

Growing the Pie: The Exploration of the Social Impacts  
Of Black Owned Business in the Development of Memphis

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### **Abstract:**

This project focuses on the societal impact that Black owned businesses have on the city of Memphis. For this project social impact is defined as having a voluntary change or effect in the environment of a community. This research focuses mainly in the contemporary moment, however uses events in Memphis' past that have caused a significant shift of direction for Black businesses and the Black community at large. Using these events as a framework to understand the contemporary moment. I connect today's issues, and the economic state of Black owned businesses, with results from these significant events of the past. I will explore the Memphis Massacre, the rise of Beale Street, and rise of the Crump political Machine, the Civil Rights Movement, and look at the contemporary moment of Black businesses. Analyzing the effects of these moments in Memphis history will connect to each other and display how it shaped Memphis today. Also, in all of these moments we will see a pattern of effects that Black owned businesses, and owners, have on their surrounding communities. We see that Black business owners play a key role in the economic, social, and political advancement of the Black community. I will highlight key figures from the past such as Robert Church Sr., Ida. B. Wells, and others. Also, look at leaders today such as Van Turner, Jimmie Tucker, and other business owners and people in positions fighting for the advancement of Black owned businesses in Memphis. These business owners were not only leaders in their Business operations but also in the Black community at large. Black business owners have continuously been a source of community leadership in Memphis, and with these leaders come impacts to the Black community.

Through texts and interviews with Black business owners, and those fighting for the success of these businesses, I see how business owners are creating an impact in their communities on a wider scale than just economically. Even today we see Business owners taking a stance outside of their

everyday business operations and continuing to make a social Impact in their community. I found that business owners today not only want to make a social impact in the community but feel as though it is an obligation for them to create an impact in Memphis' African-American community. Black businesses have more than just economic value to a community, they add something else that's not monetary. These businesses serve as a source of opportunity, hope, and pride in their community. This is from the constant white resistance from white Memphians trying to dismiss social and economic progress of Black owned businesses. This paper looks into how Black business leaders also reacted to each of these events of White resistance. For each period we see how these leaders all adopted in different ways. Some deciding to segregate themselves and build their own community separate from White Memphis, while others deciding to invade white Memphis to gain elevation for the community. The attacks on these businesses represent attacks on the Black community in Memphis as a whole. This white resistance evolves from more brutal assertions of White Superiority such as the Memphis Massacre, but the scars are still seen today. In spite of the many obstacles they face, Black business leaders have been a constant force in the leadership of advancing these communities.

### **Introduction:**

On September 2017, according to the *Huffington Post*, *Blacktech Week* named Memphis as the “#1 City for Black Owned Business”.<sup>1</sup> This was achieved through studying “7 metrics measuring the economic environment and the success of black-owned businesses in each metropolitan area” and looking at unemployment rates, cost of living in each city, etc.<sup>2</sup> However, while it's nice to highlight

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<sup>1</sup> Hatcher, Felecia, and Blackech Week. "Blacktech Week's 2017 List of the Best Cities for Black Owned Businesses." The Huffington Post. September 26, 2017. Accessed July 27, 2018.

[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/blacktech-weeks-2017-list-of-the-best-cities-for-black\\_us\\_59c9d86ae4b08d6615504575](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/blacktech-weeks-2017-list-of-the-best-cities-for-black_us_59c9d86ae4b08d6615504575).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Memphis as a city that had a lot of new emerging Black owned-businesses, 39,864 to be exact, it neglects to look deeper into these numbers and the economic state of Black owned businesses in Memphis.<sup>3</sup> What is not highlighted in this study is the fact that according to the US census of 2012, less than 1%,083, of all business receipts generated in Memphis go towards Black owned businesses.<sup>4</sup> This number is down from 1.08 percent in 2007, when the number of Black owned business was half that number (19,895).<sup>5</sup> Instead of the income coming into Black owned businesses increases as more people form their own business, the money is being exhausted amongst them instead. Only 789 out of these 39,000 have more than one paid employee.<sup>6</sup>

For a city with a 63% Black population this is alarming to say the least.<sup>7</sup> Minority businesses hire more minority employees than their white counterparts, so this is an issue that is affecting the Black community in Memphis as a whole. It doesn't help that 30.1% of African-Americans in Memphis also live below the poverty line.<sup>8</sup> With a substantial amount of Black owned business that are created in Memphis, there also seems to be a substantial amount of poverty within the Black community. With all the new economic opportunities coming into Memphis, why are White businesses growing financially while Black businesses are growing numerically but not financially? That fact is for any community "if you don't have a strong business base, your nothing" and stops any community from advancing socially.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Craven, Julia, and Madeline S. Faber. "Memphis Pushes To Level The Playing Field For Black Entrepreneurs." The Huffington Post. June 04, 2018. Accessed July 27, 2018. [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/memphis-black-owned-businesses\\_us\\_59ba7c5ae4b086432b04a9be](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/memphis-black-owned-businesses_us_59ba7c5ae4b086432b04a9be).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Craven, Julia, and Madeline S. Faber. "Memphis Pushes To Level The Playing Field For Black Entrepreneurs." The Huffington Post. June 04, 2018. Accessed July 27, 2018. [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/memphis-black-owned-businesses\\_us\\_59ba7c5ae4b086432b04a9be](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/memphis-black-owned-businesses_us_59ba7c5ae4b086432b04a9be).

<sup>6</sup> Data Access and Dissemination Systems (DADS). "Results." American FactFinder. October 05, 2010. Accessed July 27, 2018. [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=SBO\\_2012\\_00CSA01&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=SBO_2012_00CSA01&prodType=table).

<sup>7</sup> Craven, Julia, and Madeline S. Faber. "Memphis Pushes To Level The Playing Field For Black Entrepreneurs." The Huffington Post. June 04, 2018. Accessed July 27, 2018. [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/memphis-black-owned-businesses\\_us\\_59ba7c5ae4b086432b04a9be](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/memphis-black-owned-businesses_us_59ba7c5ae4b086432b04a9be).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Melvin Jones (CEO of Black Business Directory) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

The lack of sustaining Black owned businesses means the lack of opportunity for the African-American community. This opportunity is visible in many spaces. Black owned businesses, and their owners, have played a key role in the social development of communities across America. Memphis is no different.

With this information, I choose to ask the question of “What is the social Impact of Black owned business in the development of Memphis”? To answer this question, I first had to look into the past to see if there are any answers and connections with the issues Black owned businesses have today.

History has shown us that for Memphis, Black business owners have constantly served the community and try to lift them up socially, economically, and even politically. These owners play key roles in the community, mostly as symbols of great influence and pride. White society constantly trying to figure out ways to stop the economic and social progress of the Black community in Memphis. This is because the ideologies of white supremacy and segregation prevent this type of progress for Black people. White society is dedicated to the segregation and underdevelopment of the Black community in order to enforce these ideals of White superiority. We see this throughout the history of Memphis. The moments that I chose to highlight in order to help answer this question were moments that shaped the community in drastic measures. These moments were the Memphis Massacre, the rise of Beale Street, and the rise of the Crump Political Machine. From my research in each of these time periods Black Business owners have made significant impacts for the development of the Black community in Memphis. These owners set an example for many to follow, using their success in business as a gateway into politics to make change through that, and create opportunities for others in the future. By reading second hand literature about the Memphis Massacre, the rise of Beale Street, and the Rise of the Crump political machine I am able to get a bigger sense of the role that Business leaders have played in the advancement, or the possible stagnation, of the Black community in Memphis. Even though I chose to only focus on these time period to look at the impact of Black owned business, there are countless business community leaders outside these periods that have made lasting effects on Memphis.

By understanding significant events in these periods, we better understand why Black owned businesses are so crucial for Memphis. Also, the effects of these events can still be seen today. In order to get a broader scope of my research question I broke up my research question into four core questions (What are the barriers in achieving a social impact in Memphis?; What roles do Black businesses owners have in the community?; What do Black businesses tell us about the social and economic state of Memphis?; Why are black owned businesses essential for the growth and development of Memphis?). I made sure to keep these questions in mind while analyzing the effects of past events and interviewing my participants. Looking into the contemporary moment is just as crucial to get a good look into the changes that the role of Black owned businesses have in Memphis today. We see that for Memphis to reach its full potential, Black owned businesses must find a lasting place in Memphis.

By interviewing present day business owners many of whom are fighting to create a progressive space for thriving Black owned businesses in Memphis, we see the issues have not changed but instead evolved from the same issues that has haunted the city since the Memphis Massacre. We see the ways in which the city was not only holding Black owned businesses back, but also the ways in which they are helping them as well. We get more suggestions, and ways in which the city government can modify their approaches to helping these businesses more effectively. We still see the role that Business owners play in the advancement of the Black community in Memphis, outside of their everyday business hours. For Black businesses owners in Memphis, their businesses mean more than just a way for them to make money. Their businesses act as a gateway for them to make an impact in their community. This impact looks different from person to person, however they all have the same mission. Which is to bring life to the community and gain of piece of the American pie that White society constantly attempts to take away from the Black community in Memphis. Businesses serve as a source of well-being and foundation for any community, but for the Black community they mean something a little more special.

*Blacktech* naming Memphis the number-one city for Black owned business puts a spotlight on the social and economic state of the Black community in Memphis. With so many Black owned businesses and such a high poverty rate amongst the Black community in Memphis, what is the reasoning behind this? This is mostly, if not completely, due to the decades of white resistance in Memphis which was dedicated to stopping the growth of the Black community. In Memphis' history we constantly see these Black business owners continuously playing a key role in community change. One of the critical benefits of Black business ownership is that it creates a gateway for owners to enter politics and make change in the community in that. Even though Memphis' past and current relationship is unique to Memphis in many ways, there are also many ways in which the same themes echoes to many Majority Black populated cities across America. Memphians take great pride in their city, and this was clearly seen through the people I interviewed. These people, and countless more, are working tirelessly to try and better the status of Black owned businesses in Memphis, because with the success of these businesses comes the success of 63% of the Memphis' community, and by extension the entire city.

### **Memphis Massacre:**

Everything changed on May 1<sup>st</sup>, as this marked the start of the Memphis massacre and three days of destruction of the growing Black communities in Memphis. Starting the day before, an altercation erupted in the streets between Black men in uniform and some Irish police officers that resulted in physical attacks and verbal threats being thrown by each group.<sup>10</sup> This altercation spread across the entire city, both black and white, and put many citizens on high alert as many knew of the rising tensions between the police and Black troops. With even more tension than usual lingering in the air, the Irish policemen would soon wreak destruction to the foundation of these Black communities. However; nobody knew that that time would come in less than twenty-four hours after the incident in

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<sup>10</sup> Ash, Stephen V. *A Massacre in Memphis: The Race Riot That Shook the Nation One Year after the Civil War*. New York: Hill & Wang, a Division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014, 100.

the street. The next day, another incident occurred with Irish police (James Finn, David Carroll, John O'Neill, and John Stevens) attempting to break up a group of Black soldiers that ended in not only verbal attacks, but gun fire and two police officers wounding themselves.<sup>11</sup> This resulted in the police officers retreating for reinforcements and coming back to the communities of Robert Church, Joseph Clouston, and many more across Memphis with mobs of white citizens. These mobs coming in to wreak havoc and destruction on all things Black in these towns. Attacking the likes of Church, Clouston and anything that resembled being Black and free that stood in their way. Stores and buildings were burned to the ground, women were raped, and many were either killed or severely wounded. White terror swept through Memphis like an avalanche. White Memphians tearing down anything or anyone in its path that shows any resemblance of Black freedom. Burning these institutions down in order to burn down the hope of the African-American community to advance in white society. This continued for several days until General Stoneman declared martial law and mobilized troops into the city, however the damage was done.<sup>12</sup> Thousands of people's communities in disrepair and left to ashes in the wind. While many people died in these horrific moments, 60% of the attacks that occurred throughout the riot was dedicated to burning buildings and robbery.<sup>13</sup> This number is crucial because it shows the mobs were more concerned about causing damage to the businesses, homes, and churches then actually killing anyone. This mob wanted to cause damage to the community by specifically targeting the foundation of the Black community. What this mob wanted to do most was stop any type of social progression in these communities.

For the Black community, the Memphis Massacre of 1866 set the tone for Memphis' relationship with Black owned businesses and the Black community at large. This horrific event served as

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>12</sup> Carden, Art, and Christopher J. Coyne. "The Political Economy of the Reconstruction Era's Race Riots." *Public Choice* 157, no. 1/2 (2013): 57-71. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42003192>, 65.

<sup>13</sup> Waller, Altina L. "Community, Class and Race in the Memphis Riot of 1866." *Journal of Social History* 18, no. 2 (1984): 233-46. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3787286>, 240.



the start of constant struggle for the African-American community in Memphis to progress both socially and economically. After the Civil War ended, Memphis had to pick up the pieces left of their dignity and figure out the best way for their city to move forward. African-Americans were now physically free from slavery. Reconstruction was underway to ensure the physical and social safety of newly freed African-Americans. Black men who served in the Civil War were stationed in Memphis along with General John Smith, who was later replaced by General George Stoneman. Whites fearing the newfound freedom of African-Americans, racial tensions were extremely high due to the presence of Black troops. The elite of the “old citizens”, or people who were Southern born and raised, found themselves “traumatized” and “disenfranchised” by the new social and economic changes that bestowed Memphis and the entire South.<sup>14</sup> As a result of these new changes, white anxiety filled the landscape of the recovering South, especially Memphis. White Memphians, mostly the elite, in hysteria declaring that “emancipation had unleashed Black beastly passion” and highlighting stories of violence in the community.<sup>15</sup> Talk of “recruiting foreign immigrants to replace black laborers to encourage Black people to leave the region filled the streets and homes of the city.”<sup>16</sup> The fact that the Black community had to deal with tensions with the old citizens now had to deal with tensions with many Irish Memphians, and this would ultimately lead to Memphis’ outbreak of violence on May 1<sup>st</sup>.

Even though many of the “old citizens” made social and economic progress hard for African-Americans during Reconstruction, Irish Immigrants created a more direct line of tension with the Black community that helped push these tensions over the edge. These tension, which had been fostered well before the start of the Civil War, came to a head. The Irish continuously resented the Black community, because they would constantly have to compete with each other for work. With Reconstruction and

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<sup>14</sup> Ash, Stephen V. *A Massacre in Memphis: The Race Riot That Shook the Nation One Year after the Civil War*. New York: Hill & Wang, a Division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014. 32-33.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid,39.

emancipation also came a rise of the social and political power of the Irish Memphians. After the Civil War, southern-born Whites only consisted of one-fourth or less of the Memphis population and the Irish population gained drastic political power.<sup>17</sup> Now instead of being the bottom of White society's barrel, the Irish now had the majority in the city. Now all the resentment that they had for the newly freed African-Americans in Memphis since the Antebellum period could be unleashed fully. However, instead of taking frustrations out on these white elites, they set their eyes on the Black community that saw as economic competition for so long. In response to the Black troops in the city constantly around armed, Memphis decided to create a police force that consisted of most, if not all, Irish men. This caused nothing but more problems for the Black community as the "antiblack sentiment" of many Irish citizens bled through the Irish occupied police force.<sup>18</sup> The presence of the armed Black troops only aired the flames of the fire that was rapidly continuing to grow in the city. Talk of "action" and wishing "every damn nigger was killed" can be heard in huddled groups of police officers from corner to corner, just waiting for a moment to release their hatred. They just wanted one excuse, one incident to far, one sign to attack, one event too rowdy, just one moment where the policemen could be able to unleash the "explosion of racial hatred" that was festering within these police officers.<sup>19</sup> On May 1, 1866, the police got their one excuse.

This was a crucial event for Black Memphians, because with the Memphis massacre we see the start of a pattern of the constant effort of Memphis' white community to attempt to put a halt to the advancement of the Black community. This is due to the fact that White Memphis refusal room for Black advancement in any aspect in order to keep together the social hierarchy. Produced by Reconstruction and white frustrations, this act of white terror left Black communities in Memphis destitute and

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 67

destroyed many people's way of life. Many Black communities were left to ruin, which greatly affected Black communities trying to nothing but thrive and get their own piece of freedom. These communities were trying to make a living of their own and make an economic and social foundation for themselves and generations to come. Forty-six African-Americans and 2 white people were killed; many more were robbed, brutally beaten, and numerous women were raped.<sup>20</sup> With the investigation of the congressional committee came names that were given by witnesses and survivors of the traumatic experience, "however no arrests were ever made" to those people involved.<sup>21</sup> Local authorities refused to bring charges against the dozens of names that were given to the federal government. There was no restitution to the \$100,000 worth of damage done to African-American infrastructure; and no justice served to the amount of damage done to the ones killed, beaten senselessly, or raped.<sup>22</sup> Nothing was done to repair the heartache of this event. Nothing was done to even attempt to rectify the willful neglect by General Stoneman, whose sole purpose was to make sure events like this didn't occur. White terror was used to try and keep Black citizens in an economic and social state of stagnation. Black citizens continue to hear officers shout throughout the days "it is a white man's day now" as they burn buildings, businesses, churches, etc.<sup>23</sup> We see the assertion of white supremacy manifested in this attack. This was not a random act of violence, but instead a deliberate and calculated move by white society in order to show the social power that they have over the Black community. These mobs didn't randomly burn random buildings, they specifically burnt schools, churches, and prominent businesses. They targeted Robert Church, who was a business man of great influence in the Black community at the

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<sup>20</sup>Sigafoos, Robert Alan. *Cotton Row to Beale Street: A Business History of Memphis*. Memphis, TN: Memphis University Press, 1980, 45.

<sup>21</sup> Waller, Altina L. "Community, Class and Race in the Memphis Riot of 1866." *Journal of Social History* 18, no. 2 (1984): 233-46. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3787286>, 234.

<sup>22</sup>Ryan, James Gilbert. "The Memphis Riots of 1866: Terror in a Black Community During Reconstruction." *The Journal of Negro History* 62, no. 3 (1977): 243-57. doi:10.2307/2716953, 243.

<sup>23</sup> Lauterbach, Preston. *Beale Street Dynasty: Sex, Song, and the Struggle for the Soul of Memphis*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2016, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.23-25.

time. Burning Robert Church's saloon after drinking his alcohol, Lincoln Chapel, Hospital built by the Freedman Bureau, and Schools.<sup>24</sup> All of these were buildings used by many in the community to create social and economic progress for themselves. This mob sought out and destroyed "everything Black residents had built in their first year of freedom" and this mob did just that.<sup>25</sup> By targeting these institutions, we see an attempt to stop black growth in Memphis entirely.

Robert Church wasn't just attacked because he just so happened to be a Black man that had bad luck. The white mob targeted Church because businessmen like him represented the American Dream African-Americans attempted to have post-slavery. The mob searched him out, burned his building and physically assaulted him because he was a prominent figure for the Black community in Memphis. Church represented a new confidence of many African-Americans in Reconstruction. A confidence of freedom for the Black community. That Black people could finally get their piece of the dream, and this is what angered white society. Church decided to "take his stand for equality" by going to the government a year earlier to get a permit to open his billiard hall. They attacked him because he went and fought to open his own business, despite the status quo that white society tries to put on African-Americans. Which is that African-Americans don't get to be leaders or entrepreneurs. That African-Americans don't get to have any type of freedom or an American Dream to aspire to. Church represented the newfound confidence that African-American found in themselves and in their community.<sup>26</sup> That one way or another, they would get a piece of their American Dream, whether white Memphians wanted them to or not. Church decided to seek out his own freedom that white southerners constantly tried to make sure he didn't obtain. They beat him because he tried to advance

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<sup>24</sup>Waller, Altina L. "Community, Class and Race in the Memphis Riot of 1866." *Journal of Social History* 18, no. 2 (1984): 233-46. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3787286>, 234.

<sup>25</sup> Lauterbach, Preston. *Beale Street Dynasty: Sex, Song, and the Struggle for the Soul of Memphis*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2016, 27.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 16.

himself socially and economically. Church represented the community at large. Black people don't get to have an American dream in the South, or any type of freedom whether it was economic or social. This mob was intentional to use white terror to try and destroy the heart of these communities. This mob decided to "torch every nigger building, every nigger church, every God Damn son of a bitch that taught a nigger" in order to demolish the foundation of these communities.<sup>27</sup> It is the blatant destruction of Black businesses and leaders who are trying to make a better life for themselves and their community. We see, like many examples across the United States, that the consequences for Black communities trying to create their own progress is the destruction of the community's structures, foundations, and even lives. The Memphis Massacre tried to serve as a warning for Memphis' Black community and leaders that at every turn of progress, white society will be there to do everything they can to stop it. The stage is set, and the lines are drawn. The Black communities in Memphis eyes are wide open to what's in store. However, no matter what obstacles there are, the African-American community in Memphis always found a way back on track.

Again, stunted by White terror and anxiety this progress is halted but not stopped thanks to the work of Black business leader Robert Church. After the Massacre, the African-American communities across Memphis must pick up the pieces of hope and move forward together. For many in the community, the Massacre was a realization to the fact that Blacks will not be able to leave peacefully in an integrated space with Memphis' white population. As a result, the community comes closer together and build their own big community. The Black communities across Memphis began "concentrating their homes and institutions closer together" and started to "build communities around themselves rather than in anyone else' protection" with the help and guidance of Robert Church and others.<sup>28</sup> After the Memphis Massacre, many people looked to Robert Church in order to figure out the next step and

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid, 29.

would “gravitate towards Church” because he was already an influential leader in the community.<sup>29</sup> Not only in a business sense, but socially as well. When Church went to the federal government to get his billiard permit after he was denied by the local government, this showed that Church was fearless of the status quo of white southerners. Church had already made a social impact by defying White Memphians and opening his business, so this showed the community that Church could help them build a community of their own. He became an influential in moving the Black community and centering it around Beale Street. We see in this the emergence of a new Black haven led by Church. Church would continue to play a vital role in the community, establishing a park, investing in businesses and real estate, and even establishing a bank targeted to help African-Americans. We see the vital role that Black business owners play in their communities, and we see this pattern throughout the history of Memphis. No matter how much white society tried to reinforce their supremacist ideals on African-Americans, thanks to many leaders like Church, African-Americans were able to create their own communities and create their own social progress.

The social identity of Memphis is shaped in these moments, and will continue to be present through the 1900’s and the 2000’s. This identity that is shaped is one of separation between Black and white, but also the sense of community among Memphis’ African-American population. An identity of constant push back of the Black voice by white Memphians is started here. The strong ideologies of segregation are growing in these moments. The long and everlasting effects of segregation in Memphis is starting in this very moment as well, as seen as many in the Black community gather tighter together. We see in this event the start of segregation in a social, economic, political, and physical sphere. This is the start of the issues that will plague Memphis and its community’s for well over 100 years. The scars from this moment will always be visible, more hidden but still there. White resistance is taking hold

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 29.

during the Memphis Massacre, and will continue to hold for decades to come. The stage is set for the challenges that many more Black leaders will have to encounter for the next 150 years. The evolution of these challenges will require leaders to use different approaches to make a positive and strong social impact in their communities.

### **The Rise of Beale Street:**

Beale Street had a rich and meaningful history to Memphis' Black community before the Civil War even started. Beale Street was founded in 1841 by Colonel Robertson Topp and eventually General Nathan Bedford Forrest, who was also Memphis' financial commissioner at the time, would locate the city market here.<sup>30</sup> Unknown to Forrest, by doing this he would create an "center of Black freedom" that would soon reach Worldwide notoriety.<sup>31</sup> This marketplace located by Forest would soon become a "hub of Black social life during slavery" and more so after the Memphis Riots.<sup>32</sup> With this already established haven for the Black community in Memphis, it was not hard for Church and others to create their own community centered around Beale street. Many Black owners, such as Joe Clouston, had been investing in Beale Street early on. Joe Clouston became the city's first Black property owner in 1857 when he bought land and built a building that housed "his home, a grocery store, and a barbershop" in one place for Black people to come and get everything they needed in one stop.<sup>33</sup> Having "everything a freedman could need" Beale street was the heart of the Memphis Black community and was built to serve the Black community with stores and shops consisting of Black businesses.<sup>34</sup> The Memphis Massacre did nothing but speed up and grow Beale street in what would today be known as an historic

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 43.

district for the city. Many people put in the ground work to make Beale a community for the Black community, everyone contributing to helped to turn Beale Street into a mecca.

After the Memphis Massacre, Beale Street slowly became a thriving haven for the Black community in Memphis thanks to the leadership of Business owners such as Robert Church, Joseph Clouston, Ida B. Wells, and countless others. For Church, his peak of prosperity came at the expense of a disaster for White Memphians. The late 1870's saw as the mass exodus of White Memphians due to the yellow fever outbreak that swept through the city year after year, killing thousands of mainly white Memphians. The 1878 epidemic served as the worst year as there ended up being only twenty-thousand people, fourteen-thousand black people and six-thousand white people, left in the city as many died or left.<sup>35</sup> Church used this to advantage by buying two buildings from John Overton and a lot on Lauderdale Street in 1879.<sup>36</sup> Despite already owning several properties beforehand, this outbreak and exodus of White Memphians facilitated his way into Memphis economic power. Many would come to say of Church how "the riot birthed a man, but the epidemic made him a king" in Memphis.<sup>37</sup> This moment is very important for Church, because these purchases are laying the foundation for him to become an even bigger influence not only in Memphis' Black community, but Memphis in general. He was already very influential in the community, but now he had the capital, both monetary and relationship, to be something bigger than anyone would think possible for a Black man. A millionaire. After Memphis lost its charter to the state in 1879, Church was the first to buy a \$1000 bond to help the city recover financially.<sup>38</sup> We see in this moment the continuation of Church making an impact in the community, not only economically but socially as well. By Church doing this he was looked at as a "titan" and a "symbol

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<sup>35</sup> Doyle, Joe. *The Politics of Redevelopment: How Race Impacted the Rebirth of Beale Street, 1968-1977*. Rhodes College. Dlynx. Accessed 2006. [http://dlynx.rhodes.edu/jspui/bitstream/10267/23947/1/2006-Joe\\_Doyle-The\\_Politics\\_of\\_Redevelopment-McKinney\\_C.pdf](http://dlynx.rhodes.edu/jspui/bitstream/10267/23947/1/2006-Joe_Doyle-The_Politics_of_Redevelopment-McKinney_C.pdf), 5.

<sup>36</sup> Lauterbach, Preston. *Beale Street Dynasty: Sex, Song, and the Struggle for the Soul of Memphis*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2016, 50.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 51.



that any man, even a black man, could succeed” in Memphis.<sup>39</sup> Church was now the example that anything was possible for the Black community in Memphis. Church’s efforts helped maintain hope in his community. Beale was sustained and notarized through the many Business leaders who headquartered themselves here. Through Church’s leadership, he would bring in many people to the town and they would help make Beale Street famous outside the city and give it national attention.

Beale Street would make its first major impact in America with the arrival of Ida B Wells. In 1883 Ida B Wells moved to Memphis to live with her aunt and her siblings and would soon make headlines through newspapers by becoming a writer for *Living Way*, a Black owned printing company and would eventually establish her own.<sup>40</sup> Two years into moving Wells would reach national attention finding her niche for “surgical social commentary” concerning “the condition of Black lives in the South” to the entire country.<sup>41</sup> She would soon become part owner of the *Free Press Newspaper* headquartered on Beale Street. Wells’ work made a major impact regarding the narrative of Black experiences in the South. By using her own press, she was free to make a political impact on the lives of Black people across the South. Wells would discuss everything from the “second-class” rate of Black school compared to their white counterparts, to the experiences of Black women.<sup>42</sup> However, she would be most notably remembered for her lifelong campaign against lynching after her friends were lynched. After the lynching of Tommie Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Will Stewart, Wells decided that “more needed to be said about lynching” that was taking the lives of thousands of Black people across the South.<sup>43</sup> On May 21, 1892 Wells did just that, releasing a column examining the truth behind the story of Black men “raping” white women to justify the lynchings that occurred. In reality, rape had nothing with most of these lynching and that White men should stop making this claim before the “the moral reputation of

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 62-64.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 105.

their women” would come to light.<sup>44</sup> This story sent shockwaves throughout the country and shed light into the social implications of lynching. Across the South, whites used lynching as a way to show superiority over Black men; they also used it to reinforce the image of white womanhood as a tool of white patriarchal dominance. Wells exposed the South for the false, manipulative narrative that White men tried so desperately to hold on to and foster. By rewriting the narrative of these Black men who can no longer speak for themselves, Wells gave voice to the voiceless. She used her newspaper to give justice to the many lives lost to this narrative, while also dismantling this chronicle of Black men being nothing but sex driven “fiends” and “beasts” in the eyes of white society by tackling this controversial topic.<sup>45</sup> However, she would soon after never return to Memphis under the threat of death. However after; Wells left a new life would be brought to Memphis, one that would make Beale Street the “Home of the Blues”.

Music would be the staple of Beale Street, thanks to musicians that would fill the building like W.C Handy who created music that would be heard around the world. The music scene on Beale Street picked up before Handy even stepped foot in Memphis. Famed Fiddler Jim Turner would rise in 1887 throughout the South and be named “Beale Street’s first star”.<sup>46</sup> Headquartering himself on Beale Street, he would be responsible for spreading “the Beale Street mystique” all throughout the South.<sup>47</sup> Later he would be known as the “missing link in American music” because he would be lost in history for his contribution to the development of Blues.<sup>48</sup> He would pave the way for the likes of W. C. Handy to take Beale Street music from the Southern spotlight to an international spotlight. Coming in from Memphis on a train from Clarksdale, Mississippi, Handy would be guided by Turner to learn what Beale

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<sup>44</sup>Sanford, Otis. *From Boss Crump to King Willie: How Race Changed Memphis Politics*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2017, 23.

<sup>45</sup> Lauterbach, Preston. *Beale Street Dynasty: Sex, Song, and the Struggle for the Soul of Memphis*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2016, 86

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 185.

had to offer him.<sup>49</sup> A place of “optimistic race people” with streets “packed as a state fair every nearly night,” and endless musical possibilities for him.<sup>50</sup> Eventually he would reach success through his song “Memphis Blues” by reaching a wider audience through the selling of his copyrights to Theron Bennett, who was a white composer and publisher.<sup>51</sup> Handy would soon travel extensively and become known as the “Father of Blues” and Beale street referred to as “Home of the Blues”.<sup>52</sup> Having his main office on Beale Street, Handy shed a light on this city like no other. He showed the world the music innovation that was happening in Beale Street. Without Beale Street, the world would probably not have Blues. A genre that lasted mainstream success for decades and continues to influence so many musicians and artists today. Handy put the African-American experience center stage for the whole world to be in awe at. Turner and Handy gave birth to a new genre for America. Thanks to leaders like these two, new life was inhaled into the American music scene that lasted generations with Beale Street centered around it.

Beale Street would’ve never been one of the Black capitals of the country if it wasn’t for the Business owners and social activists that inhabited its streets. These leaders breathed new life into the city and gave it a national reputation as a mecca for Black culture in the South. The leadership that these people exhibited professionally and personally not only shaped Memphis’ Black community, but also the Black community across the country. The impact that each of these people had on the Black community in Memphis, is unparalleled to any other. Church helped lay the economic foundation for the Black community in Memphis by advancing Beale Street and investing in the buildings, businesses, and even a bank later on in his life. Wells gave Beale a political touch and created a space of recognition for Beale that was more than just drinking, gambling, and a lively night life. That serious work was being done in this town to help elevate Black people all over the country. Beale Street was Well’s starting pad, that she

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 153-157.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 157

<sup>51</sup>Ibid, 191.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 199.

would use to launch herself to international recognition. Owning her own newspaper in order to spread her truth and the truth of so many experiences of Black people all across the South experience. W.C Handy brought to light a whole new genre to American through Beale Street. Making his own impact by putting a spotlight on Black experiences through music. The Blues served a gateway for many to express themselves and the challenges that many Black people faced. Centering their experiences in ways that speaking about it could not convey. Thanks to the efforts of leaders such as Clouston, Church, Hardy, Wells, and countless others Beale street would rise to fame and be known as “America’s most iconic Street,” “Home of the Blues” and most importantly the center for the Black community in the south. These leaders helped create something that would live on in infamy. Something that was created out of the tragedy of the Memphis Massacre, turned into something that would be considered “the Main Street of Black America” where the Black community could live and mingle without the constant interference of whiteness.<sup>53</sup>

Even though people worked hard for the advancement in their community in Beale Street, once again white society in Memphis would continue to use terror to try and stop this growth. Following the lynching of Tommie Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Will Stewart on March 9, 1892, many Memphians were urged to save their money and leave town, for there was no protection or justice for African-Americans in Memphis.<sup>54</sup> Thousand headed this warning and fled west in a mass exodus out of Memphis, which included “black property owners, policemen, and entrepreneurs” that decided to move to Oklahoma.<sup>55</sup> This left Beale Street with fewer leaders, but like always Church “believed in Memphis” and refused to uproot his life and businesses in fear of white terror<sup>56</sup>. Church constantly risked everything to see

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 103.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 104.

Memphis thrive, and that's what he would continue to do till the day he died. However; many others would not be so fortunate to be able to stay in Memphis and remain unharmed.

Ida B. Wells was always use to controversy among white Memphians following her stories, but she could not always remain safely in Memphis. Years prior in September 1886, the office of *Living Way*, which she was writing for, had been broken into and destroyed by vandals.<sup>57</sup> The paper that helped Ida reach national headlines was completely destroyed, including "dismantling of the printing press" where she worked.<sup>58</sup> This didn't stop Wells as she would continue to stay in Memphis and write about Black experiences in the South, until 1892. Following this lynching, Wells released her article that shook the nation to its core and angered many Memphians. White Memphians broke into Ida's *Free Speech* office and completely destroyed everything and "left a warning to the paper's staff to leave town within twenty-four hours" and Wells never returned to Memphis.<sup>59</sup> Instead of letting this stop her from pursuing this work, this only helped Wells begin her "lifelong campaign against lynching" speaking to thousands about the horrors of lynching in America.<sup>60</sup> Working constantly to deconstruct of narrative that had cost thousand their lives.

W.C. Hardy's claim to fame was also a result of a bad deal from a well-known white music publisher, but he would us this to his advantage. After Hardy's song "Memphis Blues" didn't gain any notable traction, he sold the copyright to Theron C. Bennett who said he would plug it in to white shoppers. Even though Hardy didn't know, his song sold fifty thousand copies its first year making waves throughout America's minstrel shows.<sup>61</sup> Even though Handy got none of the proceeds from these sells, Hardy's name was out and noticed in mainstream America. He used this moment to advance himself in

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid ,106.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid, ,106.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid ,191.

White and Black America playing to both crowds throughout the night. Even though he was tricked out of a lot of money by this White publisher, Hardy wasn't done yet. Hardy would go on and live on to be known as "the father of Blues" throughout the country. Bringing music that began "deep in the Black experience" to an even wider audience.<sup>62</sup> Centering the Black experience, bringing musical fame to Beale Street, and uplifting the Black community all at the same time would be what Hardy would be remembered for. Not being tricked out of his money. Thanks to leaders like Church, Wells, and Hardy, Beale would be remembered for the impact that it had on the Black community in the South and the country at large. Once again, no matter what obstacles are presented, leaders like them would continue to face it all and continue to make an impact in their communities.

#### **Rise of Crump:**

The rise of the Crump Machine caused a mix of progress and setbacks for the African-American community in Memphis. The early 1900s saw a major change in the political and social atmosphere of Memphis with the rise of Edward Hull Crump. Boss Crump, as he will be referred to throughout and after his political reign, created and maintained an effective political machine. This not only spread in Memphis, but also all of Tennessee and Nationwide. He was known for effectively holding the Black vote in Memphis for decades. The Crump Machine was able to be extremely successful for a long time due to Boss Crump's hold on the Black vote. Crump knew the power and importance of the Black vote and used this to his advantage early on at a stage where no politicians in Memphis were giving the African-American community any type of attention. Because of this, Crump was able to obtain the loyalty of the Black community by giving very small tokens here and there such as a park, or a day at the Zoo. It was clear that Crump doing all of these thing "was more about politics and power" than him actually wanting

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid, 191.

social advancement for the Black community in Memphis.<sup>63</sup> Even though many Black leaders knew this, Crump still had the support of many Black leaders in the community such as W.S. Martin, George Lee, Blair Hunt and others by his side throughout his decades of political power.<sup>64</sup>

However; there was a heavy divide amongst Black leaders. For other leaders such as Robert Church Jr., Dr. Joseph Walker, J.B Martin and many others, a day at the zoo and little crumps of social progress would not suffice what these leaders wanted.<sup>65</sup> These leaders wanted faster and significant racial prosperity, that they knew Crump would never allow. Soon leaders would venture out into other options, and the social terror from the Crump Machine would start. Many of these Black leaders were business owners, who had the capital and social influence to help and possible hurt Crump's political standing within the Black community. No matter what happened these leaders still refused to be intimidated and fought to create social and economic prosperity for the community.

We see in within the era of Boss Crump how Black Business owners both played a major factor for Crump, being major influencers of the African-Americans community. While not all of these leaders were business owners, what they lacked in monetary capital they made up in relationship capital. These leaders have direct access to thousands of the African-Americans in their churches, schools, etc. At one point even being in a professional relationship with Robert Church Jr. This was a great asset to Crump as demonstrated by the 1927 Mayoral election in Memphis. Thanks mainly to Church, this election sealed Crump's position as the undisputed "boss of Memphis" forever in the City's history.<sup>66</sup> Church was looked at by the community as a nationwide Black leader. Church was biting his time to when the Black

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<sup>63</sup> Sanford, Otis. *From Boss Crump to King Willie: How Race Changed Memphis Politics*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2017, 22.

<sup>64</sup> Jordan, Jason. *An Unseen Light: Black Struggles for Freedom in Memphis, Tennessee*. "We'll Have No Race Trouble Here". Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2018,146.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>66</sup>Lauterbach, Preston. *Beale Street Dynasty: Sex, Song, and the Struggle for the Soul of Memphis*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2016, 258.

community in Memphis had “reached formidable level of numerical strength and voting ability” to take on and try to dismantle the Crump Machine.<sup>67</sup>

However; Church’s relationship with Crump would turn sour once Crump didn’t need his help anymore. Crump had the support of the public and other Black leaders across Memphis. When the time came for other leaders to try and fight for a change for Memphis’ political landscape, Crump used other Black leaders as his Black spokespersons whenever he needed African-Americans’ approval of Crump’s policies.<sup>68</sup> By using these leaders, Crump had access to thousands of Black people in Memphis, which he used to his advantage when it came time for elections. The era of Jim Crow served Crump even better as there was no outwardly public displays of the disenfranchisement of Blacks in the South. By masking the racial tensions under the surface, Crump was able to keep many in the community happy. However, that didn’t stop many other leaders from looking past the crumbs and know that they could have more without Crump.

Even though these business owners helped Crump, they were also stopped on many fronts from entering into the political realm. Even though Crump made people in the Black community think that he had their best interest at heart, Crump never “entertained the thought of running a black candidate for public office” to make sure the Black voice is made in these decision rooms effecting a large portion of Memphis’ population.<sup>69</sup> Crump not “wanting to give Black citizens of Memphis too much too soon” made sure to shut down any attempt by Black leaders to gain political positions.<sup>70</sup> This is seen as Dr. Joseph Walker, one of the founders of the Universal Life Insurance Company, tried to gain a seat on the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>68</sup> Jordan, Jason. *An Unseen Light: Black Struggles for Freedom in Memphis, Tennessee*. “We’ll Have No Race Trouble Here”. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2018,146.

<sup>69</sup> Sanford, Otis. *From Boss Crump to King Willie: How Race Changed Memphis Politics*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2017, 31.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid ,31.



Memphis City Schools Board of Education and lost to Crump's slate.<sup>71</sup> When H.C Purnell ran for county commission in 1912 in order to have a "modicum of Black representation" in the city government, however Crump "largely dismissive" of Purnell made sure he did not win that election.<sup>72</sup> These moments are significant, because during the rise of the Crump machine we see the subtle isolation of Black politicians inside the city government. Crump making decisions about Memphis' African-American community without any African-Americans in any of the rooms to lend their voice. We see the development of Crump's false sense of attention to the needs of Memphis' Black community. Just as these Black leaders were used by the Crump machine in order to gain the Black vote, some these leaders would also venture outside of Crump to try and create change themselves in local politics. However; unlike with Walker and Purnell, Crumps tactics wouldn't be so subtle, but instead more public and would result in the exile of some of Memphis' top business leaders again.

1940 saw a shift in many Black leader's support of Crump and; also Crump's Reign of Terror on these business leaders marked another significant turning point for the city. For politicians that were on Crump's side they prospered in Memphis, however those that did not see Crump as a good fit to help the social progression of the Black community would face the full power of the Crump Machine. Many leaders wanted more for themselves and their communities and realized that more needed to be done. Black people needed to be holding public office, which is what Boss Crump refused to allow. Many leaders realized that the constant loyalty of Black votes for the Crump machine saw "very few returns on their investment" and "token gestures and lip service" would not be enough anymore.<sup>73</sup> More and more leaders were seeing the problems within the Crump machine and waking up and to see that Crump was not truly for Black social progress in Memphis. They realized that they wanted "black representation" in

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid ,32.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid ,32.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid, 130.

Memphis from police officers to city officials, but they knew Crump would never let that happen.<sup>74</sup>

These leaders started making plans to try and take down the Crump Machine, and this led to the start of Crump's Reign of Terror.

This Reign of Terror was Joe Boyle (Police Commissioner), Mayor Walter Chandler, and Crump's response "to growing political activism" amongst Black leaders.<sup>75</sup> From October to December of 1940, Memphis police harassed hundreds of Black Memphians under the guise of cleaning up Memphis' crime.<sup>76</sup> Police stayed outside J.B. Martin's Pharmacy store around the clock like night watchers from October until December. Martin had just been elected as chairman of a Republican political committee, and strongly opposed Crump and worked to dismantle his political machine.<sup>77</sup> He served as a direct threat to Crump, so he decided to financially strangle him through his business. Using allegations of drugs, drinking, and gambling as reasons, Boyle made it clear that the police would not be leaving his business alone anytime soon.<sup>78</sup> Soon the police expanded outside the pharmacy and went after anyone that the police deemed to "look suspicious," which resulted in mass arrests of Black citizens around Beale Street.<sup>79</sup> Reaching out of hand, this spread of police terror would reach out of Memphis and into the national spotlight. After three months and an investigation by the Justice Department, Boyle brought his police officers away from his store.<sup>80</sup> Even though Martin won this battle, he would soon follow in Church Jr.'s footsteps and leave Memphis for good. Never to return, another Black leader ran out of town when doing nothing but trying to advance the Black community in Memphis.

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<sup>74</sup> Jordan, Jason. *An Unseen Light: Black Struggles for Freedom in Memphis, Tennessee*. "We'll Have No Race Trouble Here". Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2018, 130.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 145.

Anytime Black leaders wanted to be in political offices, Crump did everything to crush their campaign or even make sure they left town never to return. Again, this use of force is more political than physical. Crump didn't just run out people who just disagreed with his politics, but specifically those people who were making strides to make their own political strides outside white society. This Reign of Terror not only attacked Martin, but also "represented an attack on Black Memphis as a whole."<sup>81</sup> Martin stood as a symbol of "pride and achievement" for the Black community in Memphis, just like Church Jr, Ida B. Wells, and countless others.<sup>82</sup> This was to make sure that the Black community didn't progress in Memphis. Instead of physically attacking the infrastructure of the Black community, the Crump machine tried to destroy the political infrastructure of the Black community in Memphis. Crump saw that many of these leaders had great influence in their communities, and just like they helped him gain the Black vote, many of these same leaders can influence their communities to want more than just a park or one day out of the week to go to the zoo. Crump's actions served as another signal to the Black community that no matter what, white society will be there to try and stop any type of substantial progress. These leaders knew that the only way that exceptional social progress would be made for the Black community was if Black people were in the rooms where all these decisions were being made. If the African-American community in Memphis wanted long lasting progress, then there would need to be more Black people in these offices to make sure that the right decisions are being made

We see during the rise of Crump, that business leaders in this period set their sights on the political atmosphere in Memphis in order to make a positive social impact for communities. The Black leadership in Memphis during this period is critical, because there is a shift from business leaders solely staying in the community to help progress Memphis' Black community. This generation focuses on going

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 133.

into the government directly and making the changes necessary in order to better the community. Many leaders, Church Jr. especially, knew that the Black vote was a “Negro’s ticket to equality” in Memphis.<sup>83</sup> These leaders began to realize the power of the Black vote and use this as their gateway to change. Building the business in the community was the first step, the next step for these leaders was to use their capital to invade the city government with Black people. This would be the only way to have effective and city-wide change for the Black community. Business owners have the opportunity to create on a wider scale, instead of going community by community to help out. These business owners use their access to capital, resources, and influences in order to attempt to infiltrate the political sphere, which has continuously been dominated by White men in the decision rooms making laws and policies that have kept the Black community at an economic and social disadvantage. The love of the Black community is what drives this want to go face to face with Crump, to make life better for thousands of African-Americans and give them the opportunities to thrive and make a better life for themselves and generations to come. Church established a chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Memphis.<sup>84</sup> These Black leaders attempted to create an impact in the community by using their business influences to help create political strides for the African-American community, even when their livelihood and businesses were put at risk. These leaders would have to be in the rooms and make sure that policies are being made to help the Black community, instead of waiting on faith for white politicians to help make progress socially. For white Memphians excluded Black leaders from taking government offices because these positions “would put a black man on a social par” with white Memphian.<sup>85</sup> Leaders like Church Sr., Church Jr., Wells, Handy, and countless others help lay a

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<sup>83</sup>Lauterbach, Preston. *Beale Street Dynasty: Sex, Song, and the Struggle for the Soul of Memphis*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2016, 234.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid, 233.

<sup>85</sup>Tucker, David M. "Black Pride and Negro Business in the 1920's: George Washington Lee of Memphis." *The Business History Review* 43, no. 4 (1969): 435-51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3112036>, 437.

foundation of hope and reputation for many to continue to fight for Memphis' Black community through their businesses.

### **The Evolution of White Resistance:**

The everchanging and everlasting occurrences of White resistance serves as the key theme, that connects all these events. The face of which constantly changed, however behind whatever mask it was wearing, it served the same purpose. Which was to try and stop the Black community's social progress. What I refer to as white resistance in this paper is what Kim Reynolds calls "Whitelash" in her 2016 article "How White People Have Reacted to Black Success Over Time in the United States".<sup>86</sup> No matter the name, the effects of this is to assert "white supremacy" in the lives of Black communities. These moments spike in history as "retaliation for the mobility of blackness" in any space, whether it is economic, social, or political.<sup>87</sup> Black business leader know that in American "business meant money, and money meant power," not only for themselves but their entire race.<sup>88</sup> The main obstacles that prevented or halted leaders like Robert Church Sr., Robert Church Jr., Ida B. Wells, H.C Handy, J.B Martin, Dr. Joseph Walker, and countless others was the presences of white resistance from Memphians. The face of this white resistance constantly changing throughout these moments, going from physically violent discourse, to slowly more politically and economically violent discourse.

The Memphis Massacre was white resistant that sought to physically destroy anything that resembled Black mobility such as Churches, stores, and hospitals. This is the resistant that will be seen throughout history. During the Rise of Beale Street, we see this resistance as still be violent by more

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<sup>86</sup> Kim Reynolds, "Black Success In America Is Often Met With "Whitelash"," Teen Vogue, July 23, 2016, , accessed July 28, 2018, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/how-white-people-have-reacted-to-black-success-over-time-in-the-united-states>.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Tucker, David M. "Black Pride and Negro Business in the 1920's: George Washington Lee of Memphis." The Business History Review 43, no. 4 (1969): 435-51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3112036>, 438.

sporadic. We don't see any big retaliation until moments where there is some type of drastic action being made to the advancement Black people. Ida B. Wells serves as the prime example of this. When Wells decided to elevate the Black community, by exposing the false narratives around lynching, is when physical white resistance was present. Damaging her *Free Speech* business and threatening her to never come back to town under the consequence of murder.<sup>89</sup> By centering the Black experience to a mainstream stage in America was to take the spotlight of a whiteness. Which never happens, especially in the South. So, by removing the backdrop and highlighting the horrors of the Southern Black experience, Wells contested the White experience in the South. By damaging her printing office, Memphis white people not only tried to physically try to stop her growth, but intellectually as well.

The rise of Crump saw a fall in physical white resistance in Memphis, but a rise in political resistance in Memphis. Crump and his machine worked hard to paint a picture of "racial harmony" in Memphis during the era of Jim Crow in the South.<sup>90</sup> So far Crump to maintain power among Memphis Black leaders, the physical use of white resistance would not be "tolerated" for his Machine to be effective in Memphis.<sup>91</sup> Crump relied too heavily on the Black vote to do that. However, he would make sure to politically keep out the Black voice in other ways. Whether it was making sure leaders, such as Dr. Joseph Walker, did not win any city government seat or slightly more forcefully tactics such as using police force to attack J.B Martin's pharmacy under the guise of "cleaning up Memphis," the Crump Machine's white resistance stood as a way to keep Black people from politically mobilizing in Memphis.<sup>92 93</sup> Why not as forceful as many where used to seeing at the time, the effects are still

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<sup>89</sup> Kim Reynolds, "Black Success In America Is Often Met With "Whitelash"," Teen Vogue, July 23, 2016, , accessed July 28, 2018, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/how-white-people-have-reacted-to-black-success-over-time-in-the-united-states>.

<sup>90</sup> Jordan, Jason. *An Unseen Light: Black Struggles for Freedom in Memphis, Tennessee*. "We'll Have No Race Trouble Here".Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2018,134.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>93</sup> Sanford, Otis. *From Boss Crump to King Willie: How Race Changed Memphis Politics*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2017, 31.

present. With these types of White resistance over 150 years in Memphis, it has drastic effects on the state of Black businesses in Memphis today. Also, the entire Black community in Memphis, sense the attacks of these businesses and leaders were “an attack on Black Memphis as a whole”.<sup>94</sup> To understand the state of Black businesses, and Black community in Memphis at large, we must look at the role that White resistance has had on the development, or underdevelopment, of Black Memphis.

### **State of Black Owned Businesses Today:**

#### **Obstacles Today:**

The obstacles that many Black owned businesses face today resonate as scars from the constant challenges from decades ago. Getting back on track from decades of white resistance, Time, sustainability of businesses in Memphis, and the access to capital and resources all resonate as some of the reoccurring obstacles that I found when interviewing people and examining the state of Black owned businesses today. These themes connect the present with the past, as these can be seen during the Memphis Massacre, Rise of Beale Street, and the Reign of the Crump Machine. In Memphis today, black business owners make 83 cents for every \$100 spent.<sup>95</sup> This is due to the decades of constant underdevelopment of the Black community because of white interference. It took over 150 years to get to this stage, and now time is an obstacle for everyone since it will take decades to undue the effects of the past and begin to get one track. Time is of the essence for many, because for any businesses, it takes time to get to a place where your business is thriving. Especially if the business only consists of one person. This way of sustaining is only further challenged by the access to capital by many trying to start

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<sup>94</sup> Jordan, Jason. *An Unseen Light: Black Struggles for Freedom in Memphis, Tennessee*. “We’ll Have No Race Trouble Here”. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2018, 133.

<sup>95</sup> Roby Williams (President of Black Business Association of Memphis) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

or further their business to a sustaining point. We still see the inequity of Black owned businesses in Memphis, one that took over 100 years to set. From doing everything from physically running out Business owners, financially running them out, and politically by enforcing policies that keep Black owned businesses in a state of stagnation. With 152 years since the Memphis Massacre, the scar of this event and events after can still be seen in the city. The effects of decades of white resistance leaves scars so deep in Memphis, that many don't see it.

Trying to get back on track and reverse the decades effect of White resistance is still serving as an obstacle for many Black businesses in Memphis. For many, being a Black entrepreneur in Memphis is like being in a race behind the starting line so "you've got to run that much faster to get to the starting line and then you got to compete against the racers, who've already been racing for hundreds of years" because of all the years of white resistance.<sup>96</sup> By realizing the effects of the past on all minorities, especially African-Americans, you will see the ways in which white society has set back the Black community as whole to the point where extra effort must be put in. More than many of their white counterparts in America. In America, we live by the saying "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" than anyway can be successful. However; what many to realize that for the Black community, there are no shoes pull yourself up on, and white the decades resistance made sure of that.<sup>97</sup> It takes time to be able to not only get to the starting line, but also catch up with the rest of the runners. Running the race to catch up makes it harder for Business owners to try and make an impact effectively in their communities.

Time is an obstacle that many starting business owners in Memphis have to deal with for those looking to make an impact in their communities. Most are too busy trying to make sure that their

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<sup>96</sup> Mark Yates (Chief Vision Officer of Black Business Association of Memphis) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>97</sup> Melvin Jones (CEO of Black Business Directory) in discussion with the author, July 2018.



business is surviving, so they have no time to sacrifice to help the community. In order for business to be able to go into the community and make money, their company at first needs to get to a position where it is sustainable. For business leaders you can only do that when “you're successful, until you're successful, you just don't have time”. “You’re too busy trying to put bread on the table” to go out and make the impact that you want.<sup>98</sup> These entrepreneurs have to first help themselves before they can go and help others. Many of these owners are finding this time hard because in Memphis it is mostly only one person working towards the success of the business. In Memphis out of over 39,000 businesses, only 798 have more than one employee.<sup>99</sup> For thousands of entrepreneurs who would like to go into communities and do more, they can’t because they are the only ones working to make sure their business is surviving. Among these one-person businesses, the average income is \$13,000 so this shows that for many of these one-person entities, it’s a fact of necessity to devote their times to their businesses.<sup>100</sup> They must go out and get their business to a point where it will be scalable and sustainable. “It takes time to scale” a business, and so by helping businesses not only start but sustain, business owners can go out and help the community and make an impact.<sup>101</sup> By having a sustainable business, the owners are able to hire people who can take some of the work, so they can actually spend time going out to their communities and make the impact that they want to.

It’s not enough for Black owned businesses to be created in Memphis, they must be able to sustain in order to make an impact. It’s not enough to survive as a company but get to certain point of thriving as one. For many people, they see a progressive Memphis 10 to 20 years from now with more sustainable Black owned business. Business that can “sustain generations” to come and be able to be a

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<sup>98</sup> Roby Williams (President of Black Business Association of Memphis) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>99</sup> Data Access and Dissemination Systems (DADS). "Results." American FactFinder. October 05, 2010. Accessed July 27, 2018.

<sup>100</sup> Jozelle Booker (President and CEO at Mid-South Minority Business Council Continuum) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>101</sup> Jozelle Booker (President and CEO at Mid-South Minority Business Council Continuum) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

symbol for the Memphis community.<sup>102</sup> Having Black owned business that have “sustain ability is what's so critical going forward” for Memphis to be able to improve as one.<sup>103</sup> Having projects such as the 800 initiative and other loan programs to help Black owned businesses is “not the end game” but instead making sure these businesses have the capital and resources to sustain and last for a good period of time.<sup>104</sup> Also creating policies that help sustain all sectors of Black owned businesses in Memphis. Creating policies that help sustain, or help companies get that level, the 1,378 one-person food service businesses in Memphis.<sup>105</sup> Create policies that help the 1,587 one-person Arts and entertainment businesses, 296-one person manufacturing businesses, the 6,647 healthcare businesses, or the 15,165 unclassified businesses that are one-person firms.<sup>106</sup> Help this companies get to a point where they can hire people, and go out and help the community and make an impact. By making sure to focus on the wider range of businesses can help make a more sufficient impact. Helping these companies sustain by giving them access to capital and resources that is not available to many Black entrepreneurs, especially first- general entrepreneurs.

The main obstacle for many Black entrepreneurs is the lack of capital available to them, and this could include both monetary and relationship capital. For many entrepreneurs trying to make it the “lack of capital, lack of access to capital, and lack of resources has all been major players” for many trying to build a sustainable business.<sup>107</sup> For many white entrepreneurs they automatically start out with

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<sup>102</sup> Al Bright (Partner at Waller Lansden Dortch and Davis) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>103</sup> Jimmie Tucker (Managing Principal and Co-Founder of Self + Tucker Architects) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>104</sup> Jimmie Tucker (Managing Principal and Co-Founder of Self + Tucker Architects) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>105</sup> Data Access and Dissemination Systems (DADS). "Results." American FactFinder. October 05, 2010. Accessed July 28, 2018..

<sup>106</sup> Data Access and Dissemination Systems (DADS). "Results." American FactFinder. October 05, 2010. Accessed July 28, 2018.

[https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=SBO\\_2012\\_00CSA01&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=SBO_2012_00CSA01&prodType=table).

<sup>107</sup> Al Bright (Partner at Waller Lansden Dortch and Davis) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

an advantage because a lot of the time “they have friends who may have access to money, who they can call on and give them a loan to get started, personal loan, or they may know someone at a bank or they might have a trust or somebody in their family might give them money.”<sup>108</sup> White entrepreneurs usually have more ties and quicker access to money. They use their relationship capital, that many Black counterparts don’t have, in order to gain monetary capital that they could use. This lack of capital has been fostered for decades intentionally because of white resistance. Making sure who has access and who doesn’t have played a major role for the development of the Black community in Memphis. This constant hoarding of capital within white society for years has made the infrastructure of white society so strong even if one bad thing happens, their friends will make sure that they don’t fall through the cracks.<sup>109</sup> No matter what white Memphians will always have a safety net that is not afforded to Black entrepreneurs. White resistance connects through all of these issues and they all intertwine within one another. It’s going to take time to be able to get Black owned business own track from the decades of White resistance experienced in Memphis, at least to a point where they are at a level of sustainability that.

### **Conclusion:**

Black owned business, and owners, play an essential role in any city, but their effects in majority Black cities such as Memphis are essential for the success of the city as a whole. To be a Black entrepreneur in Memphis, and across America, is to be exceptional and better than your white counterparts. For many “regular entrepreneur must be a good risk taker, but Black one must be excellent” in order to sustain or even make it for a long period of time.<sup>110</sup> Black entrepreneurs have to extend themselves to the edge of the Earth in order to progress their business in a society that has

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<sup>108</sup>Jozelle Booker (President and CEO at Mid-South Minority Business Council Continuum) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>109</sup> Melvin Jones (CEO of Black Business Directory) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>110</sup> Al Bright (Partner at Waller Lansden Dortch and Davis) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

worked decades to stop it. A society that at every front has done everything in its power to make sure that African-Americans don't get their piece of the pie. For many starting off they "have to be half banker, half lawyer half salesmen, half accountant and half detective".<sup>111</sup> You have to be "two and a half men" in order to make a success for yourself as a Black entrepreneur.<sup>112</sup> For many, that support is not there at first. For first generation entrepreneurs, there no foundation to be built on. The foundation must be built before you can grow yourself and your business. Many of them do so in order to control their own destiny and help the community to prosper as a whole. The role that Black businesses have had in Memphis throughout the decades is unparalleled to any other city in the country. Many working tirelessly in order to make a positive impact in the community by starting a business, or people like Joelle Booker, Roby Williams, Mark Yates, and others in Memphis working alongside black entrepreneurs to help them sustain and become success stories. Because the success of Black owned business has always meant the success of the Black community in Memphis.

Black owned businesses provide the community with a foundation to be able to build upon and create social, economic, and political progress. Black owned businesses have constantly been institutions of opportunity for the African-American community in Memphis to elevate in every aspect of American life. Black entrepreneurs have been "people of faith, courage, determination and perseverance" who lay out the groundwork to build their communities.<sup>113</sup> They go out on a leap of faith in order to make lives better for themselves, their families, and their communities. Many owners feel as though they must "look out for the entire black community as a whole" and help progress the Black community in Memphis anyway that they can.<sup>114</sup> Many owners in Memphis feel an obligation, or want,

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<sup>111</sup>Roby Williams (President of Black Business Association of Memphis) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>112</sup> Jimmie Tucker (Managing Principal and Co-Founder of Self + Tucker Architects) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>113</sup>Jozelle Booker (President and CEO at Mid-South Minority Business Council Continuum) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>114</sup> Van Turner (Partner Bruce|Turner, PLLC) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

use their success as a gateway for the success of the Black community in Memphis. By lifting up Black owned businesses in Memphis, you lift the city as a whole up as well.<sup>115</sup> The state of Black businesses mirrors directly the state of the Black community in Memphis. This can be said for any city, especially majority Black populated cities such as Memphis.

These institutions are a cornerstone for the economic success of the Black community. For any community white or Black in American, if “you don't have a strong business base, your nothing.”<sup>116</sup> Economic success is the starting point for any community to have any social or political leverage in society. When Church Sr., Joseph Clouston, or any other person tried to have their own business after the Civil War, they knew that by having their own business for them “meant money, and money meant power” to help the community make progress.<sup>117</sup> The white citizens did to, and that’s why for decades they made sure to keep the Black economic state weak compared to theirs. Every chance running out or burning businesses to stop economic progress. This still holds true today for many business owners who see that some of their impact is “offering a young man a job that I knew changed his life” and giving them a chance to make economic progress themselves.<sup>118</sup> Giving other people job opportunities is one of the biggest impacts that any business owner can make to their community. For Memphis, which has a 32.3% poverty rate among Black people, serves as a prime reason why economic success for Black owned businesses means economic success for over 60% of Memphis’ population.<sup>119</sup> As the thousands of businesses in Memphis who can’t afford to hire people struggle, so does the city. The gateway to help Memphis economically succeed is to make sure that more. Black owned businesses do as well. These

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<sup>115</sup> Van Turner (Partner Bruce|Turner, PLLC) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>116</sup> Melvin Jones (CEO of Black Business Directory) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>117</sup> Tucker, David M. "Black Pride and Negro Business in the 1920's: George Washington Lee of Memphis." *The Business History Review* 43, no. 4 (1969): 435-51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3112036>, 438.

<sup>118</sup> Al Bright (Partner at Waller Lansden Dortch and Davis) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>119</sup> Craven, Julia, and Madeline S. Faber. "Memphis Pushes To Level The Playing Field For Black Entrepreneurs." *The Huffington Post*. June 04, 2018. Accessed July 27, 2018. [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/memphis-black-owned-businesses\\_us\\_59ba7c5ae4b086432b04a9be](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/memphis-black-owned-businesses_us_59ba7c5ae4b086432b04a9be).

businesses are essential for the growth of Memphis, so that the city can reach its full potential. When Black owned businesses are able to have this kind of progress, they are able to reach out and create political impacts.

Many Black owners such as Robert Church Jr. and Van Turner have used their businesses as a launching pad in order to make an impact politically in Memphis. By using their influences and capital, many like them have invaded the political sphere of Memphis in order to make a broader impact. In America “policies outlive people” and in order to gain equality for the African-American community in Memphis, Black people need to be in the decision rooms.<sup>120</sup> This is the reason that Crump refused to allow Black leaders hold any political office, because he didn’t want equality for Memphis’ Black community. Crump used Jim Crow era to his advantage by not showing violent pursuit of segregation in Memphis. Instead, giving little tokens of appreciation was able to make some people seem as though he was in favor of racial progress for the Black community in Memphis. That’s why Church Jr. choose to go away from his dad’s businesses and focus fully on his political career. He knew that this was the way to create long-lasting change in the city. This is still present today as leaders like Van Turner, who started his own law firm, use politics as a gateway to make lasting change for the Black community. Turner knows that politicians “controls a lot of the flow of business in and out of a city” for years passed their terms. By making sure to be in the room and being a fighter for minority businesses, he makes his impact in the community. However; this impact isn’t always economic, but mostly social for a lot of leaders. Turner also played an important role in the removal of the statue of Nathan Bedford Forrest, who was a slave trader, confederate soldier, and later a Ku Klux Klan leader in Memphis. For Turner’s father, this statue served as a reminder that to stay in his place and that as a Black man he will never be

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<sup>120</sup> Floyd Taylor (Founder and Chief Investment Officer of PreserverPartners ) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

free.<sup>121</sup> This statue served as a reminder of white supremacy, and that white resistance will always be over the heads of the Black community in Memphis. No matter what, whenever Black people try to advance people like Forrest be there riding on their horses in their white cloaks to try and stop it. For Turner, helping remove the statue was helping “symbol of hate and white supremacy that needed to stay in there longer” in Memphis.<sup>122</sup> By having a sustaining law firm, Turner was able to use his time to go and make an Impact in the community in many ways. Using politics to help elevate the community. The economic and political impacts that businesses owners have had throughout Memphis’ history have been able to create a social elevation of the Black community.

The most important role that we see from Black owned businesses throughout Memphis is that they have, and continue to be, a source of hope and pride for the Black community in the area. Business owners give the community hope, because as more Black owned businesses are successful, the community at large will be. After the Massacre, Church Sr. took charge and helped his community build their haven. Wells, Handy, and others helped Beale Street reach international recognition through their work in Music and Media. Using both of their talents to center black experiences and shaking the social landscape of America. Even though Crump in the end would ran a lot of business owners out of business, that didn’t stop them from still defying him and striving to do what they knew was best for the community. Before they left, these leaders fought every step of the way to try and make their impact on the community. Today many leaders are working hard trying to make an impact through their business or by helping more Black owned businesses be successful. These leaders serve as role models for many in the community. They serve as the example that if Church, Van Turner, Wells, Jimmie Tucker, or Floyd Turner can be successful in their jobs, then so can other Black people in the community. Seeing more and more successful Black owned businesses in Memphis means that the community is “proving every

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<sup>121</sup> Van Turner (Partner Bruce|Turner, PLLC) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>122</sup> Van Turner (Partner Bruce|Turner, PLLC) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

day that our black seeds keep on growing” and won’t be stopped no matter how much white resistance that face along the way.<sup>123</sup>

Some of the experiences may be unique to Memphis, however the effects of similar events can be seen across the national state of Black owned businesses. Today, the state of Black owned businesses is starting to progress, but still have a long way to go in order to reach its full potential in Memphis. With many dedicated leaders, these tasks aren’t as daunting as once was. Many leaders are putting a conscious effort to make an impact in their communities, whether it is by giving Black owned businesses more opportunities to not only start up but sustain, using their business influences in order to enter politics and make strides through that; or even by giving more and more African-Americans job; or even being in positions where the African-American youth can see role models making a difference in many job field and become inspired to pursue that later in life. We see for business leaders throughout Memphis history the goals are the same, but just different approaches to achieving them.

The success of Black owned business “means the success or the failure of Memphis as a vibrant economic growing community.”<sup>124</sup> These leaders have and continue to work in order to “design a better Memphis” for the Black community and the city as a whole.<sup>125</sup> This comes purely out of their love for Memphis. Their hope to see Memphis become better and “be the model for the country” and even the world.<sup>126</sup> Whether it is Archie Willis working on improving affordable housing, Robert Church Sr. helping create a Black community centered in Beale Street, Van Turner working his way into politics, Ida B. Wells fighting to break white narratives, Darrell Cobbins working on the economic expansion of businesses, or

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<sup>123</sup>Roby Williams (President of Black Business Association of Memphis) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>124</sup> Mark Yates (Chief Vision Officer of Black Business Association of Memphis) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>125</sup> Jimmie Tucker (Managing Principal and Co-Founder of Self + Tucker Architects) in discussion with the author, July 2018.

<sup>126</sup> Jozelle Booker (President and CEO at Mid-South Minority Business Council Continuum) in discussion with the author, July 2018.



even being a mentor and role model to kids and young adults. Black entrepreneurs have always and continue to make an impact in the community and elevate the African-American community in Memphis socially. With the success of Black business doesn't only fulfill the promise of the American Dream for owners, but for entire communities.