

*Essays in Economic & Business History*

2023, 41 (2)

Special Issue: The Economic and  
Business History of Black Americans



Guest Editors: Gary A. Hoover, Matthew D. Mitchell, Daniel C.  
Giedeman

Copyright © 2023, The Economic and Business History Society. This is an open access journal. Users may read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of the articles in this journal without asking prior permission from the publisher or the author.

ISSN 2376-9459 (online) LCC 79-91616 HC12.E2

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



## Contents

Reassessing the Contributions of Black Inventors to the Golden Age of Innovation Michael J. Andrews and Jonathan T. Rothwell	1-39
Contributions of Black Entrepreneurs to the US Whaling Industry, Abolition, and Other Civil Rights Valerie Ellen Mock	40-62
Mobility and Opportunity: Black Business Owners and Inventors Cross the US-Canada Borders Adam Arenson	63-83
A Comparative Portrait of Long-Run Racial Disparity in the United States and Brazil Justin R. Bucciferro	84-110
The Black Dollar in Nineteenth-Century Baltimore Marcus Anthony Allen	111-131
License to Exclude: Black Barbers in Arkansas Tanner Corley, Wendy Lucas and Marcus Witcher	132-148
Bad Men, Good Roads, Jim Crow, and the Economics of Southern Chain Gangs Howard Bodenhorn	149-170
“The Race was on Trial”—Migrant Adjustment in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh During the Great Migration Nina Banks	171-185
“So why can’t they finance Black Power?” Howard Lamar Fuller’s Fight for Black Control of Black Housing in North Carolina, 1965-1969 Anthony M. Donaldson Jr.	186-207

## Introduction to the Special Issue

The economic and business history of Black Americans remain significantly understudied topics despite their importance in United States history. Recognizing the need for additional research in these areas, the Board of Trustees of The Economic and Business History Society (EBHS) commissioned *Essays in Economic & Business History* to publish a special issue on these topics. An open call for paper proposals was issued in the spring of 2021 and, following a standard review process, nine papers were eventually selected for publication.<sup>1</sup> These papers, authored by both up-and-coming and established scholars, cover a breadth of topics and can be grouped loosely into five main themes: innovators, inventors, and entrepreneurs; international comparisons; community wealth; government involvement in the economies and lives of Black Americans; and researchers and activists.

Michael Andrews and Jonathan Rothwell open our section on innovators, inventors, and entrepreneurs with an exploration of patenting by Black Americans during the second industrial revolution from 1870 to 1940. They argue that the racial oppression of the Southern states, where most Black Americans continued to live during these years, accounts for the relatively low rate of inventiveness by Black Americans nationwide. They find that Black Americans in the somewhat less oppressive Northern states acquired patents at rates comparable to the most inventive demographic groups in the US during the period. Turning to the period before the Civil War, Valerie Mock highlights opportunities that Black sailors and entrepreneurs found in the whaling industry. She details the lives, experiences, and contributions of ten of these individuals, and examines the participation of several of these entrepreneurs (and their families) in the abolitionist movement.

Adam Arenson begins the section on international comparisons with his finding that the careers of seven successful Black entrepreneurs benefited from their ability to freely move themselves and their business investments back and forth across the border between Canada and the United States. Justin Bucciferro employs sophisticated econometric techniques to compare racial disparities in education, demographics, and migration between the United States and Brazil. Bucciferro demonstrates that, while both countries have seen improvements in racial equality, they have diverged in their timing, with the United States experiencing much of the decline in its disparities during the 1960s while Brazil did so in the first decade of the 2000s.

Turning to the wealth that existed within historic Black communities in the United States, Marcus Allen suggests that the money circulating in and through Black Baltimore in the late nineteenth century entitles it to consideration alongside the more prominent Black Wall Streets of Tulsa, Richmond, and Chicago. According to Allen, these “Black dollars” supported the churches, schools, and community organizations that made Baltimore the “Black Capital of the 19th century”. Elsewhere in the United States, however, the lives of Black Americans were impacted by the use of government policy to restrict their ability to build community wealth and by the brutality suffered while incarcerated. Tanner Corley, Wendy Lucas, and Marcus Witcher study the effects of operational licensing rules in the barber industry in Arkansas in the mid-twentieth century. They find that these policies, which garnered support from white barbers eager to limit competition, pushed Black barbers out of the industry. The authors argue that the ramifications of these rules are still being felt today. Howard Bodenhorn investigates the use of chain-gang labor for road maintenance in early-twentieth century South Carolina. He finds that, contrary to prevailing thought, this practice may have been efficient from a purely

---

<sup>1</sup> All of these papers were submitted to *Essays in Economic & Business History* without any guarantee of publication. Submitted papers went through the regular double-blind reviewing process, and were revised in response to comments by the anonymous external reviewers. Not all papers that were submitted for this special issue were accepted for inclusion.

economic perspective. He confirms, though, that chain-gangs were overwhelmingly made up of young, disenfranchised Black men who were treated severely in many cases, thus highlighting the use of chain-gangs as an example of the plunder of Black bodies.

But Black researchers and activists worked to counter such regulatory and physical assaults and to identify and develop new paths of economic opportunity, as our final two papers demonstrate. Continuing her longstanding research on Sadie Alexander, the first Black American to earn a doctorate in economics in the United States, Nina Banks examines Alexander's academic partnership with the second Black American to earn a doctorate in economics, Abram Harris Jr. Not only did Alexander and Harris analyze the migration of Blacks from the South to Northern industrial cities such as Philadelphia and Pittsburgh in the 1920s; they also offered the migrants recommendations intended to facilitate their adjustment to life in the industrial North and to improve social and economic conditions for Black Americans in general. Anthony Donaldson next presents a study of Howard Fuller's activist work as a community organizer and housing advocate in North Carolina in the 1960s. Donaldson describes how Fuller was able to initiate a change in the political control of Black Durham from elites to poor Black residents. He presents Fuller as representing a combination of Martin Luther King Jr.'s antipoverty goals with Malcolm X's more militant methods.

The primary goal of this special issue is to increase the economic and history professions' awareness of recent studies into Black American economic and business history and to spotlight the work of scholars who are conducting such research. We would like to thank the many reviewers, authors, and staff who worked to make this special issue possible. We hope that you will enjoy reading this collection of papers, and that the issue will stimulate continued research in these and other related areas. The editors of *Essays in Economic & Business History* look forward to receiving submissions which lead to the publication of further work in these areas.

Gary A. Hoover (The Murphy Institute, Tulane University)  
Matthew D. Mitchell (Sewanee: The University of the South)  
Daniel C. Giedeman (Grand Valley State University)

November 2023