

# **Greetings from Jim Crow, New Jersey: Contesting the Meaning and Abandonment of Reconstruction in the Public and Commercial Spaces of Asbury Park, 1880-1890<sup>1</sup>**

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**History**

On the night of June 28, 1889, William Nelson, a black employee of an ice cream parlor, stood watching a carousel ride inside the Palace, an indoor amusement arcade located on the boardwalk of Asbury Park, New Jersey. When a white security guard attempted to remove him from the facility, Nelson fought back, prompting a physical altercation with the officer, John A. Krause, outside of the Palace premises. After both men were arrested and fined for the incident, Palace owner Ernie Schnitzler responded by restricting entrance into the pavilion to season ticket holders only, which, according to an account published in the town's *Shore Press*, were sold and distributed only to the Palace's white patrons. However, after immediate public protests from the town's African American community, Schnitzler reversed his decision and allowed the town's black citizens back into the Palace on a restricted and limited basis. Concluding its coverage of the altercation a few days later, the *Shore Press* predicted that "it is probable that no future trouble will result."<sup>2</sup>

For the summer residents of Asbury Park, the Palace served as the focal point of a shore community centered around leisure attractions. However, for Nelson—a black man in a resort town that increasingly sought to curb the public presence of African Americans—the Palace became one of many new public and commercial spaces that highlighted the emerging Jim Crow character of the Jersey shore after Reconstruction. In the Palace, as well as on the beaches, pavilions, promenades, boardwalks, bathing houses, skating parlors, and amusement arcades of Asbury Park, white and black residents waged both vocal and physical contests over the undefined and unreconstructed social landscape. Using both the Press and active participation to assert their ideas about public and private segregation, citizens' written accounts of social relations from both communities helped to highlight the undefined and unfixed public and commercial boundaries that existed during the period between the end of Reconstruction and the legal institutionalization of Jim Crow.<sup>3</sup>

Over the past few decades, literature on the subject of Republican-led Reconstruction has successfully contributed to a more complete record of the tensions between contested notions of political, social, and economic equality within southern

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<sup>1</sup> "Greetings from Asbury Park" was and remains the official slogan of the resort community. Musician Bruce Springsteen later adopted the slogan as the title of his first commercial album in 1973.

<sup>2</sup> *Shore Press*, "Palace Guard Incident," June 28, 1889.

<sup>3</sup> Both the Monmouth County Historical Society and The Asbury Park Public Library have assembled the bound versions of *The Asbury Park Press*, the *Daily Journal*, and the *Shore Press*.

communities. There now exists, for example, greater historical insight into how particular policies and struggles were played out within specific regions, states, and communities of the South.<sup>4</sup> Yet, aside from recent monographs addressing the tensions between political leaders of the North, very few works have addressed the equally contested nature of northern-style segregation by ordinary citizens. These citizens sought to revise the social boundaries of public and commercial space, particularly along the shore.<sup>5</sup> By examining the emergence of segregation in Asbury Park, this paper explores how moral and social values among white northerners influenced political policies toward African Americans, and how conflicting memories of the Civil War and Reconstruction by both groups made Asbury Park a battleground for social space, racial equality, and the construction of historical memory.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the late 1870's and 1880's, the social appeal of the Jersey shore, as well as the revivalist sentiment of American Methodism, drew a diverse crowd of Northern white and black travelers.<sup>7</sup> The combination of cheap land and convenient travel enabled businessmen like James A. Bradley, a brush manufacturer from New York and Asbury Park's founding father, to benefit from the untapped land along the coast. Seeking a spiritual and rehabilitative escape from his urban environment, James Bradley

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<sup>4</sup> Several prominent treatments include: Randolph B. Campbell, *Grassroots Reconstruction in Texas, 1865-1880*, (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1997). Randolph addresses various experiences of selected Texas counties and examines the political, economic, and legal methods and motives expressed and implemented by the white and black citizens of Texas. Other Southern treatments include, Robert Fischer, *The Segregation Struggle in Louisiana, 1862-1877*, (University of Illinois Press, 1972); Paul A. Simbala, *Under the Guardianship of the Nation: The Freedman's Bureau and the Reconstruction of Georgia, 1865-1870*, (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1997); Thomas Holt, *Black Over White: Negro Political Leadership in South Carolina During Reconstruction*, (University of Illinois Press, 1977); Peter Kolchin, *First Freedom: The Responses of Alabama's Blacks to Emancipation and Reconstruction*, (Greenwood Press, 1972); and Leslie A. Schwalm, "'Overrun with Free Negroes': Emancipation and Wartime Migration in the Upper Midwest," *Civil War History* 50.2 (2004) 145-174.

<sup>5</sup> C. Vann Woodward remarked in his classic account, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* that "one of the strangest things" regarding the appearance of segregation in the South was that it "was born in the North and reached an advanced age before moving to the South in force." While few historians have addressed the contested nature of Northern style seclusion among ordinary citizens, several prominent monographs have been produced on the internal dialogue among moderate and radical Republican leaders over the nature of Reconstruction policies. Some of these include: Edward Gambill, *Conservative Ordeal: Northern Democrats and Reconstruction, 1865-1868*, (1981); David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872*, (1981); Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Boundaries of American Political Culture in the Civil War Era*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> During the past several years, scholarship has focused particularly on the cultural and social characteristics of sectional reunion. Nina Silber, *Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); William Blair, *Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory of the Civil War in the South, 1865-1914*; and Judith Ann Giesberg, "'To Forgive and Forget': Reconstructing the Nation in the Post-Civil War Classroom," *Civil War History*, 52.3 (2006) 282-302.

<sup>7</sup> "Resorts and Recreation: An Historic Theme Study of the New Jersey Heritage Trail Route." Edited by Sarah Allaback, and produced by the Sandy Hook Foundation, Inc. and the National Park Service, *New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route*, (Mauricetown, NJ, 1995).

arrived in the small Methodist shore community of Ocean Grove in 1869 with his black companion, John A. Baker. After consulting with the town's Treasurer, David H. Brown, who pointed Bradley towards an unsettled section of land, Bradley and Baker proceeded to travel through a wilderness of shore brush that grew upon the uninhabited beaches. Reaching the water's edge and "desiring a bath," Bradley stripped off his clothes, and eagerly advised his reluctant companion to join him in the sand of the cool evening surf. A devout Methodist, Bradley explained that he found the cool waters of the Jersey surf to be "the best nervine for a man who is not absolutely past repair," and who "desires to break away from his calling or greed and camp out in the sea shore."<sup>8</sup> After Baker eventually joined him by his side, Bradley recounted later that he found the exercise reminiscent of "Robinson Crusoe by his man Friday."<sup>9</sup>

Satisfied of its spiritual and rehabilitative merits, Bradley purchased the area's 500 acres between Deal and Wesley Lake in 1871 with hopes of building a resort community that would both honor the principles of Bishop Francis Asbury—the founder of American Methodism—as well as provide a social outlet for similar groups of northern citizens seeking an escape from late nineteenth-century urban life. As Asbury Park's founding father, Bradley demanded strict compliance regarding temperance, spiritual renewal, and sexual purity in all of its public spaces.<sup>10</sup> In accordance with these demands, a host of strict ordinances were quickly established to root out unruly and morally-unacceptable social behavior. Anti-liquor decrees were written into all deeds issued to residential properties. Strict rules on bathing, along with appropriate clothing and social behavior, were posted in pamphlets along the boardwalk, and in accordance with observing the Sabbath, all businesses within the community, including the trains, the beach, and boardwalk, were closed on Sundays. However, while visitors to the neighboring Methodist camp of Ocean Grove abided politely by their own strict guidelines, Asbury Park's citizens rebelled constantly and vocally against Bradley's rules. Boisterous summer parties were put on by the Salvation Army's marching band; the black market of alcohol and other illicit activities thrived despite Bradley's watchful eye; and nighttime rendezvous between patrons on the restricted beaches all served to highlight Asbury Park's contested social atmosphere.<sup>11</sup>

The strict standards that Bradley created did not, however, deter visitors from flocking in droves to the Jersey shore in the 1880's. As a result of Bradley's ambitious desire to increase both the physical and economic value of the town, Asbury Park became

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<sup>8</sup> Many of the key components that comprised the social profile of the Jersey shore took its cues from those in England, which had highlighted for English nobility, the social advantages of mineral retreats. Similar shore communities sprang up in Newport, Rhode Island, Bristol, Pennsylvania, and Saratoga Springs, New York throughout the early Nineteenth Century. James A. Bradley, "A History of Asbury Park," *Asbury Park Journal*, 1882. See also, Asbury Park Library, "James A. Bradley and Asbury Park: A Biography and History," Pamphlet at the Asbury Park Library, Published under the Auspices of the Bradley Memorial Committee, 1921. The James A. Bradley Papers (1830-1921) have been collected and processed by Lois R. Densky, and Edited by Gregory J. Plunges at the Monmouth County Historical Society, 1981.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, "A History of Asbury Park"

<sup>10</sup> James A. Bradley, "Three Ways of Telling the History of Asbury Park," (Asbury Park, NJ: M.,W., and C. Pennypacker, 1887).

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Wolff, *4<sup>th</sup> of July, Asbury Park: A History of the Promised Land*, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005). The most complete history written on Asbury Park to date, Daniel Wolff pays special attention to the disparities between what Asbury Park promised and its political, social, cultural, and racial realities.

one of the elite and premiere resort towns on the Atlantic coast. By the early 1880s, tourist pamphlets and *The New York Times* were actively promoting Bradley's resort by listing the elite residents who regularly traveled to the shore community from their neighborhoods in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. By attracting and accommodating 26,000 summer guests and housing another 4,000 permanent residents, Bradley and Asbury Park fed the region's leisurely and moral impulses by creating an attractive mix of religion and social enticements for the North's urban white community.<sup>12</sup>

However, at the same time, white Northerners were not the only ones attracted to the newly-established shore retreat. When white travelers entered Bradley's beach town, they were immediately greeted by Asbury Park's other population—the group of African American men and women who worked as hotelmen, laundresses, waiters, and janitors in Bradley's service economy. Arriving in Asbury Park for employment, recreation, and spiritual reconstruction, the *Asbury Park Press* noted in 1882 that outside of Bradley's commercial and residential district, a second community of black residents and other assorted working-class citizens had settled in a community known as the "West End." African Americans of the West End established schools and churches, and served as hosts for black tourists who regularly visited Asbury Park from Newark, Jersey City, Philadelphia, and New York as part of the African Methodist Church's annual sea shore "jubilees."<sup>13</sup>

While white tourists accepted the presence of African Americans as members of the working service class, they persistently objected to sitting next them on trains, lounging alongside them in the surf, and watching the men flirt with white women. As a result, by the early 1880s the physical and economic growth of Bradley's beach town, along with the rapid pace with which its secular and commercial identity outgrew its

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<sup>12</sup> *The New York Times*, "Summer at the Seaside: The Growing Attractiveness of the New Jersey Coast," April 14, 1882. The article lists the elite citizens who flocked to the shore from their aristocratic communities in neighboring New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia. The article pays particular attention to Bradley and the increased attractiveness and development of Asbury Park. For further information on the social and economic development of the New Jersey shore in the nineteenth century, see also, Harold F. Wilson, *The Jersey Shore: A Social and Economic History of the Counties of Atlantic, Cape May, Monmouth, and Ocean*, (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1953). An updated and more comprehensive version was produced by Wilson in 1964; Harold F. Wilson, *The Story of the Jersey Shore*, (Princeton: D. Vann Nostrand Co., Inc., 1964); John T. Cunningham, *The New Jersey Shore*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1958). Nineteenth century observations are provided for in the works by Gustav Kobbe, *The New Coast and Pines*, (Shore Hills, NJ, 1889, reprint, Baltimore: Gateway Press, 197); Edwain Salter, *A History of Monmouth and Ocean Counties*, (Bayonne, NJ: E. Gardner and Son, 1890); and H.C. Woolman and T.F. Rose, *Historical Atlas of the New Jersey Coast*, (Philadelphia: Woolman and Rose, 1878).

<sup>13</sup> *Asbury Park Press*, "West Side Story: Profile of a Black Community," special report, May 21, 1882. The article explains and details the growing African American population settling in Asbury Park's "West End." For a brief history of the African American experience in New Jersey see, Giles Simon, *Afro Americans in New Jersey History: A Shore History*, (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, Dept. of State, 1988); and Clement A. Price, *Freedom Not Far Distant: A Documentary History of Afro Americans in New Jersey: A Joint Project of the New Jersey Historical Society and the New Jersey Historical Commission*, (Newark: The Society, 1980). For an excellent history on the African American experience during slavery in Monmouth County, see Graham Russell Hodges, *Slavery and Freedom In the Rural North: African Americans in Monmouth County, New Jersey, 1665-1865*, (Madison, Wisconsin: Madison House Publishers, Inc., 1997).

humble spiritual origins, led to heightened racial tension within the community described by the *New York Times* as enjoying “greater social mobility than at Long Branch or at any other place along the coast.”<sup>14</sup>

In an attempt to purge the assembly of working class and “average” persons who mingled about freely after working hours, Bradley’s white guests began calling for permanently-enforced social and racial boundaries for their public sphere. In the town’s *Daily Journal* on July 7, 1885, an editorial pointed out that the “average man is easily distinguishable,” and insisted that the mass of “curiosities that have taken their position under the pavilion (white as well as black) be removed.”<sup>15</sup> However, in a follow up article ten days later, the *Daily Journal* narrowed their objections to the black citizens of Asbury Park, who, according to the complaint, “hang, intruding themselves in places designed only for guests, monopolizing the promenade, pavilion, and seats, and not content with that they come on excursions by the train load, and some days the whole beach is given up to them.”<sup>16</sup> A white visitor from New York lamented to the *Journal* that in his excursion into Asbury Park, he confronted first hand the “evils” of black servants who served as waiters, cooks, and dishwashers in Bradley’s resort community. The unidentified “Hotel Man” observed that on trains from New York and Philadelphia, as well as on the benches and seats at train depots, a sizable black faction had seemed to “regard themselves as owners of all below the sky and are offensive and indecent.”<sup>17</sup>

For the northern white elite, Asbury Park’s racial division, particularly the distinct ways in which it visibly and vocally flaunted its emerging Jim Crow persona, became one of the town’s main attractions and its primary selling point to prospective tourists. Observing the town’s social relations in 1892, Stephen Crane, the famous literary critic and resident of Asbury Park, remarked that the guests of Bradley’s resort came not for the “sea nor the cacophonous brass bands,” but rather “the people come to see the people, for there is joy in the heart of the crowd.”<sup>18</sup> Documenting the persistence of racial segregation in twentieth-century Atlantic City, historian Bryant Simon has similarly pointed out that while white northerners may have “objected to legal, southern-style segregation, when it came to public space—their public spaces—they demanded

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<sup>14</sup> *New York Times*, “The Colored Controversy,” July 20, 1885. See also, Stephen Crane, “Crowding Into Asbury Park,” *The New York Tribune*, July 3, 1892. Crane served as a shore correspondent for the *Tribune* during the summer resort season.

<sup>15</sup> *The Daily Journal*, “Impudents,” July 7, 1885; *The Shore Press*, “Two Distinct Factions,” October 22, 1885.

<sup>16</sup> *The Daily Journal*, “Too Many Colored People,” July 17, 1885. *New York Times*, “Their Jubilee Day,” July 21, 1887. The *Times* correspondent details the events of the African “jubilee” including the refusal of service in the bathing houses. “They were told that they could not be accommodated. In every case the refusal was taken in good spirits. When it rained the colored people ran into the pavilions on the beach for shelter, but were quiet and orderly all through the storm.” The *Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia) also provided several accounts of what was referred to as the “African Methodist Day” at both Ocean Grove and Asbury Park. *The Christian Recorder*, “African Methodist Day at Ocean Grove,” July 29, 1886. *The Christian Recorder* was an independent black newspaper that operated under the auspices of the A.M.E. Church of Philadelphia and published several detailed accounts throughout the period on the racial and social tension in Asbury Park

<sup>17</sup> *The Daily Journal*, “What Can Be Done?” July 21, 1885. Many who objected to the appearance of blacks upon the public spaces of Asbury Park labeled their behavior as “evil.” The reference was routinely used throughout the editorial pages of the *Journal*.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Crane, “On the Jersey Coast,” *New York Tribune*, July 24, 1892.

seclusion.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, the problem that the *Journal* termed “Too Many Colored People” did not represent an objection by white northerners to the political or legal enfranchisement of black citizens, but rather to the social intermingling of African Americans in the public spaces of white patrons. “We allow them to vote, to have full standing and protection of the law,” the *Journal* instructed, “but when it comes to social intermingling then we object most seriously and emphatically.” As one white resident more succinctly explained, “This is a white people’s resort and it derives its support from white people.”<sup>20</sup>

Bradley and his summer guests sought to create public space by clinging to pre-war notions of racial and class separation. Uncomfortable with the way that the post-war political and social climate had diverged into a program for black Civil Rights, Northern society reminisced fondly over a time when political, social, and racial unrest had been muted by slavery and more oppressive forms of class subordination. Thus, by stripping the town of its former spiritual and rehabilitative identity, Asbury Park’s summer guests created social and racial barriers that helped fight back the socially contested spaces of their own northern towns. Moreover, by constructing a distinct brand of social seclusion based on race and class, they also helped create a commercialized system of division in which social and moral values informed and sustained both political and economic decisions on appropriate forms of public space.<sup>21</sup>

Northern white visitors to Bradley’s beaches attached commercial value to the public spaces of the Jersey shore by adding or subtracting economic value based on the public presence of African Americans. As the *New York Times* wrote during the summer of 1887, the majority of summer vacationers in Asbury Park “object[ed] to the mere presence even of well behaved and well conducted colored people to any considerable number, on a beach to which they go for recreation.”<sup>22</sup> Responding to a question from the *Daily Journal* as to whether or not black citizens possessed the right to enter into the public spaces occupied by white vacationers, Bradley explained that “people who make their living out of Asbury Park” are excluded from the rights of those whose presence is paid for, because as both “colored citizens” and as “servants,” their presence lessens the attraction to white tourists and therefore threatens the *economic* value of the community. “The question of color or rights,” Bradley informed, was not “to enter into consideration.”<sup>23</sup> To prove his point, he provided the example of several families who left the park, because they could not “endure the crowds of Africans infesting every promenade and public space, day and evening with their presence.”<sup>24</sup> In their cities and in their homes, Bradley pointed out, “they do not associate with their servants and they

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<sup>19</sup> Bryant Simon, *Boardwalk of Dreams: Atlantic City and the Fate of Urban America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Much like the emerging history in Asbury Park, Simon ties the rise and fall of Atlantic City to the social and economic structure created by racial segregation and white middle-class values.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, “Too Many Colored People.” See also, *The Daily Journal*, “All Nuisances,” July 7, 1887.

<sup>21</sup> Forms of commercialized segregation within the North according to Richard Bushman were not necessarily a phenomena specific to the late nineteenth century, but were part of a longer lineage of moral and economic consolidation by late eighteenth and nineteenth century urban elites who commercialized aristocratic, European notions of “refinement” and gentility” in order to create “patches of elegance.” Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, (New York: Knopf, 1992. 356.

<sup>22</sup> *New York Times*, “Africa and Asbury Park,” July 7, 1887.

<sup>23</sup> *The Daily Journal*, “Intruders,” July 29, 1886. Although Bradley was not mentioned by name, he was referenced as “the man very prominently identified with this place.”

<sup>24</sup> *The Daily Journal*, “It Must Be Stopped,” July 30, 1886.

do not desire to do so when they arrive at the seashore.”<sup>25</sup> John Coffin, who took over for Bradley as editor of the *Daily Journal* in 1885, responded to those who criticized the paper for inflaming racial tension by insisting that “perhaps people who have not been troubled with such a disagreeable monopolization of both private and public places by Negroes will think our action harsh and unjustifiable.” Yet, Coffin warned, “something must be done or we cannot induce visitors to come here.”<sup>26</sup>

However, there was not just the question of class to consider, but also of the black tourist population who lobbied for consistent access to Asbury Park’s public accommodations. In order to appease these black tourists who regularly visited Bradley’s beaches, white citizens persistently called on Bradley to erect public spaces and establishments that would cater solely to the interests of its black residents. Criticizing the “colored invasion” of its space, one objector in the *Daily Journal* asked whether “Mr. Bradley could be persuaded to build a pavilion for their use and locate it in the immediate neighborhood.”<sup>27</sup> Offering up a similar solution, the *Philadelphia Call* in 1887 published a lengthy article, calling on the black proprietors of Asbury Park and neighboring black businessmen to open up a resort of their own. Remarking that it was “strange that the colored people of the North have not taken hold of this color question in a practical way,” the paper instructed potential black entrepreneurs that there was “money as well as dignity in the scheme if properly managed.” The article explained that of “course the color line will be obliterated in time,” but that blacks should not wait for its transformation to occur.<sup>28</sup>

In a temporary measure initiated in 1885, Bradley responded to the objections voiced by his white patrons by relocating the black population to facilities set up exclusively for their own recreation. W.H. Dickerson, an outspoken critic of the town’s racial dialogue and a citizen of Asbury Park’s black neighborhood, lamented to the *Daily Journal* that in skating parlors and other amusements, blacks were barred from white establishments through the creation of “colored facilities,” which were run, Dickerson remarked with anger, for the interests of only “Asbury Park’s colored population and vicinity.”<sup>29</sup> By 1887, however, Bradley responded by officially restricting all African Americans, both those who worked as well as those who sought to vacation in Asbury Park, from the beaches and other shore facilities. By posting signs throughout the community and stationing officers at pertinent shore locations, Bradley prohibited all black citizens from the beaches, bathing houses, pavilions, and promenades.<sup>30</sup>

Securing compliance from Asbury Park’s black residents, however, proved troublesome for both Bradley and his guests when black residents used their lack of access to the elite white spaces to actively resist new forms of exclusion. By rejecting the restrictions imposed against them, as well as calling for the creation of an independent

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<sup>25</sup> *The Daily Journal*, “Letter from Wiesbaden,” August 17, 1886. Vacationing at a German watering spa, as he was often inclined to do, Bradley explained that racial and social exclusion was standard protocol in European resorts, and thus should not be frowned upon by those in Asbury Park. J.H. Morgan, “Asbury Park Color Question,” *Christian Recorder*, August 3, 1893.

<sup>26</sup> *New York Times*, “Drawing the Color Line: Negroes Who Offend the Residents of Asbury Park,” July 19, 1885.

<sup>27</sup> *The Daily Journal*, “Colored Invasion,” August 5, 1886

<sup>28</sup> *Philadelphia Call*, “An Asbury Park of Their Own,” June 29, 1887

<sup>29</sup> WM H. Dickerson, “For Our Colored Friends,” *The Daily Journal*, July 8, 1885.

<sup>30</sup> *Shore Press*, “Bradley Statement,” July 8, 1887

black resort, African Americans insisted on their inclusion in Asbury Park's public life through both vocal and physical resistance.<sup>31</sup> Guided by the leadership of the A.M.E. Church of West Asbury Park, the community's indignant parishioners helped lead and organize continuous rallies, demonstrations, and public meetings.<sup>32</sup> Objecting to the ways that the white members of the community linked the public presence of black residents to indecent social behavior, African American leaders spoke predominantly to the moral and social responsibility of the resort town to allow free and uninterrupted integration.

At a large meeting held at the A.M.E. Church of West Asbury Park in the summer of 1887, Reverend J. Francis Robinson called on his congregation to attack "all class legislation and race distinction where the statutes of citizenship and of good behavior introduce the common right." Robinson declared that the "man who advocates the separation of whites and blacks from the equal enjoyment of civil prerogatives solely on the grounds of color places himself in a position to be questioned as to his patriotic proclivities and the genuineness of a Republic form of government."<sup>33</sup> Reflecting on the "color question" and the idea of moral responsibility, Reverend J.H. Morgan also asked whether the moral and civic lapses by a few people of a given class could be held against an entire race. Morgan commented that,

It does seem strange that so many of our friends on the other side do not seem able to distinguish any difference between colored people as regards to moral, religion or the right of manhood; and those of them who admit it seem to view it in the same light as the boy who visited the country fair and saw a cow that looked for all the world like his father's cow. You could not tell them apart, only one was white and other black. 'All colored people are alike' seems to be the maxim (especially if there is finance to be considered) either by action against us or indifference for us.<sup>34</sup>

Andrew J. Chambers of the *Colored American* also asked if the color line could be drawn on the basis of conduct, and pressed as to why then white people did not object to the presence of colored servants as servants.<sup>35</sup> As G.W. Johnson, a waiter in Asbury Park's Sheldon House, instructed, "If a white man acts boisterous, rude, or ungentlemanly, he is arrested and/or fined." Yet, Johnson attested, "the white people as a class are not blamed for the actions of one man."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *New York Times*, "To Invade the Beach," June 30, 1887.

<sup>32</sup> *New York Times*, "Defending Their Race," July 20, 1885; *New York Times*, "Color Line at Asbury Park: Negroes Indignant at Threatened Exclusion from the Beach," June 25, 1887; and *The Shore Press*, "250 People," July 1, 1887.

<sup>33</sup> *New York Times*, "Answering Mr. Bradley: Colored People at Asbury Park Speak Out In Meeting," June 28, 1887.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, "Asbury Park Colored Question"

<sup>35</sup> Andrew J. Chambers, "A.J. Chambers and 'The Journal'," *The Christian Recorder*, August 6, 1885. *Ibid*, *Answering Mr. Bradley*. The Principal of the Black School, Professor Newsome, stated in a written resolution read for the members assembled at the mass meeting that "we herein request Mr. Bradley and his colleagues in their further utterances to specify more definitely the class to whom they infer." The resolution was commented upon by J.R. Anrean, editor of the New York based *Enterprise*, who also condemned the rhetoric and actions of James Bradley.

<sup>36</sup> G.W. Johnson, "From a Colored Man's View," *The Daily Journal*, July 21, 1885.



To bolster their support from the town's white citizens, the black ministry also called on community members to be vigilant in enforcing superior moral and civic behavior of black citizens. They appealed for Bradley to restrict the behavior of both the white and black citizens whose actions betrayed Asbury Park's code of conduct. As W.M. Dickerson instructed, the "right thing to do is to weed out all bad characters, whether they be covered by a white or a black skin." In response to the forms of commercial exclusion instituted by Bradley, Dickerson also made it a point to discredit the notion that economic status defines an individual's morality. "Let the necessity of labor never take away a persons claim to respectability. Ones financial ability to board at a hotel and dress well is not criterion of ones moral worth."<sup>37</sup>

Viewing the shifting racial landscape throughout the nation, Asbury Park's black leaders saw the resort's emerging Jim Crow character as part of a disturbing nationwide trend toward racially-defined public and commercial boundaries. In recounting the unofficial means by which skating parlors were segregated in 1885, W.H. Dickerson insisted that blacks should look cautiously towards their allegiance with Northern Republican leaders. "When we are called on as 'our colored friends,'" Dickerson explained, "there is always a purpose to serve as tools or instruments. We would ask those who for many years have been using us to further their plans and fill their coffers, if they think we will always remain docile subjects to their dictation and the plain minions of their selfish interests."<sup>38</sup> Mirroring the complaints expressed by black protesters throughout the nation after emancipation, Reverend Robinson reminded the town's white audience of the achievements and struggles of African American men who fought to preserve the Union. "We are here," he exclaimed, "to defend our citizenship and our manhood." He reiterated to the white members of the audience that:

We colored people fought for our liberty some year ago, and we do not propose to be denied it at this late date. We will not be dictated to in this manner by Mr. Bradley or any other man. The colored man contributes largely to the wealth of this country, including the town of Asbury Park, and we are here to stay. We fought to save the Union as the white man did. This country is for the whites and blacks alike, including even the beach of Asbury Park.<sup>39</sup>

Through the black community's national appeals for racial justice, interested Americans (white as well as black, Northern and Southern) used the events of Asbury Park as justification both for and against racial separation in their own communities. The *New York Times*, the daily periodicals of Philadelphia, the opinions of the African American press, and those as far south as Georgia intensified their coverage of the events of Asbury Park as a result of the publicity created by Asbury's black residents. *The New York Times* in particular took a growing interest in the local issues of Asbury Park. After interviewing the town's white and black residents, the *Times* commissioned several

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<sup>37</sup> W.M. Dickerson, "A Colored Man's View," *Daily Journal*, August 12, 1886.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, "For Our Colored Friends," For examples of African American disenchantment with the Republican Party, see August Meier, "The Negro and the Democratic Party, 1875-1915," *Phylon* (1940-1956), Vol. 17, No. 2 (2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter, 1956), 173-191. Meier outlines how prominent African American leaders immediately after Reconstruction began calling for more political independence and for splitting their votes between the Republican and Democratic Parties.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, "Answering Mr. Bradley"

correspondents to cover the debate between the two communities throughout the decade. Asbury's white residents, however, denounced the appearance of the *Times* reporters for intruding and unequally siding with the "indignant colored ministry."<sup>40</sup>

Likewise, debates over public space also prompted those in the south to consider whether their protests against racial integration were particular to their region. A white southern congressman protesting public school integration in Georgia in 1892 routinely referenced the passions expressed by black and white citizens in Asbury Park to support a bill legalizing segregation in public schools. In a particularly revealing argument, he noted that the "loudest protests against the infraction of this law have come from the North," which was proven, he explained, by the "Asbury Park matter."<sup>41</sup> The comparison was not lost on Asbury Park's black leaders, who took care to point out the similarities of the debate within both regions. In a short speech protesting the emerging segregation in Asbury Park, Robinson spoke of the discriminatory language of the *Daily Journal*, whose resentment and prejudice, Robinson noted, commissioned "one to think it was edited in Georgia." Robinson explained that "at a place set apart for temperance and religion we witness a spectacle that should shame the boasted civilization of the North. Let us devote ourselves to stripping off false religious sentiment and hypocritical philanthropy, that we may expose before the people just how far race hatred can go in New Jersey."<sup>42</sup> Fellow A.M.E. Minister, Rev. H.H. Monroe of St. Mark's Church similarly remarked that talk of exclusion and separation "would be bulldozing if it was reported from Texas." He insisted that if the black population was not provided with equal and sustainable access to the same public facilities as whites, including the beach, that in the post-war North, "the ante-war spirit of race distinction still prevailed. Every act of intolerance," Monroe pointed out, "has had its match in the North."<sup>43</sup>

As Bradley and his white citizens proved in Asbury Park, it was not just white southerners who objected to racial equality. Instead, the conversation about Asbury Park not only became a referendum on Northern prejudice, but among white residents it represented a broader rejection of Black Civil Rights and a forceful repudiation of the Radical Republican agenda. David Blight has insightfully recounted that "during Reconstruction, many Americans increasingly realized that remembering the way the war was fought, even the hatreds and deaths on a hundred battlefields—facing all those graves on Memorial Day—became over time, easier than struggling over the enduring ideas for which those battles had been fought."<sup>44</sup> In 1887, one Asbury Park resident left little doubt as to his interpretation of the events in the post-war era. Writing in the *Daily Journal*, this patron of Bradley's resort stated that the effort to provide political and legal aid to black citizens was a paternal and "generous aid" provided by the "Christian spirit of right-minded white men."<sup>45</sup> The Constitutional amendments which followed

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<sup>40</sup> *New York Times*, "Asbury Park's Warfare: Colored People in Mass Meeting Denouncing Mr. Bradley's Action," July 6, 1887

<sup>41</sup> *New York Times*, "The Color Line In School: An Effort to Draw It Sharply in Georgia," July 26, 1887. The "Glen Bill" was introduced by a Georgia congressman who sought to prevent the co-education between white and black school children. Mr. Glenn routinely based his support for the bill by asking whether or not "prejudice against the Colored people is peculiar to the South?"

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, "Asbury Park's Warfare"

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, *Race and Reunion*, 31

<sup>45</sup> *The Daily Journal*, "The Offenders," June 29, 1887

Emancipation and the Civil Rights Acts extended by the Republican Congress were soon replaced, the individual explained, by the ungrateful attitude of African Americans who clamored for social equality. “There were those among the colored race,” he insisted, “who were not satisfied with what had already been done, but wanted more. It was not enough to possess all the rights and privileges as white citizens, but those rights must be insolently demanded.” The citizen lectured that by such a course “respect and equality can never be gained.” He concluded that only through passive acceptance of the current social standing could the cultural stereotypes accompanying black grievances be eliminated.<sup>46</sup>

For many years, scholars of the Civil War era marked the end of Reconstruction in 1877. As a result, historians approached the involvement of the North by questioning how and why Republican rule ultimately failed in the south.<sup>47</sup> However, most of these studies fail to consider how northern communities adjusted to black emancipation after the war, and how they, like the South, used the divisive years of congressional reconstruction to reject racial and social equality. The situation in Asbury Park thus offers historians the opportunity to consider how conflicts over memory paralleled the emerging dialogue over access to public space. In his recent study on the South’s remembered past, historian Fitzhugh Brundage notes the emergence of Southern historical tourism as a vehicle through which the South recreated the history of race and politics. He points out that “the tourist South became a stage on which southerners presented the South both as they wanted to see it and as they imagined tourists wanted to experience it.”<sup>48</sup> In addition, Brundage explains that the region’s “stable, harmonious, time honored racial order that properly fixed whites and blacks in their appropriate place” only drew attention “when it achieved the northern and transatlantic standards of beauty that obsessed its tourists.”<sup>49</sup> In Asbury Park, Northern travelers justified their social order by fixing it within a pristine national environment unscathed by the inconvenient memories of the town’s black residents.

Brundage’s arguments regarding the ways in which Southern tourist attractions were modeled after Northern resort communities also contributes to scholarship regarding issues of race and class in the northern urban or built environment. Since the South observed the Northern resort towns’ example as a model for its own tourist attractions, Asbury Park helps then reveal the origins of the twentieth century’s racially and ethnically excluded urban profile that took root in the late nineteenth century. As elite white citizens sought a retreat from new forms of urban living, Asbury Park’s racial exclusion, class conflict, moral elitism, and commercialized decadence, resulting (as Jackson Lears argues) from an anti-modernist impulse, all found their forms within the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> These traditional revisionist political narratives include, among the most prominent: C. Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966); William Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction: A Political History, 1867-1978*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); and Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1988).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, *The Southern Past*, 184

<sup>49</sup> Similar to the economic justifications assisting the public segregation of Northern African American citizens in Asbury Park, Brundage asserts that the powerful “white cultural and political ambitions-to create public spaces that at once demonstrated and justified their power-were advanced by powerful market forces.” (pp.226). Ibid, 188 and 210.

melting pot of conflicting political, social, and economic ideologies that emerged throughout the North during and after Reconstruction.<sup>50</sup>

At the same time, for the African American men and women of Asbury Park, various forms of social protest provide poignant examples of how their citizens and assorted black tourists opposed, reacted, and sometimes successfully resisted their seclusion from the beaches and other public domains. While many narratives stress the overarching power of white citizens in trumping the political rights and social privileges of African Americans, blacks living and working along the shore made sure that the policies were loudly contested. Despite the presence of signs prohibiting their access, Reverend J. Francis Robinson informed a congregation of black protesters in 1887 that they should continue to resist their seclusion by flocking to the beaches after hours. After many blacks heeded his calls, Robinson found that African Americans mingled freely with each other, as well as with other working class citizens of the town.<sup>51</sup> As Robinson informed the *Daily Journal* in 1887, “The fact is that neither the paper nor Mr. Bradley can keep us off the beach. I went down there last night and saw some elegant colored ladies. There were Chinamen there too, and Italians.” Through these displays of civil disobedience by the black community, Bradley was forced by 1890, as Schnitzler was pressured to do in 1889 after the Palace incident, to allow temporary and restricted access to the beaches for African American tourists.<sup>52</sup>

As the uneasy period between the end of Reconstruction and the legal enforcement of Jim Crow style segregation proved in Asbury Park, disputes over public space set the stage for a prolonged battle over both the regions’ social space and its historical memory. Whites and blacks created and contested public and social life in Asbury Park as they synthesized the broader meaning of emancipation and the terms of equality—two key concepts that had been inadequately addressed in the wake of the Reconstruction’s collapse. Since Asbury Park served as a Diaspora for the North’s geographically-diverse white citizens, their protests against integration highlights the racist and unreconstructed sentiment of the North after emancipation. As Jim Crow became permanently enforced throughout the North and the South after 1896, these tensions would prove central to African American’s struggle for “integrated leisure,” which became an important part of the fight for racial equality and social acceptance. The rhetoric of equality and moral superiority was thus abandoned by white politicians and northern citizens, who, in the aftermath of Reconstruction’s collapse, sought to publicly and commercially separate themselves from their fellow black citizens.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>T.J. Jackson Lears locates the center of the “late nineteenth century bourgeois” with a morality grounded in “material and moral progress” that served as a preventive measure against modern industrial life. This transformation in anti-modern culture, as dated by Lears, conforms to the formative years of Asbury Park’s racial tension as well as the legally mandated early years of Jim Crow. T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Anti-Modernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). For a comprehensive view of the racial and class components of the “New Urban History,” see: Timothy Gilfoyle, “White Cities, Linguistic Turns, and Disneylands: The New Paradigms of Urban History,” *Reviews in American History*, No. 26 (March 1998) 175-204. Gilfoyle provides the most complete survey of the prominent literature that has been produced during the past 25 years.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, “*Asbury Park’s Warfare*”

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>53</sup> In an attempt by African American and urban historians to “rethink the Civil Rights movement” by “expanding the regional and chronological boundaries,” Victoria Wolcott has written on the ways in which African Americans fought for integrated amusement parks and other leisure establishments during the

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