

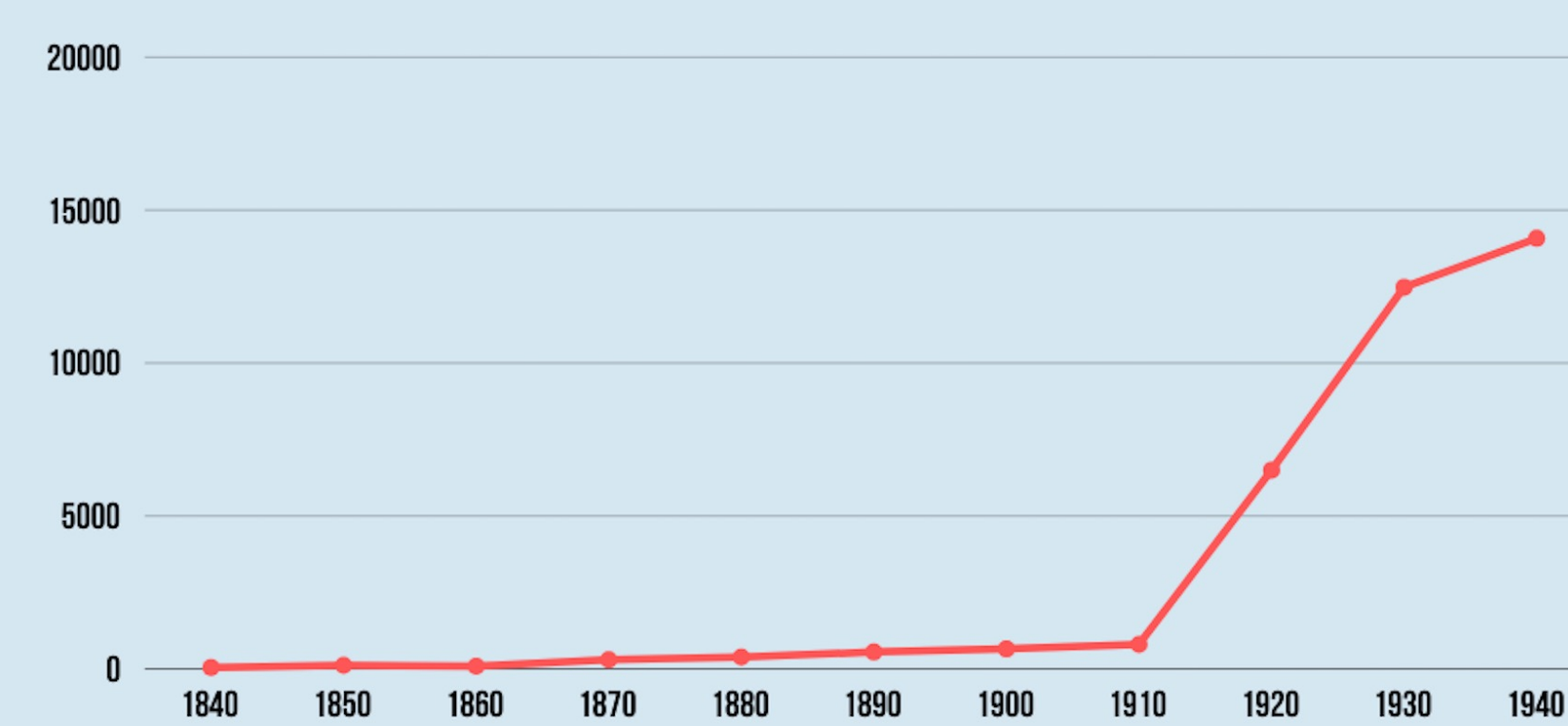
# The Social and Economic Impact of the Great Migration on Akron, Ohio

by Olivia Nengel

## Thesis

The Great Migration had a profound impact on the social life and economy of Akron, Ohio and created a nation-within-a-nation among the commerce and neighborhoods of the city. The mass movement led to a strong, new demographic in Akron, and caused a parallel economy to form consisting of Black-owned businesses.

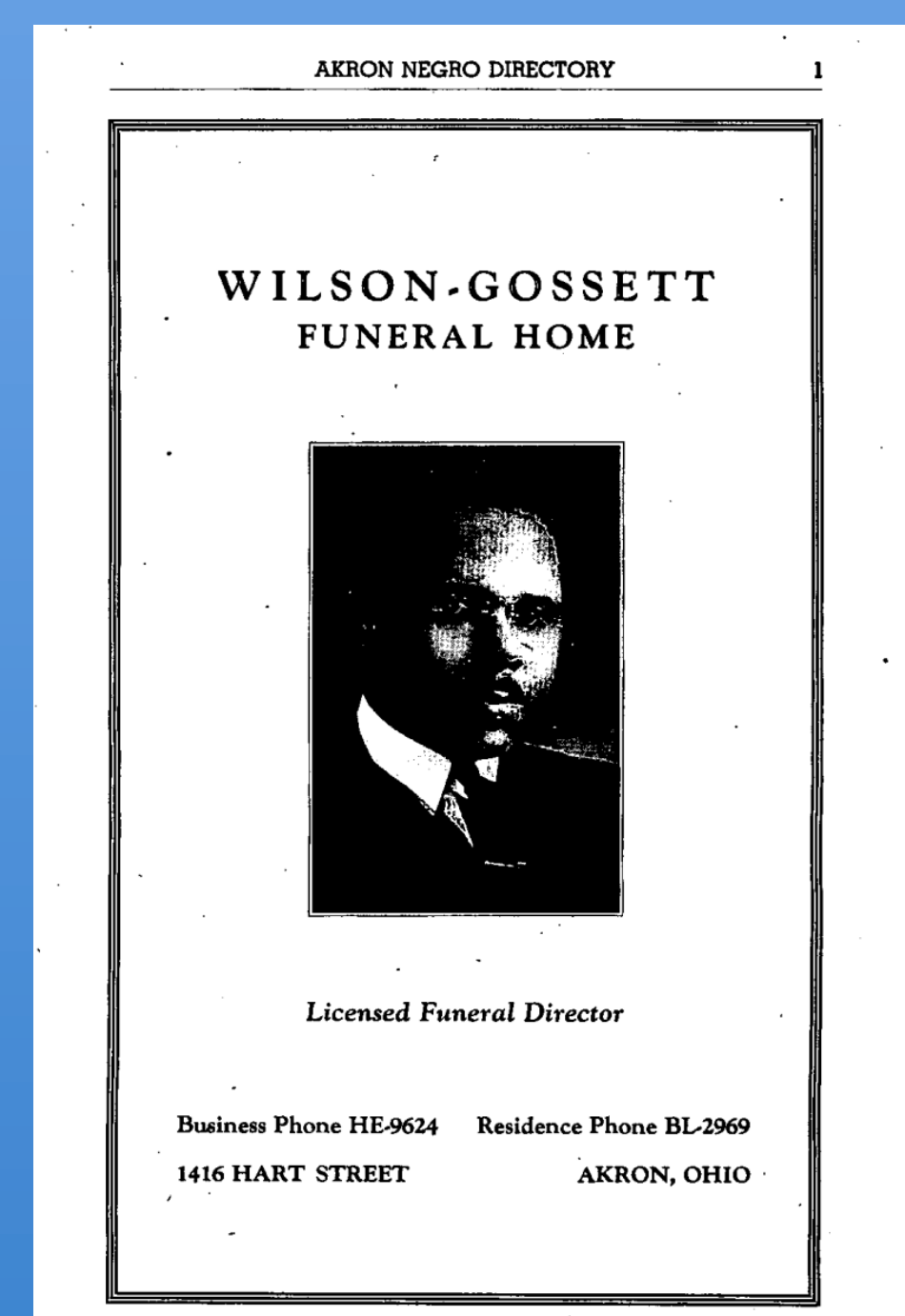
### NON-WHITE POPULATION IN AKRON 1840-1940



Non-White Population in Akron; it can be assumed that the vast majority of the non-White population was African American

## Key Sources

- *Akron Negro Directory*
- *Akron Beacon Journal*
- *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* by James Gregory



## Abstract

The Great Migration was the mass movement of over six million African Americans who left the South and resettled in cities across the North, West, and Midwest. This thesis focuses on the Great Migration in the context of Akron, Ohio. These migrants were pushed out of the South and pulled to cities for a variety of reasons. The push factors included Jim Crow laws, chronic racial segregation and violence, and bleak economic opportunities. Pull factors were more location-specific but included economic opportunities and less racial violence. In the case of Akron, African American migrants were attracted to the city to work in the rubber industry. This I.S. seeks to answer the question of how did the African American migrants during the Great Migration economically and socially impact Akron, Ohio? Profound changes and developments economically and socially occurred due to the influx of the Black population brought to Akron by the Great Migration. Among the economic developments are the creation of an independent and separate Black commercial economy and the constant supply of labor for the booming rubber industry. Socially the changes included a strong Black community with ties to social clubs and churches.

## Findings: Mapping Black Akron

The Great Migration and the subsequent sharp increase in the African American population allowed for a nation-within-a-nation to form in Akron during the early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. African Americans were able to open businesses of all kinds, attend Black-run churches across the city, and participate in social clubs. The wide range of African American-owned businesses meant that Black citizens of Akron could shop without ever having to frequent a White-owned business. Howard Street and Main Street became the commercial hubs for the Black economy. Additionally, the sharp increase in the African American population spurred innovations in education, housing, and employment across the city.



"Killings for Akron School Board", Opie Evans Papers, The University of Akron, University Libraries, Archives and Special Collections



"Blanche Norris at Super Market", Opie Evans Papers, The University of Akron, University Libraries, Archives and Special Collections

## Methodology

I chose to use newspaper articles, censuses, directories, and secondary literature in order to create an authentic depiction of Akron during the Great Migration. I mapped the Black-owned businesses, churches, residences, and social clubs with the use of the *Akron Negro Directory*. In my research I had to work around the lack of secondary sources on Akron during the Great Migration.



"Inetha Hodges and Betty Duhart", Opie Evans Papers, The University of Akron, University Libraries, Archives and Special Collections

## Historiography

Discussions among historians on the Great Migration are typically centered in big cities like Chicago and New York City. This is true for Leah Platt Boustan in her book *Competition in the Promised Land: Black Migrants in Northern Cities and Labor Markets*. James Gregory chooses to use a wide lens and numerical data to show the impact of the Great Migration on the United States as a whole. I found inspiration in Davarian Baldwin's approach to mapping a city's Black communities, in his case Chicago, to show the impact of the growing Black population.