossed* (1) 31 March 1923, 5.

<sup>41</sup> Carol Kammen, "Creating a Church for themselves: in 1830, Ithaca's Black Methodist Episcopalians formed a Separate Church," *Ithaca Journal*, 22 February 1992, sec B: 12.

<sup>42</sup> Carol Kammen, "Ithacan African Americans served in Civil War", *Ithaca Journal*, 6 April 1991, sec B: 12.

Seymour's mind. Months later, the group contacted the Secretary of War. They sought permission to recruit four thousand colored volunteers. From the beginning of the war, the federal government had given each state a quota number of men it needed to supply the Union cause. Enthusiasm was high at first among white Northerners, but as the war raged on it decreased, so colored participation served two main purposes. It recognized the equality of Africans to whites in regard to expendability and helped New York State reach the quota number. At least twenty four of the members of the 26th United States Colored Infantry were from Tompkins County.

On Christmas Day, 1863 a group of African American men in Ithaca volunteered to join the Union army.<sup>43</sup> These men knew they were going to be paid less than their white counterparts and receive fewer benefits, but still they enlisted. They met at the two churches and passed a resolution to volunteer. African American Ithacans truly believed that fighting for the Union army would elevate their social status and emancipate their people.<sup>44</sup>

No recruitment announcements exist in the Ithaca Journal, but Carol Kammen, a local historian, believes that the Ithacans enlisted at St. James.<sup>45</sup> The group consisted of Morgan Dennis, 21 years old, Henry L. Green, 25; Daniel and Jacob Johnson; and George E. Jones, 21. Most of these boys' parents were enslaved. Daniel Johnson died of disease, and Jacob was discharged early for disability. A few more enlisted on December 28 and 30. Charles Shaw, 19, and Alonzo Smith and Henry Smith, both 23, enlisted on the twenty eighth. Alonzo was discharged from the army in August of 1865 and

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<sup>43</sup> Carol Kammen, "A Final Look at Ithaca's African American Volunteers the Civil War" Ithaca Journal, 20 April 1991, sec B: 12 & 13.

<sup>44</sup> These men were not the first to enlist, Henry Terry had enlisted in 1861. It is assumed that he served in a white regiment, and his duties were most likely that of a batman or cook. But large scale involvement did not take place until 1863. Carol Kammen, "Ithacan African Americans served in Civil War", Ithaca Journal, 6 April 1991, sec B: 12.

<sup>45</sup> Carol Kammen, personal interview, May 1993.

disappears from the local record. Henry Smith returned to Ithaca, married, and worked as a broom maker. His wife Laura was recorded as living at 50 South Plain Street in 1884. The five men that enlisted on the 30th were George Richardson, 16; James E.L. Smith, 21, George Guinn, 31, Jacob Guess, 52, and Zachariah Tyler.

All of the men that enlisted on the 30th returned. George Richardson returned to Ithaca after the war and worked as a cook; he also was recorded as living at 45 North Meadow Street in 1884. James E.L. Smith returned, but no specific occupation or living arrangement was found on him. George Guinn had been born in 1832 in Virginia. His arrival date in Ithaca is unknown. After the war he married Elizabeth and the couple had two children. George was a whitewasher and lived at 23 South Corn Street. In the 1900 census his wife was listed as a widow. After the war Jacob Guess returned to his wife Clarissa. He, too, was a whitewasher, and by 1890 neither Jacob nor Clarissa are listed in the local records. Zachariah Tyler, a laborer before the war, entered the U.S. Colored Regiment as a corporal. He and his wife Julia Ann had three children before the war and two more afterwards. In the postwar census the Reverend Zachariah Tyler was listed as the pastor of Wesleyan Methodist Church. He later worked as a whitewasher and lived at 1 Wheat Street.

On January 13, 1864 Sylvester Dorsey, 36, signed up for duty and on January 19 Henry Adams also enlisted. A thirteen-year-old, Thomas McChesney, was the youngest of the Ithaca enlistees; he is listed in the 1875 records as a porter. All of these Ithacans were a part of the 26th U.S. Colored Infantry, Company B, the second regiment to be formed in New York State. At the time there were 279 African Americans in Tompkins County, so the 31 recruits made up 11 percent of the total African American population. They



served in the Union Army along with 34,000 other African Americans who lived in the North.<sup>47</sup>

One soldier, not from Tompkins County but from New Orleans, made a strong statement that captured the sentiments of many African American soldiers of his time: "No matter where I fight; I only wish to spend what I have, and fight as long as I can , if only my boy may stand in the street equal to a white boy when the war is over."<sup>48</sup>

### **Postwar Celebrations:**

Tompkins County celebrated Emancipation Day at least twice. On August 6, 1873 the Ithaca Journal proclaimed: "The Day has Come." Ithaca was taking time out to commemorate the freeing of all slaves and civil rights for all. Eight different groups took part in the parade that started off at South Plain Street. The Ithaca Brass Band, the Colored Veterans of the Union Army, the President of the Jubilee Celebration, the Chaplain, and the Reader were followed by various Vice Presidents and Executive Committee members. Also the Benevolent Society marched, followed by the children and adults in the various classes of the Colored Sabbath Schools. Lastly, the citizens joined in and followed along in the festivities. Many of the banners carried that day included mottoes that said "Equal Rights to all Citizens is true Democracy," "Lincoln our Emancipator," " Grant our Protector," "Liberty the birthright of our Children," "One God, One People, One Country," "We mourn our martyred brothers, dead upon the field of honor," and "The shackles are broken, the bondman is free. "

Carriages were used to transport the participants, except the band. A fifteen gun salute was fired and bells were rung. After a procession through

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<sup>47</sup> Carol Kammen, " A Final Look at Ithaca's African American Volunteers the Civil War" Ithaca Journal, 20 April 1991, sec B: 12 & 13.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

downtown the celebration halted at De Witt Park, where all of the speeches were delivered. Rev. J.W. Lacy of St. James spoke first and offered prayer as the designated chaplain of the day. Constitutional amendments were read by William H. Lester of Dryden. George A. Johnson, President of the Day, with felicitous remarks introduced the Hon. L.M. Langston, Professor of Law at Howard University.<sup>49</sup> The eloquent address lasted for about two hours.

Frequently applauded by the crowd, Professor Langston delivered a speech that touched on issues facing African Americans. The closing speaker was Professor Johnson of the Brooklyn Colored Orphan Asylum. More music was played and the benediction was given. Afterwards the parade continued to the Ithaca Hotel, where dinner was provided for all guests. All the arrangements were made by William H. Allen, Chief Marshall of the day and his assistants.

That night a grand promenade concert took place in front of Journal Hall. Journal Hall was decorated for the gala ball "with flags of every size and festooned with red, white, and blue flannel." "The center of the ceiling, just over the magnificent chandelier, was a large and handsome canopy of parti-colored tissue paper, which added very much to the pleasing effect."<sup>50</sup> Some sixty couples were present. The ball went on well into the night and early daylight. Frederick Douglass' son Charles was in attendance.

St. James sponsored an ice cream social at Military Hall for those who did not wish to attend the ball. The Ithaca Journal declared "The grand culmination for our colored friends' jubilee was the promenade concert at Journal Hall last night, and it was a fitting and notable closing of a day that will long be remembered in Ithaca."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Uncle of the noted Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes.

<sup>50</sup> "Jubilee! The Day Has Come. Emancipation and Civil Rights Celebration!!" Ithaca Journal, 7 August 1873, 4.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

On August 9, 1888 several hundred gathered in De Witt Park to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. Planning commenced in May, 1888 when an Emancipation Committee was formed from Ithaca's Summer Literary Society. There were eleven members in the group, but only three recorded participants in the celebration: Henry Green, a Civil War Veteran; Robert Walker, who served with the third United States Colored Infantry; and Jasper Woodsin, an escaped slave, described previously, who was brought to Ithaca by Harriet Tubman on the Underground Railroad. Various African American communities in Upstate New York supported the festivities. Delegations came from Rochester, Syracuse, Auburn, Binghamton, Owego, Norwich, Elmira, Utica, Geneva, and Watkins Glen. Music, speakers, a parade, and a baseball game were the high moments of the celebration.

The August 9th celebration in Ithaca featured a march from the Clinton House (on Cayuga Street) through the South Side area and past St. James A.M.E. Zion Church, ending in De Witt Park. Many houses and businesses along the route were decorated in honor of the occasion. The Mayor and the Common Council watched the procession from the balcony of the Ithaca Hotel.<sup>52</sup> Declarations and music by a 50 voice choir and solo performances were given at Journal Hall. Mayor David Stewart made some comments, and William H. Lester of Dryden read a letter from Governor Hill of New York, who was unable to attend the ceremonies. His letter stated that African Americans were making progress through education.<sup>52b</sup>

The main speaker of the day was Professor. J.C. Price of Livingston College. The address focused on the race problem confronting the country." I

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<sup>52</sup> The site of the Old Ithaca Hotel is now on the Commons in downtown Ithaca, New York.

<sup>52b</sup> Actually, few African Americans in New York were gaining the education necessary to enter into trades and fields that would economically uplift them. Sabbath schools were a main source of education for African American Ithacans in the 19th century. If an African American did go to public school, it was rare that he/she graduated from high school.

like the word Negro," Price commented, "I like it with a capital N and one g. I don't like the other kind." Professor Price stated that this celebration was equivalent to the Fourth of July of white citizens, which celebrated the colonies' winning their freedom in the Revolution against the English. He also noted that prejudice still existed, and that it was time to look forward to the day when all men "who were loyal to the Union in its dark days of tribulation" could celebrate together.<sup>53</sup>

Ithaca's festivities were not the only ones. Different African American communities in surrounding towns had their own celebration which other communities supported. A baseball game was played between the Crickets of Binghamton and the Invincibles of Elmira; the Invincibles won. Watkins Glen's commenced on August third and it was well supported by African Americans from Ithaca. The day was packed with many events, one activity was a baseball game where one of Ithaca's colored baseball teams lost badly to Watkins Glen's team.

### **Community Organizations: 1880s - 1920s**

Such celebrations were organized by many different committees who met for distinct purposes. Many of the same people belonged to numerous groups. These clubs kept the community tied together and laid the foundation for future collaborations. Individuals took it upon themselves to coordinate events that were important to the community. In 1892, the Henry Highland Garland Garnet Lodge, which sponsored the Black Masons, started meeting twice weekly on West State Street. Black Knights of Pythias were recorded in the 1900 Ithaca City Directory; they met on the second and fourth Wednesday of every month at Odd Fellows Hall. An Order of the Eastern Stars was

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<sup>53</sup> "Emancipation Day." Ithaca Journal 9 August 1888.

established in Ithaca around the same time.<sup>55</sup> One function of the Odd Fellows Lodge No. 4568, of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, was to sponsor Thanksgiving services at St. James. There were many organizations with similar purposes; so there was definitely social overlapping. Mrs. Ruth Mann described dinner parties and other affairs that various social groups sponsored. "People would set out their china and other fine dishes and wear beautiful gowns. Most people knew how to do things because they worked for the white folks. Blacks in Ithaca had a vibrant social life."<sup>56</sup> Musical organizations came out of the community too. The Ithaca Colored Brass Band was active for six years; they met on the Corner of Plain and Clinton Streets. The leader and manager, in 1910, was John Wye.<sup>57</sup> The Silver Tone Mandolin Club also gave concerts throughout the 1920s.

Youth organizations were prevalent around the turn of the century. Literary societies, the Young Women's Christian Association, and the Young Men's Club were devoted to aiding the "colored" youth by sponsoring activities and promoting internal leadership projects for the youth to direct and oversee. In 1910, H. Harris was the President and W.E. Payne the secretary of The Young Men's Club. They met in Room 141 on South Aurora Street.<sup>58</sup> One group which led all Ithacans out of their exclusive clubs and church memberships was the NAACP.

The Ithaca branch of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) was founded on April 11, 1921. Its initial meeting was held at St. James.<sup>59</sup> Allen B. Jones, the first president, was

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<sup>55</sup>Home,Field,, et al, A Heritage Uncovered:The Black Experience in Upstate New York 1800-1925.(Elmira: Chemung County Historical Society, 1988). 22-23.

<sup>56</sup>Ruth Mann, personal interview, Feb.1993. Mrs. Mann is a lifelong resident of Tompkins County. She is 83 years old.

<sup>57</sup> M.D. Goodhue, Ithaca City Directory. Ithaca: Norton and Goodhue, 1909.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> 25th Anniversary Mav Dance and Reception of the Ithaca Branch of the NAACP Program. (Ithaca:New York, 1946) 4

instrumental in organizing the branch, one of the oldest in New York. The organization was for all people who believed in real democracy, regardless of race, creed, or color.<sup>60</sup> Organizational events were held at Ithaca High School.<sup>61</sup> On separate occasions Mr. Walter White, past National Secretary of the NAACP, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Roy Wilkins spoke to the Ithaca Chapter. Ithaca's NAACP chapter served to coalesce individuals and African American groups toward the common cause of local and national civil rights.

### **Conclusion:**

African Americans came to Tompkins County to improve their economic and social condition. They mobilized around their churches and created an Underground Railroad station, became involved in the Civil War, and organized celebrations that recognized their national emancipation. Even though the community was stratified, African Americans in Ithaca came together to engage issues of common concern. This pattern continues in the twentieth century.

By the 1920s, the Great Migration brought a new populous to Ithaca. Southern African American women were recruited by domestic service agencies to come to Ithaca.<sup>62</sup> Other southern Blacks came to Ithaca for seasonal migrant farming work,<sup>63</sup> and Cornell opened more entry level posts to African American. Thus, Ithaca was viewed by many as a viable town in which to settle. These individuals brought with them a plethora of ideas that would enhance the social, political, and economic scene within the community. Some of these newcomers joined established groups and others

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> The De Witt Mall, a downtown shopping area.

<sup>62</sup> Lucy Brown, personal interview 2 September 1992.

<sup>63</sup> Lisa Henderson, personal interview, September 1992. Her father came from Alabama to Central New York during the summers in the 1940's. He said that he knew of people coming to this area to do similar work since the 1920's and many people decided to stay. The accommodations were extremely poor, but the workers were able to bring money back to their families or start a new life in New York State.

started their own. New subtle divisions were created, yet still a community was maintained and the diverse sections of the community came together for common causes. As we will see in the next chapter, these momentary acts of solidarity were not enough for one women's group. They decided to initiate a campaign to bring the community together permanently.

### Chapter Three

## The South Side Community Center: The Formative Years (1920-1950)

By the 1920s African American Ithacans had created a vibrant life for themselves. One woman's group believed that there was a need for community center that would provide another networking base and allow individuals to learn about jobs, housing, and other relevant opportunities. This chapter demonstrates how these women sparked further community activism that resulted in an African American cultural center, the South Side Community Center. For a thirty-year period the Center was the focal point of Ithaca's African American community. Examining how this Center was created and sustained allows us one avenue of understanding Ithaca's African American community.

#### **Social Life in the 1920's:**

The short-lived The Monitor: Devoted to the Interests of the Colored People was in the tradition of other African American magazines of its day.<sup>1a</sup> It played an important role in communicating the vast concerns of its readers by reporting on global, national, and local news of interest to African Americans, including accounts of Ku Klux Klan activities and other injustices. The editor, C. O. Wilson, and the manager, Elliott Douglas, both self-proclaimed "race men," set out to give an "unbiased and unbossed" view of the cultural conditions of African Americans in Ithaca and the Finger Lakes Region.

The Monitor also covered regional and national sports news. Locally, African Americans participated in the City's basketball and baseball leagues. They started their own teams, which played other African American teams as well as white ones. The "Colored Vets" and the "Zebras" baseball teams were

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<sup>1a</sup> C.O. Wilson. The Monitor. The Unbiased and Unbossed. (2) June 1923.



a main source of entertainment for the community on spring Sunday afternoons. Community members would go to the ball games and then hang out at Miller's (also known as the Cayuga House) at 501 State Street.

The Monitor mentioned social events attended by African American college students. The Monitor reported on their vacation plans along with fraternity and sorority news. It is interesting that African American fraternity life began in Ithaca. In the fall of 1905, a Social Study Club commenced with "social purpose and social action" as its mission.<sup>1</sup> This mission carried over as a major part of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated. Alpha Phi Alpha was chartered in 1906 at Cornell University. Community members aided in the development of the fraternity. The initial meetings took place at community members' homes. Two of the most influential and father-like figures to the students were Mr. Edward Newton and Mr. Archie Singleton. Their homes at 421 North Albany Street and 411 East State Street were used for the early gatherings. All service and social events took place downtown. The first initiation ceremonies and banquet on Tuesday, October 30, 1906, were held at the Masonic Hall (or otherwise known as Odd Fellows Hall and Red Men's Hall). A community caterer, Mrs. Cohen, received five dollars for her services.

The young men put their mission into action by being involved in different events. Rev. Auten at St. James A.M.E. Zion Church asked the men to entertain the congregation the Friday following Thanksgiving in 1906. The men read from W.E.B. DuBois's World Today and Paul Lawrence Dunbar's "The Delight." They also participated at the annual Church bazaar.

Ruth Mann remembers that "people from out of town were shocked to see that we had such a vibrant social life."<sup>2</sup> Traditionally the Black church was

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Wesley, The History of Alpha Phi Alpha: A Development in College Life (Chicago: Foundation Publishers, 1929) xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Ruth Mann, personal interview, September 1992.

the center of social activity in many southern and northern African American communities. The two oldest churches, St. James A.M.E. Zion and Calvary Baptist, were the centers of African American activity; they sponsored activities that reflected what the community wanted. Calvary's missionary associations held Tuesday evening meetings and a Prayer Service directed toward the youth on Wednesday nights. On Thursday nights, Pastor W.M.D. White, D.D. spoke on various race consciousness topics. Monthly business meetings kept the members abreast of the financial dealings of the congregation. Across town at St. James A.M.E. Zion similar functions were held. Weekly services brought evangelists to the area, including some female preachers, such as the Rev. Lucy E. Bowles of Louisville, Kentucky. The Men of Zion, another group that directed church affairs, sponsored an array of activities for the community.

As the population grew, due to the Great Migration, migrants created alternative functions. Ithaca was a microcosm of what was going on in larger Black America. The women's club movement had its impact in Ithaca. Women's groups sponsored teas and dinner parties. Other groups fostered the youth. Political, civic, and social organizations abounded. Mrs. Ruth Mann remembers functions when "people would set out their china and other fine dishes and wear beautiful gowns. At Christmas my friends and I would get together and make toys for our children. We would make cradles out of crates and stuff and stick things together to make hobby horses. We would sew for months to prepare for events, especially dinner parties and Easter."<sup>3</sup>

The Cayuga Temple, Independent Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks Women sponsored activities for all ages. Its drum corps was known

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<sup>3</sup>Carol U. Sisler, Margaret Hobbie, and Jane M. Dieckmann, eds. Ithaca's Neighborhoods The Rhine, The Hill, and The Goose Pasture (De Witt Historical Society)

around central New York. On May 10, 1923 the Cayuga Temple I.B.P.O.E.W. Daughters of Elks. No. 54 presented Jazz A La Mode at the Star Theater. The success of the event was attributed to the Chairman of the Building Committee, Mrs. Florence Alston. It was front page news in the June issue of The Monitor.

Private dinner parties were common social events. The young women's group, the Tomahawks, hosted six course dinners and elegant entertainment. Their April 16, 1923 event featured Oliver Piano Brown's Orchestra.<sup>4</sup> The women's groups planned most community events. The most visible women's groups were the WA Ha Ma, Inc., the Francis Harper Women's Club, and the Eastern Star Club<sup>5</sup>. All the groups sponsored teas and socials. WA Ha Ma, Inc. hosted teas; their event on June 7, 1923 being attended by 100 people. The Eastern Star Club held socials at members' homes and sent delegates to attend regional conventions. The annual Mothers' and Daughters' Banquet sponsored by the Francis Harper Women's Club was always a success. Recreational activities included regularly held Thursday evenings at one of the members' homes. The group of domestic workers made arts and crafts items. They also discussed how to bring the community together. There were two city funded community centers targeted toward other ethnic groups. The women of the Francis Harper Club enlisted community interest toward starting a community center for African Americans.

### **Economic Life:**

There were a number of small African American businesses in the twenties. These businesses rendered services and were meeting places for community members. Most of them advertised in The Monitor. African

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<sup>4</sup>C.O. Wilson. The Monitor. The Unbiased and Unbossed. (2) June 1923:3.

<sup>5</sup> Field Home et al., A Heritage Uncovered: The Black Experience in Upstate New York 1800-1925 (Elmira:Chemung County Historical Society, 1988), 22.

Americans made significant achievements during the 1920s. Levi Spaulding was Ithaca's first African American police officer. The community was very proud that one of their own was on the force. The Monitor highlighted

Spaulding's accomplishments in its June 1923 issue:

The Monitor is proud to mention Mr. Levi Spaulding, who has been associated with the Police Department of Ithaca. Mr. Spaulding is the only colored police officer on the city force. We as a race are proud of him and he has proved himself a man of real worth both in the social and civic life of Ithaca.<sup>6</sup> The Monitor also reported that Treman, King, & Company Hardware Firm had one African American male as a secretary" and (he) was the only colored person holding a desk in his establishment.<sup>7</sup>

The African American businesses that advertised included The Cayuga House which claimed to be the "Leading Colored Hotel in the City," owned and operated by Thomas and Russell. Some years later Jim Miller, an African American, was the owner/manager.<sup>8</sup> Harry B. Parker proclaimed that he ran an "Equal Rights Barber Shop," located out of The Cayuga House. His slogan was "If you are pleased tell others. If not, me." Another barber in the area was Joe Hopkins, whose shop was on the same floor as the Elks Club when the Club was on Tioga Street.

Employment opportunities limited African American Ithacans. The majority of African Americans held service positions, although a few started small businesses. "My mother worked for Professor Howard Merrick, who was the head of the Graduate School. She worked! I can tell you she only had Thursday and Sunday afternoon off. All the rest of the time she worked. Men worked long hours too. A few worked at the Ithaca Hotel. I remember hearing that they started off washing dishes and a few men got promoted to waiters, but all the waiters were Black. When I was young, when I was a child and

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<sup>6</sup> C.O. Wilson. The Monitor. The Unbiased and Unbossed. (2) June 1923: 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Lucy Brown, personal interview, 2 September. 1992.

young woman, all the waiters at the Ithaca Hotel were Black. And that was an evolving process and at one time that was lily white too."<sup>9</sup>

There were a number of small owned and operated African American businesses. O. J. Jones was a highly rated chef for the Cornell's Athletic Association as well as the proprietor of The XYZ Club. Its ads in The Monitor were straightforward: "Compliments of XYZ Club." J.F. Dorsey's contracting business took out ads in all three issues of the magazine. One hundred and one South Aurora Street was the home of the contracting business that specialized in excavating and crane work. Another African American business that supported The Monitor was George Bailey's. He repaired musical instruments at 118 South Plain Street. He described himself as an expert at violin repair and all other string instruments and claimed absolute responsibility for all instruments received. The editor of The Monitor, C. O. Wilson, was a notary public and a tax and business consultant. Another African American owned business was Hughes Cleaners and Tailoring on the corner of State and Corn Streets (in the South Side area). Mrs. Lucy Brown remembers the business as one that provided good service but did not last : " And I think the owners got older, and their children did not pick up the business."<sup>10</sup> Mrs. June Wall Williams remembers being told of another African American owned and operated club, The Golfer's Club, on North Cayuga Street.<sup>11</sup>

Some African American women owned businesses also. Ora Spaulding had her hair salon inside The Cayuga House. A woman could get her hair shampooed, receive a Marcel Wave, or receive any type of "switches "

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<sup>9</sup> Lucy Brown, personal interview, September 1992.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>11</sup> Mrs. June W. Williams, personal interview, September 1992.

to her hair.<sup>12</sup> Other shops in the area included Marion B. Wheaton's Bronze Beauty Shop and Geraldine's Beauty Salon. Both shops were on South Plain Street. These beauty salons were places where African American women heard about current social and political topics. Hair salons were not the only businesses that African American women owned. Stella Williams owned a rag doll and sewing shop, Stella's, Maker of Rag Dolls and Sewing of All Kinds, which was located at 113 South Plain Street. The South Side area was the hub for African American businesses from the early twenties to the nineteen fifties.

### **The Beginning: The South Side House**

The Social Service League of Ithaca founded the North and West Side houses<sup>13</sup> around the turn of the century for European immigrants as a preventive measure to poverty.<sup>14</sup> Some African Americans who lived on the North side of town participated in activities at the North Side House; young African American men from the North side of town would take part in the basketball league there. Mrs. Anita Reed remembers feeling welcome there during her childhood.<sup>15</sup> The European community centers were networking stations where newcomers could learn about housing, jobs, and social opportunities and maintain their distinct cultural heritage. The African American Churches served a similar purpose for some Ithacans, but when the demand grew they were unable to help every newcomer. Having two churches and many groups affiliated with the congregations helped maintain divisions and coalitions. The Great Migration from the South was underway.

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<sup>12</sup> C.O. Wilson. The Monitor. The Unbiased and Unbossed. (2) June 1923.:11.

<sup>13</sup> The term house was used instead of community center because the organizers felt house expressed more of a community sentiment.

<sup>14</sup> Carol U. Sisler, Margaret Hobbie, and Jane M. Dieckmann, eds. Ithaca's Neighborhoods The Rhine, The Hill, and The Goose Pasture ( De Witt Historical Society) 13.

<sup>15</sup> Mrs. Anita Reed, personal interview, September 1992.

Many African Americans were new to Ithaca and desired another mechanism to learn about jobs, housing, and social opportunities.

In the early 1920s the Francis Harper Club members began mobilizing community interest and economic vitality. After a few attempts, not enough capital could be raised from the community. The group persevered, mainly because blatant racist acts were fresh in their minds. A major incident occurred in 1925 when five hundred members of the Ku Klux Klan marched down State Street while thousands of enthusiastic supporters lined the street.<sup>16</sup>

This incident had its effects on the Francis Harper Club. The original club had 135 members but by 1938 only 50 remained. Previous attempts to start a Community Center had failed, less faithful members did not want to be a part of another venture. The faithful few decided to link up with other community folk interested in the project. A committee of 11 men and women went house to house and raised \$229 for the project. The group became known as the Serv-us League. As reported by the Ithaca Journal, "The league's aim was to provide a social-health-educational-cultural and recreational center for Negroes of Ithaca. The Center was to be non-secretarian and nonpolitical with efforts directed toward uniting the community for the betterment of each and every individual."<sup>17</sup>

The Serv-Us League eventually garnered enough resources to rent and open the basement of 221 South Plain Street. In 1930, the house became known as the South Side Community House. That year the South Side House became a part of the Community Chest.<sup>18</sup> All Community Chest

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<sup>16</sup>"Thousands See 500 March in Klan Parade" Ithaca Journal, 5 October 1925.

<sup>17</sup>"South Side Center Owes Birth to Negro - from footnote 13 Woman's Club" Ithaca Journal, 26 April 1938.

<sup>18</sup> The Community Chest was an outgrowth of the War Chest which was the initial centralization of social agencies in Ithaca. The War Chest was renamed The Community Chest in 1921 and later became a part of the United Way of Tompkins County.

agencies stressed job training and health education as well as recreational activities.<sup>19</sup> The South Side House provided similar services to those offered by other Community Chest agencies. To generate funds, the League held bake sales and other social events. The money collected went toward purchasing a house at 305 South Plain Street. To pay for maintenance costs the top two floors were rented out. The basement was used for various activities. As these community ventures were underway The Common Council and the WPA was asked to underwrite the project.

### **The Flood of 1935**

From the late 1920s to 1935 the South Side House became the primary place where African Americans learned of jobs, housing, and social opportunities. On July 7, 1935 there was a devastating flood that crippled Ithaca for days and necessitated thousands of dollars worth of repairs citywide. Mrs. Reed remembers that some families stayed in Barton Hall<sup>20</sup> for a few days until the water receded. "My father had a car so we stayed with some relatives. There was mud everywhere, and when we came back someone had dropped their little shoe. We could only take the things we would need right away and we put them in the car. There were people traveling in boats around town. I never forgot when we got to Cascadilla Street the water was rushing through and there was a creek there at the end of Cascadilla Street. The water was rushing so high that the car stalled and we thought the car was going to stop. Water was coming through the motor of the car and we kept on pushing."<sup>21</sup>

Mrs. Mann expressed similar memories. "Well, we were living on Cleveland Avenue no, we were on West Green Street and the water was

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<sup>19</sup> "South Side Center Owes Birth to Negro Woman's Club" *Ithaca Journal* 26 April 1938.

<sup>20</sup> A building on the Cornell University campus

<sup>21</sup> Mrs. Anita Reed and Mrs. Dorothy Rollins, personal interview, August 1992.



about a block away. By the time it got to our house it was between one and two feet. We had to leave of course. I put my kids in winter snow suits to keep them warm, and we went to the Treman house where my sister's boyfriend was the janitor. We stayed there until the water went down. Once the rain stopped, it was only about two or three days. When we left the house the water the worst place was the cellar for us.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Center Without Walls**

The flood affected more than just community homes. It made portions of the South Side House hazardous. Even though the building was hazardous community support did not stop. During this hiatus the community realized it needed space for its activities. There was no community building for a full three years after the flood, but that did not stop the activity. The community pulled its own and some city resources together. Mrs. Jessie Cooper orchestrated the center while it was in various locations. The Community Chest gave \$100.00 a month. Later that year, Mr. James L. Gibbs of Syracuse's Dunbar Community Center was hired as the first program director.<sup>23</sup>

Mr. Gibbs and Mrs. Cooper contacted area schools, churches, and community centers to use their space. They gained access to St. James A.M.E. Zion Church's Central Activities Room, and Parish Room; the Henry St. John Elementary School gymnasium, and some space in the YMCA; and individual families opened up their homes for certain activities.<sup>24</sup> Even the North and West Side houses lent themselves to South Side House programs. Social mixers, story hours, crafts, and cooking classes took place most afternoons in the basement of St. James A.M.E. Zion Church. Boy and Girl

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<sup>22</sup>Mrs. Ruth Mann, personal interview, September 1992.

<sup>23</sup>The Dunbar Center is affiliated with the Urban League.

<sup>24</sup>The YMCA used to be located downtown.

Scout meetings were held at Central School. Sewing, handicrafts, and reading activities took place in the salvaged parts of 305 South Plain Street. During this time a mimeographing class was used to publish a weekly community newsletter. The mimeograph machine was a gift from the stationery store owners who were members of the newly formed South Side House Board of Directors.

The community could not support the House solely through donations, bake sales, and Community Chest funds, so Mr. Gibbs and Mrs. Cooper decided to solicit municipal and federal support to bring the various programs to 305 South Plain Street. By the fall of 1935, six African American males had been sentenced to a correctional facility, and city officials deduced that the mischief stemmed from the lack of parental supervision after school hours. When a proposal was brought to city officials by Mrs. Cooper and Mr. Gibbs, the City was receptive to helping the community solve its problem. City officials viewed the African American community as a viable part of its plans; what affected African Americans affected the whole city. Thus, by supporting the growth of an African American House, the whole city benefited.

Funds and architectural plans were needed to start the project. Robert Treman, of Treman, King and Company Hardware, and Louis Bocheever, Director of Publicity at Cornell, consulted with Mrs. Cooper and Mr. Gibbs and together they decided on plans for the Center. Then, a public campaign was launched raising \$10,000. After that sum was raised, other businessmen were asked to contribute and the city was urged to get more involved. The Federal Works Progress Administration was asked for assistance. Government assistance could be given only to publicly owned facilities, and up until this time the neighborhood Center had been a private agency. Therefore, the property of the House was deeded to the City of Ithaca in early 1936. The

private citizens in the community would assume the costs of materials, the labor would be contributed by the WPA. On March 6, 1936, ground was broken for the creation of the South Side Community Center.

Donations from Cornellians in excess of \$1,200 made it possible to build an adequate gym. The monies were given in honor of an African American Cornell alumnus Jerome (Brud) Holland, who had been active in the South Side House and a star student-athlete at Cornell. A native of Auburn, Brud was seen as more of a community member than a Cornell student. The Gym-A-Torium (gymnasium and auditorium) was named after him. Future events later held in the Gym-A-Torium included concerts by Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson.<sup>25</sup>

By the fall of 1936, the architect's plans for a new Center were completed and a final application was submitted to the WPA. Mr. Robert Treman was a major influence in the initial stages of the Center. He enlisted the Common Council to get involved with the project. While the new Center was under construction, Mr. Gibbs went to Syracuse. Construction had been slowed because of the lack of steel and a shortage of carpenters. The community once again pulled together, and two men's groups and a club of older teenagers assisted in the construction. In August, 1937, Mr. Gibbs was asked to take the Executive Director position, and his wife Hortense E. Gibbs was asked to be a volunteer assistant director. They began work in September of 1937.

The first official ceremony took place when the Center was still under construction. The First Lady, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, who was visiting Cornell's Human Ecology Department for Farm and Home Week, had heard

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<sup>25</sup>Rodney Brooks "Gibbs tells history :South Side Community Center began as a Woman's Club" Ithaca Journal 31 August 1976, 4.

about the project. The only time she had open to dedicate the Center was during this visit. She arrived at the ceremony while it was in session. The audience came to their feet once they noticed who she was. Her remarks included a short dedication speech: "I dedicate this building to the service of the people of the community," and "I am glad the two races are working together, for in that way we will have a better understanding. Here in this building you will find a happier, healthier, better future for your children and therefore a happier and better community."<sup>26</sup> Mrs. Roosevelt gave the key to the South Side Center to Isaiah W. Murray, President of the Board of Managers. Mrs. Vera Irvin, the first President of the Serv-us League spoke on how the dream had become a reality. Four WPA officials spoke on future or current projects underway. They gave excuses for the delays in the project, pointing out that the clear reasons were a shortage of skilled workers and the expense of added components. The final cost of the project had been more than double the original estimate of \$22,000. The cost of the building was \$49,052, with the WPA contributing \$32,052; certain community members cosigned the mortgage note and later donated money.

In April, 1938, a \$15,000 mortgage campaign started. The ten day project started out with 125 volunteers workers. Paul S. Livermore, chairman of the campaign, stated that " the modest allocation from Community Chest and the receipts from the Negro memberships will finance a sound and healthy program on a self-sustaining basis."<sup>27</sup> This campaign was the first "permitted" by the Community Chest which was seen as the primary financier. Regular Chest funds paid for annual expenses.

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<sup>26</sup>"Center Rites Stress Understanding: A Greeting for First Lady at Center Ceremony" Ithaca Journal 18 February 1938, 5.

<sup>27</sup> "\$15,000 Campaign for South Side Center Fund" Ithaca Journal 26 April 1938.

On April 27, 1938 the volunteers met for dinner at the Center site to receive final instructions on how to conduct the campaign. Mr. Charles Kulp was the main speaker, and Mr. James L. Gibbs gave some remarks. For entertainment four young girls sang spirituals. A similar dinner was held on May 9, 1938, at the close of the campaign. The campaign and the Center gained national notoriety. Governor Lehman wrote, "I am watching with keen interest the progress of the South Side Community Center, and I am very happy to contribute to its success." Walter White, Executive Secretary of the NAACP, commented "You are intelligently facing the Negro problem here and it is tremendously important to make a success of this laboratory experiment that, if successful, will be followed in other states."<sup>28</sup>

#### **The Grand Opening:**

The Center finally opened on August 22, 1938. The formal opening was in September, with a week of functions that involved many Ithaca residents, not just African Americans. Under the Cooper/Gibbs team a strategy was being put into action of building alliances between the Community Center and the business community. The object was to place African Americans in touch with different job opportunities. The traditional connections with domestic service, Cornell food services, and the Ithaca Hotel were still in place, along with a few additions. There were two African American elevator operators at Rothschild's Department Store<sup>29</sup> and two custodians each at the courthouse, city hall, and the telephone company.<sup>30</sup> Gibbs and Cooper understood that the business community had resources, so they tapped them. The beginnings of an employment office began to unfold.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> It was located next to what is now Center Ithaca on the Commons in downtown Ithaca.

<sup>30</sup> Rodney Brooks "Gibbs Tells History : South Side Community Center began as a Woman's Club" Ithaca Journal. 31 August 1976, 4.

The Board of Directors was made up of many influential businessmen. This Board had no jurisdiction over the day-to-day happenings of the Center. Such functions were reserved for the Board of Managers. That body was made-up of nine African American community members who were active in the ongoing activities of the Center. More business owners came aboard as prospective board members, and subtle promises were made to the African American community. The Board of Directors hired the director and provided several resources. The Board of Directors consisted of twenty white business people and four African Americans who managed the business affairs of the Center and hired the executive director. With the contacts made through the board members and other city businessmen, an employment agency was established. Job links were started with Ithaca Gun Company and Cayuga Tool Company. "Both companies trained African American women for machine shop work."<sup>31</sup> Morse Chain Company hired more African Americans also.

The beautiful new Center outshined the original small wooden frame house. In the center of the lounge room was a library table laden with magazines and newspapers. To the left was the Executive Director's office and next to that a small canteen where ice cream, candy, and pop could be purchased. A large recreation room, which could also be used for a dining room, opened off the lounge. A small, but completely equipped, kitchen was connected with the dining room. Covering the entire side of the building was a gym-a-torium sixty feet long and forty feet wide. Shower baths for men and women and small meeting rooms were also located on the main floor.

On the second floor were pool and billiard rooms, the library, and a large room used for fraternal organization meetings. Several hundred

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

spectators could witness basketball games and other activities from the balcony located just above the gymnasium. The third floor contained a modern four-room apartment used as the Director's living quarters. A boys' workshop and hobby room was located in the basement.<sup>32</sup> Mrs. Lucy Brown adds that "the ceiling went all the way up to the second floor, it was kind of a semi cathedral area. And the paneling was good, you can't find that paneling now. When they renovated later on someone took that nice wood. Whoever got that off the wall sold it for something. That stuff is in somebody's house."<sup>33</sup>

Every day during the week, except Sunday, the South Side Community Center was host to a plethora of activities. A typical day went something like this: Programs began at 3:30 in the afternoon. A group of boys met in the gym for basketball; another group met in the cellar workroom. A group of small girls met in the fraternal hall to play games. At four o'clock a troop of Boy Scouts met in the recreation room on the first floor, while Girl Scouts met in the lounge. At 6:30 p.m. older boys met in the gym for boxing instruction. At 7:30 p.m. the girl scouts had a dinner in the dining room, leaving time for the men's athletic dinner to be served there at 8:15 p.m. At 8:30 p.m. a group of the older girls met in the fraternal hall for their class in arts and crafts. Mrs. Taylor, a community member, directed the sessions, which usually produced silver trays, bread trays, and other things for the kitchen. In the meantime, there had been a meeting of one of the men's clubs in the library that adjourned in time for the dinner, a scheduled game in the city basketball league for older boys, and a practice period for the junior male chorus. There was also a forty voice South Side Community Chorus, which traveled all over Central New York. The evening closed with a dance for adults. All these activities were usually

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<sup>32</sup>Bart J. Scanlon "Ithaca's New Community Center" *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 18 (1940), 360.

<sup>33</sup> Lucy Brown, personal interview, September 1992.

posted on the annual calendar. This calendar was packed with events, including a party for high school graduates, (which in 1939 was attended by a record number of ten graduates), the father and son banquet, a reception for graduates of the Cornell summer school, a young people's Halloween party, weekly social dancing parties, afternoon teas, an Easter egg hunt, and an oratorical contest.<sup>34</sup> In 1938 and 1939, the South Side Community Center sponsored an Interracial Week. This week-long program displayed neighborhood talent of all races and ethnic groups. It gave outsiders a chance to learn more about the African American community.

The Center served as headquarters for Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, fraternal orders, adult education groups, and hobby clubs, as well as providing a site for all types of recreational and social activities. On Mondays, six classes of religious instruction met. On other evenings, Dr. Emma Galvin taught Black history classes. Mrs. Lucy Brown remembers that the theme of racial uplift was dominant. "I can remember Mrs. Galvin saying you need to be very proud of yourself."<sup>35</sup> Dr. Emma Galvin finished her dissertation requirements in 1943 from Cornell but Cornell would not hire her.<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Brown also remembers that Dr. Galvin taught her classes with more fervor after her rejection, because she wanted to instill in the young people that obstacles may slow you down, but that they can't stop your desires. Later she taught at Ithaca College and wrote articles for African American magazines.

Another effective program that the Center hosted was a Well Baby Clinic led by Dr. Gregory Alexander Galvin, Dr. Emma Galvin's husband. This monthly meeting for expectant mothers received guidance and advice from the

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<sup>34</sup> Bart J. Scanlon. "Ithaca's New Community Center" Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life, 18 (1940), 360-361.

<sup>35</sup> Lucy Brown, personal interview, September 1992.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



only Black medical doctor in Ithaca at the time. This program was connected to the health program that the Center sponsored. Dr. Galvin, two other health care professionals, and neighborhood residents formed a health committee. A result of the committee work was an ongoing dental care resource and tuberculosis screening clinic. Dr. Gregory A. Galvin had already established a practice and, although in the beginning most of his clients were African American, once he became known his non-African American clientele grew. At first Dr. Galvin had an African American administrative assistant, but as his practice grew he replaced her with a non-African American. Mrs. Ruth Mann remembers that "the Galvins did not solely socialize with African Americans. They were active in social and community groups at their level and did not do much with the common people. They belonged to a white church, too. Even though Mrs. Galvin was active with a few auxiliaries at Calvary Baptist Church, most of those so called Black professionals belonged to the white Episcopal church".<sup>37</sup>

African American community members designed the programming. Their diverse organizations met in the Center and held their activities there. Mr. Art Watkins, who has lived in Ithaca for more than fifty years, told recently Corey Shane about the beginning of South Side:

When I came here at 13, the Center was the focal point of Ithaca's cultural and social activities. Just about everybody was meeting here, black and white social groups, service groups, political parties, they all met here. Any given night you could come and here there would be 99 cars parked up and down Plain Street from different people meeting here.<sup>38</sup>

Nine Cornell and Ithaca College students received New York Assistant Grants in return for aiding Mr. Gibbs by supervising the activities and assisting the children with homework. No African American males had contact with the

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<sup>37</sup> Mrs. Ruth Mann, personal interview, September 1992, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Shane, Corey. "Interview". 14850. May 1993.

police from 1937 to 1940.<sup>39</sup> This improvement was attributed to the programming at the Center. The day-to-day activities were governed by rules that everyone abided by. Youngsters who were unruly were brought in front of the court committee. This committee was made up of their peers who judged the case and made rulings. The severest reprimand was loss of privileges within the Center. The children and young adults oversaw their own actions and had pride enough in their Center to make sure everyone who was involved with the Center paid attention to the rules.

A mortgage burning party took place on February 22, 1944.<sup>40</sup> Mr. James Conley, the WPA file director, commented on the significance of the national consciousness, "in which we are outgrowing the narrow confines of prejudice and making progress toward a sounder social structure in which false barriers will have no place."<sup>41</sup> City officials and three hundred people from all over Tompkins County and Central New York came to the ceremony. The note was torn into four pieces representing the children, the young people, the young adults, and the elders of the community and dropped into an urn. For their consistent volunteering, a scroll was given to Mr. and Mrs. Robert Treman. Mr. James L. Gibbs gave an overview of the history and announced his resignation, effective March 1.<sup>42</sup> After his resignation, Mr. Gibbs became a district representative for Mohawk Airlines and a community relations consultant with the Tompkins County Trust Company.

Four years later, two hundred community members participated in the 10th anniversary celebration of the South Side Community Center. Dr. Corrine E. Galvin, President of the Board of Directors, was the chairman of the

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<sup>39</sup>Bart J. Scanlon "Ithaca's New Community Center" *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* 18 (1940), 361.

<sup>40</sup>"South Side free of Debt" *Ithaca Journal* 29 February 1944.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup>"South Side Center Free of Debt" *Ithaca Journal* 29 February 1944.

"South Side Center's Celebration" *Ithaca Journal* 1 March 1944.

program. Mrs. Jessie Cooper spoke and summarized the struggle to initiate, complete, and sustain the Center. The Presidents of the 1938 Board of Directors and Managers, Mrs. Robert Treman and Mr. Isiah Murray,<sup>43</sup> also spoke about the first dedication ceremony and early years. Mr. James L. Gibbs also gave remarks.<sup>44</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The first thirty years were difficult for the Center. There was always a shortage of money, but there was never a shortage of support. The community would sponsor fund raisers and volunteer regularly. Community members saw the Center as a second home.<sup>45</sup> Non-African Americans regularly aided the Center's employment or enrichment programs. This relationship fostered economic stability within the African American community.

As we will see in Chapter Four, the community's relationship with the Center and with outside resources shifted. Several variables contributed to the transformation: the dissolution of vital coalitions, ghettoization of the South Side neighborhood, and the needs of the community escalated beyond the Center's resources. These variables played a role in the South Side Community Center's inability to aid Ithaca's African American population as it had in its early years.

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<sup>43</sup> Mrs. June W. Williams's father.

<sup>44</sup> "South Side Center Notes 10th Birthday" Ithaca Journal 1948.

<sup>45</sup> Art Watkins and Tony Poole, personal interview, April 1993.

## Chapter Four From Heyday to Chaos (1967-1992)

### Introduction:

Chapter Three demonstrated how the South Side Community Center was created and sustained by an integrationalist and pluralistic ideology that affirmed, as well as promoted, African American group determination. The Center was the hub of cultural activity for African Americans. It also hosted programs for non-African American organizations.<sup>1</sup> The pluralism and integration ideology was shown in daily operations. For example, whites provided financial and managerial support while African Americans directed daily activities. African Americans and non-African Americans alike believed supporting the Center benefited the City.

Beginning in the late 1960s, the Center began to take a nationalist position, mirroring the ideological dynamics of the Black Power Movement. Community members began to redefine the mission of the Center. This chapter shows some of the dynamics that were present during the re-definition process, and it demonstrates how the Center shifted from a community concerned institution to a social agency directed by grant demands. Moreover, this chapter discusses how the neglect of community concerns and the ghettoization of the neighborhood directly hindered the effectiveness of the Center itself.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Interracial week" was sponsored by the Center every February. Presenting leaders from African and European American communities. Bart J. Scanlon "Ithaca's New Community Center" Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life 18 (1940).362.

<sup>2</sup> Ghettoization : Is the process by which African Americans have been systematically shut out from access to services and opportunities that are available to the larger society. Maulana Karenga. Introduction to Black Studies.(Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press1982)199.

### **The Short Term African American Renaissance**

From the 1940s to the early 1960s, community organizations sponsored many activities and the Center's programming was consistent with neighborhood needs. Mr. Fritz Townsend and Mr. John Gould, the Directors, facilitated over community events.<sup>3</sup> There were daily activities for youth and weekend festivities for teenagers and adults. By the late 1960s, many community members wanted more from the Center than programs, entry level employment, and housing information. They wanted more forums and events to address Black Power issues. The assassination of Malcolm X and the discussion of an Africana Studies Department at Cornell were topics of interest.

Community folk, college students, and professors combined their interests and worked together devising relevant cultural programs. African American college students (from Cornell University and Ithaca College) defined their community larger than campus boundaries. Funneling their organizational monies and conducting service projects at the Center only exemplified their definition of community. COSEP advisors worked with the South Side Community Center to coordinate work study opportunities for Cornell students.<sup>4</sup> Many students believed that working in the Center made their education relevant. Plus, indigenous community members viewed college students as extended family.

From 1967 to 1975 the Center flourished. The Center was infused with federal funds and community based programming which both town and gown folk supported. The most successful program, of that era, was an educational

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<sup>3</sup> Mr. Townsend's real name was Fred but community members called him Fritz. Mr. John Gould was the youth director and Mr. Fred Townsend was the Executive Director during the 1960s. Min. Mabel Welch, personal interview, June 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Ken Glover, personal interview, June 1992. COSEP is an academic assistance program for traditionally underrepresented students at Cornell University.

counseling service. Neighborhood residents were displeased with the school system, so they demanded further services that the new counseling effort provided. Black Counseling Services was staffed by teachers, college students, and professors.<sup>5</sup>

By the mid 70s, this rejuvenation affected the financial situation. Proposals for federal support lessened. Community organizers disagreed with the United Ways stipulations and there was a year when the Center did not apply for their allocation.<sup>6</sup> Community organizers felt that the Center could financially survive on federal and local funds. This strategy did not take into account that many traditional supporters were slowly leaving the Center.

This shift in financial strategy and new form of self determination alienated many and had other shortfalls. The shortcomings caused the Center's service to diminish. There were a number of factors which can explain the Center's decline. They can be cataloged as: the changing board membership and networking patterns; funding and programming; the shifts in leadership; and, to a lesser degree, the deterioration of the physical plant. We will now discuss each factor separately.

### **Board Membership and Networking**

Recall from chapters three that the Center was designed to be connected to the larger community. The alternative form of Black determination was not meant to be hostile towards whites nor distance community members, rather it was meant to affirm Black independence. Hostile or not, the alternative ideology sent messages to traditional supporters. Mr. Art Watkins, a long time community resident, believes that 1967 was the year "the Center started falling down off its progressive attitude and

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<sup>5</sup> Black Counseling Services: see Appendix 2.

<sup>6</sup> Art Watkins and Tony Poole, personal interview, April 1993

infrastructure. Before 1967 we had at least three bank Presidents, we had some lawyers and businessmen, we had our intellectuals and our progressive Afro-Americans on the board too. We functioned immensely, we were integral in the town. A number of social and recreational groups in the county met here. South Side suffered when the wealthy board members left".<sup>7</sup> Many community members felt that severing ties with white philanthropists, social agencies, and federal funds chiseled away the Center's original mission, that being to both affirm African American group determination, while remaining very much connected to the larger society.<sup>8</sup>

This disconnect had profound affects. White businesses began to turn their economic and social interests toward other ventures. An example of one venture was the creation of the Greater Ithaca Activities Center. GIAC was created through the consolidation of resources formerly used for the North Side and West Side Houses, older community houses that had served newly arrived European immigrants during the early twentieth century. After three generations, these community houses became obsolete because the people they were built to serve assimilated. After the City's Social Service League sold the West Side and North Side Houses, the idea for a multicultural neighborhood center was devised by the Greater Ithaca Recreation Council, which had coordinated diverse City youth services. The agencies that came together under the auspices of GIAC were the City of Ithaca, the Youth Bureau, the Social Service League, the United Way, and the Ithaca City School District. The YMCA had limited involvement. Although Tompkins County did not take an active role in the formation of GIAC, later two seats were given to the County on GIAC's Board of Directors. The school district allowed the

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<sup>7</sup> Mr. Watkins has lived in Ithaca since he was a teenager. As an elder in the community he has witnessed many changes inside and outside of the Center. He is currently on the Board of directors and volunteers at the Center frequently. Art Watkins and Tony Poole, personal interview, April 1993.

<sup>8</sup>The Center's original mission is stated in Chapter three.

agency to use the vacated Central School in return for offering after-school programming.<sup>9</sup> Collaborations between GIAC and South Side is common. Often discussed as a competitor by community members, the fact is GIAC services the broader Black community and non-African Americans in the similar fashion as the South Side Community Center once did. Business and City support decided to disconnect itself from the South Side neighborhood and put their efforts toward GIAC and other organizations.

It was not just businesses that left the South Side Community Center. Many civic groups ended their affiliation with the Center because it was slowly becoming evident that the South Side Community Center served a few community members. "Club Essence, was founded in 1973, in response to a need to establish more social and civic activity for Black women in the Ithaca area. "Initial meetings took place at the South Side Community Center. After different successful and unsuccessful events and meetings at South Side, the group decided to cut its connection with the Center and permanently move its operations to the Women's Community Building. Committed to youth development, the members sponsor an annual fashion show, an international food feast, and bus tours to New York City's theater district. Their efforts go towards scholarships for college-bound high school students.<sup>10</sup>

There were two other political groups that never officially linked with South Side as a result of the chaotic nature of the Center. A group of professional men created the Black Men of Ithaca. The group met at St. James A.M.E. Zion church and at members' homes. They hosted fund raisers and the proceeds went towards scholarships. The organization sometimes worked in conjunction with Club Essence. They attacked social issues also, creating

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<sup>9</sup> GIAC History acquired from GIAC.

<sup>10</sup> Club Essence History. John Henrik Clarke Library: Cornell University.



subcommittees that dealt with academic underachievers and a Big Brother program. Club Essence, The Black Men Of Ithaca, and GIAC represent alternatives routes that some African Americans took to receive services and perform civic functions. South Side was not viewed as the given meeting place for all African American organizations, but rather as a program center that provided children's services.<sup>11</sup>

Black Caucus of Ithaca was another political group. The Caucus protested for equality education, affirmative action, economic development, political action, and community relations issues. The organization called for action when there was a Halloween racial incident at Ithaca College. They also protested against a Sambo's restaurant in Ithaca and challenged the school system on behalf affirmative action.<sup>12</sup> In the past, the members of organizations like The Black Men of Ithaca, Club Essence, and the Ithaca Black Caucus took leadership roles at the South Side Community Center. Without business and professional input, the effectiveness of the Board of Directors and networking opportunities decreased.

Basically, it's a layered dilemma. There is a small Board with a lot of responsibility and little community or financial resources. Board of Director elections took place sporadically throughout the 70s and 80s. Community support dwindled to such a low point that in the fall of 1992 community residents had to be harassed to run.<sup>13</sup> The two newly elected board members resigned after a few months. Many segments of the South Side community are represented on the present Board, but there is not an active African American neighborhood representative.

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<sup>11</sup> The Black Men of Ithaca, " Official Memos," John Henrik Clarke Library: Cornell University. 1979.

<sup>12</sup> Klu Klux Klan Activity. "Memo" 5 Nov. 1979. Cornell University WHCH Dept. of Black Affairs. Series IV : Subject Files. Black Caucus of Ithaca. " Report of the Education Committee" 1 Oct. 1979. Series I By-Laws-Purpose. Black Caucus of Ithaca." Black Caucus of Ithaca By-Laws". 1979.

<sup>13</sup> Deidre Hill, Journal. May -September 1992.

## **Programming and Funding**

Support withdrawal doesn't explain in itself the programmatic problems over the last twenty-five years. For example, the South Side Community Center was able to pull off a short-term drive for independence. A key assumption in the minds of those pushing for group determination was that the South Side neighborhood would continue to be viable. From 1967 to the present the employment picture has dramatically declined. This has posed two problems, people did not have the money to contribute. Second, in order to make ends meet residents had to work two and three jobs, therefore cutting down their leisure time to volunteer. Community volunteers historically drove the Center's operations.

Ironically, as neighborhood volunteerism and financial contributions lessened, white support also decreased. This explains why the Center had to turn to State and federal grants for financial support and transients for volunteers (as Appendix 2 shows). More recent programming shows the short term nature of grants. Most grants provided just for programming, not for staff salaries or building upkeep. Under these conditions, it's not unusual that the day-to-day operations would become chaotic.

More ironically, most of the funding was earmarked for specific social programs which put different stipulations on the Center. The programs, however, did not fully match the social agenda of Center constituents. Therefore, the spin off affect of the drive toward grant funding was community alienation. Now there is a generation of youth who have not experienced the South Side Community Center as an agency where their self directed and orchestrated concerns are met. The current director and staff are desperately seeking funds without stipulations so that initiatives can be taken to engage the community.

It is important to note that even though there was a drive toward independence, the Center only briefly cut itself off from the United Way. As the Center had troubles maintaining its viability, program structure suffered. This caused friction between the Center and the United Way. In 1978, the tension became public knowledge. The United Way notified Center Administrators that their funding was in jeopardy due to lack of concordance with the agency's funds allocation policies. The United Way believed that the Center was handling its funds irresponsibly. This belief stemmed from an inability of Center administrators to submit program outlines. Submitting outlines was part of the stipulations for funding. Another stipulation was that none of the 1978 monies would be used to pay off past debts. Future funding had to be based on an evaluation of South Side's programs from October 1977 through March 1978. South Side also agreed to aid the United Way fund drive. Lack of adherence would mandate termination of funds for 1979.<sup>14</sup> The Center complied with the stipulations. The publicity of South Side fiscal mismanagement lingered for years, it was even the topic of the 1981 alderman electoral race.

Comments by a GOP candidate for alderman, Leach Morgan, that closing the South Side Community Center would enable the City to purchase a firehose for the Ithaca Fire Department alarmed South Side supporters. "Since we already have GIAC on North Albany Street, we do not need to duplicate the extra expense for an additional facility near the same area of the city," Morgan told an Ithaca Journal reporter. In response, City Controller Joseph Spano said, "The South Side Community Center has a \$62,000 budget in 1981, raised through United Way, program fees, private donations, and fundraising events, with no city funds." Other responses included one

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<sup>14</sup> Rodney Brooks, "UW Funds South Side " Ithaca Journal August 1977.

from Democratic mayoral candidate John Gutenburger, who denounced Morgan's proposal mainly because the Center represented a crucial neighborhood. Board member Margaret Jones suggested that candidate Morgan look at his own district for places to close. GOP Alderman Elva Holman, another South Side Board member, disagreed with Morgan's comment because he did not understand the necessity of the Center to the neighborhood it serves.<sup>15</sup>

The community was becoming further isolated from critical city decisions. City budget cuts hit hard in the early 1980s. One of the first elementary schools to be closed was in the South Side neighborhood. The Henry St. John Elementary School, a piece of the South Side community, was removed. Traditionally schools are places where neighborhood action takes place. With the closing of the Henry St. John elementary school, the South Side community lost a focal point. The reshaping of the community compounded the difficulties inside the Center.

### **Leadership**

As this thesis has shown, volunteerism was key to the Center's operations. They not only did the work, but designed many programs. During the late 1960s, as local volunteerism fluctuated Black students and, to a lesser extent, professors took over (Appendix 2 gives examples of programs in which students were involved). However, in the late 1970s student political and cultural activity became more focused on campus life and community participation waned. At Cornell, for example, there was a resurgence of African American Greek organizations. This meant that students definition of community consisted mainly of the campus community. During the late 1960s

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<sup>15</sup> Jane Marcham "Candidate Morgan: Close South Side to Pay for Hose" *Ithaca Journal*. 3 October 1981. "Gutenburger Says South Side Vital to Neighborhood" *Ithaca Journal*. October 1981. "South Side Supporters Outraged Over Council Candidate's Suggestions" *Ithaca Journal*. 5 October 1981.

and early 1970s, students came to the Center, exchanged ideas and performed any necessary task. By the late 1970s and 1980s, however, the students who wanted to be involved came with preconceived notions of what the downtown African American community needed. They were insensitive to existing community needs. This condescending attitude strained the implementation of programs, and the extended family relationship between town and gown folk.

Once the high number of community and campus volunteers decreased, implementing programs became chaotic. This chaos affected the staff and director morale. For example, in a two year period there were five directors.<sup>16</sup> Also, with scanty volunteerism and the financial picture rapidly changing, working at the Center became more difficult. No longer was the Director just a facilitator; the staff and the Director had to create, finance, and implement all programs, plus keep the conditions of the building suitable.

### **Physical Plant**

As I laid out in chapter three the Center was a beautifully constructed multipurpose building. In the mid 1970s the City spent \$150,000 on renovations. However, the renovations were of a poor quality. The physical condition of the building was in such dire straits that funds were spent on some urgent items and less important repairs were neglected. Some of the repairs that were neglected were cracking and crumbling floor tiles, loose ceiling panels and office door frames. Two ceiling panels fell while a conference was taking place, just missing one of the participants. The bathroom door locked for nearly an hour with a teacher and several children

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<sup>16</sup> Watkins, Art and Tony Poole, personal interview, April 1993.

inside because the lock on the door would not release.<sup>17</sup> Two children were burned when they leaned on a cracked radiator.

Most of those problems persisted through the 1980s and still remain. Viscous sewage odors at times permeated the building. There were no fundraising drives for physical issues and the building still needs repairs. The balcony overlooking the gymnasium needs to be reinforced. The mats at the end of the basketball court, and the rugs and floor tiles in different spots of the Center need to be replaced. The physical plant, programming, fundraising, and leadership issues were drastically changing when I began volunteering, in May of 1992.

### **Participant Observation**

I understood the staff frustration first hand. A week before I started going to the Center on a daily basis, I spoke with the program director, Amy Lewis. After briefly describing my project to her she was somewhat confused about my approach. She did not know of any volunteers allowing the Center to dictate the activity they would get involved in. She was pleased to have me aboard. I told her that I had experience as a camp counselor, program coordinator, and receptionist. That same day I spoke with the community coordinator, Crystal Jackson. I knew Crystal, we had spoken at length about the Center's history and her dedication to its programs ever since her undergraduate days at Cornell. She debriefed me on the hazards of the building and the acts of vandalism that often occurred. More importantly, we discussed the ongoing programs.

Immediately, Crystal took me under her wing. I attended meetings with her and became an assistant with the after-school program, of which she was the director and Terrence Calhon, a Cornell student, was a counselor. The

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<sup>17</sup>"Center Falling Apart Since Revamp" Syracuse Herald-American 12 March 1978. 60.

program had run out of funds and most of its participants opted to ride their bikes around the neighborhood instead of coming into the building. Since we were competing with the nice weather, many children did not attend. I helped one eighth grader with her math homework. The other two regular participants sometimes did their homework too, and most days we would all walk to the Commons for pizza or window shopping.<sup>18</sup> Even though the after-school program was still going on, plans were in the works for a summer camp.

Crystal and Terrence were planning Camp Imani, an African American cultural day camp. They had made up brochures and organized the paper work for the six-week day camp. During my second week, both Crystal and Terrence informed me and Tony Poole, the Executive Director, that they were leaving the Center. Terrence had a higher paying employment opportunity at Cornell that summer and Crystal was leaving for law school in her hometown of Baltimore. They passed the torch to me and the receptionist, Diaya Rashid. Crystal showed us where some of the files were from Camp Imani's first summer and told us to contact the Red Cross and the Equal Opportunity Commission. Diaya and I contacted the two agencies and we were told that there was some paper work to fill out and water safety classes to take. Both Crystal and Terrence were gone the next week.

Diaya and I were slightly overwhelmed. We decided that the camp should only be two weeks and since there was no budget we had to solicit donations. There was not a budget because Tony knew the Center did not have the resources to provide an adequate camp. Well, that was never understood by Crystal and since I was working more closely with her I assumed it as an oversight that the funds would be there. Diaya and I kept on planning for Camp Imani. We created a schedule of events and applied for

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<sup>18</sup> The Commons is a downtown shopping area in Ithaca.

food assistance from the Equal Opportunity Commission. Both Diaya and I attended Red Cross training. Loretia Pearson, a Cornell student, had been volunteering at South Side throughout the school year, as a counselor with the Urafiki program.<sup>19</sup> Loretia and I took care of soliciting funds while Diaya dug through all the necessary paper work. We received monies from the Africana Studies and Research Center and The Black Graduate and Professional Students Association. Piggy backing off of Crystal's idea of having South Side be an outreach point, meaning that we would solicit other camps in the area, and they would give us scholarships for our children to attend their camps. This would enrich the children's community awareness. Plus, the campers would still attend our camp. As the plan evolved, our camp was cut down to two weeks and most of the other camps in the area were supportive. Many of the camps wanted a more ethnically diverse camp anyway, so we helped them accomplish that goal. A few of the camps provided transportation, while Minister Mabel Welch transported other children to their camps. By the time Camp Imani started we had twenty-five campers involved and most attended another camp too. Few of these campers paid a fee. The outreach component was covered mostly by scholarships from the camps themselves. The in house portion of camp Imani ran on the \$220 received in donations.

Camp Imani received four junior counselors from the Ithaca Youth Bureau teen worker program. These teens did not want to work at all. They were unmotivated and they were harder to deal with than the campers. Two teen workers would come from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., while the other two would come from 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Many did not want to work with

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<sup>19</sup> Urafiki is one of the ongoing programs sponsored by Cornell's Ujamaa residence college. It is modeled after the big sister/big brother program.



children. In early July, Diaya left the Center and started a new job. A new Program Director, Duane Milton, was hired and he felt apprehensive about working with the camp since he wasn't involved with planning it. Loretia had to attend summer school classes at Cornell and could only help on Friday and Monday afternoons. A few parents helped by donating their time. Even though some of the staff was unmotivated or their attendance was sporadic, the camp still took place.

Camp Imani ran from July 27 thru Aug. 7 1992 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00. p.m. Each day a different predicament occurred. Either something was broken inside the Center or we would not have the funds readily available for a scheduled field trip. We spent the morning creating artwork then we ate lunch, and in the afternoon we would go swimming.<sup>20</sup> We still managed to go on an array of field trips. One afternoon we went horse back riding at Cornell. Another we went on a nature history walk with a representative from the Cayuga Nature Center. Another day we took the older campers to Tompkins Cortland Community College. They met with Michelle Berry, the STEP coordinator.<sup>21</sup> The trip exposed the campers to a college environment. We ate lunch and did a goal setting exercise.

Another trip we went up to Africana Studies and Research Center and the campers were treated to African poetry by Professor Micere Mugo and after that we had a tour of the Johnson Art Museum. Another day we went to Ithaca College and the campers were exposed to Radio and Television studios and some even were on the air with DJ Sarge. Thanks to the EOP division at Ithaca College we were treated to lunch. The campers also had the opportunity to talk with a few college students. We also went to the De Witt

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<sup>20</sup> at Stewart Park, a local public pool. The Alex Haley Memorial pool had not been built yet.

<sup>21</sup> Step was a program at TC3 that was geared toward minority students who were interested in attending a four year institution after their time at TC3.

historical society and looked at their materials dealing with African Americans in Ithaca's history. After, we went on a tour of the Tompkins County Library.

Almost every day we went on a trip away from the Center. There were a few community members who donated their talents inside the Center. Mrs. Mary Cary told African and African American folktales. Two African American school teachers donated their time and worked on silk screening projects with the campers. The end products were Camp Imani T-Shirts for everyone.

### **South Side Programs and Events**

Running the camp was a little frustrating at times but, I learned that working solo was the way the Center operated. The paid staff had to rely on their own talents and connections to pull their programs together. Amy Lewis, Program Director, used her connections to organize the South Side Festival and Community Forums. I assisted Amy with these programs. The night before the event we were collating the programs at her father's friends business because the Center did not have the resources we needed. All events ran in this fashion. Funding for programs was provided through grants, but community events were sponsored by sporadic donations (for accounts of community events refer to Appendix 2).

Different community issues arose during the summer of 1992. These issues were not unique, rather they were on-going issues that were ignited by diverse incidents. The illegal drug activity in the neighborhood and police brutality were two topics that residents were fed up about. They brought their disgust to the Center. Amy facilitated over a small group of residents and attempted to establish cordial relations between the community and the police force. A few meetings were held and a police-sponsored community picnic was tentatively planned. Community interest waned and the mobilizing ceased. Needless to say, the picnic never occurred. Similar scenarios took

place with other community action attempts. In the past, issues were discussed and acted upon because the community directed debate. Today, the same few residents take interest in bringing community empowerment issues to the South Side Community Center. Sometimes the issues are brought to other institutions or not even publicly discussed.

The community heavily supports the Juneteenth and the South Side Festivals. Both festivals take place in front of the Center. "Juneteenth [June Nineteenth] "is a Black Fourth of July. It is an independence day rooted in Black slavery. Originally celebrated in Texas, Juneteenth spread to become a countrywide day of festivals and speeches, commemorating Black independence, and fostering Black hope. Juneteenth is a distinct cultural festival for African American Ithacans. It is the official festival of Black Ithaca. The Juneteenth festival enjoys no agency underwriter. It is paid for by the community. The musicians and the technical staff, the security, and the clean up crew all donate their time out of love for the community."<sup>22</sup> The annual South Side Festival also highlights community talent and entrepreneurship. These are the main events that community members support.

### **Logic Beyond the Chaos:**

One reason I developed this project was to decipher the logic beyond the chaos at the South Side Community Center. Deciphering the logic meant understanding a historical continuum which examined prior social movements and coalitions that paved the way for a South Side Community Center. An understanding of the diverse social movements and coalitions that have taken place, in which African American Ithacans were the motivators, permits a different view upon the community, one of agent instead of victim. This thesis is one avenue of comprehending the complex collaborations that took place

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<sup>22</sup> 3rd Annual Ithaca Juneteenth Celebration. June 1993. 3&4 .

for the South Side Community Center to be created and sustained. A comprehensive history of the Center has not been previously attempted. This has left a void in understanding the survival mechanisms used to keep the Center's doors open. Once the South Side community is reminded of its history, it will be able to devise a more efficient operating strategy. That was the purpose of this study, to map out the earlier social movements and allow the community to create tactics to improve the South Side Community Center's effectiveness.

Lack of adequate community support, financial resources, and community needs assessments all affect the efficiency of the South Side Community Center. For a Center with such a rich history of building coalitions and serving community interests, it's disturbing that now the Center has been sinking because it's not making the concerns of the community its main goal. Action must be taken to reorganize the infrastructure, raise funds, assess programmatic needs, and solidify connections with the Africana Studies and Research Center, Cornell, and other social agencies. I choose these areas because they highlight both a long-term and short-term course of action. Just solidifying connections with Cornell and other outside services will not be enough; the issue of community empowerment would still be neglected.

Community engagement needs critical attention because there have been open houses and community forums, but only a fraction of the community attends. Brainstorming and consultation with other African American community organizations experts must take place with constituents to begin action on community empowerment and the other complex issues facing the Center.

## **Suggestions**

\* Ongoing community forums: invite African American campus and community organizations, businesses, and church congregations into the Center. Discuss the efficiency of the South Side Center. Ask, should the South Side Community Center exist?

\* Ongoing fundraising campaigns launched to improve the fiscal condition and rejuvenate community investment: Summer Boat Cruises, Winter Basketball Tournaments, Fall Festivals, Juneteenth Celebration are examples of seasonal activities which enhance community participation. Also, continue the membership drive, but emphasize dues. Apply for diverse grants and funding to supplement community dictated programs, additional staff, and physical plant needs.

\* Connection with outside agencies: negotiate with the AS&RC to link officially as a satellite component.<sup>23</sup> Discuss the possibility of AS&RC holding classes and events at the Center. Also, the Community Empowerment Group sponsored by Cornell University could conduct biannual needs assessment projects with the South Side staff and community.

\* Continue to build strong links with GIAC and the Youth Bureau, exchanging resources and cosponsoring programs. This would only enhance community relations. This is already happening, but more emphasis should be placed on it.

The Center's internal disharmony mirrors what is going on in the community. Drugs have taken their toll on the Ithaca's African American

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<sup>23</sup>AS&RC is short symbol for the Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell University.

community. Many young adults are locked out of the "normal" economy and have developed an underground economy. All the social ills of urban Black America are evident in Ithaca. Attempts to mobilize have been made but consistent efforts have not been successful. Internal reorganization, fundraising, and coalitions with community groups and outside agencies can create further rejuvenation.

**Conclusion: Without Struggle There is No Progress!**

This chapter mapped out the reasons why the South Side Community Center changed from a viable community center to an agency that had its activities dictated by outside sources. South Side used to be a community entity. It was embraced by African Americans in Ithaca. Since the late 1970s, community connection has decreased and financial obligations have come from federal grants. Even though the Center does not service the same needs it once did, and community support is lacking, there is still community consensus that the South Side Community Center is important. The main problem stems from residents waiting for someone else to do something about the leadership, fiscal, and physical plant problems. Since the Center is not as viable as it once was, should it remain open?

The Center was born out of a community drive for group determination. Residents banded together with their resources and engaged outside sources to reach their goal. The South Side Community Center is no longer a community entity, it is just another social agency. The community it was built to serve has gone elsewhere for most of its economic, social, and networking needs. The Center is in the midst of a dilemma. There is a community consensus that it should stay open but it does not have the commitment from its traditional constituents to make it an affective community organization.

## **Chapter One Introduction**

### **Purpose**

My thesis documents the origins, formative years, and contemporary significance of the South Side Community Center to African Americans in Ithaca, New York.<sup>1</sup> The creation and maintenance of the South Side Community Center represent episodes of community determination. This project analyzes social movements that paved the way for the South Side Community Center to exist and discusses its relationship with the community. The thesis is divided into four parts: the beginnings of the Black Ithacan community (1833-1920); the formative years of the South Side Community Center (1920-1950); and from heyday to chaos (1950 to 1992); summarizing the logic beyond the chaos.<sup>1b</sup> Examining the historical and contemporary relevance of the South Side Community Center allows us to analyze the history of African Americans in Ithaca along a social continuum. Understanding one community institution allows us one lens to view the whole community.

### **Rationale**

I began going to the Center in the fall of 1991 shortly after I matriculated at Cornell. I volunteered as a Girl Scout leader for the only area African American troop. Our troop met at the South Side Community Center twice a month, and usually there was a problem with heating or gaining access to the building. Instead of criticizing the institution, I asked community residents two main questions: "why do these problems persist?" and "what was the Center like before these problems developed?" They gave me their opinions and

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<sup>1</sup> The term African American is used instead of Black or Negro to give an accurate nation state context to people of African descent in the United States.

<sup>1b</sup> The term Black Ithacan is used by elder members of the African American Ithacan community .

positive reflections. They described the Center as an important place and connected its decline to the downturn of the whole community. A plethora of social ills -- drug abuse, underemployment, police brutality, and domestic violence have chiseled away community harmony. After hearing the diverse accounts and observing the decay first hand, I decided to use my thesis project as a medium to explore how the South Side Community Center began, as a cornerstones of the community, grew, and slowly faded in importance to African American Ithacans.

### **Methodology**

While conducting this study, I have used ethnographic techniques common in urban anthropology. Conducting interviews and volunteering at the South Side Community Center enabled me to learn about African American Ithacan history and the contemporary situation from those who have lived it. Volunteering was a natural way to understand how the Center addresses the diverse issues facing the neighborhood it services. I volunteered for four months, starting in May of 1992. Volunteering meant that I did any job needed. I assumed the Directorship of Camp Imani (the South Side Community Center's culturally relevant day camp) because I was the only person who had seen it through from its inception. That was the hardest, yet one of the most enjoyable, parts of understanding the South Side Community Center. On the other hand, finding people to talk to about the history and the contemporary situation was easy. Many people had opinions and were willing to share them with me.

My interviewing experience was fashioned in the spirit of African oral tradition; I became a student of the individuals I spoke with. I attempted to



understand the joy and pain within their testimonies. After meeting with numerous individuals, I selected a few to guide me through my study. I found the most support in five African American women from Ithaca. They shared many memories and insights with me.

One problem I found was that some community members feel exploited by the academic pursuits of college students. In the early 1980s there was one incident when a few African American Ph.D. candidates were collaborating with some community members on a history of St. James A.M.E. Zion Church. Miscommunication occurred, and some materials were lent but never returned.<sup>2</sup> When I was conducting my interviews, I made it very clear that the items I looked at or borrowed would be returned. Basically, I had to eliminate my desire to receive first-hand artifacts (scrapbooks and pictures). When they were given to me willingly, I was thankful. Other than that I did not ask for them.

I used a variety of written materials as secondary sources, such as the materials at the Africana Studies and Research Center Library, De Witt Historical Society, The Ithaca Journal, Tompkins County United Way, and other Cornell University Libraries. Mr. Ken Glover, former Chairperson of the South Side Community Center Board of Directors, lent his South Side archives. I also employed published works pertaining to Ithaca's history and contemporary situation. Using many sources aided me in gathering information about African American Ithacans.

### **Chapter Review**

This thesis divides into four chapters. Chapter Two focuses on the early years (1833-1920) of the African American community. In this period, African Americans came to Ithaca for three reasons: some were enslaved, others

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<sup>2</sup> Betty Búrke, personal interview, 14 Sept. 1992.

settled in Tompkins County after they escaped from slavery, and a few were free from birth and came here for advanced opportunities. The early organizations formed by community members reflected their diverse interests. An Underground Railroad station, churches, and social clubs were the organizational strings that tied the early African American community together. The ways in which initial African American Ithacans created organizations and laid the foundation for a community is the focus of this chapter.

Chapter Three (1920-1950) concentrates on the creation and formative years of the South Side Community Center. One women's group thought the community was too dispersed. Understanding that there were already ethnically oriented community centers in Ithaca, the women of the Francis Harper Woman's Club campaigned to start an African American community center.<sup>2b</sup> The initial aim was to bring African American Ithacans together. A secondary objective was to give the community youth a safe place to go and learn about themselves. This chapter is concerned with how the South Side Community Center began and maintained itself.

Chapter Four (1967-1992) is an overview of the years between the formative and the contemporary. The Center shifted from being a community-based organization to an agency struggling to serve a community that had more demands than it could service. No longer was the South Side Community Center the only place community members brought their activities and concerns; instead community members created alternative organizations or attended City run institutions in greater numbers. Without traditional support all aspects of the Center were permeated with mismanagement and

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<sup>2b</sup> Francis Harper was a 19th Century African American poet/activist.

chaos. This chapter also summarizes a logic behind the chaos and suggests solutions.

## Appendix 1

### List of South Side Community Center Directors

1. Ms. Jessie Cooper	1932-1938
2. Mr. James Gibbs	1938-1944
3. Mr. Franklin	1944-1950
4. Mr. Fred Townsend	1950 - 1960
a series of acting directors	1960 -1967
5. Mr. Louis Cunningham and a series of acting directors	1967-1972
6. Ms. Clementine Kennedy	1972-1973
7. Rev. Samuel Perry	1973-1977
8. Ms. Beverly Meek	1976, acting director
9. Mr. Nantumbu Bomani	1977-1980
10. Arzeymah Raqib	1981-1982
11. Ms. Beverly Ish-Renick	1982-1985
12. Mr. Fe Nunn	1985-1986
13. Ms. Audrey Cooper	1986-1990
14. Mr. Tony Poole	1990-present

## Appendix 2

### PROGRAMS AND OPERATIONS

This is a summary of some of the programs and operations that affected the South Side Community Center during the last twenty-five years.

<b>Date: 1968-1975</b>	<b>Program Type</b>	<b>Origins of Funding</b>
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• Summer, 1968	Summer Community Events	Community. <sup>1</sup>
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Community women organized music programs, regular record hops, and sporting events, and even monitored a snack bar in the lobby, like Mrs. Harper's Candy stand (the candy stand that was present when the Center first opened in the 1930s). These women chaperoned that summer's huge block parties too. A band was hired to play the first weekend event and George Hughes, the owner of a grocery store, donated refreshments. The City Department of Public Works barricaded the 300 block of South Plain Street and the 100 block of Cleveland Avenue for the dance. When there was no money to pay for the band at 2:00 p.m., the community donated the two hundred dollars needed within two hours. At the second block party The Soul Generation, a band of neighborhood teens, performed the latest hits. Mrs. Mary Love took the responsibility of soliciting area businesses. Mrs. Pauline Stout and others set up games and movies for children every Saturday. Cornell Public Library lent the movies. Other organizers included Mrs. Lucille Boyd, Mrs. Delores Johnson, Mrs. Margaret Mohn, Mrs. Juanita Duncan, and Mrs. Anita Reed.

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<sup>1</sup> Sue Strandberg "South Side Community Center' Active" Ithaca Journal 29 August 1981.

- Academic Year, 1968- 1969      Black Counseling Services      Ithaca School System.<sup>2</sup>

Starting in 1969 and leaving the Center in the mid 1980s this educational resource began from the community's demand to address the critical drop-out and failure rates. Only a small number of students were pursuing vocational job training and college education. African American students participated in limited recreational and social activities and displayed a high rate of antisocial behavior and an apathy towards success. The school system funded the program for better educational services. One hundred and forty individuals used the service when it was located at the South Side. The purpose was to link the community with the public school system and to provide a professional counseling for the community. The South Side Community Center was deemed the most appropriate place because the target audience lived in its vicinity. The program ran for at least two hours twice a week. It met for four hours at Ithaca High School.

- Summer, 1969      Building Supervision      Community.<sup>3</sup>

The building was not accessible enough for the community's children. Fiscal problems hampered building use. Parents took responsibility, devised a volunteer schedule, and provided supervision for youth activities.

- Summer, 1970      Summer Camp      Grants and fees.<sup>4</sup>

The camp fee was \$1.25 per week per child. Cornell students played a vital role in instructing an array of classes in photography, music, science, and fencing.

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<sup>2</sup> Betty Burke, "A re-organizational Plan for Black Counseling Services: 1983".

<sup>3</sup> "South Side has a Fruitful Board Session" Ithaca Journal 11 July 1969.

<sup>4</sup> Judith Horstman, "South Side Program Termed Success" Ithaca Journal 17 March 1970.

<b>Date: 1975-1979</b>	<b>Program Type</b>	<b>Origins of Funding</b>
• 1976	Day Care Program	United Way. <sup>5</sup>
Rev. Samuel Perry, the Executive Director, established a joint day care program with GIAC.		
• 1976	Youth in Trouble Program	Unknown. <sup>6</sup>
Rev. Perry, the Executive Director, started this program to deal with at risk youth.		
• 1976	Ongoing Activities	United Way.
The daily activities were led by various staff members and volunteers. Roller-skating, gymnastics, weight-lifting, cooking, arts and crafts, yoga, one-on-one preschool programming, ethnic expressions, and consumer education were some of the regular programs.		
• 1977	Community Programming	\$83,000 grant, CETA. <sup>7</sup>
The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act grant gave the Center enough money to employ six community workers: a program coordinator, an educational counselor, a recreation coordinator, a bookkeeper, a co-day care director, and an administrative assistant-receptionist. With these additions the South Side staff totaled 13. This team created diverse programs for the community.		

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<sup>5</sup> "South Side Center: Opening Ceremony Still On." Ithaca Journal 1976.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "South Side Community Center Programs" 27 March 1978.

• 1977 Day Care Program CETA and Fees.<sup>8</sup>

The day care program was attended by seventeen neighborhood children. Three other employees were paid from tuition fees. Volunteers made up the rest of the staff. The approximate program budget was \$28,000. The program was self-sufficient. It met five days a week from 7:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m., with the main goals of providing educational and recreational skills to pre-kindergarten children and assisting them in their transition into the elementary school.

• 1977 Educational Library CETA.<sup>9</sup>

An educational library began on November 21, 1977. One hundred children (ages 2-12) and five teenagers (ages 13-19) participated in this program. The library provided supplemental reading, visual materials, career information, and educational materials from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. every weekday.

• 1977 Exposure Program (film) Community.<sup>10</sup>

Entertaining and educational films were shown Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Twenty six children and twenty-three youths participated.

• 1977 Martial Arts Community.<sup>11</sup>

Fifteen adults (ages 20-45) and fifteen children (ages 5-14) attended. This program's purpose was to provide physical, mental, and spiritual karate training. It was designed to develop the participants' character and to give greater self-confidence, self discipline, self respect, and an ability to defend themselves. The program met several times weekly. The income came from participants' fees. The Executive Director, Nantambu Bomani, taught the classes.

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<sup>8</sup> "South Side Community Center Programs" 27 March 1978.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 4



- 1977 Religious Education Tabernacle Baptist Church.<sup>12</sup>

Provided an educational religious background to elementary age children. This program met Friday afternoons from 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. It was staffed by two members of the Tabernacle Baptist Church, a predominantly White congregation.

- 1977 Project Exposure State Wide Basketball Tournament and recreational drop in hours.<sup>13</sup>

Two hundred and sixty-five individuals dropped in on a regular basis. Activities focused around team sports. Provided a positive outlet for youth.

- 1977 Crochet Class CETA.<sup>14</sup>

The purpose of this program was to enhance the artistic and educational skill of crocheting and to establish an atmosphere for the beginning of the elderly programs. The major strength of the program was that it was intergenerational . Half the group was made up of seniors. Meetings were Thursday evenings from 7:45 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.. and one staff person aided the program. The program drew ten people.

- 1977 Exercise Program-Love Your Body Cornell.<sup>15</sup>

The goal was to enhance the physical and mental health of the participants, give an outline to assist people in maintaining good physical and mental health, and provide a health program that enabled people to become more health conscious. The class met Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Cornell sponsored the programs and various guest speakers from the University addressed the class.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.,3

<sup>13</sup> "South Side Community Center Programs" 27 March 1978. 4

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 5&6

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 6

- 1977 Community Drop Ins Community.<sup>16</sup>

Club Essence, the Elks Drum Corps, and church groups started meeting and holding functions at the Center again. Fish fries, basketball tourneys, and educational classes made the Center viable. The Ithaca Branch of the Masons, with twenty members, met every first and third Tuesday from 7:00 - 10:00 p.m. The local branch of another national African American organization, the Eastern Stars, with fifteen members, also met every first and third Tuesday evening of the month. Bingo became an ongoing Wednesday night event and a successful fund-raiser. Neighborhood families came together and supported the Center and the notion of winning a little money. "The rebirth inspired the recreation of the Youth Council. Composed of teen leaders that organized a collective expression of opinion to be brought to the Board of Directors and staff. This Youth Council was also responsible for maintaining order within the Center and for evaluating the desires of other youths."

- 1978 Summer Camp E.O.C.<sup>17</sup>

(E.O.C.: Equal Opportunity Commission) The focus of the day camp was to promise educational and recreational activities for forty children. The staff consisted of three full-time employees, three work-study students from Cornell, and six E.O.C. Youth workers.

<b>Date: 1980-1990</b>	<b>Program Type</b>	<b>Origins of Funding</b>
• 1984	Daily Activities	United Way and Fees. <sup>18</sup>

The summer camp serviced fifty kids; an after school program was attended by twenty to twenty-five children on a regular basis; Junior and Cub Scouts met

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<sup>16</sup> "South Side" Mwanzo July 1977.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> "South Side Community Center Newsletter" Vol. 1 No.4 & No 2 June & July 1984.



- 1984

Positive Self Image Program

County  
Division of  
Youth.<sup>20</sup>

The Positive Self Image program included basic recreation, education, social development, cultural, and economic components meant to enhance the self esteem of the members. The Center was thought to provide the most influential atmosphere because it was a place most of the participants were familiar with. The recreational component involved game nights, social events, Boy Scouts, and other opportunities for social interaction. The educational components centered on tutoring programs and other types of academic assistance. The adults involved would also be active with Project Moving Up, the Task Force Project, and other opportunities to heighten learning exposure.

- 1985

Community Unity Programs

County  
Division  
of Youth.<sup>21</sup>

Community Support, Community Cleaning, and Community Fund Raising. The support phase was an organized effort to aid the elderly and disabled within the community by doing chores and other acts of kindness. The cleaning phase, directed towards the beautification of the community, meant sweeping the streets and planting flowers for neighborhood residents. Moreover, bake sales, car washes, dances, and other events became major fund-raisers

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<sup>20</sup> Nancy B. Zahler. "Memo: NBZ: sls" 6 January 1984.  
Beverly Meek, "Annual Report for 1984 "South Side Community Center " .25 January 1985.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

• 1986 Young, Gifted and Black Community.<sup>22</sup>

Four African American women founded Young, Gifted and Black. The group met at South Side regularly. The program provided its forty-five participants an opportunity to learn about their culture and history through the performing arts. Their artistic pieces consisted of choral singing, poetry readings, dance, and pantomime. The group performed for Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign stop in Ithaca. One performance paid homage to the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Another was a guest appearance with the Cornell Orchestra. That year the group performed on public access television twice. They were guests at a May program at Cornell's Africana Studies and Research Center. They also presented at the Tompkins County Human Rights Commission's Sixth Annual Awards affair.

• 1986 M.A.P. Grant<sup>23</sup>

The M.A.P. (Minority Applicant Pool) Program enrolled twenty-three individuals in 1986. South Side staff member Barbara Gardner and later Ms. Vickie Scott coordinated the program. They referred qualified minority job seekers to employers who wanted to interview, hire, and enroll minority candidate with or without experience. Job referrals came to their attention. Cornell, Civil Service, and New York State Job Service were active employers.

• 1987- 1989 Cold Weather Shelter City.<sup>24</sup>

The South Side Community Cold Weather Shelter was a homeless outreach program designed to serve lodgers, who were given referrals, bus tokens, clothing, food, counseling, housing and employment assistance. The South

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<sup>22</sup> Beverly Meek, "Annual Report for 1984" South Side Community Center 25 January. 1985.

Beverly Meek & Larolyn Davis "Grant Application: Interim Report Form" Tompkins County Arts Council: Exhibit B. 5 July 1986.

<sup>23</sup> Fe Nunn "Structure Report" South Side " 12 September. 1985.

<sup>24</sup> "Emergency Cold Weather Shelter " 1989.

Side Community Cold Weather Shelter served mostly able-bodied men, older than nineteen and younger than sixty. The Shelter opened at 9 p.m. and closed at 7 a.m.; lodgers could enter between 9 p.m. and 12 p.m. The services provided included washing and drying machines, showers, a mail drop, references, dinner (if there was food to serve), entertainment (movies sometimes) and a place to sleep. Lights went out at midnight, and lodgers awakened at six a.m. to begin the day with a small breakfast. The lodgers were responsible for cleaning the bathrooms, lobby, and gym. Some were employed or between jobs, others had stopped seeking work. A few times women and minors were served, but only in extreme situations. The winter of 1989 was the last year of operation for the South Side Community Cold Weather Shelter because of numerous occupation and fire code violations. The Shelter stopped due to the lack of funds and renovations.

- 1989                      Weekend Meals Program                      Cornell,  
Downtown  
Restaurants, and  
the Ithaca  
Common  
Council.<sup>25</sup>

The Weekend Meals Program was facilitated by Cornell Hotel School students Anne Loehr and Lorie Paulson. Sponsored by area restaurants and diverse pools of volunteers, the program was able to expand from a Saturday meal program to a weekend one. South Side was an ideal location; the Center's "reputation for being for all neighborhood residents helped the program establish some credibility". Financial support to the tune of \$2,400 came from the Ithaca Common Council. Many businesses donated money, materials, and food.

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<sup>25</sup> Anne Loehr & Lorie Paulson. "Weekend Meal Program at South Side Community Center: The Adaptation of a Saturday Meal Program and Expansion of the Weekend Meal Program." P. 2&3. May 1989.

- 1989 Day Care Grant/Community.<sup>26</sup>

In 1989 the Day Care Program was in crisis for lack of a certified child careworker . The program existed on a shoestring budget, and a certified care giver was never employed. The families that used the service did not pay regularly, adding to the budget and human resource problems that eventually forced the closing of the Day Care Center.

- 1989 Community Events United Way.<sup>27</sup>

An open house in November, and a "wing ding fling/cultural thing". The Center received a \$930 grant for conga drums instruction.

<b>Date: 1990-1992</b>	<b>Program Type</b>	<b>Origins of Funding</b>
• 1991	GED and College Courses	TC3. <sup>28</sup>

A few residents took advantage of the General Education Degree exams. A partnership was established with Tompkins Cortland Community College. Three college level courses were scheduled to be taught at the Center: Basic Writing Skills, English 101, and Introduction to Sociology.

- 1992 Community Forums Community.<sup>29</sup>

A few forums were held to address African American and Latino educational concerns. The African American & Latino Community Educational Reform

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<sup>26</sup> Audrey Cooper.: to Marge Dill, Director Daycare Council. 8 September 1989.  
Constance Graham. Board Members: Daycare becoming Headstart. 16 October. 1989

<sup>27</sup> "South Side Community Center, Directors Report December "1989.

<sup>28</sup> "Advertisement flyer" Spring 1991.

<sup>29</sup> Marcia Fort and Anthony Poole: Spokespersons for The African American & Latino Community Educational Reform Council: "Statement" 2 June 1992.

Council was created as an advocacy group. It desired further discussion of how the Minority Student Affairs Office, the current manifestation of Black Counseling Services, interfaced with the administration, guidance departments, and support services on behalf of the community.

- 1992                      The Wheat Street Independent                      Community.<sup>30</sup>

The community newspaper was born in 1990 and only printed a few issues. The paper was committed to "promoting change in Black American Life and in spurring debate on the issues deemed important to African Americans". A small group of interested residents wanted to rejuvenate the paper during the summer of 1992 but there was not enough financial support.

- 1992                      Black Radio                      Community.<sup>31</sup>

Community members came together and formed a group called Community Meetings for African Americans. One of the subcommittees dealt with the issues of Black Radio. DJ Sarge, a resident of New York City from New York City who was a student at Ithaca College, invested money and time into starting a cable ready urban radio station. Due to little support it went off the air in five months.

- 1992                      Renaissance Missionary Baptist Church.<sup>32</sup>

This small congregation, made up primarily of college students, broke from Calvary Baptist Church. Rev. Derrick Span, a rejected candidate for the pastor

<sup>30</sup>*The Wheat Street Independent*: "Until The Last Blade of Grass is Free" Vol. 1., Nunn. 1 1990.

<sup>31</sup> DJ Sarge, personal interview, December 1992

Todd E. Mottley "Research Project: The History of Blacks in Radio in Ithaca" Africana Studies & Research Center Acc #1 Carton #2 Folder #18. 20 May 1983.

<sup>32</sup> Renaissance Missionary Baptist Church Bulletin March 1992



ship at Calvary, delivered message of liberation theology. The elders at Calvary agreed somewhat with the message but not with the messenger. With a faithful few Rev.Span brought his messages to the South Side neighborhood. The congregation paid enough tithes for a South Side staff to open the doors on Sunday mornings. The weekly program had a message " a people dedicated to the teaching and preaching of the liberating Work of God, as taught by Jesus Christ, for the complete freedom of the whole person from spiritual and physical bondage, oppression, domination, exploitation, addiction, and all other manners of evil and sin". At first the congregation numbered about fifty people, but by the end of May there was only a handful. These few launched a breakfast program and other outreach activities. When the Renaissance Missionary Baptist Church moved to another downtown location attendance drastically dropped. Parishioners did not favor worshipping in a gym, so another location was found. The sermons turned from a theme of liberation to begging for financial resources, which further turned people off. By August the church dissolved.

• 1992 Girl Scouts Community.<sup>33</sup>

Another active group was Girl Scout Troop 1311. Four seven years Troop 1311 has operated out of the "Big SS," as Mrs. Martha Smith, the head troop leader, calls the South Side Community Center. An African American Girl Scout troop has existed off and on since before South Side was South Side. Mrs. Anita Reed remembers when she was a Scout at the South Side House in the early 1930s. College and family volunteers were recruited to help plan and supervise activities. A South Side staff person was needed only to open the building. On many occasions the troop was locked outside of the building due to a lack of understanding between the Center and the troop. Community

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<sup>33</sup>Martha Smith, personal interview, June 1992.

groups coming into the Center designing their own agendas have always added life to the Center, but the administration's lack of knowledge deters community groups from using the building.

• 1992 Ongoing Programs United Way.<sup>34</sup>

Other main programs the Center hosted were an after school program, homework assistance, a teen program, a food pantry, a newsletter, a community bike program, and a senior food shopping service.

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<sup>34</sup> Other programs the Center hosted were an afterschool program, homework assistance, a teen program, a food pantry, a newsletter, a RIBS bike program, and a senior food shopping service. They were all run sporadically because funding and personnel fluctuated. Deidre Hill, Journal May-June, 1992.

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