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Introduction

For Fiscal Year 1991 the Delaware State Review Board for Historic Preservation placed a priority on developing a historic context framework that would help set future funding priorities for the identification, evaluation, and registration of the significant historical resources associated with the minority experience in Delaware. The Review Board established this priority because the historic resources that manifest the minority experience in Delaware (particularly those related to African-Americans) are scant in number, highly perishable, and very threatened. The same historic, cultural, and economic forces that kept minority groups in a socially and economically subservient position also dictated that those minority groups would have meager material resources. Those resources that were created have been lost at a much greater rate than resources related to the larger society.

The Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering received a matching funds grant to undertake the following tasks:

1) establish an advisory committee to recommend an outline for a historic context and to frame a long-range research agenda to guide the identification and evaluation of minority historic resources;

2) sponsor, with the advisory committee, a statewide workshop to discuss which of the issues related to the minority experience in Delaware should be given the highest priority in the development of a historic context;

3) make recommendations to the State Review Board on research priorities for developing the minority historic context and for future projects related to the identification, evaluation, and registration of historic resources related to the minority experience in Delaware.

After the first meeting of the advisory committee, the group concluded that, since the predominant minority group in the state was African-Americans, the project should focus on developing the historic context and priorities for that particular group, with the intent of providing a model that could be used for the study of any other minority group in the state.
Role of the Advisory Committee

In consultation with Bureau of Archaeology and Historic Preservation staff and Harmon Carey (Executive Director of the Afro-American Historical Society of Delaware), the members of the Advisory Committee were selected in August 1990. The membership list is included as Appendix A. The committee met on September 13 and November 28, 1990, to consider the priority research topics for developing an African-American historic context, and on January 15, 1991, to plan the workshop. The workshop was held on February 16, 1991, as part of the "Fourth Annual Conference on African American History and Teachers Training Institute" at Delaware State College in Dover, Delaware.

Defining Minorities and Ethnic Groups in Delaware

At its first meeting, the committee identified the primary minorities in Delaware--ranked in order of their proportion of the population--as African-Americans, Native Americans, and ethnic groups (e.g., Italian-Americans, Polish-Americans, Greek-Americans).

Between the first and second committee meetings, it was learned that the National Register of Historic Places labels one of its areas of significance as "Ethnic Heritage," defining it as "the history of persons having a common ethnic or racial identity." "Black" is a subcategory of "Ethnic Heritage," defined as "persons having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa;" "Native Americans" are "persons having origins in any of the original peoples of North America."

At its second meeting the committee agreed that the title of the broad historic context in the state preservation plan should be changed from "The Minority Experience in Delaware" to "Ethnic Heritage in Delaware." The subcontexts would be "African-Americans," "Native Americans", and so on.
The Nature of African-American Resources

The National Register of Historic Places is concerned with material objects that reflect or embody significant historical aspects of American society, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture. These include individual buildings, structures, or sites, and historic districts formed from neighborhoods, towns, and/or landscapes. The historic resources associated with African-Americans in Delaware reflect their characteristics and experiences in the state in the following ways:

1. The physical historic resources associated with African-Americans are few, reflecting their small numbers both as a group as well as a percentage of the larger Delaware population.

2. These resources are also few because African-Americans have historically been the poorest of the state's residents.

3. Many of the architectural resources related to the experience of African-Americans as immigrants to the city of Wilmington have been recognized by the National Register for the significance of their original builders and residents but their connection to African-Americans has been ignored.

4. Settlement patterns for African-Americans have been heavily influenced by discrimination; as discriminatory barriers are eroded, many of the areas once inhabited by African-Americans are disappearing.

5. A smaller percentage of historic resources related to African-Americans survive than ones related to the larger population. In many cases, these resources were demolished because they were of little value for the real estate market or to the larger society, or because they represented obstacles to goals of slum clearance, downtown revitalization, and urban renewal.

6. It is difficult to evaluate the significance of African-American resources because many of the documents that could be used to interpret the context of the resources still remain scattered among family collections.

7. Many of the historic resources related to the African-American experience in Delaware continue to be threatened by development.
Major Themes for Research

The following subjects were identified by the advisory committee as high priorities for development in a historic context on African-Americans in Delaware.

Demographic history and settlement patterns. This section would include discussion of African-American towns and neighborhoods, community formation and maintenance, community organization, women, slave and free black populations, housing patterns, and the Underground Railroad.

Research on this theme would look closely at the sociological factors that influenced the settlement patterns of African-Americans in Delaware while identifying African-American communities and resources that have disappeared or been destroyed by urban renewal, highway construction projects, or institutional expansion.

Women were emphasized as an important issue not only as they relate to demography, but also because of their key roles in community maintenance, religious organizations, and the education of children.

Religion. The role of churches as community organizations was identified as extremely important both for the way they defined a community but also because churches are often the last recognizable marker for an African-American town or neighborhood.

Education. Like churches, African-American schools (particularly the Dupont schools) are good markers of the location of African-American communities. They were also an important institution involved with the maintenance and continuity of the African-American identity.

Economics. Subthemes for this subject should include slavery, employment practices, trades, apprenticeships, artisans and craftsmen, agriculture, possession of taxable wealth (including real estate and livestock), and the migration of the African-American population to the city with the onslaught of industrialization.
Threatened Resources

During the discussion of the major themes appropriate for a context on African-Americans in Delaware, a concern was expressed about the large number of African-American related resources that are currently threatened by development, demolition, or neglect. Priorities for funding, it was felt, needed to address the problem of balancing long-term research on various themes against the need for short-term preservation action.

In identifying threatened resources, the committee was concerned less with specific kinds of buildings and more with types of threats and threatened locations. Non-residential buildings were seen as far more threatened than residential buildings because they tended to be in continued use. Deterioration and abandonment in remote rural areas and deterioration in urban areas were also cited as a threats.

Documentary resources, such as family papers and photographs, are threatened because they have not been systematically collected and preserved. Important oral histories and ethnographic resources are disappearing rapidly as senior members of the African-American community die.
Workshop on African-American Resources

The workshop was held on February 16, 1991, and was led by David Ames (Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering), Harmon Carey (Afro-American Historical Society of Delaware), and Steven Del Sordo (Bureau of Archeology and Historic Preservation. A copy of the agenda is attached as Appendix B. Opening presentations provided information on the state historic preservation planning process, the National Register of Historic Places, and African-American historic resources already listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The themes recommended by the advisory committee were presented and discussed. While the workshop participants agreed that all of the themes were important, they placed a high priority on churches and cemeteries because of the central role these resources play in African-American communities.

As with the advisory committee, there was great concern over the rate at which historic resources were being lost. The workshop participants thought individual homes were being lost most rapidly, followed by neighborhoods and towns. The participants felt that the most threatened resources should be targeted as the highest priority for preservation activities, regardless of the type of building.

The workshop participants also supported the committee's desire to establish a method for collecting manuscript materials, including community, family, and local histories.
Major Recommendations

The nature of African-American historic resources and the ways they are threatened have influenced the recommendations in this report. On the one hand, there is an immediate need to develop a statewide historic context for African-Americans in Delaware, focused primarily on settlement patterns and demographic changes. The context itself would be an important element in preserving the African-American experience in Delaware before the physical evidence is lost and the memory disappears.

At the same time, it is important to take action to identify, evaluate, register, and preserve those resources that are associated with the African-American experience in Delaware. For these reasons, we are recommending a series of specific projects that should be added to the funding priorities for the Historic Preservation Fund. Not all of the projects could be attempted immediately; some are dependent upon the completion of other projects. The list is presented in priority order.

1. Development of a statewide African-American Historic Context under the historic theme of Settlement Patterns & Demographic Change with subthemes of Religion/Community Organizations and Education. We are recommending that the initial historic context for the African-American experience in Delaware be written under the theme of Settlement Patterns and Demographic Change. Since relatively little research has been done on the African-American population itself and little of their heritage remains on the landscape physically, the most important first step in developing a historic context would be to understand the demography of the African-American population and their settlement patterns as they evolved over time. The identification of specific settlement patterns will help to pinpoint the possible location of archeological resources.

The demographic analysis may also reveal the influence played by discrimination in the creation of this historically segregated pattern of settlement. As part of the current project, we have written a profile of the demographic history of African-Americans in Delaware
between 1800 to 1980. It is included as Appendix C. Historically, the central institutions in African-American communities have been churches, serving their communities not only as houses of worship but as the focal point of political and social relationships. Therefore it is recommended that Religion and Community Organizations be developed as a single subtheme.

* The demographic component should establish a framework for further research on topics raised by the committee including the role of women, education, and sociological factors influencing settlement patterns

* The settlement pattern component should identify African-American towns, neighborhoods, and rural settlement concentrations, as well as the role of settlements in the Underground Railroad

* The religion/community organizations subtheme should deal with the role of churches as community institutions

* The education subtheme should describe the role of education in the evolution of the African-American community in Delaware

* A preliminary set of property types would be developed for each of the historic themes; criteria for evaluation, priorities and goals for property types, and location patterns would be established after the survey is completed (see number 4 below)

* The context would identify and prioritize additional subcontexts that should be identified individually in future years.

2. Establish a set-aside pool of money for the documentation of threatened resources related to African-Americans. A list of threatened resources could be developed from the existing knowledge of advisory committee members. Guidelines for evaluation of significance of specific resources and methods of prioritizing sites for documentation would be developed in the first year of the project and then applied to activities in future years.

Building on the development of the historic context for Religion/Community Organizations, this project would work through the churches to make contacts with communities and individuals and begin to systematically collect these materials for the Delaware State Archives. This project would be carried out by a graduate research assistant under the supervision of a project director. It would be set up as a competitive assistantship open to African-American graduate students and would be titled "Delaware African-American Heritage Research Assistantship."

4. A survey of African-American historic resources and application of the property types developed in the historic context on Settlement Patterns and Demographic Change. Resources would be evaluated for architectural integrity and possible eligibility for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Priorities and goals for registration and treatment of the property types would be developed in this project.

5. Thematic National Register nomination of African-American churches throughout the state. For communities that have lost population or even disappeared as a settlement, churches often remain as the only markers of their existence. Churches, as community institutions, are often the most frequently cited in historic materials and literature. For example, the Beers Atlas of 1868 notes the location of 00 African-American churches throughout the state. Because of their centrality, churches are frequently the repositories on community records; church members themselves would also be an important source of oral histories.

6. Thematic National Register nomination of African-American schools throughout the state.

7. Additional fully-developed historic contexts should be prepared, one at a time, and in the priority order identified by the original context on Settlement Patterns and Demographic Change.
APPENDIX A:

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP LIST
# Advisory Committee for the Minority Experience in Delaware

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Maryanna Ralph</td>
<td>Historic Preservation Planner</td>
<td>Office of Planning</td>
<td>800 N. French Street, 7th Floor, Wilmington, DE 19801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Historic Preservation Planner</td>
<td>New Castle County Department of Planning</td>
<td>2701 Capitol Trail, Newark, DE 19711</td>
</tr>
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<td>Historic Preservation Planner</td>
<td>Kent County Department of Planning</td>
<td>414 Federal Street, Dover, DE 19901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. James Stewart</td>
<td>Bureau of Museums and Historic Sites</td>
<td></td>
<td>102 South State Street, Dover, DE 19901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Madeline Thomas</td>
<td>Bureau of Museums and Historic Sites</td>
<td></td>
<td>102 South State Street, Dover, DE 19901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Barbara Benson</td>
<td>Historical Society of Delaware</td>
<td></td>
<td>505 Market Street, Wilmington, DE 19801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Ronald Whittington</td>
<td>Assistant to the President</td>
<td></td>
<td>126 Hullihen Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor James Newton</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Black American Studies</td>
<td>417A Ewing Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Carole Marks</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>Black American Studies</td>
<td>420 Ewing Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Ann Boylan</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>Department of History</td>
<td>320 Ewing Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Bill Williams</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>University Parallel Program</td>
<td>P. O. Box 610, Georgetown, DE 19947 DTCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yda Schreuder</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>Department of Geography</td>
<td>Robinson Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven Del Sordo</td>
<td>Bureau of Archaeology &amp; Historic Preservation</td>
<td></td>
<td>15 The Green, Dover, DE 19901</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Dover, DE 19901

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Wilmington, DE 19802

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Advisor to Advisory Council  
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Dover, DE 19901
APPENDIX B:

WORKSHOP AGENDA
AGENDA FOR WORKSHOP ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION 
OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN HERITAGE 
IN DELAWARE

Delaware State College 
Dover, DE

February 16, 1991

1. Welcome
   Daniel Griffith, State Historic Preservation Officer and 
   Director of the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs

2. Purpose of the Workshop
   David Ames, Director of the Center for Historic Architecture and 
   Engineering, University of Delaware

   The National Register of Historic Places
   Ethnic Heritage and the African-American Experience in Delaware

   Organization of the Workshop

3. Identifying African-American Historic Resources
   Harmon Carey, Executive Director of the Afro-American Historical 
   Society of Delaware

4. African-American Resources in Delaware on the National Register of 
   Historic Places
   Steven Del Sordo, Architectural Historian, Bureau of Archeology 
   and Historic Preservation

5. The Workshop
   David Ames, Moderator

   Discussion of specific resources that workshop members think are 
   important reflections of the African-American experience in 
   Delaware.

   Presentation and discussion by workshop members of the 
   recommendations of the Advisory Committee on major themes and 
   priorities for an African-American Historic Context for the State 
   Historic Preservation Plan
APPENDIX C:

AFRICAN-AMERICAN POPULATION OF DELAWARE:

1800 TO 1980

by

David Ames
Mary Helen Callahan
Susan Chase
and
Rebecca Siders

Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering
College of Urban Affairs and Public Policy
University of Delaware
Newark, Delaware

February 1991
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  Figure 2: African-American Population Change in Delaware 1800-1980 / 4
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Introduction

Delaware’s population growth occurred in roughly three phases: from 1800 to 1840, from 1840 to approximately 1940, and from 1940 to 1980 (Figure 1). In 1800, Delaware’s population was 64,273. African-Americans numbered 14,421 (22% of the state’s total); 6,153 or 43% were slaves.

Over the next 140 years, the African-American population of the state grew modestly, increasing an average of 6% each decade until 1940 (Table 1 and Figure 2). Growing at a slower rate (4% per decade), the white population increased to 58,564 people by 1840. By 1840 the African-American proportion of the state’s population had risen slightly to 25%. From 1840 to 1940, however, the white population, fueled primarily by growth in Wilmington, grew at a faster rate than did African-American population—15% per decade on the average (Figure 3). In 1940 the 19,251 African-Americans living in Delaware constituted 14% of the state’s total population.

After 1940, both white and African-American populations in Delaware increased significantly. Between 1940 to 1960, the rate of growth among African-Americans was higher (28% per decade on average) than for whites (22%). While the number of both populations continued to increase between 1960 and 1980, however, the rates of growth per decade on average dropped to 26% for African-Americans and 13% for whites. By 1980, African-Americans numbered 95,845—16% of Delaware’s total population of 583,662.

From 1800 to 1860, the number of slaves in Delaware declined from 6,153 to 1,798. Because during this same period the total African-American population increased from 14,421 to 21,627, the number of free African-Americans increased from 8,268 to 19,829. After 1820, the number in slavery dropped steadily decade by decade until the eve of the Civil War when they represented only 8% of Delaware’s African-American population.

The basic elements of demographic change are natural increase (births and deaths) and migration. Population change is measured by the amount of change in both of these categories. A demographic analysis would look at both of these factors in depth. This paper describes the historical outlines of demographic change in the African-American population of Delaware.
Figure 1: Population Growth in Delaware, 1800-1980

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census
Table 1: African-American Population in Delaware 1800-1980

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* Data for Wilmington were not separated from New Castle County data until 1840.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census
After growing slowly for 140 years, the African-American population of Delaware increased rapidly after 1940.
Figure 3: Rate of Change for African-American Population in Delaware, 1800-1980

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census
Delaware. Because population densities are also an important characteristic of a population, it is important to remember that Sussex County is nearly half of the land area of the state, while Wilmington is less than one percent. For example, in 1880 when the African-American populations of Sussex County and Wilmington were roughly equal--5,692 and 5,469 respectively--the density of African-Americans living in Sussex County was 6.0 people per square mile whereas that of Wilmington was 423.8 people per square mile.

Statewide Changes in African-American Population

Important demographic differences begin to emerge between the African-American population in Wilmington and the in the rural remainder of the state after 1840. It is therefore important to distinguish between Wilmington and New Castle County outside of Wilmington (which is possible only after 1840) in addition to Kent and Sussex counties.

Geographic Shifts

In 1800 of Delaware's 14,421 African-Americans, 5,731 lived in Kent (40%), 4,592 in New Castle (32%) and 4,098 resided in Sussex (28%). By 1900, 53% of the African-American population (16,187) lived in New Castle County. Although the number of African-American residents in Kent County grew by 35% from 1800 to 1900, its share of the total number of African-American Delawareans declined from 40% to 25%. In Sussex, the African-American population increased 65% during the same period, while Sussex's proportion of the state's African-American dropped from 28% to 22%.

The growth of the African-American population in Wilmington accounted for this northward shift. In 1840, when the U.S. Census first published separate population figures for Wilmington, 1,616 African-Americans lived there--8% of Delaware's African-American population and 22% of New Castle County's African-Americans (Figure 4). Over the next 60 years, Wilmington's African-American population grew faster than any other area in the state, increasing by 502%. In one decade alone, 1870 to 1880, Wilmington's African-American population increased 70%. In comparison, in Delaware outside of Wilmington, the African-American population grew by
Figure 4: African-American Population Growth in Wilmington and Delaware, 1840-1980

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census
only 17% during this period. As a result, by 1900 nearly one-third of the state’s African-American population lived in Wilmington.

New Castle County outside of Wilmington contributed little to the northward shift of the African-American population from 1840 to 1900. Mirroring the changes in the two southern counties, where from 1840 to 1900 the increase in the African-American population was 14% in Sussex and 24% in Kent, New Castle County’s increased by 13% (Figure 5).

From 1900 to 1920, the overall growth of African-American population in Delaware came to a standstill—the population that stood at 30,697 in 1900 was some 300 less in 1920. The changes in the counties and city produced a very uneven demographic landscape for African-Americans (Figure 3).

From 1920 to 1940, the African-American population in Delaware grew 18%. The rate of growth between 1940 and 1960 was much higher (61%). By 1960 the African-American population of 60,688 was almost twice its 1920 total; two of every five African-American Delawareans lived in Wilmington. Of the remaining African-American population of Delaware, 25% lived in Sussex County, 18% in suburban New Castle County, and 16% in Kent County. The 39% growth rate during the 1950s was the highest in demographic history of African-Americans in Delaware and part of record overall population growth in the state. While the growth rate of the African-American population declined in the 1960s and 1970s, the population continued to increase, reaching 95,845 by 1980.

Migration and Natural Increase

The appearance of stability suggested by unchanging population totals between 1800 and 1930 can be misleading. For example, Harold Livesey says that between 1890 and 1910, Delaware had one of most mobile African-American populations in the country, noting that in 1910, 30% of all African-Americans born in Delaware had moved out. He also observed that Delaware did not attract African-Americans to move into the state; of the 31,000 African-Americans living in Delaware in 1910, 22,400 were born in Delaware and 5,400 came from Maryland (Livesey 1968, 116-117).

Looking more closely at data from 1860 to 1930 reveals that the
Figure 5: African-American Population Growth
in Wilmington, Suburban New Castle County, Kent County, and Sussex County, 1840-1980

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census
proportion of African-Americans born and living in Delaware declined from 75% in 1860 to 66% by 1930 (Table 2 and Figure 6). Out-migration of African-Americans increased steadily during this period; 25% of Delaware-born African-Americans were living outside the state in 1870 and 34% by 1930. Correspondingly, the number of in-migrants in the population increased from 11% in 1870 to 34% in 1930. The actual number of African-American in-migrants grew from 2,564 in 1870 to 11,171 in 1930. Overall, from 1860 to 1920, more African-Americans were leaving Delaware than moving in.

This means that during this period, the growth in the African-American population of Delaware was primarily through natural increase (more births than deaths). Although the majority of the African-Americans born in Delaware remained in the state, an increasing number and percentage choose to leave. Although in-migration also increased, the population trends in the counties and Wilmington suggest that most of the out-migration was from rural areas while most of the new-comers came to Wilmington.

The Counties and Wilmington

After 1840, the bulk of the African-American population growth was occurring in Wilmington. In 1840, the African-American population in Delaware outside of Wilmington numbered 17,908; by 1940, it had only increased to 21,620 (Figure 7). The average rate of growth per decade actually declined over several decades. Although the number of African-Americans in each county shifted over time, the ranking of the counties in African-American population density remained the same with Sussex County the lowest, rural New Castle the highest, and Kent County maintaining an intermediate density. In contrast, Wilmington's African-American population increased from one-fifth of the state's African-American population to more than one-half (from 1,616 in 1840 to 14,256 in 1940).

Sussex County

The African-American community in Sussex County was the smallest among the three counties in 1800, accounting for 28% of the total African-American population. In 1800, 4,098 African-Americans lived in Sussex
Table 2: In- and Out-Migration of African-Americans in Delaware 1870-1930

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>African-Amer'ns born &amp; living in Delaware</th>
<th>African-Amer'ns born in Delaware</th>
<th>African-Amer'ns living elsewhere</th>
<th>African-Amer'ns living in Delaware</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>26819</td>
<td>20214 (75.4)</td>
<td>6605 (24.6)</td>
<td>2564 (11.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>30994</td>
<td>22426 (72.4)</td>
<td>8568 (27.6)</td>
<td>5936 (20.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>33071</td>
<td>23274 (70.4)</td>
<td>9797 (29.6)</td>
<td>7394 (24.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>32664</td>
<td>22668 (69.4)</td>
<td>9996 (30.6)</td>
<td>8401 (26.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>30919</td>
<td>20438 (66.1)</td>
<td>10481 (33.9)</td>
<td>9589 (31.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>32184</td>
<td>21311 (66.2)</td>
<td>10873 (33.8)</td>
<td>11171 (34.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* In the columns recording data for African-Americans born and living in Delaware and for African-Americans born in Delaware and living elsewhere, the percentage figure is the percent which that group represents of the total number of African-Americans born in the state. In the column recording data for African-Americans born elsewhere and living in Delaware, the percentage amount is the percent which that group represents of the total African-American population of the state.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census
Figure 6: In- and Out-Migration of African-Americans in Delaware, 1870-1930

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census
Figure 7: Growth of African-American Population in Kent and Sussex Counties, New Castle County outside of Wilmington, and the City of Wilmington 1800-1980

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census
County, of whom 2,837 (69%) were slaves. Whereas the African-American population grew to 5,711 by 1860, the number of slaves dropped steadily each decade to only 1,341 (23%) by 1860. The settlement pattern of African-Americans in Sussex County was by far the most dispersed in the state at 4.3 persons per square mile. Even by 1910, when the African-American population of Sussex had grown to be the largest rural segment of African-Americans in the state, its population density remained the lowest. The African-American community in Sussex County remained the largest among the counties, outside of Wilmington, until 1980, when it fell to third.

Between 1810 and 1870, the African-American population in Sussex County fluctuated up and down each decade by only a few hundred persons, averaging about 6,000 persons. Then the number of African-Americans in Sussex began to grow steadily, increasing by 5% in the 1870s and peaking at 17% in the first decade of the twentieth century, when the actual population was 7,938.

After a loss of 11% between 1910 and 1920, the African-American population of Sussex grew slightly in the 1920s (4%) and then more rapidly through 1960, averaging 19%. In the 1960s and 1970s, the rate of increase in the African-American community of Sussex County declined to an average of 9%. In 1980 the African-American population of Sussex County numbered 17,970.

Kent County

Throughout the nineteenth century, except for the decade of the 1830s, the largest proportion of African-Americans in Delaware lived in Kent County. The African-American population in Kent was very stable in total numbers well into the twentieth century. In 1810, the number of African-Americans living in Kent County was 6,344; in 1950, African-Americans in Kent County numbered 6,859. By 1910 the African-American population of Kent County ranked third after Wilmington and Sussex County; after 1940, it contained the smallest African-American population.

In 1800, 1,485 of the African-American population of Kent County were slaves, the smallest number and percentage among the three counties. Consistent with the overall pattern in the state, the number of slaves
declined both absolutely and as a proportion of the total African-American population until 1860.

While the African-American population of Kent County grew slowly from 1800 to 1880, between 1880 and 1940, the population decreased by 20%. This decline suggests ongoing out-migration from the county, which is consistent with the statewide trend noted earlier. Rapid growth in the African-American population of Kent County did not begin until the 1950s, 30 years later than in Sussex County. After a century and a half of minimal population change, the African-American population of Kent County almost tripled from 1940 to 1980, reaching 17,759 in 1980.

New Castle County

In 1800, the African-American population of New Castle County numbered 4,592--32% of the African-Americans living in Delaware. Through 1830, when its African-American population was 6,494, New Castle County census figures include Wilmington; starting in 1840 the city was counted as a separate unit. Hence after 1830, "New Castle County" refers to the county outside of Wilmington.

From 1840 to 1900, the African-American population of New Castle County grew by 13%, from 5,698 to 6,461. It followed the same pattern of minor fluctuation in the midst of stability that characterized the two southern counties. Between 1900 and 1940, this fluctuation resulted in a 4% loss in population. Between 1940 and 1970, however, the growth rate of the African-American population in New Castle County increased to an average of 31% per decade. And in the 1970s, the population increased by a staggering 76%. Thus from 1940 to 1980, New Castle County's African-American population quadrupled, increasing from 6,190 in 1940 to 24,258 in 1980.

Wilmington

In 1840, when the U.S. Census started reporting Wilmington separately, the African-American population of Wilmington was 1,616, of whom almost all were free. After 1840, the African-American population in Wilmington grew at the fastest rate in the state until 1910--the year Wilmington, with a population of 9,736, became the largest African-American community in
Delaware.

Between 1910 and 1920, the African-American community lost 7% of its population. From 1920 to 1950, however, the African-American population in Wilmington grew an average of 18% a decade, establishing a population of 17,202 in 1950. In the 1950s and 1960s, the African-American residents of Wilmington experienced the highest growth rates of the century in Wilmington, increasing by an average of 43% per decade. By 1970 the number of African-Americans living in Wilmington was 35,072--nearly half of the total of African-American Delawareans. However, in the 1970s the rate declined to 2%, bringing the African-American population of Wilmington to 35,858 in 1980.

*    *    *    *    *    *

Up to this point, we have been describing the demographic changes in the African-American population of Delaware and have not considered the influence of racial discrimination on these patterns. The differential growth of African-Americans in Wilmington and New Castle County, however, was heavily influenced by racial discrimination and economic segregation. To describe more completely and understand more fully the demographic history of Delaware's African-American population we must look at the dynamic of the total state population.
References