

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

SAMPLE APPLICATION NARRATIVE

Summer Stipends

American History

National Endowment for the Humanities

Division of Research Programs

Excerpt from a Successful Application

This excerpt from a summer stipends application is provided as an example of a funded proposal. It will give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. It is not intended to serve as a model. Every application is different, depending on the requirements of the project, the stage of the research, the resources required, and the situation of the applicant. This sample includes only the narrative and the bibliography; it does not include the résumé or letters of recommendation.

Additional examples of funded applications can be found on the Division of Research section of the NEH website: <http://www.neh.gov/howeare/divisions/Research/index.html>

Project Title: Right To Ride: African American Citizenship, Identity, and the Protest over Jim Crow Transportation

Project Director: Blair L. M. Kelley, North Carolina State University

Result: *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

"Right To Ride: African American Citizenship, Identity, and the Protest Over Jim Crow Transportation", describes the struggle of thousands of African Americans who refused to accept the segregation of trains and streetcars at the turn of the twentieth century. When railroads re-instituted policies barring black riders from first class cars despite the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1875, African American sued southern railroads, filing federal suits that challenged the unequal conditions on train cars. Even after the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was declared unconstitutional in 1883, black passengers continued to press for dignity and equal inclusion. The protests of train passengers culminated at the U.S. Supreme Court, with PLESSY V. FERGUSON (1896). Despite the legal defeat, black southerners fought the passage of additional Jim Crow laws. When southern states and local municipalities began to pass laws segregating streetcars in the 1900s, African Americans boycotted the streetcars in at least twenty-five cities. News spread quickly through the black press and disparate communities united in their stand against being "Jim Crowed". By recasting this important chapter in the history of civil rights, the project uncovers the complexities of black leadership, institutional development, and community life.

Through an examination of protest communities in New Orleans, Louisiana, Richmond, Virginia, and Savannah, Georgia, the manuscript investigates how black men and women contested informal policies and formal segregation laws that attempted to strip them of their right to ride unhindered by the humiliation of second-class conditions. I chose these cities for several reasons. Newspapers serve as a rich groundwork for recreating a day-by-day account of the protests, adding detail to our general understandings of the battle against train and streetcar segregation. The three cities also exemplify the ways that difference within African American communities shaped protest.

New Orleans serves as starting point for this project because it was the birthplace of the Plessy decision. The city also offers insight into the complexity of culture, class, skin color, and identity within African American communities. The antebellum history of free people of color has been well-chronicled, but their unique identity continued to shape their challenge in the era of de jure segregation. This project assesses the impact of this legacy on the protests of the 1890s. Leadership in New Orleans divided along cultural lines, and this project connects the history of creoles of color with the leadership of the Americanized black community of free slaves and urban migrants, outlining the political meanings of African American identity in New Orleans.

Given that New Orleans is an exceptional case, Richmond and Savannah offer a rich counterpoint. The history of Richmond provides an opportunity to examine the leadership of a burgeoning black business class and the resilience of the working class in the battle against segregated streetcars. Savannah's church-based protests led by ministers and their dynamic congregations offer a different perspective on leadership and identity.

This project combines the detail present in local histories with the wider assessment of a regional study. A focus on one urban community could easily be dismissed as an exceptional case. Through comparative study, patterns in laws, protest styles, and leadership emerge. Through an assessment of geographies of protest, this project attempts to map both the physical and rhetorical locations where the protests took place and recreate how these communities interconnected to make a movement. Another essential element of the manuscript is a reassessment of failure in American history. Indeed the men and women who fought segregation failed to halt the growth of Jim Crow. Because the protests were not successful, this story has not been highlighted as an important chapter in the history of black resistance. With the exception of the groundbreaking article by August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, "The Boycott Movement Against Jim Crow Streetcars" scholars have not engaged in extended study of the mass dissent against the segregation of public conveyances at the turn of the twentieth century. The notable exceptions are the works of legal, business, and economic historians who have examined segregation. But none of the existing studies connect an examination of African American life and political culture to the history of protest. As Robin D.G. Kelley noted, "while the primary project of civil rights

scholarship has been to examine desegregation, the study of black resistance to segregated public space remains one of the least developed areas of inquiry." (Kelley, 1996) This project is an important new addition to the history of American civil rights.

The project highlights a crucial turning point in American history. The turn of the century has been characterized as the "nadir", a time when political repression and extra-legal violence stunted the lives of all black southerners. This era is also characterized as the age of accommodation, when black southerners, led by Booker T. Washington, de-emphasized a demand for their rights in favor of economic advancement. Historians have accurately outlined the ways in which black communities turned within, seeking to develop a separate institutional life, in order to counter the barbs of racial segregation. Indeed important new scholarship reveals the development of African American civil society, vibrant communities of churches, businesses, and social clubs growing "behind the veil". Indeed, black southerners worked to strengthen their communities, but that focus did not divorce them from the defense of their citizenship. "Right to Ride" builds on this scholarship and complicates our understandings of the place of protest in this dire period.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The project begins with the efforts in New Orleans to contest unfair conditions on trains. Chapter one reveals that both the Creoles of color and the Americanized black middle class protested by employing radically different understandings of the meaning of race. The second chapter continues with an examination of the collective organizing to contest the passage of the Separate Car Law of 1890. Tracing the history of two protest organizations, the American Citizens Equal Rights Association and the Citizens' Committee, the chapter outlines how color and culture in New Orleans divided the protest community.

Despite the devastating national defeat of the Plessy case, African Americans continued to challenge the encroachment of segregation laws. The next part of the project examines the popular protests waged against the segregation of southern streetcars. The third chapter continues an inquiry into protest in New Orleans, examining the efforts of Americanized blacks to fight streetcar segregation. Although black New Orleans was united in its effort to end the humiliation of being literally caged in at the backs of streetcars, the chapter traces how divisions over approach stalled efforts at a unified protest.

The fourth chapter traces the 1904 streetcar boycott movement in Richmond. When Virginia Passenger and Power decided to enforce a voluntary state segregation law, leaders from the black business and fraternal communities pressed for an immediate boycott. Tracing the writings of boycott leaders John Mitchell Jr. and Maggie Lena Walker, the chapter outlines how questions of blame and culpability shaped the battle against segregation. The fifth chapter explores the history of protest in Savannah, tracing how protestors boycotted segregated streetcars in the shadow of violence, repression, and a race riot in nearby Atlanta. But in the end, tensions within the community, economic intimidation, and the treachery of the streetcar company, not violence, undid the impressive boycott.

WORK PLAN

One of the strengths of the current manuscript is the multiplicity of voices that are employed as sources. The project currently draws on twenty historically black and white newspapers, court documents, archival collections of black leaders, city directories, census records, state segregation laws, city ordinances, corporate utility records, federal case law, historic maps, and photographs. The breadth of sources allows the project to trace the development of segregation and protest from multiple perspectives, allowing the reader to explore the viewpoints of a variety of historical actors. For example, the manuscript not only explores the arguments that African Americans made in response to the segregation laws put forth by white lawmakers, but also traces the debates within the community of protest about the best way to proceed.

My research revealed that the fight over the segregation of trains and streetcars brought unexpected enemies and allies. For example, not all black newspapers supported black protests. The Atlanta Independent, under the sway of Booker T. Washington who opposed agitation, silently ignored the boycotts and suits put forth by blacks across the South, stifling the efforts at a south-wide protest. A historically white newspaper, The Daily Picayune, carefully traced the attempts to segregate the streetcars of New Orleans, and provided detailed and supportive accounts of the efforts of African Americans to resist the changes in the law.

The records of streetcar companies have been particularly helpful. My initial examination of the George Johnson Baldwin Papers of the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill was invaluable. The Baldwin papers demonstrate the hesitancy of the company leaders to enforce the law separating passengers by race. Baldwin, president of the Savannah Electric Company, believed that the sudden attempt to enforce the decade old the law had less to do with race, and more to do with local efforts to bankrupt and take over the streetcar company. Baldwin's correspondence reveals the racial climate on the cars prior to the passage of the laws, the initial success of the black community's protest of segregation, and the clandestine measures the company took to undermine the success of the protest. The inclusion of a variety of documents helps to reveal unexpected tensions; the fears of railroad and streetcar managers who were reluctant to segregate, citing the unnecessary cost of running separate cars for black passengers, dreading the protests of black customers, fearful of inciting racial unrest, but in the end, unwilling and unable to challenge the rules of race in the Jim Crow South.

With the grant from the NEH, I would examine three important additional sources and incorporate them into the manuscript. The archives of Virginia Passenger and Power have recently been made available. An initial examination of the holdings reveals that the records carefully trace the events of 1904 and the subsequent bankruptcy of the streetcar company. The NEH grant would provide the funds necessary for extensive research of this newly available source. I would also use this time at the Library of Virginia to trace the bankruptcy of Virginia Passenger and Power. Protest leader John Mitchell, Jr. believed that the company was bankrupted by the financial blow dealt by the successful protest of black passengers opposed to Jim Crow segregation. An examination of the documents will reveal to what extent company officials made similar claims to the court.

And finally I would use the NEH grant to complete my research in the Baldwin Papers at the Southern Historical Collection in Chapel Hill. Baldwin not only served as president of the streetcar company in Savannah, but also six other southern cities. Further examination of the papers would enrich the comparative perspective that is an important part of the manuscript.

As a whole, the project reveals how African Americans responded to the rise of segregation at the turn of the twentieth century. This project traces how African Americans fought for their "right to ...ride," unimpeded by shame or degradation. The history of this movement enriches our understandings of the difficulties present in every struggle for justice. The NEH Summer award will add to the variety and depth of the sources I can include in this crucial narrative of American history.

Church Records, First African Baptist Church, Savannah, GA.
City of Richmond Records, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA.
George Johnson Baldwin Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina,
Chapel Hill.
Historic New Orleans Collection, Williams Research Center, New Orleans, LA.
Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, DC.
Nannie Helen Burroughs Papers. Mary Church Terrell Papers. Booker T. Washington
Papers. Records of the National Negro Business League.
Maggie Lena Walker Papers, Maggie Lena Walker National Historic Site, Richmond, Virginia.
P.B.S. Pinchback Papers, Moorland-Spangarn Research Collection, Howard University,
Washington, DC.
Plessy v. Ferguson Records, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.
R.L. Desdunes, Papers Xavier University Library, New Orleans, LA.
United States City Directories, 1882-1901, New Orleans, LA, Richmond, VA,
Savannah, GA. Research Publications, Inc., New Haven, CT.

CRUSADER, New Orleans, LA.; RICHMOND PLANET, Richmond, VA.; SAINT LUKE
HERALD, Richmond, VA.; SAVANNAH MORNING NEWS, Savannah, GA.; SAVANNAH
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