DELAWARE'S FARM LABOR MARKET AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR BLACK LIFE

by

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ABSTRACT

Historic shifts in farm labor markets across the United States have identified farm labor as an ethnic niche (an occupation by which an ethnic group is overrepresented by at least 50 percent) for Black and Latinx populations, varying by state and region. In 1940, farm labor was identified as an ethnic niche for Black workers across the U.S. South. At the time, Delaware led southern states in this overrepresentation of Black farm workers by a significant margin. Through the first half of the twentieth century, Delaware was transparently dependent on its 'Black farm labor market,' which hindered access to education for Black folks across the state. However, World War II and the expansion of wartime industry incited a farm labor emergency for Delaware, as well as many other states, which raised concerns about future distributions of labor. In my research, I draw on archival material and oral histories to examine shifts in Delaware's historic farm labor market, considering how the state managed its farm labor emergency and the broader implications for Black education and employment opportunities through much of the twentieth century.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

A commonly recited trope in present-day Delaware, specifically north of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, is "Slower Lower," referring to the state's southern parts, residents, and a stereotype from 'northern elites' that those residents below the Canal are essentially uneducated farmers. "Slower Lower" may not have been recited in Delaware during the first half of the twentieth century, but northern elites certainly held similar sentiments about their southern neighbors, especially those that were Black. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Delaware's economy was believed to be "singularly dependent on colored farm labor" (Taggart, 1988, p. 135). These prevailing narratives and overgeneralizations regarding Black people had significant implications for the development of Black education and employment opportunities within the state. These essentialisms were enabled among Delaware elites, manifested in policy making, shaped construction projects of schools, labor camps, and, at least for the sake of this research, bring into question how Black life was historically structured, controlled, and, in some cases, restricted in Delaware.

It is worth noting that in the early twentieth century, Delaware's public education system was infamously underdeveloped, not exclusively for Black children, but all children. In 1919, the *New York Times* published an article titled "Primitive

Delaware; State of the Whipping Post and 'Bound' Children, Awakened Now, Is Fighting Hard for Decent Schools." The article identified two characteristics of Delaware that warrant this "primitive" description. At the time, Delaware's education system, or quality of education, ranked 38th out of the 48 states in the country. The second component of this critique was the state's use of public whippings as a form of punishment against citizens convicted of crimes. Delaware was reportedly the only state in the country still using this as a form of punishment (New York Times, 1919). A former University of Delaware professor, Robert Caldwell, looked at over 1600 cases of whippings between 1900 and 1942, finding that 68 percent of these whippings were used to punish Black citizens convicted of crimes (von Hentig, 1948). This overrepresentation of Black people being subject to whippings was even higher among reoffenders. This disproportionate, unjust treatment of Black folk in Delaware was not exclusive to the state's whipping practices; instead, the *Times* article is a reflection of the state's broader and deeper understudied racist history.

In this research, I offer a new and deeper understanding of this largely untold history. I utilize archival data that I collected to explain the different ways in which Delaware preserved and promoted "colored farm labor," especially between 1940 and 1950, a decade in which the state faced an unprecedented "farm labor emergency" (Delaware State Agricultural Planning Committee & State Farm Labor Sub-Committee, 1941). I then draw from oral histories I collected from former students and employees of William W.M. Henry Comprehensive High School, the first Black high school in Delaware's Kent County, to consider the implications of improved access to

education on Black employment opportunities. Delaware' efforts to preserve "colored farm labor" curtailed Black school construction projects in the early decades of the twentieth century. However, the state's 1949 school building program followed a decade of shifts in its farm labor market. My research connects how these farm labor market shifts brought about an increased need for Black education facilities, specifically south of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, as the state entered the second half of the twentieth century.

In the next chapter, I provide an overview of Roger Waldinger's theory of the ethnic niche (1996), which identifies industries and jobs that ethnic groups may be overrepresented in. I then review case studies of the ethnic niche, highlighting the shortcomings and space for qualitative intervention within existing studies (Bolíbar, 2020; Cho, 2017; Eckstein & Nguyen, 2011; Morales, 2008), as well as future research. I contextualize this analysis by drawing from Robert Boyd's 2002 research note that identifies farm labor as an ethnic niche for Black workers across much of the U.S. South in 1940 to offer new considerations and critiques for ethnic niches that have been largely overlooked in much of the available literature on the ethnic niche (ibid). I derive these considerations and critiques from scholars of Black Geographies (Hawthorne, 2019; McKittrick & Woods, 2007) and geopolitics (Flint, 2021; Hyndman, 2012), those of whom consider questions of power relations and how these relations produce spaces that aim to define, surveil, and control different populations. In chapter three, I dive into the research questions that informed my approach, describe the methods that I implemented in this work, as well as the process of data

collection and analysis. In chapter four, I draw from the findings of my archival data to explain the various ways in which governmental and non-governmental organizations preserved and promoted Delaware's "colored farm labor" market; more specifically, highlighting efforts to control migrant flows and "the distribution of [B]lacks" in Delaware (Taggart, 1988, p. 135). In chapter five, I discuss the findings from six of the eight oral histories I collected. I highlight these six and place these histories into three separate pairs in order to describe lived experiences and perspectives around specific themes that arose in each of the pairs, respectively. To conclude, in chapter 6, I provide an overview of my results, revisit key takeaways from my research, consider the limitations of this study, as well as potential direction(s) for further research on ethnic niches and related topics.

My research not only provides insight and an extended understanding of Delaware's racialized and racist history, but also an original, qualitative analysis and study of an "ethnic niche," considering causality, the preservation of, and the impacts that result from related essentialisms. In this research, I emphasize how such concentrations and overrepresentation of certain populations in occupations and industries that may be described as 'low-skilled' or 'requiring little to no training' should not be viewed as safety nets or security for the group or community as some scholars suggest, but instead constitutes a risk for some ethnic and racial minorities in the US and world more broadly. I argue that disproportionate employment outcomes and certain ethnic niches can produce essentialisms that shape place(s) and inform our understandings of certain areas, communities, and people that are problematic. I find

that these essentialisms acted not only as a structural characteristic in Delaware, both physically and socially, but also illustrate the historic gap found in power relations between Black Delawareans and the state's white elites, largely concentrated in Northern Delaware. Much of the available research on community disinvestment and marginalization, specifically concerning Black communities during the twentieth century, focuses on practices such as redlining and overtly racist laws and policies. Despite existing evidence of residential discrimination and redlining-like practices and outcomes within Wilmington, Delaware (Sedegui, 2018), Delaware is a state that has no publicly available redlining maps, nor do the state's historic racist laws present a unique case study. However, what is unique to Delaware is the state's farm labor market history. When this farm labor market was destabilized, specifically its "colored farm labor" market, the state underwent significant changes that restructured Black life and communities, just as redlining did in communities across the country at the same time(s). Identifying these changes and power relations as products of an ethnic niche, frames niche occupations and industries as a structural component of place and calls for further consideration of the implications of such disproportionate employment outcomes among marginalized populations both historically and contemporarily.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The analyses of contemporary and historic employment outcomes within and across labor markets tend to illustrate patterns of clustering by ethnic groups in certain jobs or parts of the labor market. These place-based patterns reflect the social process of economic incorporation that all demographics experience and navigate. This process of incorporation tends to sort groups into different positions and forms ethnic niches, occupations or industries in which an ethnic group is disproportionately employed (Waldinger & Bozorgmehr, 1996). Much of the available literature and research on ethnic niches, specifically those that emerge in the United States, focuses on employment outcomes, challenges, and/or experiences of 'east' Asian and Latinx immigrant populations (Cho, 2017; Eckstein & Nguyen, 2011; Morales, 2008). Far fewer discussions of the ethnic niche consider the outcomes, challenges, and experiences faced by domestic migrants, especially those encountered by Black migrants navigating the United States. Some scholars discuss the ethnic niche as providing some populations a pathway to "economic integration" and "sources of material security" (Cho, 2017, p. 98; p. 106). These studies provide a compelling argument related to race, ethnicity, and citizenship, however, discussions do not pay enough attention to the uneven power relations and structures that lead to these outcomes.

Mireira Bolíbar (2020) concludes that ethnic niches and inequities in labor market outcomes are "based on social, cultural, political, and economic barriers and structures" (ibid, p. 7). Scholars of Black Geographies and geopolitics alike find that such barriers, structures, and inequities are products of uneven power relations. Drawing points of inquiry and foundational considerations from both geographic subdisciplines provides an analytical toolkit that can fill in the qualitative void identified by Bolíbar (2020). At a foundational level, Black Geographies, or Black thought, has long been concerned with understanding the intersections between (and production of) space, place, and power (Hawthorne, 2019). Foundational conceptualizations of geopolitics are concerned with how space is produced, surveilled, and maintained through uneven power relations (Hyndman, 2012). If ethnic niches are product of "social, cultural, political, and economic barriers and structures" (Bolíbar, 2020), and these structures and barriers are produced by spatial power relations, we can draw from these points of inquiry to better understand the complex and sometimes overlooked interactions between these social, cultural, political, and economic factors.

In this chapter, I discuss the theory of the ethnic niche, specifically the conceptualization of this theory by Roger Waldinger (1996). I then dive into specific case studies of ethnic niches (Bolíbar, 2020; Cho, 2017; Eckstein & Nguyen, 2011; Morales, 2008; Boyd, 1998; 1996), acknowledging how these studies inform my research both through their contributions and shortcomings. Then, highlighting Robert Boyd's 2002 publication *Urban unemployment, the rural labor market, and southern*

blacks during the Great Depression: a research note, I contextualize my research surrounding farm labor, specifically in the unique case of Delaware. Using 1940 census data, Boyd identifies farm labor as an ethnic niche for Black workers across the U.S. South, but also explains some of the risks and implications associated with such labor market outcomes (ibid). Boyd's research note omits causality of such outcomes, nor considers how uneven power relations could have led to this overrepresentation of Black folk employed in farm labor. In the following section, I highlight the points of inquiry and considerations I draw from scholars of Black Geographies and geopolitics, explaining how this mixed analytical framework can connect and identify causality to make sense of Black farm labor as an ethnic niche in Delaware and across the U.S. South, as well as a new way to consider the implications of this labor market history.

2.2 The Theory of the Ethnic Niche

In Roger Waldinger's (1996) *Ethnic Los Angeles,* ethnic niches are defined as industries or occupations in which an ethnic group is overrepresented by at least 50 percent. In this work, Waldinger and co-authors discuss the process of economic incorporation and subsequent labor market sorting experienced by Mexican and Central American immigrants in Los Angeles, California. The authors note that these immigrant populations tend to be sorted into 'low-skilled,' labor intensive industries, but these groups are nonetheless finding employment in a city and region that, in general, tends to favor 'white collar,' service employment. These contemporary labor market outcomes reflect historic transformations and labor market shifts that force some groups to choose a specific economic pathway. Due to the focus of the study of

Ethnic Los Angeles, as well as many other studies of the ethnic niche, the experiences and employment outcomes of domestic migrants who must also undergo this process of economic incorporation are not considered. However, in Waldinger's view, there is opportunity to further address these historical transformations that force populations to choose economic pathways (1996, p. 27). Explaining the historic processes and practices associated with, specifically, farm labor market sorting in Delaware during the first half of the twentieth century illustrates how Black Delawareans and Black migrants alike were being forced to choose an economic pathway—farm labor.

Ethnic groups vary in the historical context of incorporation, a point that directs our attention to the interaction between structures and groups. The clustering of certain groups in specific parts of a labor market reveals distinctive occupation and/or industrial patterns. These patterns highlight the role of ethnicity in ordering ethnic groups within and throughout the economy. These patterns often reflect the development of ethnic niches, calculated as: (insert group) makes up 4 percent of the employed population, but this group makes up 8 percent of farm laborers. Dividing the share of the farm labor force by the group's share of the overall labor force yields an index of representation of 2, the equivalent of 100 percent overrepresentation. Ethnic networks sort workers into these niche occupations and industries, causing groups to concentrate in specific parts of the labor market and maintain these concentrations over varied periods of time. For example, ethnic ties pull one group of categorically distinctive workers into a set of occupations or industries (Waldinger, 1996, p. 29).

In Waldinger's view, ethnic niches act as a means of economic incorporation, at least among the first generation(s), while later generations "move up and diffuse through the occupational structure" (ibid, p.28). Related to this framing of the ethnic niche, in Cho's (2017) *Revisiting Ethnic Niches*, the author describes differentiated employment trajectories among 1.5 (arrived as an adolescent) and second generation immigrant youth, specifically contrasting the experiences of Korean and Mexican young adults. Cho emphasizes the central role that one's ethnoracial background activates the different social and structural resources they may have access to, which shapes the range of occupations they may enter (2017, p. 98). From this perspective, Cho finds that ethnic niches offer a path to economic integration ethnic groups are able to access despite constrained socioeconomic conditions (2017, p. 102). Pushing back on the notion that the children in immigrant families will try to evade ethnic niche occupations, Cho's findings suggest that some children "may actually benefit from mobilizing these ethnic resources" (2017, p. 107). In conclusion, Cho finds that differentiated outcomes between the employment trajectories of Korean and Mexican youth may lie in the availability of, or lack thereof, ethnic niches, especially for those of whom are undocumented within the United States.

Eckstein and Nguyen's (2011) *The Making and Transnationalization of an Ethnic Niche*, similar to the findings presented above, also found that an ethnic niche may act or produce social capital and security for immigrant populations. Eckstein and Nguyen consider how overrepresentation of Vietnamese women in the beauty industry, specifically nail care, not only became an ethnic niche, but an industry that

Vietnamese women recreated and developed into a professional nail-care industry that they dominate today (ibid, p. 655). In the face of workplace discrimination and the complicated barrier of citizenship status, these studies present ethnic niches as pathways to material security and the "primary" labor market for immigrant populations (Cho, 2017). Robert Boyd has published multiple works on the emergence of various ethnic niches among Black US citizens (2002; 1998; 1996), considering how these niches assist Black people in overcoming economic disadvantages in the United States. Boyd specifically highlights Black employment in hairdressing (1996) and the ministry (1998) as examples of overcoming structural obstacles laid out by the white majority. Boyd goes as far as to say that "ethnic niches exist because they benefit the ethnic group (1998, p. 327). I find these claims and studies to be problematic, not in the sense that these are not examples of financial and material security in the face of disadvantage, but because there is insufficient consideration of both cause(s) and effect(s), as well as how normalizing ethnic niches in the aforementioned sense may increasingly disadvantage populations that are already navigating a system in which they are disadvantaged.

Bolíbar (2020) frames these niches in a different light, emphasizing that for dark-skinned migrant populations in Spain, labor-intensive ethnic occupational niches may confine the ethnic group to "low-skilled positions," and, as a result, continue to face indecent working and living conditions, as well as facing increased risk to economic recession (ibid). Bolíbar analyzes the implications of such niches and outcomes quantitatively, but concludes "further research may explore this topic in

greater depth by combining quantitative data with qualitative data" (ibid, p. 7). In my research, I combine quantitative findings with qualitative data and theoretical analysis; specifically, I build from the findings of Boyd's 2002 research note where there is a calculation of an Index of Occupational Representation (IOR) of both Black and white people(s) employed in farm labor using 1940 census data (ibid) (see: Figure 1).

State	Black men		Black women		White men		White women	
	IOR	PSW	IOR	PSW	IOR	PSW	IOR	PSW
Alabama	172.4	14.5	166.5	10.9	64.5	7.1	22.8	7.6
Arkansas	149.0	15.4	188.8	11.2	83.5	7.9	42.8	7.8
Delaware	391.6	18.6	325.8	12.5	61.4	8.2	45.6	7.4
Florida	218.4	11.3	203.0	10.2	54.8	7.3	22.0	6.5
Georgia	195.6	11.5	183.1	9.0	53.8	6.1	19.9	7.0
Kentucky	246.1	19.6	103.4	15.4	88.7	11.3	99.3	9.6
Louisiana	195.5	15.7	187.4	11.3	50.3	8.9	10.5	8.2
Maryland	294.0	13.4	268.0	11.1	67.1	7.1	48.7	7.6
Mississippi	144.2	14.5	140.3	10.7	55.4	6.2	20.6	6.8
North Carolina	236.4	13.9	233.6	14.2	53.2	5.0	25.1	5.2
Oklahoma	191.3	22.7	222.4	14.5	93.0	10.7	80.9	8.1
South Carolina	198.5	9.3	177.0	6.2	35.0	4.3	12.8	4.2
Tennessee	163.5	14.5	189.7	11.7	86.9	8.0	57.8	6.9
Texas	173.6	16.3	155.4	11.7	89.5	9.0	80.8	8.0
Virginia	205.2	13.6	257.9	12.4	69.6	5.4	17.9	5.8
West Virginia	51.2	14.6	27.4	8.4	103.5	10.3	107.6	7.7

Figure 1.1: ***Farm labor as an ethnic niche in the 1940 U.S. South***

Boyd identifies farm labor (working as a laborer on a farm) as an ethnic niche for Black men and women across much of the U.S. South in 1940 (2002). The above *Index of Occupational Representation* took the proportion of Black men, Black women, white men, and white women employed in farm labor, respectively, and divided each by the respective demographic's proportion of the workforce, on a state-by-state basis. This was then multiplied by 100 to calculate the IOR results depicted in

the table. An IOR equal to or greater than 150 indicates an ethnic niche, overrepresentation by (at least) 50 percent. Across the U.S. South, the average IOR among Black men employed in farm labor in 1940 was 201.65, more than 100 percent overrepresentation. The average IOR among Black women was 189.3, equivalent to 89.3 percent overrepresentation. The variable "PSW" represents the percentage of the respective demographic who are unemployed and seeking work (Boyd, 2002), which is beyond the scope of this project to address. Within this dataset, Delaware should be noted as an outlier for both Black men and women as Black men employed in farm labor were overrepresented by almost 300 percent, and Black women by more than 200 percent, far above their neighbors throughout the U.S. South.

2.3 An Analytic Framework

In 2002, Boyd—in a shift from earlier published work—calls attention to Waldinger's (1996, p. 451) criteria for the mobility trap, a condition that is product of ethnic niches that can be described as "low-skilled," or requiring little to no training, and failing to reduce the exploitation of this group by the ethnic majority; and/or the group's overrepresentation in the niche reduces the opportunity for other group members to also find employment in the niche. Under this criteria, Boyd finds that both conditions were met, and that farm labor, as an ethnic niche, was a mobility trap for Black men and women across the U.S. South. Boyd concludes that these concepts may be useful for further comparative and historical studies of the rural labor market, but, similarly to domestic migrant niche-related outcomes, the implications of ethnic niches and the mobility trap remain under-studied. Considering the qualitative gap

identified by Bolíbar (2020), the push for further research from Boyd (2002), as well as my own concerns with the framing of ethnic niches as safety nets and pathways to economic inclusion or integration, I draw in foundational points of inquiry emphasized by scholars of Black Geographies (Hawthorne, 2019; McKittrick & Woods, 2007) and geopolitics (Flint, 2021; Hyndman, 2012; see further analysis in chapter 4) to consider how uneven power relations within space between ethnic majorities and ethnic minorities aim to create and preserve ethnic niches, specifically within the context of Delaware during the first half of the twentieth century.

Scholarship and research across discussions of the ethnic niche either directly or indirectly acknowledge that such employment outcomes are a product of either uneven power relations, or these occupational clusters develop to circumvent such power relations. Morales (2008) studies the ethnic niche as an economic pathway, finding that ethnicity and, more specifically, skin complexion act as sorting mechanisms in labor markets which can produce ethnic niches. Morales reaches these conclusions through quantitative research and analysis, omitting an in-depth qualitative discussion into these manifestations of 'difference,' a recurring theme in much of the literature. However, these productions of difference and practices of sorting tie to patterns of socio-spatial organization that are considered by scholars of Black Geographies (Hawthorne, 2019) and geopolitics (Flint, 2021) alike. Hawthorne (2019) states that Black Geographies and thought more broadly have "long been concerned with questions of space, place, and power;" also noting that the production of space is tied to the production of difference (ibid, p. 3). Relatedly, Flint (2021)

notes some of the critical points of inquiry within geopolitics, which include the spatial organization of human activity which reflect relations of power. Pabst (2006) clearly illustrates the intersection of the concerns laid out by Black Geographies and geopolitics by examining the relationship between Black subjectivity and geopolitics; Pabst finds, "Geopolitics, as the word implies, is also about politics, interactions of privilege and disadvantage, the intricate set of power relations embedded within the places, the ways, and the reasons we dwell and move, individually and collectively" (ibid, p. 26). Ethnic niches are not only an example of socio-spatial organization, but also reflect how ethnic groups and communities navigate these relations of power, as well as disadvantages, something I extrapolate on in this study.

I argue that bringing to focus the outlier of Boyd's 2002 study, considering farm labor in Delaware as an niche for Black citizens, and putting this case in conversation with the points of inquiry found across Black Geographies and geopolitics sheds light on the shortcomings of the literature discussing the ethnic niche that seems to assume implicit social dynamics of citizenship, racism, and/or other forms of discrimination. As Hawthorne (2019) notes, insights from Black Geographies allow us to trace the many ways racism has been historically camouflaged and embedded in material landscapes, planning documents, et cetera. Further, these insights provide a geographical understanding of racism and an analytical toolkit to identify forms of differentiation are derived from essentializing ideas. McKittrick and Woods (2007) foundational work on *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* highlights a number of "closely related trajectories that illustrate how [B]lack human geographies are implicated in the production of space" (ibid, p. 4). For the sake of this

research, I am primarily concerned with the trajectory that considers the ways in which essentialisms situate Black people as subjects and their geopolitical concerns as being marginal (McKittrick & Woods, 2007). Applying this inter(sub)disciplinary analytical framework to consider the ways in which Delaware's farm labor history and practices situated Black men and women as economic goods and tools, and treated their basic needs as marginal, informs how I conducted this research. In the next chapter, I outline the methods I used to apply this critical analytic framework.

Chapter 3

METHODS

3.1 Introduction

As previously noted, farm labor emerged as an ethnic niche for Black workers across much of the U.S. South in the first half of the twentieth century. Despite this common history across most southern states, Delaware still emerged as an outlier among its neighbors. In order to understand this uniquely Delawarean condition and the further implications for Black education and employment opportunities within the state, I conducted archival research and gathered oral histories from 8 community elders, 6 of which will be highlighted in this study. In the following sections, I, first, provide my research questions, explaining how these questions are informed by and address my analytical framework; secondly, I discuss my position as a researcher and the role that bias may have played while collecting oral histories or while analyzing my data; and I conclude this chapter by describing my process of collecting and analyzing data.

3.2 Research Questions

Drawing from the analytical framework outlined in chapter 2, I consider the ways in which Delaware's farm labor history and the creation of an ethnic niche produced an essentialism that situated "[B]lack subjects and their geopolitical concerns as being elsewhere (on the margin, the underside, outside the normal), a spatial practice that conveniently props up the mythical norms and erases or obscures the daily struggles of particular communities" (McKittrick & Woods, 2007, p. 4).

Despite an increased need and requests for Black secondary education facilities across Delaware in the early decades of the twentieth century, education reformers ignored these requests in an effort to preserve the state's niche labor market; specifically situating the education needs of Black Delawareans as marginal in relation to the state's economy and its dependence on "colored farm labor" (Taggart, 1988 p. 135). These responses essentialized Black Delawareans as 'colored farm laborers,' or farm hands, and situated Black people as an economic tool. Roth et al. (2023) describes essentialism, specifically racial essentialism, as a concept of what races are, emphasizing that "racial essentialism is a historically harmful perspective, associated not just with individual-level stereotyping, racism, and bias but also with broad-based movements and social structures," (ibid, p. 14). In the context of Delaware's economy and labor market, Black Delawareans were being essentialized as farm laborers, and their (education) needs were situated outside what reformers viewed as 'normal,' emphasizing the functional role essentialist beliefs can play in maintaining 'status quo' (Roth et al, 2023). This raises questions about how essentialist beliefs intersect with exclusionary policies and practices and, more specifically, in the case of Delaware, how developments (or the lack thereof) of Black public education connected to the state's farm labor market.

In this study, I place Delaware and its 'Black farm labor market' within this analytical framework. I explain the connection of such essentialist ideas with, firstly, the ways non-governmental organizations structured Delaware's public education system, specifically for Black children; secondly, the efforts of government

institutions to preserve and promote the farm labor market; and, thirdly, the later reformation of these structures in the latter part of the century. From these lines of inquiry, I form the following research questions:

1. In what ways did labor institutions in Delaware preserve the state's 'Black farm labor market' during the first half of the twentieth century?

2. What changes in Delaware's farm labor market and farm practices preceded the state's 1949 School Building Program?

3. How do the lived experiences of students and teachers at the first Black high school in Delaware's Kent County (William Henry High) reflect, or not, the presumed impact(s) of improved access to secondary education for Black students and the belief among Delaware elites that improved access would lead to economic disadvantage for Black folk and the state's economy?

Answering these questions, first, provides an understanding of the impacts of such essentialist beliefs on Black employment opportunities outside of farm labor in Delaware. Throughout this study, I connect this farm labor history with access to education, addressing, secondly, how essentialist beliefs connected with restricting access to Black education facilities and, later, improving this access following the state's development of a new farm labor program. Thirdly, and finally, I center Black Geographic narratives and lived experiences as these assumptions about the impacts of access to education were developed by the state's white elites. Bringing Black voices and individualized experiences into focus ensures that this empirically rich study moves away from "naturalizing racial difference in place" (McKittrick & Woods, 2007, p. 7), specifically within Delaware.

3.3 Positionality

Despite my efforts to omit my own biases while developing this research, collecting data, and during the analysis process, my positionality as a young Black man with grandparents, aunts and uncles who lived through this exclusionary history, influences my own interpretation of archival materials and participant oral histories. While collecting oral histories and introducing the topic(s) of this study to consenting participants, I positioned myself as a researcher, looking to understand the presumed, essentialized impacts of improved access to education that may or may not have manifested in the lives of participants. Despite my familiarity with most research participants, some of whom I am related to, a power dynamic emerged in which I, the researcher, have the privilege and power to frame their oral histories and lived experiences around my own research interests. This dynamic is clearly illustrated across the various oral histories as these were collected over a 6-month span, a time period in which my own approach to this research changed as I conducted and analyzed each oral history, archival data, attended classes, and became more familiar with the existing literature. Furthermore, I now have the privilege and power to cite these oral histories as data, applying and interpreting these experiences as a researcher, not someone who directly experienced this history. Bornat (2004) notes that this approach "allows for active reconstruction and fluidity in the telling of a story, [but] inevitably draws on the theoretical framework employed [by the researcher] in its explanation" (ibid, p. 35). As previously noted, I analyzed these oral histories, as well

as my archival data, through an analytical toolkit informed by points of inquiry found in Black Geographies and geopolitics, considering how uneven power relations tie into the experiences of Black people in Delaware.

Not only does my position inform power dynamics in the process of conducting oral histories, but it also informs biases that play a role while collecting and analyzing data. Martin et al. (2022) reiterates the importance of this recognition to disrupt the privilege and biases of researchers. Therefore, it is important that I acknowledge the role of my own bias during the data collection and analysis process as a Black man and researcher, who took this study of Delawarean history quite personally. Not only have I lived in this state for the majority of my life, but so has my father, as well as his parents and elders who directly experienced much of this history as former students, teachers, and staff members of William W.M Henry Comprehensive High School, Kent County's first Black high school which opened in 1952. My bias as a Black man plays a role in my interpretation of archival data, for example, in conversation with various archivists, they seldom understood how farm labor or migrant farm labor intersected with Black people, while I interpret these terms, or demographics, as interchangeable during the analysis process. My bias as a Black researcher plays a role in analyzing and coding oral histories, which can be best understood by the skepticism of many participants who were not sure how well their lives could inform the topic of my research, while I view their experiences as essential components of my research, as well as Delawarean history. Although these

acknowledgements do not omit my biases or privileges, they do provide transparency that is necessary in conducting ethical, qualitative, human-engaged research.

3.4 Methods and Strategy

At the start of my research, I was looking to develop an improved understanding of historic place-based exclusionary practices and subsequent outcomes. The inherently historic context within which this study takes place required me to employ methods that could engage with this history, thus, explaining the implementation of archival research and oral histories as methods. In the following sections, I will detail the application of these methods and processes of data collection and analysis.

3.4.1 Data Collection

In order to answer my first two research questions that are concerned with the ways in which "Black farm labor" was preserved in Delaware and the changes in the state's farm labor market that preceded the 1949 school building program, I accessed archival material and records between May 2022 and March 2023 through the University of Delaware's Special Collections, University (of Delaware) Archives, Delaware Public Archives, and Hagley Museum and Library. Each archive served a different purpose informing this research. Special Collections and the University's Interlibrary Loan Service gave me access to archival materials that provided insight on Delaware's labor market history through labor reports, cases of injustice, and scholarly works that were not accessible outside of these services. University Archives offered

pivotal insight on historic shifts in Delaware's farm labor market and state practices that were implemented in response to the farm labor situations that arose during the first half of the twentieth century. Delaware Public Archives contained extensive materials on Delaware's history, specifically of interest in this research was the various landmarks that memorialize Black education facilities, as well as sites of injustice, such as the state's historic whipping posts. Hagley Museum and Library has a wide array of information and materials that span economic and political history in Delaware to the country more broadly. Of particular interest at Hagley were materials relating to Delaware public services and school building programs, as well as extensive correspondence, meeting minutes, and surveys of the state's public education system. The materials I highlight and cite in this research connect Delaware's farm labor and education history, specifically considering the implications of these practices for Black education and employment opportunities throughout the state.

Concerning the intersections of farm labor, education, and Black opportunities, I centralize Black life, voices, and experiences. My third research question brings to focus the lived experiences of Black people who attended William W.M. Henry Comprehensive High School, a school that was approved and constructed by the 1949 school building program, I needed the "narrative space" provided by oral histories which placed the lives of participants as the main focus of the conversation. Oral histories work at three different levels, they assist the ability of the researcher (myself) in reconstructing events of the past, understanding how these events are remembered

and told by those who lived through them, and, finally, connecting what we understand to be historical fact with the narratives of the participants (Portelli, 2019). Between July 2022 and January 2023, I recorded 8 oral histories, with each conversation spanning between 1 and 3 hours. In this study, I highlight 6 of these oral histories as these experiences speak most closely to the subject and considerations of my research. The 2 oral histories that were omitted from this study did not provide enough information for those experiences to be analyzed in tandem with one another or the others. Of these 6 oral histories and participants that are within the scope of this project and analysis, 4 participants were former students at William Henry, 1 participant was a former student and staff member, and 1 participant attended Howard High School, the state's first and only Black high school prior to 1950, but went on to teach at William Henry. In these oral histories, participants reflect on their experiences in Delaware from childhood to adulthood, specifically considering how they navigated restricted education and employment opportunities in the face of *de facto* and *de jure* segregation, as well as how improved access to these opportunities may or may not have influenced their employment outcomes and related decision making.

3.4.2 Data Analysis

Despite the thematic overlaps across my archival data and participant oral histories (which will be discussed in later chapters), these datasets were analyzed separately. First, I reviewed, collected, and analyzed archival materials to answer my first two research questions; considering how farm labor was promoted and preserved through the first half of the twentieth century. I answer this question by highlighting labor market outcomes and practices, as well as education reform, which went on

during the first half of the twentieth century as, in the case of Delaware a century ago, the public education system was designed to preserve the labor market outcomes the state had historically grown accustomed to. In my second research question, I bring to focus the farm labor market shifts and farm labor practices that preceded the state's 1949 school building program. The 1949 school building program reinforced and bolstered Delaware's public education system for white students, but revamped this system for Black students, especially south of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal; and, as I emphasize in the next chapter, actually completed the work that should have been done during the state's first public education project. I analyzed my archival data specifically considering the ways in which essentialist beliefs about Black people and farm labor led to exclusionary practices and outcomes across education and employment opportunities which were maintained through uneven power relations.

Participant oral histories speak to my third research question, bringing to focus the lived experiences of Black people within Delaware, and how their lives inform the lasting legacy of the history found in my archival data. All participants were born prior to the 1949 school building program and able to make use of secondary education facilities courtesy of the school building program. Prevailing essentialisms in the first half of the twentieth century suggested improved access to education for Black students would cause 'negative' impacts throughout the state such as population redistribution and economic disadvantage (Taggart, 1988). It is important to incorporate Black voices and experiences in this research to counter these historic essentialisms that have not been contested in existing literature. McKittrick and

Woods (2007) warn that geographic investigations surrounding race that lean on empirical evidence may fall into the trap of furthering these essentialisms. Building from this foundational work on Black Geographies and Black Geopolitical concerns, I incorporate these Black Geographic lived experiences "because they reconfigure classificatory spatial practices" (ibid, p. 5). I analyzed these oral histories considering the correlation, or lack thereof, between essentialist presumptions among Delaware's white elites and the lived experiences of community elders by coding each oral history transcription for "education" to highlight experiences in education that provide insight on what it was like to be a student at a segregated primary or secondary school in twentieth Delaware. Further, I coded for "employment" to illustrate how participant labor market experiences and outcomes may or may not have been influenced by access to secondary education facilities. In addition, I coded for "discrimination," considering how these choices may have been influenced or restricted by other exclusionary labor market practices or social customs in Delaware. I also coded for "mobility," or movement, to draw out examples and choices participants made regarding where to live as education reformers were leery of "population redistribution." The findings from participant oral histories will be discussed in further detail in chapter 5. In the next chapter, I discuss the findings and results I drew from my archival data.

Chapter 4

LABOR MARKET SHIFTS, EDUCATION REFORM, AND THE STURCTURE OF BLACK OPPORTUNITY

4.1 Introduction

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Delaware's reputation preceded itself to such an extent that it made national news by 1919 in the *New York Times*. The article vilified Delaware for its underdeveloped public education system as well as the state's continued use of public whippings to punish citizens convicted of crimes. Some of Delaware's northern, white elites saw the *Times* piece as further iteration for the need of necessary reforms throughout the state. One of the state's greatest accomplishments in the decades that followed was the Delaware School Auxiliary Association's (DSAA) school construction program. Plans for the program were developed from sets of recommendations provided by the Rockefeller General Education Board who was commissioned to survey Delaware's public education system. Improvements were recommended for white and Black education, separately. The DSAA largely followed the provided recommendations, especially those for improving the white public education system. However, the improvements for Black education were curtailed by essentialist beliefs among reformers about Black Delawareans in regard to their education needs and work as farm laborers.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Delaware's farm labor market remained generally 'undisturbed,' such that Black farm labor could be identified as an ethnic niche in 1940, the first U.S. census that included more detailed sets of questions

including occupation, industry and class of worker (United States Census Bureau, 2012). However, the state's farm labor market would undergo significant changes between 1940 and 1950 as World War II depleted farm labor sources not only in Delaware, but across much of the country. These shifts restructured Delaware's labor market and had further implications for the development of Black public education and employment opportunities. In the case of twentieth century Delaware, such essentialist beliefs acted as a structural characteristic of place, both physically and socially, through the construction (or lack thereof) of schools and labor camps, as well as the racialized policies and practices that acted as employment barriers and/or employment pathways for Black folk in Delaware.

In this chapter, I discuss the conditions in Delaware that made way for this ethnic niche to develop in the early decades of the twentieth century, the efforts made by government and non-governmental organizations to preserve this niche, and the implications for Black education and employment opportunities within Delaware. In the next section, I rely on the works of Robert Taggart, who has conducted extensive research on Delaware's public education and the work of Pierre S. du Pont, to provide background information on the early developments of Black public education in Delaware, as well as the Delaware School Auxiliary Association and its 1919 school construction program. In the following sections, I describe the findings of my archival data, highlighting the various efforts to structure Black life around farm labor, as well as discussing how these efforts and subsequent outcomes should be understood through the lens of a Black, geopolitical analytic framework. The findings I present in this chapter address my first two research questions: *(1) In what ways did labor*

institutions in Delaware preserve the state's 'Black farm labor market' during the first half of the twentieth century? (2) What changes in Delaware's farm labor market and farm practices preceded the state's 1949 School Building Program? To conclude, I emphasize the implications associated with this early twentieth century niche in Delaware and how further consideration should be given to the essentialist beliefs, racialized policies, and exclusionary practices that can be derived from niche occupations.

4.2 Background Information

Delaware's Black education system had its earliest foundations laid in the 1840s. At the time, Black school building efforts and responsibilities fell on Black communities themselves. Through the legal system of taxation, local governments and the state ensured that the so-called 'burden' of educating Black children was not shouldered by white Delawareans, so no taxes paid by white people were used to fund Black education (Hagley, 2001). As a result, there were a number of small, 1- and 2-room elementary schools scattered throughout the state, but these schools lacked infrastructure and were significantly under-resourced (Taggart, 1979). In 1867, Black access to education expanded as the Association for the Moral Improvement and Education of Colored People opened the state's first Black high school, Howard High School, in an under-resourced, five-room building in Wilmington, Delaware (Hagley, 2001; Delaware Public Archives, 1988). This was the reality for Black public

education through the early 1900s, prior to the interventions of the Delaware School Auxiliary Association.

The Delaware School Auxiliary Association was established in 1919 by Pierre S. du Pont, former president of General Motors and E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Company, and his (du Pont) philanthropic collective, the Service Citizens of Delaware. Du Pont was the wealthiest and most influential Delawarean of the twentieth century. Taking over the DuPont Company in 1915, it only took 10 years for du Pont to turn this Delaware-based explosives business into the world's largest chemical corporation. During the first World War, the DuPont Company amassed great wealth by supplying 40 percent of the explosives used by the Allied Powers (Biography, 1996). Du Pont used these war profits to expand the DuPont Company and his influence in Delaware. Approximately 4 months before the end of World War I, du Pont invited eighty "important [northern, white 'elites'] Delawareans" to the Du Pont Building in Wilmington, DE, to organize what became known as the Service Citizens of Delaware (Taggart, 1988, p. 48). Just one year later, the Service Citizens would form the DSAA.

In the words of the Service Citizens, during the first World War, there was a revitalized sense of patriotism across the United States that inspired citizens to start "thinking and working for things bigger than themselves" (*Citizens at Work,* 1940, p. 3). Pierre du Pont was elected president of the Service Citizens, he then provided the group a generous working fund, and appointed Dr. Joseph H. Odell, a well-known minister from New York who du Pont had much respect for, as director. Before the du

Pont working fund could be put to work, Odell warned, “Before attempting anything constructive, it is essential to know the facts and understand conditions,” (*Citizens at Work*, 1940, p. 3). Surveys were then conducted of Delaware’s public education system, public health, and public administration. The surveys were compiled to understand where improvements would be needed. To survey the state’s public education system, du Pont and the Service Citizens commissioned a research team from Columbia University that made clear “the deplorable conditions of education in Delaware” to the Service Citizens in 1918 (Phelan and Phozen, 1973, p. 86). In 1919, du Pont brought in the Rockefeller General Education Board to conduct another survey and provide recommendations for the school construction efforts that would ultimately be funded and carried out through the DSAA.

The Rockefeller General Education Board provided du Pont and the DSAA with separate recommendations for white public education improvements and Black public education improvements. Concerning Black public education in Delaware, the Rockefeller General Education Board provided a list of 5 recommendations to improve this segment of the public education system. Of the 5 recommendations, the DSAA would loosely follow 4. The recommendations were listed as follows (Taggart, 1988, p. 131):

1. Small schools should be consolidated whenever possible, though limited to “natural consolidations” that would not require transportation.
2. Building expenditure must be limited to the minimum consonant with modern educational facilities so that available funds would construct all necessary [B]lack school buildings.

3. Schools must not, however, be too cheaply built, because long-term maintenance costs would be burdensome.
4. Schools must serve a community function, with adequate playgrounds and a building suitable for use as a social center.
5. There should be a high school for [B]lacks in each county to permit equal access to secondary education.

Over the span of the next two decades, the DSAA would undertake separate public education reform efforts. Some projects were for white public education, others were for Black public education. Efforts were shaped by the provided recommendations, but the DSAA ignored the 5th recommendation which called for a Black high school in each of Delaware's 3 counties. Instead, the DSAA only rebuilt Howard High School in 1928, based in the state's northernmost New Castle County. The DSAA was also largely unsuccessful in consolidating small schools. It is noted that even within du Pont's philanthropies there was little support for Black education improvements, but these failures were permissible in line with "a powerful economic argument for maintaining the status quo" (Taggart, 1988, p. 135):

> "[The argument] insisted that care must be taken not to disturb the distribution of [B]lacks, because 'Delaware is singularly dependent on colored farm labor.' Large, consolidated schools might be of 'temporary advantage' to [B]lacks, but if consolidation were pushed 'it would tend to concentrate the colored population of the state in a relatively few centers.' Population redistribution would be to the 'economic disadvantage of the Negroes themselves' as well as the whole state."

Director Odell also stated that the concern of high schools was "a question of policy that can be decided only by the State Board of Education" and that the DSAA would only support one high school until the "educational aspirations of the colored people enlarge," (Taggart, 1988, p. 136). This statement clearly contradicted the findings of

the surveyors who noted an increased demand for secondary education among Black Delawareans (Taggart, 1988). The DSAA followed through with these omissions which reduced the improvements for the Black public education system, as a result, the state's southernmost counties, where agricultural producers and canning and packing facilities were concentrated, would not see Black high schools open until 1951. This delayed access to secondary education not only reflected the uneven geopolitically situated power relations that existed in Delaware at the time, but also the essentialist beliefs, racialized policies, and exclusionary practices that can be derived from niche occupations.

I rely on Taggart's history of du Pont's school construction program as Delaware archives are no exception to the "archival crisis, as scarce resources are available on 'ordinary' Black schools and students," (Lewis & James-Gallaway, 2022, p. 270). Conventional history methods have historically tended to "omit Black life" in archives (ibid), so researching this history through Pierre du Pont was necessary for Taggart. In the next sections, I, first, rely on the 1956 work of Jerome Holland and highlight the conditions in Delaware that made way for farm labor to develop as an ethnic niche in the early decades of the twentieth century, I then present the efforts made by government and non-governmental organizations to preserve this niche and restrict other employment opportunities throughout this time period, and the implications for Black public education in southern Delaware in greater detail.

4.3 Wartime Delaware, 1910 - 1950

The first objective of this section, and this project more generally, was to identify the conditions in Delaware that made way for this niche occupation to emerge in the early decades of the twentieth century. While conducting archival research, I found "farm labor" was often preceded by the word "colored," this line of work was viewed as a 'Black job.' In Holland's *A study of the employment status of Negro population in the State of Delaware* (1956), Holland suggests this clustering of Black workers in farm labor was expected as, following the abolition of slavery, "[i]t was only natural, then, that at the outset he ["the Negro"] would remain predominantly an agriculture worker, for this status was one of his heritage from his past in America," (p. 1). However, I would argue that there was nothing natural about this clustering around farm work, instead, this process of labor market sorting was produced by the interactions between social structures and, in this case, Black folk.

Holland notes that Delaware, at least at the time, cannot be thought of as having just one economy, it is divided by county, industrial activities, attitudes and allegiances. For example, Delaware's northernmost county, New Castle, was the state's industrial center. The two southernmost counties were far less developed industrially, instead these counties relied on raising "vegetables, stable crops, fruits and poultry," (p. 80). Holland goes on to explain that living in southern Delaware would push Black folk towards agriculture and related industries as "southern Delaware traditions hold the employment line rigid." There was little opportunity for

Black folks as workforce managers in these areas who were “aware of the inequities of work distribution [are] afraid to disturb the old order of things,” (p.86). Holland continues, “As a result of this fear, jobs remain vacant for the want of white workers, even though capable Negroes are in that job market,” (p. 87). Holland critiques work distribution and labor market equity across Delaware, but throughout this work, it becomes increasingly evident that conditions in southern Delaware, specifically in Kent and Sussex County, were worse than those in northern Delaware, or New Castle County. Holland concluded this critique, “Southern Delaware is completely lethargic about the employment status of Negroes. Occupational progress will continue at 18th century pace without a catalyst to hasten it,” (p. 101).

Holland describes Black workers in Delaware as “pawn[s] in the economic game” as the processes of labor market sorting and associated movements were “dominated by a combination of circumstances over which he [“the Negro”] had very little control,” (p. 11). Early on in Delaware, these circumstances were shaped, firstly, by the history of land use in the state. Since the state’s “original settlement” in the seventeenth century, “[Delaware’s] land has been primarily used for production of food and timber,” (University of Delaware Cooperative Extension Service, 1909). Due to this history of land use, engagement in farm labor was ‘normal’ for most Delawareans, Black and white Delawareans alike. Through the first decade of the twentieth century, 40 percent of Delaware’s entire population was engaged in farm labor (Kee, 2019). These early twentieth conditions in Delaware actually resulted in out-migration by many Black Delawareans. Between 1900 and 1920, the state saw its

Black population percentage decrease 3 percent, as Black folk searched for better opportunities and living conditions (Holland, 1956).

Delaware's farm labor market and practices started to shift during the second decade of the twentieth century. The first World War broke out at a time in which the farm labor market in Delaware, as well as much of the United States, was disorganized. There were no formal employment services or structures in place to match farmers with available laborers. The labor shortage that resulted from the demand for troops and the expansion of wartime industry shed light on the need for organized structures that could bridge the gap between farmers and potential laborers. Some sense of order was established by the end of the war as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) started to coordinate these efforts and develop lines of communication between farmers, communities, and the U.S. Employment Service (USES) (Schwartz, 1942). Unfortunately, the development of these employment pathways and what Holland referred to as "changes in the economic process that lead to progress, work against the Negro's advancement," (1956, p. 91). These newly developed farm labor employment pathways and practices, and the development of labor-replacing equipment, helped Delaware and the United States navigate this farm labor shortage, which also allowed for continued expansion of wartime industry and further diversification of the Delawarean economy.

The importance of shifts and improvements in farm labor practices was lost in the early 1920s as much of the international community and U.S. trade partners had recovered from the war and no longer needed to rely on U.S. food exports. Despite

these declines in demand for U.S. exports, these improvements in farm processes made it difficult for farmers to reduce production. The resulting surpluses forced sharp declines in farm prices and caused an agricultural depression. Delaware would get through this depression by further diversifying its farm economy and creating jobs in manufacturing and mechanical industries throughout the 1920s (Kee, 2019). However, as previously noted, Delaware's economy cannot be viewed as one economy, and these growing industries favored white Delawareans leaving Black Delawareans concentrated in the declining industry which was agriculture. Holland notes that in Delaware, "the more diversified the industries of an area, the larger the proportion of Negro unskilled workers employed in it[...] at the bottom rung of the social ladder," (1956, p. 82). In this analysis of the state's expanding industries, Holland continues, "it will be noticed that the cleaner, more lucrative, easier, and newer occupations are first distributed to whites," (ibid, p. 67). Black workers in Delaware, despite their own qualifications or capabilities, would have to wait to find employment in these new and expanding industries due to prevailing discriminatory practices.

4.3.1 The Interwar Period

As white employment opportunities diversified and expanded through the 1920s, so did white education opportunities. This interrelated history is illustrated across these modernizing shifts one century ago. These shifts away from the state's 'traditional' agricultural norms resulted in the state shifting away from its 'rural

values' as well. These rural values, or "the political predominance of rural citizens," explained the state of Delaware's public education system prior to World War I (Taggart, 1988, p. 16). Southern, rural, white Delawareans preferred a decentralized public education system as the proposed plans for education reform included raising taxes and, at the time, this segment of the population did not believe that education would make a difference in improving quality of life. This decentralized system in which local communities controlled their schools was viewed as an essential component of rural life in Delaware, and these communities preferred to maintain schools, as described by Taggart, as "inexpensive supplements to their life style, as they always had been," (1988, p. 25). However, following years of increased pressure from the state's board of education, a centralized public education system would come with the passing of the 1921 school code.

The Delaware School Auxiliary Association carried out its white school construction program from 1920 to 1936 (Delaware School Auxiliary Association Records, 1917-1941). However, aside from three schools in Wilmington, Delaware, the DSAA had "rebuilt virtually the entire [B]lack school system within four years," (Taggart, 1979, p. 471). Delaware's 1921 school code and the work of Pierre S. du Pont and the DSAA undoubtedly improved public education for Black Delawareans, and du Pont's efforts are generally remembered as if he were a champion of civil rights in Delaware. Less attention is paid to the shortcomings of the DSAA school construction program, nor the design and motives of the program. Holland's analysis

of employment outcomes of Black Delawareans were dominated by "circumstances over which he ["the Negro"] had very little control," (p. 1). Similar can be said for the development of education opportunities for Black Delawareans. The DSAA made early efforts to work with the Delaware Negro Civic League, an early civil rights organization formed to promote the interests of local Blacks, specifically across economic, social, and political arenas, but these efforts failed (Taggart, 1979). Consequently, Black Delawareans had marginal say in the location of their schools. Instead, the DSAA followed county survey results and built schools in relation to population distribution (Taggart, 1979). Therefore, schools were constructed in areas that the DSAA believed had high enough concentrations of Black children.

It is important to note that, despite the Hagley Museum and Library's general celebration of Pierre du Pont, the DSAA, and its school construction program, not even du Pont himself was particularly interested in improving Black public education out of the goodness of his heart. Taggart (1979, p. 479) writes:

> "[Pierre S. du Pont] moved rapidly to build schools for [B]lacks so that whites would rebuild their own schools. As he admitted to Drew Pearson later, the Auxiliary's function was to cajole whites into matching his gifts with increased school taxes and bonding so as to form the impetus for rebuilding the entire Delaware school system. Unfortunately for du Pont's good intentions, Delawareans were extremely suspicious toward an outside agency such as the Auxiliary which was not politically accountable to them. Therefore, as du Pont confided to Pearson, "We tried another tack." He offered to rebuild all [B]lack schools, so that the whites, "Not wanting their children to attend poorer schools than the Negroes, immediately became interested in education." If persuasion through guilt would not work, as presented in the Auxiliary's surveys, then perhaps embarrassment might. Whites would hate admitting that [B]lack schools were superior to their own. [...] Furthermore, by constructing all [B]lack schools himself, du Pont

> believed that he had stolen one of the most pervasive arguments whites had against public monies for schools: that white money would be used for [B]lack children."

Taggart's works complicate the perception that Pierre du Pont and the DSAA considered the interests and needs of Black Delawareans when formulating their school construction plans. Their general disregard for Black education, specifically secondary education, went so far as to refusing to even build classrooms for secondary education in Black elementary schools (Taggart, 1979). It is quite evident that du Pont, the Service Citizens of Delaware, and the Delaware School Auxiliary Association were more than content following the "economic argument for maintaining the status quo," which, as noted above, was primarily focused on preserving Black farm labor.

These coordinated efforts to preserve the status quo in Delaware could be considered successful. By the 1930s, and the completion of the DSAA's Black school construction program--barring three Wilmington-based projects--Black workers in Delaware found their largest gains in manufacturing and mechanical industries as unspecified manufacturers (i.e. as factory workers on assembly lines) and paperhangers (i.e. hanging wallpaper), while white workers found their largest gains in more lucrative positions within these industries, such as managers and operators (of large machinery), (Holland, 1956). Through the 1930s, Black Delawareans would remain concentrated in farm labor, reiterating that, up to this point, "[t]he shift away from agriculture has been for white workers primarily," (Holland, 1956, p. 43). By the 1940 census, representation in farm labor proved this line of work to be a niche occupation for Black Delawareans. For the next decade, this niche occupation that

Delaware's elites worked to preserve, would be destabilized by the United States' increased involvement in World War II.

4.3.2 World War II and the Farm Labor Emergency

World War II presented the United States with an unprecedented farm labor emergency due to the demands of war, specifically the demand for laborers in defense plants and other industrial jobs, as well as the drafting of soldiers through the U.S. selective service (Records of Cooperative Extension: General, 1941-1947). By April 1942, just a few months after the events of Pearl Harbor, which drew the United States into active conflict, certain parts of Delaware saw its farm labor forces depleted by as much as 35 percent. By 1943, as much as 50 percent. Prior to 1942, at least in the case of Delaware, farm labor deficiencies were generally handled by the United States Employment Service. Once World War II had broken out, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Defense Board and Delaware's State Agricultural Committee also got involved with the situation. Coordination across these organizations was limited and, ultimately, their efforts did not rectify the situation at hand. As a result, farmers struggled to keep up with demands for production and prospective farm laborers experienced difficulties finding work and were forced to endure poor living conditions while searching for employment opportunities.

In early 1940, representatives from the Delaware Labor Commission and other cooperating state agencies attended a conference that included labor representatives

from neighboring states, such as Maryland, New Jersey, and Virginia, to discuss "migratory labor problems," (Sutherland, 1941). Migratory labor refers to migratory farm labor, specifically Black farm laborers that travel from the U.S. South for seasonal work. In order to make sense of these migrant labor conditions, Delaware's labor representatives surveyed migrant farm labor camps and facilities throughout the state later that same year. At the time, migratory farm labor was disorganized and the "extent of and the hazards created by the migratory labor movements were practically unknown to the general public and usually were ignored by State and Federal labor, health, and relief agencies," (Sutherland, 1941, p. 2). Since canning firms, or canneries, employed 80 percent of migrants in Delaware, surveyors visited the state's 14 canneries; 8 of these facilities also had migrant labor camps. There were only Black men, women, and children in the labor camps, the majority of migrants were from Maryland or Florida, some identified as Delaware residents, and others were from Alabama, North Carolina, and Virginia (ibid).

Camps were typically repurposed buildings that were divided into different rooms to house multiple migrant families. These 'accommodations' did not offer much as they were often described by migrants as makeshift or low-quality. Beds were made of straw, migrants would bring their own sheets and blankets. Only 3 of the 8 camps had electric light. A few camps were furnished with stoves that would have to be shared across families. The increased use of labor-saving agricultural machinery compounded with the lack of an organized farm labor market across the United States

prohibited many migrants from being able to find sufficient employment, forcing them "to live in unhealthy squatter camps, without money to buy food and clothing at the barest subsistence level," (Sutherland, 1941, p. 2). This employment pattern kept most migrants among the lowest income group in the United States (ibid). Prior to 1943, little to no efforts were made to improve the situation.

In 1943, Delaware's Cooperative Extension Service, an extension agency operating under the U.S. Department of Agriculture, assumed complete responsibility of the farm labor situation after spending the previous year collecting facts about Delaware's farm labor market. In the Cooperative Extension's "Annual Report for 1941," it was not clear how involved the Extension Service would be moving forward, but the report's "Outlook for 1942" states, "however, assistance and services will be based on the plain facts and difficulties presented in our location in a rapidly expanding war industrial area, which is drawing heavily on farm labor and seriously disrupting our social and economic pattern," (Records of Cooperative Extension: Emergency Farm Labor Program, 1942-1947). Before shifting its efforts to the farm labor situation, Delaware's Cooperative Extension Service was primarily concerned with land use practices, agricultural machinery, and food security. The demands of war brought the Cooperative Extension Service into focus as an essential proponent of the war effort, specifically concerned with "the conservation of human and material resources," (Agricultural Experiment Station, Circular No. 37, 1943).

In March 1942, a meeting between representatives of the USDA Warboard, State Board of Agriculture, Delaware's Cooperative Extension Service and other

relevant parties was held at the office of Governor Walter Bacon. At the meeting the state's farm labor deficiencies were discussed at length, the meeting minutes read, "Because of these conditions Delaware must rely to a much greater extent than in the past on migratory labor to plant harvest and process crops so urgently needed by the Nation in the National production program," (Records of Cooperative Extension: Emergency Farm Labor Program, 1942-1947). In the case of twentieth century Delaware, it must be emphasized that farm labor, especially migrant farm labor, was interchangeable with Black labor, and the University of Delaware's Cooperative Extension Service's archives do not hide this history. In the early years of Delaware's World War II-induced farm labor emergency, representatives from the Extension Service looked to familiar sources of farm labor for help. In the Extension Service's monthly report for April 1942, prepared by A.D. Cobb, Extension Leader in Agricultural Planning, notes (ibid):

> "As it becomes more evident that the Delaware Farm Placement Service was not establishing successful contacts with sources of migrant labor, letter were sent to all Negro County Agricultural Agents in six northern states seeking such contacts. Replies indicate a general farm labor shortage throughout these states and that migrant labor will not move into Delaware this year in nearly such numbers as in the past. Replies from Alabama gave two possible sources of women labor for canneries and field work. From Virginia the names of 6 men were obtained who might supply some labor. From North Carolina the names of 6 negro college presidents were given to refer to for possible colored student labor. All of this information was turned over to the Farm Placement Service."

The report goes on to note that Paul Hodgson, former Acting State Supervisor of Agriculture, who had been recruiting local labor sources, found "134 boys and 143

girls from colored schools, willing to work on farms this summer and that colored teachers would volunteer to supervise their placement," (ibid, 1942). Hodgson was recruiting "High School pupils" and it is not clear if these children attended Howard High School or were enrolled in classes at Delaware State College (a historically Black college in Dover), but it is interesting to note that, despite the limited access of Black secondary education at the time, Black children were the only labor source mentioned.

In early 1943, the Cooperative Extension Service would launch its Emergency Farm Labor Program. The Program provided a list of recommendations, or policy interventions, to alleviate the labor emergency, as follows:

a. Discontinue the recruitment of experienced farm labor for industry.
b. Close filling stations, stores, offices and other establishments part of day, to permit employees to help produce and harvest crops.
c. Encourage people to spend their vacations on farms assisting in the production of food.
d. Arrange with school officials to permit a 15-day leave without the loss of school credit for older high school boys to work on farms during an emergency while the school is in session.
e. Close schools for half-day periods in areas where emergency exists in the production and harvesting of crops.
f. Close non-essential plants during periods of emergency in harvesting and processing crops.
g. Continue to cooperate with the Selective Service in the deferment of essential, experienced farm managers, workers and processors.
h. Encourage training on the farm of non-farm youth, men and women for special operations within their ability.
i. Provide satisfactory working and living conditions for resident workers.
j. Provide supervision for untrained groups of farm workers.
k. Shift from non-essential farm enterprises to be the production of commodities stressed in the "Food for Freedom" program.
l. Exchange labor among farmers
m. Do custom work on farms.

n. Continue training in repair of farm machinery and other courses leading to more efficient farm labor.
o. Encourage a work or fight attitude.
p. Cooperate to conserve time and tires in hauling products and supplies to and from the farm.

Many of the above regulations did not restrict the mobility of individuals employed outside of farm labor, however, for individuals employed as farm laborers, some of these regulations, such as discontinuing the recruitment of "experienced farm labor" for industry, would further confine them to the "lowest income group in the Nation," (Sutherland, 1942, p. 2).

The policies that would follow and efforts to preserve "farm labor" carried significant implications for Black life in Delaware. For example, the first point in the list of recommendations (above), the recommendation to discontinue the recruitment of "experienced farm labor" for industry led to the implementation of "Directive No. XIV," an order proposed by the United States War Manpower Commission prohibiting industry from employing anyone with a historical background in farm labor, in 1943 (Records of Cooperative Extension: Emergency Farm Labor Program, 1942-1947). Compounded with the preexisting lack of Black employment outside of farm labor, such orders would further restrict Black folk in Delaware to farm labor and "the lowest income group." Recommendations to target efforts toward Delaware schools and non-farm youth also specified outreach efforts to Black children. In 1943, Paul Hodgson, who was in charge of securing more school-aged laborers, sent communications to state superintendents and principals, reminding them that "[i]f you have colored schools in your jurisdiction, please be sure to include them in this

program," (1943). Further, as noted by the 1940 survey of migrant labor conditions in Delaware, all migrants living in camps were Black, therefore, efforts to improve working *and* living conditions carried even more implications for Black life in Delaware.

Despite such policy interventions, the demands of war forced Delaware to become increasingly reliant on new sources of farm labor. In the state's "Plan of Work for 1944," it is noted "[c]anneries and large farm operators who have been dealing with southern negro help for years found it practically impossible to obtain help of this type in 1943," (Records of Cooperative Extension: Plan of Work, 1919-1978). Looking back at the 1940 survey of migrant labor conditions in Delaware, surveyors only identified one migrant worker from the Bahamas and none from Jamaica (Sutherland, 1941). However, during the 1944 and 1945 harvest seasons, Bahamian and Jamaican migrants would emerge as the second largest labor source(s) in Delaware. Local seasonal laborers were the largest (Records of Cooperative Extension: General, 1941-1947). At the time, Gordy noted that Delaware farmers preferred foreign labor sources to interstate sources "since [foreign migrants] are more nearly subject to control," (Records of Cooperative Extension: Emergency Farm Labor Program, 1942-1947). In earlier years, A.D. Cobb noted "a growing sentiment today about developing a 'work or fight' program in order to break up the apparent general practice of [interstate] colored farm labor failing to report for work on Monday as a result of too much week-end celebration," (Records of Cooperative Extension: Emergency Farm Labor Program, 1942-1947). These beliefs about Black farm

laborers led to “troublesome supervision” of migrant workers, specifically Jamaicans. Tensions stemming from these supervisory practices had reached a boiling point in August 1945, just before the end of the war, when Jamaican laborers refused to report for work in the Kent County-based Woodside (Labor) Camp. Workers cited abuse from Cooperative Extension Service employees, as well as the contractors and farmers who employed them, indicating that they would no longer stay in Delaware for work. Jamaican representatives informed Cooperative Extension staff “that the Jamaican people were high-class and that they were not negroes nor should they be treated as such, they should be treated as guests,” (Records of Cooperative Extension: Emergency Farm Labor Program, 1942-1947). Once the war had ended, foreign sources of labor were less accessible, shifting the farm labor focus back to migrants from the U.S. South, as well as how these migrants were going to be treated and accommodated moving forward.

In the Extension Service’s 1946 Plan of Work, it is noted that “the farm labor problem is tougher now than during the war period” and there is need for a new program that “makes best use of migrants,” (ibid). In August 1946, a conference was held between farmer associations and related organizations from Delaware and New Jersey interested in a permanent migratory farm labor program. Participants of the conference felt “very strongly that the social conditions surrounding the employment of migratory labor should be given proper consideration,” (Records of Cooperative Extension: Plan of Work, 1919-1978). These sentiments were echoed in the Delaware Extension Service’s 1947 Plan of Work, “The year of 1946 saw a decided increase in

the numbers of [interstate] migrants coming into Delaware over the number during the past 3 years. In 1947, increased attention should be given and more detailed plans should be made in reference to this source of harvest help," (Records of Cooperative Extension: Plan of Work, 1919-1978). The Extension Service worked to make sense of migrant labor conditions and developed a proposal for a permanent farm labor program. The proposal noted that a number of "factors" limit the ability of farm laborers to find better employment opportunities and proposed a variety of solutions concerning different aspects of migrant life, including, but not limited to: income, housing, sanitation, and education.

Highlighting the shortcomings of education, the proposal provides the following recommendations for general education:

1. Provision of educational facilities for the children of farm laborers, the same as, or comparable to, those provided other children. Steps should be taken to insure that children of farm laborers, particularly those of migrants, take full advantage of the provisions for general education.
2. Increased emphasis in schools on vocational training in the fields of agriculture, in allied occupations, home economics, trades and industries, and other vocations that will broaden the opportunities of rural youth to engage in needed and satisfying employment.

To reiterate that these policies were targeted at Black migrant workers from the U.S. South, the Extension Service's 1947 Plan of Work stated, "With [prisoners of war] entirely out of the supply picture and with the use of any appreciable number of Bahamians or Jamaicans very doubtful, it appears that our efforts in 1947 will have to be much more in the direction of inter-State sources. Delaware for years has looked to

southern Negro migrants as a leading source of harvest hands, especially during July and August," (ibid).

It is also important to emphasize the second recommendation listed above, as that vocational-focused curriculum was adopted by the Black high schools that were later constructed in Delaware's Kent and Sussex counties. In 1947, Delaware's 114th General Assembly motioned for a study of Delaware's public education system that was to be completed by December 1, 1948, ahead of the state's 1949 115th General Assembly (Delaware General Assembly, 1947). At the 115th General Assembly, a new school building program was approved and allotted a $20 million budget. The General Assembly approved the construction of two comprehensive high schools for Black students in Kent and Sussex County, respectively (ibid, 1949). William C. Jason Comprehensive High School would open in Sussex County in 1951 and William W.M. Henry opened Kent County in 1952 (The News Journal, 1951). Comprehensive high schools adopted the emphasis on vocational training that was described in the proposal for a permanent farm labor program. A 1960 survey of Delaware's Black comprehensive high schools described the comprehensive high school as a "program of secondary education for all youth, with due regard to the great variety of immediate and eventual personal goals. It is uniquely American in origin and largely a product of the 20th century," (The Library of Comprehensive High Schools, 1960).
Approximately three decades after the Delaware School Auxiliary Association launched its school construction program, Black Delawareans of Kent and Sussex

County had accessible high schools, but even the curriculum of these schools was circumscribed by the state's white elites.

4.4 Discussion and Conclusion

In Holland's 1956 study of the employment history of Black Delawareans, Holland notes that "social and cultural ambitions" have been circumscribed to Black folk by the state's white elites (ibid, p. 89). My archival data presented in this chapter highlights examples of education and employment aspirations being "circumscribed" to Black Delawareans without their own input. These practices were shaped by Delaware's farm labor history and the state's historic dependence on Black farm labor, an ethnic niche that non-governmental organizations and labor institutions worked to preserve through the first half of the twentieth century. These are examples of the uneven power relations and Black subjectivity that prevailed through twentieth century Delaware. Holland (1956) highlighted a number of factors that influence Black employment in Delaware, one of these key influences was the "paternalistic attitude of whites towards Negroes," (p. 84). These paternalistic attitudes manifested in the DSAA school building program and the decision to not build Black high schools in Kent and Sussex County, in addition to the ineffective school consolidation efforts. The 1949 school building program would also undertake the school consolidation efforts by closing one-room schools, something that the DSAA failed to do (Delaware

General Assembly, 1949). Black school construction projects approved in the 1949 school building program were projects that were recommended to the DSAA in 1919.

In my view, the motion to revisit and further improve Delaware's public education system at the 114th General Assembly and the school building program approved at 115th General Assemblies would not have been passed if not for the Cooperative Extension Service's proposal for a permanent farm labor program. This is not to suggest that the proposal informed the decisions at either General Assembly, however, even under the belief that these 1947 policy interventions are unrelated, these instances are further evidence of white Delawareans' paternalistic relationship Black Delawareans as the education needs outlined in the permanent farm labor program proposal went so far as to prescribe the curriculum that was adopted in the second, third, and fourth Black high schools in Delaware. Further, these Black school construction projects had to wait for white approval. Petitions for construction of Black secondary education facilities were submitted to the Governor, State Board of Education, and the Department of Public Instruction in 1944, 1945, and 1946. Each petition was rejected, with the last two petitions only being rejected by the Governor at the time, Walter Bacon, an accountant who served as a treasurer within the DuPont Company from 1918 to 1930. Elbert Carvel, an early advocate and leader for civil rights legislation in Delaware, was elected governor in 1948. At the 115th General Assembly, Governor Carvel highlighted his concerns for Delaware school districts at risk of falling below minimum standards, he called for a new school construction program which, as previously noted, was approved at the session (Waters, 1956).

It is not clear if the Extension Service's proposal for a permanent farm labor program played a part in the Carvel-led school construction program. The Carvel administration championed public education opportunities throughout the state, noting that he wanted public schools to be of the same qualities as private schools, and all children should have equal education opportunity. In the early years of the Extension Service's involvement with the farm labor situation, it is clear that Governor Bacon, who was also a du Pont affiliate, was at least in-the-know through the March 1942 meeting at the office of the governor. However, through my archival research, I cannot say that Governor Carvel was involved with the situation, although it may be worth noting Delaware's Cooperative Extension Service Agricultural Experimental Station, the Elbert N. & Ann V. Carvel Research and Education Center, does honor the former governor today on the University of Delaware's Georgetown campus. Whether Carvel cooperated with the Extension Service or not, the data I have presented in this chapter highlight the historic connections between farm labor in Delaware with Black life and experiences; more specifically, how different government and non-governmental agencies worked to preserve Black farm labor, as well as the farm labor conditions surrounding the state's school construction programs. In the next chapter, I consider how the early warnings surrounding the DSAA's school construction program may or may not have manifested in the lived experiences of former students, one teacher, and one former staff member at William W.M. Henry Comprehensive High School, one of the school's approved by the 1949 school construction program.

Chapter 5

EXPECATION VS. REALITY: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNITY ELDERS

5.1 Introduction

McKittrick and Woods (2007) emphasize the importance of researchers and scholars of Black Geographies to centralize Black voices and experiences in research to ensure that such studies of the Black experience do not reduce Black life to statistics and essentialisms. In a shift from the previous chapter, this chapter brings Black voices and experiences into focus by placing 6 collected oral histories into focus to address my third research question: *(3) How do the lived experiences of students and teachers at the first Black high school in Delaware's Kent County (William Henry High) reflect, or not, the presumed impact(s) of improved access to secondary education for Black students and the belief among Delaware elites that improved access would lead to economic disadvantage for Black folk and the state's economy?* I derive this question from the 'argument to maintain status quo' and the warnings to the Delaware School Auxiliary Association to pay special care to the state's farm labor market. The oral histories highlighted in this chapter were collected between July 2022 and January 2023 from 4 former students of Kent County's William W.M. Henry Comprehensive High School, 1 former student, who returned to William Henry as a

staff member later in life, and 1 participant from Delaware's first Black high school, Howard High School, who went on to teach at William Henry.

The collected oral histories, spanning between 1 and 3 hours, focus on the lives of participants, specifically their life experiences navigating restricted employment and education opportunities, how improved access to these opportunities may or may not have influenced their own employment outcomes and related decision making (such as moving or dropping out of school), and their experiences navigating other forms of *de facto* and *de jure* segregation in Delaware. The collected oral histories work at 3 different levels in my research. First, these oral histories assist myself, the researcher, in reconstructing the memory of the developments discussed in the previous chapter, such as how Delaware's migrant farm labor program or school construction programs are remembered. Second, the lived experiences of participants during these time periods offer different perspectives and narratives that were not found in my archival data and research. Third, the experiences discussed in this chapter connect what was understood to be fact about farm labor and Black education opportunities with the narratives of these participants, specifically considering how the warnings and arguments to "maintain status quo" may or may not have manifested in the lives of participants.

In the next section, I provide more background information on my oral history participants and their collected oral histories, presenting the themes and topics that were discussed in each conversation, how the collected oral histories were coded during analysis, and the common thread(s) throughout these conversations. Due to

some thematic overlaps and similarity in experiences, I present these oral histories in 3 separate pairs in the following section due to specific topics that were emphasized across each pair, specifically (1) segregation in Delaware, (2) experiences in secondary education that influence essentialized employment outcomes, and (3) perceived shortcomings of William Henry High School. In the following section, I present the oral histories in the aforementioned pairs, describing specific experiences and observations that provide insight on Black experiences in Delaware's labor market and public education system almost a century ago. Finally, I conclude this chapter by highlighting discrepancies between collected oral histories and the essentialisms and overgeneralizations about Black Delawareans and Black workers that were presented in the previous chapter. This approach emphasizes the importance of incorporating marginalized perspectives as archives and documented history (i.e. books, documentaries, etc.) tend to omit, or overlook, these voices and experiences.

5.2 Background Information

As previously mentioned, the DSAA's school building program that kicked off just over one century ago, curtailed Black access to secondary education and effective school consolidation due to the prevailing belief that Delaware was dependent upon its Black farm labor market, and that education reform may disturb this labor market and the distribution of the state's Black population (Taggart, 1988). Therefore, while collecting oral histories from Black Delawareans who lived through the state's 1949

school construction program, I questioned how improved access to education informed decisions regarding employment, movement, and other related decision making. While analyzing the oral histories presented in this chapter, I considered the correlation, or lack thereof, between these earlier fears of Delaware's white elites and the lived experiences of community elders. During analysis, I coded oral histories for "education," "employment," "discrimination," and "mobility," or movement. Oral histories allow participants the narrative space to discuss their memories and perspectives, so coding for these themes helped contextualize these histories and find commonalities across individualized experiences.

In the first pair of oral histories, I focus on the topic of segregation in Delaware, drawing on the oral histories of William Smith and Warren Pinkett. William was born in Alliance, North Carolina, in October of 1939, however, through the migrant farm labor system facilitated by Cooperative Extension, his family would move to Delaware by 1950. William would attend segregated Black schools in Delaware, including William Henry, although he did not complete secondary education. Warren was born just a couple years earlier, in the September of 1937, in New Castle, Delaware. After graduating from Howard High School, Warren had spent some time in North Carolina, attending North Carolina A&T University, a historically Black university (HBCU) in Greensboro. Warren went on to teach at William Henry from 1960 to 1963. William and Warren alike speak to overt examples of racism and *de jure* segregation that were enabled in North Carolina, but they both contrast racism in North Carolina with the understated racism and *de facto* segregation that has

prevailed throughout Delaware during their lifetimes. These contrasts connect these two histories and offer an interesting understanding of historic race relations in Delaware, as well as the state's twentieth century labor market. Further, William's experiences in migrant farm labor offer different understandings of farm labor conditions under the watch of the Cooperative Extension Service, and Warren's experience as a teacher in Delaware offers deeper insight of teaching at segregated schools.

In the second pair of oral histories, I focus on the education and employment experiences of Charlotte Anne Pinkett and Joyce Bryan, sisters who were born in different parts of Delaware, in January of 1945 and December of 1945, but both grew up in Dover, right between the two small towns of Felton and Frederica. Charlotte Anne was born in Wilmington, Delaware, just before her parents moved to Frederica. Although the sisters had very different employment outcomes, as Joyce had very little employment history, they both graduated from William Henry and recall the types of classes they took in high school. Through these discussions, I learned how different classes were separated by gender and reproduced new essentialisms about jobs in the labor market. Despite this fact, Charlotte Anne and Joyce both emphasized their appreciation for William Henry and the education they were able to receive growing up, from the two-room Union (Elementary) School right down the street from their childhood home to Booker T. Washington Middle School, which should be recognized as one of the greatest accomplishments of the DSAA school building program. Booker

T. was one of the few “truly consolidated” schools and the only Black school that was built with an auditorium during the DSAA program (Taggart, 1979).

However, in the third pair of oral histories, I was presented with a different perspective on William Henry by focusing on the oral histories of Jean Wilson and Paul Bryan. Jean and Paul are siblings who briefly attended William Henry, but did not hold the same appreciation for the school as Charlotte Anne and Joyce. Jean was born in Chester, Pennsylvania in November 1948, just before her family moved to Dover, Delaware, on the outskirts of the town of Cheswold. Jean was young enough that Delaware’s school system was desegregated while she was still in school. When Delaware schools had desegregated, Jean actually transferred from William Henry to Dover High School, the historically white school and, at the time, the overwhelming majority of students and all of the teachers were white. However, Jean appreciated her education from Dover much more than the education she received at William Henry. Similarly, Paul, who was born in Chester in February 1942, left William Henry before finishing his freshman year of high school. Citing mistreatment from one administrator at William Henry and his personal preference to work, Paul dropped out of school entirely. Despite their abbreviated time at William Henry, the experiences of Paul and Jean offer different perspectives on the school and further insight on curriculum-related matters that were also discussed in the previous pair of oral histories. Jean graduated from Dover High School and went on to work as an accomplished, local seamstress, while Paul gravitated towards mechanical work and became heavily involved with the automobile industry. Paul also ran a number of

businesses over the years and holds no regret about choosing to move on from William Henry and education when he did.

The main objective of this chapter is to scale down from the administrative-level discussion of the previous chapter and bring individualized Black experiences into focus, considering how the aforementioned administrative beliefs and practices may or may not have influenced decision making while these individuals navigated racism in Delaware. In the next section, I discuss the collected oral histories in the order presented above, emphasizing the respective topics and key themes that arose in each pair. In the following discussion and conclusion, I will tie these topics and themes back to the 1919 "argument to maintain status quo" and other findings that were presented in Chapter 4.

5.3 *De Facto* Segregation in Delaware

As previously mentioned, William Smith was born in Alliance, North Carolina, in 1939. When asked what it was like to grow up in Alliance, William says, "Well, I can hardly say growing up because it was, like, miserable." William continues, "You was called all the 'N-words' as a little boy because we left from down there, at least father took us from down there, I was the age of 9, but in that time, I remember so much that I hated. The way that we was treated, even as young Black boys. Always was called names, and it was a situation that you could not repel the older folks or say anything back to white folks at that time in North Carolina."

William explains that he remembers North Carolina to be so rough that, to this day, "I go through North Carolina, but I don't stop hardly in North Carolina." William and his family lived in the woods growing up in North Carolina, explaining they lived on a dirt road, a mile away from any neighbor as William's father wanted to keep the family away from white folks. When William was about 6 or 7 years old, he describes a Black family building a house close to them, "right across the field, a lot land back there," but by the time the neighbor's house was built, William's family was "just about on our way. My father [was] to start a migrant working system, which my father was called a 'crew boss.' He was the crew boss." Crew bosses coordinated with Extension Service county agents and organized migrant labor crews. Crew bosses received higher wages than the general laborers.

William describes his family leaving North Carolina on the back of a truck and the first place he remembers traveling to was Petersburg, New York. William described New York as an eye opening experience. William explains,

> "It was totally an eye opener for me. It was a totally different thing. The people, when I say people, the white folks, was a lot different. We occasionally went there. It wasn't no 'if you wanted to go to school' or your parents wanted you to go, you had to go. They, at these labor camps, there was a society that would run around and see and took [account of] what kids was there. And if you went there during school time, you had like 1 week to get those kids in a certain school, and they told you what school was the closest. And it was amazing, one of the first times I went to school, with all white folks and Black folks together, and to tell you the truth, I was so scared. I could not imagine that I was going to walk into this school. And I'll never forget, they gave you your lunch, and it was a buffet style. I'll never forget it."

William could not believe the contrast between how he was treated in North Carolina and New York. However, New York was only temporary. Deeper into the harvest season they stopped in New Jersey before returning to North Carolina and waiting for the next harvest season. William explains they went to Buffalo, New York, at the start of the harvest season and William was excited to return to New York he says, "It was just totally like you was in another world." After spending part of the harvest season in New York, William and his family stopped in New Jersey again, then made their way to Florida for the duration of the harvest season. The next harvest season, of 1949, his family stopped in Delaware briefly. However, in 1950, when William's family returned to Delaware, William's mother was diagnosed with tuberculosis. At the time, William's family was working on a potato farm in Smyrna, Delaware. Due to his mother's health condition, the family would permanently settle in Delaware. William reflects on his travels up to this point saying, "I seen so much in my time of traveling, from different places, I didn't like what I saw." William explains,

> "It's amazing, with all of that, and all I saw, people would be surprised [by] the migrant workers. How they were treated where they lived at. Well, I mean, we lived anywhere, in anything, from garages to chicken houses. I remember that one year, chicken was in the chicken houses. You know, they had to have the thing the chicken sits up on. Well, we went in there, and they had run the chickens out, tear all the hoops, stands down, and sterilize the place, because you know chickens, messy stuff. And we sterilized the place, and, by night, we were just one big room and I'll never forget it. My father and mother had a blanket to hang here, this way, there was a blanket for my sisters. And we [the boys] slept in the open space, where they cooked at and everything else. And that's why no inside toilets, you go outside, except for the

> girls. My father always had a pot for the girls and, the next morning, the boys had to take it out."

William did not specify where this 'camp' was, instead William went to explain the resentment he developed towards white people through these experiences. William explains, "When [my] parents done the best they could, as the way I see it, but there is a thing that I think you look at your parents, that they would do better if people didn't treat us so bad." William explains that he eventually developed the belief that he would do better on his own, "So, at 16, I walked out of the house [in Delaware]. Not in front of my mother and father, it was about 2 o'clock in the morning that I left." William went to Long Island, New York, where he worked for a year picking potatoes. After a year, William felt done with potato picking, he wanted work that was less physically demanding, so he returned to Delaware.

To get away from potatoes, he started working on a dairy farm. William was making less money on the dairy farm, but he was also going back to school, even though he was about 3 years behind where he should've been. However, his wife, Shirley, was in school so he wanted to be there too. William completed one year of school at Booker T. Washington and graduated to move on to William Henry. However, William did not complete his first year at the school, he explains, "I couldn't get my mind on studying anything. I couldn't get my mind on learning anything, and I wasn't learning anything. I was just there, really." William returned to farm labor, however, he did not feel he was making enough money so he negotiated a sharecropping agreement with a farmer in Dover, Delaware. However, in 1960, the

agreement fell apart after just one year of the arrangement. Therefore, William looked to his father for work, in the cement business. He was making much better money than he was in farm labor, but his father was overworking him. After an unsuccessful negotiation for a better wage, he quit working for his father. William instead started his own concrete business, working as an independent contractor. After landing and completing a 4-month contracting job, William was in search of work again.

William explains that during this gap of employment, he encountered levels of prejudice that he did not know existed in Delaware. William explains,

> "So, when that happened, I had no job again, and what I didn't know, I faced the ultimate of what I never really thought was in Delaware—prejudice. I don't know where, but every job that I would go to, I would be turned down. I went to different people's houses, unbuilt houses, stuff like that. The contractors, to be the contractor, I wanted to be the subcontractor. And some of them, and a lot of people don't think this was in Delaware, almost told me, 'I'm not going to hire you because you're Black.' Well, that was fine."

William decided to go where work was needed and such discrimination did not persist. William found some work to do in Virginia, but, after a couple of weeks, he was more-or-less run out of Virginia by union guys who told he could not work there without union membership. He completed the job, under the supervision of the union, before returning to Dover. William then goes on to describe the difficulties navigating the labor market in southern Delaware,

> "You know, right here in Dover, actually was, I'd call it, 'North Carolina undercover.' That's actually what I would call it. Undercover because they [white folk] didn't come out and call you the 'N-word,' anything like that. They treated you nicely, but when I went out to start a contract, to do the same thing they was doing for these dollars, then it showed up. I had so much trouble for 3 years trying to establish myself

> in Dover. I was working in Annapolis, I was in Maryland, all over the place. And I'm not talking about big jobs. Just to go all over some place, to do five hours work and come back. That's all I could get."

Due to the financial strain this pattern of work was developing. William then got a job with a larger, white contractor in Dover, Walt Ellis. William was a part of a concrete crew, working under a foreman by the name of Harold. After some time, William explains that he approached Harold for a raise as William noticed he was doing more work than his peers. William describes the interaction as follows,

> "So I went to the foreman. I told him, I said, 'Harold,' his name was Harold, I said, 'I have- I do a good job for you?'[Harold responds] 'Yeah, you just- it's none better.' I said, 'You know, how'd Wayne do?' He said, 'Aw, man, you beat Wayne.' That was his brother! I'm getting my information together now because I am going to ask him for some raise. So, as he got finished talking, long story short, I said, 'Harold, I understand, and I'm not bragging on myself, and I know what I do. I give you a good job.' And I said, 'Listen, I'd like to have a raise.' [Harold responds] 'Oh, no problem! No problem! No problem… How's a nickel?' I said, 'No, I'm thinking about 2 dollars and 50 cents, that makes a 25 cents raise.' [Harold] said, 'Oh no, no, no, no.' He said, 'You can't- that's as much as Wayne makes.' Wayne's a white fella, his brother."

William went on to ask Harold, "Why can't I make [as] much as Wayne when I do more than Wayne?" Harold just looked at him. William then asks, "Is it because of my skin?" Harold responded, "You said it." William then told Harold he would quit, reiterating, "I did not know y'all was that prejudice around here." Harold responded, "Well, ya know, that's the way it is."

William immediately approached Walt, informing Walt he was quitting, and explaining why, telling Walt exactly what Harold said. Walt insisted that Harold is the foreman and he cannot get involved, but Walt does not want William to quit. Once

William decided to leave and start packing his stuff, Walt went to talk to Harold. Walt tried to see if Harold and William could come to an agreement. Harold told Walt, "Don't worry about it. [William] won't be gone long." William informed them he would not be back, and concluded the interaction, "You people [are] about the prejudice-est people around here I ever knew, and I didn't know it. And why? Cause y'all was hiding it." William went back to running his own concrete business which started to gain some traction in Delaware this time around. Approximately 2 years after restarting his own business, William's former employer had closed down, which pushed Harold and his brother, Wayne, to come and work for William.

Since William spent his earliest years in North Carolina and traveling throughout the east coast due to his father's role in the farm labor market, he had to adapt to what Warren Pinkett and many Black folks born in Delaware learned as they grew up. No sooner than Warren answered the question of where he was born, he followed with, "When I was born, you [Black folks] weren't born in a hospital. You were born at home." Warren clarified, "They [white children] were born in the hospital. Most of them. [...] But Black babies were not born in the hospital." Due to segregation in hospitals, a doctor would be sent out to the home. Today, Warren lives barely 2 miles from the house he was born in. Unlike William, Warren spent his childhood, and the large majority of his life, in the same community.

Growing up in Buttonwood, a predominantly Black neighborhood in New Castle at the time, Warren attended the Buttonwood (Primary) School, a two-room school that was reconstructed in 1926 through the DSAA school building program.

When asked what the Buttonwood School was like, Warren responded, "Lovely because you knew everyone. You saw them during school, after school, and, on weekends, you played together and went to church together—lived like brothers and sisters." After graduating from Buttonwood, Warren went on to Howard High School, the first and, at the time, only Black high school in Delaware, located in Wilmington. Howard's status as the only Black high school in the state significantly expanded the student body in comparison to Buttonwood. Warren explains that Howard drew in students from as far south as Middletown (Delaware) and as far north as Claymont (Delaware). Although this area is all a part of New Castle County, it should be noted how inaccessible the school was for most Black children in Delaware, especially those south of Middletown, one of New Castle County's southernmost cities. Middletown, which is south of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, is also more than 30 miles south of Claymont and just under 30 miles south of Wilmington's Howard High, almost a 40-minute drive today.

Warren's experiences at Buttonwood and Howard actually shaped his career aspirations. From a young age, Warren explained that he wanted to be a math teacher due to how much he enjoyed math courses. Warren started to excel in math at an early age, recalling, "[I]n the third and fourth grade, is where I really started liking math because I learned how to read numbers. And the teacher was so impressed, we had a two-room school, and I was in the third grade. And they had [grades] 1 through 4 in one room, and 5 through 8 in the next room. And [the teacher] was so impressed that he took me to the higher classes to show them that I knew how to read numbers." In

high school, Warren continued to prioritize mathematics as he took all of the math courses he could take. When asked why Warren did not consider engineering or another pursuit that incorporated mathematics, he responded, “It was a math teacher because when I was in high school, in college, I had nieces and nephews that were crazy about me. And I always said, ‘I want to teach kids.’ Because I thought all the kids would be crazy about me too. It wasn’t quite that way when I was teaching, but that’s what I thought!” However, Warren continued, “My dad was a little bit in politics in the city of New Castle, and he would tell some of the white folks how good I was in math, and they told him, ‘Let him go into engineering.’ But, at that time, I didn’t realize the difference in the salaries.” Warren’s father informed him that there would be more money in engineering, but he wasn’t interested in the money, Warren would rather feel appreciated, which is what he thought he would feel as a school teacher.

Once Warren graduated from Howard, he went on to study at North Carolina A&T University, an HBCU in Greensboro, North Carolina. Warren had never traveled as far south as North Carolina prior to college. Describing the transition and journey to Greensboro, Warren explained:

> “On the way down there, on the train, if we took a train, we had a [train] car for Blacks. So they would be in the back of the train. We went, traveled to North Carolina, and once we got off there, the first time I had ever seen, carved in stone, ‘COLORED ONLY,’ it was the side of the train station that we had to go through. The first time I had ever seen it was when I went to college.”

I asked Warren how racism in North Carolina compared to racism in Delaware, he responded, “Here, you knew where you were supposed to go and where you weren’t supposed to go, so you just didn’t go in those places. But down south, they had ‘COLORED ONLY’ or ‘WHITES ONLY.’ So they had it carved in stone, so they told you where you had to go and where you could go.” I followed up, asking, “How did you know where and where to not go up here in Delaware then?” Warren responded, “You learned it as you came up.” Warren continued:

> “We [Black folks] couldn’t go in certain movies, certain stores, and certain sections of town, you just didn’t go into. Because they were segregated. We had a Black theater. We had Black stores to go to, and we had a Black section. In Wilmington, it’s called ‘East Side.’ So you didn’t have too many whites in the ‘East Side,’ you didn’t have too many Blacks [folks] in the middle of town, or the west side of town, so you just didn’t go there. And, in fact, the only times I went in those areas is when I was playing sports, if you had to play a team. If it was a white team, then it wasn’t in your [Black folks’] area.”

I asked Warren to further contrast Delaware, specifically the areas he was referring to above, and North Carolina, more specifically Greensboro. Warren reminded me:

> “Well, I wasn’t raised in the South, so I don’t know about that part. But I know around here, it [‘COLORED ONLY’] wasn’t carved in stone. But say- Buttonwood is a part of New Castle, okay? So Buttonwood is mostly Black. In New Castle, you had a Black area. You had a Polish area [known as Dobbinsville]. You had an Italian area [known as ‘Charlestown’]. You didn’t go. That’s right. You didn’t go to the Polish area or the Italian area, they didn’t allow Blacks [folks] in there. So you just didn’t go there. You may go *through* them, but you didn’t go *in* them, to stay or spend any time. Because they had no Blacks in those areas. And then, they didn’t like Blacks in those areas.”

Asking Warren how things have changed in New Castle over time, he explains that his elders would not recognize New Castle today. Housing developments replaced much

of the farmland that encompassed New Castle when Warren was growing up. Farmland in New Castle was owned by white folks, but when asked who worked on the farm land, Warren emphasized, “Blacks, Blacks, Blacks.” I asked, “Locals?” Warren responded, “Oh yes. We didn’t have a lot of immigrants then. I had an uncle that lived here [in New Castle, unspecified], that’s the only place he ever worked, is on a farm.” Another one of Warren’s local uncles worked as a custodian. Warren then noted that his aunts “worked out in white folks’ houses, they cooked and cleaned for them.”

The work that Warren’s aunts and uncles were engaged in were the type of jobs that Holland described as ‘Black jobs.’ I asked Warren why Black folks may have gravitated towards these jobs at the time, to which he responded, “White folks didn’t want to do them. So if they didn’t have to do them, they didn’t do them.” Warren notes that, in his view, Black Delawareans have many different employment opportunities today. Further, Warren continued, “They’re [Latinx immigrants] taking Black jobs- that’s what Black folks used to do. What you see them doing now. Working in the fields, on farms, and cleaning people’s houses. And different kinds of jobs like that, but Black folks used to do all that work.” Warren continued, “We’re [Black folks] moving up from our jobs, the jobs that we used to do. We’re getting better jobs now because in the old days they didn’t hire Black folks to do those jobs.” Warren was not suggesting that Black folks and Latinx immigrant populations are competing for this work today, just that, in his view, these former ‘Black jobs’ seem to favor this demographic in Delaware today.

Of the jobs that were available to Black folks throughout much of the twentieth century, Warren recalled, “The best job Blacks [folks] had in the old days was teaching, cause you got regular pay. You didn’t make a lot of money, but you had regular pay. By the way, when I first started teaching, see I taught at Black schools. I didn’t get paid by the state- I’m sorry. I got paid by the state, but I didn’t get *local* pay.” This is worth noting as, in Taggart’s 1988 work on Pierre du Pont’s philanthropy and Delaware’s public education system, the author explains that prior to the passing of the 1921 school code, Delaware’s taxation system ensured that white Delawareans’ taxes did not go to Black public education. In 1925, while also overseeing the DSAA school building program, du Pont was appointed as Delaware’s tax commissioner, and, in Taggart’s work, it is stated that the taxation system became more equitable during the reform period. However, Warren, who started teaching in 1960, explained:

> “Well, for some reason or another, they [Delaware legislators and tax officials] ain’t put a circle around the Black schools. Like, except Howard, Howard was in the city of Wilmington. So they got all the taxes, increments from the city; but outside of the city, like William Henry, [William C.] Jason, Dunleith School, those were the Black schools that came along later on in life, well they were circled, and in those circles, they didn’t get any tax increment. They paid taxes, say like in the city of Dover, paid taxes for the whole city, but the state didn’t give them- or the city didn’t give those schools, and those school teachers, their tax money. They only got taxed- state money.”

Warren explained that this was because “[t]hey segregated those schools, they were Black schools so they didn’t get any increment.” Warren then illustrated the pay discrepancy between teachers at white and Black schools:

> “So the teachers in, say, [William] Henry and Dover High got the same state money, but they didn’t get that local tax money. Say for instance,

> if you got- if you were paid, and this is more than they got paid, say you got paid $15,000 a year, well the Black teachers got 10 [thousand dollars] and the Dover teachers got 15 [thousand dollars] because they got the state money which was the 10,000, plus the 5,000 for the city."

As previously stated, Warren was not too concerned with the pay and primarily concerned with making a positive impact through his work as an educator. Warren explains that his goal was to "impact their life. Impact their life because you cared. And you knew how hard it would be if they didn't learn, so you tried to make sure that they learned. And you kept telling them, you have to be better. You have to know this." Warren emphasizes that working as a Black educator was about more than the curriculum, it was about empowering the next generation to improve their circumstances later in life. Warren noted that every student did not appreciate this approach, some students called him "'hard,' but that's because [Warren] knew what it was like. And I didn't want them to grow up the way I did, I wanted it to be easier."

The oral histories of William and Warren not only provide insight into discrimination and segregation they experienced and observed in Delaware, but also speak to the geopolitical concerns surrounding power relations that become embedded within place (Flint, 2021) and the ability of scholars of Black Geographies, as highlighted by Hawthorne (2019), to trace how racism may become "camouflaged," or hidden, within place. William and his experiences surrounding employment in Delaware, and him referring to Delaware as "North Carolina undercover," emphasize these points. The racism that William encountered and these labor market structures, or barriers, were not as visible to William in Delaware as they were in North Carolina,

yet they existed all the same. As Warren noted, North Carolina carved it ("COLORED ONLY") in stone, while, in Delaware, he learned where he could and could not go as he was growing up. Although Warren wanted life to be easier for his students than it was for him and his peers, Warren still emphasized that he was "lucky" to grow up with both of his parents involved in his life and to have had such great teachers, who were also like parents and served as positive influences in his life. In the next section, Charlotte Anne Pinkett and Joyce Bryan echo similar sentiments about their experiences in Delaware's Black public education system, specifically within Kent County.

5.4 New Schools and New Essentialisms

Growing up on a little country road that ran between Felton and Frederica, Delaware, a part of Kent County, Charlotte Anne and Joyce both recall all of the farmland that surrounded them growing up. They had a neighbor across the road growing up and two other houses beside theirs, but those were too far to be considered 'next door.' Charlotte explained, "[The houses] were spaced out because there was also some farmland in that area, at that time." The farmland was divided among a number of small-scale farmers, including two cousins of Charlotte Anne and Joyce, however, those were not their neighbors. Early on, it was two Black families neighboring both sides of their house on their side of the road, but there was a white family that lived across the street for a couple years. Joyce recalled,

> "First, it was a white family that lived there, and I can't recall their names, and we used to play all together [with the white children]. My mother became friends with their mother, and we all got along. They [the children] would call us the 'N-word' a lot (Joyce laughs), but we don't think they even knew what they were saying."

After some time, the white family moved, and their step-father's, who Charlotte Anne and Joyce refer to as their father, brother moved in across the street with his family. This was Uncle Kermit, a Black man who worked at the local "Swift Chicken Factory" in Felton until he retired. When Charlotte Anne and Joyce were in high school, Uncle Kermit recruited both of his nieces to briefly work at the chicken factory during one summer, but the work was very demanding and that did not last long. Charlotte Anne admits that she only lasted 3 days, Charlotte Anne described, "[B]ecause I was on this, like, assembly line, and the chickens were going by, and you had to reach up there and pull out the innards, or whatever. [I look puzzled, and ask, 'Really?'] Yes, yes. And, to me, that was hard work. And you had to be there by like 5 o'clock in the morning." Joyce lasted longer than Charlotte Anne, but hated the work all the same. Joyce recalls, "It was yucky work! Whew. Or, like, my job was inspecting chickens. So, you know, that was a lot easier than what some of the others had. You know, where they had to gut the chicken, and clean it, and all that." Charlotte Anne and Joyce's mother also briefly worked at the chicken factory and, later, worked as a housekeeper "off and on, for some of the white ladies in Frederica." Their father worked at Dover Air Force Base as a carpenter. Joyce explained that Black folks gravitated toward these jobs as "a lot of places just weren't hiring Blacks [folks]." When asked what places were hiring Black folks, Joyce identified Dover Air

Force Base, General Foods, and the local chicken factory where they both worked, which speaks to Holland's (1956) note that living in southern Delaware pushed Black folks to work in agriculture and related industries. However, Charlotte Anne and Joyce's elders did not have the opportunity to attend William Henry, which played a pivotal role in shaping their career aspirations and pursuits.

Before Uncle Kermit recruited Charlotte Anne and Joyce for work at the chicken factory, in their younger years, they just played and went to school with their neighbors and Uncle Kermit's "12 or 13" children. During their elementary years, all of the kids walked to the Union School, a two-room school that was equivalent to the distance of 1.5 city blocks away from their childhood home. After completing 6th grade, they went on to Booker T. Washington Middle School. Booker T. was approximately 12 miles away, so Charlotte Anne, Joyce, and their neighbors were bussed there. After graduating from Booker T. Washington, both Charlotte Anne and Joyce went on to William Henry. William Henry was "somewhere between 12, 15, maybe not quite 20 miles" away from their home, the kids were also bussed there. When asked what skills they had learned in school, Charlotte Anne quickly responded, "Well, I learned secretarial skills because I took business [classes] from the 10th grade through the 12th grade. So I learned how to type, I took shorthand, and those were the 2 main business courses I took." After graduating, Charlotte Anne briefly moved to Philadelphia, living with a cousin. In Philadelphia, Charlotte Anne went to Philadelphia City Hall to take a (secretarial) test, applying for a job at City Hall. After a few weeks, Charlotte Anne had not heard anything from City Hall, but the principal

of William Henry had actually called Charlotte Anne to offer a secretary job at her alma mater. Charlotte Anne happily took the job at William Henry saying, “I didn’t like Philly. I mean, I wasn’t there that long, but I just didn’t like it. And plus, I was homesick.” Charlotte Anne only worked for William Henry a year before securing a secretary position with Atlas, which is now known as AstraZeneca. Charlotte Anne worked in this role for 24 years before getting a promoted Information Coordinator in the company’s personnel department, a position she held 3 years before retiring.

Thinking back on her experience in business classes at William Henry, Charlotte Anne recalls, “[T]here were no boys in the business, or not in the business classes that I took. You know, typing and shorthand. Those were the two main courses. And no, there were no boys in those classes. I guess they [educators] felt that was unmanly, well, back then.” Charlotte Anne did not know what type of business classes boys at William Henry took. Considering what Charlotte Anne understood to be ‘womanly things,’ at least at William Henry, she mentioned “home economics.” It is worth noting that one of the two recommendations for general education from the permanent farm labor proposal mentioned in the previous chapter, advocated for increased vocational training in the fields of agriculture and allied ‘occupations,’ such as home economics. Charlotte Anne vaguely remembered being involved with a club that had “something to do with home economics.” When asked what home economics were, Charlotte Anne explained, “That’s where they teach ‘womanly things’ (Charlotte Anne ‘air quotes’), like sewing, cooking.” Charlotte Anne later clarified that the club was called “New Homemakers of America” and it was only girls in the

club. In my conversation with Warren, he had actually described his mother as a "homemaker," meaning she did not work, she instead took care of the kids and home.

Joyce was one year behind Charlotte Anne in school and also aspired to work as a secretary while at William Henry. When asked how William Henry informed this pursuit, Joyce said:

> "I think our teachers, back then, they wanted you to strive to be the best you could be. You know, and felt whatever you wanted to be, you could become that if you worked hard at it. But they believed in, you know, do a good job, you know, and you can be whatever you want to be. And, at the time, I don't know, all I could think, or what I thought of, 'Hey, I like secretarial work.' My classes, you know, there at William Henry, the business class[es]. Shorthand, type, I loved that. So yes, I wanted to be a secretary."

When asked about how Joyce felt these attitudes fostered among other students, Joyce responded, "A lot of them, the females, you know, wanted to be secretaries, or a teacher." Joyce felt that secretarial work was popular amongst her and her peers saying, "I think from our classes of typing and shorthand and all that. I think a lot of us just fell in love with that, and thought, 'Hey, secretarial work would be great.'" Joyce and Charlotte Anne both note that their business classes of shorthand and typing were taken only by girls in school. Other classes, such as mathematics, were not separated by gender.

Unlike her sister, Joyce did not go on to work as a secretary. However, in our conversation, Joyce noted, "[A]nd then, after [a secretary], I wanted to be a housewife and a mother." No sooner than graduating, Joyce got married and moved to New Castle with her husband once he got a job with the DuPont

Company at its DuPont Experimental Station in Wilmington, Delaware. Although Joyce did not work as a secretary like her sister, she did briefly work as a 'cleaning lady,' like her mother, after graduating. Joyce was working at a Black dentistry, ran out of the dentist's home, cleaning the area once the dentist had finished with all of their appointments. Joyce noted that she enjoyed the work, but did not stay long as the dentist "had a reputation for liking young girls" and Joyce was no longer comfortable working there. This work that Joyce, her mother, and Warren noted that his aunts also engaged in is categorized as "personal service," or "domestic service," throughout Holland's analysis of the historic employment outcomes among Black Delawareans.

In 1950, there were 11 industries that employed Delawareans: public administration, finance, business and repair service, wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing, transportation, communication and public utilities, professional and related services, mining, agriculture, construction, and personal service. Comparing the representation of Black women and white women across Delaware's 11 industries, Black women only overrepresented white women in the personal service industry, 59.6 percent to 40.4 percent. In Holland's analysis, "It is easier for both Negro men and women to be employed in personal service jobs than in any of the others. The preference is definitely on the side of the Negro women. They have in the past dominated and it seems that for the near future they will continue to dominate this work," (1956, p.51). Throughout Holland's work, the difficulties finding employment that are

experienced by Black men and women are emphasized, however, Holland notes, “Although Negro women are found represented in all of the major occupational classifications [as of 1950], their opportunities for employment are much restricted than are those of Negro males,” (ibid, p. 79). Of the occupations that Black women were concentrated, Holland states, “Negro women were primarily servants, laundresses, and housekeepers,” (p. 61).

Through conversation with Charlotte Anne and Joyce, it seems that Holland’s note concerning the representation of Black women in personal service, and his belief that this would continue for “the near future,” was not off base. As presented up to this point, such forms of employment were once regarded as ‘Black jobs’ within Delaware, which is evidence of Black employment, specifically the employment of Black women, as being essentialized. Considering different employment outcomes between Black women and white women, Holland characterized the employment status of white women as “occupational adolescence” and that of Black women as “occupational infancy,” (p. 47). This metaphor for employment rates emphasized the need for groups of people in Delaware to, first, be accepted by an industry or occupation. For example, Holland explained of the 1950 employment situation in the state, “Public administration, finance, and business and repair services have just begun to accept Negroes as workers,” (p. 52). Across the 3 industries listed by Holland, white women overrepresented Black women 95.5 percent to 4.1 percent, 96.3 percent to 3.7 percent, and 97.1

to 2.9 percent, respectively (p. 51). Aside from personal and domestic services, Holland called attention to the development of Black women in Delaware's construction industry as Black women were starting to get jobs as (unspecified) office workers. It is not clear if office workers refers to or includes secretaries and secretarial work, but, in my view, the work that Charlotte Anne and Joyce learned in their business classes at William Henry was preparing Black women for "occupational adolescence" through secretarial work, which Charlotte Anne assumed the school thought was "unmanly," producing new essentialisms around employment in Delaware.

The fact still remains that Charlotte Anne and Joyce are appreciative of their high school educations and experiences at William Henry, through classes, extracurricular activities, school government, and the other ways in which they developed their sense of community at the time. Joyce especially emphasized how much respect she held for her teachers at William Henry. However, the experiences and memories of Charlotte Anne and Joyce do not encompass the experiences and memories of others who attended William Henry or grew up in Delaware's Kent County. In the next section, I shift focus to the oral histories of Jean Wilson and Paul Bryan who do not so fondly reflect on the time either of them spent at William Henry.

5.5 Chester to Cheswold

Jean and Paul were both born in Chester, Pennsylvania in 1948 and 1942, respectively. Jean was approximately 6 months old when the family moved to Delaware, where their father had purchased more than 20 acres of land in Dover, on the outskirts of the town of Cheswold. Jean was the 10th child at the time, and their parents had 3 more children in Delaware. Jean notes, “I think what was interesting was to know that it was different for them, for the older ones, when they came to Delaware—dealing with segregation, and prejudice, and all that, and everything.” Jean went on to explain that they did not experience such segregation back in Chester, explaining, “Like going to the movies, up in Chester and all that, you know, there wasn’t no thing, [as if] they had to sit in certain spots or whatever else.” Jean continued, “It was just a different state, it was Pennsylvania, you’re in a different area.” Paul, the 6th child, was old enough before moving to Delaware that he had memories in Chester. Paul noted similar differences that Jean had mentioned, “It was different, now believe me. We moved right outside of Cheswold. We had no idea what Cheswold meant, I’m 5 years old. And the only thing I noticed is that, when we were downtown or any place, people didn’t look at you and they definitely didn’t speak to you. I was used to speaking to people in Chester, and they [white people too] would speak back.” Paul remembered Chester quite fondly, noting that he and his siblings could walk all the way to the supermarket, which was “a good distance” from their Chester home. Cheswold was much different for Paul and his siblings, Paul recalled,

"[W]e were just wondering why people were treating us so differently when we moved down here."

After moving to Delaware, Paul notes that his older siblings had bad experiences (with racism) "at work, when they tried to get a job, and especially at school," but Paul could not recall specifics. However, Paul did recount one encounter him and his siblings had:

> "[E]arly on, we had some crazy stuff happen, especially with the guys in, like, their 30s and upper-30s, in that range. We had this guy, he used to chase us off the road with his car, as we were walking to school. We'd tell daddy about it and daddy reported it, and it kept happening. So the police stationed a guy out there on Cheswold road, but they stationed him up to these people's house. And so what we did, we kind of filibustered around until we knew he was coming. We went past this particular driveway because we knew the cop was sitting up there waiting on him. So, after a while, here he comes, so we make, like, now we're walking. Here he comes, chasing us. Aw, man. He really poured it on that day. We run up the driveway, he turned [in] the driveway, just to be sitting there, looking up at cops."

Fortunately, the cop that was stationed in the driveway apprehended the crazed racist. Paul went on and clarified, "But it wasn't a group of people that expressed that hate. You would get one here or there, you know what I'm saying? But not a group." Paul and his siblings did have some encounters at school though. During their primary education years, Paul attended the two-room Cheswold School. Paul said, "[The Cheswold School] was interesting because we had some rough days at school, because, some of the kids, they didn't like you a whole lot." I asked Paul to clarify the ethnic background of these "kids" because we were discussing race relations, yet he brought up issues that arose in school during a time in which schools were segregated.

Paul clarified, “Well, they’re Cheswolds. Some people call them Moors and whatever. They’re actually Indians [Native Americans], they’re actually Indians, but I guess, if they had to choose a race, they would choose the white race. And they didn’t like the idea of us mixing in with their group.” Up to this point, there has been no mention of “Moors,” a term that was historically used to refer to Delaware’s indigenous population, the Lenni Lenape Tribe.

Prior to Paul’s mention of “Moors,” I had not considered if any other non-white populations attended these segregated schools. Paul continued, “[E]ven the teachers were Moors, like that, and they weren’t crazy about you [Black students] either.” After the Cheswold School, Paul attended Booker T. Washington Middle School, like Charlotte Anne and Joyce. Paul did not mention any bad experiences in his years at Booker T. Washington, where all teachers were Black. After finishing, Paul moved on to William Henry, where all of the teachers were also Black. Paul attended William Henry for 2 years. Paul failed his first year there, but could not make sense of it. Paul had a friend who failed as well, but he was “just trifling” in Paul’s words, so it made sense that he failed. However, Paul could not make sense of his own circumstances. Nonetheless, Paul repeated the 9th grade. After this second year, Paul recalled,

> “[F]or some reason, I didn’t get to school the last day, for whatever reason. So I had to come back later and pick up my report card. And when I did, [my homeroom teacher] said, ‘You know, Paul, I think- I think you failed again.’ What? She got the report card out, and it said ‘Eligible for 10th grade.’ She crossed it out and put ‘Ineligible.’ Well I seen that. So I come home, I tell my mom, ‘Something is wrong here.’ And, this lady didn’t teach me anything! And so, how [are] you going

> to disregard all the other marks in the report card? And you put on there, 'Not eligible.' And so, we went to Mr. McDowell [the school counselor at William Henry] about it. Mr. McDowell straightened it out, and he made me eligible then for the 10th grade."

However, between this experience and a cleaning job Paul had downtown (in Dover) at a local car dealership, Beider Lincoln and Mercury, Paul's attention had turned elsewhere. Paul described working for a Mr. Beider, a 'short, hateful-looking white guy that loved to teach.' From a young age, Paul was interested in working on cars. Paul recalled being fascinated by cars, even while living in Chester, as his family would take long drives to see their grandmother that lived in Georgetown, Delaware, a part of the state's southernmost Sussex County. Despite working for Mr. Beider as a cleaner, Paul was starting to learn to be a mechanic. Mr. Beider asked, "'Paul, you interested in cars?' [Paul responded] 'Oh yeah, I'm interested- interested in cars.'[Beider responded] 'Well, you looking to be a mechanic or something?' [Paul said] 'Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.' [Paul responded] 'I'll take you after school.'"

Paul did not want to wait until "after school." Something that frustrated Paul at William Henry was not being able to pursue his interest in mechanics, instead he was pushed towards agriculture. "You didn't have a choice- well, the choice you had was, your first year, you either do ag[riculture], electrical, or [carpentry], 'shop,' and something else. You had to do two of these things." Paul worked with Mr. Beider all summer, after his first two years at William Henry, and was learning a lot. Once the school year came back around, Paul approached his parents, "'You know, mom. I would kind of like to stay with this man. I mean I'm [one-on-one] with this man, and

he's teaching me *everything* I love, I mean, I love cars, and he's just pouring that knowledge into me." To Paul's surprise, his parents trusted his decision and allowed him to drop out. Paul followed, and emphasized, "I didn't quit school to do nothing. I quit school because I wanted to be something, and I thought what this man was teaching me was going to help me to accomplish what I wanted. And guess what? It did." Paul continued, "I'm a car dealer, and I've been around cars all of my life, and anything I've earned, I've earned it through the automobiles, pretty much. I said, but I love cars. And this man was instrumental in helping me to gain the knowledge that I have about cars."

Despite the gap in years and education reforms that occurred between Jean and Paul's time at William Henry, Jean would also leave the school after having unpleasant experiences with teachers there. Prior to William Henry, Jean only attended Booker T. Washington. When the 1949 school construction program was approved, so were further school consolidation efforts, as discussed in Chapter 4. As a result of further school consolidation that occurred between Jean, Paul, even Joyce and Charlotte Anne, Jean received her first 6 years of education at Booker T. In 7th grade, Jean moved on to William Henry, where she completed the next 4 years of school before transferring to the predominantly white Dover High School. Jean noted that people will ask why she left before it was 'totally integrated.' Jean explained, "I could study for tests and take the tests, and pass it with an A or a B. No less than a B. Same thing with quizzes. They give pop quizzes. I never got nothing other than A or, usually, only averaged a B. Explain to me why I kept getting Cs?" I asked Jean to

clarify which school this was occurring to which Jean responded, “No, this was at William Henry. This was happening at William Henry, my own people [Black folk].” One of Jean’s peers was experiencing similar treatment and they transferred schools as well, but not to Dover High, where Jean went on to graduate.

Jean felt treated much better by teachers at Dover in comparison to her teachers at William Henry. Jean explained, “Even though every teacher at Dover High was white, that I had, the most of them that I got very close to, they became very appreciative of me even being there in the school. Because they kept telling me that I was helping to educate the other students, by just my presence, of being there.” It was quite evident Jean’s peers needed to be educated. There were even times Jean missed being at William Henry among Black students. Jean noted, “[A] lot of the kids didn’t want to be bothered with me because it was like I had leprosy or something.” Jean draws this comparison to leprosy, also known as Hansen’s disease, which is a physical condition that appears on the skin and, in some cultures throughout history, has caused individuals with the condition to be shunned by their communities. Jean went on to recall, “One day, my mother had to make an appointment for me to go get my hair done as soon as I got off the bus that day because they called her from the school to tell her what happened to me. Somebody put gum in my hair, and they couldn’t get it out.” Throughout Jean’s first year at Dover, she was called names and picked on, but noted that it did get better over time.

Jean highlighted two of her white classmates and how her relationship with them developed over time, “I had 2 boys in homeroom class. They were brothers, they

were twins, but they weren't identical. So just the way they looked different, they *were* different. Their personalities and everything were different. But they were both told the same thing: to have nothing to do with me, don't talk to me, don't do this, don't do that. But, during the meantime [in school], they had to sit beside me." One of the brothers started to talk to Jean as time went along and, one day, the brothers actually got into a fight because of this disagreement. Jean spoke up about what was happening so that the brother she would speak to in class was not suspended. As a result, only one of the brothers was suspended. Jean went on to explain that, by the end of the year, the brother who was suspended eventually gave up his racist grudge. Jean said, "He finally gave up. He realized it, because what happened [was] he started to notice how everybody was treating me, and he- what it was, he admitted to me. I said, 'Why is it you just hated me so bad? You didn't like me. You didn't even know anything about me.' He said, 'Well, I started to realize, you're like some of my sister,' he had a sister, and I think she was otherwise talking to him too. And telling him don't do anything to me, don't bother me." Jean continued, "[B]y the end of the year, he literally, in his own way, he apologized for what he did."

Jean finished her second year at Dover High, which was her senior year, and graduated. During the summer after graduation, Jean worked at a local motel in Dover, cleaning rooms. After the summer, Jean got a new job with Leeds Travel Wear, which was located in Clayton, Delaware, just north of Dover. Jean worked at Leeds as a seamstress. Jean only worked there for a year as the work environment was not particularly safe for fingers and hands. After a year with Leeds, Jean moved to a safe

work environment as a seamstress with International Latex Corporation Dover (ILC). Jean credited her mother with teaching her how to sew and the reason for her being drawn to this work as a seamstress. Jean is very proud of the work she did over the years, especially with ILC. In her time with ILC, Jean was a part of a team of seamstresses who actually made the spacesuits worn by Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on their Apollo 11 mission to the moon in 1969.

In the late 1970s, Jean opened her own seamstress shop in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, after briefly running a shop in Dover. Unfortunately, after a year and a half, Jean was in a bad car accident which resulted in a broken hand that required 4 different surgeries. Jean had to let the shop go, but in the time that she was running her own shop, Jean called back to lessons she learned growing up that also informed how she ran her business. Jean recalled, "I had so many young men down there [in Rehoboth]. They were gay. And I'll never forget, when a couple of them came to ask me if I did alterations, said, 'Well, it's not so much on- it's not men's clothes. I just want to let you know, I'm a drag queen, and I perform.'" Jean, recalling how men who would come to her Dover shop were looked at, started to do work with drag queens after hours. Jean said that her customers appreciated this and explained that she empathized with these customers, saying, "Cause I know what it's like for someone to look at you and act like you have leprosy," which is a reference to how Jean felt treated while attending Dover High School.

While Charlotte Anne, Joyce, and even Warren expressed their appreciation and fond memories of Delaware's Black public education system, Paul and Jean both presented very different perspectives in this pair of oral histories. Paul's memories of getting chased off the road while walking to the two-room Cheswold School, provided through the DSAA school construction program, as well as his experiences in school, speak to the issue of the DSAA not incorporating Black organizations or community perspectives in their program plans. For example, the Rosenwald Foundation which built Black schools across the U.S. South, built schools where the [Black] community requested. Communities were "careful" to build schools in their own communities, out of the way of white folks (Taggart, 1979). The DSAA program did not follow the same approach, which speaks to the different experience Charlotte Anne and Joyce had, taking a much shorter walk to their school, which only had Black teachers and students that identified as Black. Paul's experience *in* the Cheswold School speaks to the issue of *who* the school is built for. The same sentiment was echoed in conversation with Jean about her experiences at Dover High School. However, both Paul and Jean also criticized some of their teachers at William Henry, which turned them away from the school. Since Paul and Jean dropped out and transferred from William Henry, respectively, it is interesting to contrast their employment pursuits with Charlotte Anne and Joyce, who were graduates of William Henry. While Charlotte Anne and Joyce both felt prepared for secretarial work, Paul decided to drop out, distance himself from the William Henry-provided curriculum, and pursue what he loved. Jean graduated from Dover and did the same, only to be cut short by the accident.

5.6 Discussion and Conclusion

In the Hagley Museum and Library's 2001 documentary on Pierre du Pont and the DSAA school building program, there is little attention given to the shortcomings of the program in regard to Black public education. Aside from a 60-second sidebar about the controversy surrounding the location of the DSAA-approved Howard High School, this 53-minute and 33- second documentary focuses on applauding the great contributions of Pierre du Pont to Black public education, highlighting the gratitude of Black communities and students who wrote "Thank You" letters to du Pont and, in some cases, even wrote and sang songs in honor of his contributions. There is no mention of the Rockefeller General Education Board's list of recommendations to improve the Black public education system, nor the argument to preserve status quo, which only comes up in the works of Robert Taggart. Although none of my oral history participants spoke directly to this history, their lives and memories still reflect this history as 5 of 6 participants were among some of the first and few students to take advantage of improved access to education in southern Delaware, and the 6th worked as an educator in one of those schools. The argument to maintain the status quo, first, emphasized the importance to not disturb the distribution of Black Delawareans through its school construction program. Considering where the DSAA constructed schools, Warren, Charlotte Anne, Joyce, and Paul were able to walk to school growing up, despite the racism Paul and some of his siblings had encountered

along the way. It is evident that, at least among this group, population distribution was not 'disturbed' by the DSAA construction program.

The second component of this argument emphasized short-term economic advantages, specifically for Black Delawareans, and long-term economic disadvantages for Black Delawareans, and the whole state (Taggart, 1988). However, neither Warren, William, Charlotte Anne, Joyce, Jean, nor Paul noted any economic advantage. Instead, many of the oral history participants mentioned 'Black jobs,' such as farm labor or house cleaners, and places that were willing to hire Black folks, such as the chicken factory or General Foods. The last and most central component of this argument to maintain the status quo reiterated Delaware's dependence on "colored farm labor," (ibid, p. 135). Efforts to maintain population distribution and economic advantage were focused on maintaining the state's Black farm labor market. As Boyd's (2002) study shows Delaware as a significant outlier in its overrepresentation of Black workers employed in farm labor in 1940, Holland's (1956) report notes, by 1950, "[t]he (Delaware) Negro has been making a wholesale exodus from agriculture into other non-agricultural pursuits, to the extent that he ("the Negro") is no longer an important element in the agriculture of [Delaware]." However, as noted in Chapter 4, 'local Black farm labor' was replaced by 'Black migrant farm labor.' William spoke to this history only recalling other Black folks in the camps he and his family navigated growing up. Further, in my conversation with Paul, he explained, "[Y]ou would find (migrant) laborers on, specifically, potato farms, some tomatoes, but if it's potatoes, you definitely had migrant laborers here (around Dover) working from Florida." Paul

recalled military-style trucks that migrant laborers would be transported as a common sight growing up in Delaware. Paul also recalled seeing, on potato farms in Delaware, Black migrants living in chicken coops.

Despite Delaware's transition away from its dependence on local Black farm labor and Black folks in Delaware still found their overwhelming success in personal and domestic service, which includes the cleaning work that Charlotte Anne and Joyce's mother, Joyce, Jean, and Warren's aunts all worked in, evidence that new essentialisms were being produced. Holland (1956) also noted on the representation of Black Delawareans employed in this industry, "The larger percentage of Negro women than white [women] is accounted for by the fact of employer preference in and lower wages of private household employment," (p. 51). This parallels the preference for "colored farm labor," which the 1940 report on Delaware's migrant farm labor situation noted restricted most (Black) migrants to the lowest income group in the United States (Sutherland, 1941). Calling back to my conversation with Paul, I asked about his thoughts on the migrant farm labor situation he observed in Cheswold, Dover, and around Kent County, in Paul's view, "Blacks (folks) were the only ones who would take that kind of work, you know, cause other folk were more educated. You know, you're talking about a time when people were just getting out slavery into a competitive workforce. But if you don't have the knowledge and skills, you have to take what you can get, you know?" However, even with the education that was offered to Paul, Joyce, other oral history participants and their peers, Black folks still had to wait to be offered higher-paid and 'higher-skilled' jobs in the Delaware workforce.

Throughout these oral histories, memories and recollections of how 6 community elders experienced and navigated racist customs in ‘everyday Delaware,’ as well as public education and the state’s labor market. These lived experiences of navigating the prevailing white paternalism of twentieth century Delaware reemphasize and reframe the prioritization white education and employment opportunities over those of Black folks throughout the state less than one century ago.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

In this research, I present an original, qualitative study connecting the interrelated histories between labor market shifts and education reform within Delaware, and consider how these shifts may have influenced and shaped 'Black opportunities' in certain parts of the state. My findings show how farm labor, which was identified as an ethnic niche occupation for Black workers in Delaware, acted as a structural characteristic of place, both physically and socially. Physically, Delaware's farm labor practices facilitated migrant flows, repurposed buildings and prompted the construction of labor camps, and, later, highlighted the need for further construction of 'schools for migrant children,' who were noted to be Black migrant children. Socially, rhetoric surrounding farm labor carried significant implications for Black life within Delaware, as noted by the DSAA school construction program. This rhetoric and these essentialist ideas were also displayed throughout the Delaware Cooperative Extension Service's farm labor programs. The proposal for a permanent farm labor program and the oral history from William Smith especially tied these histories together by, first, emphasizing the need for improved access to education for migrant children and, second, the evidence provided by William's life, as he grew up in the migrant farm labor system and attended schools that were built after the proposal.

My findings provide further considerations for studies of ethnic niches and related labor market inequities, as well as emphasizing how racism can be camouflaged through these labor market practices (i.e. “migrant farm labor,” “migrant children”). I incorporated Black oral histories in an effort to avoid further essentializing Black experiences within twentieth century Delaware, however, participants emphasized other essentialisms about Black labor that arose in the state as Black workers moved away from farm labor. In the next section, I provide an overview of my results, connecting my findings to other studies of ethnic niches and theories discussed in Chapter 2. In the following and concluding section, I describe the limitations of this study and potential considerations for future research.

6.2 Overview

Compared to other studies of ethnic niches, which tend to focus on the labor market and employment experiences of migrant and immigrant populations as these groups navigate existing citizenship and language barriers, I shifted focus to how an ethnic niche may produce further essentialisms and social customs that manifest in policy making designed to preserve such niche occupations. As Paul explained in his recount of seeing only Black migrant laborers growing up, “[I]f you don’t have the knowledge and skills, you have to take what you can get,” which explains why disadvantaged populations resort to these occupations in times of need. This supports other studies which describe such niche occupations as ‘economic safety nets.’

However, when such employment patterns become normalized, I present how this normalization, or these essentialisms about labor, may result in further restricting certain groups to positions at the "bottom rung of the social ladder," (Holland, 1956, p. 82). Efforts to preserve this niche were evident through the early twentieth century and the DSAA's school construction program, through discriminatory employment practices and essentialisms about 'Black jobs,' and throughout World War II as multiple state and federal agencies collaborated to control the wartime farm labor emergency.

World War II efforts to preserve the state's farm labor supply resulted in the development of a permanent farm labor program that placed increased emphasis, and subsequent dependency, on Black migrants from the U.S. South. Black Delawareans were moving on to other pursuits, as noted by Holland and the collected oral histories discussed in the previous chapter. However, despite distancing themselves from farm labor, Warren, William, and Joyce each explain how other essentialisms about Black people and Black employment opportunities persisted throughout the state's labor market, and throughout their lives. This history of twentieth century Delaware builds upon the 1956 work of Holland and his view on what factors influence Black employment outcomes within the state. Holland noted 5 key influences in Delaware: (1) degree of unionism and extent of Black exclusion; (2) paternalistic attitudes of white people toward Black people; (3) number of Black workers already employed; (4) attitudes of white workers towards working with Black workers; and (5) the extent of need for labor (ibid, p. 84). Across the collected oral histories of folks who

navigated the state's after Holland's study, it was evident that white paternalism and white opinions on working with Black folks still persisted as key influences.

The analytic framework presented in Chapter 2 draws on essential components of research in Black Geographies and geopolitics to focus on uneven power relations that define and maintain spaces, as well as define and 'surveil' specific populations. These uneven power relations manifested through the work of the DSAA, Cooperative Extension, and other exclusionary labor market practices in which Black Delawareans had to 'take what they could get,' as Paul said when describing the situation that migrants faced, which intersected with Black experiences discussed in the previous chapter. These essentialisms shaped Delaware physically and socially which carried significant implications for Black life in the state. All participants noted that Delaware has significantly changed over the years, both through land use and labor market practices, however, in conversation with Jean, I responded to one of her comments, noting that racism in Delaware "was" understated in general discourse, to which Jean quickly responded, "Oh, it still is!" Just as racism has persisted in Delaware, so have essentialisms about labor, as noted by Warren who explained that twentieth century 'Black jobs' are jobs that Latinx immigrant populations tend to work across the state today. It is not clear what may be considered a 'Black job' today, but as long as such overrepresentation manifests in specific roles within the Delaware labor market, increasing attention should be paid to how this pattern may inform policy making to restrict other opportunities for specific ethnic groups.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

While my findings show evidence of the 'structuring' of Black employment and education opportunities in twentieth century Delaware, there are limitations to the study. First, archival work is always limited. In Brittany Lee Lewis and ArCasia James-Gallaway's 2022 *White Philanthropy Won't Save Black Education: Tracing an "Ordinary" Segregated School's Life in Delaware*, the authors note, "Delaware archives are no exception to this archival crisis, as scarce resources are available on 'ordinary' Black schools and students," (p. 270). Further, the archives of Delaware's Cooperative Extension Service used to be housed in the University of Delaware's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, which once lost materials to a flood that had occurred in a former building. It is quite evident that some of the materials I engaged with cut short, or certain collections were unfinished. For example, in Chapter 4, the discussion of the 'encounter' between Extension Service representatives and Jamaican labor representatives does not provide how the situation was resolved just as the materials did not—the frustrating reality of archival research.

Concerning the collected oral histories, it is worth noting that oral histories were collected simultaneously with archival data. As archival data collection was underway, I became better informed about my own research and could explain the topic of interest more in depth to some of the later oral history participants, such as Paul and William. Considering the sample size of oral histories, there may be concerns of bias; however, despite oral histories being placed in pairs to emphasize certain

themes and topics, none were used to extrapolate findings and essentialize Black experiences. The collected oral histories allow for detailed, individualized analysis, but I will note that oral histories, especially with elders, are limited by memory. Warren, Charlotte Anne, Joyce, and William all mentioned that 'the memory is not what it used to be.'

Future research should account for the potential shortcomings that may arise with archival and oral history research methods, however, the use of such qualitative methods provide a detailed history of this place-based history of farm labor, an ethnic niche that arose in Delaware during the first half of the twentieth century, and the implications for Black life. Findings highlight not only the intersection between Delaware's labor market history and education history, but also the different ways in which these histories produced essentialisms and the status quo that played an integral role in structuring the state just one century ago. These legacies persist in other employment patterns across the state today, as well as the world more broadly as ethnic niches do not only arise in Delaware, emphasizing the need for increased attention to place-based labor market outcomes and exclusionary practices that are designed to preserve these conditions.

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