



FAMU WAY

HISTORICAL SURVEY

For the City of Tallahassee

David H. Jackson, Jr., Ph.D. - Principal Investigator

Reginald K. Ellis, Ph.D. - Researcher • Will Guzmán, Ph.D. - Researcher • Darius J. Young, Ph.D. - Researcher

Historical Information

Physical history:

1. Date(s) of establishment: 1880s and 1890s
2. Landscape architect, designer, shaper, creator: not applicable
3. Builder, contractor, laborer, suppliers: not applicable
4. Original and subsequent owners, occupants: not applicable
5. Periods of development: 1880s-2000s
 - A. original plans and construction: not applicable
 - B. changes and additions: not applicable

Location, Boundaries by street name:

Palmer Avenue to Van Buren Street (south to north)
South Adams Street to Lake Bradford Road (east to west)
FAMU Way to Lake Bradford Road (east to west)
Wahnish Way to Lake Bradford Road (east to west)
Wahnish Way to FAMU Way (south to north)

Present Owner:

City of Tallahassee and state of Florida

Present Occupants:

Residential and non-residential

Present Use:

Residential homes, apartments, rental homes, and commercial spaces.

Significance:

The effect of the creation and development of Florida A&M University on its surrounding community.

Historians:

David H. Jackson, Jr., Ph.D.
Reginald K. Ellis, Ph.D.
Will Guzmán, Ph.D.
Darius J. Young, Ph.D.

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The FAMU Way Extension Project was first discussed with the community in January 2009 at a citizen breakfast at the Walker Ford Community Center. From the beginning, the goal was not only to address transportation needs, but to also demonstrate a commitment by the City of Tallahassee to the surrounding neighbors, businesses and university. Through extensive collaboration with residents, Florida A&M University leaders, businesses owners and people who simply loved this community, a vision was created. In partnership with Blueprint 2000, funded by the local penny option sales tax, and Leon County Government, that vision grew to include a linear park, gathering places, wide sidewalks



and lush landscaping. The goal, as set forth by the City Manager, was to create the most beautiful roadway in all of Tallahassee.

It was through these interactions with the community that this history project began to unfold. Stories emerged of resilient neighborhoods, civil rights advocates and leaders, and hard-working families. The City contracted FAMU history professors to capture and share these stories with a goal of incorporating them into the FAMU Way Project. This history, therefore, is dedicated to the men, women and children of Tallahassee's Southside who have helped create a community for which we can all be proud.



Introduction

The City of Tallahassee's FAMU Way Extension Project began in 2009. At the direction of the City Commission, City staff embraced the challenge of designing the extension of Florida A&M University (FAMU) from Wahnish Way to Lake Bradford Road so that it not only meets the transportation needs of the community, but so when completed, it would be "the most beautiful roadway in Tallahassee." The City engaged area residents and FAMU throughout the design process while also working to minimize impacts to environmentally sensitive areas, historical neighborhoods, nearby businesses and the University.

From the earliest stages of the project, the City understood the importance of recognizing the history of the area along the route of the extended roadway. As work progressed during the first phase of construction, the City contracted Dr. David H. Jackson, Jr., with the History and African American Studies Department at FAMU, along with Drs. Reginald Ellis, Will Guzman and Darius Young to collect information from area residents in order to capture the area's history and tell the story of the people, places, and events that have helped shape the community.

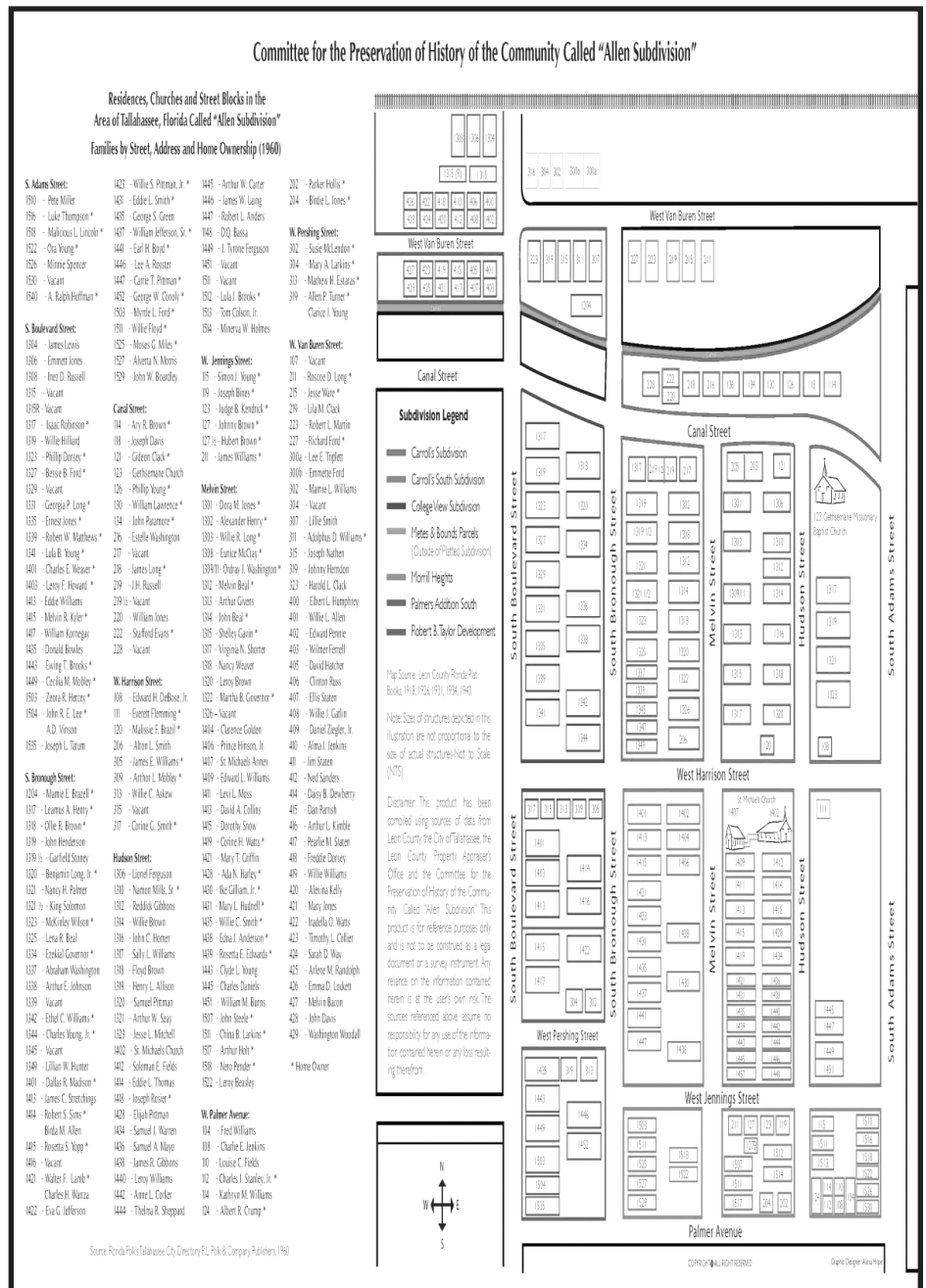
People who their resident in Villa Mitchell Hill and Allen Subdivision were very proud of their communities and are still inspired by the history of the areas. Members of Allen view themselves as being an integral part of Tallahassee's community. In a 2015 pamphlet titled "Super Significant Seniors of the Historic Allen Subdivision," which features residents of Allen who are older than eighty-years-old, the authors, Jennie Smith Collett and Inesta Beasley Johnson penned an example of their resolve: "we have suffered through Jim Crow laws, segregation, arrests and cross-burnings. We have participated in sit-ins, boycotts, demonstrations, marches and fights to change our plight and the plight of our children." However, while acknowledging the challenges they faced, residents still described their heritage and themselves with exuberant pride: "We are the great-great and great grandchildren of slaves. We are the grandchildren and children of businessmen, doctors, lawyers, seamstresses, brick masons, cement finishers, midwives, beauticians, cab drivers, mechanics, jewelers, carpenters,

professors, etc."¹ A declaration as such epitomizes the story that follows addressing the history of what is now FAMU Way, the community that lived along and near that corridor, and the people who would make the history of the area come alive.

Historical Context

African Americans have been planted in the Tallahassee area of Florida for centuries. Starting with the period of enslavement, Africans worked on plantations in what was termed Middle Florida where Tallahassee is located, for decades before the era ended with the close of the Civil War.

Committee for the Preservation of History of the Community Called "Allen Subdivision"



Map of Allen Subdivision. (Courtesy of Delores Harpool).

Although people of African descent received some reprieve from the horrors of slavery and actually made advancements during the Reconstruction period, that time only lasted for a brief twelve years. After that, black people spent the next ninety years or so struggling to surmount Jim Crow laws that enforced segregation and marginalized them in society. The Jim Crow era would begin to transition with the advent of the long civil rights movement that forced Florida and the rest of American society to deal justly with African Americans. However, the amazing thing about the story of black Floridians, particularly in Tallahassee, is that through it all, they still found a way to carve out auspicious, significant, and fruitful lives for themselves. They created schools, churches, businesses, recreational venues, and other parallel institutions to sustain them and perpetuate their existence. This report briefly highlights those narratives with a focus on Florida in general and Tallahassee in particular as it relates to the African American experience. Moreover, this study narrows its focus even more on the experiences of those black people who lived in Villa Mitchell Hill, the Allen Subdivision, along what is now FAMU Way and were, in some form or fashion, impacted by FAMU, the anchor of their community.

Slavery in Florida

In 1823 William P. Duval, four-term Florida territorial governor, commissioned William H. Simmons and John Lee Williams to select a new site for the future capital. Initially, per the order of the United States Congress, Florida's Legislative Councils were to alternate between St. Augustine and Pensacola. However, after travel bungles and deadly diseases afflicted council members in route to both cities in 1822 and 1823, it was decided that a midway site "between the Ochlockonee and Suwannee Rivers" would be the best alternative. By March 1824, Duval officially chose an area that Simmons and Williams came upon that was, at various points during the previous 300-years, home to a myriad of people and communities including the towns of Taloofoa and Mikasuki; Native people such as Apalachees and Creek, along with Seminole Chiefs Neamathla and Chefixico; Spanish conquistador Hernando De Soto; Franciscans and their missions; and the exploits of future president Andrew Jackson.² After official incorporation in 1825, Tallahassee became Leon County's seat of government in 1828.³

Tallahassee would not only serve as the political capital for state affairs, it quickly became an important agricultural and slave-trading center with a vital port twenty-three miles south on the Gulf of Mexico, Saint Marks, and Port Leon, that would export various goods to United States eastern seaboard cities and Europe. These goods were primarily the result of the rich agricultural output of Leon County and surrounding areas that

would come to be known as Middle Florida. The Tallahassee Red Hills - the cotton-growing area comprising the northern two-thirds of Leon County - would have extremely fertile land.⁴ For the most part, the land in the south and southwest portion of Leon County, historian William W. Rogers tells us, "was not well suited to plantation agriculture."⁵ Nevertheless,

From the earliest stages of the project, the City understood the importance of recognizing the history of the area along the route of the extended roadway.

agriculture dominated the economy; thus, farming and directly related occupations were the chief means of livelihood for those in the area. Leon County "led the state in the amount of farm land, the value of livestock, the production of corn, and the number of bales of cotton ginned. The total cash value of Leon's farm products made it number one in Florida."⁶ Corn covered more acreage than cotton, producing 421,654 bushels between 1859 and 1860.⁷

Consequently, the institution of slavery would be the backbone of the local economy. By the early 1820s Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia cotton planters began to leave their farms in search of cheap lands in the West and

Lower South where they could "realize a profit on their heavy investment" in African captives.⁸ Good cotton lands were nearby in the new territory of Florida, especially the northern section, where Tallahassee is located. This hilly region had elevations of more than 250 feet above sea level.⁹ This rich soil and large influx of planters allowed cotton to become king as the Middle Florida cotton belt expanded to include Jackson, Gadsden, Leon, Jefferson, Madison, and Hamilton Counties in the 1830s. Middle Florida's cotton production, according to Clifton Paisley, "exceeded that of all but seven of Georgia's 132 counties...and of all but twenty-one of the fifty-two counties of Alabama."¹⁰

Planters were those "owners who held at least 20 bond persons and possessed more than 500 hundred acres."¹¹ According to historian Larry E. Rivers, they were "a virtual barony" whose empire expanded in the late 1840s and 1850s until it "extended on the west from Jackson County across the Suwannee River on the east down to the upper peninsula's Alachua and Marion Counties."¹² Between 1821 and 1860, this relatively small, but efficient Black Belt was on par with or out-produced regions such as the Georgia piedmont or the Black Belts of Alabama and Mississippi.¹³ Historian Julia Floyd Smith shared, "the rapid expansion and increase of cotton culture in Florida would not have happened without slavery. Abundant cheap labor made possible the process of winning new lands from a wilderness."¹⁴

Slavery in Leon County

Much of the slave trade in Florida centered in Tallahassee, since the capital city was in the heart of the state's Cotton Belt. Slave traders purchased slaves there from the auction block and then proceeded with them to various areas for resale.¹⁵

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Tallahassee slave brokers such as R. H. Berry, Edward M. West, and R. A. Shine, Jr. advertised themselves as an "Auctioneer and Commission Merchant" and openly promoted the sale of African captives. Occasionally, blacks were auctioned-off at bankruptcy sales held in front of the Leon County courthouse.¹⁶ Enslaved Africans were often brought into Tallahassee by businesses like Hughes and Patterson, a firm of slave-traders.¹⁷ These traders came up from Saint Marks by ship then went on to Tallahassee to dispose of their black cargoes. African captives were kept in the Tallahassee public jail or in "slave pens" until the time of sale. The selling of blacks was widely advertised in advance and bidding "was often spirited" when they were presented at auction.¹⁸

The increase of Florida's black population during the antebellum period was dramatic, due in part to the brisk commerce and services these slave traders provided. The appetite of slave owners for increasingly more profits caused Florida's enslaved population to unusually balloon more than eight-fold within thirty-years from 7,587 in 1830 to 61,750 by 1860, which reflected nearly half of the state's total population of 140,500. Middle Florida, particularly Leon County, was the beneficiary of this profound uptick.¹⁹ Yet, death at a young age was one reason for the continual importation of African captives into Middle Florida because of the suffering from "a good deal of sickness" due in part to a poor diet lacking essential nutrients. According to historian Julia Floyd Smith, this resulted in a much higher mortality rate for Florida's enslaved blacks than that of whites. Black children suffered even more so; "of the 122 deaths in Leon County in 1850, for example, 97 were slaves; of the slaves who died, 62 were children aged six years or younger." Similar ratios existed throughout Middle Florida (Florida's Black Belt).²⁰

In 1860 manufacturing accounted for \$261,200 in products, placing Leon ahead of all but two Florida counties. Of the total number of adult white males, nearly half, or 418 persons, listed themselves as "farmers, planters, overseers, or, in a few instances, farm laborers."²¹ By 1860 large plantations dominated Leon County's cotton production with seventy-nine farms of 500 or more acres of improved land, operated by seventy-three owners that accounted for 12,245 bales of the 16,686-bale county cotton crop.²² Additionally, the majority of Middle Florida planters (73 percent) owned between twenty and forty-nine African captives. This small-planter class forced blacks to work in Florida's Black Belt throughout the antebellum period.²³ One writer aptly stated that slavery in Florida derided honest labor and "warped the culture as well as politics and the economy."²⁴ If this was true for the state as a whole, it was particularly fitting for Tallahassee and Leon

County since it served as the epicenter of elite planters whose vested interest was to exploit the labor of African Americans for profit.

Prior to the Civil War, Tallahassee and Leon County served as the hub of Florida's economic, political, and social life. Leon County became the seat of state government and by 1860 "the most prosperous and heavily populated county in Florida."



Tallahassee 1885, State Archives of Florida (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

This prosperity was due in large measure to the institution of slavery and the forced exploited labor of blacks who toiled the many plantations of the county. One of the lesser-known of these plantations was "Highwood" which housed one of two homesteads of slave-owner and territorial Governor William P. DuVal and is the current site of FAMU.²⁵ African Americans were 74% of the total population of

the county, with virtually all of them enslaved. The total Leon County population of 12,343 included 3,194 whites, 9,089 slaves, and sixty free persons of color. In the city of Tallahassee, African Americans were nearly 50% of the population, with a total population of 1,932 making it the fourth largest city in the state. Of these, 997 were white, 45 were free black persons of color, and 890 were enslaved Africans.²⁶

Free blacks represented a threat to the planter class because they symbolized a contradiction in terms of the ideology that blacks were lazy and child-like who required whites to enslave them for their own good. Additionally, free blacks were viewed with disdain because white planters feared they would provoke insurrection and serve as models for enslaved blacks to emulate. Thus, legislators in Florida attempted to exclude free blacks from entering the state altogether. Prior to 1845, if they were caught entering Florida after a second offense, they were "subject to being sold at public auction for five years." Moreover, slave owners were forbidden to free enslaved blacks unless they also made provisions for them to leave the state.²⁷ A law passed in 1848 "required all free blacks and mulattos over twelve years of age to have a white guardian. In 1856, all of them who had not secured guardians became subject to a ten dollar fine and imprisonment until the fine and costs were paid." As a result of this law, at least thirty-five free blacks from Pensacola declined the offers of friendly whites to become their guardians and migrated to Tampico, Mexico, in 1857. A year later, a Florida statute of 1858 permitted free blacks "to elect their own masters" and become enslaved! In another instance, the orphan children of free blacks were "apprenticed to whites for ninety-nine years to learn a trade."²⁸

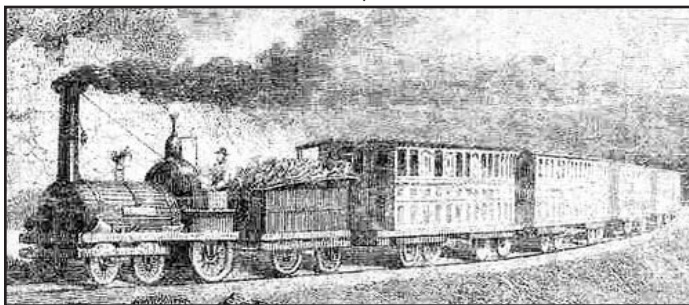
Free black Floridians could own property, and by 1860 their property was valued at \$97,985. Most free blacks worked at unskilled labor, but there were a few notable exceptions.²⁹ Despite their limitations in 1860, some free blacks in Leon County managed to carve out a living and in a few cases do very

well for themselves.³⁰ For example, historian William Warren Rogers has documented that Jack Hall was a farm laborer who had amassed \$800 in real estate and a personal estate of \$200. Robert Ponder was an overseer; Starling Jones and Jason Heart were carpenters.³¹ Payton Brown and William Chavis were draymen (freighting and hauling) who earned more money than many whites.³² Musician James T. Selby earned enough that upon his death his wife Cynthia Selby was able to purchase 360 acres of land with cash in 1863.³³

Many free black women in Leon County worked as cooks and washerwomen such as Katie Jones, Hanah Baker, and Sally Robinson, along with mother-daughter teams Lucinda and Julia Rosberry, Malinda and Eliza Norris, and Eliza and Harriet Hudson. Malinda and Harriet had personal estates valued at \$1,000. Two black women, Lidia Stout and Mary Owens, were seamstresses—an occupation at that time dominated

by white women. A rarity, African American Dorothy O’Cane “was an unusual member of the planter class” whose real estate was valued at \$2,000 and personal estate worth \$12,000. She owned 10 slaves and 400 acres, producing 18 bales of cotton and 700 bushels of corn.³⁴

Nearly all of Florida’s representatives in Congress and its governors were slave-owners.³⁵ Thus, it would not be surprising that these leaders requested for the Florida territory to be admitted into the Union as a slave state beginning in the late 1830s and early 1840s. The disproportionate amount of political influence southern slave owners had throughout the entire region made this request easier to honor by their allies in both chambers of the United States Congress. Furthermore, Iowa’s petition for admittance as a free state suppressed the voices of dissent even more so, allowing for a narrow win and the “peculiar institution” to expand once again. On March 1, 1845, both states would be approved for admission and two days later on his last full day in office, President John Tyler signed the law that resulted in Florida entering the nation as its fourteenth slave state and twenty-seventh state.³⁶



Railroad Development in Tallahassee



Tallahassee Mule Train, State Archives of Florida (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

Planters and businessmen in Leon County realized they needed a more efficient route to transport and bring their products to market. This resulted in the building of a railroad from Tallahassee to Saint Marks in 1836-37. The north-south tracks cross over Canal Street (now FAMU Way) and border the west end of what is today known as the predominately African American neighborhood of Villa Mitchell Hill—located just yards from FAMU. Over the years, Saint Marks was the shipping point for cotton from several Georgia and Florida counties resulting in over 53,000 bales of cotton worth \$2.5 million. Nearly one-third of it was grown in Leon County and shipped from there in 1856. Thus, the railroad, due to both its location and its destinations, was integral to the lives of African Americans. By 1860, the chief industries in Leon County were the Pensacola and Georgia Railroad Company, worth \$50,000 and the Tallahassee

Railroad Company, an investment of \$30,000.³⁷

According to writer George Pettengill, the first railroad charter issued in Florida was the Leon Railway organized in 1831 by Harry Bond, Robert Y. Wilford, Robert W. Williams, Isham G. Searcy, John Y. Gary, and Thomas Brown. The charter authorized the building of a railroad from Tallahassee to the Port of Saint Marks. It was stipulated in the charter that freight rates should not be more than 12-1/2 cents per hundred pounds. However, the train track was never built and the company reorganized on February 11, 1832. The franchise was given to the Tallahassee Railroad Company in 1834, formed by prominent persons (some of whom were well-known Leon County slave owners), such as Richard K. Call, Green Chairs, Benjamin Chairs, Sam Reid, Samuel Duval, John Sheppard, Samuel Park Hill, John Park Hill, Romeo Lewis, Charles Austin, Robert J. Hackley, and T. R. Belton.³⁸

Before 1835, agriculture from Middle Florida was taken to Saint Marks by wagon. Small boats carried the merchandise to and from the ships anchored out from shore. Some of the products included: cotton, tobacco, hides, syrup, brown sugar, molasses, and corn shipped out in exchange for flour, coffee, gunpowder, bolts of homespun quinine, calomel, castor oil, and other necessary items. However, planters and businessmen soon realized they would have to develop a more practical means of transporting their cotton to Saint Marks. The solution was the Tallahassee Railroad Company.³⁹

On February 10, 1834, the Tallahassee Railroad Company was incorporated with its office located at Tallahassee by a legislative act. The original stock issue was limited to \$100,000 and the company was granted 500,000 acres of land by the territorial government to be sold with the proceeds to go for internal improvements. Construction started in 1834 and was completed in 1836. The railroad in Florida was the first to be

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constructed with iron strips on longitudinal wood stringers. The “trains” were small wooden cars hauled by “slave-driven mules.” The passenger “coach” consisted of a box of two benches holding eight people. One of the most famous “engineers” on the railroad at the time was Murry Tatem. Some years as many as 50,000 bales of cotton were shipped from Saint Marks most of which was loaded at Tallahassee for shipment on the cars.⁴⁰ By 1856, a steam-powered train was making daily trips to and from Saint Marks, averaging two hours each way, including time to stop and refuel with wood and water to maintain sufficient steam. Only two other railroads were operating in Florida during the antebellum period: the Pensacola and Georgia Railroad, connecting Quincy with Jacksonville; and the Florida Railroad, connecting Fernandina with Cedar Key, both completed in 1860.⁴¹

The Tallahassee Railroad Company was a financial success in its early years due to low initial costs. The ideal location was between an established seaport and its southern terminus in the extensive cotton-producing area. However, before the end of 1861, the state provided some financial assistance to the Tallahassee Railroad and the Pensacola and Georgia Railroad. By the end of 1864, the Florida Railroad abandoned the track west of Gainesville but kept its operation going in the interior around Gainesville, Lake City, and Baldwin.⁴²

After the Civil War, many railroad properties were in physical ruins. Agriculture continued to be the mainstay of Florida’s economy owing to the cotton growing counties within the Black Belt having not been invaded during the Civil War. However, marketing the crop through the Union blockade was difficult, and the Florida Confederate government discouraged planting cotton in favor of food crops. Since cotton was non-perishable and commanded a good price when it could be taken to market, the planter class continued to produce it in considerable quantities.⁴³ It would take nearly fifteen years after the Civil War for the state railroad system to recover, going from 444 railroad miles to 1,654 miles between 1880 and 1885.⁴⁴

The Seaboard Air Line Railway Company eventually took

over the Tallahassee Railroad depot in July of 1900. Over time, the railroad would become the avenue by which many students arrived at FAMU. The Twentieth Annual Catalogue of The Florida State Normal and Industrial School for the 1906-1907 school year instructed “Students arriving on the trains are advised to notify authorities of the date and schedule time of their arrival. They can, on arrival at the station, easily walk to the institution, as the buildings are in plain view of the depots.” Students remembered disembarking from the train, receiving their bags, and walking up the hill for the first time to attend FAMU. The hill was steep, so it took tenacity and determination to traverse it with luggage and other items. It surely became an experience that all students who arrived at FAMU that way remembered. With its close proximity to Canal Street and the University, students used this means of transportation when they needed to travel back and forth home, sometimes with special fares.⁴⁵



Tallahassee Railroad Company eventually became the Seaboard Railway Company (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

Civil War/Reconstruction

African Americans reacted differently to the end of the Civil War and freedom’s arrival. Some immediately left the plantations and began to look for loved ones, while others left the region to completely disassociate themselves from the site of their previous oppression. And yet, the majority stayed on their plantation because they simply did not have any place to go despite the racist sentiments most white Floridians harbored against them.⁴⁶ These Floridians opposed most of the Reconstruction legislation that granted civil and political rights to blacks. They believed that granting equality to African Americans was unconstitutional and did not hesitate to express their disapproval violently, particularly against black and white Republicans, scalawags, and carpetbaggers in order to drive all moderates out from the political process. The planter class and their conservative sympathizers were determined to reestablish white supremacy in Florida, keep blacks subservient paupers, and make the Florida Republican Party ineffectual. Their goal would come to fruition, particularly after the Compromise of 1877, in which blacks were “forced into a role of public accommodation that accorded with their poverty in postwar Florida.”⁴⁷

African Americans in Florida attempted to use the “elective franchise as a primary weapon in the war to guarantee their rights.” This became more difficult to secure after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Yet, formerly enslaved Joseph Oats of Tallahassee was elected by his peers to participate in a national delegation of blacks who petitioned President Andrew Johnson for the right of suffrage. Oats and his counterparts told the new president to remember that he walked in the footsteps of Lincoln and thus was obligated to carry forth his vision. Frederick



African American high school students from around the state arriving at the Tallahassee depot to visit the capitol in 1961. FAMU students also used the depot. (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

Douglass led the delegation that told Johnson: “Your noble and human predecessor placed in our hands the power to assist in saving the nation and we hope that you, his able successor, will favorably place in our hands the ballot with which to save ourselves.”⁴⁸

During Reconstruction black Floridians believed “that access to land, education, and the elective franchise” was essential for a just society.⁴⁹ One black Union soldier stationed at Jacksonville said it more plainly: “there is only one thing I want, that is my vote.”⁵⁰ Additionally, the promotion of labor rights would be vital to democratizing the New South. Historian Paul Ortiz recognized “the foundational ideology of black politics was the belief that labor was the basis of all wealth.” This was true during slavery and thus “they sought to transform Florida into a Republic where powerful economic interests were subordinate to the needs of the people.” However, many whites believed otherwise and fought “to keep wages, taxes, and labor mobility low” by using physical terror, electoral fraud, and coercion to accomplish their goal - “the annihilation of black political aspirations.”⁵¹

Due to this annihilation, “Black Floridians struggled to hold on to the ballot in the 1880s. Their adversaries were formidable. White supremacists inflicted violence on would-be voters while conservatives used growing legislative majorities to sabotage the electoral system.” This was done with the help of the fourth estate: Florida’s newspapers and other media outlets (magazines, journals, and later with the advent of radio and television) which provided editorial support for one-party rule and suppressed information about election improprieties. One Republican activist testified that the 1880 election in Leon County was plagued by “the use of...tissue tickets, violence, [and] fraud in counting returns,” which benefitted white Democrats and worked to the detriment of the Republican majority.⁵² Another writer poignantly noted that “so great was racial political repression in subsequent decades that another black person would not be elected to Congress from Florida until 110 years later.”⁵³ One of those individuals would be Carrie P. Meek—a long-time resident of the Allen Subdivision, the predominately black neighborhood which bordered Canal Street, now FAMU Way.

One former Middle Florida slave owner articulated his economic outlook in 1869 as follows:

*Large Plantations could be purchased and divided into small farms to great advantage. Since the war I have made three crops, planting a very small proportion of my land, and have made an average annual income of \$9,000 and I value my property, with improvements, mules, etc., at \$50,000. I use black labor entirely, and almost exclusively my former slaves.*⁵⁴

During Reconstruction black Floridians believed “that access to land, education, and the elective franchise” was essential for a just society.

Clearly, at least for some former Florida slave owners, the inability to continue to enslave African Americans, the brief tenure of Republican rule, or the small and brief incorporation of a progressive agenda during the Reconstruction era, did not prevent landed elites from experiencing large profits after the Civil War as some would have believed. The fact is white Floridians constructed a powerful myth: Reconstruction had been a tragic error because African American workers deserted the plantation to participate in politics. As a result, these propagandists argued the state’s economy had plunged into chaos. The promotion of this myth contributed to the abrupt end of Reconstruction in Florida, and as a southern state, it mirrored the nation when it staked its future on low wages and racial oppression while it

turned its back on blacks by finding new ways to “control the fruits of their labor” as they had done prior to the Civil War. T. Thomas Fortune, a native of Florida’s Black Belt, astutely observed that the forces of power and wealth were hell bent on ensuring that labor remained subordinate and that the two major political parties capitulated to corporate influence.⁵⁵ Needless to say, “investors applauded the triumphant march of white rule.”⁵⁶ Sadly, business as usual would continue at the peril of black advancement. Tallahassee’s plantation heiress Susan Bradford Epps embraced the white “supermen” who would “redeem” the state and destroy the “Black Republican Serpent.” For Democrat Governor George Franklin Drew’s 1877 inauguration, Bradford Epps described the gleeful conservative Democratic mood as follows:

*Louder and louder they grew, nearer and nearer they came. Some of these new comers wearing red shirts, some waived red flags. Yelling like demons, they rushed into the square car load after car load of men, eager to help with the inauguration. Our men they were, no idle threat and the Carpet Beggars and Negroes recognized this fact and the inauguration proceeded quietly...when all was over and these men, who for ten years had been working for this end, realized that they had succeeded, that once again they had home rule—the famous “rebel yell” went up like incense to heaven.*⁵⁷

Alas, Florida’s triumphant “supermen” plunged parts of the state into disarray and Jim Crow Florida became alive and well.⁵⁸

Jim Crow Florida

Although race leader Bishop Henry McNeal Turner called Florida a “paradise” for blacks and a place where they could make a lot of money, race relations in Florida in the early twentieth century were not good.⁵⁹ In fact, race relations were worse for Florida blacks in many ways than for blacks in other Southern states like Mississippi, Tennessee, North Carolina and Texas. Although Florida is not usually thought of as a

Deep South state, white Floridians carried the same attitudes and assumptions of superiority as other Southern whites. In addition to slavery, Florida had its share of lynching and mob violence, residential segregation, black codes, discrimination, and even the total destruction of one of its all-black towns, Rosewood.⁶⁰

While modern-day Florida conjures images of Disney World and sunny beaches, the African American experience in the Sunshine State from 1877 to 1970 was not so bright. Indeed, race relations in Florida were equal to or even harsher than other southern states. Ultimately, when examined, Florida's past must be properly placed alongside of the mores, traditions, and values that governed the South and wreaked terror against black people in large measure.

During the Jim Crow era, many black Floridians understood they had a clearly defined "place" in society, including those people who resided in Villa Mitchell Hill and the Allen Subdivision. Having a "place" meant that wherever they turned, African Americans faced segregation. More often than not, Jim Crow customs required not merely separation, but also exclusion. At funerals, weddings, courtrooms, public facilities, and other places of social gathering, habit dictated the races would never integrate. In general, the racial code in Tallahassee prohibited any form of interracial activity that might have implied equality.⁶¹

Racial Politics

The Democrat Party controlled the political system in Florida and functioned on the tenet of white supremacy. White Democrats in Florida utilized different tools to disfranchise black voters in the state. In 1889, they adopted multiple ballot box laws and used the poll tax which effectively reduced the African American voting population and eliminated their influence. White Floridians were emboldened by the Supreme Court's refusal to overturn the 1890 Mississippi Constitution which included literacy tests, poll taxes, and understanding clauses and the 1898 Louisiana Constitution that created the Grandfather Clause which allowed whites to vote, but disfranchised former slaves. These laws became so entrenched that state legislators did not see the need to codify the disfranchisement of blacks during the 1895 Florida constitutional convention. Racial segregation, along with white supremacy, relegated the black population to second-class status and consistently reminded them of their inferior position in the social order.⁶²

In addition to disfranchisement, black Floridians, as was common in Tallahassee, became victims of white economic and occupational discrimination. In this effort, whites established "black codes" to ensure the presence of a stable labor force. Black codes designated employees as "servants" and employers as "masters," and prevented African Americans from vagrancy or loitering, effectively forcing blacks to work whether they wanted

to or not. Among other things, black codes permitted corporal punishment, restricted blacks from intermarriage, using firearms or drinking alcohol, and limited the areas in which they could rent or purchase property. A major goal of white supremacists was to keep blacks in a subordinate "place" so they would always provide a pliable and exploitable labor force.⁶³

In terms of politics during the era, by 1890 white Democrats had "redeemed" the state and Florida's blacks were forced out of virtually all national, state, and county offices. The state's Democrat Party announced that only whites could join in 1902, relegating blacks to the Republican Party, "whose impact on Florida politics was inconsequential," according to one writer. However, African Americans continued to serve in elected and appointed positions at the local level

through 1924. For instance, Joseph A. Nottage and Albert Lewis Browning were city councilmen in Palatka until that year. While all-black Eatonville continued to elect its own officials, legal and extra-legal manipulations of the political system by whites throughout the rest of the state eventually ran its course, and African Americans were denied a voice in Florida politics for more than a generation.⁶⁴

Racial Violence

Racial violence and terrorism against Florida blacks reminded them of their precarious situation in the state. In fact, Florida led the nation with eleven lynchings in 1920, and between 1882 and 1930 black people, especially black men, were more likely to be lynched in Florida than any other southern state. According to Tolney and Beck, for every 100,000 African Americans in Florida 79.8 were lynched. Mississippi followed with a relatively distant second of 52.8 per 100,000.⁶⁵

Out of 19,427 people in Tallahassee, Leon County, in 1910, whites made up 4,697 and blacks comprised 14,726 or 76 percent. Leon and Jefferson County (a neighboring county), were the only two Florida counties that had black populations exceeding 75 percent of the total. Of the 170 lynchings that occurred in Florida between 1889 and 1918, only 2 happened in Leon County, one taking place in 1909.⁶⁶

According to a newspaper report, Lake City had a notorious reputation for keeping African Americans in their "place." In 1909, six black men were taken there from Tallahassee for safekeeping from vigilante terrorists, but still were lynched. The black men had allegedly shot and killed B. B. Smith and slightly wounded B. Register, both white men, near Tallahassee. Smith and Register had testified against suspect Jerry Guster the day before in court. Guster and Charlie Norris, identified as leaders of the group, were accompanied by Edgar Knox, Paul Norris, Mack Norris and Jake Norris. When Guster and the others saw the two white men on the road, they "began firing on them almost without warning. Register fled from the fusillade, and received a slight wound as he ran," a Tallahassee newspaper

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reported.⁶⁷ Even with the prevalence of stereotyping, acts such as these dispelled Old South mythology about black timidity, passiveness, and docility.

When several Tallahassee deputies arrived on the scene, they found Guster and the others standing around Smith's body with shotguns. The men surrendered to the officers without resistance and were taken to the Leon County jail. Fearing a lynching in the capital city, Governor Albert W. Gilchrist had the men moved to Lake City for protection on Saturday night. "The public will demand a speedy and exhaustive trial of these men," the Weekly True Democrat reported, "and if the evidence shows willful and premeditated murder nothing short of a hanging will atone for the crime."

The very next morning, three members of a mob went to the Lake City jail and gave the jailer a note supposedly from the Leon County sheriff stating he "had received intimations that a mob was being formed in Tallahassee to take the negroes from the Lake City jail. The message ordered that the men be carried further south to frustrate the suspected mob," the paper reported. The telegram appeared authentic, as the six Negroes had been moved to Lake City for a similar reason. The Columbia County sheriff was out of the city and had left his sixteen-year-old son in charge of the jail, so this unsuspecting young man possibly did not realize the sinister purpose of the men and turned the prisoners over to them.⁶⁸

According to one source, the mob initially planned to lynch the black men, but after the suspects resisted, they were taken to the outskirts of the city and "literally shot to pieces." Four other black men implicated in the crime and confined to the Leon County jail were released after the Lake City murders because no incriminating evidence existed against them. However, officials still warned the men to leave Leon County for their own safety. Governor Gilchrist offered a \$250 reward for each of the three white men who went to the Lake City jail with the phony note. Also, as a result of this egregious act, a state senator introduced a bill in the Florida legislature appropriating a reward of \$5,000 for evidence leading to the conviction of the men involved in the murder.⁶⁹

Decades later in 1937, two black Tallahassee teenagers, Ernest Hawkins and Richard Ponder, were lynched by vigilantes after they were accused of assaulting a white policeman with a knife. The young men had been arrested and held in the Leon County jail, which had been constructed recently by the Public Works Administration. However, on the 20th of July at around 3:30 a.m., four masked gunmen entered the jail and forced the night guard to give them access to the detainees. Before they received a hearing or a trial, the men seized Hawkins and Ponder at gunpoint and sped away in their vehicle. At approximately 4:00 a.m., the kidnapers and their victims arrived at their destination, three miles east of Tallahassee, and ironically only a few yards away from the home of a Florida Supreme Court justice. The gunmen forced the young men out

of the automobile, urging one to run for his life. However, after he took a few steps they mowed him down with about twenty rounds. As he lay dying from the gunshots, the terrorists turned on the other young man and shot him fifteen to twenty times. Signs were hastily spray-painted on pasteboard packing boxes by the bodies that read: "Warning, this is what will happen to all negroes who harm white people;" and, "This is the beginning, who is next?"⁷⁰ Indeed, incidents of this sort were intended to engender fear among Tallahassee's black citizens and remained worrisome to black residents like those in Allen Subdivision and Villa Mitchell Hill because they knew the same thing could happen to them.

This incident brought great shame and embarrassment to the city of Tallahassee and the state of Florida as the national press picked up on the story. The Miami Herald asserted, "All intelligent and loyal citizens of Florida deplore the lynching that took place in Tallahassee a day or two ago." The editors of the St. Petersburg Times opined: "Florida was disgraced again early Tuesday when an armed mob of masked men took two accused Negroes from the county jail at Tallahassee and riddled their bodies with bullets." They feared the lynching would do their city and by extension the rest of the state "irreparable harm everywhere throughout the North." Many people suspected that law enforcement was complicit in the lynching and questioned the sincerity of Governor Fred P. Cone.⁷¹ Conditions such as these forced black men to respond in a number of ways, especially when they realized that law enforcement officials provided little to no help in preserving their lives. One such effort occurred in 1886 when several "colored men" in Tallahassee organized the Leon Guards of Florida, a militia company. The officers were Edward T. Singleton, Captain; H. D. Watson, First Lieutenant; A. R. Edwards, Second Lieutenant; and Jesse Franklin, Third Lieutenant.⁷²

By the time World War II began, segregation remained deeply entrenched in American culture and blacks became committed to a Double V campaign – the defeat of fascism abroad and racism at home. For black soldiers stationed in Tallahassee and Carrabelle, the capital city became home to some of Florida's most serious racial disorders during the war era. In 1940, African Americans made up 40 percent of Tallahassee's population of 16,240. The African American servicemen were stationed at Dale Mabry Field, just three miles west of the capitol, and the Amphibious Training Center at Camp Gordon Johnston sixty miles toward the coast in Carrabelle. Nonetheless, these troops chafed at the racial conditions they experienced in north Florida. One soldier protested: "Above all we have Southern White Crackers as officers over us who abuse us, and treat us worse than we would treat the lowest of dogs." Others argued that German prisoners of war received better food and more respect than the black troops.⁷³

These conditions inevitably led to conflict on base; for

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instance, an African American serviceman stationed at Dale Mabry Field breached the code of racial etiquette when he attempted to purchase a soda from a “whites only” vending machine. Scores of white and black soldiers fought over this “breach,” resulting in injuries to at least eight people. On another occasion in the spring of 1944, a group of African American servicemen were charged with “mutiny” for refusing to obey orders until they were granted a forum to air their grievances about racial practices. For this act of protest, five of them were dishonorably discharged and received long prison sentences. In the city, many of the black soldiers were drawn to Tallahassee’s Frenchtown area, the largest black community in the city, but doubtless they visited social gathering places along Canal Street. However, when they visited town, especially Frenchtown, they frequently found themselves in conflict with local Tallahassee policemen. Numerous letters written by the African American soldiers reflected their frustration and growing militancy.⁷⁴

Some people had swings on their porches, and most people in the community had their own gardens which provided residents with whatever vegetables they needed

Racial Segregation

Segregation forced blacks to live among themselves and find ways to sustain each other and their communities. Mary Frison Avent, who grew up in the Allen Subdivision, related that what she remembered most about the 1940s and 1950s was that her community was self-contained. As a child, she had everything she needed and was sheltered from segregation. Celiy M. Mathews, eighty-three-years-old, who attended FAMU High School and worked as a cook at a sorority house at Florida State University (FSU) for forty years, remembered “how the people of Allen stuck together in their neighborhood.” Likewise, eighty-five-year-old Susie Brown recalled “the quietness of the neighborhood and enjoyed the way the kids in the neighborhood bonded and supported one another.”⁷⁵ Indeed, people in her neighborhood were proud to live near FAMU. They were in a sharing community, according to Mary Avent. She recalled entire houses being moved on trucks into their Allen neighborhood. Even though it was during the time of segregation, Allen was a desirable area, and many of those who moved there viewed themselves as “moving on up.” The community remained mixed with different classes of African Americans living together.⁷⁶

Notwithstanding this fact, children were raised being taught that they “couldn’t do anything wrong.” Why, because “everybody was a police” during that time. Neighbors would report the misbehavior of children. Sometimes, they would even give wayward youth a spanking and when the children got home, they “would really get it.” Young people quickly learned from these encounters that they could not “shame” their parents or disgrace their families.⁷⁷ Mrs. Charlie Conoly Smith, now eighty-one, revealed that one of the things she is most proud

of about growing up in Allen was “the way grown people were respected.”⁷⁸

Doris Hall, over in Villa Mitchell Hill on Pinellas Street, had similar experiences. Born on March 29, 1932, she was the third oldest of eight children. Her father, Edward Courtney, was a mechanic and worked at New Way Laundry, a white-owned business in Frenchtown on Copeland Street. Palice Oliver Courtney, her mother, also worked as a shirt presser at the laundry. At home, Doris had chores and was expected to wake up and go to school. She also swept the lawn because they did not have grass at the time, just dirt. Nonetheless, they kept the yard very clean. In fact, Doris recalled that “everybody kept their yards clean.” Her dad made their brooms by going in the bushes and tying the branches together. All of her family members had something to do. Since Doris was the oldest girl, she was placed in charge of the other children. She did the washing and recalled having a black wash pot outside that she boiled clothes in. She had three other tubs for white clothes. Doris also washed clothes on the scrub boards her family possessed.⁷⁹

Similarly, Marjorie Williams reported that she “swept the yards with brooms and kept the dirt yards clean.” Ultimately, this shows, as Mrs. Williams said, that “people had pride in their yards.” C. Skipper Langston, Doris’s son, recalled his grandfather requiring him and his siblings to sweep the yard as well. As a result, his grandfather could tell based on the footprints in the sand if any of the children slipped out of the house when they were not supposed to. However, Skipper reported the way they worked around that obstacle was to hide a broom in the bushes, so they could “sweep their way out and sweep their way back in.”⁸⁰

Some people had swings on their porches, and most people in the community had their own gardens which provided residents with whatever vegetables they needed. The communalism that existed among those who lived along Canal Street was indicative of a time of sharing. People bought and sold vegetables from each other in the neighborhood. When close neighbors needed produce out of each other’s gardens, they were welcomed to get what they needed whether the neighbor was at home or not, according to Doris Hall. In her words, “they were family.”⁸¹ According to Jennie Collett, they ate from fruit trees in the neighborhood, so they were never hungry. In the Allen Subdivision, they ate plums, pears, dates, and so forth. Similarly, those in Villa Mitchell Hill had mulberry trees they ate from, blackberries, and plums, and often times they would eat so much that they would have “that stuff” all over their mouths and clothes. Sometimes they even pulled down limbs from date trees and hid them under the house until they ripened. If a person had a fruit tree in his/her yard, it might as well been a community tree, because anyone in the

community could partake in the harvest. A good thing about this was that the people ate healthy food, even for snacks.⁸²

Rilla Curry, born on February 6, 1931, grew up in the segregated conditions of Tallahassee near the Providence Neighborhood. Curry fondly remembered the strength of her father and her rearing during the height of Jim Crow. “We had the meanest daddy you ever seen,” Curry recalled. Although a very stern individual, Curry admitted that her father “took care of us.” Both of her parents worked long hours to help provide for their family of eight. Curry’s father worked for the saw mill adjacent to the “ditch where we lived,” while her mother worked for the pecan factory. Because both of her parents worked away from home, Curry was responsible for her siblings’ well-being. “I always felt I was the boss. I was the head, because I was the oldest,” she noted.⁸³

Surely, for a group of people emerging from the institution of slavery, growing up in segregated communities had its limitations. Notwithstanding that fact, Jim Crow segregation created a place of forced communalism, intellectual development, and leadership. These segregated communities also produced giants who would go on to leave a larger mark on society. For instance, Congresswoman Carrie P. Meek hailed from Allen Subdivision.

Born on April 29, 1926, Meek was the granddaughter of a slave and the daughter of former sharecroppers. She grew up in Tallahassee during the Jim Crow era and attended FAMU. Meek graduated from the institution in 1946; however, at that time, black folks could not attend graduate school in the South. Thus, Meek enrolled at the University of Michigan and earned a master’s degree in 1948.⁸⁴

Carrie Meek returned to the South and began a teaching career at Bethune Cookman College in Daytona Beach, Florida. After working there for a while, Meek returned to her alma mater and taught at FAMU until 1961. At that time, she left Tallahassee and headed south to serve as special assistant to the vice president of Miami-Dade Community College. While there, she became instrumental in desegregating the community college and also became very active in the local Miami community.⁸⁵

In 1979, her involvement in the community led to Carrie Meek being elected as a Florida state representative. Three years later she became a member of the Florida Senate, making her the first African American female elected to that post in the Sunshine State. While in office, she took a keen

interest in educational matters, and her other efforts also led to the construction of thousands of affordable housing units. Meek became a member of the United States House of Representatives from Florida’s 17th Congressional District in 1992. This made her “the first black lawmaker elected to represent Florida in Congress since Reconstruction.” While in Congress, she was credited with advocating for senior citizens

and Haitian immigrants, economic development, education and housing, health care, and improving Dade County’s transit system, among other things. Despite her accomplishments, Carrie P. Meek never forgot that she was a product of Allen Subdivision and a daughter of FAMU. Community members and alumni always welcomed her back home and accorded her the respect and recognition that she earned.⁸⁶ “We were well represented by her in many capacities by the work she did in the Florida Legislature, House of Representatives, Senate and Congress,” they proclaimed. “All residents loved and honored her for a job well done.”⁸⁷

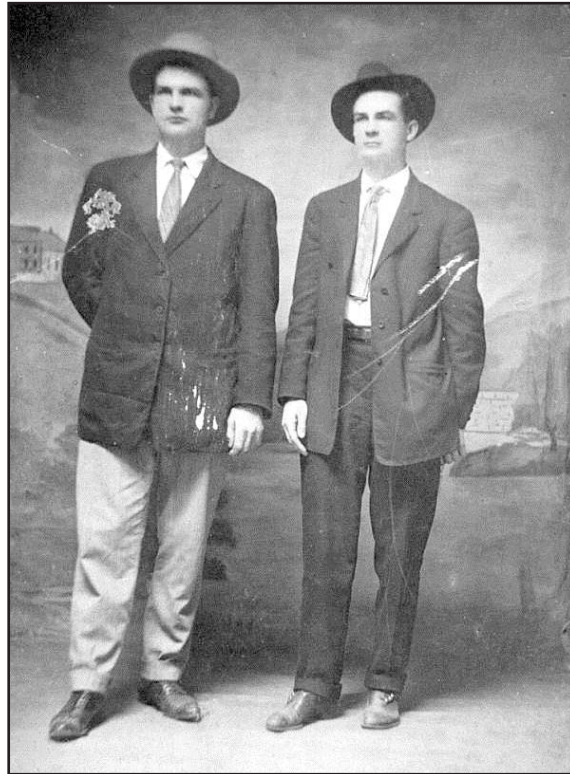
White Businesses

As more railroad tracks were laid, they would begin to play an important “role in the timber business, making it possible to reach stands of timber at greater distances.” By 1860, the turpentine

industry developed along the line of the Florida Railroad and played a “leading role in the exploitation of the state’s pine forests for nearly a century.”⁸⁸ Sadly, many of the “turpentine camps, state-authorized, were Florida’s gulag.” Innocent men, mostly African American, disappeared into them and never came out. The camps were not abolished until 1949.⁸⁹

The Boynton Brothers Turpentine Still, later W. J. Boynton and Son Turpentine Distillery, was located at 1700 Mill Street in Tallahassee and was a business adjacent to the Tallahassee-Saint Marks Railroad and the Villa Mitchell Hill neighborhood on the western end of Eugenia Street nearby where the old Shingles Restaurant was located. William James Boynton, Sr., (a 1933 State Representative) and his son, William J. Boynton, Jr., owned the turpentine still. Boynton, Sr., started the business in 1927.⁹⁰

W. J. Boynton, Sr., hailed from Princeton, Kentucky, where he lived until 1904 when he moved to Holder, Florida, in Citrus County, to work in the phosphate mines. In 1911, he entered the turpentine business with his brother-in-law, B. A. Darden, in Inglis, Florida. By 1914, he moved his business to Havana, Florida, where he married Sadie Miller of that town. Unfortunately, in the fall of 1923 a big hurricane came through



Boynton Brothers (no date) (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

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the area and practically demolished all of his timber. Thus, in an effort to recoup from the losses he sustained, Boynton asked Clyde Spencer to join him and they began buying crude gum and operating a central distillation plant on Mill Street in Tallahassee. Spencer eventually married Boynton's daughter, Sarah Lee. However, when his son W. J. Boynton, Jr., returned from service in 1945, the business was incorporated as W. J. Boynton and Son. Although a number of other activities were included in the corporation, gum naval stores processing continued to be the main activity until a fire in the summer of 1957 destroyed the plant at a cost of \$175,000.⁹¹

The turpentine industry produced a product that was in demand all over the country. Turpentine was sold almost entirely as a paint-thinner, but a small amount was used for medicinal purposes. W. J. Boynton and Son hired about twenty-two employees, a number of them African Americans who lived in Villa Mitchell Hill, Allen Subdivision, and the surrounding area. He was called "Mr. Will" by his employees, friends, and customers.⁹²

Shortly after W. J. Boynton, Jr., returned, Clyde Spencer left the company and started the Royal Sandwich Company. However, before he departed, Spencer secured a patent on a device/procedure that extracted the gum turpentine out of the wooden barrels. With the proceeds from the patent in hand he was able to purchase a lot and build a home in Betton Hills between 1948 and 1949, and presumably use some of the remaining funds to start his own business. Spencer started making sandwiches on the dining room table in the 1940s. Eventually, he purchased a lot from his father-in-law and opened the Royal Sandwich Company at 904 Gamble Street. Spencer hired Oscar Mitchell as a cook for the business and he "catered all the state buildings and the universities." He also branched out into the vending business and ran the concessions at FAMU's Bragg Stadium and at Doak Campbell Stadium, particularly, for over twenty years.⁹³

According to Sandra Spencer Miller and Phillip Spencer (his children), "more people worked for Clyde Spencer than almost

anyone else." Phillip even worked for his dad for years as a salesman at Doak Campbell Stadium and by selling sandwiches to fraternity members at FSU at night. Sometimes the Royal Sandwich Company made from 800 to 1,000 sandwiches per night including: chicken salad, egg salad, ham and cheese, and ham and turkey. A black woman named Catherine was in charge of making all the sandwiches on the sandwich line.

She normally started work at 6:00 p.m. and worked until 1:00 a.m. A prudent businessman, Clyde Spencer eventually built a 240-unit apartment complex on Franklin and Call Streets in Tallahassee. He also built thirty-six apartments on Park Avenue. He gave many people in Tallahassee jobs and became one of the founding members of the Seminole Boosters. Clyde Spencer passed in September of 2005.⁹⁴

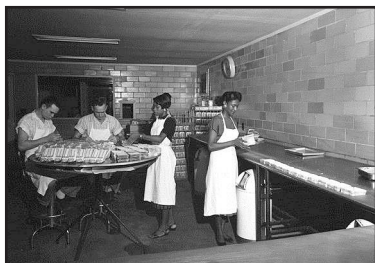
"Dairying began to develop rapidly during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and by 1900 Leon was the first county in Florida in milk production. Butter was the principal product and skim milk was fed to hogs. In 1916 Leon

County dairymen began shipping milk to a Jacksonville ice cream company in refrigerated cars of the Seaboard Railroad. By 1918 about a thousand gallons of milk a day were moving to Jacksonville and the dairy industry was called a \$100,000-a-year business."⁹⁵ The dairy industry, via its use of the Seaboard Railroad track, was an important element to the economic activity of the Railroad Avenue and Canal Street (FAMU Way) area. In addition, for nearby neighborhoods such as the Villa Mitchell Hill and Allen Subdivision, this activity was important for marginal employment opportunities and visual cues of the geographic landscape.

Another example of a business that impacted the immediate local community included the once budding pecan industry in Leon County. The Florida Planting Company, led by A. P. McCaskill, stationed salesmen throughout the United States North and West and offered prospective investors a pamphlet entitled, "Income in a Nutshell." One buyer of the Florida Pecan Endowment lots was the famed drama critic and night editor of the Kansas City Star, David Austin Latchaw, "who bought



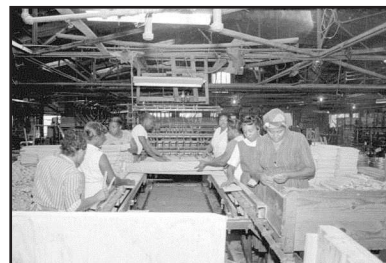
Royal Sandwich Company (circa 1949) (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)



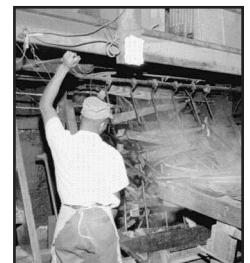
Employees wrapping sandwiches at Royal Sandwich Company in 1959 (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)



Coca Cola Bottling Company in 1954 on South Monroe Street (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)



Inside Elberta Crate Factory in 1963 (photos Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)



two lots near the tracks of the Georgia, Florida and Alabama Railroad," in which Canal Street (now FAMU Way) runs parallel.⁹⁶

These pecan trees gave the residents of the Allen Subdivision and the Villa Mitchell Hill neighborhoods, particularly youngsters, amusement and joy as they gathered pecans to eat or sell to the nearby Tallahassee Pecan Company. Employees for the pecan company would come around in trucks to pick up/buy pecans from all the people who collected them in the community. Jennie Collett recalled that she would pick and sell pecans, so she would have money for the fair. The company would pay pecan collectors 15 to 20 cents per pound. There were others who learned that to add rocks to the bottom of their pecan bags so they would weigh more, and they would receive more in pay. This practice continued until the factory owners became wiser and figured out the ruse.⁹⁷

There were a number of other white-owned businesses on Adams Street and Canal Street. For example, the Coca Cola Company and a bread company did business there. Tallahassee proprietor Mark Temple operated the Union Station Restaurant near the Tallahassee Railroad Depot on Railroad Avenue. Other white businesses in this area also provided employment for African Americans. One of the major employers in the community was the Elberta Crate Company, so named in honor of the Elberta Peach of Georgia, founded in Marshalville, Georgia, in 1905. Due to a big demand for peach and tomato crates, founder John Middleton Simmons II, established a second mill in Tallahassee in 1922 called the Elberta Crate Company. By 1928, production expanded after Elberta Crate acquired the Southern Crate and Veneer Company of Macon, Georgia, and the company changed its name to Elberta Crate and Box Company. During the Great Depression, the mills ran steadily and during World War II, demand on the mills for product increased and management decided to expand the plant even further.⁹⁹

During this era, a lot of black women worked in white people's homes or at restaurants. However, Doris Hall, along with many other residents of the Villa Mitchell Hill and Allen communities, worked at the Elberta Crate Company a place with a workforce comprised of mostly black men and women. She began working there when she was twenty-seven or

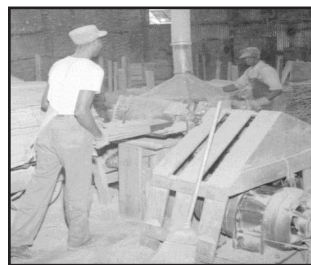
twenty-eight-years-old while living on Kissimmee Street. Doris had three children at the time that she kept during the day; however, her husband kept the kids at night while she worked on the keel at Elberta Crate from 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. Wearing pants was a requirement considering she fed wood into one side of the machine, and on the other side, others caught it as it came out. Employees made baskets for fruits and vegetables.¹⁰⁰



Mark Temple operated the Union Station Restaurant near the Tallahassee railroad depot. (No date) (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

At the time, Doris felt that "they had the best pay at Elberta Crate" because the company paid more than what maids received working in white people's homes. Moreover, maids had to cook, clean, and babysit children. According to Mrs. Hall, "unless you worked for the city or the state or county, for blacks," Elberta Crate was a good job. Doris even recalled that some school teachers, who had the summers off, worked at Elberta Crate during that time. Marjorie Williams asserted that Elberta Crate "paid enough to live off of. People made a living and they bought homes" with the money they earned there. Employees at Elberta Crate were paid every two weeks, and all workers had to punch the clock at the crate company. Although a large number of blacks worked for Elberta Crate, in step with Jim Crow practices throughout the South, whites almost always served as the supervisors no matter how poor they were. Thus, during her tenure at the company, Henry Hobbs was the only black supervisor that Hall remembered who worked there.¹⁰¹

By the 1960s, former Tallahassee mayor Jack Simmons owned the business, and the Elberta Crate and Box Company had gained a reputation for being a place that employed unskilled laborers at low wages and forced them to work under very unsafe conditions at the factory. Elberta Crate paid workers the minimum wage of \$1.60 an hour, according to the International Woodworkers Union. These conditions eventually led to a strike of more than 500 black workers in Bainbridge, Georgia, and Tallahassee by September of 1969. The employees wanted safer working conditions, better wages, quality insurance, and retirement benefits. The strikers gained the support of Reverend C. K. Steele, a group of mostly white FSU students, and others who marched and picketed at the Tallahassee establishment



Inside Elberta Crate Factory in 1963 (photos Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

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and downtown at the capitol on October 14th. In response the crate company won an injunction from the courts claiming that the protestors had intimidated non-striking workers; however, activists did not ease up. C. K. Steele led another larger group of marchers to the capitol on October 30th demanding “raising the living wage of black workers everywhere.” The managers at the company quickly acquiesced, and five days later they provided higher wages and other benefits to their employees.¹⁰²

Outside of the businesses discussed above, whites came into Allen Subdivision and Villa Mitchell Hill to sell things, like insurance, and to transport their maids back and forth. They also had businesses that were patronized by blacks. For instance, Temples Café’ on Railroad Avenue was white-owned. An African American lady by the name of Ms. Cali Mae worked as a waitress for the blacks who patronized the restaurant. However, if they wanted to be served there, blacks had to enter through the side door, not the front. Mrs. Little served African Americans at her white-owned Little Café. Doris Hall even worked there on weekends cleaning tables.¹⁰³

Black Businesses

Despite the odds against them during the Age of Jim Crow, African Americans continued to make significant economic and educational strides. All over the state, black entrepreneurs created businesses to serve their segregated communities.¹⁰⁴ While there were successful businessmen like John G. Riley, who lived in a beautiful two-story home in Smokey Hollow, and whose wealth and achievements could compare to some of the wealthiest blacks in the state, most black entrepreneurs owned small businesses. In the Allen Subdivision and through Villa Mitchell Hill, blacks conducted a number of businesses to meet their day-to-day needs. An examination of Polk’s Tallahassee City Directories of 1930 and 1960 illustrate the number of residents and businesses that were located throughout this section of Tallahassee.¹⁰⁵ Virginia Pinkney expressed the sentiments of many of the people who grew up in the Villa Mitchell Hill and Allen Subdivision areas when she asserted that during her youth “she has special memories of...all of the amenities of living near Florida A&M University.”¹⁰⁶

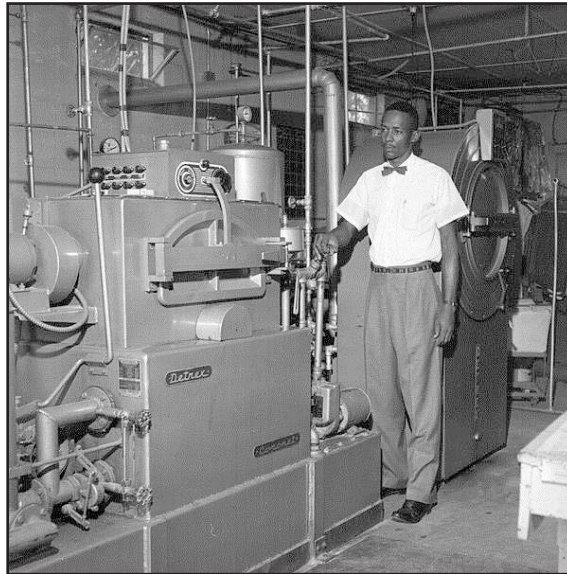
One of the major stores of the era was Crump’s Store. Crump was biracial and his father was white. Crump sold meat, kerosene, dry goods, etc., at his store. A Mr. Dupont had a meat market that sat on Van Buren Street. A.D’s Café’, owned by Aldolphus D. Williams, also doubled as a grocery store. According to Ruth Jackson, “eating at Red Bird Café’ and A.D’s Café’ was a joy.” The Sam Madison Grocery store

and Johnson Beauty Shop on Eugenia Street was also widely patronized by community members.¹⁰⁷

The Madison grocery store sold goods like hog head cheese, regular cheese, candy, and bottled drinks but no meats. However, Speed Grocery, owned by Reverend Daniel Speed had a bountiful supply of goods and sat right off of Eugenia Street on Floral Street. His store was likened unto “a miniature Winn-Dixie.” Marjorie Williams recalled that Mr. Speed would let FAMU faculty members charge their items on credit until the end of the month. Williams also shopped at Robinson Grocery on Holton Street where the owner “sold everything like in a Walmart.” Residents frequented the Cherry Hill store, also black-owned, and recalled that the ice man came twice a week. Jennie Collett remembered visiting the Fountainette owned by Dr. L. S. B. Foote. It housed a restaurant, beauty and barbershops, candy and other dry goods, and even sold dinners. The establishment became a hangout for teenagers like Collett and Mary Avent.¹⁰⁸

Ralph and Carrabelle Hoffman built the Ship Ahoy business on the corner of South Adams and Palmer Avenue. This business housed a restaurant and became a hangout for FAMU students. The Hoffman’s building also had enough space to house other businesses and a second floor which provided housing for students. Mrs. Hoffman recalled, “in the early times Monroe Street did not come as far as Palmer Avenue, and Adams Street was a dirt road, and the property she bought was a cow pasture.” Even today at age ninety Mrs. Hoffman still owns and manages rental properties in Allen Subdivision and the business property she owns.¹⁰⁹

In addition, a number of dry cleaners were available to service the residents of this area. For example, the campus cleaners, owned by James and Sybil Mobley, sat next door to the Fountainette. To earn additional funds, the Mobleys rented out rooms in the upstairs section of the cleaners, and James taught cleaning at historic Lincoln High School at night. Burnie’s Dry Cleaners sat on Osceola Street. Mary Spencer’s parents opened “a wash house on the corner of Disston and Gamble, (now In and Out Barbershop)” in the 1950s. Harold Knowles worked at Knowles Cleaners and Coin Laundry in 1961. Mrs. Mary Lamb, the owner of Ma Mary’s Restaurant on Eugenia Street, lived in Allen Subdivision, and became known for her outstanding food. Easter Ferrell, now eighty, moved into Allen Subdivision in 1956 and was employed as a waitress at Ma Mary’s for thirty years. Students ate breakfast, lunch, and dinner at Ma Mary’s, and the food was very inexpensive. Sometimes, the Lambs would let students pay a lower amount or not charge them at all.¹¹⁰



Harold Knowles at Knowles Cleaners and Coin Laundry in 1961 (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

Henry's Store, on the corner of Bronough and Canal Street, sold candy and snow cones.¹¹¹

Moreover, there were a number of beauty and barbershops in the community. Williams Beauty Shop operated out of one of the homes in Allen. Rosa Lee Baldwin ran a beauty shop in Ma Mary's building. Mattie Mobley, now one-hundred-one-years-old, moved to Allen Subdivision in 1939 and became a master cosmetologist and owner of Mobley's Beauty Shop, which was a home-based business. Virginia Pinkney's grandmother, Georgia "Sang" Long, "is known to have been the midwife that delivered most of the neighborhood children." Ms. Gertrude Williams, another mid-wife in the community, owned a daycare business. Interestingly, she hired a taxi to pick up the children and bring them to her establishment and to take them back home in the afternoons. A Ms. Thomas on Okaloosa also kept children.¹¹²

While there was a wide variety of homeowners in both Allen Subdivision and Villa Mitchell Hill, a number of the houses "at the bottom," along Canal Street and Harrison Street were rental homes. Many of those properties were owned by whites even though they were in the black community. Residents recalled that when it rained, a lot of water collected at "the bottom."¹¹³ Although FAMU had dormitories at the time, after World War II the school experienced a boost in enrollment and did not have enough housing to accommodate its student population, many of whom were soldiers attending school on the G.I. Bill. Thus, many out of town students lived in the homes of residents of Villa Mitchell Hill and Allen Subdivision. Indeed, many homeowners in Allen rented rooms out to college students for \$15 to \$20 a month, with usually two students staying in a room. Thus families made an extra \$30 to \$40 per month as income. The Pittmans, Carrie Meek's family, had about twelve rooms in their home that were rented out to twenty-four students each year. In fact, their home was much like a hotel. In Villa Mitchell Hill, Marjorie Williams paid \$5 a month for rent. Mattie Mobley's family provided housing to FAMU students. According to Collett and Johnson, "Mrs. Mobley often says that all the children in the neighborhood were her children." Moreover, "she says that forty years in the neighborhood as a beautician were special to her because she had the honor of meeting many people throughout the years." The connectivity and interaction of FAMU students with the residents in Villa Mitchell Hill and Allen communities where they lived illustrates

a genuine sense of community.¹¹⁴

According to Jennie Collett, for those children growing up in the Allen Subdivision, "FAMU was their life." Eddie L. Smith, her dad, was an entrepreneur who was a watch maker and repairman. He owned Smith Jewelry Company and became so proficient at repairing guns, televisions, and watches that white and black people alike patronized his shop. In fact, he became known as "Mr. Fix It." He also worked as a brick mason and concrete finisher until the 1970s. Collett recalled that he became vice president of the Bricklayers Union for the State of Florida.¹¹⁵

FAMU became a major employer for residents who lived in Allen Subdivision and Villa Mitchell Hill, among other places. For example, Moses General Miles, who worked as Dean of Students at FAMU, lived on Bronough Street at the "top of the hill" in Allen Subdivision. After he graduated, Eddie Lee Williams, Sr., became an electrician and worked at FAMU for forty years.¹¹⁶ Jennie Collett's mother, Abneather Smith, worked at FAMU cleaning the girls' dormitory at Diamond Hall, and in her later years she worked at the front desk at Diamond.¹¹⁷ A Ms. Haynes, who lived in Villa Mitchell Hill was the cafeteria cook at FAMU High.¹¹⁸ Certainly this impacted young aspiring entrepreneurs such as Dr. Carolyn J. Ryals, who was motivated by these



Lucy Moten 1957 Kindergarten Graduating Class (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)



Lee Hall Auditorium at FAMU. (no date) (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

black business owners, and is continuing in their tradition as the owner of Kopycat Copy Center on Okaloosa Street.¹¹⁹ Again, this highlights the connection between the residents of the community and the university and how the university served as an economic engine for this area of Tallahassee.

Similarly, Laverne Washington, born on May 26, 1954, in Tallahassee, remembered working for local businesses in Allen during his adolescence. "I had a unique experience," Washington recalled. "I actually began working in second grade. I was a shoeshine boy, and I shined shoes for twenty-five cents at a barbershop." Washington also sold boiled peanuts and cleaned the barbershop for extra money. While most school-age children would have resented the idea of working after school and on the weekends, Laverne cherished his time in the barbershop. "I garnered a lot of experience pretty much ahead of my time," due to those relationships with barbershop clientele, he said.¹²⁰

Not only was Washington able to earn extra money, he also learned important life lessons from being around members of the black community. For example, "FAMUans came to

Charlie Davis's barbershop, and so you would have intellectual discussions," he said. Being a part of this environment caused a young Laverne to stay sharp on his facts. "I would always have to be the person with the knowledge of baseball games. Did Willie Mays hit three-hundred thirty something? I would have to have the stats." This constant fact checking led the young man to his passion for thoroughly reading the newspaper daily so that he would always be prepared for tough questions. Washington explained that he learned in the barbershop, "you better know what you were talking about [or] they'll grind you up."¹²¹ In reflecting on his youth, Washington said he would not trade his upbringing for any anything: "It allowed me to go out and know, that I could be somebody."¹²²

Recreation

African Americans created their own venues for recreation during this period of Jim Crow segregation. Thus, people in Allen and Villa Mitchell Hill found plenty of things to do for recreation. Students at the Lucy Moten School received activity books which allowed them to attend football and basketball games on FAMU's campus and to enjoy movies at Lee Hall Auditorium. They were introduced to different genres of music through the university and went to many of the plays on the campus. Children during that time would ride bikes and wagons, and would skate down from the top of what was called Boulevard Street (now Martin Luther King Blvd) all the way down to Canal Street at the bottom of the hill which during the 1940s and 50s was not paved. Eighty-four-year-old Pinkie Felder, who has lived in the Allen community for fifty-six years, recalled how "her brother 'Dawee' built wagons that they rode up and down Bronough Street." Pinkie also remembered playing "Sallie Go Round the Moon", and "Spring Board," and that her "first doll was made of grass."¹²³

At the time, Eugenia Street was not paved either. As one might imagine, when it rained, it became difficult to traverse the clay streets to go up the hill, especially to campus. Children pulled off their shoes to play in the clay. However, they had to wash the clay off of their feet and legs before they could enter their homes. The city would even send a "scraper" into the community to scrape the mud and smooth out the streets after every rain. Children in the community would also travel down Canal Street to Monroe on foot heading over to what was called Centennial Field, which is where Cascades Park is today, for high school football games. However, Collett recalled that she and her siblings could not go past the train station.¹²⁴ "It was understood that if you went over the railroad tracks, you were going to the white side," one interviewee informed.¹²⁵

Carrabelle Hoffman, age ninety, moved to Allen in 1943 to attend FAMU. She later became Miss FAMU, an accomplishment she remains proud of. Mrs. Hoffman recalled a time when one

of Florida's governors was traveling by car up Palmer Avenue when it was a clay road on his way to FAMU after a big rain and "his car slid into the ditch." Mr. Crump ended up assisting the governor with retrieving his vehicle from the ditch and, according to Hoffman, "that kind act caused the Governor to join and lead the drive to get streets paved in Allen Subdivision."¹²⁶

While growing up, children also played on empty lots.

Marian Gibbons recalled that some of her favorite time was playing at the park on Cleveland Street.¹²⁷ James Cullen Lawrence, age eighty-three, moved to 130 Canal Street in 1939, and lived there until he graduated from FAMU. One of his special memories of Allen Subdivision was him playing ball with neighborhood friends in the empty lot where Saint Michael's Church is now located. Many of the residents recalled walking down the hill to Canal Street and following the railroad tracks or passing through Monroe Street for football games at Centennial Field.¹²⁸

On Fridays, many families ate fish and grits. They could purchase ten pounds of fish for \$1 cleaned or fifteen pounds

for \$1 uncleaned. Collett also recalled that her father was the first person in the area to purchase a television. Being the inquisitive person he was, and to the chagrin of his wife, soon after he purchased the set, he took it apart. This ultimately paid dividends for him over the long run because he learned how to repair televisions and this became a service he offered with his repair businesses. People in the community were welcomed into their home to watch different programs.¹²⁹ Doris Hall's family owned a floor model radio that had two big batteries in the back. It resembled a piece of furniture in appearance, she recalled, and people who lived in Villa Mitchell Hill would come down to their home to listen to boxing matches and for other information.¹³⁰

The Hawaiian Grill was a "juke joint" that sat off of Canal Street. Also, for recreation a number of people in the community frequented the Savoy Club on Van Buren Street, formerly A.D's Café.¹³¹ The Savoy Club was essentially an old wooden shotgun house that had been converted into a club. Its reputation resonated throughout generations of community members in Allen Subdivision, Villa Mitchell Hill, and among FAMU's students. At times, the establishment sold tasty soul food dishes during the daytime. However, at night, particularly on the weekend, music blasted in the small club until late hours, with partygoers dancing, sweating, and having a good time.¹³²

The Peppermint Patio became another popular club in Allen Subdivision. During the 1950s and 1960s, Leroy and Sophia Ash owned the thriving business on Canal Street. According to a former resident, "this establishment brought to the African American community the concept of a club without a roof.

The Savoy Club was essentially an old wooden shotgun house that had been converted into a club. Its reputation resonated throughout generations of community members in Allen Subdivision

The only segments of the club that were covered were the restrooms, the bar where alcoholic beverages were served and the kitchen, where meals were prepared." The club's patio (used for dancing) and the stage were surrounded by a tall wooden fence. As loud music played at the club, neighborhood children would clandestinely visit and peek through the fence to catch a glimpse of adults dancing and different bands that performed.¹³³

Many of the homes sat up high on pillars and the children would play under the houses. Boxes used to package items like refrigerators were made into beds for playing.¹³⁴ Mrs. Hall articulated the view of many people who grew up in Villa Mitchell Hill and Allen Subdivision when she proclaimed that while growing up, she "didn't feel like they were missing anything...they never were hungry. There was always food." In fact, she fondly recalled, "people loved to come to their house because they always had food."¹³⁵

Keith Miles, son of Moses G. Miles and Willie Mae Miles, grew up at the top of Bronough Street. Living there "was a fun time because there were a lot of children at the time in the area," remembered Miles. During the 1960s and 1970s, Keith and his friends spent a lot of time playing at Gibbs Park which sat where the Allied Health and Nursing buildings are on FAMU's campus today across from the fraternity wall on campus. At the park there was a steep hill that sloped downwards. There was also an amphitheater in the park with a big concrete stage at the bottom of the hill. FAMU High held their May Day festival there and any number of concerts was held there over the years. Jennie Collett said FAMU was their playground, and she also had fond memories of her times at Gibbs Park.¹³⁶

During the springtime, FAMU hosted an annual "Old Watermelon Cut" which was a big community activity and really connected the University to the black community in Tallahassee. There was a DJ on the stage playing music, tables were set up, and people who worked for the University would cut up the watermelons and serve the community folk and just have a good time. The event was very interactive and contained a great social atmosphere. "It was just a fun time. People connected with each other and talked to each other," Miles said, "it was a sense of community." This is important because even though most of these people did not attend FAMU or work there, "they were strong supporters of the university because they felt connected by a number of activities and events that the university would have

that connected it to the black community."¹³⁷

Sometimes Keith and his friends played marbles. Other times they rolled down or slid down the steep hill at Gibbs Park on cardboard boxes. He and his friends were sports fans, so "whatever the season was if it was football season, we played football. If it was basketball season, we played basketball. If it was baseball season, we played baseball." The children ended up forming teams, and the guys at the top of the hill would play against the guys at the bottom of the hill in all sports. Much of that activity took place at Gibbs Park as well. During the summers, Keith and his friends would also walk down Bronough Street to Canal Street and then take the railroad tracks and go directly to Myers Park because they had a swimming pool there. On more than one occasion, the train came while they were walking along the tracks, making for a frightening experience.¹³⁸

Other people navigated the large pipe that connected one side of the canal to the other with great proficiency. Ruth Jackson, eighty-nine-years-old, and Queen Bruton, eighty-three-years-old, still have fond memories of "walking across the canal pipes to Van Buren Street." For many, this was the shortest path from Canal Street to Van Buren Street, and many of the residents of Allen Subdivision used this method. Even though their parents admonished them not to do so, on occasion children would attempt to cross over the canal and slip and fall. Regrettably, when they got home they would have to explain to their parents why they were so dirty. This

became a shared part of the experience for those living in the area.¹³⁹



All Angels Episcopal Church, (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

Black Churches

Since emancipation, the black church had been a cornerstone of black life, and after the family it served as the black community's most important institution. African Americans in Florida, as with blacks in the rest of the nation, desired to organize their own churches with black ministers. Affiliation with these churches later became a symbol of freedom and independence among African Americans. The more prosperous members of the black community in Florida, the elite blacks, tended to join the Presbyterian, Catholic, Methodist Episcopal, Congregational and Episcopal churches, and their services tended to be more formal and solemn. However, for the black masses these churches were unappealing. Most black Floridians preferred church services that were spirit-filled and emotional. These kinds of services were most likely to be held at Baptist,

African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and Colored Methodist Episcopal Churches. Around the turn of the century, the most influential of these denominations in Florida was the AME Church.¹⁴⁰

Revival meetings played a large part in recruiting new members and energizing the attendees for African American churchgoers in Florida. The following example illustrates how some of these black-run revivals were conducted in the Sunshine State. One observer noted that during the course of a revival the blacks started “screeching, dancing, stamping and jumping...They broke the flooring all to pieces, cracked the [window] sill and finally the chimney began to show signs of crumbling before the demonstration was stopped.” The church served not only the spiritual needs of African American people but also their social needs. The black church became a place where African Americans nurtured and developed future leaders. It also provided relief during the Great Depression, assisted black southerners as they moved from rural to urban areas, and became safe havens for black people during the civil rights movement.¹⁴¹

The major churches of Villa Mitchell Hill and Allen Subdivision were Greater Fountain Chapel AME Church, Gethsemane Missionary Baptist Church, and Saint Michael’s and All Angels Episcopal Church. Based on a survey conducted by Delores Harpool, the respondents noted how important the church was to their lives and upbringing. Various church activities played an important role in the respondents’ current spirituality. Those activities included, “youth and teenage leadership training through observation of church leaders, Children and Collegiate Choirs, Prayer Meetings and Bible Study, Baptist Training Union (BTU) and Choir Unions, Christmas and Easter Programs and Plays.”¹⁴²

Mary Avent attended Gethsemane Missionary Baptist Church. A “highlight of the week” was going to church and Sunday School, for which Avent served as secretary. A number of FAMU students attended that church and joined its choir. College students called Gethsemane the “rock and roll church.” During the 1960s, Gethsemane became a gathering place because it was considered “safe” during the civil rights era. When students planned protests at the capitol, they would assemble on campus and then march down Boulevard Street north to Canal Street heading east. From there they would fill the streets heading to the capitol. However, many times during the civil rights movement, police officers would stop protesters on Canal and Melvin Street or Canal and Hudson Street, just before they got to the Gethsemane church. Several times when police pursued students and community protesters with dogs and tear gas,

they ran into the church and the police would not enter.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, for decades after the civil rights movement ended, students would continue to use this route (today’s Martin Luther King Boulevard to FAMU Way), to go to the capitol to launch protests against policies and actions taken by federal and state government officials, police officers, and other perceived purveyors of injustice, only without police obstruction.¹⁴⁴

One observer noted that during the course of a revival the blacks started “screeching, dancing, stamping and jumping...They broke the flooring all to pieces, cracked the [window] sill and finally the chimney began to show signs of crumbling before the demonstration was stopped.”

Marjorie Williams came to Tallahassee to attend FAMU from Donaldsonville, Georgia, during Dr. William Gray’s tenure as president in the 1949-1950 academic year. Her first major was Home Economics, but she later declared a second major of Elementary Education. Williams would go on to teach in the Leon County Schools for forty years, earning two master’s degrees in the process. Since she attended an AME Church in Georgia, Williams decided to join Greater Fountain Chapel AME Church in Tallahassee which sits in the Villa Mitchell Hill community on Eugenia Street. A Reverend DuPont was pastor at the time, and Mrs. Pikes served as the musician. Mrs. Pikes also taught at FAMU. While she was a friendly, caring, and outgoing person, Pikes was also a stickler for time and wanted to make the youth under her tutelage better

people.¹⁴⁵

Another FAMU employee who attended Fountain Chapel was its registrar, Daisy Young. She served as the director of the Young People’s Department (YPD) and taught Sunday School classes at Fountain Chapel. In short, Young served as coordinator of students at FAMU and Fountain Chapel, according to Mrs. Williams. Gussie Long Bruce, Dean Efferson Manning’s secretary, also attended the church. These FAMU employees often recruited students to attend and join Fountain Chapel. The church served a large number of students and was seen as being “very student friendly.” Church leaders hosted concerts and invited other churches over for programs. Fountain Chapel became, sort of, a center of activity for several students and members. Mrs. Williams even remembered selling spaghetti dinners and sweet potato pies to raise money to attend the church conventions.¹⁴⁶

Doris Hall also attended Fountain Chapel AME Church because that was the church her grandmother attended. However, her mother went to Tabernacle Church which was located where the Tallahassee Civic Center sits today. In contrasting the two churches, Hall recalled “services were different at Fountain Chapel. They had an altar at the church and it was where she was baptized and met the Lord. Others in the community attended the Saint Michaels and All Angels Episcopal Church. One person recalled that mostly “campus

kids" attended, and there were clear class differences between that church and others in the vicinity.¹⁴⁷

Deborah Bellamy of Tallahassee recalled attending church religiously as a child as her grandfather was the pastor of Mt. Zion Primitive Baptist Church on Saxon Street. One Sunday morning, she and her siblings decided to skip church and spend their "church money" on candy. "My older brother decided he wanted us to play hooky from church," Bellamy said. "We went into Mable's concrete and played in the sand and the rocks until church was out. Then we walked on home like we had just come from church. However, when we got there, my grandfather asked us 'what was the sermon today?' We said, 'They talked about Jesus and this and that. And he said in response, 'come here'. All y'all just get in that room and line up!'" They knew what those words meant. They also learned church members were watching them, so when they decided to skip church, they were noticeably absent.¹⁴⁸ Not only was the church important to black life, but also, education remained critical.

Black Education

After the Plessy v. Ferguson decision in 1896 established the legal principle of "separate but equal," Florida began to codify its segregation laws. African-Americans could not stay at "white" hotels, were not to be treated at "white" hospitals, were not to be buried in "white" cemeteries, and could not attend "white" schools, among other things. Although black and white lives were separate, they were not equal. The disparate funding of public education in the state is a case in point. In 1898, Florida spent more than double on white education. They paid \$5.92 per capita to educate each white child in the state, but only \$2.27 per black child.¹⁴⁹

Before the momentous Brown decision of 1954, black Floridians had been providing their own education for nearly one hundred years.¹⁵⁰ In Tallahassee, the African American children who lived along what is now the FAMU Way corridor, the old Canal Street and Eugenia Street, attended primarily, historic Lincoln High School, Bond School, or the Lucy Moten School before the latter became Florida A&M University High School (DRS). Lucy Moten became a leading black educator early in the 20th century. Born in 1851 to a free black couple in Washington, D.C., Moten received her early education in Massachusetts and at Howard University. She worked as director of the Miner Normal School for 37 years (1883-1920), a teacher training school for blacks in Washington, D.C. Moten, who never married, taught prospective African American teachers from all over the nation and became nationally known for her high educational standards and her abilities to discipline youth.¹⁵¹

Unfortunately, in 1933, a taxi struck and killed Moten at Times Square in New York. J. R. E. Lee, FAMU's third president

and an associate of Moten, named the teacher-training school at FAMU for Moten in 1932, the year before she passed. A new Lucy Moten School was constructed in 1935 at the corner of Gamble and Boulevard Streets (now Martin Luther King Blvd). Originally, the school served students in first through eighth grades, the highest grade offered to blacks at the time, but was later expanded to serve kindergarten through twelfth grade, was renamed FAMU High School, and is now the FAMU Developmental Research School.¹⁵²

In the early years, young people who lived in the Allen Subdivision attended Bond School, Lincoln High, or the Lucy Moten School. Students like Jennie Collett had fond memories of her time as a student at the Lucy Moten School. The cost to attend was \$5.00 per semester. She had two brothers who attended historic Lincoln High School, but families in the area that could afford it sent their girls to school closer to home.¹⁵³ Mary Avent, who attended both Lucy Moten and FAMU High, recalled how professors from the university visited the school frequently to

supervise student-teachers. Mrs. Delores Brooks Lawson, and her brothers Henry Brooks and Ewing Brooks, attended both Lucy Moten and FAMU High and had fond memories of the experiences. Mrs. Irene Edmonds who was over speech and drama at the school planned many activities for the students. Lawson recalled attending the children's theater founded by Edmonds. They had pageants, completed science projects, helped with the choir and the band, used FAMU's gym for games, and when they graduated from FAMU High, many went straight into college at the University. Lawson, the daughter of Ewing Tipton (E.T.) and Willie Ruth Brooks, saw FAMU as both a center for learning and the epicenter for entertainment.¹⁵⁴

In 1930, twenty-six-year-old Dorothy Nash wed James Tookes. The upwardly mobile Dorothy Nash Tookes had graduated from Florida A&M and worked as a schoolteacher at one of Leon County's many rural schools for blacks. According to one source Tookes "is believed to have been the county's first state-certified teacher." However, in 1935, Superintendent of Leon County Schools Frank Hartsfield asked Mrs. Tookes to start an elementary school in the Bond community and serve as its first principal. Initially, the school was established in St. John's Missionary Baptist Church, but later expanded to include Flipper Chapel AME Church. The Leon County School Board paid for construction of a modern school at its current site, but Tookes left Bond in 1940 and took a teaching job in Gadsden County where she taught until her retirement in 1971.¹⁵⁵

Even prior to the establishment of what is now FAMU, Lincoln Academy opened its doors in 1869 during the Reconstruction era. The school was named for Abraham Lincoln, the "Great Emancipator," and at the time, it was the only school in Leon

Before the momentous Brown decision of 1954, black Floridians had been providing their own education for nearly one hundred years

FAMU WAY HISTORICAL SURVEY

County serving black children. Initially, the school was located at Copeland and Lafayette Streets. The school was reopened at Copeland and Park Avenue, the current location of FSU's campus. Again, the school moved into a frame building in Frenchtown on Brevard Street in 1906 and was bricked in 1926. However, due to overcrowding, some black students eventually attended Bond School for grades one through nine and others attended Griffin High School (now Griffin Middle). John Gilmore Riley became the first black person to serve as a principal of a Leon County school when he led Lincoln. He was a highly respected businessman, educator, and Masonic leader in the state of Florida, and under his tutelage, historic Lincoln High School became an education center and a place for social events and dances. Children who attended these schools had friends who lived in other neighborhoods like Allen and Villa Mitchell Hill.¹⁵⁶

Founding of FAMU¹⁵⁷

The only public institution of higher learning in the state for blacks was FAMU, founded on October 3, 1887, as the State Normal College for Colored Students. Its location borders Allen Subdivision and the Villa Mitchell Hill community and served as an anchor for the area since its founding. Thomas Desaille Tucker, an outstanding attorney from Pensacola became the school's first president, with Thomas Van Renssaler Gibbs, a state representative from Duval County, serving as his top assistant. In 1891, the school received funds under the Second Morrill Act for agricultural and mechanical arts education. In 1909, the name of the school was changed to Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College for Negroes. In 1953, the school received university status and by the 1960s the Schools of Law, Nursing, Pharmacy and Graduate Studies were created to serve a student population of nearly 4,000.¹⁵⁸

At the close of the Reconstruction era in the American South, the black middle-class of Florida began to assert themselves as the leaders of their race. For example, over two-hundred of the most prominent black leaders met in Gainesville, Florida, for the "State Conference of the Colored Men of Florida." The meeting was scheduled to create a plan for African Americans in Florida a few years removed from the false promises of post-Civil War Reconstruction. Well aware of the political unrest within the state of Florida, and on the national level, this meeting addressed issues of local and national civil rights.¹⁵⁹

Leaders urged its members to devise a plan that would create a more intelligent voting mass. At this convention, over two-hundred prominent black leaders of Florida met to discuss pertinent issues concerning the future of the African American

community. Local mainstream media outlets covered the convention with varying views of the total outcome. The Florida Times Union gave a synopsis of the convention two days following the proceedings in which the editor of the paper recalled the voice of one of the most prominent spokesmen for education at the convention, John Willis Menard. Menard responded to questions of separation of the races prior to the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision by stating, "If we must have separate schools and separate cars, let them have the same conveniences and advantages as those provided for the whites." Moreover, Menard and other leading members of the convention argued that proper education would insure an intelligent voting mass throughout the state and the nation. Therefore, this group decided to use its last bit of political capital on black education. This would serve as an investment that would hopefully pay off for black Floridians in future generations.¹⁶⁰

Black journalist and political spokesman Menard sparked the idea of a state-supported institution for advanced education for African Americans in the state. Ironically, Menard's son-in-law, Thomas Van Renssaler Gibbs, spearheaded the idea's implementation. Gibbs, also the son of the state's distinguished former superintendent of public instruction, Jonathan Gibbs, achieved enactment of necessary legislation and financial support as a delegate

to the 1885 Florida Constitutional Convention and as a state representative.¹⁶¹

When news of an all-black, state-supported educational institution reached Floridians, white traditionalists were not happy. One conservative writer even demonized the intelligence of the black voting population in a letter to the New York Freeman shortly after legislation was passed. The author of this commentary proclaimed, "the coloreds have a great deal of political power, but they don't seem to understand it." Obviously upset with the notion of a growing black middle-class, the writer argued that these classes of African Americans "render you as much service as a goose." Moreover, the writer asserted, "yet still they can dress fine, smoke fine cigars and visit frequently bad dens, and their heads are as empty as a gourd." Sentiments of this sort explain the fear that many white southerners had of African Americans in positions of authority. Moreover, images of blacks dressed in traditional Victorian garb, and carrying themselves eloquently debunked stereotypes white southerners had previously placed on them.¹⁶²

While white southerners expressed their dissatisfaction with the creation and support of an institution of higher education



Gibbs Hall (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

The only public institution of higher learning in the state for blacks was FAMU, founded on October 3, 1887 as the State Normal College for Colored Students

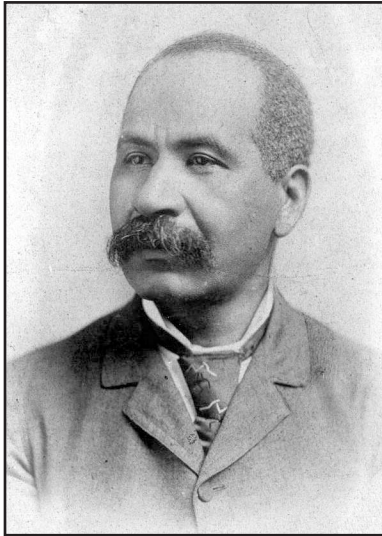
for blacks, a question arose as to who would lead the school among the political leaders of Florida. While many black and white Floridians assumed Thomas Gibbs would step into its presidency, white political leaders desired someone else, a fact that would carry major implications for the institution's future administrators. This came about because former Confederate General Edward A. Perry of Pensacola had assumed the governor's chair in 1885. Perry subsequently oversaw the rewriting of the state's constitution and worked to revolutionize state government with the aim of reversing Reconstruction-era trends and policies. It appears likely that Perry and his advisers mistrusted Gibbs, whose connections in black social and political circles reached the highest levels.¹⁶³

In these circumstances, Perry surprisingly turned to a fellow Pensacola resident to take Florida State Normal and Industrial School's (FSNIS) helm, and he likely did so based upon advice from unexpected sources. The turn of events reflected relationships tested over decades. First, Perry's immediate predecessor as governor, William D. Bloxham, had assumed office as secretary of state and, as such, sat on the Board of Education. Bloxham meanwhile had enjoyed an extremely close association since the Civil War's end with Leon County's state senator, John Wallace. Wallace, in turn, had kept close ties with a fellow black Civil War veteran and one-time congressman, Josiah T. Walls. Interestingly, at the time Wallace and Walls had been well-acquainted for almost one quarter of a century with Pensacola attorney Thomas Tucker. The friendships traced back to the Civil War when the lawyer, likely taught the two public officials at an army institution called the Mary S. Peak School in Hampton, Virginia. Wallace and Walls then were serving in Company D., Second United States Colored Infantry. At the school, Tucker and other instructors combined basic academic exercises with liberal doses of religious training. Available evidence, although spotty, suggests Wallace and Walls recommended Tucker to Bloxham who, in turn, passed his name to the governor as the proper man to head the state normal school.¹⁶⁴

The Tucker Years

Prior to taking the reign of the FSNIS, Tucker had asserted himself as a leader in Pensacola's black community. In April 1887, shortly before he was chosen as the first president of the school, his wife, Charity Tucker, accepted a teaching position at a new public school in Pensacola for black youth. In support of his wife's new career, the lawyer gave a lecture on home training to parents "that did not know how to raise their children." This lecture was not uncommon for African Americans in the middle-class, as the leaders of the race during the late 1800s desired to train their future leaders in the norms

of a Victorian society. On September 24, 1887, only nineteen days after delivering his "training" address, Thomas DeSalle Tucker was selected as the first president of the FSNIS. Tucker arrived in Florida's capital a few days prior to the first classes. During his initial year at the new school, his wife, Charity, remained in Pensacola to hone her teaching skills.¹⁶⁶



Thomas DeSalle Tucker (1887-1901), an attorney from Pensacola, was chosen to be the first president (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

On October 3, 1887, the FSNIS opened its doors to fifteen students. Initially, however, admittance into the school proved difficult. According to FAMU historian Leedell Neyland, admission was restricted to persons sixteen years of age and over. Facing the challenge of educating individuals who were only twenty-two years removed from slavery, the forty-three-year-old Tucker, and his new partner in education, Thomas Gibbs, "deemed necessary to examine all newcomers and place them in categories on the basis of the scores received." Therefore, the courses of study were divided into preparatory and normal school. Surprisingly, for a new black college during the late 1880s, the normal department courses consisted of Latin, higher mathematics, physiology, astronomy, general history, rhetoric, pedagogics, and natural, mental and moral philosophy. On the other hand, the preparatory department courses consisted of algebra and Latin, while focusing on a concise review of education practices. According to historian James D. Anderson, black higher education during the late nineteenth century was focused on rudimentary education with an emphasis on industrial and vocational training. Therefore, Tucker's curriculum at FSNIS was totally out of step with many other black educational institutions, especially southern-based black institutions during this era.¹⁶⁷

After he gained one year of experience, Tucker began to assert himself in Tallahassee as the preeminent education leader for blacks in the state of Florida. The president gained approval from the state legislature to hire another instructor at the institution. With his first hire, Tucker appointed Laura Clark, a graduate of Wilberforce College, the first female instructor at the school. Clark lightened Tucker's teaching load by instructing English and literature courses in the preparatory department. The three instructors were surprisingly paid on par with white normal schools of the state, with Tucker's annual salary equaling \$1,100, Gibbs, \$1,000 and the newly hired Clark's salary \$700. This sign of confidence from state officials launched the Tucker administration into full gear, as his vision for the institution continued to grow.¹⁶⁸

In September 1889, the staff of the young institution released its course catalogue, a neatly printed pamphlet of sixteen pages. This catalogue revealed the number of students at the school and course offerings. Moreover, the overall purpose of

this pamphlet was to assure the citizens of the state that their tax dollars were not being spent in vain.¹⁶⁹

At the end of that academic year, the institution celebrated its third annual closing exercises. This event marked the culmination of the educational experience for the pupils, while giving the public an opportunity to see the depth of knowledge that these new students gained while at FSNIS. Almost totally conducted by the new graduates, the commencement exercise offered the audience an insightful look at their future leaders. A number of prominent figures from both races attended the ceremony, including state superintendent Major A. J. Russell and black physician William John Gunn. Governor Francis Fleming was not in attendance due to a reported illness, which left him incapacitated for many days. Overall, the progress of the young institution surprised many people of both races.¹⁷⁰

As Tucker's administration continued to flourish, black leaders throughout the state continued to support his vision for the institution. The members of the Colored Teachers Association of Florida passed a resolution proclaiming, "That the members of the association will use every exertion to encourage schools and increase the attendance of the same." While Tucker received well wishes from black leaders, conservative politicians had another idea for the curriculum at FSNIS. As early as 1891, the institution began to hire more agriculture and industrial instructors, which appeased white political leaders. At the start of the academic year in 1891, the school employed W. J. Clayton, an 1891 graduate of Hampton Institute. Clayton trained students in the Agriculture Department, which marked the beginning of the end of the prominence of FSNIS's liberal arts curriculum during the era.¹⁷¹

The Young Years

In 1901, Nathan Benjamin Young, its second president, was appointed to lead the institution. His appointment as president of Florida's only publicly funded black institution of higher education carried with it great prestige within the African American community; yet, his first year at FSNIS involved serious challenges. During this time (1901-1902) the school's enrollment reflected 204 students. The majority came from twenty-eight counties in Florida, with two students from Georgia and one from Virginia. Even with such a small enrollment, Young struggled to obtain enough money to keep the school operating. No equality or anything near parity existed in the funding of white and black schools. For example, Florida's white public schools received \$523,000 for school operations in 1900, whereas black schools received only \$114,000. Young's first annual report, issued on July 1, 1902, showed that his school received only \$19,601.66. Of that amount, \$12,500 had come from money appropriated

from the Morrill Fund, a sourced derived from a federal program extended to southern regions in the 1890s that gave all states 30,000 acres of land per member in Congress. Proceeds from these land sales, according to the law, could be used only to establish colleges in engineering, agriculture, and military sciences. In any event, the amount reflected in Young's 1902 report did represent an increase of \$5,994.79 over the amount received by President Tucker for the year ending July 1, 1901.¹⁷²

Financial and other challenges notwithstanding, Young managed during the century's early years to achieve solid results. One of the school's greatest accomplishments involved the changing of the institution's name and status from that of a school to a college. The transformation began during the 1907-1908 academic year, when Young petitioned the new Board of Control (recently created to supervise state higher education programs) to change the name of the institution to more appropriately identify the school and its mission under the Morrill Act. After several years of consideration, the board in 1909 finally approved an official change to Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College for Negroes (FAMC).¹⁷³

The Lee & Gray Years

Throughout the early twentieth century, FAMC was becoming a nationally respected black institution of higher education. J.R.E. Lee is the president who ushered in the first Golden Age at FAMU. Many of the historic brick structures on campus were erected during the years of his administration. After the death of the college's fourth president, J.R.E. Lee, the State Board of Control appointed Jubie B. Bragg, then head of athletics, as acting president. Although Bragg was familiar with the school and well equipped for the position, the board believed they would obtain a better candidate by conducting a broader search for an administrator who did not have any previous connections to FAMC. After an intensive search for a new president (that ended on June 8, 1944), the Board of Control tentatively selected Dr. William Gray as the college's fifth president. Gray's reputation in education reached Tallahassee by way of his contact with Daniel E. Williams, State Supervisor of Negro Education and Doak S. Campbell, president of FSU. Leedell Neyland reveals in his book that Williams knew of Gray's work in Louisiana and at Florida Normal and Industrial College (FNIC) in Saint Augustine, while Campbell reported that he visited FNIC twice during Gray's tenure as president and observed changes which indicated he was excelling as president. Many of the board members were impressed with Gray as a person and educator but held one reservation. There hesitation came on the part

No equality or anything near parity existed in the funding of white and black schools. For example, Florida's white public schools received \$523,000 for school operations in 1900, whereas black schools received only \$114,000.

of Gray's age. It appeared that age worked against Gray being named president of the college without the "tentative" label being placed on his title. Moreover, the appointment was made under a probation period, where Williams was to perform annual evaluations on Gray. After four months of observations by Williams, Gray was advised to take office on September 1, 1944, ten days before his thirty-third birthday.¹⁷⁴

As highlighted in The History of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, the transition period between Lee and Gray produced two extremes. President Lee had the distinction of being one of the oldest college presidents in the nation; on the other extreme, Gray held the distinction of being one of the youngest. Although age was their chief difference, both men held the belief that an institution of higher education must expand and render wider educational services if it was to justify effectively why it belonged as a college in the United States of America.¹⁷⁵

Although Lee left a large shadow, he also left the institution in great condition for a successor. In building upon the foundations of Lee, Gray successfully spearheaded a small but noticeable period of expansion at the college. One of the efforts was to secure a new health and nursing-education center that Lee began in 1938. This program was aided by Dr. Leonard Foote, who Gray personally asked to lead the cause. He asked Foote to enlist support from state and local officials, and find agencies to help raise more than a million dollars for a hospital fund.¹⁷⁶

When Gray assumed the presidency, the college, like other institutions of higher learning in Florida, was suffering from the abnormalities created by wartime living. Prior to Gray's arrival at FAMC, there had not been a major building erected on campus for nearly twenty years. Furthermore, the school lost many influential faculty members to better paying positions in wartime industries and the student body declined noticeably. Nonetheless, FAMC's new president was able to utilize his political connections to enhance the educational experience of his new college. Specifically, during World War II, Gray was in charge of the Florida Area War Manpower Program, a federal training program for shipyard workers, which eventually helped to jump-start new buildings constructed during his administration. These buildings included Polkinghorne Village and the new hospital facility. Polkinghorne Village was built to accommodate and assist veterans as they adjusted back to civilian life, and sat on the border of the Villa Mitchell Hill community.¹⁷⁷ In fact, Marjorie Williams (a resident of Villa Mitchell Hill) and her husband, Eddie Lee Williams, Sr., met at FAMU and married in 1952 while they were students. They lived in Polkinghorne Village because Eddie had served time in the Navy.¹⁷⁸

During Gray's second year, the state government along with the Veterans' Housing Authority provided financial support for

building a Veterans' Housing Project on the campus to hold 170 housing units for married veterans and eleven barracks to be renovated into living quarters for 250 single veterans. This structure backed up to Eugenia Street in the Villa Mitchell Hill area as well. Gray chose Professor M. R. Kyle of the Department of Mathematics to chair the committee charged with naming this housing facility. The individual who received that honor had to



FAMC hospital (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

be a former student or graduate of the college who through heroic actions died during World War II. The name that was submitted to Gray was First Lieutenant James R. Polkinghorne of Pensacola. Polkinghorne was selected because he was the first FAMCean to be accepted into the Air Corps and to receive wings at the Tuskegee Army Flying School on February 16, 1943. Soon after receiving his wings, his squadron of P-36 fighter planes, was lost on May 5, 1944 on a strafing mission

to Sezze and Terracina, Italy. Dr. Gray chose homecoming 1948 as the official dedication of Polkinghorne Village. The program's keynote speaker was the honorable Robert A. Gray, Florida's Secretary of State.¹⁷⁹

One of the most significant structures that President Gray fought for during his tenure was the FAMC hospital, a place patronized by citizens of the Allen community and Villa Mitchell Hill. It also served as employer to the community's residents. In a report of FAMC alumni, Gray proclaimed the need to finish the job, which was "so near the heart of our late president." Members of the alumni association assured Gray they would do everything in their power but could make no promises. As a sign of good faith, however, the association raised five-thousand dollars, which included five-hundred dollars that Lee previously secured. In his efforts, Gray formed a Fund Raising Committee with Dr. Leonard Foote and himself serving as co-chairmen. Both Foote and Gray won the support of Governor Millard F. Caldwell, the Board of Education, the Board of Control, the State Improvement Commission, the General Education Board, and health officials of the federal government. They secured grant money and Gray used his presidential muscle to influence faculty and staff at FAMC to contribute at least twenty-five dollars to the hospital building fund, stating that it was "expected." Unfortunately, in spite of his vigorous effort to have a new hospital built, Gray was removed from office prior to the first cornerstone being laid.¹⁸⁰

Nonetheless, during his tenure as president, not only did the institution undergo a brief period of building expansion, but it also went through a period of intellectual growth. Midway through his administration, Gray discovered that the state of Florida did not make any provisions for graduate education for African Americans in the state outside the field of education. In his opinion, "progressive trends of the state" demanded

critical changes. On April 2, 1945, Gray informed the executive committee of the college that the State Board of Control expressed a willingness to implement graduate work at the college and would ask for an appropriation from the legislature to initiate the activity.¹⁸¹

With this significant development, Gray recruited intellectuals to enhance scholarship at the college. This mass recruitment reached its pinnacle in 1946, when President Gray influenced twenty-three talented professors to render their services to the college. In this outstanding class were Mr. Wilbur L. Bate, Associate Professor of Agriculture; Dr. Charles U. Smith, Professor of Sociology; Dr. Sybil C. Mobley, Professor of Accounting in the Business School; and, Dr. William P. Foster, Professor of Music and Chairman of the Department of Music and Director of Bands.

Foster recalled meeting Gray at a football game between FAMC and Tuskegee Institute in October 1945 at Tuskegee, Alabama. Among the fans and friends that observed the pre-game and halftime show performed by the Tuskegee Institute Marching Band under Foster's direction, were Gray and Moses G. Miles, director of student affairs at FAMC. After the game, the three gentlemen attended a meeting of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated. Before the meeting ended, Foster headed home around 11:00 or 11:30 p.m., fatigued. Shortly after reaching his home, he heard a knock at his door. To his surprise, it was Gray and Miles, who were there to influence him to take a band director job at FAMC. Gray informed Foster that he wanted to "put FAMC on the map." The offer was too good for Foster to turn down; therefore, in the early spring of 1946 he made a trip to Tallahassee to meet with Gray. The agenda of the meeting was to discuss expectations, needs, resources and challenges. Shortly afterwards, Foster accepted employment at FAMC, effective on June 1, 1946. Through the help of Foster and other members of the "Famous Class of '46," FAMC stood as one of the nation's strongest institutions of academic excellence.¹⁸²

The Gore Years

Four years later, on March 6, 1950, at a special meeting of the Board of Control, the Honorable M. B. Jordan nominated Dr. George William Gore, Jr., for the presidency of FAMC. The actions of the Board of Control were subsequently confirmed unanimously by the State Board of Education, thus ending a lengthy search for a capable leader to serve as president of the college during a tumultuous time.¹⁸³

Gore quickly became connected to the Tallahassee community and its leading citizens. Keith Miles had a chance to personally meet Dr. and Mrs. Gore because his dad was an administrator on campus. Keith recalled going to the Gore's home and having dinners with them.¹⁸⁴ With the assistance of his devoted wife,

Pearl, President Gore, in an effective, yet quiet and unassuming manner, set out to meet the challenges that faced him as a new administrator. Dr. Gore recognized that a growing institution of higher learning could not and should not attempt to remain aloof from the citizens of the state and community. Thus, on May 14, 1952, he inaugurated the first Community Day observance. On this day citizens from the state and community



(Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

visited the school, observed its progress and needs, and shared the hospitality of the students, faculty, and administration.¹⁸⁵ Without a doubt, individuals from neighboring Allen Subdivision and Villa Mitchell Hill also took advantage of the Community Day observance by participating in the affair.

The institution and the community were inherently tied together, and for many of the families in the surrounding areas it became a

common goal to attend and graduate from college. Many black families, through great sacrifice, supported Gore's vision to grow the university and sent their children to "A&M". The connection of FAMU to the community surely inspired many young people to attend college and raised the educational expectations for black people in Tallahassee. Mary Hartsfield who attended FAMU during Gore's administration recalled that each of her eight siblings attended college. In 1969, she graduated with a degree in Library Science from FAMU. She commented, "All of my sisters and brothers went to college – I don't know how we did it, [but] what a blessing!" Gore had embraced the legacy of the presidents that preceded him and continued to make sure that attending a quality school like Florida A&M was a viable option for all black people, especially for those in Tallahassee.¹⁸⁶

Similarly, Irene Allen, who has lived for a century, and resided in Allen Subdivision from 1952 to 1964, wanted her seven children to receive a college education. According to Collett and Johnson, "her passion was to insist that all of her children enroll at Florida A&M University." Indeed, four of her children graduated from FAMU and another one finished The University of Florida. "All were gainfully employed," Irene Allen said, "and had accomplished careers."¹⁸⁷

In an attempt to recruit faculty to the young institution, Gore set out to gain an understanding of the faculty's needs. After an exhaustive study he found that faculty hesitated to come to Tallahassee not only because of low salaries, but also because of the acute shortage of adequate housing for blacks in the city. Gore, therefore, called upon the Board to help provide adequate housing to meet the demands of the large group of professional people that a university would require. A nucleus of twenty-five teachers' housing units was seen as necessary to attract desirable faculty members, who after entering the service of the university for a period of orientation and deciding to settle, would then build or purchase a home of their own, making the college housing units available for use by incoming groups.¹⁸⁸

Perhaps one of the greatest achievements came under the presidency of Dr. Gore. The Florida legislature elevated the college to university status, and in 1953, FAMC became FAMU. Obtaining university status meant restructuring existing programs and designing new academic offerings to meet the demands of producing quality students at the professional and graduate levels. Between 1953 and 1968, the Schools of Pharmacy, Law, Graduate Studies, and Nursing were created.¹⁸⁹

To be sure, the history of FAMU coincides with Canal Street (present-day FAMU Way). Many of the oral histories that are captured in this document speak to the influence that the institution had on the lives of individuals who lived in the communities surrounding FAMU's campus. For instance, Laverne Washington recalled working at Charlie Davis's local barbershop on Canal Street where the M. S. Thomas Bridge is now, and seeing presidents and professors drop by weekly for their haircuts. According to Washington, these men would debate the racial issues of the day, while also charting the path forward for the college in general, and for the overall black community.¹⁹⁰

FAMU had an even larger impact on Laverne Washington's life. According to him, students of his generation were able to attend college because around 1973, Pell Grants were provided to help offset their expenses. Washington remembered that merely ten days after he graduated from Rickards High School, he accepted a job as a janitor at FAMU in the late spring of 1973. Therefore, with the assistance of the Pell Grant and his six-hour fee waiver as an employee of the state, Washington was able to afford a college education at FAMU¹⁹¹

Civil Rights Movement

Florida's African Americans were certainly at the forefront in terms of civil rights in the nation. Harry T. Moore of Mims, Florida, is one figure who deserves mention. He became a teacher and principal in Brevard County. As an activist he challenged the discriminatory wages paid to black teachers and concentrated on voting rights and violence committed against blacks in the state. Moore helped to establish the first statewide conference of the National Association of Colored People (NAACP) and became president of its Florida branch. In 1945 he created the Progressive Voters League in Florida which significantly increased the number of Florida's black registered voters. However, these deeds brought extreme suffering and later death to Moore and his wife, Harriett. On Christmas night of 1951, racist whites, presumably Klansmen from Orange County, bombed Moore's home killing Harry T. and Harriett.

Moore is considered by some to be the very first civil rights martyr in America.¹⁹²

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., once stated, "the black revolution is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws – racism, poverty, militarism, and materialism. It is exposing evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society...and suggests that

The students at FAMU and the residents in its neighboring communities were at the forefront of the civil rights struggle.

radical reconstruction of society is the real issue to be faced."¹⁹³ The story of the civil rights movement has mainly focused on the "classical" phase of the black freedom struggle that begins with the Brown v. Board of Education decision of 1954, and culminates with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Martin Luther King, Jr., and a few other notable activists, such as Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, and Stokely Carmichael have dominated the narrative and consequently prevented "one of the most remarkable mass movements in American history from speaking effectively to the challenges of our time."¹⁹⁴ The

civil rights movement was not a monolithic national movement; instead, it consisted of hundreds of grassroots struggles led by African Americans in every region of the United States.

In 1956, Tallahassee consisted of only fourteen square miles and had a total population of approximately 38,000 people, of whom thirty-six percent were black. It was the home of two state universities, the all-black FAMU and all-white FSU. Despite the educational opportunities for African Americans in the city, the culture of Tallahassee reflected the traditions and ideology of its southern neighbors. White Tallahasseeans remained resistant to social change, and obstructed African Americans from achieving social, economic, and political equality. Just steps from the Florida State Capitol building were several African

American communities that served as visible reminders of both the racial disparities in the city and the perseverance of African Americans during the Jim Crow era. FSU professor Jackson Lee Ice recalled, "it was not so much the 'rednecks' or lower classes that kept the blacks 'in their place' and denied them equal opportunities and rights but the well-meaning, soft-spoken upper and middle classes which made up the controlling power structure of Southern Culture."¹⁹⁵ By the 1950s,

local black religious leaders, community activists, and students challenged the racial status quo in the city, and fought to bring equality to Florida's capital city.¹⁹⁶

The students at FAMU and the residents in its neighboring communities were at the forefront of the civil rights struggle. According to late FAMU professor Charles U. Smith, author of two books about civil rights protests, "the activity of student



Protest Signs on FAMU's campus in 1959 (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

protesters at FAMU is unprecedented; students at no other school did as much or produced as much (change) as did FAMU students," he said. "It changed Tallahassee, as even those opposed (to civil rights) realized they had to deal with it. There's not a chance civil rights would be as far along (without FAMU)."¹⁹⁷ Black communities such as Villa Mitchell Hill, Allen Subdivision, and Providence, served as both an epicenter for activism and a safe haven for its participants. While African Americans always found ways to rebel against white supremacy in the city, they began to gain international attention after the 1956 Tallahassee bus boycott.

Tallahassee Bus Boycott

On May 26, 1956, Wilhelmina Jakes, Carrie Patterson, and another female student boarded a crowded city bus at a bus stop on Adams and Canal Street (now FAMU Way) for a short ride into downtown.¹⁹⁸ The three women had planned to go shopping for materials to make new dresses for an upcoming dance. After paying their ten-cent fare, one went to the back of the bus with the other black passengers, but roommates Jakes and Patterson decided to sit next to a white woman in a three-person seat behind the driver. The driver of the bus, Max Coggins, saw the two women sitting next to the white woman, turned his seat, and asked them to move to the back of the bus. Jakes and Patterson refused but did offer to leave if the bus driver refunded their fare. Coggins refused and eventually parked the bus at a service station and called the police. Three police cars arrived on the scene and the arresting officer proclaimed, "if they wanted to ride so badly, he would give them one – to jail."¹⁹⁹ Patterson and Jakes were charged with placing themselves in a position to incite a riot. After being taken to jail their friend who boarded the bus with them made her way to the police station and was told by Jakes and Patterson to call "the counselor for off-campus students at Florida A&M, who in turn told Edna Calhoun, the dean of women." Calhoun contacted Moses G. Miles, the dean of students, who went to the jail and posted a twenty-five-dollar bond for the women's release.²⁰⁰

The next day the two women met with Reverend Charles Kenzie Steele, pastor at Bethel Baptist Church, and Robert Saunders, Executive Secretary for the Florida NAACP branch. The two local leaders praised the women for their actions and told them that they had their support in bringing some sort of resolution to the situation. That evening around 5:30 p.m. Jakes had just finished speaking with George Thurston, a local reporter, when someone knocked on her door. When she answered, Jakes was greeted by a burning cross in her front lawn. Jakes, a resident in the Villa Mitchell Hill community, was brought to campus for her safety.²⁰¹

On Monday morning, FAMU students filled Lee Hall Auditorium. A few local leaders were present, but no administrators or professors attended the meeting. Led by Student Government Association President Broadus Hartley, the students decided they would not be humiliated anymore and they would follow the precedent set in Montgomery just months before, by boycotting the city buses for the remainder of the school term. After loudly singing the alma mater the students rushed out of the auditorium onto the campus. One of the students at the time, former FAMU President Frederick Humphries, recalled a bus driving through "The Set" near Lee Hall and members of the football team ordering the black passengers off the bus. Some followed their directions while others remained on the bus. At that point the members of the football team surrounded the bus and began to shake it until the bus was empty. It was at that point when the boycott was in full swing.²⁰²



Reverend C. K. Steele (center left) and Reverend Daniel Speed (center right) protest segregated seating on buses in Tallahassee 1956 (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

One of the non-students who witnessed the meeting and was also a prominent member of the FAMU Way community was Daisy Young, the assistant admissions director and later registrar at FAMU. She watched the students stop the first bus, and recalled that a police car followed the second bus that came through campus, but it was empty. By the next day the students, members of the black community, and other black leaders had effectively mobilized across the city and began the citywide protest.²⁰³ Indeed, African Americans made up the majority of those who used public transportation and those in the Allen Subdivision and the Villa Mitchell Hill areas who normally relied on the buses joined with FAMU students and participated in the boycotts. Collett, who was in her senior year of high school, reflected on how the black people created carpools to take residents wherever they wanted to go: movies, work, shop, etc.²⁰⁴

While many individuals played an integral role in the success of the boycott, one person by the name of Maxwell Samuel Thomas needs to be highlighted for the purpose of this report. Thomas, a FAMU professor and local activist, suggested that an umbrella organization be formed to direct the boycott operations. The result of his idea became the Inter-Civic Council (ICC), the first protest organization in Tallahassee to represent a cross section of Tallahassee's black community that included professionals, ministers, small businessmen, laborers, housewives, teachers, and domestics. The M. S. Thomas Bridge that hovers over a former section of the Allen Subdivision and sits at the beginning of FAMU Way is named in his honor. Another prominent member of the FAMU Way community, Daisy Young, provided clerical services for the ICC and served as a vital link between FAMU students and boycott

leaders. She also allowed students to meet at her home and at Fountain Chapel AME Church for instructions on what buses not to ride. Black women in the communities raised money to keep the boycott and the ICC afloat.²⁰⁵

C. K. Steele emerged as the most prominent member of the ICC, but the organization would not have thrived if it were not for the prominent institutions, churches, and residents in the various communities along FAMU Way/Canal Street. Reverend King Solomon Dupont, pastor at Fountain Chapel on Eugenia Street, would later become the first African American to run for office in Tallahassee since Reconstruction. He was elected an officer in the organization. This made an impression on individuals like Rilla Curry who attended Fountain Chapel and was inspired by her pastor being involved in the movement. Another clergyman, Father David Brooks of St. Michaels and All Angels Episcopal Church on Melvin Street off of FAMU Way and president of the NAACP, was also elected an officer at the inaugural meeting. Minster and community grocer, Daniel Speed, who owned Speed's Grocery on Floral Street, served on the executive committee.²⁰⁶

Members of the black community carpooled to provide alternative transportation for bus riders. Speed often provided gas for the carpools and his business suffered as a result of his donations. According to Marjorie Williams, Mr. Speed "owned a station wagon. He took people to work and back home or to campus as a carpooler." For eighteen months the police harassed, ticketed, and jailed the drivers who provided rides in an attempt to stop the boycott. In January 1957, vandals pulled out shotguns and blew out the windows at Speed's store. "Speed remembers that the pattern of destruction became so frequent that he and his family became resigned to it. When any of the family caught sight of a car full of whites heading for the store, they shouted to one another to take cover. Neither Speed nor any member of his family was ever hurt, but both whites and conservative blacks stopped buying from him."²⁰⁷ At the end, the Cities Transit Company eventually negotiated a settlement to desegregate the buses.

Betty Jean Owens Assault

By the spring of 1959, there had been some sustained activism in the city, but there had not been any significant protests. That changed on May 2, 1959. Earlier that day four white men made a pact to "go out and get a nigger girl." They armed themselves with shotguns and switchblades and crept up behind the parked car of a FAMU student that had three passengers inside. Patrick Scarborough pressed his sixteen-gauge shotgun against the driver's nose and ordered everyone out of the car. He forced the two black men to kneel, while his friend David Beagles held

the two black women at knifepoint. At that point, Scarborough told the two men to get back in the car and ordered them to leave. As they drove away one of the women, Edna Richardson, was able to break free and ran into a nearby park. This left Betty Jean Owens alone with her attackers. With a knife to her throat she was pushed into the backseat of their automobile where the four men raped her seven times.²⁰⁸



FAMU Students Join NAACP March down Canal Street (now FAMU Way) to the Capitol in 1964. (Please note Gethsemane Missionary Baptist Church in the background) (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

Again the students at FAMU came to the defense of their classmate and demanded justice for this heinous crime. There had been very few, if any, convictions against white males for committing rape against black women in the nation, and her assailants showed very little concern about being punished for their actions. Again, FAMU was the anchor for the black community in Tallahassee, especially in the surrounding communities. When the students heard the news of the attack on Owens and the

subsequent arrest of her attackers, a small group planned an armed march to City Hall to let city officials know they were willing to protect black womanhood in the same manner whites protected white womanhood. After being talked out of the march, 1,500 students filled Lee Hall Auditorium, where SGA President Clifford Taylor said he "would not sit idly by and see our sisters, wives, and mothers desecrated." The next day thousands of students gathered in the university's quadrangle with signs, singing hymns, and offering prayers aimed at the national news media, which covered the story and sent the message out across the country.²⁰⁹

Hundreds of students and members of the community packed the Leon County Court House during the trial. One of those individuals was sociology professor Charles U. Smith who remembered the white defense attorney yelling at the jury, "Are you going to believe this nigger wench over these four boys?" The prosecuting attorney William Hopkins asked the jury, "Suppose two colored boys and their moron friends attacked Mrs. Beagles' daughter...had taken her at gunpoint from a car and forced her into a secluded place and regardless of whether they secure her consent or not, had intercourse with her seven times, leaving her in such conditions that she collapsed and had to be hospitalized?" He reminded the jurors that Owens was "within an inch of losing her life."²¹⁰

The courthouse remained packed with restless spectators, while three hundred African American held a silent vigil outside. The jury returned with the decision "guilty with a recommendation for mercy." The decision showed progress, but it also showed that there was still a lot of work to do, especially since rape was considered a capital crime. The Betty Jean Owens incident sparked a new commitment to the movement that would be sustained throughout the next decade.²¹¹

Sit-In Movement

By early 1960, students at FAMU had organized a Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) branch in Tallahassee. In February they staged a sit-in at Woolworth's lunch counter to protest segregated eating facilities. FAMU student activist Patricia Stephens Due, a national leader of CORE, was on Adams Street nearby where it intersects with Canal Street when she was tear-gassed in a march during 1960, forever damaging her eyesight.²¹² C. K. Steele credited FAMU students for their support of civil rights actions. He stated, "they are the militants, they are the soldiers."²¹³ Many members of the black middle-class and the working-class were reluctant to participate in the various movements out of fear of losing their jobs. "We were not allowed to take part in the boycotts," Doris Hall remembered, "because lots of people lost their jobs." Nonetheless, others chose to operate behind the scenes. Once again Assistant Admissions Director at FAMU, Daisy Young, had the courage to step into the forefront, as she did during the bus boycott. During the sit-ins, Young had received an indirect message from FAMU President George W. Gore, to tone down her involvement in civil rights activities. After growing tired of receiving several secondhand messages, Young spoke directly to Gore and said, "I know I just have a B.S. degree from A&M and not an M.A. or Ph.D., but I'll tell you one thing, I speak good English, so instead of getting messages from everyone else, I want you to tell me what you want to say to me."²¹⁴ Gore told Young that he would like to give her a scholarship for her to attend another university and earn a M.A. degree. Young responded, "it was too late for that" and from that moment she believed that Gore respected her more, and never again challenged her about her involvement in the movement.²¹⁵

In 1963 FAMU students, some of whom lived in the Allen community and Villa Mitchell Hill, picketed the whites-only Florida Theater. In this instance, students attempted to buy tickets; when the cashier refused to sell them to the students they returned to the end of the line to try again. This disrupted the business and eventually led to 257 demonstrators being arrested that day alone. From 1960 to 1964 the students helped to break down racial barriers in the city, through demonstrations, legal cases, and various other protests. By the mid-1960s it seemed that the students had successfully integrated the public facilities in the city, but the fight shifted to protecting the black community's most prized institution, FAMU.²¹⁶

Laverne Washington remembered living in the Allen Subdivision and witnessing the students of FAMU participate in the movement. "You could hear them on both sides of the street. You could hear them coming down Adams Street ... all of the sudden you could hear them running. They [police] were spraying tear gas on these kids and sending them home," Washington recalled. While the college students were participating in the civil

rights movement, Washington remembered how some residents of Allen "encouraged" their children to stay away from such activities. "It was a painful time for us," he said, and as youth "we did not fully understand what was happening, but we did know the implications of it."²¹⁷

The FAMU Hospital

On December 12, 1950, the FAMC hospital opened its doors for the first time. The two million dollar facility was the only hospital for African Americans between Jacksonville and Pensacola (east and west) and Atlanta and Tampa, (north and south). It had 105 beds and was equipped with the latest in medical technology; the hospital boasted a physical therapy department, blood bank, operating room, obstetrical department, and an emergency room. The hospital would also be used as a laboratory/teaching facility for the college's thriving nursing program. While not every black Tallahasseean attended FAMU for college, the FAMU hospital became the one institution that was inherently tied to the entire black community, and it stood as a jewel in the community and was at the center of one of the largest movements in the city.²¹⁸

In addition to the hospital, in the Allen Subdivision and Villa Mitchell Hill communities there were also midwives who delivered children and had been doing so for years before the hospital came to fruition. Jennie Collett and her siblings were all delivered by midwives at their homes. However, if the medical needs became more serious, people in the surrounding communities and beyond would go see Dr. L. S. B. Foote and/or Dr. Russell Anderson at FAMU's hospital. The physicians, nurses, and staff at the hospital were very qualified individuals. For example, Russell Lloyd Anderson became the first African American to earn a Ph.D., from the University of Pittsburgh in Science, and he earned a Medical Degree from Howard University, then came to FAMU as the Medical Director of the hospital. Others went to Dr. Alpha Omega Campbell who had his own small hospital. There were also several midwives who served Tallahassee's black community including a Ms. Long, a Ms. Floyd, and Ms. Gertrude Williams. Ms. Long lived on Boulevard Street, and she delivered Doris Hall's son, Skipper, and one of her other children, but her daughter was born at FAMU's hospital in 1953, and delivered by Dr. Anderson.²¹⁹

On July 2, 1964, President Lyndon Baines Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. This "gave the Attorney General additional power to protect citizens against discrimination and segregation in voting, education, and the use of public facilities." At the time, students viewed this as an important victory and confirmation that they had not been fighting in vain. However, "one of the most controversial provisions of the law required the elimination of discrimination in federally assisted programs or

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withdrawal of federal funds upon failure to comply." The passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act served as a necessary step toward ending the culture of segregation in the South. Theoretically, African Americans could now receive equal treatment at the same public establishments frequented by whites. However, the irony of this legislation is that this same civil rights act created an opportunity for some white politicians to attack publically funded historically black institutions and deem them irrelevant in a post-segregationist society.²²⁰

Almost immediately after the passing of the civil rights act, FAMU's hospital came under fire. In June 1966, The St. Petersburg Times ran the headline: "A&M Hospital Reported Near Crisis." The government began withdrawing its funding from the hospital as early as 1965 because of the lack of white patients even though the majority of the staff was white. Although President Gore and hospital administrator Hilmon Sorey did their best to make sure the hospital was in compliance with the new law, white patients would not go to the FAMU hospital for treatment. The issue of losing federal dollars was compounded when the previously all-white Tallahassee Memorial Hospital (TMH) began to admit black patients, in an effort not to lose its federal funding. Ironically, this prompted many middle-class African Americans who had the money and proper insurance coverage to choose TMH over FAMU's hospital. That same year TMH began construction on an expansion wing to accommodate their growing clientele. At this point, the whispers of closing the FAMU facility were starting to become more of a reality.²²¹

In a closed-door meeting that occurred on June 21, 1966, that excluded President Gore, Hilmon Sorey, or anyone else affiliated with the university, the Board of Regents met with Governor W. Haydon Burns to discuss the financial problems of the hospital. They made the suggestion that, "the ultimate solution apparently will be to curtail its operation as a community-wide facility and limit its services to students attending the university and for training students in the A&M Nursing School." Board members did not reach an immediate decision at the meeting because Governor Burns and other officials recommended that they wait until the expansion at TMH was completed. Secretary of State Tom Adams agreed with the governor and characterized the situation as, "a frustrating dilemma, because if it is closed immediately, there will be no place to put the patients now there...Tallahassee Memorial is expanding but that is a year or two away and

meanwhile it is crowded most of the time." A few days later the board determined that they would keep the hospital open for at least one more year.²²²

Sorey tried to improve the financial situation at the hospital, but the lack of funding made his job nearly impossible. He could not afford to purchase new equipment, hire adequate staff, or convince black and white Tallahasseeans to consider coming to a hospital whose closing appeared to be inevitable.

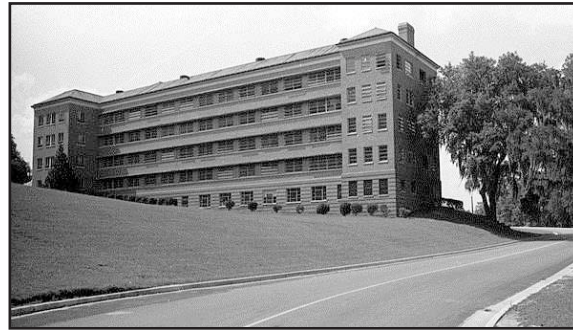
Ultimately, the enrollment in the hospital continued to decrease, and by the time the Board of Regents met in April 1967 the hospital still had not served any white patients. At that meeting, they decided to withdraw all funding for the hospital. The state decided that it was no longer feasible to fund two hospitals in the same city.²²³ Instead of closing the doors immediately, the Board negotiated a deal for the city and the county to take over the operations of the hospital. President Gore found himself in a powerless position. The circumstances forced him to agree with the conditions of the lease in hope of preserving the institution.²²⁴

On April 6, 1967, the Board of Regents finalized a deal. The county pledged \$125,000 a year for two years with an additional \$10,000 for renovations. The city representatives agreed they would share the responsibility of the

hospital and keep it open. However, they did not specify the amount of money they would contribute to the hospital per year. The city and the county agreed to lease the building for an additional two years. This assured that the hospital would stay open at least until the construction at TMH was complete.²²⁵ Tom Brown, the chairman of the Leon County Commission, insisted, "overall management of the hospital must be under M.T. Mustian, the head administrator at TMH." Brown then went on to say that, "this was not meant as a reflection on the A&M administrator whose position would remain unchanged, but we need all the administration we can get."²²⁶

Middleton (M.T.) Mustian first created new positions and titles for himself and others. Mustian became the Director of Hospitals, and instead of Sorey being Assistant Director, a person by the name of R. C. Daniel received the post. Sorey remained an administrator and continued his duties at the FAMU hospital. However, from that point Mustian appointed new doctors to the medical staff at TMH and FAMU.²²⁷

In May 1967, the FAMU hospital had also been leased to the City of Tallahassee for the sum of \$1.00 a year, and there were ongoing talks between the governor and state



Back side of the FAMU Hospital in 1965 (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)



Nurses working on patient at the FAMU Hospital in 1965 (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

legislators to merge FAMU with the predominantly white, FSU. For some, they saw the merger as inevitable. This was the atmosphere that fueled the students to move their activism from challenging the segregationist laws of Tallahassee through passive resistance, to protecting the only publically funded black institution in the state of Florida. More importantly, young black students at the time wanted FAMU to reflect the consciousness of the student body. Similar to other students nationwide, they demanded a student voice in governance, more courses on African and African American history and culture, and more scholarships. The students attempted to redefine the mission of FAMU and prove that HBCUs still served a purpose in a post-segregationist society.²²⁸

City and county officials took control over the hospital on July 1, 1967, and the FAMU hospital now became the Tallahassee A&M Hospital (TAMH). President Gore encountered constant scrutiny for not preventing the take-over. Many of the students, faculty, and alumni felt as though Gore just acquiesced to the Board's demands and did not fight hard enough to protect the institution. By February 1968, the students had organized several black power organizations on campus and began publishing a student newspaper called UHURU (Swahili word for freedom) to articulate their agenda. Throughout the year the students used revolutionary language in their publications and speeches and seemed willing to protect their institution by any means necessary.²²⁹

King Riots

Sadness and disbelief swept residents of Allen Subdivision, Villa Mitchell Hill, and the campus of Florida A&M University after hearing the news that civil rights icon Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., had been assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968. The students on campus seemed to be in a state of shock as everyone tried to make sense out of this horrific tragedy. Within hours, the students' feeling of sorrow and grief had festered into anger and rage. Students organized and held small demonstrations on campus. An unnamed black leader told a reporter that the "administration of FAMU feared the Black Power militants on campus," and was concerned that the protests could escalate to violence. "They have more influence on campus than anyone in power," he said. Benjamin L. Perry, the Dean of Administration, approached the students and tried to convince them to remain calm and honor King's legacy by remaining nonviolent. As he began to speak, the demonstrators "hooted and booed," and sent him running away with "a few well-hurled bricks."²³⁰

Surely race relations in Tallahassee were frayed after the

assassination of King. Laverne Washington remembered the black residents being so enraged by this domestic act of terrorism that they began to retaliate against the white community at-large. "When Dr. King was killed in '68," Washington recalled, "right where Rally Burgers is there was a trailer park and black citizens were hurling rocks at any white car that passed. When whites came, they would yell 'white!' If they were black, they would let them through," he asserted.²³¹

Students organized and held small demonstrations on campus. An unnamed black leader told a reporter that the "administration of FAMU feared the Black Power militants on campus," and was concerned that the protests could escalate to violence.

About two hours later, a young white man stumbled into the Tallahassee Police Department bleeding from the ear while his hysterical girlfriend cried in the background. Their car, which proudly displayed the Confederate Flag on their license plate, was pelted with bottles, stones, and bricks from FAMU students as they drove by the campus. Less than an hour later, police Lieutenant George Dawes was driving Tallahassee Mayor Gene Derkowitz and City Commissioner John Rudd down Railroad Avenue, just steps away from FAMU, when the rioters targeted them. "I was sitting in the back seat," Rudd said, "when everything seemed to explode. Glass was everywhere." A pop bottle had sailed through the car window and hit the other door panel, injuring Rudd's shoulder. Then

around 2:00 a.m., a writer for the Tallahassee Democrat, Bill Montgomery, and his photographer, Dan Stainer, had attempted to cover the disturbance when suddenly, Stainer began frantically yelling, "let's get outa here," as a brick shattered their rear window.²³²

Florida highway patrol trooper, W. R. Roddenbery said, "it's just like Vietnam, except we can't shoot back." For more than four hours that night and morning, over 150 police officers enclosed the perimeter of FAMU. The police received orders "to hold the students there on campus." Throughout the night, students hid in the trees on top of the hill at the entrance of the campus and fired guns at the police. They had pinned the officers behind their squad cars, as "light-caliber" bullets ricocheted off their vehicles. "We're sitting ducks out here," said Captain. H. L. Coleman. Another student acting like an archer had climbed a tree and pelted officers with four or five "target-tipped" arrows. Occasionally the police fired warning shots on the hill, and shot out the city lights surrounding the campus to give them more security. The standoff ended that night after Officer Dan Duncan received some long-range tear gas shells and fired them at the students. Two students were wounded that night, but no arrests were made on campus.²³³

Moments after the police fired tear gas at the students, and forced them to return to their dorms, firefighters responded to a fire at Crow's Grocery Store at 1902 Lake Bradford Road. Around 2:30 a.m., the wife of Deputy Sheriff E. B. Chaires

heard a loud explosion and called the fire department. The owner of the store, Travis Crow II, had jumped from the window with his wife and thirteen year old son, Michael. His other son, Travis Crow III, was still trapped in his room. "I kept hoping Travis would be outside...I thought he might have jumped out his window but he wasn't there."²³⁴

The couple's older son, Larry, had just arrived on the scene and saw his family's business and home engulfed in flames. He immediately rushed the building and had to be restrained by a fireman. He then witnessed two firemen knocked off a ladder when they broke a window to the young man's room above the store. The pressure from the intense heat knocked the men backwards and singed their faces. Larry grabbed the hand of another firefighter as they navigated through the burning building. They made it to Travis's room, where they found him lying on his back between the bed and the window. They carried him downstairs to an ambulance that took him to TMH where he was pronounced dead. Two local black teenagers, James Colbert and Billy Ray Oliver, would later be arrested and convicted of first-degree murder. They both received life sentences.²³⁵

The next morning on April 5, the campus was eerily quiet and seemed to be calmed by the cool drizzling rain. More police had begun relieving other officers and taking down road blocks. Order had seemed to be restored, as the students, administration, faculty, and staff attempted to grapple with the death of King and the ensuing unrest that followed the previous night. At 10:00 a.m., around 2,000 students crowded into Lee Hall to pay tribute to King. President Gore, told the students to honor King by remaining nonviolent, and "observe the passing of this great leader in a sober and respectable manner." During the memorial, Gore was interrupted with shouts of protests, and when he labeled King's nonviolent policy as "he did what Jesus Christ did," one student responded, "Jesus died!" Another student yelled, "Let's get rifles!" The memorial service concluded with the students singing the battle hymn of the movement, "We Shall Overcome," as the American flag outside of Lee Hall was lowered at half-mast.²³⁶

Just as it seemed the situation was under control and there would be no more violence, someone threw a firebomb in a store window on nearby Macomb Street. Another group of students then began demolishing a white-owned laundry mat located on the campus. Looters used crowbars to destroy every washing machine and stole whatever they could carry. An anonymous caller tipped off the police and warned them to stay away or there would be more destruction.²³⁷

Later that night around 9:00 p.m., there were reports of shotgun and pistol blasts as the students once again opened fire on officers stationed on Palmer Avenue and South Adams. Six black students were taken into custody and investigated

for having illegal weapons, but no charges were filed. Gore met with members of the faculty and administration and decided to close the school until April 15. Many students packed up their cars, while others rushed to the Greyhound stations. Parents of students at FSU traveled from out of town to pick up their children, in an effort to protect them from the disturbance. Vandals and joy riders kept the police busy throughout Saturday night, but by Sunday April 7, the town was quiet.²³⁸

In the aftermath of the riot, FAMU students took a powerful, bottom-up approach to redefine the mission of the HBCU in a post-Jim Crow society.

During the week that school was suspended, Gore met with the faculty and administration to develop a plan for when the students returned. A report submitted by the faculty stated that Dr. King's assassination was not the sole cause of the crisis, and that the university community should use this as an opportunity to re-examine itself and the total institutional structure with the purpose of improving administration, faculty, and student body relationships. Their main objective was to provide for more academic freedom for both the faculty and students. While the explosive demonstrations over the past few days seemed abrupt to some, the faculty recognized in a report they submitted to Gore that the students' new approach to

racial reform had begun to take shape in the mid-1960s and accelerated in 1967 with the talks of the merger.²³⁹

The goals of this new black student movement challenged the nonviolent and integrationist practices of the traditional civil rights movement, and focused more on sustaining its black institutions, and more importantly for black colleges to better address the concerns of its community. According to historian Martha Biondi, the students feared their university would be lost to what they considered to be the white power structure, and risked losing its black identity and consciousness. Students at HBCUs in general, wanted to prevent their institutions from being "integrated" into white-run universities, modernize the physical plant, and make HBCUs the exemplars for self-determination. At the time of King's death, over 60% of black college students still attended HBCUs. There was an anxiety and concern about the future of HBCUs; in the end the revolutionary tactics helped them maintain black control of their institutions.²⁴⁰

In the aftermath of the riot, FAMU students took a powerful, bottom-up approach to redefine the mission of the HBCU in a post-Jim Crow society. When the students arrived back on campus on Sunday April 14, they were given a letter that welcomed them back to the university and assured them that the administration understood that King's "assassination was not the sole cause of campus discontent," and that they were willing to speak with all students about reevaluating the direction of the university.²⁴¹

Four days later, a report was submitted to the administration signed by faculty members and student leaders, including future state senator Arthenia Joyner, with recommendations on how the students wanted to move forward. The twenty-one point

platform called for better communication between the faculty and students, more opportunities for scholarships and funding, more freedom for women students on campus, and for the university to “redefine its role and scope with increased emphasis upon Afro-American Studies.” They called for the university to train especially the social welfare students, teachers, and others about the problems of the black communities in Florida and elsewhere. Their proposal was adopted and two years later FAMU started its Afro-American Studies department.²⁴²

Despite how one may grapple with the morality of what the students did in the wake of King’s death, they certainly brought about meaningful change to FAMU. Even those who opposed the students’ tactics on campus were persuaded by the merits of their demands. While certainly they did not fully achieve their idea of what a black university should be, they did help make FAMU better serve their needs. The merger talk died down in 1968, but would pick back up in the 1970s.

Closing the FAMU Hospital

In early 1970, the Hospital Municipal Board announced their plans for a two-year phasing out of the former FAMU hospital. Shortly after that a senate subcommittee cut appropriation for the state university system by \$5 million and then made the suggestion that “a money saving program be mandated immediately to gradually merge Florida State and A&M University.” State Senator Lee Weissenborn, commented that FAMU served as a “monument of racial separation.” Governor Rubin Askew followed his comments by adding that “there are no sacred cows and our goal is to achieve maximum efficiency.” Once again the relevancy of black institutions was being questioned. Weissenborn’s comments served as an obvious misrepresentation of the historic significance of the institution. They ignored the racist attitudes and laws that made FAMU, the hospital, and other black institutions necessary in the first place. One of the ironies of the Jim Crow South was that its segregationist practices were meant to deprive black people from political, social, and economic advancement. But it also provided a space for African Americans to create parallel institutions to better serve the black community.²⁴³

The day after Weissenborn’s comments, 1,000 students, faculty, and staff met in Lee Hall to discuss the matter. The students announced a state wide tour to voice their displeasure and to protect their institution.²⁴⁴ FAMU’s student body president, Donna Dawkins, commented on the situation with the law school and hospital by stating: “what’s been done to FAMU over the years has never been done to any other university in Florida!” She then acknowledged that, “a lot of black people would never have gone to college anywhere had it not been for FAMU.”²⁴⁵

Black students from FAMU, FSU, and the local high schools including FAMU High, which continued to serve young people in the Allen Subdivision and Villa Mitchell Hill, organized and joined with local leaders from the community to protest the closing of the hospital and the possible merger. In April 1971, the students occupied the office of their university’s president

to discuss their disapproval and then they marched to the steps of Lee Hall and held another short rally. The black hospital workers at TMH and at the FAMU hospital also began to speak out. Lizzie Smith, a nurse at TMH, said that “right now, a black person cannot get good health care in Tallahassee.” Mrs. Dee Stephens, a registered nurse at TAMH, said “we just don’t have anybody to care for them [poor blacks] anymore.” Another black nurse at TMH commented that, “the doctors give orders to not put their white patients in a room with a black, writing on their patients chart that it may be detrimental to the patient’s health.” While others charged: “white supervisors abuse black employees without being reprimanded.”²⁴⁶

Community leaders such as C. K. Steele, David Brooks, and members of the Malcolm X United Liberation Front, vowed they would provide extensive research and establish a publicity program along with conferences related to these problems. Reverend Moses General Miles also spoke out against the closing of the hospital but he also said that it might be too late. Miles had been appointed to the hospital board and stated that TMH hired a consulting firm to approve the closing of the hospital. He questioned the firm’s credibility commenting that, “consulting firms do what you tell them to, you pay fees, tell them what you want, and they’ll slant their report your way.”²⁴⁷

Father David Brooks of Saint Michaels and All Saints Episcopal Church organized a meeting to bring media attention to the matter. Brooks stated, “the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) is ready to bring the 400-500 persons to demonstrate.” At the press conference, he called attention to the harassment of the black workers along with unfavorable conditions at TMH and TAMH. The leaders told the media that a protest would be the last resort, but they were ready to assemble if the circumstances did not improve.²⁴⁸

In an article in the *T-T News* in July of 1971, resident manager of TAMH, Eddie Haugarbrook, said, “I’ll bet you can dig up a lot of information about our problem but you won’t come across the real reason the hospital will be closed.” Dr. Haugarbrook stated that it would cost about \$1 million to get the TAMH facility to modern standards, as opposed to the \$8 million expansion of TMH. He also stated that the white TMH doctors are only sending patients to TAMH who have, “run out of money.”²⁴⁹

After the city’s takeover of the FAMU’s hospital, the finances and patient load continuously declined. The first five months of 1971 saw an average of a \$22,000 net loss. In June of 1971, TAMH only had an average of 17 adults occupying beds at the former 105-bed facility, compared to 280 adults at TMH. The phasing out strategy that had been implemented in April of 1970 proved to be successful.²⁵⁰

In a calculated effort to alleviate some of the pressure from the pending demonstration, M. T. Mustian discussed the possibility of converting TAMH into a health clinic for TMH. Mustian stated that only 50 percent of those who come through the emergency room are true emergency cases. The other fifty percent were unable to find a physician.²⁵¹ This

appeared to appease Mustian's dissenters for the time being. In July 1971, the medical board had reached an agreement that would keep the hospital open through 1972. After this announcement there were no other protests in regards to the hospital situation for the remainder of the year.²⁵²

It was very little news about the FAMU situation until on Christmas Eve 1971 when Mustian announced the immediate closing of the hospital. That day many workers received their pink slips before the holiday. The remaining medical staff was informed that they should remove their belongings and be prepared to report to work at TMH on December 28. Mustian assured the staff that they would not lose any of the salary or benefits they earned at TAMH. However, he could not guarantee that everyone would be able to keep his or her job. The move seemed to be strategic especially since the majority of the students had left the city to return to their hometowns during winter break and local Tallahasseeans were preoccupied with preparing for the Christmas season. Hence, Mustian was able to follow through with his decision with very little opposition.²⁵³

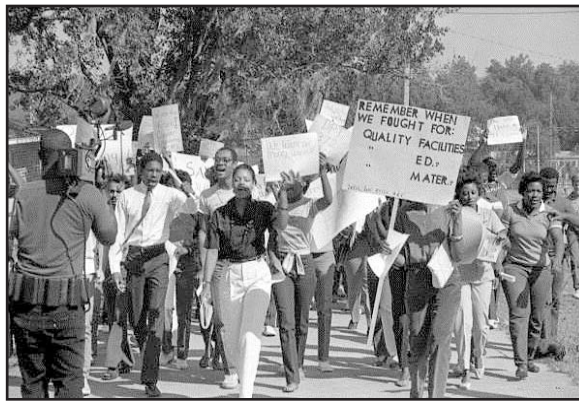
After the holiday season, members of the Malcolm X United Liberation Front picketed outside of City Hall with signs reading, "Mustian Must GO," "Support Black Workers," "Reopen A&M."²⁵⁴ One of its leaders, Minister Robert Perkins told the *T-T News* that "first, our plans include more demonstrations. The groundwork for organizing hospital workers is being done." He also stated that, "not all black workers at TMH are afraid and intimidated by Mustian and his henchman."²⁵⁵

Reverend Moses Miles, the only black member among the hospital board, questioned "why only the executive committee met to decide the hospital's fate instead of the entire twelve man board." Miles also highlighted that no FAMU representatives from the hospital were contacted until after the decision was made.²⁵⁶ The TAMH staff had not been warned prior to the closing, and some workers received calls at home. When they arrived on the scene, their belongings and equipment were being taken from them. After reporting to TMH many of their job titles did not transfer. For example, a TAMH nursing supervisor was appointed the assistant to the assistant supervisor position at TMH, and there were also several other similar cases of TAMH workers being demoted.²⁵⁷ By the start of the New Year the doors had been closed and locked. This marked a sad and abrupt end to such an important institution.

The FAMU hospital stood as an institution of excellence during its first years of operation. However, the hospital began to decline after the government refused to support it through grants and other funding. FAMU's hospital did not decline

because of the administration or the staff that comprised it. It declined because of an all-out attack from federal, state, county, and city officials that did not want the institution to serve the black community in Leon County. By the time the community tried to save the hospital, the infrastructure for its demise was already in progress. The closing of FAMU hospital is a tragic tale of greed, deception, force, and a struggle for power which limited medical access for residents in Villa Mitchell Hill and the Allen Subdivision. It is unfortunate that FAMU had to lose this institution, but this story, and other stories similar to it must be told so that present and future generations will be able to preserve their institutions before it becomes too late.

The FAMU hospital today has been converted into an administrative building serving students and faculty. The closing of the hospital in 1971 left behind a void in the medical program at FAMU. The school currently boasts one of the most prestigious pharmaceutical and nursing schools in the region. Thus, if the infrastructure of the hospital was still present on campus, in a non-racialized society, this could have furthered the rationale for the creation of a medical or dental program, making FAMU one of the leading institutions for medicine or dentistry in the country.



FAMU Students Protest in 1984 (Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory)

M. S. Thomas Bridge

By March of 1984, plans were being made by the Florida Department of Transportation to construct a bridge connecting Adams Street to Duval and Bronough Streets. The problem was that the development was designed to run through the middle of Allen Subdivision. At least twenty homeowners and businesses were going to be impacted by this development. People who lived on Harrison, Canal, South Duval, South Adams, Blount, and Hudson Streets were impacted by the overpass. Dorothy R. Carroll, William and Lucinda Lawrence, Millie L. Hicks, Dale Lauer, Namon and Ida Mills, Roscoe D. Long, William Lawrence, and Doris Ruth Madison Jefferson are just a few of the people who had their homes subjected to eminent-domain in order to make way for what would become the M. S. Thomas Bridge. According to famed historian John Hope Franklin, "there are two ways which whites destroy a black community. One is by building a freeway through it, the other is by changing the zoning laws." In this case, a freeway was not constructed, but the overpass had a similar effect. Traditionally, when road systems run through a neighborhood, they lead to blight and a downward spiral in the impacted community. Surely, the neighborhood lost some of its vibrancy with the complete demolition of many of its properties and the displacement of many of its residents.²⁵⁸

Officials decided to name the bridge after a long time employee at FAMU. Maxwell Samuel Thomas first came to Tallahassee in 1938 after he was employed by FAMU as the "State Itinerant Teacher Trainer of Trade and Industrial Education." Four years later, he became director of Vocational Training for War Production Workers at the school. From 1946 to 1957, he served as dean of the Division of Mechanic Arts (later called the Division of Engineering and Mechanic Arts). He also was appointed director of the Vocational Training Institute and acting head of the Department of Industrial Education until President Benjamin L. Perry made him the coordinator of Planning and Development at the university. He held this position until he retired in 1977. A man deeply committed to his craft, Thomas received the honor of having the Maxwell Thomas Industrial Arts Laboratory named in his honor at FAMU. The "under the over" bridge is also named after Mr. Thomas.²⁵⁹

Conclusion

This study would be incomplete without a discussion of the role of legendary retired and recently deceased FAMU sociology professor, author, and civil rights leader, Dr. Charles U. Smith, and his role in having the name Canal Street changed to FAMU Way. In August of 2012, the Tallahassee Democrat printed a story titled: "City Commissioners take up renaming proposal for Oakland Avenue to be FAMU Way." The article featured Dr. Smith. "City commissioners are going to decide today whether to rename Oakland Avenue to FAMU Way, between South Monroe and South Adams streets," the paper informed. According to the story, "the idea came from Charles Smith... who believed the area should be a gateway to the historically black college." In the same article, Gabe Menendez, Director of Public Works, reiterated that "the idea to rename this portion of Oakland Avenue was brought to us by Dr. Charles 'C.U.' Smith when we were first meeting with area leaders and community members about the FAMU Way Project." During the commission meeting, Dr. Smith expressed his concern that the FAMU Way name would not extend to a major state roadway, such as Monroe Street. He firmly believed that if the proposal was approved, "this change will bring greater recognition to FAMU and assist in the work to create a seamless, unified roadway from Monroe Street to Lake Bradford Road."²⁶⁰

By September 2, 2012, the Democrat reported that city commissioners had changed the name at the urging of Charles U. Smith, "who several years ago spearheaded the renaming of Canal Street to FAMU Way." In a second interview with the paper, Smith "called it 'disrespectful' to his university that FAMU Way [had] ended at Adams Street instead of Monroe Street." Indeed, for nearly 100 years Monroe Street, named for the fifth United States president James Monroe, was the main street in downtown Tallahassee, and a prevalent idea for some in Tallahassee was that FAMU's name should not extend to such a major thoroughfare.²⁶¹ However, through the effort of Dr. Smith and many others, including local elected officials, the FAMU Way name change sailed through the local government.

As has been demonstrated throughout this work, FAMU

has been the bonding agent that has brought the people of Allen Subdivision and Villa Mitchell Hill together, among other Tallahassee communities. Even during the era of slavery, black people worked the land where FAMU now sits on the Highwood Plantation. During Reconstruction, African American leaders pushed the state to create a school for "colored youth" that would evolve into what is now FAMU. During the Jim Crow era, FAMU provided jobs for local residents, educational opportunities for children in grades kindergarten through college, and helped to create the black middle-class not only in Tallahassee, but throughout the nation, if not the world.

A Tallahassee newspaper writer summed it up best: "If there had been no University of Chicago or University of California-Berkeley, maybe the nation would have fewer Nobel Prizes. If there had been no University of Pennsylvania or M.I.T., maybe the nation would have fewer titans of business." However, if there had no FAMU, "the city of Tallahassee, the state of Florida and the nation would have been a poorer place in many ways." Why, because over the course of its history, "FAMU has been one of the nation's leading producers of opportunity for black citizens – which has benefited us all."²⁶² After all FAMU has done, naming a street in the university's honor really should not be big news in 2015 - fortunately and unfortunately, it is.

Acknowledgements

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