FORGOTTEN: SCIOTO COUNTY'S LOST BLACK HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

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This paper explores the untold history of the Black community of Portsmouth and Scioto County, Ohio. It provides a brief overview of the national and state level political and cultural context in which this story is told. This project is limited in both scope and in resources, and as such, while some information about Scioto County’s early history in relation to Black citizens is included for context, this research is focused mainly on the struggle for integration of the Portsmouth City School system in 1885, and the larger political and cultural context in which these events took place. This story not only highlights the struggles that members of the Black community in the area have faced, but also demonstrates the abundance of Black history in Scioto County, and the causes of the erasure of this history. The folklore of the county itself, like the Floodwall Mural project’s artistic summary, omits the rich Black history of the county. This paper argues the historical importance of the Black community to this particular place, a cultural and racial crossroads in the nineteenth century, and being a larger conversation about the role of Black citizens in Scioto County history. Additionally, this paper purposes to situate Portsmouth in the broader social and political culture of the nineteenth century.
For my partner, my parents, my family, and Coda Bear. This thesis would have been impossible without their love, their support, and most importantly, their senses of humor.

For the African American citizens who have made Scioto County their home:

Your story has not been forgotten.

and

For Charles. This all started because of you. I hope I made you proud.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Scioto County is one of Ohio’s southernmost counties, situated at the intersection of the Appalachian foothills and the mouth of the Ohio River, and the confluence of the Ohio and Scioto Rivers. It is neighbored on the south shore of the river by Kentucky, and has more than 100,000 acres of heavily forested areas within its borders. It is a quiet, bucolic place. From the early nineteenth century, Portsmouth, the county seat, was a busy river hub, home to several fire-brick factories.¹ In its heyday (the 1930s to the 1950s), the area was home to a bustling industrial base that included steel mills, shoe manufacturing, and fabrication plants. It was once home to a world-class amusement park, Millbrook Park, and an NFL team, the Portsmouth Spartans, later the Detroit Lions. Branch Rickey, who was also a Scioto County native, was responsible for signing Jackie Robinson to the Brooklyn Dodgers, breaking the color line to integrate Major League Baseball in 1945. Today, Scioto County and the town of Portsmouth are a ghost of its former prestige, a shell of what once was. The manufacturing companies vanished years ago, leaving behind a single coal coke plant and a shoelace factory. The only remaining entertainment are a dirt race track that is flooded much of the year and two small movie theaters. The population of the city of Portsmouth and Scioto County as a whole has declined steadily over the past several decades. Scioto County is as beautiful as it ever was, but much of the economic resources have moved elsewhere, leaving high numbers of unemployment and twenty three percent of residents living below the poverty line.²

¹ Fire-brick is a specialized kind of construction brick, made with clay composed of high levels of aluminum oxide and silica, which are both plentiful in the clay deposits of the Scioto Valley hills. These bricks were used to line kilns and in other high-heat applications.
Portsmouth’s glory days are well remembered and enshrined by a large public history project, the Portsmouth Murals. Painted on the two thousand feet of floodwall space along the Ohio River, these twenty-foot tall murals tell the history of the county, starting with its indigenous population, their earthwork mounds, and their first encounters with French settlers. The mural moves through the transition from an agrarian to industry economy, highlighting local educational achievements, notable residents, and ending with an image of a bridge that spans the river between Portsmouth’s main thoroughfare (Chillicothe Street) and South Shore, Kentucky. The floodwall murals, however, seem to exclude the rich diversity of citizens who have settled in the area. Specifically, the number of Black citizens represented in the murals does not match the proportion of Black citizens that have lived in the county. The rich Black history of Scioto County has simply been forgotten within this highly visible public history project.

This paper will explore the untold history of the Black community of Portsmouth and Scioto County, Ohio. It will also provide a brief overview of the national and state level political and cultural context in which this story is told. This project is limited in both scope and in resources, and as such, while some information about Scioto County’s early history in relation to Black citizens is included for context, this research is focused mainly on the struggle for integration of the Portsmouth City School system in 1885, and the larger political and cultural context in which these events took place. This story not only highlights the struggles that members of the Black community in the area have faced, but also demonstrates the abundance of Black history in Scioto County. The folklore of the county itself, like the Floodwall Mural project’s artistic summary, omits the rich Black history of the county. This paper will argue the historical importance of the Black community to this particular place, a cultural and racial crossroads in the nineteenth century, and being a larger conversation about the role of Black
citizens in Scioto County history. Additionally, this paper purposes to situate Portsmouth in the social and political culture of the nineteenth century. Ohio had varying attitudes regarding Black citizens, with pockets of abolitionists throughout, but particularly concentrated in the Northeast corner of the state, and Southern Ohio was generally understood to be more conservative, with ties to the river industry and the proslavery South. In many ways, geographically, economically, and perhaps culturally, the counties of the southernmost part of Ohio are very similar. Scioto County, however, stands out as an anomaly, due in part to the large Black communities that have made their home there for three centuries, and also because of the progressive individuals that have been raised there and gone on to make a difference in the world in terms of race and equality. In addition, Scioto County and Portsmouth, especially in their earlier years, were a place of great social change and forward thinking by some of the residents, which went against the general culture by which they were literally surrounded. In Portsmouth, for example, Black merchants could have successful businesses during the nineteenth century, and there were Black professionals throughout the city; just across the bridge into Kentucky, however, slavery was legal until the day the thirteenth amendment abolished it, and free Black citizens were not welcome or wanted.

In Chapter 2, I trace the early history and the laws regarding Black citizens in Ohio and in Scioto County. Southern Ohio was originally Native American land, settled by the French in the 1750’s. Portsmouth was already a city when Ohio was incorporated as a state, and was already home to many Black citizens at that time. In Ohio’s early years, new Black citizens were generally not welcomed into the state. The state passed harsh Black Laws that required documentation of free status, registration fees, and denied Blacks many rights that were freely given to Whites. Because of Portsmouth’s central location on the Ohio and Scioto Rivers, it
became a hotbed of Underground Railroad activity. Further, there is ample evidence of both brutal, racially motivated atrocities happening in the area, as well as many examples of fair treatment of Black citizens. Chapter 3 is a discussion of Ohio as a battleground for Black rights. Portsmouth was situated in an important place, geographically, to serve as a crossroad for racial sentiment of the time. With only the Ohio River separating slave and abolitionist land, the forces and opinions for both sides of the color line were at work in the area. The controversy spilled over to many community issues, most notably in the local public school system. This chapter explores the changing attitudes and laws in Ohio regarding the rights of Black citizens in every arena of public life from taxation, education, enfranchisement, and basic civil rights.

Chapter 4 focuses on the political and cultural battle that took place regarding school integration after Reconstruction. Ohio passed its first law requiring desegregation in 1875, but it took almost a decade for schools to start testing these waters. Portsmouth City Schools were one of the first test cases of the new laws. This chapter outlines the events that led up to school segregation in Portsmouth, and the murky details surrounding the ending of this policy sometime in the early twentieth century. Chapter 5 looks at the issue of whitewashing history, or the intentional forgetting or non-remembrance of certain parts of history, most usually the histories of minorities. In the case of Portsmouth and Scioto County, it is clear that this history has not been prioritized or taken special care of in any way. In this chapter, I give specific examples of this phenomenon and how it has manifested in the recorded history of the area.

Given the time frame of this research, the terminology regarding Black citizens varied greatly in the resources. Though such racist terms were commonly used and printed in that time period, I have tried to minimize the use of the worst of the terminology. In many cases, Black individuals were called derogatory names by the newspapers. For the sake of clarity, I will use
the term ‘colored’ in places where it is appropriate in context when considering the time frame of
the resource, and the more generally acceptable term ‘Black’ where possible.
CHAPTER 2: EARLY OHIO LAWS AND EARLY SCIOTO COUNTY

The first non-indigenous people around the region that became Portsmouth were part of the Ohio Company. On January 29, 1751, the settlement group came down river from Cincinnati to explore and document the area.\(^3\) Records note that a slave held by Mr. Christopher Gist, commander of the party, was the first person to step foot on the bank of the Ohio. The young Black man jumped out and moored the boat to a tree.\(^4\) Even before Ohio became a state in 1803, the Scioto River Valley area was home to numerous free Black citizens, many of whom were well-regarded as part of the city’s landscape. For example, several stories in the local newspaper of the time were written about the ‘town character,’ the local bootblack Mr. Peter Weaver and his wife Charlotte, a well-known midwife to nearly every expectant mother in the city. Mrs. Weaver was honored with a full-page obituary in the \textit{Portsmouth Times}, noting appreciation for her service to the families of the area.\(^5\)

Issues of race were turbulent in Ohio, an abolitionist state, from its inception. The first Constitutional Convention for the State of Ohio was held on Monday, November 1, 1802, in Chillicothe, the first state capitol. The minutes of the convention are brief and presumably incomplete, but even in this abbreviated form, one can begin to see that Black citizens, and their legal status in the state, were an important issue from Ohio’s conception. The Convention debated six motions concerning Black citizens regarding suffrage (Black people were ultimately denied the right to vote), and public service (Black residents were denied the right to serve in any public office, military office, or give oath or testimony in court against a White person for any

\(^3\) Nelson Evans, \textit{The History of Portsmouth} (Portsmouth: Self-published, 1906), 10.\(^4\) Portsmouth Public Library, “Black History” (folder of miscellaneous librarian research, Local History Department, Portsmouth Public Library), accessed September 24, 2014.\(^5\) Ibid.
reason).\textsuperscript{6} They also voted on whether to allow slavery within Ohio’s borders, ultimately outlawing it by one vote.\textsuperscript{7} However, the final draft of the Constitution was written without a single reference to Black citizens except in reference to the article on slavery. Black people were not recognized in the state of Ohio as having any political existence or rights. They occupied the same status as Native Americans or unnaturalized immigrants. Because of this, all of the rights and privileges granted under the Ohio constitution applied to White men only.

Further strengthening the policy of White-dominated government and citizenship, in 1804, Ohio’s legislature passed the Black Laws, designed to “regulate Black and Mulatto persons,” and provide protocols in regard to their entry and settlement into the state.\textsuperscript{8} Among the regulations, each Black person that desired to reside in the state was required to obtain and present to the local government documentation from “some court in the United States” that ‘proved’ their freedom.\textsuperscript{9} Per the law, all Black citizens already residing within Ohio’s borders were required to register with the state, provide the name of their children, and pay a registration fee of twelve and a half cents for each member of the family.\textsuperscript{10} White citizens were not required to register or pay this fee. White citizens were barred from hiring any Black person that could not produce the court certificate or proof of registration, or else they were fined from ten to fifty dollars. Not coincidentally, the same fee was imposed on anyone caught ‘harboring, or hindering

\textsuperscript{6} In the ruling of \textit{Jordan v. Smith} in 1807, the Ohio Supreme Court upheld this law when they included the following: ”Let a man be a Christian or infidel; let him be Turk, Jew or Mahometan; let him be of good character or bad; even let him be sunk to the lowest depths of degradation; he may be witness in our courts if he is not Black. If a negro or mulatto, he must be excluded from giving evidence where a White man is a party.”

\textsuperscript{7} Frank Quillin, \textit{The Color Line in Ohio, a History of Race Prejudice in a Typical Northern State}, 1913, 14.

\textsuperscript{8} Passed January 5, 1804, Laws of Ohio II:63

\textsuperscript{9} Frank Quillin, \textit{The Color Line in Ohio, a History of Race Prejudice in a Typical Northern State}, 1913, 21.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
the capture of a fugitive slave.\textsuperscript{11} In 1807, an addendum to the laws required a bond for all new Black citizens wishing to settle in the state. This $500 bond required the signature of two (White) bondsmen and assured both good behavior and a guarantee against the Black resident becoming a pauper, and therefore a burden to the city.\textsuperscript{12} White residents were not required to post such a bond. These laws also severely limited or denied African Americans’ rights to marry interracially, to own guns, property rights, and other freedoms liberally given to White citizens.\textsuperscript{13} Ohio was the first state to pass such laws, though many others followed soon after.\textsuperscript{14} The laws remained in effect until 1849, when Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law. It was not until 1865, with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment that was slavery completely outlawed in the United States. Despite these obstacles, both Ohio generally and the Scioto River Valley specifically sustained a sizeable Black community even in the earliest years of the nineteenth century.

By 1815, Ohio was a major conduit of the Underground Railroad, home to many that supported universal freedom.\textsuperscript{15} Ohio was, ironically, also a place of vicious proslavery sentiments from some on the other side of the moral or political spectrum. Because Portsmouth was at the front lines of the border between free and slave territory, it was home to many skirmishes related to runaway slaves. The common reward for the recovery of a runaway was up

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\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} This is approximately $12,100 in current value, per the Consumer Price Index (estimate) 1800–2014. Consumer Price Index (estimate) 1800–2014. Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. Retrieved February 27, 2015.
\textsuperscript{13} Yale Law School, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/sl004.asp
\textsuperscript{15} Its geographical location bordering slave states, large population of abolitionists and proximity to large communities of free Blacks and runaway slave accounts for this. The abolitionists were primarily Quakers, Covenanters and Free Presbyterians, Wesleyan Methodists, and other universal freedom supporters.
\end{flushleft}
to $500, and for some, the money and the excitement of the hunt proved too enticing to refuse participation. For others, though, they made it their life’s work to help channel previously enslaved people through the area to safety. By 1820, fugitive slave notices began to appear in the Portsmouth newspapers.\textsuperscript{16} By 1830, the general attitudes towards Blacks in the city had further hardened. For example, on January 21, 1830, a day termed “Black Friday” by the local newspaper, approximately two hundred White, property-holding male citizens of the city signed a petition which cited the state’s Black laws, requiring the eviction of all Black men in the city.\textsuperscript{17} The expelled men were forced to leave behind their families, their work, and any possessions they could not carry. They were escorted to the northern city limits by the local lawmen and advised never to return. This was, however, not an isolated incident. In 1829, the Black residents of Cincinnati were given sixty days to meet the bond requirement (and to register, and pay the fees), or else leave the city. While waiting for the sixty days to pass, some White residents became impatient and incited mob violence against the Black citizens of Cincinnati, attacking and killing several dozen Black people. As a result, more than half of the city’s Black population migrated to Canada.\textsuperscript{18}

In 1834, a Portsmouth newspaper reported that a slave caravan transporting recaptured slaves down river stopped in town. It caused quite a scene. The article claimed that seven Black men and six Black women were chained together, herded through town by several heavily-armed White keepers. The captured runaway slaves, still chained together, were beaten with whips for talking to free Black people from the town that gathered to see the spectacle of the caravan. Around this same time, more runaway slave notices had appeared in local newspapers, paid for

\textsuperscript{16} Elmer Sword, \textit{The Story of Portsmouth}. (Portsmouth: Self-Published), 1965, 36.  
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.  
by southern slave owners chasing their ‘property’ along the Underground Railroad. The Scioto River Valley became a common entry point for the runaway slaves escaping to freedom and the bounty hunters chasing them.¹⁹

Future Montana Governor James Mitchell Ashley grew up in the Portsmouth area and saw a similar scene as a child. In an interview later in his life, he recalled being a young man working as a deckhand on a flatboat on the river, where he witnessed a group of White bounty hunters abduct a group of Free Black men who lived in the area. He later learned that these abducted men had been sold into the runaway slave Black market.²⁰ Their free status meant nothing to the hunters, who saw the Black men as only objects to be stolen and sold. When he was seventeen years old, in 1839 or 1840, Mr. Ashley participated in two separate Underground Railroad operations. He assisted the groups cross the river at Wheelersburg (on the east side of Scioto County), and then facilitated transportation of the parties to Portsmouth. From there, he paddled them north on the Scioto River to Pee-Pee Creek in Pike County, Scioto County’s northern neighbor. When he was an old man, in his late 70’s, he called it the most exciting time of his life.²¹ These events, along with his Quaker upbringing, stuck with young Ashley for the rest of his life and influenced his later political and personal life. He was a founding editor of the Portsmouth Democratic Inquirer, and ran for Mayor of Portsmouth in 1850, but lost. According to local rumors, Ashley lost the race because he was known to be a “friend of the Black man.”²²

As word spread of his activities on the Underground Railroad (illegal, even in Ohio), he sold his

²¹ Ibid.
business and moved to Toledo, where he became a radical anti-slavery politician, serving as representative of the tenth district of Ohio in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, D.C., before serving as Governor of Montana. While a representative, he became a close confidant of President Abraham Lincoln, and authored a bill to abolish slavery in Washington, D.C. He was also responsible for writing the Thirteenth Amendment and presenting it to Congress, which abolished slavery in the United States permanently.23

The two major routes used to move the runaway slaves through the area were the Scioto Line, which followed the Scioto River north through Portsmouth, Waverly, and to Columbus via Richmondale and farther. The other branched northwest at Waverly through the Pee-Pee Creek settlement to Bainbridge and Greenfield to Washington Courthouse and beyond.24 Those travelling on the Underground Railroad generally avoided Chillicothe, as it had been settled mostly by people from Virginia and Kentucky, and the town had demonstrated a strong pro-slavery sentiment. At the same time, even though slavery was illegal under state law, there were publicly acknowledged slave owners in the area, and it was commonplace for slaves to be chained together, driven through the streets, kicked or whipped in full public view.25

The culture that allowed for this kind of treatment of Black people in early Ohio and early Scioto County is important to understand because racism and discrimination have been baked into Ohio’s laws and values from its very beginning. The fight for equality was an uphill battle, and the framework of inequality already in place made the fight that much more difficult. It is important, however, to highlight the cracks in the system, those individuals that resisted the

status quo and fought from within for change. In the following chapter, the legacy of the Black
Laws and their effect on Ohio’s history become clear.
CHAPTER 3: OHIO AS A BATTLEGROUNDFOR BLACK RIGHTS

On March 7, 1838, the Ohio Legislature passed an act that designated funding in support of local common schools, for the education of all White youth in the state. On February 24, 1848, the first State legislation regarding the education of Black youth was passed, allowing property taxes paid by Black or Mulatto citizens be used to establish separate Black schools, wherever there resided more than twenty Black children. In areas where the population was less than twenty, these funds were allocated to the common fund, and it was left to the White citizens to “admit said Black or colored children into the White schools upon the same terms as if they were White: Provided, no written objection be filed with the directors, signed by any person having a child in such school, or by any legal voter of such district.”

The forces and opinions for both sides of the color line were at work in the area. The controversy spilled over to many community issues, most notably in the local public school system. Progressive for its time, the charter for the city of Portsmouth explicitly stipulated that: ‘all taxes paid by Black and Mulatto persons should be used for the education of colored children.’ In 1838, a small public school for colored children was opened, with Mrs. Joseph Glidden as the first Black teacher in the city. These schools only provided primary education. By 1840, the Black population had regenerated enough after Black Friday that several Black churches had been founded within the city limits. Specifically, there were two Baptist and two Methodist churches in the North End area, a segregated district of 42 city blocks. This area soon became known as “Bucktown,” deriving from a racial slur used to describe an African American

26 Act of March 7, 1838, § 1, Laws of Ohio, XXXVI, 21.
man who was “usually muscular or tall, who defies White will and is largely destructive to American society. He is usually hot-tempered, excessively violent, unintelligent, and sexually attracted to White women.”

“Bucktown” appeared in newspapers and other writings about the city well into the twentieth century, and remains in colloquial use today.

Around this same time, Black Ohioans petitioned against the exclusionary laws enacted by the government, but the state legislature denied that Blacks had the right to petition the government for any purpose whatsoever. In 1839, the legislature declared:

That the blacks and mulattoes, who may be residents within this State, have no constitutional right to present their petitions to the General Assembly for any purpose whatsoever, and that any reception of such petitions on the part of the General Assembly is a mere act of privilege or policy and not imposed by any expressed or implied power of the constitution.

The Free Soil Party was active nationally between the years of 1848 – 1852, and was outspoken in opposition of the expansion of slavery into the western territories, arguing that free men on free soil comprised a morally and economically superior alternative to slavery. They opposed slavery in the new American territories and worked to repeal laws that discriminated against freed Blacks, particularly in Ohio. In 1849, the Free Soil Party gained some political traction in the state and helped implement a partial repeal of the Black laws, specifically bond-posting. Efforts to repeal the law began in the 1829-1830 legislative session, and after eight failed attempts, the 1804 and 1807 laws that regulated Black and Mulatto persons were repealed in 1849. As a result of these repeals, Black citizens were no longer barred from entering the

30 This is still considered a primarily Black community today. It is bounded by Kinney’s Lane to the north, Offnere Street to the east, Gay Street to the south, and the Scioto Trail (US 23) to the west.
32 Attempts to repeal the laws (memorials) were introduced in the following sessions, before finally passing in 1849: 1829-30, 1833-34, 1836-37, 1840-41, 1843-44, 1844-45, 1846-47, and 1847-1848.
state of Ohio, could give testimony against White citizens, and Black children were included in public education, albeit in separate buildings from White students. On the other hand, Black Ohioans were still denied the right to vote in Ohio, which also meant they could not serve on juries, nor granted legal residency in the state. Other laws restricting Black rights and behavior, like the anti-miscegenation laws remained in place until the 20th century. There were mixed reactions to the repeal of these laws, but even the most exuberant of celebrators realized that the repeal was mostly symbolic. In an editorial following the repeal, the Ohio State Journal, the leading Whig paper at the time, summed up this position succinctly:

The announcement that the Black Laws are repealed is received in different quarters with alternate paens and execrations; and we suppose it is lawful for us to ‘rejoice with those who do rejoice,’ though our sympathies do not enable us to enter very profoundly into the sorrows of those who mourn over an event which we regard as of so little intrinsic importance. Our sense of gratification at the repeal of the Black Laws does not result from any conviction that some great end in ethics or politics has thereby been attained; we rejoice at the result because it is a consummation long and diligently sought by a large body of our fellow citizens, under the firm conviction, honestly entertained, that these laws were very oppressive in their operation upon our colored population. It was doubtless thought by many that the repeal of these laws would greatly meliorate the condition of the colored race in Ohio. We think differently and are of the opinion that it would puzzle the most intelligent of the colored race within our borders, or the most ardent of their champions to point out the practical advantages which are to result to them from the repeal of these laws. It is but a fancied gain.

Ohio held a second Constitutional Convention in 1850-1851. More than two dozen petitions were received regarding Black citizens and Black citizenship. Daniel Drake of Scioto County, for example, petitioned for the immediate cessation of Black settlement in the state. The repeal of the Black Laws was far from popular, and very

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33 The United States Supreme Court ruling in Loving v. Virginia in 1967 formally overturned anti-miscegenation laws throughout the country.
34 Ohio State Journal, February 24, § 2849, 1.
35 Ohio Constitutional Convention, Debates, II, 159.
likely did not indicate the sentiment from the vast majority of White Ohioans. A committee from central Ohio’s Fairfield County passed a resolution that stated: “Resolved, that we are opposed to free-soilism, abolitionism, demagogism, and negroism.” Another Representative, Mr. Loudon of Brown County, in the southwest corner of the state near Cincinnati, stated a position in favor of extraditing all Black residents to another country:

There is a feeling in the section of the country that I come from upon this particular subject of extradition that outweighs perhaps all other feelings with regard to the doing of this Ohio convention. A majority of the people I represent, without regard, I may say, to whether they are of the Democratic Party or of the Whig Party, believe with the fathers of this State that this should be a State for the White man and the White man only. A separation we regard as alike advantageous to both races; and therefore, without wishing to injure the Negroes, we ask that they be removed. But, as the power of removal is an important one, we wish it exercised with great prudence and humanity. No Negro should be deprived of his property, without receiving a compensation in money, and none should be removed until provision is made for them in another country. But, whatever may be the consequence to the Negroes, the happiness and welfare of the White race, both as to the present and future generations, requires the removal, and therefore it should be done.

The view that America's apparently intractable racial problem should be solved by colonization, or removing blacks from this country and resettling them elsewhere, was not a new, nor particularly original idea. As early as 1714, lawmakers in colonial New Jersey proposed sending Black people to Africa, and in 1777 a Virginia legislature committee, headed by future President Thomas Jefferson (himself a major slave owner), proposed a plan of gradual emancipation and resettlement of the state's slaves.

While prejudiced attitudes permeated the state and culture generally, anti-Black sentiment was particularly pronounced in the southern counties. In the northeast corner of the state, the

36 *The Ohio Statesman*, February 22, 1849, 2.
Western Reserve was home to many abolitionists, while the southern counties were more racially conservative. Some cite the area’s settlement by southern farmers with ties and loyalties to the old South. The southern counties were economically dependent on the river, which meant they were tied to the agriculture and pro-slavery sentiments of the South that used that river for commerce. The northern counties were tied to northern economies, which explains, at least in small part, why there was such a contradiction in sentiment towards Black citizens at the time.

It would take twenty five years for the next major change to the legal status of Black Americans. The Civil Rights Act of 1875 was a federal law which, when enacted during the declining years of Reconstruction, was meant to benefit the newly-freed Black population. The law mandated that African Americans receive equal treatment in both public accommodations and public transportation, and prohibited exclusion of Black citizens from jury service.\(^{39}\) Also known as the Enforcement Act, this law was declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court in 1883. The Court held the Fourteenth Amendment, specifically the Equal Protection Clause, already prohibited discrimination by the state, but that it did not give the federal government the power to legislate or prohibit discrimination by private individuals. Neither the state nor the federal government could make or enforce any policies that would be considered discriminatory, but these restrictions were limited to the government. Private citizens could not be compelled to act in a non-discriminatory nature. In other words, discriminatory laws were prohibited, but an individual citizen’s discriminatory attitudes and actions were legal. Further, the court ruled that while the Thirteenth Amendment eliminated slavery, it did not prohibit racial discrimination in public spaces.

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Under the Civil Rights Act of 1875, African Americans were granted the right to receive equal treatment in public accommodations, which many Black Ohioans understood to include public educational facilities. When this law was passed, it marked the beginning of the fight for equal access to primary and secondary education for Black children, a battle that was waged relatively early in Scioto County.
CHAPTER 4: THE ROAD TO SCHOOL INTEGRATION

In the years following the Civil War, the struggle for school integration was vastly different in the North and in the South. In the South, school desegregation efforts were focused primarily on slow, gradual progress, acquiring incremental legal precedents as part of a larger attack on the constitutionality of state mandated segregation statutes that ultimately climaxed in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954. In the North, however, the major obstacles standing in the way of full integration did not come in the form of laws, but rather in the political and cultural milieu of the time. In the nineteenth century, many Northern states had already passed laws prohibiting school segregation, and most courts would enforce those statutes. Even still, many local districts continued to segregate students by race, usually through extra-legal measures like gerrymandering, or just blatant segregation policies. Surprisingly, there were also many African Americans that supported segregation. Some believed their children would have better opportunities when taught by Black teachers, or feared that Black teachers would lose their jobs in integration. Others feared the mistreatment of Black students, and worried that integrating students would bring about the end of Black-controlled educational institutions. On the other hand, there were also many Black citizens that fully supported school integration. Many felt that continued separation of the races would only feed the caste system already in place in formal education. A question that needs to be explored further, of course, is why these numerous laws and court decisions did not actually change the status of segregation in public schools in the United States? Even though laws were passed in the Northern states as early as the mid-nineteenth century outlawing school segregation by race, segregation practices persisted well into the 20th century. Additional research is needed to answer this question definitively, but it is clear the court did not have absolute power, and that cultural and political context are essential to
the application of law. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once wrote, “laws only declare rights; they do not deliver them.”

40 As Davison M. Douglas argues in *Jim Crow Moves North: The Battle over Northern School Segregation, 1865-1954*, “Statutes that seek to reverse longstanding and embedded cultural understandings – particularly those associated with race and ethnicity – may prove especially difficult to enforce.”

In addition, Douglas points out that the efforts to desegregate schools in the nineteenth century:

> did not necessarily reflect a broad commitment to school integration. Rather, they reflected a combination of Reconstruction-era racial idealism among some White northerners, a desire to capture Black votes in closely contested elections, and the high cost of dual schools. Moreover, all of these statutes were enacted at a time when the northern Black population was a tiny fraction of the total population. This commitment to pupil mixing eroded in the wake of migration of hundreds of thousands of southern Blacks into northern communities during the first half of the twentieth century, and as a result, noncompliance with the antisegregation legislation sharply increased.

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Even though the federal Enforcement Act was passed in 1875, it was largely ignored and, ironically, rarely enforced. In 1878, for example, in Portsmouth, a two-story school was opened on Eleventh Street for Black students. It boasted an all-Black staff of eleven teachers for 357 students (194 boys and 163 girls). Portsmouth City Schools remained segregated in spite of the law.

On May 16, 1885, the *Portsmouth Times* newspaper published a notice stating the Board of Education had received a “pretty strongly worded paper” signed by Mr. James Weaver, the respected Market Street barber. The paper further reported a meeting of Black residents, demanding that Black children be admitted to the High School on “terms of equality with

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40 Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 167.
42 Ibid.
43 *Portsmouth Times* (Portsmouth, OH), May 16, 1885, 1.
Whites, under the law.” Portsmouth’s Black community argued that they were required to pay taxes to maintain all of the city’s schools, both Black and White, but if they wished to educate their children beyond an elementary education, they had to send them far away from home to do so, and at great expense. Several Black families did send their children to boarding schools, for example Misses Emma Steele and Hattie Berkshire were sent to Georgetown, Kentucky for such purposes in 1885. The Board of Education agreed to discuss the matter, and on May 30, the paper reported that during the Board meeting of that week, the majority of board members declined to approve the admittance of “colored scholars” to the high school. Their official reasoning was:

Those who opposed admission believed that they were acting for the best interests of the schools, for the Whites and for the colored people. It was stated at the meeting that but four colored scholars expected to be admitted. It is evident that but little is to be gained, while much may be lost. To let well enough alone is the part of wisdom. If the High School is to be mixed, so will all the grades be. They must be in the very nature of things, and this would tend to unsettle the schools, to drive out colored teachers, and in the end work to the injury of the very people it is pretended to benefit.

On July 11 of the same year, Mr. Haley, the Black school board member from the Sixth Ward, presented to the rest of the board a petition that was “several feet long,” inscribed with the names of hundreds of local Black citizens. The petition reportedly began with:

To the Honorable Board of Education, Portsmouth, Ohio: We, the undersigned colored citizens of Portsmouth, loyal and law-abiding, humbly represent to your honorable body that we will not send our children to the side show presided over by Professor Ferguson and the Misses Woodson –

At this point, board member Mr. Huston objected to further reading of the petition on the grounds that it was “couched in language disrespectful to the Board and the teachers employed

44 Ibid.
45 Portsmouth Times (Portsmouth, OH), December 1, 1884, 2.
46 Portsmouth Times (Portsmouth, OH), May 30, 1885, 2.
by the same.”47 The objection was sustained, and the Chairman moved that it be laid on the table for anyone who wanted to read it.48 In other words, the Board declined to consider the petition without even reading it.

In September, Mr. Jacob Johnson, a Black father, sent his daughter Narcissa to the all-White Portsmouth High School. She was refused admittance by the principal of the school. That same month, Professor Ferguson, the principal of the Black schools, resigned. In an effort to appease the Black community, Mr. Lewis B. Lewis was brought in from Cincinnati to replace the much maligned Mr. Ferguson.49 In October, the Board received a request from Mr. John Crenshaw, another Black father, asking that his daughter be admitted to the high school. This was assumed by the paper to be a legal formality, a foreshadowing of planned legal action against the Board to force integration.50 Soon, the Board was served notice that legal proceedings were, indeed, forthcoming. Mr. Farnham, the legal counsel for the Black petitioners, asked the city to prepare for the upcoming litigation.51 A writer for the Portsmouth Times speculated that the case would end up in the hands of the Supreme Court of Ohio, as the State School Commissioner had indicated that the case in Scioto County was a test case for integration.52 The newspaper writer added, in a tone common (and acceptable) for the time:

We don’t know that the better element of the colored people of this city is demanding, or even desiring the freedom for their children of the White High School. Compliance with the law is the first requirement of a good citizen, and should be obeyed without hesitation. If our excellent schools are to be jeopardized, and perhaps broken up, through a legal technicality, forced on a by a lawless and ignorant few, whose ways are at best devious and dark, it is unfortunate.53

47 Portsmouth Times (Portsmouth, OH), July 11, 1885, 2.
48 Ibid.
49 Portsmouth Times (Portsmouth, OH), September 12, 1885, 2.
50 Portsmouth Times (Portsmouth, OH), October 24, 1885, 2.
51 Ibid.
52 Portsmouth Times (Portsmouth, OH), November 7, 1885, 2.
53 Ibid.
In late October, the Board decided *not* to secure counsel against legal action, and a resolution to integrate the High School, but only by inaction as not enough Board members were in attendance at the meeting to vote down the motion. Black students were admitted to Portsmouth High School on October 28, 1885. While there is further research to be done on the immediate aftermath of this desegregation, one can assume much from the tone of this note printed in the newspaper:

> We are in receipt of communications on the subject of the color line in the schools which show popular sentiment is averse to this mixing of the races. A majority of the School Board is also against it, but the scheme was carried through lack of parliamentary discipline. There is a ground swell coming, and if the overthrow of the High School is the result, the sentimentalists and politicians are the ones to blame.54

Clearly, not everyone in Portsmouth wanted school integration. It is important to note, however, that this message is unsigned, and the number of “communications” they received is not noted. It is unknown why several of the Board members were not at the meeting, but it appears that the pro-integration organizers in Portsmouth knew of their absence ahead of time, and used this information to their advantage.

On December 12, 1885, in an article entitled “Mix Them Up,” the *Portsmouth Times* reported that the Black grammar schools were being abolished to allow the “scholars to go to the White schools in the districts in which they reside,” but it is not clear when or if this ever happened.55 On December 26, a social note was published that highlighted the difficult position of the students in the middle of this fight, and the mixed support they received from the community.

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54 *Portsmouth Times* (Portsmouth, OH), November 14, 1885, 2.
55 *Portsmouth Times* (Portsmouth, OH), December 12, 1885, 2.
Prof. Sparks entertained the students of the high school at the residence of W. K. Thompson, Wednesday night, and a very pleasant time was had. The sensation of the evening was the appearance, before anyone else arrived, of the two colored scholars. They came early and walked up and down in front of the residence and finally went in. Something told them that they were not in harmony with their surroundings and they soon left. The colored girls were not to blame. When they were admitted to the White school they naturally supposed that admitted to them to all its privileges, social and otherwise. If they are good enough to go to the White school, they should not be barred from any class privileges.56

Nothing is reported in the papers about the progress of the integration experiment until February of the following year. After less than three months at the new school, the paper reported that “the colored scholars have all dropped out of the highest class in the High School, and those in the lowest grade into the Grammar School. They couldn't keep up their percentage. Some White scholars shared the same fate.”57 It is not clear how many White students were also demoted, but that all of the Black scholars were demoted is noteworthy. It is possible that the students had not received the same foundation in their studies as their White peers and were not prepared for the work, but it is just as likely that the students were unfairly targeted or demoted. The true reason may never be known.

Also in 1886, Ohio General Assembly representative Benjamin Arnett introduced legislation to repeal the state's Black Laws. After serving closely under President McKinley, Arnett was considered one of the most powerful Black men and politicians locally and nationally. Arnett was an ordained minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.), the largest and most influential of Black Christian denominations in the United States, and was elected as the first Black Representative in the state of Ohio, most surprisingly from a

56 Portsmouth Times (Portsmouth, OH), December 26, 1885, 2.
57 Portsmouth Times (Portsmouth, OH), February 13, 1886, 2.
When Arnett was elected to the General Assembly in 1885, the effort to desegregate schools across the state was well underway. African American leaders like James Poindexter, Columbus city councilman, and Harry Smith, editor of the popular *Cleveland Gazette*, had been lobbying for more than a decade on this issue, despite a concentrated opposition from within the Black community. Driven by the fear that Black teachers would be excluded from the schools, and also that Black students would be ignored, or unprotected from insults and injury from their White peers and teachers, some African American residents resisted the idea of integrated schools. Undeterred, Arnett pushed for what became known as Arnett’s Law in 1887. Arnett was particularly concerned that state law did not ensure that Black children had the same educational opportunities as the state’s White children. With the passing of his law, the statutes regarding education were changed, and the state was thereafter required to provide equal opportunities to all children regardless of race. Arnett wrote:

> The conflict of right and wrong is not confined to the human heart, but found in the laws and customs of men. They find themselves incorporated into the fundamental law of nations. In the declaration of rights and wrongs, the Legislators formulating them, and spreading them on the Statute book often sanction them. They are seen in the judicial decision of the Supreme Court, in the dissension of the minority from the majority. But though wrong may be written in the constitution, and affirmed by the judicial decision of a thousand courts, it will not be right. It may be law, but law is not always right.  

On March 27, the *Portsmouth Times* reported that “the Ohio House has passed a bill doing away with the color line in the public schools. It abolishes schools for colored children and...

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58 The AME church was founded in the early years of the nineteenth century, after Northern Blacks felt ignored, excluded, and even betrayed by the White Methodist Congregations in their communities. A rare hub of Black directed leadership development and organizational skills, the church (and its ministers) quickly became influential in Northern Black communities.


60 Benjamin Arnett, “Centennial Thanksgiving Sermon,” 1876, n.p.
unites the White and colored schools. Should it become a law, it will be good-bye to colored
school teachers.” In April of 1886, further reports noted that Washington Township, on the
west side of Scioto County, had also abolished the color line in their schools, integrating the
Union Mill School with the White school. In May of 1887, the city of Chillicothe also considered
integrating the schools under Arnett’s Law, though the outcome of that consideration is
unclear. Additionally, the city of Ironton (in neighboring Lawrence County, to the east) had
integrated their schools by October. The Times noted that “Prof. A. R. Guy, the colored school
teacher of Ironton who found himself without a school in that city on account of the abolishing
of the color line, has secured a school in Ashland, Ky., where the color line still exists.” While
Portsmouth was the first to integrate, it is clear that they were not the only school system in
southern Ohio trying to resolve the sensitive issue of segregation.

From March, 1886 until April, 1887 little to nothing is written about the integration of
schools in the Portsmouth Times. It is clear that it is still a topic of contention in the area, though,
when the topic reemerges. On April 9, 1887, the Times published a notification that stated:

There is a gentleman in the city who took his daughter out of school because a
[illegible] Negro youth was placed along side of her. We don't know that he was
socially opposed to Negroes in the schools, but he did object to having this
particular colored youth for a right or left hand [illegible] closer for his daughter.
The boy is sixteen years old, and is the precocious hero of a scandal which has
agitated colored [illegible] for some time. In short, he is a father and the prospective
mother being a colored woman old enough to be his mother. The little girl's father
did right in taking her out of school. He will probably send her to St. Mary's
Catholic school when the new building is finished. It is [illegible] the abolishment
of the color line lowers the tune of our schools, once the pride of the city. 64

61 Portsmouth Times (Portsmouth, OH), March 27, 1886, 1.
62 Portsmouth Times (Portsmouth, OH), May 14, 1887, 2.
63 Portsmouth Times (Portsmouth, OH), October 22, 1887, 3.
64 Portsmouth Times (Portsmouth, OH), April 8, 1887, 2.
It is not clear when the first Black scholar graduated from the high school. The *Portsmouth Times* printed a full write-up of the commencement exercises each June, including the girls’ dresses, the content or topic of speeches, and even information on the particular flowers used to decorate the gymnasium. However, not once from 1885 to 1900 did they mention a graduate of color. In every instance possible prior to this, the newspapers identified Black citizens as ‘colored’ or ‘Negro’ in their text, and skin color would have certainly been noted in such a ceremony as graduation. There is evidence, however, that there were some Black graduates from this period. For example, in her 1911 obituary, it is written that “Louise Elizabeth Parker Anderson, a teacher in the colored schools, was the first Black graduate of PHS.”65 No graduation year is given, but with a birthdate of 1873, she possibly graduated between 1888 and 1892. Her obituary also notes that she taught for seventeen years, and died after succumbing to typhoid fever in 1911.66 Additionally, there is evidence of Black students graduating from PHS as late as 1897. On June 25 of that year, a notice appeared that “the colored citizens of Portsmouth will give a banquet at Allen chapel Tuesday evening, June 29 at 8:30 o'clock, in honor of the newly elected teachers of the Eleventh Street School and the undergraduates of the high school.”67 Allen Chapel was part of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), and any banquet given in this location would have been for members of the Black community. While there is no evidence to suggest it, it is possible that there were separate graduation ceremonies for Black and White scholars, or it is possible that Black students were not allowed to participate in the official commencement exercises. There were no other public high schools in the city at

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66 Ibid.
67 *Portsmouth Times* (Portsmouth, OH), June 25, 1897, 2.
that time. In contrast to the integration of the high school, the lower grades of the Portsmouth Public School system were never integrated.

In an 1893 interview, Superintendent Vickers discussed the issue of truancy, specifically calling out the Black schools and Black parents. Asked by a Times reporter, ‘Are you troubled by truancy?’ Vickers replied:

There is a good deal of it. Of course, most of it is among the colored people. They give Truant Officer Thompson a great deal of trouble. The colored people keep their children at home for the most trial excuses - ‘to mind de baby,’ ‘to feed de pigs,” etc. I said we hadn't a vacant room- yes, we have. There is one in the colored school building. It would not be vacant if we could get all the children in the school. The High school? Well the attendance is larger than it has ever been. There are more than eighty pupils in the "D" grade. Mr. Vickers also spoke of a class of people who did not like to send their children to school because there were colored pupils in attendance. ‘One gentleman,' he said, 'sent me word that if we had room of the grade that suited his daughter, in which there were no colored pupils, he would send his daughters to school. I sent him word that it was a matter not in his hands. The law compelled him to send his daughter to school - if not to the public school, then to a private one.68

The data is unclear as to when exactly the high school re-segregated. What is known is that Ohio schools were legally segregated in 1890 by the Jim Crow laws of the era, with the state mandating de jure “separate but equal” segregation of all public facilities, including schools. However, as noted earlier, there is ample evidence that Portsmouth High School remained integrated, in spite of these laws, at least until 1897. Also in 1897, there seems to have been some argument over the staffing of the colored schools, but they do not differentiate between colored grammar, primary and upper level courses. In September, 1898, however, the Times reported that Professor Anderson, a Black teacher in the Eleventh Street School, was in trouble for choosing to not send his own children to the segregated grammar schools:

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68 Portsmouth Times (Portsmouth, OH), August 23, 1893, 1.
Mr. Bannon read a communication from Prof. Anderson, regarding his refusal to send his children to school. Prof Anderson being present, the board requested him to explain. He did so by saying that he did not think his children would receive proper treatment at the colored schools and he claimed the right to send them to the other buildings, but the superintendent had refused them admission. The board did not think his explanation satisfactory, and therefore approved the action of the superintendent.69

Professor Anderson went on to teach at the Kentucky Normal School, never working in the Portsmouth system again.70 Kentucky schools remained segregated by law at that time.

The Eleventh Street School was the colored school after resegregation, until 1927, when the Booker T. Washington School was built as an addition to the Eleventh Street School, to serve as the high school for Black students. Washington school was closed in 1956, when Portsmouth schools fully integrated following Brown v. Board of Education. The research for this particular project did not lead to any definitive information on when the schools were resegregated, or why the Black students were removed from the high school at all.

The enactment of nineteenth century antisegregation laws, on the National, State, and local levels, were important first steps in the fight against segregation in public education and the dissolution of the color line, but ultimately, they failed to make any real changes to the culture of or policies related to segregation. Additional study is required to understand why, but it would take seventy more years of political activism and cultural change to achieve such landmark victories as Brown v. Board of Education and the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

69 Portsmouth Times (Portsmouth, OH), September 24, 1898, 2.
70 Portsmouth Times (Portsmouth, OH), April 1, 1899, 2.
Three general histories of Portsmouth and Scioto County have been written. The first, *The Story of Portsmouth*, was written by Nelson Evans in 1906. In it, Evans includes the Black Friday event of 1830, the slave caravan story from 1834, and the founding of the “Light Guards” in 1871, a Black civic organization. In addition, the author notes a Black woman named Maria Warren who claimed to be 114 years old, and he also notes, in a single line in the “Interesting Items” section, that “October 31, 1885, colored pupils admitted to the High School for the first time.” Though he had the date wrong, it is surprising (to a contemporary reader) that this was included without explanation. Evans called the ejection of Black citizens from the area a “relic of barbarism.” In a book of several hundred pages that covers several hundred years of local history, these are the only mentions of Black people in the text.

The next history written, *The History of Portsmouth*, written by Elmer Sword in 1965, included most of the stories of the previous work, as well as a few additional stories. Neither of these books, however, were very specific. Very few names, vague dates, and only anecdotal details are given. In chapter 8 of Sword’s book, he mentions the first Black school built in Portsmouth, but fails to mention anything about the integration of the schools in 1885. There are no mentions of the North End neighborhood or churches, and there are no names of Black citizens, except for a single runaway slave known as “Gabriel.” Mr. Sword seemed to genuinely be appalled by the treatment of Blacks in the area, and this sentiment is apparent in his work. When describing the slave caravan episode in 1834, for example, he wrote, “It is almost

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72 Ibid.
73 Ibid, 613.
unbelievable that such a thing could have happened in our country, but it did, and it was to prevent such things as this, along with other reasons that the Civil War was fought.”

In the most recent volume, History of Scioto County, written in the 1980’s, all of these stories have been omitted entirely. In fact, in over 800 pages, there is only one-half of a page dedicated to the history of the North End neighborhood, and one quarter of a page dedicated to Allen Chapel (the local African Methodist Episcopal Church), in which the Black citizens of the county are still referred to as colored, and the community as a whole are only referred to as “Black America.”

Only one image of a Black citizen, part of a group photo of medical professionals in the 1970’s, was located in the book. The authors of the book, a committee, included in their foreword the following:

What we have put together is not intended to be a documentary history, but rather a collection of facts and stories as remembered by past and present residents of Scioto County. We do not presume to be historians; we are collectors of remembrances, making them accessible for sharing with others and those to come. We hope the reader will realize the tremendous effort involved in assembling the book, and forgive us the inevitable errors which occur regardless of our diligence.

While mistakes are inevitable in any 800 page volume written by a group of people, it seems unlikely that the Black community was simply overlooked.

Looking again to the Portsmouth Mural Project, one sees that this has become a trend. There is some disagreement about how this particular issue transpired. After the murals were completed in 2002, committee members discussed the lack of diversity in the paintings. As a solution, the artist, Robert Dafford, was asked to revise several of the images by adding Black faces to some of the scenes. Mr. Dafford maintains that he was mindful of the diversity of the

76 It is possible that an image was overlooked, but all efforts and precautions were taken to avoid this. Ibid, 666.
77 Ibid, Foreword.
78 Scioto County Commissioner’s Office http://www.sciotocountyohio.com/murals.html
79 Mrs. Emily Cobb-Thomas, whom was present at the meeting, personal conversation, January 4, 2015.
history of the area from the onset of the project, and does not recall being asked to add in extra Black figures. What is agreed upon, however, is that the murals are still lacking in terms of the cultural diversity that has been part of Scioto County since its inception. In at least one case, this resulted in the rewriting of history. In the Dreamland Pool mural, for example, Black children appear in the grassy area, playing among the other families, but Dreamland Pool was legally segregated until the 1960s, and socially segregated until at least the late 1980s. In fact, a separate Black pool, McKinley Pool on Findlay Street, was maintained in the North End neighborhood. McKinley Pool was named after Eugene McKinley, a 14 year-old Black child that drowned in a sand and gravel pit in the Ohio River in 1961. Because Dreamland was a White-only institution, there were very no other public places besides the river available for him to swim, and there were no lifeguards on duty at the river. The history of Dreamland Pool is problematic in its own right; the pool was originally incorporated in 1929 as a private, for-profit swimming club. The grounds were more than three acres in size, the pool was double the standard Olympic size, and the entire complex was surrounded by a chain link fence. After the stock market crash of 1929, Dreamland struggled financially. At one point, the city almost purchased the Pool and grounds, but it remained in private hands, likely because of fears of forced integration. The segregation at Dreamland remained in place until 1965, though not by consensus. In 1964, for example, several “wade-ins” were held, when groups of Black youth, tired of being excluded from the Dreamland scaled the fences and entered the water in protest of their exclusion. The pool was officially integrated in 1965, but remained socially closed to Black citizens until it closed in the early 1990s. It was demolished soon after. The history of Dreamland is challenging from an equality

80 Robert Dafford, e-mail conversation with the author, March 17, 2015.
81 Blaine S. Bierley, “Swimming Pool Integration in Portsmouth” in his book Charles Street Tales, self-published book is in the Local History Room at the Portsmouth Public Library
point of view, but the inclusion of Black children playing in the grass is a non-truth. It is possible that a few individuals swam at Dreamland, but segregation was maintained by the community by having both Dreamland and McKinley Pool operating in this small town.

Sanitizing Scioto County history in this way de-emphasizes unpleasant topics, such as segregation and the denial of basic civil rights in defiance of public law. The 1937 flood scene is another example of the mural project as a tool for whitewashing the history of Scioto County. The large mural is a dramatic, sepia-toned scene, highlighting the devastation the city endured during the most catastrophic flood in county history. A small vignette at the bottom left of the mural depicts a scene of a young mother, drowning in the raging flood waters, tragically handing her baby to a rescuer in a boat as she slips under the water, but the details of the story are left to the imagination of the spectator. The young woman, Miss Bessie Tomlin, was the only casualty of the 1937 flood, a twenty two year-old African American mother of four. Neither her name nor the details of her life are included anywhere on the mural. In addition, thanks to the sepia tone of the mural, it is not distinctly clear that she is Black. There is no differentiation between her skin tone and those of the people around her, thus her identity was even further erased from the story.

Finally, the most prominent depiction of a Black individual on the floodwall is that of Jackie Robinson, one of the greatest and most honored players of professional baseball. He is included in a mural to honor Branch Rickey, a Scioto County native responsible for the integration of Major League Baseball in 1945. Robinson’s inclusion is not problematic, but that he is the

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82 This is the same flood that destroyed all of the local police records prior to 1937, and a substantial portion of Portsmouth Times archives. The river crested at 74.23 feet on January 27, 1937, and as a result of the flood, 63% of the city was under water, including 97% of all stores, 6,234 homes, 14 schools and 13 churches. (Portsmouth Public Library Local History Page http://yourppl.org/lh/histories/the-1937-flood/ )

83 There are small plaques standing across the street from the murals, situated every few murals, that give extra information about the subjects in the images. While Ms. Tomlin and her surviving daughter are mentioned by name on these plaques, there is no mention of Bessie’s birthdate, burial location, or her race.
largest Black figure represented in the 2,000 feet of murals is. He is not from Portsmouth, or even from Ohio. Robinson was not from Portsmouth or Ohio; he was born in Georgia, and is only known to have visited Portsmouth once, for Mr. Rickey’s funeral in 1965. While Mr. Robinson is undeniably an American hero, the Portsmouth Mural Project was designed to honor Portsmouth’s history, and it is unfortunate that the largest depiction of a Black person was of someone not actually from the area. There have been many remarkable Black citizens in Portsmouth’s history, many have been lost to history. In addition to the few individuals highlighted in this work, like Louise Elizabeth Parker Anderson, the first Black graduate of Portsmouth High School, there have many other progressive and successful Black people that have called Portsmouth home. For example, in 1894, Mr. William E. Ross was elected as the first Black city councilman. He served for one year as a representative of the sixth ward. By 1899, the city had hired two Black police officers, Mr. Walter Bowen and Mr. Arthur McFarland, a well-liked Black postman; a Black dentist, Dr. William H. Lorry; a Black physician, Dr. K. F. Scott; Black entrepreneurs like Mr. Pharaoh McDaniel, who owned both a saloon and a confectionary and was active in local politics; and a Black attorney, Mr. Emery M. Contry. Other newspaper articles reported that there were many Black laborers in the steel mills, brick yards and at N. & W. Railroad, while others held porter jobs or were early taxi (carriage) drivers. There were more than one hundred Black farmers in the county at the time, mostly congregated in the Jefferson Township area of Lucasville, north of Portsmouth. While steel

84 According to the local paper, his term in office was completely “uneventful,” showing his only major activities to be asking for funding for carpeting and ceiling repairs for a local firehouse. Portsmouth Public Library, “Black History” (folder of miscellaneous librarian research, Local History Department, Portsmouth Public Library), accessed September 24, 2014.
85 Portsmouth Public Library, “Black History” (folder of miscellaneous librarian research, Local History Department, Portsmouth Public Library), accessed September 24, 2014.
work, rail work, agricultural work, and the history of medicine in Scioto County are all depicted in the murals, there are no representations of Black citizens holding these jobs, even though there is ample evidence that they existed and prospered in the area.

In addition, Portsmouth has often been discussed as a major entry point for the Underground Railroad, as discussed earlier in this paper, but there is only one marker in the county that recognizes this history, nor is the UR addressed as part of the murals. Placed in a small grassy area in the middle of the downtown street, coming off of the U.S. Grant Bridge from Kentucky, the sign is neither easily accessible nor easy to read in its current location.

When we ignore the contributions of people of color to our communal history, when we erase their stories from our monuments and our murals, we are lying about history, and perpetuating untruths and historical subjugation.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

It is the sincere hope of the author of this paper that this work is simply the beginning of a much larger conversation. So much of Portsmouth’s local history has been lost to time, poor record keeping, or even intentional whitewashing, and it is now the time to reclaim and rediscover that history. The Black community of both Portsmouth and Ohio have been active, honorable citizens in this state since its inception in 1803, and it is time that their story is told.

The research into the history of Scioto County’s Black community has, so far, uncovered more questions than answers. Why have the diverse histories of the city and the county been whitewashed out of existence? What purpose does erasing this history serve? The particular geographical location of Scioto County in relation to the free north and enslaved south must be explained. As a result of its location on the river, Portsmouth had both deep connections to slave-owning business in the south, and to the free North. Scioto County was a particularly busy crossroad, as it intersected with the Ohio River, the Scioto River, and the Ohio Erie Canal. What are some possible reasons for suppressing this part of Portsmouth’s history, and the history of Black people in the area? And, maybe most importantly, how can we rediscover these stories and then integrate it into the larger historical narrative of Portsmouth and Scioto County?

These questions will require further research to fully answer, but from the information already uncovered, it is clear that Portsmouth’s history and relationship with its Black residents have been complex and multifaceted. Examples of this are easy to find: the active participation of early residents, both Black and White, in the Underground Railroad; the many socially progressive and the successful Black professionals and entrepreneurs in the area during the nineteenth century; and the debates on the color line in the city that resulted in the temporary but exceptionally progressive desegregation of the city’s public schools in 1885. Evidence that
terrible, racist events were happening in the area is abundant and heart wrenching, but there were many other documented instances of tolerance, fairness, and efforts by citizens, both Black and White, to correct some of the wrongs that had been put into place by a larger, segregationist society. Both sides of this story deserve to be remembered.

How was Scioto County "seen" by neighboring counties and by the nation? Did it have a reputation which might shed a light on some of these questions? Traditionally, Southern Ohio has been seen as more exclusive to outsiders than its northern counterparts, partially because of the naturally exclusive Appalachian culture of the area. Southern Ohio has a reputation for being more conservative than Northern Ohio, and it is also known as less progressive and welcoming place for people of color.

It would be easy to argue that Scioto County has long been an exception to this stereotype. According to publicly available census data for 1830-1900, Scioto County has always had a higher than average Black population (by percentage) than its neighbors.87 The only exceptions are Columbus, Ohio and Huntington, West Virginia, which were and are cities that maintain much higher numbers of population in general. On average, Portsmouth and Scioto County have maintained a Black community that represents roughly three to five percent of their population overall. In comparison, Greenup County (KY) has never had more than half of one percent of their total population comprised of Black citizens. Adams and Pike counties are similar to Greenup in percentages. In addition, Portsmouth’s percentage of Black citizens has always been consistently higher than the state average.88 The point is that if Portsmouth has maintained a consistent, constant, thriving Black community throughout its history, despite the

87 As compared to Pike, Adams, and Lawrence counties, Ohio (all of the Ohio counties that border Scioto), Franklin County, Ohio (Columbus), Greenup County, Kentucky (also a border county), and Cabell County (Huntington), West Virginia.
88 See Appendix for census data
cultural and political challenges that stood in its way, there is no reason why the history of the Black community should not be intertwined with the history of the White citizens of the county. If Black and White lives were intertwined, as research has clearly indicated they have been, so should be their recorded histories. Social, political, and cultural histories should be more inclusive, including the various complexities of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and social class to the narrative, in an effort to add to the already complex story of our predecessors. The story of Portsmouth is ripe for this kind of intervention.

There is still considerable research that can and should be done, but it is limited by the resources available. For example, in the course of researching this thesis, it became clear that no police records for Scioto County before the 1937 flood exist; they were all destroyed by the many floods that have plagued Portsmouth throughout the years. Many of the oldest newspapers were completely destroyed as well, by the floods, neglect, and improper storage methods. Many of the newspapers that have survived are only available at the Ohio History Connection in Columbus, and the large majority of those have yet to be digitized. Also, the resources on Black history in Scioto County are, unfortunately, limited. At this point, it is unclear if anyone has ever tried to gather resources – books, photos, oral histories, newspaper articles, church and court documents, city government documents, tax records, marriage records, family histories, etc. – but work would need to be done in these areas before the deep ties that the Black community have to Portsmouth could be fully flushed out. Because we are more than a century past the events of the school segregation in 1885, for example, these resources may not exist at all. No comprehensive Black histories of the area exist, to the author’s knowledge, and in the established histories written of the county in general, the scholarly work on Black citizens has been overlooked or intentionally left out.
What the research has made abundantly clear is there is ambivalence toward Black history in Scioto County. Social history regarding race can be messy and painful, and in an effort to avoid causing discomfort, many of these stories have been simplified, changed, or simply forgotten. Since its inception, there have been voices on both sides of the color line at work in Portsmouth. Black and White residents have worked together and against one another, both ushering in change and stalling progress at the same time. Black professionals and entrepreneurs have displayed a long history of success in the area, but there is plenty of evidence that proves wide anti-Black sentiment, as well. Scioto County has given two noteworthy sons to the national cause of racial equality, both Governor Ashley, who was an ardent abolitionist and played a critical role in ending slavery in the United States, and Branch Rickey, who was the first manager in Major League Baseball to sign a Black athlete to play in the previously all-White Major Leagues. In addition, the integration of public schools in 1885 was radically progressive for the time, even if it was only temporary, but it proved that opportunities for equality were possible, even in a small border town like Portsmouth, Ohio. On the other hand, the largest public history display in the county fails to incorporate the achievements of Black Scioto Countians, of which there have been many. This erasure of Black citizens from Portsmouth’s history is part of a larger trend of disremembering the distinct historical struggle of Black citizens, both locally and nationally. We must stop this trend going forward, and find new ways to integrate the stories of our pasts.
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