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Cooking with Caste Iron: Food System Modernization in Birmingham, 1910-1964

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THOMAS C. MCLEMORE

HISTORY

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to capture the social and political conditions that contributed to the rise of class and racial disparities in Birmingham's food system. The way in which all Birmingham residents located, grew, raised, purchased, cooked, and consumed food reinforced and furthered a caste system of social dispossession and black oppression. An overview of the poor health conditions of the pre-modern, industrial city provides a basis for understanding the reasoning of later efforts in systematic modernization. These efforts took place amid broader, national contexts of political and social Progressivism and the emerging paradigm of the New South. These trends contributed to a continuance of exploitive practices of absentee owners in an effort to increase efficiency and maximize industrial output.

As industrial modernization occurred throughout the Jim Crow era, whites in Birmingham grasped at new methods of controlling the black working class. These efforts extended into food access and selection. Through new practices in urban segregation and racial distinction, whites rendered Jim Crow onto Birmingham's food system. Commissaries and grocers created redundant food systems that separated blacks and whites and benefited from their further separation. Also within this modernization, a conflict arose between Birmingham's penchant for privatism and a growing national trend toward a welfare state. This conflict played out in how working-class citizens, especially blacks, received food relief.

Further, the growth of the industrial city created diversified and dependent systems of service and consumption. The segregationist society in which they developed shaped these new systems. Intimate interactions and assertions of interracial consumptions shaped race relations. These declarations of equitable consumption came to define the basis of the civil rights movement in Birmingham. Black protest focused on the democratic importance of the equitable purchase as much as the franchise. In a way, Birmingham's food systems displayed similar features to issues regarding voting rights, access to education, and equitable employment. As Birmingham's populace developed a modernist, urban, industrial culture, it included the city's food systems. This resulted in the development of institutions of food consumption reflective of the people who contributed to their creation.

Keywords: Jim Crow, Birmingham, food systems, race relations, consumerism, urban history

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INTRODUCTION

The modernization of Birmingham's food system occurred alongside several other significant periods in local and national transition and development. Events and changing social and political landscapes of the early twentieth century shaped the way in which Birmingham residents accessed, prepared, and consumed food. Birmingham's food system did not modernize merely as a byproduct of greater efforts in economic and municipal growth, but as an explicit focus of both the politically powerful and the organized, working class. Political and industrial leaders focused on shaping Birmingham's economic position nationally and growing its industrial capacity, as working-class communities struggled to maintain autonomy while securing basic needs.

Historian Robert Wiebe's work, particularly *The Search for Order*, has provided the structuralism framework for understanding Birmingham's emergence as a modern industrial city within the broader context of national bureaucracy and systematization. Through this lens, we can view Birmingham's food systems developing in accordance with a greater national trend toward order and hierarchical social control. Wiebe's assertions also addressed the impact of certain elements of welfare capitalism as they coincided with political Progressivism, yet with markedly different intentions. Historian Stuart Brandes's work on American welfare capitalism acknowledged this relationship,

but correctly identified the institution as a component that bolstered broader, more complex efforts in "bureaucratic orientation."[1]

Geographer Bobby Wilson's work provided a substantive bridge from Wiebe's structuralism argument to Birmingham leadership's efforts for racial order as their effects translated onto the city's food landscape. From Wilson also comes a working definition of modernity as an acculturation of rigid routine within a population to serve an emergent economy dependent on industrial productivity. Wilson identifies major social implications in the Birmingham leadership's attempts at creating a white supremacist racial order. This racial order and the responses elicited from black resistance shaped cross-racial relationships and defined the eventual extent of social justice. Many blacks increasingly identified social justice culturally and systemically as requiring equal access to outlets of consumption, thereby defining the parameters of progress.[2]

In establishing a timeline, the organization of Edward Lamonte's *Politics and Welfare in Birmingham* has provided political landmarks around which an intermarried discussion of politics, culture, and industrial modernization can be constructed. This thesis orients itself similarly to Lamonte's work as it begins by focusing on the genesis of Birmingham until 1917. This first portion identifies the industrial contributions to the structure of political power in the city as well as the effects of national political trends such as Progressivism. Again similarly, both transition to a Depression-era discussion of federal intervention and relief. Lamonte's work guided this thesis in a transition to a post-war look at the effects of the New Deal on the relationship between federal, state, and

[1] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 184-194.; Stuart D. Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism: 1880-1940*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 8.
[2] Bobby M. Wilson, *Race and Place in Birmingham: The Civil Rights and Neighborhood Movements* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 13-24.

local governments. The New Deal established a basis of conflict within the city as a growing "caretaker government" clashed with a "continuing political culture of privatism." Lamonte's final chapter further directed this thesis as it begins in the transformative years of the early 1960s. Here Lamonte highlights the socially and politically turbulent years of Public Safety Commissioner Bull Connor's waning power and the culmination of civil rights advancement in Birmingham. This chronological framework has proven an invaluable guide in organizing the complex interplay of food, politics, industrial modernization, and race relations.[3]

A discussion of systemic revolutions, particularly within an emerging urban-industrial setting, necessitates an overview of preexisting conditions of food quality, availability, and access. Birmingham inherited the initial structure and conditions of its new, urban food system from Old South capitalism. Both new, urban South and Old South food systems produced insufficient, inefficient, and unaffordable outlets for the working class. Thus, a discussion of the politics of Birmingham's modern food system warrants insight into the roles of different classes shaping and accessing methods of food procurement. The ground-breaking nature of the evolution of the urban food system in Alabama only revolutionized food access insofar as the city's transition to an industrial-capitalism economic base required. Working-class households still acquired food from relatively unchanged modes analogous to the subsistence farming and food allotment of a rural, pre-industrial sharecropping system.[4]

[3] Edward S. Lamonte, *Politics and Welfare in Birmingham, 1900-1975* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), xii-xiii.
[4] W.M. McGrath, "Conservation of Health," In *The Survey* (New York: Survey Associates, 1912), 1505.; Samuel Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), 5.

New approaches in food access and comprehensive public health practices succeeded Birmingham industry's rapid and uncoordinated formation. The welfare capitalism and social science initiatives of Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company (TCI) president George Gordon Crawford introduced Birmingham's working class to new methods of dependency and corporate control while also affecting the evolution of municipal public health reform. Although a private company, TCI's social science initiatives so pervaded the domestic landscape of the city's majority working class that they affected and shaped private life and public policy. The nutrition-based efforts of Dr. Thomas Spies in curing the malnourishment of Birmingham's laborers displayed further government neglect and an industrial incentive toward investing in public health initiatives. In both experiments, white men directed the reform and tasked masses of female social workers and homemakers with ground-level implementation. These usually unpaid women served as agents of community health in laying the groundwork for emerging systems of addressing of food and health access. They delivered a message of standardized, orderly household health by introducing corporate, predetermined lessons in diet, nutrition, and cleanliness.[5]

As Birmingham's working class slowly became conditioned to middle-class-driven consumer capitalism during the late thirties and more rapidly so in the post-war era, Birmingham's food system shifted to reflect that cultural trend. Wholesalers engaged in more mechanized systems of interstate food trade and dependency. These systems introduced extra-state regulations on both food and facility quality. Whites successfully

[5] Marlene Rikard, "George Gordon Crawford: Man of the New South," (M.A. thesis, Samford University, 1971), 38; Linda Akenhead, "Conquest of 'Hidden Hunger': The Work of Thomas Douglas Spies" (Birmingham: Jefferson County Medical Society/University of Alabama at Birmingham Health Science Archives, July 1987), p. 25.

sought to implant segregationist practices into these new systems of consumption. Further, within this emerging consumer culture, middle-class whites also used methods of distinction in the home and in education to distance themselves culturally from increasingly encroaching middle-class blacks. Again, this effort of distinction and discrimination emanated from a white male elite, yet strongly relied on the ability of women to adapt in their duty as homemaker, and newly attributed duties of employee and consumer.[6]

Whites further used food access as a means for social control by directing food relief throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Birmingham's Public Safety Commissioner, Eugene "Bull" Connor embodied the Birmingham penchant for controlling federal food assistance. He also acted as the face of the city's white power structure as it attempted to exert its control over poor blacks. Connor experimented with withholding food from Birmingham's poorest families—black and white— in an attempt to quell rising black protest. His efforts, however, only drove blacks to more concentrated areas of familiar consumption and organization while they planned and fought against segregation. Blacks reduced consumption and only patronized businesses supportive of the civil rights movement, including grocers. These businesses made possible and sustained their boycott.[7]

Blacks used these segregated grounds to organize and demand equal rights to consume. Civil rights organizations such as the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) challenged segregation by self-selecting supportive food outlets and by

[6] *Birmingham News*, January 1, 1961; *Birmingham News*, November 11, 1965; *Birmingham News*, August 23, 1940.; *Birmingham News*, November 5, 1957.
[7] Glenn T. Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 200.

boycotting and sitting-in at segregated restaurants. Birmingham felt and ultimately acknowledged their collective consumer power even within the limited confines of segregated consumerism. The propulsion of Birmingham's population toward a consumption-driven class identity within the social and legal barriers of Jim Crow stimulated racial conflict and ultimately black protest. As powerful whites in Birmingham demanded and commanded the city's entrance into the modern, industrial era they lost their insular control over the city's function as an apparatus of wealth production. No longer were they isolated autocrats, but merely components within a broader, nationalized system of not just food, but power and control.[8]

[8] April 18, 1961, Police Report of ACMHR Meeting held April 17, 1961, Connor Papers, Birmingham Public Library Archives.; *New York Times*, April 12, 1964.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORY AND TRADITION

Interlink'd, food-yielding lands!
Land of coal and iron! land of gold! land of cotton, sugar, rice!
Land of wheat, beef, pork! land of wool and hemp! land of the apple and the grape!
Land of the pastoral plains, the grass-fields of the world! land of those sweet-air'd interminable plateaus!
Land of the herd, the garden, the healthy house of adobie!

--Walt Whitman[9]

In 1910 Birmingham's annexation of neighboring communities increased its square mileage sixteenfold and more than doubled its population. Growing pains, both physical and psychological, unsurprisingly accompanied it. Its rapid industrial growth necessitated constant recruitment of working-class families. The preceding booms and busts in industry resulted in a perennial lag in adequate municipal responses to issues of public welfare. The cheap labor that provided the exceptional base for a new industrial economy required Birmingham leaders to tap into outside labor pools. The district's growing need for attracting foreign immigrants and domestic migrants alike faced realities of poor infrastructure, little public investment, and a traditional Southern disconnect between the aristocratic elite and the working class. The inadequate development of Birmingham's emerging modern public health and food systems made

[9] Walt Whitman, "Starting from Paumanok," *Leaves of Grass* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1897), 26.

evident these issues. The weight of the issues of availability, access, and affordability of proper nutrition and healthcare fell fully on working-class families throughout the Birmingham district. However, the state and local power structure reserved policy decisions for the educated class at the state level and the wealthy class locally.[10]

The influx of European immigrants and blacks from Alabama's Black Belt called for reform and brought with it alternative methods of securing basic needs. This influx occurred alongside significant corporate and municipal restructuring. In 1907, Pittsburgh -based U.S. Steel acquired the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company (TCI) as its largest subsidiary. In 1911, as a result of the 1910 annexation, Birmingham implemented a city commission form of government, replacing an unwieldy mayor-council form of government. In this emerging enterprise of New South industry, food and healthcare access became a tool for both elite corporate control and community agency and identity. Industry initiated alternative systems for addressing food and health concerns within company towns. Working-class families and corporate leadership both experimented with alternative food systems during this time of growth in Birmingham. These systems were modeled out of an unlikely marriage of cosmopolitan, holistic health policy reform, Old South paternalism, and traditional ethnic foodways.[11]

Geographer Samuel Hilliard effectively constructs an Old South tradition determined by an absentee planter class and its perennial tendency to invest all capital into means of production of cash crops. This practice created a greater dependency on a

[10] Carl V. Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham*, 1871-1921 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 32; McGrath, "Conservation of Health," 1505-1506.
[11] Theresa Aguglia Beavers, "The Italians of the Birmingham District," M.A. Thesis, (Birmingham: Samford University, 1969), 14; U.S. Census data as reported at http://www.bplonline.org/resources/government/BirminghamPopulation.aspx.; Harris, *Political Power*, 19, 81-84.

regional system to provide the South's foodstuffs. In Birmingham's industrial boom of the 1880s and the subsequent community planning, initial shortcomings in public health and food systems evinced not municipal oversights, but a continuation of labor exploitation and short-sighted profit motives.[12]

Hilliard also points to the threat of food shortage throughout the antebellum South as a major deterrent to engaging in widespread subsistence farming. Instead many plantation owners used the same vehicles employed in selling their cash crops as a means for importing sustaining foodstuffs. Proximity to waterways and port cities influenced and predisposed some planters to engage in broader, regional food systems. The environmental instability of much of the South, paired with elite planters' efforts to maximize cash crop production, forced much of the plantation South, slaves included, to eat food sourced from outside their state, if not the South. Poorer farmers more regularly participated in subsistence farming, a practice that rural freed blacks would eventually employ as white landowners asserted their control over labor by withholding food supplies throughout Reconstruction and early twentieth-century sharecropping. Hilliard concludes that not all planters swore off procuring foodstuffs from traders, but few refused to engage in extra-regional food systems.[13]

Known for its relatively unsuccessful tenure as an assortment of cotton and corn fields, Jones Valley, where Birmingham rests, held the natural ingredients for a much grander harvest. Birmingham's unique geological position as the "only city in America…formed directly on the surface of the raw materials which are its own

[12] Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 4-5.
[13] Ibid., 24-36.

feeders—coal, iron-ore, and stone…" provided the city's industrial pioneers a unique opportunity in shaping a city's structure and growth from its outset. The rarity of this opportunity and the impressive development of the city did not escape its founders, as founder Henry Fairchild De Bardeleben noted:

> There's nothing like taking a wild piece of land all rock and woods—ground not fit to feed a goat on—and turning it into a settlement of men and women; bringing railroads in, making pay rolls, starting things to going: nothing like boring a hillside through and turning over a mountain![14]

As serendipitously as the raw materials of Birmingham industry formed, Birmingham's founders did not rely on happenstance in organizing its cultivation of human capital. John T. Milner, Birmingham's primary founder, identified an early industrial capacity in Jones Valley. In Milner's vision, Birmingham would develop similarly to a plantation, in that it would arrange itself solely to provide greater means to the modes of production. Milner's vision accounted for a weak, unorganized labor force, initially comprised of slaves. After the Civil War, Milner transitioned his interest to convict leasing as an inexpensive, sustainable alternative to slavery. Milner also accounted for a co-developed food system to rise alongside the city's industrial purpose. As a civil engineer, Milner understood a highly industrialized plantation required substantial systems of fuel supply, and not just in regard to coal. As a motivated capitalist, Milner also saw great economic potential in Alabama answering its own need for foodstuffs. He furthered this proposal in his dream for Birmingham.[15]

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[14] Ethel Armes, "The Spirit of the Founders," In *The Survey* (New York: Survey Associates, 1912), p. 1453.
[15]Ibid., 1454-1456.; Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008),50-52.; John T. Milner, *Alabama: As It Was, As It Is, As It Will Be* (Montgomery: Barrett and Brown, 1876), 26.

Men of similar background and practice accompanied and succeeded Milner in Birmingham's industrial formation. Milner, De Bardeleben, James R. Powell, Alfred P. Shook, and Enoch Ensley—all early political and industrial leaders—even shared the same designation of Colonel from participation in the Civil War. These leaders served as a continuance of Hilliard's Old South absentee planter tradition while focused on grander visions of industry. Douglas Blackmon importantly observes that these Southern industrialists strayed from their antebellum counterparts—the paternalistic planter—in their view of labor. No longer did sentimental paternalism cloud the vision of the elite. They viewed "…labor here…" in the Birmingham district as "…more akin to a source of fuel than an extension of a slave owner's familial circle." They limited their collective concerns of public welfare to traditional practices of subsistence for their labor force. As this sentiment translated onto the landscape of the city, Birmingham became a disconnected network of company towns, its labor force stranded and isolated throughout the district. Much within the tradition Hilliard puts forth, Birmingham's early industrialists expected subsistence supplemented by foodstuffs brought in by rail to fulfill their laborers' needs. The early failure of southern-based industry in effectively addressing the needs of the working class contrasted greatly with the adaptable leadership to follow. Nonetheless, business leaders ignored developments in poor public health, vocally impressed with their own ability to create. They left the working class unacknowledged and underserved. The codified, intentional ignorance of business leaders led to some of the region's most concentrated cases of illness and communicable disease.[16]

[16] Armes, "Spirit," 1454-1456.

Systemic Inadequacies (1910-1920)

As the twentieth century began, much of the South, including Birmingham, already actively engaged in a regional food system, sometimes incorporating products cross-nationally and globally. Meats came from large-scale producers in Midwestern states such as Kansas; oranges from California; peaches and plums from Georgia; cantaloupe, tomatoes, and squash from Florida; cheese from Switzerland and Germany; flour from Tennessee, Michigan, and Indiana. Food distributors such as Wood Fruitticher and E.C. Adams & Co. organized the import and sale of foodstuffs at the Morris Avenue Market. Functioning in such a dispersed food market system carried inherent risks, such as fluctuation in availability and price. For example, in 1903 fresh meat became scarce due to floods in the Midwest. In 1914 food prices soared out of the growing concern of the war in Europe. Birmingham's middle- and upper-class population willingly participated in this regional food system since they could afford the fluctuation of broad markets. As laborers largely comprised Birmingham's population, this system created a clear class division in regard to food access. Connected by default through company stores in this for-profit food system, Birmingham's working class struggled with hunger and hunger-related illness throughout the early twentieth century.[17]

Problems in distribution and sanitation plagued Birmingham's food systems during the 1910s. Due to the city's rapid expansion, Birmingham's public sector struggled to develop alongside the greater community's rapidly growing needs, especially in addressing public health. In much of the city, citizens did not benefit from food

[17] *Birmingham Age-Herald*, June 8, 1903, 4; June 9, 1903.; September 7, 1914; "History," Adams Produce, accessed December, 12, 2011, http://www.adamsproduce.com/Adams/history.cfm; "History," Wood Fruitticher, accessed December, 12, 2011, http://www.woodfruitticher.com/history.asp.

refrigeration or pasteurized milk, resulting in many episodes of tainted meat and spoiled milk. Diet related illness such as typhoid, diarrhea, and dysentery permeated the city's neighborhoods. Company towns and convict labor camps amplified these illnesses by their exponentially inferior living conditions, tainted water, and inadequate food.[18]

Until the 1910s, Birmingham's employed private waste management creating sporadic maintenance, often causing contamination of water sources and town gardens. Although regulations existed regarding sanitation and food quality, not until the 1910s did an effective regulatory public health and sanitation department develop in the city. Even then Birmingham's per capita spending in the department of health as a percentage of the average health department spending in Southern cities of comparable growth was 86.7% in 1910, but dropped to 34.4% in 1920. In his article on public health in *The Survey*'s analysis of Birmingham in 1911, W.M. McGrath stressed that even the new health ordinances of 1910 stood out of reach for the poorly funded municipality. He also noticed "practically no inspection of food" and only sporadic removal of waste from company towns.[19]

Birmingham's working class faced larger problems than tainted meat and spoiled milk. Malnourishment affected mine and mill laborers and their families. Employers frequently cited it as a reason for high absenteeism. In the early 1900s the average laborer could work only twelve days out of the month; the rest were beset by illness. Company towns often occupied the least desired real estate in the company's possession such as

[18] Martha Carolyn Mitchell "Birmingham: Biography Of A City Of The New South," (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1946), 160, 176; Justin Fuller, "History of the Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company, 1852- 1907," (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1966), 303-304.
[19] Carl Vernon Harris, "Economic Power and Politics: A Study of Birmingham, Alabama, 1890-1920," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1970), 287; McGrath, "Conservation of Health," *The Survey*, 1508.

swamps, marshes, and other wetlands often downstream from livestock. Proper waste removal became a further public health concern as many company towns relied on individual privies and decentralized garbage dumps. "Vectors of contagion," including the expected flies and mosquitoes, but also cows, chickens, and hogs had easy access to both areas of waste and living quarters. In the case of company towns, these necessary alternative food systems also supported disease propagation. Company towns faced poor living conditions exacerbated by inadequate public health services. Companies in turn experienced difficulty attracting family men, contributing to turnover rates as high as 400%. The poor environmental conditions of many company towns also precluded the possibility of the workers effectively growing their own food. Adding to the food access woes of residents of early company towns, commissaries—or company stores—served as a major profit for steel companies. Commissaries, ostensibly a service to families, increased prices to unaffordable levels, often indebting their town-bound employees to the company. Commissaries also offered pay-day lending and unemployment benefits including food assistance. Once the laborer regained employment with TCI, the commissary levied the price of back-rent, interest, and any other relief from the worker's paychecks.[20]

Any discussion of food and healthcare access, particularly its availability to Birmingham's working-class community, requires an analysis of existing organizations providing assistance. Edward S. LaMonte provides an insightful overview of private

[20] Rikard, "George Gordon Crawford," 38; Fuller "History of TCI," 319; *Birmingham Age-Herald,* August 12, 1903; Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 5, 19-22.

Birmingham agencies established during the time period. Jewish Charities served the area as the only non-live-in private agency that provided meals to the needy during the era. Only six non-hospital, live-in organizations offered assistance services, and only two of these addressed the needs of poor blacks. No description of any independent private organization mentions assistance for adult men. Out of various schools and agencies, the Birmingham Social Settlement Association formed. The settlement houses established by the association only benefited whites, although a separate settlement house was founded and operated for and by blacks. Birmingham's church community was the primary financier of most of the houses. U.S. Steel also supported settlement houses on the outskirts of their company towns. Birmingham only benefited from the services of one, ninety-bed indigent care facility, Hillman Hospital, in 1911 and shared it with an entire county of roughly 240,000. The city quarantined contagious and infectious cases on its periphery. Facilities that received these cases operated off a largely self-supported, individual food system created by cultivating the surrounding land. Birmingham's per capita spending on "Charities, Hospitals, and Prisons" as a percentage of the average spending of Southern cities of comparable size was 39.7% in 1910, and falling to 17.4% in 1920. These numbers shed some light on the poor quality food available to convict labor and to the lack of private charities providing relief. The city itself did not provide any sort of direct, non-hospital relief in the form of agency, home, or institution. The only city spending on direct, non-hospital relief went to the United Charities, later the Associated Charities. United Charities organized as a fundraising agency that developed from a set federation of agencies which mainly served as a central registration bureau for potential beneficiaries and was used primarily to screen out "unworthy objects" and

"professional beggars." TCI and the Red Cross employed a similarly strict welfare regime for determining need through home inspection.[21]

Throughout Birmingham's early formation, pioneer industrialists ignored many of their labor force's needs. Company towns, where industrial processes had a major impact on the daily life of a laborer, exacerbated the willful ignorance of the industrialists' desire to maximize profits. In a pre-modern, urban environment where individual diet so closely related to personal and community health, the gaps in quality food access carried grave health implications. Birmingham's network of private organizations attempted to ameliorate the effects of this disregard on the founders' behalf. These efforts proved inadequate as government support for public welfare initiatives waned relative to population growth. As Birmingham moved toward a new era and a new decade, leaders addressed these issues more directly while still harboring an unwillingness to engage in systemic change or significant public investment.

[21] LaMonte, *Politics and Welfare In Birmingham*, 40-65; Carl Vernon Harris, "Economic Power and Politics: A Study of Birmingham, Alabama, 1890-1920," Ph. D. diss. (University of Wisconsin, 1970), 287, 311-312; McGrath, "Conservation of Health," *The Survey*, 1501-1504.

CHAPTER 2

NEW APPROACHES IN PUBLIC HEALTH (1910-1940)

Progressives and Pure Food

Preceding more successful ventures in systemic reform, the Progressives sought to make their mark on national food systems including Birmingham's. Historian Michael McGerr importantly identified the Progressives' push toward pure food as they invoked "disparate Americans' shared identity as consumers." In defining the parameters of the contest of corporate regulation as consumers versus producers, Progressives created a political culture in which citizens developed expectations of protections offered from the federal government. McGerr noted that Progressives capitalized on the extent that American citizens transitioned to this collective consumer identity. Progressives employed strategic rhetoric and legislation questioning the purity of foods not only as a mechanism of systematizing food quality under a federally legislated, bureaucratic order. They also identified popularity in appealing to a growing section of the public whose political priority lay in its consumer identity.[22]

In regard to rural America, agricultural historian R. James Kane identified pure food legislation as emanating from a grassroots, populist basis. With this assertion in

[22] Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University, 2003), 160-162.

mind, the fact that the Alabama legislature failed to even vote on its statewide pure food bill highlights the lack of Populist-to-Progressive continuity in the state and the disdain Alabama leaders carried for regulatory reform. Conversely, Wiebe identifies the successful pure food implementation in urban environments as a top-down method of satisfying the industrial necessity of accounting for reliable food quality standards. Looking at Birmingham in particular, the Jefferson County Health Department eventually enacted these regulations as an evolution of governing systems meant to recognize and mitigate the risk of close living and ultimately to increase productivity. Despite suggestions of continuity from Populism to Progressivism in Alabama, pure food legislation in Birmingham did not pass at the hand of the laborer but instead as the bane of the small-scale farmer and vendor. Its passing, although perhaps narrowly related to a Progressive sentiment, missed the height of Alabama's Progressive movement, and instead passed within a new wave of reform focused on industrial modernization, not social welfare. TCI president George Gordon Crawford led this business-based reform as he overhauled public health in company towns. His successful remedy of much of TCI's laborer's ills positioned him to lead the modernization and growth of the county's health department in 1917. In turn, municipal health reform and regulation originated from this new bureaucracy. Crawford did gain from Progressive predecessors of public health reform. As McGerr pointed out, Progressives conditioned both the body politic and political institutions to expect the government to direct and fund corporate regulatory functions.[23]

[23] R. James Kane, "Populism, Progressivism, and Pure Food," *Agricultural History*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Jul., 1964): 161-166; Wiebe, *Search for Order*, 191-192; Harris, *Politics and Power*, 240; Sheldon Hackney,

George Gordon Crawford's Welfare Capitalism

By Birmingham's 1910 annexation, TCI had been under the ownership of the United States Steel Corporation for nearly three years. Upon their acquisition of the Birmingham property, U.S. Steel's leaders sought out one man in particular to lead in the corporate overhaul of TCI's extra-industrial practices. Marlene Rikard has put forth an extensive historical treatment of George Gordon Crawford, TCI president, as a New South business leader and policy reformer. In her doctoral dissertation, Rikard furthered her profile of Crawford by documenting his implementation of welfare capitalism in the Birmingham district. Upon inspecting company properties, Crawford applied an obsessive rubric of public health standards to all of TCI's company towns. This effort tangentially involved a moral-based reform but directly targeted the company's high turnover rate.[24]

Amid an industrial culture of worker disregard and exploitation, George Gordon Crawford's venture in welfare capitalism garnered both positive and negative attention. Crawford and his welfare capitalism proved to be an adaptable form of leadership and control. It considered an evolution of labor consciousness and of the urban landscape and responded to foreseen obstacles. Its implementation extended from Northern corporate interests. The Sloss-Sheffield Steel and Iron Company (Sloss), a rival company within the district, did not approve of Crawford's revolutionary intervention in the lives of his employees. The President of Sloss, John C. Maben (also a Colonel) identified TCI's programming as "coddling workmen." He commented on the company's initiatives as

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Populism to Progressivism in Alabama (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969), 314; McGerr, *Fierce Discontent*, 163.

[24] Marlene Hunt Rikard, "An Experiment in Welfare Capitalism: The Health Care Services of the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company," Ph. D. Dissertation, (University of Alabama, 1983), 49.

they targeted both races: "There aren't enough illiterate niggers to go around. They're spoiling them now-a-days by educating them." Maben and Sloss reflected this distaste for welfare capitalism due to its "foreign" derivation. Welfare capitalism did not function as an indigenous Southern institution. Instead, he believed Crawford acted as an extension of northern industry.[25]

As Crawford identified the ailments plaguing the lives of his inherited workforce, he recognized an immediate and effective remedy. In addressing issues of health and wellness, particularly nutrition and food availability, Crawford ensured increased labor vitality while simultaneously engendering dependence. His introduction of TCI's Department of Social Science also recognized an untapped capacity for labor in the women of company towns. Within a year, as Crawford provided supplies and hired an agricultural expert from the United States Department of Agriculture, twenty-five percent of TCI employees participated in family gardening. In the following years, Crawford built upon this initiative. He replaced the shacks and shotgun houses and wetland-villages with entirely new villages and homes which fostered communities more organic in appearance than previous company towns. Crawford invested in the health and wellness of the communities by establishing hospitals, an extensive school system, and a treated water supply.[26]

Crawford also employed a network of social workers to lead TCI company towns in welfare and community activities, recreation, horticulture, and education. The horticulturist led each community in establishing school, community, and home gardens.

[25] Rikard, "Experiment," p. 52.
[26] Edwin Mims, *The Advancing South* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1926), 102; Marlene Rikard, "George Gordon Crawford," pp. 20-49.

Home economics teachers at each school instructed female students on how to incorporate garden produce into the family diet. The company schools also tasked the home economic teachers with preparing school lunches at a minimal cost per student, greatly increasing food security among the most vulnerable population in working-class communities. Social workers employed a similar program with the women of the communities, especially the ones whose children displayed a heightened risk for malnutrition. Company towns remained racially segregated, and notable disparities arose among them. TCI's white company towns, such as Edgewater, served as a model for the industry. The company built white towns with sanitation in mind—noted by their waterproof, closed privies, constructed for easy cleaning. TCI constructed Ensley, one of TCI's black company towns, in disregard for public health with many families sharing open-air privies which emptied into open ditches. These realities placed much of the health concerns on the women of the company towns and reduced much of the actual corporate investment to the allowance of unused land.[27]

To institutionalize TCI's domestic science effort at the town level, the company placed a director of welfare in each. A mock company town home and kitchen served as a test facility for the home economics program of TCI's schools. The home economics program laid the test kitchen out similarly to an average home within the town. TCI not only directed female students to keep a home and garden a particular way but to keep them within the context of their company town. Through this effort they perpetuated their labor force and labor support. Beyond curricular efforts in TCI schools, TCI imparted particular values on its students in their extracurricular activities. The white schools'

[27] Morris Knowles, "Water and Waste," In *The Survey*, (New York: Survey Associates, 1912), 1488-1489.; Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 58-59.

year-end play in 1927 featured characters who emphasized virtues of health with names such as Nutrition, Milk, Fruit, Cereal, and Green Vegetables. In the same year, TCI instructors had their black schools put on a musical. This production instead focused on minstrel Indian and Egyptian characters while also managing to incorporate Daniel Emmett's "Dixie."[28]

In this new system, with the cost of living significantly lowered, residents could use the commissary as a supplement to their garden by buying dry goods like flour, salt, and cornmeal. Even if prices inflated they did not affect food access as much. Since commissaries generated such significant income for the company, and the initiatives Crawford employed generated considerable costs, he identified an even greater profit potential in the output of a well-fed workforce. He declared his practices of welfare capitalism as "good business," noticeable in their product. In appeasing his employees either by company-funded programs or by the publicly funded health initiatives of Birmingham, he avoided paying for higher wages and suppressed labor disputes. He declared the initiatives not philanthropy but "pure business." Ironically, these company-initiated gardens on company land that were intended to stifle labor unrest later served as a means to support strikes, as women continued to grow food to feed unpaid men on the picket line.[29]

In his study of iron workers in Birmingham, Henry McKiven offers a more evenhanded view of welfare capitalism. He characterizes the practice as an assertion of

[28] TCI Department of Social Science Notice, 1928, 3; TCI White Schools Spring Festival Program, 1927; TCI Black Schools Spring Festival Program, 1927, TCI Social Services Papers, Birmingham Public Library Archives.
[29] Edwin Mims, *The Advancing South* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1926), 102; Marlene Rikard, "George Gordon Crawford," 20-49; Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 69.

corporate paternalism and labor suppression. He also importantly adds the observation of welfare capitalism as an alternative system to white Birmingham's growing consumerism. Jim Crow created the need for alternative, duplicative urban systems of communities, education, healthcare, and food access. Further, welfare capitalism enhanced the racial divide of Jim Crow by providing another basis of racial and class distinction. Those who engaged in the services provided by welfare capitalism came from the working class. Given geographic disparities and spatial segregation due to the isolated and restricted nature of company towns, European immigrants and blacks in company towns had less of an opportunity to engage in mainstream capitalist systems.[30]

Crawford's actions reflect Robert Wiebe's model of municipal and corporate systemization. Crawford's implementation of welfare capitalism coincided with the rise of Progressivism but ultimately offered markedly different solutions to answering systemic problems. Instead of incorporating a public voice to address public needs, political and business leaders in the early twentieth century opted for highly mechanized and bureaucratic systems to shape order in an evolving urban landscape. These leaders addressed social welfare by applying a standardized rubric of municipal function intended to create order and an environment for heightened production. As Wiebe puts forth in his aptly named metanarrative, *Search for Order*, Crawford acted in line with contemporary business leaders, not in line with Progressive reformers, as Rikard may suggest. Rikard made this conclusion herself, yet allowed Crawford to escape her treatment without an even critique. This systematic approach to reforming TCI's

[30] Henry M. McKiven, *Iron and Steel: Class, Race, and Community in Birmingham, Alabama, 1875-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 5.

company towns shaped the eventual structure and functions of communities throughout the city.[31]

Crawford analyzed the towns of TCI and viewed them as a component to a greater system of production. In line with this thinking, Crawford addressed these issues systematically, employing broad scale social reforms to quell labor unrest and to increase efficiency. His background in engineering and production suited him well in this era of systematic problem solving. As Crawford's vision rendered itself within the food systems of his company towns, it furthered his penchant for systematized order and mass program implementation. His pervasive domestic science initiative pulled TCI laborers' food systems into this hierarchical corporate structure of production. The end economic gain of the provisions of available foods defined Birmingham's working-class food systems. Even Crawford's broader public service initiatives of sanitary communities, education, and healthcare only reformed existing conditions insofar as economical viability would allow. This corporate systemization of addressing social needs introduced Birmingham's working class to a new era in American modernization. Instead of increasing self-reliance and independence, welfare capitalism ensured individual dependence on sprawling systems and on industry. As Birmingham's economy shifted to a dependency on nationwide investment, the bases for the city's systemic function expanded. European immigrants filled labor gaps. Northern educators answered calls for teachers in TCI's schools. Interstate foodstuffs lined market and commissary stores. In this sprawl of interconnected and interdependent systems, Birmingham's leaders struggled to apply the rubric of Jim Crow to an ever-modernizing urban environment, seemingly unknowing or

[31] Wiebe, *The Search for Order*, 181-187; Rikard, "Experiment," 354-355.

uncaring of the anachronistic futility of such an effort. As will be discussed further in regard to middle class food access, legislative Jim Crow in Birmingham began allowing for spatial inconsistencies in creating racial proximity at work and in consumption, causing whites to grasp at developing cultural Jim Crow and racial distinctions.[32]

Gardening at Sloss Quarters

As much as top-down initiatives shaped the urban food landscape, the migration of rural families to Birmingham transplanted traditional agricultural practices. In maintaining their previous lifestyle of growing and raising most of their food, rural transplants in Birmingham earned considerably more than they did in their past jobs. Sloss Quarters accommodated this influx of rural, particularly black, families by allotting communal land for chicken coops, pig yards, and a company garden. Sloss also allotted for family gardens. Some residents at Sloss Quarters, like those at TCI, found the commissary system manipulative and financially dangerous, but many found it to be to their advantage as they used it to supplement their garden and livestock. Women made extra money by preparing dinner for single men working at the furnaces. Sloss provided the means for women to can and preserve vegetables and fruits for the agricultural department. Neighbors often gathered for watermelon cuttings, barbecues, and chittlin' suppers. This close relationship to food and to community fostered food security among the laboring families. The gardening skill of black women from the rural South came

[32] Rikard, "Experiment," 50-51; Lamonte, *Politics and Welfare*, 55; Letter from Winifred Collins to Dorothea Ross, April 21, 1928, TCI Social Services Papers.

from a necessity for thrift and an oral tradition. This tradition made foodways transplantable in a new, urban setting.[33]

Working-class black women differed from middle-class white women in their limited means and access to new plants, supplies, and methods. The structure and content of the agricultural discussion in Birmingham newspapers highlighted this disparity. The paper offered daily information on commodity crops and flower gardens, but no discussion of subsistence gardening. In black working-class communities, plants, seeds, and methods took on heirloom qualities as women passed them down from generation to generation or gave them as cross-community gifts. That tradition would not be abandoned in migration to the city, but maintained through the transplantation of crops such as butterbeans, okra, tomatoes, corn, sweet potatoes, watermelons, and collards.[34]

On its face, the Sloss Quarters gardens appeared to be much the same as TCI's welfare capitalism efforts. On the contrary, the women of Sloss used the land to maintain their own identity and food traditions. These women had more in common with the Italian merchant class to follow, in that they both saw potential for communal benefit in the land. Gardening and pastoral practice did not serve as an individualized effort of posterity or as a vehicle for protest, but as a dynamic assertion of defiant persistence of self in an increasingly industrial setting. Unknowingly, the juxtaposition of livestock,

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[33] Karen Utz, "Goin' North: The African American Women of Sloss Quarters," in *Work, Family, and Faith: Rural Southern Women in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Melissa Walker and Rebecca Sharpless (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 229-259.; Richard Gaines, Interview, Birmingham, March 22, 1984, Oral History Collection, Mervyn H. Sterne Library; Abraham Williams, Interview, Birmingham, February 28 1984, Oral History Collection, Mervyn H. Sterne Library.

[34] Sallie M. Lee and Marjorie White, "Grandmother's Garden," (Birmingham: Birmingham Historical Society, 2009); Diane D. Glave, "'A Garden so Brilliant With Colors, so Original in its Design': Rural African American Women, Gardening, Progressive Reform, and the Foundation of an African American Environmental Perspective," *Environmental History*, Vol. 8, No. 3, (July 2003): 395-491; *Birmingham Age-Herald*, June 8, 1903, June 9, 1903, September 7, 1914, October 17, 1914; *Birmingham News*, September 24, 1910.

garden, and furnace put on display their effort to maintain individualism in the face of assimilation and industrial modernity.

Perhaps the only effort from Sloss Furnaces to directly affect its labor's eating habits came in its periodical, *Pig Iron Rough Notes*. A section dedicated to "Gentlemen Cooks" highlighted Sloss employees who had a talent for cooking. Many recipes included hunted meats such as muskrat. Recipes also often called for home and camp cooks to use Sloss-made cast iron cookware. Sloss clearly used this medium not to offer advice on how to secure adequate nutrition, but as an entertaining advertisement of its products to its own labor force.[35]

Hillman Hospital Nutrition Clinic

As welfare capitalism in Birmingham waned during the Great Depression, another private force in Birmingham acted on behalf of public health interests and recognized one particular dietary deficiency plaguing the South. Pellagra, identified as the "lazy" disease, affected its victims by draining their will to work and even eat. It also produced leprosy-like sores over the body. Southerners attributed much of the region's trouble with pellagra to rural black populations, yet research conducted at Hillman Hospital in Birmingham during the 1930s showed that 95% of pellagra cases occurred in white communities. However urban the population in the study, the uncovered dietary deficiency shared its roots in a rural sharecropping system with Birmingham's labor base. Pellagra grew from the tendency of the sharecropper to use all of his land for the cash

[35] Sloss Furnaces Company, "Gentlemen Cooks" *Pig Iron Rough Notes*, heat no. 105 (Winter, 1948): 30; heat no. 104 (Summer-Spring, 1947): 32; heat no. 83 (Winter 1941): 39-40.

crop of cotton and buy most of his food from the landowner. The sharecropper purchased mostly vitamin-deficient carbohydrates, most often corn in various forms. Poor farmers and their industrial, urban decedents found nutrient rich foods such as vegetables, meats, and dairy products to be not only prohibitively expensive but also perishable. This research brought to light the extent that pellagra plagued the new, urban South. Birmingham's working class and its collective malnourishments provided ample grounds for experiments in dietetics and public health.[36]

In 1935, Hillman Hospital physician-in-chief, Dr. James L. McLester, challenged one of the nation's foremost researchers in addressing issues of diet-related illness to try his hand at curing Birmingham's ailments. Dr. Thomas D. Spies brought impressive credentials to his new post in Birmingham. He had earned degrees from the University of Texas and Harvard Medical School and most recently had headed medical research at the University of Cincinnati Medical School. Upon his arrival, Spies set up a nutrition clinic in a hallway-sized space at Hillman Hospital, Birmingham's charity hospital populated my mostly indigent patients. Through Spies research and leadership, the Hillman Nutrition Clinic became a nationally-renowned institute at the forefront of dietary sciences. Spies achieved these accolades and scientific findings by using Birmingham's most poorly nourished as test subjects. He recruited both poor blacks and whites from Birmingham's labor pool. In the fifteen years prior to Spies arrival, Hillman lost about one third of all of its pellagra patients to death. Due to this pervasive and perennial tendency of malnourishment in Birmingham's working-class communities, Spies found a willing and appropriate test population to develop his work. In deciding upon test

[36] Akenhead, "Conquest of 'Hidden Hunger'," 11.

subjects from Birmingham's mine and mill communities, Spies also delivered an indictment of the limitations of the measures of Birmingham's social welfare programs, especially those of TCI.[37]

Spies initially administered food-based treatment for pellagra. Due to the impracticality of feeding and monitoring the meals of all of his patients—not to mention the exorbitant cost—Spies transitioned to an alternative remedy. Interested in the uses of scientific intervention, Spies relied on chemistry and vitamin supplementation to curb and reverse the effects of pellagra. Spies discovered that nicotinic acid, otherwise known as niacin, effectively cured pellagra in humans. In 1938, Spies began receiving recognition for curing pellagra in several hundred patients at Hillman. He received local and national awards and recognition for his work with Birmingham's working class. However, the Spies clinic did not develop his findings by means of municipal or state investments. Spies had achieved this discovery in nutrition as an underwritten researcher from the University of Cincinnati Medical School. Aside from the free space in Hillman, the operations of Spies's nutrition clinic never benefited from government funding. [38]

During the 1940s, Spies extended his work in nutrition sciences but transitioned his focus to the effects of malnutrition on childhood development. This involved social workers administering milk daily to children across Jefferson County and into neighboring Tuscaloosa County. Spies recorded remarkable gains in cognitive and physical development in his subjects. While in Birmingham, Spies developed into a prolific researcher and tireless physician. He published over twenty articles a year and

[37] *Birmingham News*, November 17, 1938.
[38] *Birmingham News*, March 31, 1939; *Birmingham News*, April, 10, 1939; *Birmingham News*, July 8, 1939.; Akenhead, "Conquest," 15-20.

often only slept a couple of hours at a time, constantly monitoring and tending to his patients. As his work expanded so did his clinic. By the mid-forties the Spies Clinic had grown from a staff of three to forty and from a hallway to three floors of the Hillman Outpatient Clinic.[39]

The clinic's rapid growth drew attention, both positive and negative. Many of the district's industrial leaders came to Spies's defense in his effort to obtain permanent space. Representatives from Woodward Iron, Alabama Power, Stockham Pipe Fittings, and Alabama By-Products all sought private donations and offered their own in order to retain the benefits of Spies's research. They recognized an economic boon in the industrial productivity offered by the clinic's work—one that far exceeded what they could achieve in their individual efforts. Its growth, however, coincided with the emergence of the Medical College of Alabama, which competed with Spies for space. The very hospital administrator who solicited Spies's expertise in 1935, Dr. James McLester, eventually called for his removal. McLester's own efforts in fundraising for Hillman had been overshadowed and stifled by Spies's ability to secure funding locally and nationally. In an ongoing effort to remove the Spies Clinic, one state committee member for the expansion of the University Medical Center declared:

> The Spies Clinic has no more right in old Hillman Hospital than a private law office would have there…. In fact, it's probably a violation of the law having the clinic there at all.[40]

Although an overwhelming political popularity in Spies's work secured his clinic's place in Birmingham, his time in the city dwindled. Throughout the 1950s, Spies

[39] Akenhead, "Conquest," 25-27.
[40] *Birmingham News*, September 3, 1943; Tennant McWilliams, *New Lights in The Valley: The Emergence of UAB* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 78-80; *Birmingham Post-Herald*, August 21, 1953.

split his time among similar nutrition outposts in Puerto Rico and Cuba. In 1959, Northwestern University extended its first Charles F. Kettering Professorship in Nutrition and Metabolism to Spies, although the university postponed its offer due to Spies's diagnosis of lymphoblastoma. Spies's rapid health deterioration and move from Birmingham-centric research led to the eventual removal of the nutrition clinic shortly after his death in 1960.[41]

Dr. Spies's time at Hillman Hospital brought to light many of the health and systemic disparities in Birmingham communities, physical and political. In his initial efforts, Spies recognized a particularly severe public health issue in Birmingham's working class. The industry leaders of Birmingham had failed their labor force and had failed themselves in resolving issues of efficiency and productivity. Groups, publications, and individuals such as the American College of Physicians, *The Progressive Farmer*, the *Birmingham News*, and the U.S. Surgeon General all championed Spies for solving problems that Birmingham leaders had refused to acknowledge just three decades prior. Spies's success and the eventual political resistance against his clinic's progress typified the institutional and political disparities in the structure of Birmingham's leadership and governance. Business leaders sought support and solutions to public health problems, where politicians ignored and refused to take responsibility for addressing them. Spies's implementation of a broad, systematic approach to addressing health issues called for government intervention in developing modern, urban systems of health and safety. The inability of the state government and local hospital administration to support and further

[41] Thomas H. Jukes, "Tom Douglas Spies—A Biographical Sketch (1902-1960)," *The Journal of Nutrition*, 102, (November 1972): 1398-1399.

Spies's efforts showcased the lack of political will in Alabama and Birmingham to dedicate itself to answering the needs of its working class.[42]

The cures and successes Dr. Spies developed in Birmingham furthered a culture of scientific solutions to malnutrition and diet related illness. The idea of precision and science-based remedies in addressing health issues not only permeated the growing field of dietetics and medicine research, but informed public policy and home life. These developments in science and health reinforced notions of the worth and ability of domestic sciences in creating a proper home.

Within new efforts to address public health concerns, developments and shortcomings made evident the economic stringencies in which progress would happen in Birmingham. The initial failure of the Progressives statewide and the public backlash against their health and food safety reform in the city seemed to doom the era of reform from its outset. Birmingham's leadership established clear limitations of public investment in both Crawford and Spies efforts to remedy health maladies of the working class, particularly those diet-related. As both made major contributions to the health of the city's working class, they still did not compensate for widespread reform and food access. Further, the Progressives, Crawford, and Spies did relatively little to bridge the gaps in access created by segregation. As an era in public health reform waned, the conditions of Birmingham's food system made the way to increased access evident—in a for-profit food system, more capital ensured a heightened access to foodstuffs. No food-

[42] *Birmingham News*, January 13, 1946; *Birmingham News*, August 5, 1940; *Birmingham News*, March 31, 1939.

safety legislation, gardening initiative, or medical advancement would change the economic capacity of the working class.

CHAPTER 3

GREATER BIRMINGHAM AND MIDDLE-CLASS FOOD ACCESS

What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman, for I walked down the sidestreets under the trees with a headache self-conscious looking at the full moon.

In my hungry fatigue, and shopping for images, I went into the neon fruit supermarket, dreaming of your enumerations!

What peaches and what penumbras! Whole families shopping at night! Aisles full of husbands! Wives in the avocados, babies in the tomatoes!--and you, Garcia Lorca, what were you doing down by the watermelons?

I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the pork chops? What price bananas? Are you my Angel?

I wandered in and out of the brilliant stacks of cans following you, and followed in my imagination by the store detective.

--Allen Ginsberg[43]

In C. Vann Woodward's *Orgins of the New South*, he argues that Birmingham industrialists typified the newest of the New South. He claims their rapid construction of the new urban, industrial center and the rise of the company town and labor management

[43] Allen Ginsberg, "A Supermarket in California," *Howl and Other Poems* (New York: City Lights, 1956) 29. Note on poem: Ginsberg wrote this poem to Whitman on the 100 year anniversary of his initial publishing of *Leaves of Grass*, from which the epigraph in chapter one was excerpted.

marked a new chapter in the Southern economy. Although a tempting conclusion, Woodward's New South in application to Birmingham does not take into consideration that appearances may not constitute reality. Historian Jonathan M. Wiener offers a more in-depth analysis of the economic institutions born of the post-Civil War South. Wiener identifies the institutionalization of racism in an effort to control labor impeded the South's capitalist development. Geographer Bobby Wilson convincingly furthers this argument that early industrialists ignored the liberal idea of pure, free market capitalism in Birmingham's initial structure as an effort to maintain racial order. This social order encouraged and maintained discrimination and segregation despite its contradiction to open, competitive capitalism. In this way, Wilson connects early industrial leaders in Birmingham to a planter-class lineage. This planter vision within a modern, industrial setting developed into a repressive caste system at the bottom of which rested black labor.[44]

Wilson's look at structural and cultural racism in Birmingham identifies an evolved, black middle-class consciousness emerging during the 1930s. This new class consciousness neglected broader notions of racial identity. His overview and analysis of the rise of the black middle class provides a basis in furthering the identification of structured social order. This structuring occurred primarily as an effort to modernize the city's social capital in a supportive boost to industrial productivity.[45]

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[44]C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951) 126-128, 300-301;Jonathan M. Wiener, "Class Structure and Economic Development in the American South, 1865-1955," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 84 No. 4 (October 1979): 970-992; Wilson, *Race and Place in Birmingham*, 28-30.
[45] Ibid., 31.

The eventuality of a black middle class in a modern, industrial city called for whites to act in concert to define cultural and physical boundaries. Coinciding with the city's relative economic stagnation, Wilson identifies a boom in the impact of the black consumer on the Birmingham market during the twenty-year period between 1939 and 1960. Despite the evolution of black consumption, black-owned businesses never took significant hold of any market in any part of Birmingham during the same time period. Black-owned businesses often faced difficulty in securing a self-segregated economy. Interclass conflict and distrust drove black consumers away from black-owned establishments. Even though white-owned establishments offered unequal service, they too influenced blacks to venture outside of self-segregated markets. Black-owned also meant a finite customer base—as whites did not patronize black-owned businesses—which hardened the impact of economic downturn. The segregation of consumption in Birmingham not only limited the black business owner, but defined the parameters of class growth. The dominant, white middle class used segregation as a control over popular consumption to direct middle class expansion and "to weaken working class identity."[46]

Wilson explains that Fordism within the Keynesian welfare state enabled the working class to join the "regime of consumption" that came to define middle-class culture. Fordism, coined from Henry Ford's effort to grow his customer base within his own higher paid labor force, perpetuated the consumer base that bolstered an increasingly interdependent consumer-capitalist economy. Thus, Fordism depended on Keynesianism to introduce and make expendable more consumer-managed capital. As a result of the

[46] Ibid., 42, 49; Lynn Feldman, *A Sense of Place: Birmingham's Black Middle-Class Community, 1890-1930* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 87.

economic and political conditions necessary to foster Birmingham's growth into a post-modern form of industrial urbanism, the means and avenues for black consumerism developed. Wilson identifies the rapid emergence of Fordist consumerism in Birmingham as a denial of the greater working class's ability to self- and group-identify properly around issues concerning race and labor. Instead an "embougeoisment" of the greater public eliminated overt and widespread race and labor-based organizing. The oppressive and manipulative politics of the city's elite contributed to and exacerbated this growing class divide. The growth of consumption-based individualism took root in Birmingham's middle-class culture, including the black middle class.[47]

As will be discussed further in subsequent sections and chapters, Wilson claims this false class consciousness eventually drove the new, more encompassing black middle class to challenge segregated forms of consumption. It also contributed to the failure and lag of black-owned economic development. In a potential free market, black-owned businesses developed on a lower social rung of consumerism. The limited availability and accessibility of black-owned businesses within black communities limited the growth of individualism and identity in an emerging consumer culture.[48]

Niche Market (1910-1930)

The influx of Italian immigrants into the Birmingham District between 1900 and 1920 filled the racial divide within the city-wide food systems. It also introduced another alternative food system besides cultivation and commissaries. Most Italians immigrated

[47] Ibid., 52, 54-56.
[48] Ibid., 57.

to Birmingham to answer the call for labor in the mines and mills. Like other migrating populations, foodways became a tangible and transportable staple of culture for Italian immigrants. Italian immigrants had access to something the black laborers from the Black Belt did not—upward mobility. Although not regarded as socially equal to whites, Italians could go into business transactions with their white neighbors. Italians also had access to untapped markets— neighboring black communities. They used this advantage, along with a deep desire to leave the intensive labor of steel manufacturing and mining behind, to become entrepreneurs. The gap in food access between the working class and the wealthy, blacks and whites, along with the Italians' existing knowledge of agriculture and cooking, created a market for food suppliers. Italian entrepreneurs began by truck farming in East Lake in 1906. Italians first functioned off a sharecropping system. After saving enough money, they began buying large tracts of farm land in East Lake, Huffman, West End, and Bessemer. The wagons would cover routes from one side of the city to the other and back, often going through black and white neighborhoods and company towns. Italian truck farmers soon became so successful they began supplying local restaurants and hotels with their produce.[49]

As Italians began to profit from truck farming, they began to invest their profits into more stationary businesses—the community grocery store. Since whites would under no circumstances do business in black communities, they remained largely underserved. Italians began buying small shops, living over them, and only carrying what the customer wanted and could afford. Most black households in Birmingham were low income and

[49] Pat Dunbar, *Joe: Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of Bruno Food Stores* (Birmingham: Joseph S. Bruno, 1983), 27-33; Frank Joseph Fede, *Italians of the Deep South: Their Impact on Birmingham and the American Heritage* (Montgomery: Black Belt Press, 1994), 72-73; Theresa Aguglia Beavers, "The Italians of the Birmingham District" (M.A. thesis, Samford University, 1969), 26-27; Fede, *Italians of the Deep South*, 65-66.

did not have refrigeration, which caused customers to shop day-to-day. Grocers often offered smaller cuts of meat and smaller quantities of dry goods such as sugar, flour, rice and beans. Profits proved to be slow but steady. Over ninety percent of Italian-owned grocery stores occupied storefronts in black communities, often within the perimeter of company towns. In an effort to redirect the profits of food supply for miners and mill workers, companies such as TCI paid in "scrip" useable only at the company commissary. By 1930 the *Birmingham News* estimated that over three hundred Italian-owned grocery stores dotted the Birmingham District. Italians not only participated in established food systems but created a new network of food suppliers in Birmingham as Italian truck farmers supplied Italian wholesalers who in turn supplied nearby Italian retail grocers. No other group had this degree of knowledge of agriculture and food production, access to start-up capital, and ability to forge relationships with both blacks and whites.[50]

These Italian grocers served the black communities in which they established their businesses further than just supplying meats and produce. These spaces formalized the black communities' engagement in emerging consumer capitalism. Within the same concept that Italians enjoyed the economic privileges of an intermediate race, Italian-owned stores created a spatial intermediary where blacks recognized their own purchasing power in segregated markets. Blacks bought, bargained, selectively patronized, and consumed just as whites did in their communities. This shared consumption, although spatially segregated, threatened white identity while enlivening

[50] Beavers, "Italians of the Birmingham District," 21-26; Fede, Italians of the Deep South, 86.; Marjorie White, *The Birmingham District: An Industrial History and Guide* (Birmingham: Birmingham Historical Society, 1981), 104.; Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 58-59.

black political economy. These interactions later shaped responsive shifts in identity in middle-class white communities. They also contributed to the efforts of equitable access within the civil rights movement.

Food Industry Growth in Birmingham (1930-1960)

In the transition to an industrial, nationalized food system, consumers—female homemakers—and the marketplace engaged in a new, nuanced *quid pro quo* of shrewdness and clever marketing. Processors, wholesalers, and grocers marketed foodstuffs in deceptively appealing ways by rebranding, repackaging, and advertising. As a response, homemakers' organizations, such as the Alabama Home Economics Association, tasked themselves with educating the homemaker of the future as a proficient and effective consumer. Grocers initially thought the irrationality of the female shopper would drive consumption in new markets. Once these initial expectations subsided, new, self-service markets developed a more informed view of the homemaker as a thrifty, value-driven consumer. This growth not only altered the aesthetics and content of the marketplace, but the relationship the consumers had to the spaces in which they purchased.[51]

In Birmingham, locally-owned grocery chains procured many of their products out-of-state, most boasting of the array of product origins. Enduring brand names began to appear in newspaper inserts. Offerings in Tyler Grocery stores in the district consisted of Duke's Mayonnaise and Log Cabin Maple Syrup. Among these brands, stores also

[51]Harold H. Martin, "Why She Really Goes To Market," *Saturday Evening Post*, September 28, 1963, Vol. 236 Issue 33, Pp. 40-43; *Birmingham News*, November 11, 1965.

offered products that created and reinforced a consumption-based racial divide. Products such as "Nigger in de Cane Patch Syrup" harkened Old South, minstrel imagery while fitting neatly on the cupboard shelf.[52]

In the early 1930s, regional chains, such as Rogers Groceries, Tyler, and Hill Grocery Company began marketing locally Southern-produced goods and implementing consumer-driven business practices. This marked an era of retail grocers advertising down a fine line between touting the modern, mechanization of their industry and the local benefit of shopping at their stores. Hill Grocery, with two hundred thirty-five stores in central Alabama, had one of the state's largest strongholds on the grocery industry. As Hill grew throughout this era of appealing to the consumer, its statewide advertising budget boomed. Hill found its largest consumer base in Birmingham and dedicated its advertising budget accordingly. Throughout the mid-thirties and early forties, Hill advertised in three major Birmingham newspapers—the *Birmingham News*, the *Birmingham Post-Herald*, and the *Birmingham World*, a black-owned newspaper. During this period, its monthly advertisement expenditures were $1,500-$2,500 for the *Birmingham News* and $500-$1500 for the *Birmingham Post-Herald*. In contrast, the company allotted only $12 weekly for the *Birmingham World* through the mid-thirties. Its advertisement in the black newspaper became increasingly sporadic and eventually ended entirely in 1941. Shortly after, from 1945-1949, Hill's annual advertisement budget more

[52] Tyler Grocery Insert, undated, approx. 1930, Birmingham Public Library, Tutwiler Collection of Southern History.

than doubled, all Birmingham accounts reflecting this boom save for the *Birmingham World*.[53]

Due to the growth in regional retail grocery chains, a growing need developed for centralized food processors, packagers, and wholesalers. The complexity of Birmingham's food system grew alongside the economic opportunities the wholesale grocers of the district identified in joining a broader food industry. Announcing the grocery business boom as "systematized," Birmingham wholesalers engaged in broader, more industrialized forms of food shipment and processing. Always claiming local economic impact as the number-one-priority, wholesalers shipped foodstuffs out of state in quantities that seemed "too big to be sold in a month in even the big retail stores." In this interstate system of distribution, Birmingham wholesalers submitted themselves to higher demands of not only quantity but quality. Wholesalers participated in rigorous screenings for cleanliness and sanitation in order to emphasize the importance of "pure food." Local wholesalers even claimed to be at the forefront of industrial quality standards. These industry-wide measures separated the chain retailers who procured most of their goods from these wholesalers from neighborhood corner stores, which—due to recurring incidences such as food poisoning and roaches baked into bread— had developed a reputation for selling spoiled and unsanitary foodstuffs.[54]

During this period of wholesale growth from about 1930 to the mid-1950s, many food businesses relocated to a new $7 million "Food Terminal" northwest of the central city on Finley Avenue. This new space held over thirty food-business firms on its thirty-

[53] *Birmingham News* October 24, 1930; *Birmingham News* February 27, 1931; Hill Grocery Co. Ledgers, 1935-1949, Birmingham Public Library Archives, Birmingham, AL.
[54] *Birmingham News*, undated.; *Birmingham News*, August 30, 19424.; *Birmingham News*, September 20, 1942.

four-plus acres. It also accounted for a county-wide farmers' market in its construction. The new Food Terminal served as a component of a network of six throughout the South. Wholesalers identified centralization and mechanization of food processing as another major component to this rising system. To answer the growing needs of the consumer, processors and packagers such Armor and Swift expanded in the city alongside retailers and wholesalers. Having residency in Birmingham since the early 1900s, Armor facilities needed significant attention. After a fire devastated a major Armor packing plant in 1953, 1000 cattle and 300 hogs roamed free around the city. In response to their provisional lag, Armor not only consolidated and absorbed smaller meat packaging and processing operations around the city but invested $100,000 in a "modernization" program for its facilities.[55]

The symbiotic co-development of consumer and producer created a market system that reflected consumer wants and desires. The process of developing a new, consumer-driven marketplace intentionally omitted the voices of black consumers in Birmingham. In accordance with white expectations and intentions, segregated consumption not only neglected to acknowledge a shared humanity in the need to eat but excluded blacks from shaping the formation of modern modes of consumerism. Thus, even in eventual desegregation, the white middle-class consumer had already irreversibly defined the parameters and expectations of the urban, southern consumer.

[55] *Birmingham News*, undated; *Birmingham News*, May 29, 1952; *Birmingham News*, 1953; *Birmingham News*, September 22, 1960.

Whiteness in Birmingham's Food System (1930-1960)

In his groundbreaking work on the societal function of taste, *Distinction*, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu claims that food serves as a strong basis for identity within the dominant class. Despite the changes of a social landscape, one's maintenance of taste preferences "refers directly back to the oldest, deepest experiences." Bourdieu furthers this by asserting that the perceived effects food has on the body and the body's use as a tool in acquiring capital determines class food selection and dispositions toward certain foods and tastes.[56]

He claims the dominant class identifies light, healthy, non-fatty foods as most suited for contributing to the desired body type. The working class viewed inexpensive, energy dense foods as contributing to a laborer's ability for output. Bourdieu offers further gender and age-specific breakdowns—which certainly have pertinence to the South—but food choice for the perceived purpose of utility underlies each disposition. Working-class households construct meals from thrift in an effort to increase freedom in quantity. In contrast, the dominant class emphasizes form in its dish and meal construction. In other words, the dominant class creates a set of learned, finite boundaries in meal preparation. In the urban South, faced with a shifting landscape of segregation, each of Bourdieu's claims carry particular resonance.[57]

Historian Grace Hale's work is essential for connecting Bourdieu's insights to the emerging racial distinctions enforced through consumerism in the urban South. She points to the distinct differences between self-sufficient agrarianism of the Old South and

[56] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1984), 79, 99.
[57] Ibid., 190-193.

the more urban and consumer-oriented domesticity of the New South as a new ground for defining race. Hale claims upper- and middle-class whites opted to maintain interracial proximity in new urbanism in order to reinforce a class-based hierarchy. Although whites used a combination of exclusion, segregation, and personal assertions of racial superiority, segregation rose to become the basis for whites to venture comfortably into urban spaces. Within this interracially proximal segregation, Hale asserted that an encompassing, emerging culture of self-defining whiteness pervaded the post-Reconstruction South. This culture of whiteness also sought to define racial otherness as it provided itself with a caricature reinforcement of a simultaneously benign black mammy female and threateningly ravenous black male.[58]

Hale draws from the Vanderbilt Agrarians' texts as they argued that northern business had infiltrated the idyllic pre-industrial South with the excesses of industrialism. The need to rid the industrial system of "overproduction" moved a nationally emerging consumer economy into the new, urban South. Participation in a greater consumer economy redirected systemic control to forces outside the South. Northern Progressivism, the Agrarians claimed, functioned as the guise under which industrialists accomplished this infiltration.[59]

Hale claims this Agrarian ideal ignored the complicit nature of the South's entrance into and acceptance of these incoming systems of industrial production and consumption. The willingness of southerners to engage in consumerism and the "false promise of industrialization," had allowed the Agrarian ideal to dominate intellectual

[58]Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 87, 124-125.
[59] Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 138-139.

discussion and the contemporary southern imaginary. Only through the support of industrialist, consumption-driven benefactors did the Agrarians arrive at their lofty conclusions. The falsehood instead lay in the creation of the myth of the Old South and its extension of pastoral imagery through the Agrarian writers. The Agrarians had not misplaced their notions of an infiltration of a northern industrial economy, but had born their thesis from the same industrialized consumer culture they so detested.[60]

Historian Angela Cooley builds upon Hale's whiteness thesis by identifying assertions of whiteness within the New South's foodways. Whites used new methods of meal preparation and food procurement from these rising systems of consumption in order to establish food-based social race boundaries. In Birmingham's increasingly industrialized food system, the need for labor outweighed the need to maintain strict rules on segregation. The demands of industrialization and consumer capitalism created the need for blacks to work in industrialized food processing plants, cook in white restaurants and white school cafeterias, and even eat the same food as whites. As a result, whites depended on a new widespread method of enhancing racial distinction. Instead of merely relying on spatial segregation, whites began determining white-specific foodways. Whites rooted this new food culture and its supportive domestic sciences in a pseudo-European tradition. This culinary lineage to the source of the "superior race" broke with Old South food imagery and with popular regional identity. This newly created white food culture stressed the importance of consumerism and scientific education. These key tenets provided built-in barriers for poorer whites and blacks.[61]

[60]Ibid., 143-145.
[61] Angela Cooley, "To Live and Dine in Dixie: Foodways and Culture in the Twentieth Century South," (Ph.D. diss., University of Alabama, 2011), 20-30.

Whites did not neglect the construction of racial superiority through the organization of Birmingham's emerging modern food systems. With the potential for blacks and whites to be tied together through a shared consumerism, whites found an answer to the fear of the racial ambiguity. TCI's social science initiative proved essential in institutionalizing a widespread adherence to a strictly formed curriculum of household maintenance. Evinced in the eventual promotion of Margaret Dillon, a former director of diet for TCI, to the role of a nationally syndicated food expert, TCI's domestic sciences pervaded Birmingham and Alabama's domestic culture far beyond the borders of company towns. With the peddling of domestic science, its practices, and its wares, the New South portrayed itself as autonomous from dependency on black food preparation and black foodways. Products, recipes, conferences, and domestic science schools all perpetuated newly constructed food practices rooted in precision and science. This notion of scientific precision and nutrition-based food preparation lent support to the rising pseudoscience of eugenics—the notion that selective reproduction produces a genetically superior race. Euthenics—the idea that controlling external, environmental conditions contributed to a superior race— domestic science's base ideology, identified not only the necessity for monitoring and controlling of genetics but also recognized nutrition as a vital role in the creation and maintenance of a superior race. [62]

Both consumerism and the ideas of euthenics separated southerners from traditional foodways. New, scientifically-proven foods became "white" as whites viewed traditional food preparation as primitive, lowly, and ultimately "black." Whites integrated the creation of white-specific foodways as a component in the New South identity. This

[62] Ibid., 31-37.

identity disregarded plantation-style cooking as antiquated and characterized domestic science food preparation as inherited from Anglo-European roots. This racial construction carried inherent class divisions and gender roles. In order to prescribe to this new dominant culture, a household needed economic means for travel to and from goods and grocery stores, more money to spend on food, more time to devote to the learning, procurement, and particular preparation of food, and literacy to read the materials and cookbooks evangelizing the benefits of this new culture. This cultural construction carried systemic implications, as whites depended on physical segregation in food sourcing to uphold the distinctions.[63]

Statewide groups focused on the white home and white nutrition formed and evolved throughout the early twentieth century. The Alabama Home Economics Association organized in Montevallo, but held yearly conventions in Birmingham. These annual meetings showcased the latest in nutrition and domestic sciences technology. Another statewide organization, Alabama Nutrition Committee, focused instead on identifying issues of proper nutrition and community health. This organization worked closely with home economics representatives statewide. Both efforts and organizations reserved concerns of black public health to the periphery of their discussions. This exclusion of black voices and concerns effectively defined a home-based culture of whiteness.[64]

As the emerging consumerism of the late 1950s and early 1960s permeated the homeplace, these groups trained housekeepers to become effective consumers. They tied

[63] Ibid., 43; Alabama Nutrition Committee Report, 1940, Birmingham Public Library, Tutwiler Collection of Southern History.
[64] *Birmingham News*, no date.

proper housekeeping and motherhood to particular modes of industrialized accumulation. These groups worked to standardize the functions of the home and the housekeeper within it. National home economic standards in cooking methods, utensils, and wares allowed a crafted message to find resonance in many white homes in Birmingham. This message conveyed a sentiment of proper homemakers learning and employing the proper mechanics and machines of homemaking.[65]

The *Birmingham Age-Herald* even housed a white, national authority on the subject of food in the home. Margaret Dillon, known in pen as Sue Scattergood, covered issues of home economics for the *Age-Herald* and the *Birmingham News*. Scattergood wrote on home economics events, city school domestic science programs and fielded questions regarding housekeeping. She had developed her knowledge of nutrition and housekeeping by serving for three years as TCI's director of diet for not only company schools, but camps as well.[66]

White schools such as Phillips, Ensley, and Woodlawn provided female students extensive home economics coursework with an ever-evolving focus on the homemaker in the marketplace. These students excelled and competed in nationally recognized homemaker competitions. These city school programs not only directed the homemaker of the future, but the woman of the future in general. As Scattergood's coverage showed, a growing need began to consume home economics to shape women as they entered the employment outside the home. If women had to transition to a more permanent role in the

[65] *Birmingham News*, no date; *Birmingham News*, 1965; *Birmingham News*, 1967.
[66] *Birmingham News*, August 23, 1940.

labor force, home economics programs tasked themselves to serve as a guide for middle-class whites to find proper employment in fashion, dietetics, tea rooms, and journalism.[67]

Independent, black domestic sciences developed alongside white domestic sciences in Alabama, but with markedly different intentions. The institutional, black-defined domestic sciences in Alabama emanated from the Tuskegee Institute. These teachings found little resonance in a controlled urban environment. Tuskegee's domestic science message and focus rested on rural, self-sustaining agrarianism. As made evident by earlier instances of Tuskegee graduates' involvement with George Gordon Crawford's welfare capitalism, urban blacks in an industrial economy received domestic directives more in tune with their white counterparts. As a means to prevent interracial closeness, Crawford had hired Tuskegee graduates to implement his curriculum in black company towns. If any independent influence toward a self-sustaining alternative food system came from Tuskegee, white-defined urban culture where consumption, technology, and science dominated the domestic landscape drowned it out. Extension agents from Tuskegee visited mostly rural counties, and Tuskegee's annual conference on subsistence was held in Montgomery rather than Birmingham. Because of the economic attraction many rural blacks identified in Birmingham, Tuskegee eventually adapted its message and training to a more industrial base, but did not explicitly incorporate the realities of disparate access to foodstuffs in its urban, industrial curriculum.[68]

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[67] *Birmingham News*, December 27, 1928; *Birmingham News*, May 11, 1929; *Birmingham News*, February 27, 1958; *Birmingham News*, November 5, 1957.

[68] *Birmingham News* April 30, 1936; *Birmingham News*, February 27, 1938; *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 19, 1940; *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 28, 1953; *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 28, 1956; Rikard, "George Gordon Crawford," 41.

Many whites in the South saw the teaching of racial etiquette as "more natural" than legislated segregation. In the urban South these practices were increasingly relied on due to the proximity of black domestic employees to intimate components of white life, such as food preparation. Historian Jennifer Ritterhouse claims that these practices in racial etiquette took on a new adaptable fluidity in the urban South. In a more densely populated area within a consumer capitalist, industrialized economy, races were bound to inter-consume. Thus, whites sought to create distinction based on where consumption could take place. This limited black consumers to separate dining areas or take-out windows.[69]

In Birmingham, this culture of white supremacist fear took on several legislative forms to further the normalized, socially enforced racial etiquette. Due to the city's commission form of government, Birmingham's champion of segregation, Commissioner of Public Safety, Bull Connor, was presented with an opportunity to legislate and ensure racial separation despite the development of racial closeness. Connor saw it as his responsibility to uphold the city's 1944 General Code as it applied to segregated restaurants. Birmingham Ordinance Section 369, Separation of Race read as follows:

> It shall be unlawful to conduct a restaurant or other place for the serving of food in the city, at which white and colored people are served in the same room, unless such white and colored persons are effectually separated by a solid partition extending from the floor upward to a distance of seven feet or higher, and unless a separate entrance from the street is provided for each compartment.[70]

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[69] Jennifer Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), p. 27.
[70] Letter from Chief Judge, Seybourn H. Lynne to Police Chief Jamie Moore, June 18, 1962, Connor Papers.

As Connor vigorously defended this segregationist provision—even into federal court—one peculiarity arose which had been unaccounted for within this new, urbanized segregated consumption. The proliferation of black cooks in restaurant kitchens made real the professed fears of pure, white food. Yet, in an emerging service industry dependent on cheap labor, many restaurants sought out blacks to cook in the kitchens. This intimacy with food prepared with white consumption enhanced the threat of interracial contamination. This new commercialized proximity of blacks to white food continued and extended the interracial proximity seen in the homes of white elites in the South since slavery. This reality had been in public political discussion—largely out of white fear and self-preservation—at a nominal level for decades. Domestic workers, school cafeteria cooks, and now cooks in the commercial setting threatened the purity of white food. If black hands had to prepare the food of Birmingham's restaurants, Connor made sure those public health officials screened and regulated those hands. Carrying into the next decade, mandatory regular health screenings and food handling course attendance of at least eighty percent of a restaurant's employees determined its chances at a successful health score. Previously overseen by the Jefferson County Department of Health, these new regulations benefited from a city-county partnership attempting to ensure successful regulation.[71]

As modernized, industrial food systems moved into Birmingham proper, white middle class consumers shaped the location and layout of the groceries they frequented. In line with past efforts at modernizing Birmingham's food systems, these systematized grocery outlets functioned almost exclusively for whites and predominantly for financial

[71] Letter from Chief Jamie Moore to Bull Connor, June 18, 1962, Connor Papers; *Birmingham News*, November 10, 1944; *Birmingham News*, June 17, 1957.

profit. As chain grocers democratized food consumption for middle-class whites, working-class communities, especially black, found little resonance in the offerings of the modern grocery. This racial gap resulted not only from geographic disparities in access to food markets due to segregation, but from intentional methods of white-based exclusion and social dispossession. Finally, Connor's regulatory actions recognized the shared public health concerns of both races. Stressed in *The Survey* over three decades prior, the poor health provisions in black communities throughout the city unavoidably affected the health of the whites they served. Even into the thirties, many black domestic workers lived in neighborhoods with no running water and shared outdoor privies. Connor's solution provided continuity to Birmingham's leadership's penchant for answering cultural fears of interracial proximity with matching legislated social regulation.[72]

[72]McGrath, "Conservation of Health," p. 1514.; Rebecca Sharpless, *Cooking in Other Women's Kitchens: Domestic Workers In the South, 1865-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 97.

CHAPTER 4

FOOD RELIEF AND CONNOR'S CONTROL (1957-1962)

"I think people are acting like chickens with their heads off about Captain Butler…He wouldn't hold food from starving people…I'm sure he's just as loyal and patriotic as any of us and he's just too proud to defend himself. You know how obstinate men are when they get their backs up."

--Melanie Hamilton, Gone With the Wind[73]

Depression Era Food Relief

During the Great Depression, in 1934 the USDA's first rendition of food assistance in Birmingham placed seven large commissary-type outlets throughout Jefferson County. These commissaries issued relief in the form of commodity foods purchased by the federal government in an effort to stabilize nationwide, plummeting crop prices. Wholesalers and retail grocers alike publicly criticized this program as it potentially affected their pricing and subsequently their sales. Although many argued that those participating in federal food relief could not afford to purchase food from retail outlets in the first place, Birmingham transitioned to a food stamp program, becoming the first city in the South to do so. This provided the grocers ample economic stimulation to endure the Depression and accept the federal intrusion. This transition also marked the

[73] Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 1936 (Reprint, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008) 329.

growing political power of the local food industry to direct not only the food coming into the city for purchase but the food coming into the city for relief.[74]

Surplus Food Program (1954-1957)

In an effort to drive consumption of government-supported agriculture, the USDA made available surplus commodity foods to "Federal, State, and local public welfare organizations." During the thirty-eight month period that Jefferson County first participated in the Surplus Food Program, over 70,000 people claimed over $240,000 of commodity foods per month. Jefferson County's poorest households benefited from a collective total of $9,266,634 worth of food assistance. Most of the assistance goods consisted of fats such as shortening, butter, and lard and grains such as flour and rice. Dried beans, dry milk, cheese, and lean cuts of pork and beef were sometimes incorporated. Some local county officials cited the program's operation costs as not worth the return. The *Birmingham News* later uncovered that the city and county's failure to comply with USDA regulations served as a major reason for the abrupt end to participation. The local officials failed to instate a full-time administrator. Instead, existing local and county officials oversaw distribution. Whether coincidence or intentional, the initiation and dismissal of the program's benefits also coincided with the brief lapse in Connor's commissionership. Connor, a supporter of the city's culture of "privatism," as Lamonte indicates, would later carry significant weight when faced with a

[74] Lamonte, *Politics and Welfare*, 123-124; "Legislative History: Food Distribution Programs," 2, accessed April 8, 2013, www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/aboutfd/fd_history.pdf.

decision to reactivate the city's participation in federal food assistance and under what guidelines.[75]

"Case for the Hungry"

After discontinuing participation in the surplus food program in 1957, Jefferson County leaders began receiving appeals from local business and philanthropy leaders to reintroduce the program. In response to Birmingham's dismal economic performance during 1960, the *Birmingham News* even printed a series, "Case for the Hungry," during January of 1961. In their public plea for the city's hungry, the *News* provided a brief profile of households and individuals experiencing hunger in each installment. The *News* also incorporated potential participation statistics along with likely annual program costs.[76]

One profile outlined a single mother's plight from Adger, an unincorporated community of Birmingham. She told the reporter that she sold the family hog—a valuable asset for a hungry family—in order to purchase coal for warmth for herself and her eight children. The family lived off two meals a day mostly consisting of beans with occasional powdered milk and biscuits. The paper noted that among such hungry households, "milk is a luxury, and meat is unknown." This observation carried a strong indictment of a city that within the same year had allowed the closure of Spies's nutrition

[75] Ibid., 3; Letter from Howard Strevel and Emil Hess, Co-Chairmen of Jefferson County Committee on Surplus Food Commodity Program, to Bull Connor, October 4, 1960, Connor Papers; "Alabama Social Welfare," June 1955; *Birmingham News*, January 4, 1961; William A. Nunnelley, *Bull Connor* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991), 61; Lamonte, *Politics and Welfare*, xii.
[76] Letter from John Ike Griffith to Bull Connor, January 4, 1961, Connor Papers; Letter from Mrs. MacDonald Gallion to Bull Connor, January 26, 1961, Connor Papers; *Birmingham News*, January 4-15, 1961.

clinic, founded twenty-five years prior on the same claims of inadequate food access for working-class households. The initial installment of the series also located the most concentrated areas of hunger in public housing such as the "Central City," along with mining camps and company houses.[77]

A later profile focused on a police officer's widow. She attested that she could no longer avoid neighbors' offerings of loans and handouts. Another profile of a homebound, elderly man showed the hardship of medical expenses. The man claimed to "just about live on medicine." His rent and medical costs left him little money for food. The *News* likened the living conditions in slum neighborhoods to "'pioneer-hard' life." The *News* only profiled one black family during the series. They lived in a shack behind a home on the thirty-third block of 31st Street North. A bucket of coals that had to be periodically removed from the home in fear of fire served as their only source of heat. Since the couple had nowhere to prepare food, the wife, who worked as a domestic for a white family, bought food, cooked it at work, and brought it home in a sack. Within these profiles the *News* also included testaments of service providers—many of whom served as local religious and philanthropy leaders. They accordantly appealed to readers' moral and religious convictions to help feed the city's poorest. They also spoke of depleted reserves in church and private run charities' food relief.[78]

Near the end of the series the paper began receiving letters to the editor concerning hunger throughout the city. Most letters expressed support for the paper's effort to uncover poverty and petition the city government for participation in the surplus

[77] *Birmingham News*, January 4, 1961.
[78] *Birmingham News*, January 5, 1961; January 6, 1961; January 10, 1961.

food program. However, one letter-writer claimed that "the usual crowd" abused the last installation of the assistance program. He further claimed the government would make a step toward socialism if it decided to accept federal food assistance. He did, however, acknowledge the root of the issue as an industrial failure to provide adequate employment opportunity.[79]

Another critic took issue with the lone profile of the black household on the same page as an announcement for a benefit show for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in New York. Instead of program participation, this letter-writer called for blacks to form their own relief organizations in the South similar to whites (as if they had not already). He also called for the show to "benefit anyone except Martin Luther King's political ambitions."[80]

By January 12th, the *News* had received a flood of correspondence offering services, food, financial aid, and even housing from businesses and individuals throughout the city. The *News* quickly established a citywide Emergency Food Fund to organize mailed-in contributions. The Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights even donated half of one of their meeting's proceeds to the *News*'s fund. The *News* reserved the assistance strictly for only families with no income. One former acquaintance of Bull Connor's who had suffered from a stroke sent him a donation for a food relief fund. Connor promptly returned it.[81]

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[79] *Birmingham News*, January 12, 1961.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.; *Birmingham News*, January 13, 1961; Letter from C.A. Thornburgh to Bull Connor, January 12, 1961, Connor Papers; Letter from Bull Connor to C.A. Thornburgh, January 13, 1961, Connor Papers.; April 18, 1961, Police Report of ACMHR Meeting held April 17, 1961, Connor Papers.

Revival of Surplus Food (1961-1962)

Since Birmingham's Department of Public Safety served as the surplus program's umbrella office, several individuals wrote their plea to participate to Birmingham City Commissioner of Public Safety, Bull Connor. Connor initially deflected responsibility, claiming participation as a county-level concern. Connor and the other commissioners finally caved to local and federal pressure to accept the Surplus Food Program into Birmingham. Upon this announcement, Commission President Morgan commented, "maybe our newspaper friends will ease up on us."[82]

The program was reinstated in March with all of the surplus food stored in one central warehouse located in Birmingham and nine distribution centers throughout Jefferson County. Through the one-man administration, Connor maintained a controlling grasp on the program by using his police force to watch over distribution. Since the program proposal determined the Birmingham warehouse to be the only center for storing foodstuffs, each day distributors returned any foods not picked up at the distribution centers. This not only centralized the food supply for the program operators' convenient distribution, but also for their convenient guarding.[83]

Connor displayed an obsessive control over the surplus food program once he and the other city commissioners allowed its reintroduction. Under Connor's direction, Birmingham police officers guarded the lone county warehouse. One even received commendation for occupying the post. Connor employed particular scrutiny in one case

[82] Letter from W.B. Norton to Bull Connor, January 9, 1961, Connor Papers; Letter from Bull Connor to W.B. Norton January 10, 1961; *Birmingham News*, January 12, 1961.
[83]Program of the Jefferson County Citizens Advisory Committee for Surplus Food, January 1961, Connor Papers; *Birmingham News*, June 12, 1963.

of false benefit claims. He specifically ordered several reports regarding Jesse Thomas's arrest on May 9, 1961. In the program's second month of operation, officers found Thomas fraudulently over-claiming dependents to receive more commodity foods. After receiving a tip from Thomas's estranged wife, Officers L.H. Kirk and W.F. Gladden arrested Thomas with the charge of obtaining food assistance under the false pretense of dependency of his wife and his three children. Thomas, twenty-seven years old, had instead lived elsewhere for two years with his mother. The officers estimated that the assortment of grains and fats Thomas falsely procured totaled an estimated value of $32.61. For this, the city held Thomas on a $500 bond until his court date a month later. Connor requested further follow up on the progress of Thomas's case, ending with a letter from police Captain Walker detailing Thomas's guilty plea and three-year sentence. The Captain closed this last letter with "I trust this meets with your approval." Connor and the police department's keen attentiveness to the program's proper function intensified through the year. Public opinion reflected Connor's scrutiny of the program. Program skeptics, including Birmingham businessman Elton B. Stephens, wrote Connor with concerns about communism, socialism, and societal degradation. That November, two local program specialists—including the future first executive director of the Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity, John H. Carr—briefed Birmingham's Optimist Club not only on the program's extensive reach, but on the lengths some went to falsely acquire benefits.[84]

[84] Birmingham Police Department, Personnel Commendations, January 8, 1962, Connor Papers; Arrest Report, May 9, 1961, Connor Papers; Letter from B.F. Walker to Bull Connor, May 15, 1961, Connor Papers; Warrant of Arrest, May 1961, Connor Papers; Letter from L.H. Kirk to B.F. Walker, May 11, 1961, Connor Papers; Letter from L.H. Kirk to B.F. Walker, June 23, 1961, Connor Papers; Letter from B.F. Walker to Bull Connor, June 27, 1961, Connor Papers; Letter from Elton B. Stephens to Bull Connor, July

In Spring 1962, as many of Birmingham's blacks mounted a boycott campaign of downtown businesses, Connor leveraged his control of access to surplus food in an attempt to quell black protest. Connor decided within a year of operation to cut the city's participation in the restored food surplus program until blacks ended their boycott. This reversal of municipal participation in the federal program acknowledged the consumer power of the black middle class. It also coincided with the county's decision to end its participation. This decision made the Birmingham warehouse the sole distribution center in the entire county. Despite the economic impact of the boycott, Connor received ample support for his decision to withhold benefits from boycotters. The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen lodge sent their collective support. Another letter more explicitly said, "Congratulations [for] the way you handle the Negroes…why feed them and take this boycott." Another supporter claimed that the boycott displayed black ingratitude since "Negroes always get 90% of everything that is free."[85]

Despite his decision's popularity among whites in Birmingham, Connor received scrutiny from outside the state. The national office of the NAACP criticized the end of the surplus food program. The Jewish Labor Committee publicly petitioned the Department of Agriculture to intervene. Representatives within the state started citing other reasons for Birmingham's decision to opt out of surplus food. Some argued the city struggled financially to maintain the program, despite the fact that it operated at less than half of its already sparse, projected operational costs. The absence of the projected

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17, 1961, Connor Papers; Bulletin of the Optimist Club of Birmingham, November 1962, Connor Papers; Lamonte, *Politics and Welfare*, 224.

[85] Letter from C.J. Cochran to Bull Connor, April 5, 1962, Connor Papers; Letter from J.A. Screws to Bull Connor, April 6, 1962; Letter from J.H. Sims to Bull Connor, April 8, 1962; Letter from W.D. Kendrick to Arthur Hanes, June 29, 1962, Connor Papers; County Commission of Jefferson County Surplus Food Department Budget October 1, 1961-July 31, 1962, Connor Papers.

weekly $4 million economic impact that the black community had on local Birmingham businesses had made itself painfully apparent in the city center. Instead of acknowledging the growing democratic voice of the black consumer, Connor counted on his ability to control the black population.[86]

Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and others in the civil rights movement had an answer to Connor's effort to end the boycott. Shuttlesworth had stressed earlier in 1961 the importance of investment on the part of the business owner. He had challenged members of ACMHR to end trade with business owners unwilling to purchase ads to financially support an annual book documenting the movement. Like a sports program or school annual, the ACMHR published this civil rights annual by selling advertisement space to local businesses. This advertisement proposition extended to grocery store owners. As the movement had progressed, businesses contributed to ACMHR. Grocers sent donations into weekly meetings accompanied by circulars advertising their stores. People within the organization would make a point to announce the name and location of a store financially supportive of the movement. One store hired a black clerk and pledged one percent of profits to the organization. In 1963, after Connor had moved to end participation in the surplus food program, organization leaders urged trade with a newly opened, black-owned grocery store. Martin Luther King, Jr. also spoke on sustaining the boycott effort. He urged the organization to abstain from unnecessary purchases and to buy only food during the boycott's duration. Further, Reverend Ed Gardner, cofounder of ACMHR, announced that since the city of Birmingham neglected hungry blacks, his organization would feed them. Blacks strategically retreated into familiar, segregated

[86] *Montgomery Advertiser,* April 8, 1962.

spaces—like neighborhood groceries—to endure and organize against Connor's attempt at ending their protest.[87]

After receiving much support for his decision to reverse surplus food benefits, Connor claimed that blacks constituted 95% of surplus food recipients. One supporter voiced a long-held sentiment among Birmingham's food processors, retailers, and wholesalers. A sales manager from S.T. Jerell, a local company that dealt primarily with dried milk products, informed Connor of the business lost by not participating in federal food relief. Through a series of back and forth letters, he and Connor deemed it would be most beneficial to the economic health of the city and for the control of the black population to disengage entirely from surplus food distribution. Instead Connor, the sales manager, and even local surplus food program representatives supported food stamps over surplus food. Citing lower overhead and federal stimulation of local business, Connor supported this transition. Connor saw this as an opportunity to direct federal intervention not only in the way he saw fit, but in a way that maximized local economic benefits and minimized local investment. Although Connor did succumb to pressure from the Kennedy administration to participate in some form of food assistance, he directed Birmingham to associate with the least costly program that offered the greatest economic boon. This decision fits within a tradition to forgo any type of health-driven, dynamic

[87] April 18, 1961, Police Report of ACMHR Meeting held April 17, 1961, Connor Papers.; April 25, 1962, Police Report of ACMHR Meeting held April 23, 1962, Connor Papers; May 7, 1962, Police Report of ACMHR Meeting held April 30, 1962, Connor Papers; March 20, 1963, Police Report of ACMHR Meeting held March 18, 1963, Connor Papers.

food assistance or equitable food system in order to boost the economic gains of the city's commercial-political elite.[88]

One year later, as the structure of city government transitioned from three-member commission to a mayor-council system, so too did the city's federal food relief transition from surplus food to food stamps. As the newly elected mayor Albert Boutwell ushered in the USDA's Food Stamp Program, he also determined the extent and direction that federal aid would enter the city. Much like the food relief and public health initiatives of the preceding fifty years, the city government made a public policy decision that served an economic end. This decision lessened the local investment even lower than the Surplus Food Program's twenty cents per person per year. It also directed federal relief dollars into the hands of Birmingham's grocery business community, an increasingly mechanized, interstate industry. This participation showed a change and growth in local policy and leadership, yet maintained a position of disregard for the city's most vulnerable. This transition ensured that even Birmingham's poorest households— black and white— would need to rely on the same food system that had been developed for the city's middle-class, white consumer.[89]

[88] Letter from Felix Snow to Bull Connor, September 7, 1962, Connor Papers; Letter from Bull Connor to Felix Snow, September 10, 1962, Connor Papers; Letter from Felix Snow to Bull Connor, September 15, 1962, Connor Papers; Letter from Bull Connor to Felix Snow, September 17, 1962, Connor Papers; *Birmingham News*, January 12, 1961.
[89] Letter from Homer J. Harper to Bull Connor, November 26, 1962, Connor Papers; *Birmingham News*, June 12, 1963.

CHAPTER 5

CIVIL RIGHTS AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF CONSUMPTION (1960-1964)

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed--

I, too, am America.

--Langston Hughes[90]

As we have seen, whites in Birmingham had used consumerism, including food markets and systems, to create new grounds for the reinforcement of racial boundaries. Ironically it also provided blacks opportunities to challenge the racial order. Earlier lessons in consumption provided Birmingham's black population the cultural conditioning necessary to segue into middle-class food systems. This assimilation into a

[90]Langston Hughes, "I, too" in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 46.

culture of consumption shaped the black middle class and provided the subsequent parameters of the popular civil rights movement in Birmingham. Assertions of social justice frequently took the form of calling modes of segregated consumption into question. The act of boycotting, a violation of a consumer culture, threatened the systems which supported Birmingham's power structure. Inherent in their increasing role in desegregated spaces, blacks developed an urge to extend and challenge legislative and socially enforced limitations of consumption. Beginning in 1960, Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and students from the Anti-Injustice Committee adopted a similar strategy to that of the Greensboro, North Carolina activists with the primary objective to challenge racial segregation in restaurants and at lunch counters.[91]

The sit-in movement came to Birmingham much more gradually and sporadically in comparison to other cities of contention in the segregated South. The short, initial episode in 1960 produced inflammatory results with implications for the sustainability for the movement and marked a temporary initial success for white resistance. On the morning of April 2, Shuttlesworth and ACMHR organized a group of local black students to stage Birmingham's first sit-in. The group separated into pairs and took their posts at the lunch counters of five department stores throughout the city that sold food. Police officers promptly arrested the demonstrators along with Shuttlesworth and fellow organizing ministers, Reverend Charles Billups and Reverend C. Herbert Oliver. Each was charged with "vagrancy." This charge prevented the arrestees from posting bail or from making a phone call for three days. These reactions formed equivalently with others concerning potential racial proximity in social environments. These students from Miles

[91] Wilson, *Race and Place*, 59, 60, 86.

College and ACMHR organizers violated the cultural and legislative boundaries of segregated consumption in an effort to showcase the brazen enforcement of racial barriers. As will be discussed in the following section, the demonstrators who took part in sit-ins modified their intent over the following years, but the contested grounds of consumption remained unchanged.[92]

In April 1963, in the midst of the continued boycott of downtown stores, demonstrators broke the racial barriers once again to draw attention to the injustices of segregated public spaces. This demonstration succeeded in garnering national attention but failed in scale and endurance. Police officers immediately arrested the twenty-one black demonstrators. The court hurriedly tried and sentenced them to one hundred eighty days in jail. The following day demonstrators again attempted to contest segregated lunch counters. Ten of the demonstrators were immediately arrested for "trespass after warning." Four of the five department stores were able to prevent much commotion by cooperating with Connor and the Birmingham Police by shutting down their lunch counters for the day.[93]

These exercises in protest of Birmingham's segregated modes of consumption did not find much initial resonance in the way of widespread restaurant desegregation. They did, however, establish a practice and a precedent for the efforts in direct action to follow. They provided a testament to the endurance of the goals and depth of black protest. The sit-ins also brought to light the overtly racist-driven structure of Birmingham's social order. Sit-ins encroached on white efforts to maintain racial order, as whites resorted to

[92]Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama: The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 149-153. *New York Times*, April 12, 1960.
[93] *New York Times*, April 5-6, 1963.

altering their lives in order to avoid black progress. Whites closing stores and avoiding shopping due to the boycott and sit-ins shed light on the ultimate futility of white resistance to desegregation.

Katzenbach v. McClung

As the spirit of these sit-ins continued into 1964, their challenge shifted from local authority to the enforcement of federal law. The Civil Rights Act of 1964—inspired by Birmingham demonstrations—gave legal grounds to the efforts of black protest in segregated spaces of consumption. Ostensibly extending even into privately owned businesses, Title II of the act established Congress's rights under the Interstate Commerce Clause—not merely the equal protection provision of the Fourteenth Amendment— to provide blacks new legal ground to fight segregation in the city. One Birmingham restaurant in particular provided all of the contradictions of the South's enforcement of segregation through food. Among its thirty-six employees, Ollie's Barbecue employed twenty-four blacks. While the restaurant had expanded since its 1927 opening to provided space for two hundred twenty patrons, Ollie's never made room for any black customers. Ollie McClung only provided for potential black business in the form of a take-out service. Even the restaurant's choice of specializing in barbecue highlighted the contradictions and complexities of interracially shared Southern foodways.[94]

[94] *Katzenbach v. McClung*, retrieved from www.oyez.org/cases/1960-1969/1964/1964_53.; Derived from Caribbean meat preparation involving open pit roasting and honed by slaves in antebellum kitchens, Southern barbecue has a complex history with regional variations stemming from myriad of multiracial and

The rare position of the Civil Rights Act's offender acting as plaintiff typified the belief held by Birmingham's whites that integrating food consumption threatened not only the "southern way of life" but their access to American individualism. This lawsuit equivocated taking away individual autonomy with taking away a restaurant owner's right to segregate. The plaintiff, Ollie McClung, even attempted to argue that being forced to serve blacks could be seen as "involuntary servitude" under the protection of the Thirteenth Amendment. More than five decades of systematization and public policy in the form of the Pure Food Act, a national industrialized food system, and Public Health inspections aside, McClung alleged Congress's integration of his restaurant was a bureaucratic affront to his ability to operate a business privately.[95]

McClung argued that to rule over private business and property threatened his individual rights and freedoms. Initially upheld by Birmingham's Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, McClung's argument that his business neither engaged in nor affected interstate commerce shed light on how gradual and normalized the process of participating in a national food system had become. Perhaps the Appeals Court judged from an end result of the business of feeding people in a fixed place within the state. What the Appeals Court overlooked and what the United States Supreme Court later identified was that Ollie's, along with virtually all other restaurants in Birmingham and beyond, heavily engaged in the highly industrialized national food system. Ollie's spent over $70,000 annually on meat products from a local wholesaler who sourced its meat through the national meat supplier Hormel & Company. In acquiring over half of its foodstuffs from

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multiethnic foodways. For more on Southern barbecue, reference: John T. Edge, ed. *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, Vol. 7: Foodways* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007); Lolis Eric Elie, ed. *Cornbread Nation 2: The United States of Barbecue* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009).

[95] Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 182; "Beyond a Doubt," *Time*, December 25, 1964, Vol. 84 Issue 27, 15-16.

out of state, Ollie's local discriminatory service clearly engaged interstate commerce. The Court criticized the irrationality of the plaintiff's claim to Thirteenth Amendment protection and concluded that the Civil Rights Act, much like the Thirteenth Amendment, did not infringe upon the rights of property owners, but strengthened the individual rights of the greater public. [96]

What had been creeping up on Birmingham throughout the twentieth century had finally taken precedent over blatant Jim Crow segregation. The Court's ruling confirmed Birmingham as a modern city troubled by an overtly segregationist past. In order to survive beyond the era of legislated Jim Crow, segregation needed to find a new basis within a modern context of urban development embedded in a broad network of national, federally regulated systems.

[96] Sokol, *There Goes My Everything*, 187-191.

CONCLUSION

A SEAT AT THE TABLE

when I unwrap the sandwich
from the wax-paper the wax-paper
crackling like the cold grass
along the Selma to Montgomery road,
like the foil that held
Medgar's last meal, a square of tin
that is just the ghost of that barbecue
I can imagine to my tongue
when I stand at the pit with my brother
and think of all the hands and mouths
and breaths of air that sharpened
this flavor and handed it down to us

--Jake Adam York[97]

Two hours after the Supreme Court decided to uphold the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as it applied to Ollie's Barbecue five black patrons walked into the restaurant in Southside Birmingham and presumably had a pleasant and uneventful meal. This meal signified the success of the civil rights movement in securing equitable access to existing outlets of consumption. Equally important, this meal also symbolized the stagnated

[97] Jake Adam York, "Grace," *Washington Post*, November 20, 2012.

progress of the movement as it had turned to the affirmation of the federal government in desegregating Ollie's Barbecue. The Court's decision had not altered the culture that, two hours prior, had stood proudly as the South's last bastion of half a century of segregated eating. Although the McClungs conceded to the highest law with such self-attributed patriotism "as law-abiding Americans, we feel we must bow to this edict," they displayed no moral compunction or newfound integrationist enlightenment. Instead they still maintained fears of lost business and uncertainty over their autonomy as a business.[98]

Much like Progressivism had acculturated citizens to expect the federal government's intervention on behalf of the consumer, the Ollie's decision conditioned those within the civil rights movement to look to judicial affirmations of equality and desegregation. In its placation to the spatial desegregation of consumption, the civil rights movement conceded its most politically powerful tool—the mass, grassroots organizing of the righteously indignant. Similar to the backlash and subsequent plans for re-segregation following the *Brown* decision, the Ollie's Barbecue decision also defined the parameters in which white segregationists could operate legally. The decision did not undo the years of asymmetrical urban development in which Birmingham's food systems had modernized. The Civil Rights Act and the Ollie's decision did not retroactively address systemic disparities propagated by cultural and legislative segregation.[99]

In regard to Birmingham's poorer black communities—who had been forcibly corralled into isolated and undesirable neighborhoods by city ordinance and planning—the decision ensured a breakdown of racial solidarity in exchange for an unhindered

[98] "Beyond a Doubt," *Time*, 16; Nicholas C. Hosford, "Broad and Sweeping Federal Power: Birmingham Barbecue and Southern Culture in the Crosshairs of the Commerce Clause," *Vulcan Historical Review* Vol. 17, (2013): 10, 14, forthcoming.
[99] Michael J. Klarman, "How Brown Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis," *The Journal of American History* Vol. 81 No. 1 (June 1994): 81-118.

consumption-based, black middle class expansion. As grocery chains had already moved into the desegregated markets of Washington and California, blacks—in particular poor black neighborhoods—faced a grocery landscape that offered less selection of fresh produce and meats, perishables closer to sell-by date, and higher food costs than their wealthier white counterparts. The urban renewal, white flight, suburbanization, consolidation of markets, and the rise in large grocery chains in Birmingham only engendered a similar environment of low-quality, low-selection foods for poorer black neighborhoods. This evolution brought to light what had become so glaringly evident—that unless Birmingham's black communities found real economic and political parity and justice, they would not ever be the determinants of their own food systems. White, urban developers continued to avoid and disregard the needs of black communities—especially working-class black communities— in the name of economic strategy. Much in line with the emergence of Birmingham's food systems thus far, the city's food system continued to develop and operate as an extension of the politically powerful business community.[100]

Never in the name of health or humanity did Birmingham's city government or industrial leaders provide substantial systemic change. Instead, Birmingham faced a continuation of bifurcated social progress, only now the white power structure increasingly enlisted members of the black middle class to further create a food system designed to satisfy the city leadership's desire for economic gains. In his recent Environmental Science, Policy, and Management dissertation, Zac Henson identified this

[100] Ibid., 14; Charles Connerly, *"The Most Segregated City In America": City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920-1980* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2005) 49-58, 230-231.; Wilson, *Race and Place*,100, 119.; James Ridgeway, Segregated Food at the Supermarket, December 5, 1964, 6-7; Marie Gallagher, *Examining the Impact of Food Deserts and Food Imbalance on Public Health in Birmingham*, (Birmingham: Main Street Birmingham, 2010).

continuation as it permeated the rhetoric and aim of the modern food movement. As Henson notes, much of the black middle class's coalescence into traditionally white-dominant solutions to food disparities highlights the maintenance of Birmingham's class-driven and racially disconnected strategies for addressing fundamental barriers to equitable food access. Many of the proposals of the modern alternative food movement in Birmingham familiarly tout the economic viability of such solutions in an expanding global economy. Working-class black voices are still absent from much of the discussion, as are appeals to addressing systemic poverty in the recognition of shared humanity or for the sake community-driven, holistic health reform. Much like Cooley's argument of white-defined food purity, the reforms of Crawford and Spies, and the actions of Connor and even the black patrons at Ollie's, in order to further its political goals, Birmingham's modern food movement has turned to marketing its ideas to the city leadership and its constituents.[101]

Research regarding race, class, and urban food systems is not only pertinent but essential in uncovering the origins of broader systemic disparities. This newly breached field lends itself to an enhanced historical perspective of systemic manipulation and control. Continuing research focused on something as fundamentally essential as food opens broader discussions of political, economic, and individual agency and freedom. Scholarship that focuses on filling the chronological gap between the Ollie's Barbecue decision and Henson's analysis of the present debate over remedying many of the aforementioned, perpetual systemic disparities is essential in determining how exactly Birmingham's white, business-driven power structure reacted and adjusted its position to

[101] Zac Henson, "Separate Tables: Segregation, Gentrification, and the Commons in Birmingham, Alabama's Alternative Food and Agricultural Movement," (Ph.D. Diss., Berkley: University of California, Berkley, 2013), 15, 46.

maintain its ability to direct the further development of urban food systems. Further, this research offers much opportunity for expansion in an effort to develop an understanding of the corresponding modernization of the urban South's food systems. The notion that these urban centers acted as food hubs, not only logistically as noted in Birmingham's Food Terminal, but in determining the future of the culture surrounding Southern food deserves further exploration.

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