"All Kinds of Money": Black Women on the Moving and the Policing of Urban Alley Workers, 1900-1935

jub Sankofa
Yale University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, jubsankofa@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/gsas_dissertations

Recommended Citation
Sankofa, jub, "'All Kinds of Money': Black Women on the Moving and the Policing of Urban Alley Workers, 1900-1935" (2022). Yale Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Dissertations. 654.
https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/gsas_dissertations/654

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. It has been accepted for inclusion in Yale Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Dissertations by an authorized administrator of EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. For more information, please contact elischolar@yale.edu.
Abstract

“All Kinds of Money”: Black Women on the Move and the Policing of Urban Alley Workers, 1900-1935

jub Sankofa

2022

“All Kinds of Money”: Black Women on the Move and the Policing of Urban Alley Workers, 1900-1935 is a story about labor refusal, informal wage earning, and the rise of “criminal” identification in North America. My dissertation examines the migration, working, and carceral histories of Black women dubbed by police and press as “rollers” and “alley workers.” By the turn of the 20th century, white newspaper outlets regularly printed articles with headlines such as “Rolled by a Negress,” “Caught White Man in Alley,” and “Gang of Negresses Prey On White Men.” The racializing and labeling of rollers as a professional “criminal” class evolved from the everyday police complaints that came from white male Johns reporting that a “negress prostitute” had picked their pockets for a wallet or roll of cash.

As a unique form of underground labor resistance, rolling Johns reflected an unorthodox picket line, a general strike, or an uprising against the criminalization and economic exploitation of Black women’s sexuality. Instead of a set wage, rollers insisted that men pay with all the cash they carried, even if it meant their last cent. I weave prison and police files, newspapers, and maps together to provide a social, legal, and geographical history of urban rollers and alley workers in North America between 1900 and 1935. I follow Nettie Weems—a notorious roller marked by police in as many as 12 different cities from Chicago to Vancouver to California—over a 20-year period. Weems’ migration and working history provides an alternative narrative to the Great Migration settlement story. Organized in four parts, each with two chapters, I map Black women’s migration patterns; how they confronted sex work and how they were policed and prosecuted in the urban city.

Part One, “Looking for a Fugitive Negress” examines Black women on the move and the rise of criminal identification in North America from the 1850’s to the 1930’s. This part begins with a teenage Weems on the run as a “fugitive from Justice” in Chicago in 1914. Part Two, “Has Pictures of her in Various Cities,” follows Weems across the border to British Columbia, Canada in 1925 where one Black migrant woman stated there was “all kinds of money” in Vancouver’s underground sex economy. I reveal how police identification and surveillance technologies, including fingerprints and mug shots, followed
migrant sex workers across city, state, and international borders. Police tracking also illuminates the extreme mobility of rollers in North America in the early 20th century.

The third part, “Police Have Declared War,” examines the social construction of urban rollers and alley workers and the aggressive city-wide campaigns targeting Black women. Chapters five and six highlight Weems’ migration from Vancouver back across the US border to Washington then to Sacramento where she hides out as a fugitive in 1925 before serving a four-year prison term at San Quentin State Prison in California. The final part, “Comet in its Orbital Track” follows Weems out of prison in California where she travels back to British Columbia and up and down the pacific west coast during the Great Depression. During this period, Weems served a prison term in Canada and Washington state for rolling Johns. Police in many cities on the West coast had a record of her career as a roller, fugitive, and formerly imprisoned woman. The concluding chapters uses arrest records to map and illuminate the impact of policing and vagrancy laws on the forced and unforced migrations of Black itinerant sex workers like Nettie Weems.
“All Kinds of Money”:
Black Women on the Move and the Policing of Urban Alley Workers, 1900-1935

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
Of
Yale University
In Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
jub Sankofa

Dissertation Director: Crystal Nicole Feimster

May 2022
© 2022 by jub Sankofa
All Rights Reserved.
Table of Contents

List of Illustrations .................................................................................................................. viii
Dedication ................................................................................................................................. xiii
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. xiv
Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 1

Black Itinerant Rollers and the First Wave of the Great Migration

PART ONE .................................................................................................................................... 32

“Looking for a Fugitive Negress”

Chapter One ............................................................................................................................... 36

The Rise of Criminal Identification in North America, 1850-1935

Chapter Two ............................................................................................................................. 61

Black Women on the Move and Resisting Detection

PART TWO ................................................................................................................................... 96

‘Has Pictures of her in Various Cities’

Chapter Three .......................................................................................................................... 102

“Mugged a Number of Times”

Chapter Four ............................................................................................................................ 119

All Kinds of Money in Vancouver

PART THREE ............................................................................................................................. 171

“Police Have Declared War”

Chapter Five ......................................................................................................................... 182

“Negresses Prey on White Men”: Racial Sex Economies and the Rise of the Urban Alley Worker

Chapter Six ............................................................................................................................... 214

“Constant War on Prostitutes”: Spatial Policing and Racial Surveillance in Sacramento

PART FOUR ................................................................................................................................ 241

“Comet in its Orbital Track”
Chapter Seven .................................................................................................................. 245

“Song of the Open Road”:
Pay Cash, Go to Jail, Or Leave Town

Chapter Eight .................................................................................................................. 260

Mapping Black Itinerant Women

Closing .............................................................................................................................. 296

Geographies of Survival

Bibliography .................................................................................................................... 303
List of Illustrations

Figure i.1  Map of Nettie Weems traveling from Tacoma, Washington to Vancouver to Nanaimo, B.C., 1930 .................................................................21

Figure 1.1 $20 Fugitive Reward Advertisement, 1838 .................................................................37

Figure 1.2 $40 Fugitive Reward Advertisement, 1828 .................................................................38

Figure 1.3 Sketch of Alphonse Bertillon’s Anthropometric system ........................................41

Figure 1.4 Dollie Bibbs (aka Nettie Weems) no.10989 .................................................................49
reprinted from Sacramento Police Department mug Book, 1923-1925

Figure 1.5 Identification Portraits of Will West and William West ..............................................53

Figure 1.6 Arrest History of Florence Hicks (aka Nettie Weems) no. 56866 ...............................60
reprinted from San Quentin Inmate Files

Figure 2.1 Stella Moore, “female highwayman . . true western style” ...........................................63
reprint from Spokane Press, 1907

Figure 2.2 Map of Belle Henderson’s Travels as a fugitive, 1890 ..............................................75

Figure 2.3 Map of Belle Henderson’s movements in the Midwest, 1890 .....................................76

Figure 2.4 Map of Estelle Williams’ Arrest history in the Pacific Northwest ..........................86

Figure 2.5 Map of Estelle Williams’ Movements in the Pacific Northwest ..............................87

Figure 2.6 Lorraine Henderson no. 50786 .................................................................89
reprinted from Sacramento Police Department copy of San Francisco mug book, 1932-1934

Figure 3.1 Nettie Weems collage of identification portraits .....................................................97
reprinted from various police departments

Figure 3.2 Map of Nettie Weems’ arrest history between 1915-1925 .........................................99

Figure 3.3 Flossie Douglas, alias, ‘Thousand-Dollar Flossie’ .....................................................105
reprinted from the Buffalo Courier, 1904

Figure 3.4 “Drive Em out” Campaign ...................................................................................113
reprinted from Seattle Star, 1905

Figure 3.5 Map of Julia Crews’ Police Identification Record in 9 Cities, 1911 .....................116

Figure 4.1 Irene Benson no. L1990 ...................................................................................127
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917

Figure 4.2 Virgil Thuman no. L116 ....................................................................................129
reprinted from Vancouver Police Identification Photograph
Figure 4.3 Ida Brown no. 417…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………
Figure 5.1 Map of Nettie Weems traveling from Vancouver to Snohomish, Washington

Figure 5.2 Marie Washington Wanted Poster, 1922
reprinted from Sacramento Police Department Ethnic Groups Wanted Bulletins, 1917-1927

Figure 5.3 Map of Nettie Weems traveling south on the Pacific West Coast as a fugitive, 1925

Figure 5.4 “Negro Pickpockets Must Leave Spokane”
reprinted from Spokane Press

Figure 6.1 Mamie Gardner no. 26304
reprint from Sacramento Police Department copy of San Quentin State Prison Women Mug Book, 1911-1926

Figure 6.2 Mamie Gardner no. 11070
reprint from Sacramento Police mug book, 1925-1927

Figure 6.3 Grace Jackson no. 4825, “Suspected Alley Worker”
reprinted from Sacramento Police Department copy of San Diego, Long Beach, Tacoma, and Denver mug books, 1922-1928

Figure 6.4 Ruby King no. 4820, “Suspected Roller”
reprinted from Sacramento Police Department copy of San Diego, Long Beach, Tacoma, and Denver mug books, 1922-1928

Figure 6.5 Josephine Allen no. 4788, “Alley Worker”
reprinted from Sacramento Police Department copy of San Diego, Long Beach, Tacoma, and Denver mug books, 1922-1928

Figure 6.6 Beulah Smith no.10287, “Alley Rat”
reprinted from Sacramento Police Department copy of Oakland mug book, 1923-1927

Figure 6.7 Marie Martin no. 10353, “Alley Rat”
reprinted from Sacramento Police Department copy of Oakland mug book, 1923-1927

Figure 6.8 Nellie Dempsey no. 9956, “Alley Creeper”
reprinted from Sacramento Police Department mug book, 1921-1923

Figure 7.1 Map of California Sheriffs exporting Nettie Weems to San Quentin State Prison, 1925

Figure 7.2 “Dusky Vamp Told to Leave Binghamton”
reprint from Press and Sun Bulletin, 1923
Dedication

To my unnamed ancestors,
    thank you
To Elizabeth, born enslaved,
    you crossed the river

To Rosa, Martha, Elizabeth, and Helen
    you continued the journey to be free

To Mary, Evelyn, Robert, Roberta, Betty, and James
    the gifts and lessons you gave live through me

To Beloved Barb, my mother, a survivor
    I dedicate my everything to you

To Andre, my father figure and dear brother
    Without you, I would not have made it this far

To Melvin, LaToya, and Brandon
    You kept me grounded

To my cousins and kinfolk
    I am forever grateful

To my dear wife jasmine Sankofa
    Thank you for loving me without limitations, providing unconditional support
    and
    for seeing me through

To Aubrey, my loving daughter
    I am because you are, you are because I am

To the Black women whose stories
    of struggle, resilience, and resistance
    inspired me
    You are not forgotten
    I dedicate this dissertation in your honor
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank all of the people that played a role in the completion of this project. Without the special support of friends, family, and a host of scholars and advisors, I would not have made it this far. I am forever indebted to all the different ways that people have showed up to support my journey. I cannot thank professors Nikki Taylor and Earl Wright Jr., and the McNair Scholars program at the University of Cincinnati enough for preparing me to pursue graduate studies and a doctoral degree. To Dr. Cheri Westmoreland, Valda Bronston, and Stephanie Davis, I am thankful for the program and community you cultivated for me as an undergraduate student. The opportunity to begin my graduate research and teaching in the African American studies department at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) gave me the greatest opportunities to work with scholars and practitioners that helped define my research and writing. To professors Kelly Lytle-Hernandez, Sarah Haley, Robin D.G. Kelley, and many others, thank you for the mentorship and guidance that helped define my historical research and writing skills.

The last six years as a graduate student in the joint departments of African American Studies and American Studies helped me expand on my research and teaching interests in ways I never imagined. The public humanities program gave me a chance to think about my research and teaching from a multi-disciplinary approach, from digital humanities to documentary studies. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with the members of my dissertation committee. To Laura Wexler and Caleb Smith, I appreciate all the feedback and support you offered along the way. Professor Crystal Feimster directed my dissertation from start to finish and has been instrumental in the culmination of this dissertation project. Thank you for your support and commitment to helping me cross the finish line. I am grateful to have advisors, staff, and friends that have provided a community for me to grow personally and academically over the last decade.

I cannot forget all of the researchers, writing groups, and archivist that have helped shape this project in many ways. To the archivist at the California State Archives in Sacramento, I am forever indebted to all the days you spent helping me search for people in the records. To the Rebel Writing Collective, thank you for helping to forge a virtual community of writers and thinkers when it seemed the world had shut down. I want to thank all of the staff that have labored for me and other students to have the best experiences inside and outside of the classroom.
I want to say that none of this would have been possible without my mother, brothers, sister, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends that have been by my side for as long as I can remember. You never gave up on me even when I almost gave up on myself. Family is everything and I would not ask for it to be any other way. My brother Andre never got a chance to see me graduate from high school but has always been by my side telling me to never give up as I reach for new heights. It was you that planted the most lasting seed within me. Your light has guided me.

Before I ever imagined graduate school, I became a father to my beautiful daughter Aubrey. Every day when I see you, I see everything that it took to make it through this marathon. To Ezzie, the role you have played has not gone unnoticed. Thank you. I cannot thank my wife jasmine Sankofa enough. You have been the person by my side day in and day out throughout this entire process. To my life partner, you are my orange moon, and I am forever grateful that you came into my life. For anyone that I did not mention, I apologize and just know that I appreciate you. This dissertation would not have made it this far without a community of people trusting, caring, and staying committed to me and my personal and professional aspirations. And so, I close with an African proverb that has guided me through this process; “judge each day, not by its harvest, but by the seeds you sow.”
Introduction

Black Itinerant Rollers and the First Wave of the Great Migration

Lucy Green is at the old stand working under the tutelage of ‘Diamond’ Flossie, the cleverest pickpocket in the United States, whose criminal record reaches across the continent.
- Seattle Star, 1905

Annie Hooly, a negress arrested in Winnipeg a few days ago for holding up people on the streets, has a local record, and is well known to the police of Vancouver, Seattle, Spokane and several other cities. The woman is supposed to be the most dangerous female crook on the continent.
- Victoria Colonist, 1907

In the arrest of Julia Crews, a negress, yesterday by Detectives Morgan and Wallace at Second and Scott street, it is thought by the Detective Department that they have interfered with the plans of one of the cleverest negro criminal organizations that have ever operated in the South. The negress is said to be widely known in the United States, having police records in New York, Chicago, Denver, Fort Worth, Dallas, Omaha, Seattle, Oklahoma, and Hot Springs.
- Daily Arkansas Gazette, 1911

With a small diamond set in nearly every tooth in her head, Mabel Walker, alias Mabel Small, alias Mabel McNeil, alias the Diamond Kid, was arrested at 204 Montcalm street, Monday and haled to police headquarters to answer to the charge of being a fugitive from Justice. Mabel, who is a Negress, 27 years old, is listed with the police of every big city in the country as the cleverest diamond snatcher and all around thief in the business.
- Detroit Free Press, 1916

On August 4, 1930, police in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada jailed Nettie Weems on a charge of theft over $10.00.1 A man accused her of picking his pockets on the streets of Hogan’s Alley, a multi-ethnic enclave where Black migrant women from the U.S. labored in the formal and informal economies.2 After detaining Weems for a week, prosecutors dismissed the case and released her from jail because either the

---

1. Florence Hicks, Imprisoned no. 56866 [Nettie Weems], San Quentin Inmate Files (SQIF). Weems made a habit of giving law enforcement fictional names. Florence Hicks was a name that was not recorded until 1934. Hence, I use Nettie Weems throughout this dissertation to identify this woman.

complaining witness refused to testify in court or due to lack of corroborating evidence.

For Weems, the detainment in jail by Vancouver authorities in 1930 was her second confrontation with criminal courts in Canada for taking cash from a white man. Five years earlier, an out of town visitor had accused Weems of removing $85.00 “from his trousers watch pocket.” A prosecutor dismissed the case, but that did not prevent Weems’ image from entering the Vancouver Rogues’ Gallery. Despite the cases being dismissed, Vancouver officials mugged and fingerprinted Weems in 1925 and 1930 and had shared their criminal identification database with law enforcement in the United States. Weems was traveling back and forth across the US/Canadian border at a time when most Black Americans were settling in urban cities in the North, Midwest, and American West. Her presence in British Columbia provides insight into Black geographies beyond the borders of the United States that have primarily remained invisible in migration studies.

One of the central themes of Black migration history in North America is the Southern exodus. After the Civil War, the emancipation proclamation empowered Black Americans with a freedom of movement that had not existed for centuries. Prior to this, the legal institution of chattel enslavement confined most Black Americans to southern states. The expansion of the transcontinental railway system—from Mexico to Canada—would play a critical role in Black mobility throughout North America. In the late 19th century, as


4. As early as 1902, Vancouver identification officials forced everyone accused of a crime to “have their portraits taken for distribution amongst the rogues’ galleries of the Pacific coast cities.” See, “Objected To Jail Portraits,” *Province* (Vancouver, British Columbia), September 8, 1902, newspapers.com (accessed October 21, 2020). Rogues’ Galleries were rooms and identification records such as mug books that were used to profile people accused of crimes and repeat offenders. For more on the value of mugging and identification galleries in Vancouver, see, “Rogues Gallery and Why It is Kept: Evil-Doers For Whom the Police Are Always Watching Until They Known Them Dead—Stories From the Album of Crime,” *Vancouver Daily World*, June 9, 1905, newspapers.com (accessed October 21, 2020). Chapter one will go more into the rise of Rogues’ Galleries and identification photography in North America.


6. In the centuries leading up to the Civil War, there was the Middle Passage across the Atlantic, large-scale transport of enslaved people around the Caribbean and up and down the Atlantic coast, and an internal slave trade between the Upper and Lower South, as well as the clandestine passages of fugitives. From the 15th to the 19th century, the movement of Black bodies was primarily centered around the shipping industry, mobility across oceans, and the geography of plantation life.

many as 100,000 to 200,000 Black southerners left the lands of their enslaved ancestors. Black southerners first began moving from rural areas to urban industrial cities in the south and then came larger groups migrating to northern urban cities. Each decade after, more Black migrants fled the south.

In the decade leading up to the First World War, one of the most dramatic events in US history began to unfold. It was sudden, yet it captured a collective spirit of Black American consciousness. Over the next sixty years or so, as many as six million Black Americans would migrate out of the South. Their mass exodus—coined “the Great Migration”—occurred in two waves and transformed the urban demographics in the United States. Up through the First War, an estimated 400,000 to 700,000 Black southerners populated northern, midwestern, and western cities. In the 1920’s following WW I, as many as 500,000 more Black Americans joined the southern exodus. The first wave was halted by the Great Depression in the 1930’s. The second


half of the Great Migration continued following World War II and lasted for another thirty years. This wave was even more dramatic than the first with millions of more Black migrants on the move.

Langston Hughes—a famous Black American writer—beautifully articulates the push and pull factors of the southern Black exodus in his poem “One Way Ticket.” He captures Black migrants’ hopes and desires for a better life in urban cities across the country. Hughes writes:

I pick up my life
And take it with me
And put it down in
Chicago, Detroit,
Buffalo, Scranton,
Any place that is
North and East—
And not Dixie,

I pick up my life
And take it on the train
To Los Angeles, Bakersfield,
Seattle, Oakland, Salt Lake,
Any place that is
North and West—
And not South

I am fed up
With Jim Crow Laws
People who are cruel
And afraid,
Who lynch and run,
Who are scared of me
And me of them.

I pick up my life
And take it away
On a one-way ticket—
Gone up North,
Gone out West,
Gone!13

Hughes captures the overall sentiment of Black people picking up their lives and leaving the U.S. South with a one way ticket, North, East, and West. Jacob Lawrence’s artwork visualizes the Great Migration in a

---

13. Langston Hughes, Jacob Lawrence, Hugh Heyne Smythe, and Mabel Murphy Smythe, One-Way Ticket (New York: Knopf, 1949).
remarkable fashion.\textsuperscript{14}

Histories of the Great Migration primarily highlight a small select proportion of the migrants involved in this massive movement of Black people and have generally centered the story of fleeing the South and settling in new cities.\textsuperscript{15} My dissertation veers from this narrative and follows Weems and other migrating Black women who refused to settle and instead moved from region to region during the first wave of the Great Migration to reveal migration routes that have been long overlooked or forgotten. The common theme of the one way settlement story in Black migration studies often obscures mobility and the migration histories of individuals, such as Nettie Weems, not born in the US South and/or never permanently settled in one city during the years of the Great Migration.\textsuperscript{16}

Weems lived many of her young adult years moving from one city to another. She did not leave behind a diary or firsthand sources that detail her working and migration history. However, a biographical sketch that she provided to California penal authorities leaves geographical traces of her life and movements on the Pacific west coast. Or at least, this is what she wanted them to know. Weems reported that she was born in Oakland, California around 1899 and that she lived there until 1910. Following this, her family moved north to the

\begin{itemize}
\item Weems reported that she was born in Oakland, California around 1899 and that she lived there until 1910. Following this, her family moved north to the
\item Weems lived many of her young adult years moving from one city to another. She did not leave behind a diary or firsthand sources that detail her working and migration history. However, a biographical sketch that she provided to California penal authorities leaves geographical traces of her life and movements on the Pacific west coast. Or at least, this is what she wanted them to know. Weems reported that she was born in Oakland, California around 1899 and that she lived there until 1910. Following this, her family moved north to the
\end{itemize}

\begin{itemize}
\item 14. On art and the Great Migration see, Jacob Lawrence’s artwork. Elsa Smithgall, “The Migration Series,” lawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org (accessed June 19, 2016). “The website has been launched in conjunction with the exhibition People on the Move: Beauty and Struggle in Jacob Lawrence’s Migration Series, organized by The Phillips Collection and the Museum of Modern Art in collaboration with the Schomburg Center of Research in Black Culture.”
\item 16. Weems’ prison case file is a part of a collection of records housed at the California State Archives. Only 10% percent of the records from this period remain. Out of the thirty or so remaining archives of incarcerated Black women in the 1920’s and 30’s, Weems’ case file was not an anomaly in terms of multiple arrest histories in numerous jurisdictions prior to her prison sentences in California. The CBCII constructed arrest histories across broad geographical regions on every incarcerated person in California. The compilation of archival sources included in these case files, from arrest records and mugshots to court outcomes to probation and parole investigations reveal important details about Black women’s migration patterns and experiences with police, courts, and confinement.
\end{itemize}
Everett and Seattle, Washington region, which was 115 miles away from the US/Canadian border.\textsuperscript{17} Weems recounted migrating to port cities on the Pacific West Coast from Oakland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, Everett and Seattle to the British Columbia cities of Victoria and Vancouver.

Young Black women on the move to and through urban cities—especially on the West Coast—during the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century have not been the primary subjects of migration studies. Furthermore, it is imperative to illuminate the Black West in migration histories.\textsuperscript{18} There are several historical analyses that have pushed scholars to examine urban Black life through the lens of race, gender, class, and sexuality.\textsuperscript{19} These scholars illuminate the varying experiences of young Black women in the urban city from work, love, leisure, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, to sexual liberation. Weems came of age during the onset of the Great Migration when the increased presence of single Black women had sparked a moral panic in the urban city.

In “Policing the Black Woman’s Body in an Urban Context,” Hazel Carby illuminates how manufactured stories about Black women’s laziness, sexual deviance, and licentious lifestyles was seen as a threat to the social, political, and moral fabric of a respectable urban Black and white middle class. The

\textsuperscript{17} On Black communities in Oakland and Seattle in the late 19th and early 20th century, see Chris Rhomberg, \textit{No There There: Race, Class, and Political Community in Oakland} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Quintard Taylor, \textit{The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle’s Central District, from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era} (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).


collective theory that incorrigible Black women reflected an urban problem in need of moral discipline and control led to the collaboration of Black and white social reform organizations, institutions, and carceral systems dedicated to controlling and policing the bodies and behaviors of urban Black women. Migrating Black women had their own reasons for leaving the South. Like Black men they were compelled by poverty, economics, and the threat of lynching—but they were also motivated by the everyday threat of patriarchy, male violence, and sexual vulnerability.

Darlene Clark Hine argues that the inner lives, motives, and desires of urban Black women has been underexamined due to what she calls a “culture of dissemblance”—a collective consciousness around keeping aspects of their lives secret. Migrating Black women concealed their true feelings and past experiences with rape and domestic violence as a way of protecting themselves. Hine forces us to think beyond the promise of finding better paying work as the primary reason for Black women’s decisions to leave the South and to include Black women’s desire to escape the threat of sexual violence and their desire to reclaim control over their bodies and labor. The lack of primary sources on Black women’s intimate and personal lives makes it difficult to construct a comprehensive story about their everyday experiences with marriage, divorce, work, and migration in the urban city. Dreaming of a promising future in urban America was one thread of the Great Migration. Arriving in cities and surviving without the support of family networks presented new and different challenges.

Weems’ experience with the idea of marriage reflected the “traditional” respectable route imagined for


21. Darlene Clark Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14, no. 4 (1989): 913–14, https://doi.org/10.1086/494552. Hine writes, “Because of the interplay of racial animosity, class tensions, gender role differentiation, and regional economic variations, Black women, as a rule, developed and adhered to a cult of secrecy, a culture of dissemblance, to protect the sanctity of inner aspects of their lives. The dynamic of dissemblance involved creating the appearance of disclosure, or openness about themselves and their feelings, while actually remaining an enigma.”
young women in America.22 She mentioned that she “left home at 15 to get married.”23 However, Weems would not end up marrying as a teenager and notes that she was “[o]ut of work” and “got into trouble easily.”24 The few working opportunities offered to young Black women up through the first wave of the Great Migration were limited to domestic duties and service jobs, from laundresses to cooks. Single young women were vulnerable to destitution and displacement in cities where they had no relatives and extended social networks if things did not work out or if they could not find sustainable employment. With dreams of a better life thwarted by the realities of urban life and limited working opportunities, many young Black women turned to creative forms of wage earning to survive and thrive, from running numbers, gambling, selling alcohol, hosting parties, to trading sexual favors for cash.25

The sex trade and off the books income provided some urban Black women the opportunity to earn wages while exploring leisure, pleasure, and sexual autonomy. For other urban Black women, informal wages

---


23. Florence Hicks, *Imprisoned*, no. 56866, SQIF. Several other Black women incarcerated by California penal authorities in the 1930’s mentioned marriage to older men and abuse in their teenage years and some of the reasons why they ran away from home. Lillian Jefferson pursued marriage in order “to get away from grand folks.” After one year, her “Aunt had marriage annulled because [Lilian] was too young.” Lillian recalls her husband being “very jealous.” Ollie Williams recalled getting married at the age of 16 and that she separated from her husband because he “was very jealous.” See Lillian Jefferson no. 57950, SQIF; Ollie Williams no. 58116, SQIF.

24. Ibid.

gave them more control over their time, labor, and working environment. Domestic work often meant living with white employers or traveling across the city daily only to suffer verbal, physical, and sexual abuse from white employers and their relatives. With most poor Black neighborhoods in proximity to former tenderloin districts, and the growing commercialization of saloons, cabarets, and dance outlets in urban cities, Black women became more aware of the disposable income carried by white men seeking cheap pleasure and amusements in Black districts.

The rise of “slumming” and interracial mingling added to the underground cash available to Black women that were out of work and out of luck in the urban city. Though Black sex workers engaged their trade with non-white men, including Black men, my dissertation focuses on Black women’s choices to solicit white men. Black sex workers had different reasons for turning to informal wage earning and making their trade exclusive to white men.

As a sociology thesis project on Black community life in Los Angeles, James McFarland Ervin interviewed a series of Black sex workers in the Great Depression. Their responses provide a lens into the personal and working lives of Black sex workers from the perspective of their own voice. One young Black woman recalled spiraling downward after a white male teacher raped her and forced her to undergo an abortion. Following this, she battled depression, dropped out of school and did not want to work. She stated, “I then turned to the game I am now in. I made good money . . . I don’t fool with Negro men. I like to have white trade because they will pay more. Then too I have decided that since a white son . . . started me off this way that I would make all white men pay and pay and pay . . . I’ve got a nice car, fine clothes, and I get what I want.” White men’s consistent pleasure seeking in Black districts with disposable income made the racial and economic disparities of the urban color line more noticeable.

---


28. As a sociology thesis project, James Erving conducted several qualitative interviews with Black and white sex workers. Also, for more on rollers and alley workers in Los Angeles, see James McFarline Ervin, “The Participation of the Negro in the Community Life of Los Angeles,” Thesis, (University of Southern California, 1931), 72.
Sex work was dangerous and drove many young urban women into depression and despair that was masked by alcoholism and secrecy. One sex worker stated, “I honestly don’ like to do what I am doing, but I don’t know anything else to do, now . . . [w]hen I have contacts with the mens it nearly kills me. Nobody knows what we poor girls have to suffer . . . All I know is that I likes to make good money and this is the only way I can make any.”

Though down and out of options, her insight illuminates why she and perhaps many other Black women found a glimpse of hope in choosing white male clients: “I like the white mens better . . . They gives you your money without any trouble.” Choosing to avoid Black men in the trade was a business decision that gave Black women control over their clientele.

Black sex workers were reluctant to engage their trade with Black men, specifically because it made their jobs easier to negotiate higher pay with white men who they knew had more disposable cash than Black men. Some Black sex workers with dreams of marriage someday preferred white men as a way of separating their working lives from their family and intimate relationships. However, not every Black sex worker cared to separate their working lives from the politics of respectability.

One migrant woman named Nell specifically marketed her services to white men and had no shame in telling them to promote her trade. “You can tell all of the S------ that for me . . . if you want a keen time just see me . . . Cause I don’t fool with niggers . . . I likes white mens . . . They aint cheap like these d--- nigger b-----.”

Turning to sex work often reflected the lack of legitimate wage earning opportunities available to urban Black women, but it also reflected a complete rejection of domestic and servant duties for some migrant women like Nell who did not care what white or Black people thought about her sexuality or working life. “You know what my game is . . . well that is just what I is and don’t give a d--- who knows . . . Im just plain hard Nell from Louisville.” Nell, like other Black sex workers, developed a working habit of looking for lookers, who were primarily white men.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. On politics of respectability, see note 22.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.
Despite the benefits of sex entrepreneurship in the lives of urban Black women, the trade did not come without stigmatization, frequent contact with police, and punishment. Furthermore, violence and sexual assaults against Black women—and particularly sex workers—was seen as a problem of their own making and often ignored by police.\footnote{See Danielle L. McGuire, \textit{At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance- a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power} (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).} Another under examined aspect of urban sex work is Black women’s confrontation with white men over pay and the terms of their services. There were no employment or legal rights for sex workers, which forced Black women to develop their own systems of promotion, labor insurance, and self-protection.

Within the world of urban sex economies, there was a class of Black women like Weems that not only rejected domestic and servant labor, but also rebelled against the sexual and racialized economic terms put forth by white men in their industry. Women involved in this urban rebellion left nothing up to negotiation and were dubbed by police and the press as “badgers,” “creep joints,” “rollers,” “drunk rollers,” “alley workers,” “alley creepers,” and “alley rats.”\footnote{These terms were constructed by police identification officials.} The racializing and caricatures of women in this line of work as a professional “criminal” class evolved out of the everyday complaints that came from primarily white male Johns reporting to police that a Black woman had picked their pockets.\footnote{I use the term and name [John Doe and John] throughout this dissertation to identify the primarily (not always) heterosexual white men that were involved in sex trade with Black women. Police protected Johns in private and public accounts that rarely revealed full names while simultaneously highlighting Black women’s full names and aliases in the press.}

The discourse of rolling Johns centered throughout this dissertation builds on Kali Gross’ chapter titled “Tricking the Tricks” examined in her book, \textit{Colored Amazons}.\footnote{Kali Gross, \textit{Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880-1910} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 72.} Mobility and sexual performance were keys to success in the roller business.\footnote{At the center of every roller job was some form of performative sexual desire used to distract men long enough to extract wallets. For more on race, performance, and the politics of freedom in the United States and throughout the Black Atlantic from the mid 19th to the early 20th century, see Daphne Brooks, \textit{Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910} (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2006).} Black women using sex trade to systematically victimize white men was not a
form of wage earning that would have been possible several decades earlier. Under the regime of enslavement, Black women and girls—and anyone deemed chattel property were defined outside the legal category of rape.\textsuperscript{39}

Rolling Johns and tricking the tricks reflected a different dynamic of power and control between free Black women and white men. Gross sums up the stakes simply,

\begin{quote}
[h]istorically white men masked their attacks on enslaved black women by promoting the idea that libidinous black women were all but impossible to rape. Whereas white men used negative sexual myths to victimize black women with impunity, conversely black badgers [rollers] used the ‘pretense of sex’ to victimize white men. By effectively ‘tricking the tricks,’ black badgers turned the older script on its head. Paradoxically, the crime allowed black women to capitalize on their own former exploitation.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

Rolling Johns reflected Black women’s frustrations with low wages and made visible their ability to manipulate the racist and sexist double standards that defined the urban sex trade to their advantage.

Rolling was not exclusive to Black women perpetrators or white male victims. Women of all ethnic backgrounds picked the pockets of Johns and drunk men in tenderloin districts. In regions like the American west, where Black populations were in proximity to other ethnic groups, there are reports of roller crimes against non white men as well.\textsuperscript{41} Similarly to white men, these Johns also had to navigate the slippery slope of seeking legal retribution or risk the embarrassment that came from being robbed by a sex worker. Furthermore, there are reports of Black women picking the pockets of Black men, either in private and/or with friends and male accomplices as well.\textsuperscript{42} However, the everyday urban story that I reveal was shaped around Black sex workers and often “white m[en] whose name was not recorded” seeking sexual thrills in poor Black and ethnic

\begin{flushright}


\end{flushright}
immigrant neighborhoods.\footnote{43} Rolling Johns is a special topic in the history of crime and punishment in North America, particularly since it had specific actors, methods of criminalization, and unique criminal court outcomes.\footnote{44} The rise of the rolling Johns in the urban city was amplified by the frequent white men crossing the racial and sexual boundaries into neighborhoods outside of their own. The police and press did everything they could to alert white men about the so-called dangers of Black “prostitutes” lurking the streets of urban poor neighborhoods.

It was common to see the press identifying Black female “rollers” in reports and headline statements such as “Says Negress ‘Rolled’ Him,” “Drunken Sailor Is ‘Rolled By Negress,’” “Wants Em Tried: Emma Williams and Jessie Jones, Colored ‘Rollers,’” and “‘Rolled’ By A Negress: She Admitted But White Man Would Not Prosecute.”\footnote{45} It is important to note that rolling was not an official crime that would be filed in an indictment. The particular charges typically ranged from petty theft to grand larceny and robbery. The specifics of roller affidavits involved the accusation of taking money or personal property from the body of a person, i.e. pick pocketing. I use the terms rolling, rollers, and alley workers to identify and examine a range of women and methods deployed to extract wallets and personal property by picking the pockets of Johns.\footnote{46}


\footnote{46}{It is important to also notice that each of the previous press accounts put the words “roller” and “rolled” in special quotation marks. These terms were constructed by police and identification officials to categorize and mark women as habitual offenders and then dispersed to the public through newspaper outlets.}
An article published in the *Pittsburgh Press* in 1919 illuminates the core confrontations between Black female rollers, white men, law enforcement, and prosecutors in the urban city. The *Press* reported, “Commissioner Kane says many of the women are experts in ‘frisking’ a man of his money without his knowing he has been robbed . . . The situation is a novel one in the criminal history of Pittsburg[h], for never before have women banded together in such work, or worked as individuals, so much along the same lines.” As was the case in every urban city, Pittsburgh police had difficulty securing convictions because Johns refused to testify against rollers, especially white men. The *Press* wrote “One great trouble the police are facing is the reluctance of victims to make charges or testify against their assailants. A [white] man does not like it known that, in his cups [sic], he has wandered across the color line. Many of them sooner would suffer their losses.”

What the *Press* also revealed was the critical role that racial and sexual geographies played in the rise of the roller economy. Spatially, the segregated color line in most urban cities was typically at the heart of almost all complaints to police. Rollers usually had the upper hand when choosing the perfect location to execute their plans.

The animosity from police toward rollers was heightened when prosecutors were forced to dismiss charges due to Johns not appearing in court or refusing to file an affidavit knowing they would be expected to show up at trial and testify. A report from a police officer illuminates how law enforcement narrated certain details in the criminal identification profiles of noted rollers that had constantly escaped conviction: “She was a drunk roller and alley worker . . . [o]n her record at least three misdemeanor arrests would be classed as felonies at the present time, being Theft from Person, but due to the embarrassment of a white man accompanying a Negro woman into an alley, felony prosecution could not be obtained.” It frustrated police who could arrest a woman they believed to be guilty and then see her as a free woman a few days later.

No John meant insufficient evidence. The frequency of prosecutors dismissing roller charges suggest that this special problem of evidence may have led to an increase in pre-trial punishment. Some Police Judges insisted that accusers must face Black sex workers in court and warned police “not to bring charges against

---


48. Ibid.

49. Eileen Sparks, Imprisoned no. 55119, San Quentin Inmate Files (SQIF).
alleged prostitutes unless the complaining witnesses were brought also.”50 Even though prosecutors often failed to secure convictions, the de facto punishment for rolling Johns was the process of being subjected to mugging, fingerprinting, displayed in newspapers, expensive bail fees, fines, and pre-trial jail time served.51 There is ample evidence to suggest that the world of urban rollers played an instrumental role in the working lives of detectives, beat officers, prosecutors, Police Judges, and criminal identification authorities across North America.

Under the umbrella of rollers, there was an arm of the industry marked by police and identification officials as alley workers.52 Women in this line of work mastered the racial and sexual boundaries of alleys to resist detection and punishment. In 1919, the Los Angeles Times published a multipage article that illuminated how alley rollers carved a unique—“criminal hall of fame” niche in the local underworld. Detectives and press dehumanized Black alley workers with names such as “alley rat” or a “human rodent.”53 In other words, the local alley roller was despised and lauded as a skillful underground wage earner by police and press. The Times explained, “[h]er art—for with the alley workers the task of separating a man from his money has reached a high state of perfection—is the art of the magician, the hypnotist and the athlete combined. Her stamping ground is any street where the lights are not too bright.”54 A statement provided to the Times from a local veteran detective highlights how police marked alley rollers as class of skillful criminals. The detective complained, “You can’t catch them, you can’t get the goods on them, you can’t get the victims to testify against

50. “Complainants Wanted Also: Judge Anderson Insists That Accusers Face Women in Court as Prostitutes,” Sacramento Star, August 1, 1921, newspapers.com (accessed December 6, 2019).

51. Despite if people were guilty or innocent, the process of booking, Bertillonage, mugging, and having your portrait displayed in a Rogues’ Gallery was a form of punishment in itself. The power to subject people to take pictures and undergo invasive body measurement processes reveals the inherent violence associated with using biometric identification methods in law enforcement, especially since it was a pre-trial process. On processes of pre-trial punishment, see Malcolm Feeley, The Process Is the Punishment: Handling Cases in a Lower Criminal Court (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1992).


53. “‘Alley Rats’ Defy Police Traps: Remarkable Women Criminals Reap Rich Harvest Here and are Seldom Caught; Victims are Loth to Testify, the Official Records Show,” Los Angeles Times, March 9, 1919, newspapers.com (accessed September 22, 2020).

54. Ibid.
them, and you seldom get convictions from the courts.”55 This statement is evidence that a substantial amount of policing and local court processes centered around capturing and prosecuting Black female rollers.

There are scant records available that detail social and legal histories of rollers in the urban city. There were no specific statistics publicly available on how often roller complaints occurred or how often courts were forced to dismiss charges.56 The Times would go on to note what local police believed to be a broad overview of alley rollers operating in the city. It explained, “There are perhaps not more than fifty first-class operators of this type in Los Angeles and 95 per cent of them are negresses or mulattoes . . . The police say the percent of victims who make reports of their loss is about ten out of every hundred.”57 A similar overview of local rollers was highlighted by the Chief of Police in Des Moines, Iowa. According to the Des Moines Tribune, the Chief “says only a tenth of the actual robberies by ‘alley workers’ are reported to police because most of the victims prefer accepting the loss of their money to admitting how they lost it.”58 With two different police departments making the claim that 90 percent of roller crimes were unreported, it is fair to assume that an overwhelming portion of roller history will remain incomplete.

All Black women working in illicit economies were under the same racial and gendered surveillance and punishment apparatus as rollers in terms of the criminalization and policing of their bodies in the urban city. On the other hand, however, a roller by profession was marked by police and press not only as an immoral woman or an undesirable sex worker, but as a violent habitual criminal. Or, in other words, as the Seattle Star coined,—a “parasite.”59 Though rolling was primarily a crime of petty theft, when prosecutors did convict rollers—especially repeat offenders—it could mean an indeterminate prison term or a life sentence as a habitual

55. Ibid.


57. “‘Alley Rats’ Defy Police Traps, Los Angeles Times.”


offender in some states. By moving around to different cities, rollers could at least escape punishment and surveillance.

Black female rollers exploited and dominated white men and due to this, in the eyes of police and press and the general white public in North America, the urban roller was in need of constant surveillance, containment, and control. Courts across North America punished rollers on varying occasions. However, the story that I illuminate throughout this dissertation is not about Black women’s experiences in prison but specifically about what we can learn by examining Black women’s strategies of navigating the lucrative—yet risky, dangerous, and punishable industry of rolling Johns in the urban city.

My dissertation links the exodus of Black and white southerners and the movement to professionalize police in North America with the rise of media and print press culture in the urban city. For example, articles such as “Charged with Fleecing a White Man,” “Caught White Man in Alley,” and “Gang of Negresses Prey On White Men,” were frequently featured in newspapers across North America to racialize and demonize rollers. The numerous press accounts that covered Black female rollers illuminate how police, detectives, and the general white public constructed rollers into a professional “criminal” class of violent prostitutes targeting white men.

---


Each decade following the Civil War, Black women increasingly came into more contact with law enforcement and punishment regimes in different regions of the country for charges related to sexual encounters with white men. The social construction of the seductive Black “prostitute” preying on innocent white men was exacerbated by police, prosecutors, and the white press during the same period as southern lynching narratives that depicted Black men as sexually deviant monsters seeking to rape white women. Though the white press amplified the Black male rapist story used to justify lynching, that narrative has been thoroughly contended and proven false by anti-lynching scholars and historians. The other story rarely highlighted in the general white press is the long history of white male rape and violence against Black women. When Black women and girls, and especially Black sex workers defended themselves against rape, the outcome could mean further victimization by the criminal legal system.

When Pauline Jones was 12 years old, both of her parents died. At the age of 13, a forty-five-year-old man married her. Through most of her teenage years, Pauline recalls running away from her husband quite often and then returning. After suffering four years of domestic violence, Pauline separated from her husband and moved from Emmet, Arkansas to Los Angeles without family. She recalls having to purchase a “pocket knife for protection” because she was “frequently accosted on her way home from the restaurant at night.” Eventually, Pauline would have to use that knife against a white man that tried to rape her.

According to Pauline, the man “was forcing her to commit a sensuous act upon him which she refused and because of his insistence and in order to protect herself she inflicted some knife wounds upon him from which he subsequently died.” The criminal record and press reports that described Pauline as a roller and murderer did not give her the benefit of self-defense. The district attorney wrote, “defendant, a negress


65. Pauline Jones, Imprisoned no. 48930, San Quentin Inmate Files (SQIF).

66. Ibid.
prostitute, murdered Charles Riding a white man by stabbing him about twelve times.”

Pauline’s plea of self-protection would not be heard by the courts. A judge would eventually sentence her to an indeterminate sentence at San Quentin State prison. Pauline’s imprisonment is rooted in a broader history—past and present—of the criminal legal system punishing Black rape survivors for self-defense. This was always the threat of a roller.

Law enforcement and newspapers often told the story of how risky it was for a white man to allegedly follow Black sex workers into alleys and dark places. What the press did not report was how risky it was for Black women to enter secluded spaces with white men. Or, how white men justified violence against Black sex workers and rollers. For example, take the case of an unnamed Black woman murdered by a drunk white man in Tampa, Florida. Chester E. Logan jr. admitted and even praised the fact that he had shot and killed a Black woman he claimed was trying to take his roll. He expressed: “Just tell me this one thing, chief . . . Did I do a good job of it or not? There isn’t any chance of me waking up tomorrow finding that she’s still living, is there? No ‘shine’ can hold me up and get away with it.” White press reports didn’t typically feature the countless Black women who were raped, beaten, robbed, and murdered by white men. Nevertheless, rollers flipped the script, took the risk, and leveraged the use of alleys and secluded locations in anyway suitable to their trade.

If there was a popular cultural dynamic that spoke to the lives of women like Weems, it would

---

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

69. For more on one of the earliest legal rulings in the United States that punished Black women for defending themselves against sexual violence, see State of Missouri vs. Celia, a Slave. https://www.famous-trials.com/celia. Also, see McLaurin, Celia, a Slave. For contemporary campaigns on rape survivors and punishment, see Report By Survived and Punished In Collaboration With Project Nia and the UCLA Center For the Study of Women, “Defending Self-Defense: A Call to Action by Survived and Punished,” March 2022, https://survivedandpunished.org/.


71. For historical analysis of sexual violence against Black women see note 64. For more on Black women and rape in the 20th century, see McGuire, At the Dark End of the Street and Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West.”
certainly be highlighted by blues performers. Artist like Billie Holiday even personally wrote about working in the sex trade in her timeless autobiography Lady Sings the Blues—prior to her success—because of her hate for domestic labor and working as a maid. Songs like Bertha “Chippie” Hill’s “Street Walker Blues” speaks to the lives of urban Black women that were faced with choice of eviction or soliciting on the streets under the threat of aggressive policing. She sings, “aint got a dolla, give me just one lousy dime, got the street walking blues, aint gon walk the streets no more, cause the cops is getting bad. In Bessie Smith’s “Jail House Blues,” she opens “Lord, this house is goin’ to get raided, yes sir . . . Thirty days in jail with my back turned to the wall.” Many of Smith’s songs were everyday themes in the lives of rollers and women working in underground economies.

Other Blues themes about mobility such as Ma Rainey’s “Leaving this Morning,” Runaway Blues,” Walking Blues,” and “Lost Wondering Blues,” provides a lens into the spatial lives of women like Nettie. In “Traveling Blues,” –a song that she would later say was one of her favorite—Rainey sings, “Trains at the station, I heard the whistle blow, I done bought my ticket and I don’t know where I’ll go . . . I’m dangerous and

---


73. For more on Holliday and her views on urban sex trade and domestic labor, see Billie Holliday and William Dufty, Lady Sings the Blues (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), Julia Blackburn, With Billie (New York: Pantheon Books, 2005); Donald Clarke, Wishing on the Moon: The Life and Times of Billie Holiday (Cambridge: DaCapo Press, 2002) Also see Harris, Sex Workers, Psychics, and Number Runners, 138.


blue, can’t stay here no more, Here come my train folks, and I’ve got to go.” Rainey illuminated Black women’s life on the move even if they did not know where they were going.

Within two weeks following her release, Weems picked up her life and left Vancouver. She likely had some extra money on hand, especially since she had gotten away with cash and forced prosecutors to dismiss the charges. When Weems left this time, she did not travel back to the United States and instead, took a train or steamboat across the Strait of Georgia to Nanaimo—a neighboring city in the province of British Columbia. Below is a map of the Pacific Northwest that illuminates Weems’ travels from Tacoma, Washington to Vancouver to Nanaimo in 1930.

![Map of Nettie Weems traveling from Tacoma, Washington to Vancouver to Nanaimo, B.C., 1930](image)

**Figure i.1** Map of Nettie Weems traveling from Tacoma, Washington to Vancouver to Nanaimo, B.C., 1930

Leaving has always been a central theme in Black spatial studies in North America. The traditional Black migration narrative in North America almost always centers the Jim Crow South as the place being left behind. This was not the case for itinerants, especially women with frequent contact with the criminal legal system—whether it was those that freely chose to relocate or those that courts ordered to leave. On August 21st, 1930, police in Nanaimo, British Columbia arrested Weems for rolling a man for $30. Police raided a local hotel and detained Weems after she tossed the cash evidence out of the window before her capture. The next day, she pleaded not guilty in court and elected to have a speedy trial. Weems reported her name to police in Nanaimo as Mabel Jones.77 Within a few weeks, spatially, Weems had spent time handcuffed, in two different local jails, and had also migrated from one British Columbia city to another. There are no details that illuminate her experiences in these spaces. Nevertheless, one can only imagine Weems waking up in a jail cell and then being escorted by police to court and then back to confinement. While detaining her in jail awaiting trial, Nanaimo police authorities had communicated with criminal identification officials in the United States to conduct a background report on Weems.

Weems’ confrontations with British Columbia authorities reveals that police in the region had knowledge from law enforcement in the United States that she was still a wanted fugitive in Washington state.78 Weems reflected the modern 20th century fugitive who had access to more freedom over her movements, opportunities to support themselves on the move, and a more developed transportation system from steamboats, trains, buses, and eventually automobiles.79 Weems did not just end up on the other side of the international border, it was the second documented time that she had traveled to the region and the third time authorities in British Columbia had indicted her on felony roller charges. Weems’ status as a fugitive from the United States and her ultimate identification by British Columbia authorities evolved from a long history of biometric information technologies used to capture Black bodies on the run.


78. Ibid.

79. See note 7 for history of the railway system in North America.
Fugitive studies has always been about geographic movements in the face of capture and spatial constraints. There is a large collection of narratives and studies that document Black fugitivity and the lives of enslaved people fighting for freedom in various ways. Fugitive women like Margaret Garner and many others have provided insight into the meaning of motherhood, mobility, and freedom under the regime of enslavement. Spatial histories and studies of fugitivity have primarily highlighted the stories of enslaved people escaping from plantations. There are the first hand narratives written by former enslaved people such as Harriet Jacobs, Frederick Douglass, and William H. Brown. There are studies that document the underground railroad north and other pathways to Indigenous lands, the American West, Canada, and Mexico.

What does not fully exist is a body of literature on modern fugitivity in the context of Black free people, the Great Migration, and the criminal legal system in the early 20th century. The ability of Black people to move about more freely following emancipation opened the door to a much more broader terrain of mobility that existed outside of the US South. According to a record constructed by the California Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation (CBCII), police in as many as 12 different cities had jailed, prosecuted, or


pursued Weems as a fugitive. This record is evidence of Weems’ extensive migration history over a twenty year period. By 1930, innovative telegram technologies and the long distance ability of criminal identification authorities to share information would have been at the disposal of Nanaimo detectives and prosecutors to use against Weems in court.84

A jury in Nanaimo eventually found Weems guilty of theft resulting in a loss of $10 or more of personal property. The judge sentenced Weems to two months at Oakalla Prison Farm in Burnaby, British Columbia. After her term at Oakalla, Canadian immigration officials deported Weems to the custody of law enforcement in Snohomish, Washington to face punishment for a roller conviction and escaping jail in 1925. Weems’ deportation status meant that her mug portrait and other supporting information would surely remain in some international criminal identification database.

There is no sustained study that provides a history of Black migrant women confronting sex labor, policing, and criminal legal courts in different regions and on both sides of the US/Canadian border. Weems’ movements to and through different cities with thriving interracial sex economies—from Chicago’s State Street Stroll to Vancouver’s Hogan’s Alley to Sacramento’s L Street District to San Francisco’s Barbary Coast to the South Central District of Los Angeles, California—is illuminating in the context of the Great Migration settlement story. Her itinerancy disrupts the migration discourse of permanence and reveals how rollers combined knowledge of criminal legal systems, tenderloin districts, and mobility to forge an underground sex industry that could be operated on the move in any urban city where white men “wanted to spend some money” with Black sex workers.85

“All Kinds of Money” examines the social, legal, and geographical history of Black female rollers in North America. I argue that rolling Johns was a form of social, economic, and political resistance that provided a consistent source of cash for Black women both as a part time and fulltime off the books source.86

84. The telegram system was invented by Edward Ernst Kleinschmidt. For more on telegram and teletype systems, see Edward Ernst Kleinschmidt, Printing Telegraphy . . . A New Era Begins, Gutenberg EBook, 2016, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/53481/53481-h/53481-h.htm; Thomas Boghardt, The Zimmermann Telegram: Intelligence, Diplomacy, and America’s Entry into World War I (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2013); Linda Rosenkrantz, Telegram!: Modern History as Told through More than 400 Witty, Pignant, and Revealing Telegrams (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2003).

85. Florence Hicks, Imprisoned, no. 56866, SQIF.

86. For more on Black women’s labor history in the late 19th and early 20th century, see Hunter, To ’Joy My Freedom; Nan Enstadt, Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor
Furthermore, my dissertation reveals how Black women transformed rolling Johns into one of the most disruptive and unique underground economies in urban America.

Firstly, I demonstrate how Black female rollers confronted and exploited racialized sexual labor and subverted criminal punishment by having an awareness of white men’s vulnerabilities and the trial court system. In addition, Black women understood that white men loitering in certain areas of the city were looking to spend money. By hosting white men slumming in tenderloin districts, rollers mastered methods of soliciting, pickpocketing, and disguise that could be imported to almost any urban city with an underground illicit economy or vice district.

Moreover, the project argues that urban rollers reflected the evolution of Black female fugitivity in North America, especially once police had subjected them to body measurements, forced portraits, fingerprints, and a criminal identification profile. The charges related to roller complaints were punishable by a prison term in most jurisdictions in North America. That rollers represented a modern fugitive class is evident from the many printed press reports of police and detectives on the hunt to capture and punish them across state and international borders.

I argue that the rise and development of criminal identification technologies in North America enabled law enforcement to track and trace people that police booked regardless if the charge led to a conviction or not. Criminal identification profiles provide insight into Black women’s mobility and confinement and illuminate how racialized surveillance and the movement to professionalize police in the urban city adopted to the itinerant nature of rollers. Police identification archives followed rollers over time and across space like Weems whose

---


87. Bertillonage was a method of criminal identification that emerged in the late 19th century. It was named after French identification expert Alphonse Bertillon. Chapter one will examine how Bertillonage made its way from France to becoming a professional system used by law enforcement and criminal legal institutions across North America.

profile stretched from 1915 to 1935 in three regions despite most charges being dismissed against her.

Finally, “All Kinds of Money” argues that a sustained spatial analysis of migrant sex workers has been neglected in Black migration histories and the movement to professionalize law enforcement in the early 20th century. I broadly contextualize urban sexual spaces and itinerancy as “rival geographies.” Stephanie Camp calls on the term to map how enslaved Black women confronted “mobility in the face of constraint.” She writes “the rival geography was not a settled spatial formation, for it included quarters, outbuildings, woods, swamps, and neighboring farms as chance granted them.”89 This project examines the varying ways that Black women used spatial knowledge and sexual performance to carve out pathways toward financial independence and mobility.90

Rollers resisted urban police occupation and surveillance by disguising their identities and conducting their trade in spaces designed to be concealed, i.e. rooming houses, automobiles, and alleys. Other contested spaces such as the court room brought the politics of inter-racial sex trade and slumming into a public and legal context. The fact that almost every vagrancy statute in North America dubbed “pickpockets” and “common prostitutes” as vagrants left any migrating roller vulnerable to police harassment and detention at every turn.91

Chapter Outline

“All Kinds of Money” is divided into four parts, each with two chapters. The first part, “Black Women on the Move and the Rise of Criminal Identification” begins with Weems fleeing the state of Illinois on the run

89. Stephanie M.H. Camp, Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2006), 7-8. The term “rival geography” was coined by Edward Said as a language for geographers to describe resistance to colonial occupation and expanded on by Camp to examine the various ways that enslaved women contested the constraints of plantation geographies.


from police in Chicago, Illinois in 1914. Her escape was anticipated by the rise in police identification methods that had evolved since the 1850’s. Chapter One charts how the rise and development of biometric identification technologies in North America evolved from enslaved Black bodies to professional tools used in law enforcement and penal institutions across the western hemisphere to racialize, surveil, and mark people as criminal. Between the 1850’s and the early 20th century, all major police departments and prisons in North America instituted a system of criminal identification, from measuring human bodies, subjecting unconsented face portraits, to fingerprinting. This professional movement gave rise decades prior to World War I and the first wave of the Great Migration.

Chapter Two, “Looking for a fugitive Negress” is a story about Black women on the run from law enforcement and the everyday practice of assuming different characters at different times and different places. I illuminate how Black women used aliases, fashion accessories, makeup, gendered performances, and mobility to evade police identification and criminal punishment. As a result of roller’s everyday fugitivity and itinerancy, law enforcement launched city wide searches and traveled to other cities and regions on the hunt for Black women like Weems.

The second part, “Has Pictures of her in Various Cities,” follows Weems to Vancouver, British Columbia in 1925. Over a ten year period since Weems’s Chicago arrest, police in several other cities had booked her. I bring the question of itinerancy, migration, and identification history into the fold by illuminating the mug portraits and arrest records of rollers in multiple cities and regions, specifically in the Pacific Northwest.

Chapter Three, “Mugged a Number of Times” uses press reports to trace the life of a notorious itinerant roller and Madame that operated under the name, “Diamond Flossie.” Between the late 1890’s up through the first decade of the 20th century, police in several cities across the country mugged and exiled Flossie from Chicago, Los Angeles, to Seattle, Washington. Press accounts printed in several cities provide a glimpse into Flossie’s life as a roller and Madam. In addition to Flossie, this chapter also maps the itinerant history of Julia Crews, a notorious roller, “widely known” by police in every region of the country from Seattle to New York to Little Rock Arkansas. Both Flossie and Julia—by virtue of being booked by law enforcement in several cities as expert thieves—left a trail of identification portraits in the hands of police. Though these mug shots
were not publicly available, the press stories evidence the fact that many copies of Black women’s portraits and identification profiles were shared amongst police in different cities.

Chapter Four, “All Kinds of Money in Vancouver” locates Weems in the Hogan’s Alley district of British Columbia, at a time when alcohol was prohibited in the United States and red-light districts had moved into the shadows of urban landscapes. In 1925, the Mayor of Vancouver was W.D Taylor, a popular working class man that had earned his third term by this time. Taylor’s tenderloin district policies and loose criminalization of vice during the post war years made Vancouver one of the very few tolerated tenderloin districts in North America, particularly since alcohol was prohibited in the United States at the time. In addition to illuminating the east side of Vancouver while Weems was there, I reveal a history of Black American women crossing the Pacific Northwest border to engage in underground wage earning in Vancouver. Furthermore, this chapter examines Canadian vagrancy laws and Black women’s clothing and fashion attire as presented in the local mug books in Vancouver.

The third part, “Police Have Declared War” opens with Weems on the run again—this time from law enforcement in Washington after escaping jail in 1925. While a fugitive, she hides out in Sacramento, California. This part illuminates various ways that aggressive law enforcement and surveillance in the urban city was shaped around Black women working in the sex trade. The collective reports of city wide police campaigns against Black women in various cities reveals how the criminal identity of the urban roller and alley worker was constructed into a shared language between law enforcement and newspaper outlets across North America.

Chapter 5, “Negresses Prey on White Men” examines the racial, gendered, and sexual politics of rolling Johns during the first decade of the 20th century, a period where most urban cities tolerated tenderloin districts, saloons, alcohol, and illicit leisure economies to an extent. This was the period that gave rise to Diamond Flossie and Julia Crews. Urban sexual economies gave rise long before the first wave of the Great Migration was underway and Black women played a major role, especially in cities with a moderate Black female population and especially those with thriving tenderloin districts. White men on the prowl for alcohol and sex took their disposable income into the tenderloin districts nightly. It would not be long after the turn of the 20th century before newspapers across the country were regularly featuring reports of Black women rolling white men in connection with some form of the local sex trade.
This chapter also illuminates how the social construction of the urban roller transformed from the early 20th century through the war years as a result of prohibition and progressive era anti-sex work campaigns.\textsuperscript{92} In the late 19th and early 20th century—when saloons, brothels, and cabarets operated legally, Black women did not have to always work on the streets to roll a John. As a result of the Red Light Abatement movement and prohibition, tenderloin districts, vice, and sex work moved further into the shadows of the urban underworld and alleys increasingly became a local landmark for rolling Johns. I examine how press narrated the victimization of white men in alleys as opposed to the longer history of white men victimizing Black women with impunity. In this chapter I illuminate how law enforcement and white newspapers constructed “Alley Workers” into a specific racial and gendered criminal identity with geographic implications for spatial policing and surveillance. It was not a mystery, police in several cities specifically “declared war” against Black sex workers, rollers, and alley workers.

Chapter Six, “Constant War on Prostitutes,” follows Weems to Sacramento where she is vulnerable to a highly surveilled and racially criminalized local sex economy. I use Sacramento as a case study for charting the long history of police harassment and the city wide campaigns against Black sex workers from the 1860’s up to Weems’ arrival in 1925. Furthermore, I examine Max P. Fisher—a local identification expert—and the rise of the Sacramento Bureau of Criminal Identification following the turn of the 20th century. Black women’s visible presence in Sacramento’s local sex trade was not an anomaly. By using police mug books in Sacramento, this chapter examines how local police constructed racial and gendered criminal profiles on

women marked as rollers and alley workers like Weems.

The fourth and final part, “Comet in its Orbital Track” combines two chapters about mobility, confinement, and cartography. Chapter seven, “Song of the Open Road,” illuminates an untold story about Black women, vagrancy laws, and exile in the late 19th century up through the first wave of the Great Migration. Black women’s public exile was on display nearly every day in print newspapers with a similar slogan—“Negress is Banished.” Chapter Eight, “Mapping Black Women’s Geographies” provides a spatial sketch of Weems’ movements in the years after her release from San Quentin prison in 1929. This part is not an exhaustive biography of Weems’ life after incarceration but more of a sketch of her movements and encounters with law enforcement, jails, and prisons through the lens of police identification.

One of the important methods used to analyze itinerancy throughout this dissertation is mapping. I argue that Black spatial histories and cartographical representations of the Great Migration have failed to construct maps that illuminate Black women’s mobility and confinement in the early 20th century. The maps that I construct in the final chapter reveal the migration patterns of rollers on the move—through personal choice, police pressure, and court sanctioned banishment—moving around from region to region. I map four itinerant rollers including Weems—to reimagine how scholars and historians might construct qualitative individual migration experiences. Furthermore, I use cartography to disrupt the one way ticket narrative and to provide a more nuanced visualization of Black women on the move during the first wave of the Great Migration.

“All Kinds of Money” is a collective story about Black women seeking to live their best lives in different urban cities, with the same and different challenges, hopes, dreams, frustrations, and emotions, with different names, on different days, in different years confronting the same racial, sexual, and criminal legal politics of the urban city. Throughout this dissertation, the reader will notice that many of the police and press reports tell a repetitive story—Black woman sexually seduces and victimizes a white man “without fear of punishment.”

This urban tale was not wholly untrue. However, the imbalance of power in the construction of this tale—from both press and police narrators—silenced and erased the voices of Black women.

My dissertation broadly employs a methodology that Marisa Fuentes calls ‘subverting the overdetermining power of discourse.’ The historical knowledge about Black women that can be generated from police and press sources is limited if scholars fail to confront the archival silences and erasure of Black women’s perspective. I examine and read against the grain of the same repetitive carceral and journalist documents that demonized Black sex workers and shift the viewpoint in order to honor and commemorate what seems often to be the only mark of these difficult lives. I reconstruct these sources in order to build out the humanity of Black sex workers from the carceral and dehumanizing language in which their lives are captioned, framed, and minimized in the historical record. The first part of this project provides an historical overview of Black women on the move and the rise of criminal identification in North America from the mid 19th century up through the first wave of the Great Migration.

PART ONE

“Looking for a Fugitive Negress”

With deftness that showed experience, a woman known to the police as May Lewis, alias May Blanchard, of the red light district, is alleged to have robbed [John Doe], a returned Klondiker, of $500 on Clore Street, Helena, [Montana] Thursday evening. She has successfully eluded all efforts to ascertain her whereabouts and it is thought she left the city on one of the early morning trains yesterday. Missoulian, 1902

Deputy Sheriff McGee of Port Gibson, was in the city yesterday looking for a fugitive negress, who is wanted in Claiborne county for larceny. Vicksburg Herald, 1902

95. “All Over the State,” Missoulian, October 19, 1902, newspapers.com (accessed October 20, 2020).

Introduction

According to a record constructed by the California Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation (CBCII), police in Chicago, Illinois arrested Weems for the first time in the late months of 1914. The Chicago record is the first arrest entry that police developed into a criminal identification profile that would follow Weems into her 30’s. Though it was only an indictment, police booked Weems, which included a range of forced identification procedures such as body measurements, fingerprints, and multiple mugshot portraits. Weems was only a teenager in the midst of a changing city landscape and the beginning years of the First World War. Weems faced similar circumstances as many young Black women following men to a new unfamiliar city.

The Black population in Chicago had substantially grown with the influx of Southern migrants since the years following the Civil War. Each decade, more and more Black Americans saw Chicago and various other northern and midwestern cities as sites of racial and economic refuge as they fled the US South searching for a better life. As Hughes articulated in his “One Way Ticket” poem, Black migrants imagined any place outside of the US South as a promised land. Chicago, like many other urban cities outside of the US South confronted Black southerners with a host of unexpected circumstances from racial discrimination in housing to limitations in educational and employment opportunities, to various other issues including segregation, and policing. Well before the turn of the 20th century, Black women were actively earning informal wages in Chicago’s tenderloin economy, better known as the Levee District.

Cynthia Blair’s *I’ve Got to Make My Living*, provides one of the most in-depth local analysis of Black women’s restricted low wage employment opportunities in late 19th and early 20th century Chicago and their pathways from domestic labor to a more active role in the local sex trade. Intersecting with the Great Migration

---

97. Florence Hicks no. 56866, Imprisoned, SQIF.


99. For more studies on Black women and girls from the plantation to the urban city, see note 19.

and population growth in Chicago’s urban landscape, Blair charts the varying reactions of newly arriving migrant men and women to Black sex workers’ visibility in urban illicit economies.\textsuperscript{101} Blair traces the changing sexual economy in Chicago over four decades and historicizes the role urban sex work played in the racial and spatial boundaries of policing that would transition from the Levee district to the State Street “Stroll” as more Southern migrants settled in the city. On State Street, between 26\textsuperscript{th} and 39\textsuperscript{th} Streets, the new district represented a scene that came alive at night, with the streets lit from the jazz clubs and Black patrons loitering and attending the venues. The “Stroll” was one of the most rivaled districts in urban America—next to Harlem, New York, South Central, Los Angeles and many others—where Black life and entertainment was embraced and celebrated day and night.\textsuperscript{102}

In addition to the rise of the “Stroll,” Weems’ presence in Chicago also intersected with a period where the local police department gave rise as one of the premier professionalized departments in North America.\textsuperscript{103} Though Weems was still coming of age, Chicago was prime for a young roller to possibly learn the game or pursue alternative wages connected to illicit economies and entertainment in the State Street district. On the other hand, by this the time, local law enforcement and the white press had labeled Black female rollers as notorious criminals for at least fifteen years in Chicago. The rise of everyday roller complaints stemming from John’s visiting the Levee District led detectives and city officials to argue that these complaints were not just isolated incidents. In 1899, a committee in Chicago was instituted to investigate alleged systematic rolling of Johns by both Black and white women.


\textsuperscript{103} Robert Mc Claughry helped to professionalize and develop the first identification laboratory in a local police department at Chicago in the late 19th century. For an in-depth history on Mc Claughry, see Frank Morn, \textit{Forgotten Reformer: Robert Mc Claughry and Criminal Justice Reform in the Late Nineteenth-Century America} (Lanham: University Press of America, 2012), 244, ProQuest eBook Central.
The *Chicago Tribune* amplified the police identification trope of the “organized gangs of negresses.”104 Rolling Johns and intentionally tricking men out of cash was not a new development in the city. However, testimony that police corruption and involvement in the practice forced one attorney in Chicago to claim that the responsibility was in the hands of the Police Commissioners. The *Chicago Tribune* noted stories of police refusing to arrest certain women even when evidence was certain enough to prosecute.105 The language and headlines centered in press accounts like the *Tribune* helped to validate and exacerbate a racial and gendered construction of dangerous Black sex workers and vulnerable white male victims prior to the turn of the 20th century.

After posting cash bail, Chicago authorities released Weems from jail until her trial date. She would not return to court and instead fled the state of Illinois. Evading prosecution meant that Chicago law enforcement would now mark Weems as a “Fugitive From Justice” with a telegram dispatch sent out to police agencies with the notice, “Wanted at Chicago, Ill., for robbery & Bond Forfeiture.”106 The body descriptions, fingerprints, and face portraits compelled by Chicago law enforcement would also serve the purpose of quick identification access to police in various cities. As a part of a larger international movement to professionalize police, the local Chicago Bureau of Identification had been established for at least twenty five years before police booked Weems. By the First World War, police and practically all major organizations of law enforcement in North America subjected detained people to several forms of criminal identification. This increase in information was then combined with the use of telegram technologies to send police records and press accounts across state and international borders. The first chapter charts how the professionalization of criminal identification evolved from the mid 19th to the early 20th century.


105. Ibid.

106. Florence Hicks, Imprisoned, #56866, SQIF.
Chapter One

The Rise of Criminal Identification in North America, 1850’s-1935

The rise of biometric identification technologies and the apparatus of anti-Black surveillance in the North America is fundamental to the transatlantic slave trade and the legal institutions of chattel enslavement.\(^{107}\) Biometrics, i.e. the means in which bodies and body parts are measured and transferred into identification information was a technology that functioned to shape the branding of African captives into a global commodity.\(^{108}\) In addition to branding Black bodies as property, biometric identification served as a mark of racialized surveillance and control within and around plantations. The long history of identification information embedded in the transatlantic slave trade is evident from the archival records of fugitive advertisements.\(^{109}\) Running away was an act of “self-theft” and biometric markers served as a barcode on chattel property. By examining almost any runaway reward advertised in newspapers, the sources reveal that there was a process of branding and memorializing descriptions, complexion, body parts, scars, and other identification markers noted by enslavers and those on the hunt to capture them.

Newspaper advertisements evidence how print culture and press outlets helped to professionalize the identification of Black bodies in a public forum. The first ad below was published by the *Daily Picayune* in New Orleans in 1838 and reveals how the words “very black” and “negress” were highlighted by press to racialize and gender descriptions of rebellious enslaved women.\(^{110}\) The branding of blackness also illuminates how bodily information processes were used to make visual distinctions between certain types of chattel


\(^{108}\) Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 91. Brown writes, ”Biometric information technology, or biometrics, in its simplest form, is a means of body measurements that is put to use to allow the body, or parts and pieces and performances of the human body, to function as identification.

\(^{109}\) A publicly available archive of North American fugitive advertisements can be examined at https://freedomonthemove.org/.

property, i.e. those with full blooded African DNA and those whose features and proximity to whiteness were products of rape and miscegenation.¹¹¹

Figure 1.1 $20 Fugitive Reward Advertisement reprint from Daily Picayune, 1838

¹¹¹ Brown, Dark Matters, 92.
The advertisement below with the headline “Forty Dollars Reward” was published in 1828 by the
New-Orleans Argus. It highlights how biometric identification operated as a racializing information technology.
As opposed to the “very black negress” used in the first article above, this column highlights the fact that Mary
and her sister Rosanna were “yellow girl[s] . . . with black strait hair.”  
112 The racial descriptions included in
every fugitive advertisements help us understand the role that branding played in constructing racialized Black
subjects rooted in the one drop rule.  
113 In addition to branding Rosanna as a racialized subject, “the scald or
burn on the right side of the head” was a physical mark of biometric identification that transferred her enslaved
body into an information technology.  
114

Figure 1.2 $40 Fugitive Reward Advertisement
reprint from New Orleans Argus, 1828

November 8, 2020).

113. On miscegenation laws and the social construction of race in America, see Peggy Pascoe, What
Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
2009).

114. “Forty Dollars Reward.”
The legal utility of press advertisements and the rise of print culture illuminates the connections between enslavers, slave catchers, and the early stages of the law enforcement profession in North America. Most enslaved Black people were under some form of social surveillance of white patrolmen bound up on horses with guns. These patrolmen had numerous roles from night watches to policing movement to surveilling unsanctioned social gatherings. The most critical goals of patrolmen was thwarting plantation rebellions and capturing runaways. White patrolmen operated under the legal procedures set forth in the Slave Codes, including the Fugitive Slave Laws.

Sally E Hadden examines how slave patrols began in the Caribbean and influenced states in the United States. In Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas, she notes that North and South Carolina relied extensively on the wisdom of laws in Barbados as enslavers sought to control and maintain the population of captives that was constantly increasing on the island. On the other hand, Black fugitives also fueled the development of slave patrolmen and slave catchers. Barbados laws were not new however either. Their model of patrolling and capturing runaway captives was heavily influenced by Spanish and Portuguese colonist and enslavers that had begun a law enforcement practice connected to fugitivity dating back to the 1500’s.

As early as the 1700’s, slave patrols—also known as patrollers and paddy rollers—became the first publicly funded law enforcement feature in the US dedicated to the containment and control of Black bodies on the move. The surveillance and tracking of African captives was anticipated by the rise in chattel property exported to the American colonies. The need to control and contain Black bodies was a fundamental tenant to North American colonist and would play a role in evolving slave patrols across the US South throughout the 19th century. By the mid 1850’s, while Southern states held most Black Americans captive and under the

115. For more on unsanctioned gatherings and secret parties hosted by enslaved people, see Camp, Closer to Freedom.


118. Ibid., 10.

119. Ibid, 14.
surveillance of slave patrolmen, another biometric technology foundational to the criminal legal system arose—identification portraits, also known as “convict” photography.

“A Thing of Beauty”

Beginning in the mid 19th century up to the present, identification photography would evolve into a professional practice used in immigration, military service, law enforcement, prison institutions, and other professions across the globe. The rise of criminal identification photography would help to form a genre of biometric identification that Susanne Regener coined “compelled photos.” Photographs in this category were unconsented by the subjects and forced by law enforcers and penal administrators in order to create a database of accused and known criminals. French and British law enforcement began using photography to document the faces of people booked by police in the early 1840’s. By the late 1850’s local police from New York to Philadelphia were actively using identification photography. The technology of photography would eventually evolve into an everyday identification tool available to the law enforcement profession as a whole.

Though penal institutions and law enforcement in the United States had their own limited identification practices using portraits and other biometric methods, the evolution of the practice relied on inspiration from authorities in Europe. The professionalization of identification methods and the evolution of modern policing in North America is largely accredited to the work of Alphonse Bertillon, a French police officer and identification expert—and son of an anthropologist—that started his career working in the clerk’s office in the Paris police department. Bertillon applied his knowledge of anthropometry—the study of measurements proportionate to the human body—to invent a scientific language he dubbed morphological vocabulary.

Bertillonage, as the identification method became known, worked from the assumption that the human body was unique and that no two people had identical body part measurements. Bertillon argued that his system could give a precise description of humans in as many different forms and phenotypical variations as possible, including the illumination of “peculiar marks” such as scars, moles, and tattoos. The systematic study of


personal characteristics and the practice of easy and precise recognition were some of Bertillon’s primary goals in addition to an organized system of archiving portraits and other biometric information that could distinguish and recognize repeat offenders quickly and efficiently as possible. The following collage illuminates the invasiveness of Bertillon’s method and the multiple steps required to record precise body measurements.

Figure 1.3 Sketch of Alphonse Bertillon’s Anthropometric system of Identification reprinted from Signaletic Instructions


123. For more on Bertillon’s anthropometric system, see Alphonse Bertillon et al., *Signaletic Instructions: Including the Theory and Practice of Anthropometrical Identification* (Chicago: Werner Co., 1896). This book was first introduced in the United States by Robert Mc Claughry and is a great source for further exploring Bertillonage and his specific instructions for expert identification methods that would eventually become a standard practice of Prison administrators and local law enforcement in the United States and Canada.
In 1879, Bertillon first attempted to introduce his system to the Paris police department. It was not for another 3 years until a new Prefecture of Police with a more open mind was in place that Bertillon was able to introduce a pilot program to test his new system. Beginning in late 1882 and through 1883, during the pilot program, Bertillon was able to recognize the identity of 49 habitual offenders. Within the next couple of years Bertillon’s system had nearly doubled the recognition of habitual offenders and was adopted by police departments and penal authorities across France and Europe.\textsuperscript{124}

In addition to creating a system of measuring and classifying individual bodies deemed criminal, Bertillon fueled the professionalization of criminal identification and photography in Europe and North America. In \textit{Father of Scientific Detection}, Bertillon’s biographer Henry T.F. Rhodes writes, “[p]hotography as Bertillon devised it, was standardized and accurate. He planned to photograph every accused person in full face and profile, which in itself was an important innovation.”\textsuperscript{125} Bertillon introduced what he called the portrait parle (speaking picture)—also known as Bertillon Identification Cards— which was a record catalog that contained anthropometric body measurements, criminal identification information, and multiple high profile face portraits. Bertillon’s two angle method of capturing compelled photos is one of the longest standing methods in identification history as seen in the modern mugshot, which always includes a front facing portrait and side angle that includes the ear in the shot. Bertillon was very particular about the importance of the side angle and contested that if the ear was not entirely exposed then the picture must be retaken.\textsuperscript{126} While Bertillon was evolving his system across France, law enforcement and penal administrators in the United States were still using portraits and memorization as primary methods of criminal identification.

One of the men accredited with the professionalization of detectives and criminal identification in the United States was Thomas Byrnes, a New York police officer that rose from patrolmen to police Sergeant to becoming one of the leading detectives in the United States. In 1882, state legislators in New York passed an act that established a bureau that would become the central office for all detectives. Byrnes would eventually

\begin{flushleft}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item Rhodes, \textit{Alphonse Bertillon}, 83.
  \item Ibid., 89. Though the term “mugshot” has a modern meaning synonymous with police identification photography, the word “mug” is an English slang term for “face” dating from the 18th century. Mugshot is a broad term that relates to any small picture of a face that is intended for a specific use.
\end{enumerate}
\end{flushleft}
take on the role of Chief Detective Inspector and established an authority that was independent of the New York police commissioners.\textsuperscript{127} Byrnes created a process of subjecting portraits and recording identification information that would become the standard professional procedure in New York.\textsuperscript{128} He taught the detectives under his leadership to search for distinguishing features and body marks that were noticed in mug portraits.

Mugshot portrait collections had been a method used in law enforcement in the US since the 1850’s. However, the recording of criminal records was not an everyday practice in the United States. Though Rogue’s Galleries were being used as early as the mid century, Byrnes popularized the term in the 1880’s. Byrnes also instituted the “Mulberry Street Morning Parade.” This process would be the equivalent to the modern day police line ups. Byrnes would bring a group of alleged criminal suspects into a room to allow the detectives under his leadership the opportunity to identify people as suspects in current criminal investigations or as repeat offenders.\textsuperscript{129}

In September of 1886, Byrnes gave shape to the importance of photography and organized criminal identification in his book, \textit{Professional Criminals of America}. The book contains as many as 200 hundred portraits that make up the first public album of alleged criminal types in the United States. On the importance of photography and the professionalization of the Rogues’ Gallery, Byrnes writes:

\begin{quote}
When we have a man with a strong case against him he knows that his portrait in some shape or other must be added to the gallery, and he is shown that it is absurd to try and defeat the purpose of justice. That makes him resigned to his fate, and all our recent artistic acquisitions are good ones. A point is made to have the best we can get, for of late photography has been an invaluable aid to the police. In the federal service and in all the big cities they are following our example.\textsuperscript{130}
\end{quote}

From the perspective of Byrnes, archiving mug portraits served a dual purpose. He believed that not only did portraits provide a valuable aid to police and identification officials, but also served as a form of discipline,

\textsuperscript{127} J. North Conway, \textit{The Big Policeman: The Rise and Fall of America’s First, Most Ruthless, and Greatest Detective} (Guilford: Lyons Press, 2019), 2165, Kindle.

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 2179.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 2186.

shame, and punishment for alleged criminals to know that police had a portrait and profile of their crimes displayed in a public gallery.\textsuperscript{131}

Byrnes especially focused on thieves and wrote an entire chapter on why he believed it was important to mug people accused and convicted of property crimes. Memory was one thing, but Byrnes believed an identification portrait could provide police with a better tool to regularly recognize people by studying profiles in the local rogues’ gallery along with other supporting details and body descriptions. One story in Byrnes’ book stemmed from his ability to recognize a man convicted of burglary that he saw on the streets of New York. “That was it,” he recalled, “[t]he picture was this man’s portrait, and the mysterious chamber where it hung was the Rogues’ Gallery.”\textsuperscript{132} Byrne’s book is one the earliest publications that details the value of identification photography in law enforcement in the United States.\textsuperscript{133} His book would be used widely across the United States to professionalize the growing field of identification.

In March of 1887, the year following the publication of the \textit{Professional Criminals of America}, an association dedicated to the registering and sorting of identification records was formed at a meeting in Detroit, Michigan. The newly found association of Wardens and Superintendents of American prisons sought to create a centralized location and process of distinguishing between first time offenders and repeat offenders using Bertillon’s system.\textsuperscript{134} Robert McClaughry, Warden at the Illinois State Penitentiary, was appointed Secretary of the association of Wardens and Superintendents of American Prisons. McClaughry was considered one of the leading professionals in the prison reform movement of the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century and headed the movement to professionalize criminal identification practices in North America.\textsuperscript{135} He was a fierce advocate for the institution

\begin{itemize}
  \item 131. On pre-trial processes of discipline and punishment, see note 51.
  \item 132. Ibid., 59
  \item 133. Byrnes was also known for his ruthless investigation tactics of using torture and abuse to get confessions. He coined his methodology the “Third Degree” which involved three stages of interrogation from persuasion to intimidation to the final stage of torture.
  \item 134. Bertillon, \textit{Instructions for Taking Descriptions for the Identification of Criminals and others by the means of Anthropometric Indications}, 10-11.
  \item 135. The late 19\textsuperscript{th} century prison reform movement focused on the idea of preparing jailed and incarcerated people for post release as opposed to retribution and long term prison sentences. This period marked the birth of probation, parole, and indeterminate sentencing. For more on probation, parole, and reform in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, see Jonathan Simon, \textit{Poor Discipline: Parole and the Social Control of the Underclass, 1890-1990} (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993); David J. Rothman, \textit{Conscience and Convenience: The
of Bertillon’s system to Wardens and Chiefs of police across Canada and the United States.\textsuperscript{136} To McClaughry, this new system was for the discharged prisoner who might veer back into a life of crime.\textsuperscript{137}

Once Bertillon’s instructions were translated from French to English with McClaughry’s support, he made it his mission to purchase complete sets of Bertillon’s identification instruments from officials in Paris. At a meeting in Toronto, Canada in September of 1887, Mc Claughry managed to get endorsements from several prominent prison Superintendents in the US and Canada. Following this, the Wardens Association of United States and Canada officially adopted Bertillon’s system of criminal identification with Joliet as the central location.\textsuperscript{138}

In addition to the construction of a new criminal laboratory at the Joliet Prison in Illinois, McClaughry established a school of instruction on site that would be attended by representatives from numerous prominent U.S. prisons. Within the first year and half, authorities at the state penitentiary at Joliet classified as many as 1400 identification portraits into an index that was promoted as a technology that could sort through records within minutes using anthropometric descriptions.\textsuperscript{139} McClaughry had taken the role as Chief of the Chicago Police Department and soon after introduced the first use of Bertillon’s system in local law enforcement.\textsuperscript{140} The need for local Bertillon laboratories was touted as a mandatory feature of modern police departments and spread across North America.

An article printed in the \textit{Los Angeles Herald} in 1892 reveals how Bertillon’s system had made its way from Eastern and Midwestern law enforcement officials to the West Coast of the United States. It explained, “The Bertillon system of measuring criminals is being introduced in eastern cities, and, it is hoped, will soon be used in Los Angeles. It is the most effective system for the detection of criminals that was ever devised. Every


\textsuperscript{136} Morn, \textit{Forgotten Reformer}, 213-14.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 243.

\textsuperscript{138} Bertillon, \textit{Instructions for Taking Descriptions for the Identification of Criminals and others by the means of Anthropometric Indications}, 12.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{140} Morn, 123.
unchangeable portion of the human body is measured.”141 The use of Rogues’ Galleries and Bertillonage could now be combined to aid police and identification officials in their quest to mark and recognize repeat offenders.

In 1894, the Seattle public learned how the credibility of photographic identification was emerging as an essential feature of a modern police department. The Seattle Post-Intelligencer would also highlight the professional naming of this new practice. It wrote, “The process of photographing a criminal is now call[ed] by the police ‘muggin,’ thus when the chief of police desires that a suspect be taken to the gallery he ordered of his officers ‘chase’ the unfortunate individual down town and ‘mug’ him.”142 In addition to subjecting accused people of portraits, local officers also began using the back side of portraits to add Bertillon inspired details including biographical information, characteristics, and past arrest records. Mug Shot cards in the United States were inspired by Bertillon’s portrait parlé.

In 1896, the Buffalo Evening News featured an article that illuminates how police in that city had professionalized their system of identification photography in stages. It wrote, “In the old days says the Brooklyn Eagle, the police authorities had a standing contract with some photographer and whenever it was necessary to have a picture taken the culprit was trotted out the doors to some public gallery.”143 As business in the city grew, so did photography and mugging in addition to the local rogues gallery and the labor required to keep up with capturing the portraits of every person arrested by police. Eventually local prosperous photographers according to the Evening News became frustrated with their duties to police and associating their galleries with so called criminals. The dilemma was that police needed not just a photographer, but someone who was readily available at all hours of the night as their profession expanded. Without a professional photographer and studio, the efficiency of the local Rogues’ Gallery dwindled as some of the remaining local photographers became less reliable an unavailable at studios when police needed them.144


144. Ibid.
The way that Buffalo police managed to professionalize their rogues’ gallery was to invest in the purchase of a camera that was exclusive to the department. It was much easier to employ a photographer and build a studio at the police headquarters. In addition, the local police were consulted by a professional photographer on the top equipment to purchase which they now argued made their studio one of the most advanced photo booths in the city. The Evening News continued, “[t]he camera itself was a costly affair. It was provided with one of the best lenses in the market. The shutter is of the latest pattern and the stand has so many conveniences that it can be moved and poised in half a dozen different ways by a child. In addition to all this there are on hand all the dark room and printing alliances that may be found in the best galleries.”145 The method of building studios in house only required a space, equipment purchases, and a professional photographer to hire. The win for police, according to the Evening News was the partnership between police equipment investment and an expert photographer looking for work.146

In November of 1897, the Spokane Chronicle headlined an article, “A Thing of Beauty: Police Will Open a Photograph Gallery Saturday.”147 The publication illuminated the excitement of local authorities in their latest steps to develop a photographic laboratory of criminal identification. The Chronicle went on to state that “[t]he police in nearly every city of any size in the country maintain a Rogue’s Gallery, and it is a valuable adjunct to the business of apprehending noted criminals.”148 One of the major groups of people that were guaranteed to be mugged by local authorities were pickpockets and rollers. The Chronicle also quoted the Chief of police who stated that following the processing of mugging, “we will exchange photos with other cities and in this way detect noted criminals and learn much about their previous criminal records.”149 The institution of a sophisticated rogues’ gallery and photograph exchange system in Spokane is another example of how identification methods and judicial photography had transitioned into a profession in the late 19th century.

145. Ibid.
146. Ibid.
148. Ibid.
149. Ibid.
The professionalization of Bertillonage and its relationship to biometric information technologies connected to the transatlantic slave trade is evident in any police mug book. This process—like runaway fugitive advertisements—resulted in the racialization, gendering, and othering of Black bodies. Mug book inscribers used body type markers such as “slender build” and “stout build” to categorize each woman. Every entry marked racial descriptions such as “Mulatto or Octoroon . . . Bro. skin . . . Lt. Bro. skin ( yellow) . . . dk. yel . . . Dk. brn. . . . dark.” In addition to documenting skin color and body types, police inscribers used words like “negress” and “cooness” to describe Black women in the mug books. The word negress as revealed earlier was a description of Black women typically used to demonize Black womanhood. The continuity of the word negress from runaway advertisements to police mug books is telling. Inscribing these terms was a designation of race, African ancestry, social difference, de-gendering, de-feminizing, Black inferiority, and criminality.

In the Sacramento police mug books, other non-Black women of color and white women are listed as female, and, if they were born in a different country, a description of nativity would appear before the word female. But never in these mug books did police officers describe Black women as female. Skin was one of many identification markers documented in Black women’s mug book files. Most Black women have some notes written in the section designated for “peculiar marks” such as moles, tattoos, or scars. One can only imagine any rising detective or identification expert modeling Bertillon’s system of objectifying bodies and


153. See note 151.
capturing multiple portraits of every Black woman booked by police, especially itinerant rollers like Nettie Weems. Below is a mug book profile of Weems in 1925 constructed by identification officials in Sacramento, California—nearly a hundred years after the “Forty Dollar Reward” advertisement printed in the *New Orleans Argus*.154

![Mug Book Profile of Nettie Weems](image)

**Figure 1.4** Dollie Bibbs (aka Nettie Weems) no.10989 reprinted from Sacramento Police Department Mug Book, 1923-1925

---

Not every city had a professionalized Rogues’ gallery or mug book database prior to the turn of the 20th century, however, the evolution of any modern police department began with an organized Rogues’ Gallery. For example, in 1907, the Billings Weekly in Montana published an article that detailed how the Chief of police had begun to update the local rogues gallery. Up until this point the identification portraits were not arranged in a way that made it easy to sort through. According to the Billings Weekly Gazette, the update was about efficiency. It explained, “Chief Taigo and Jailey Heagney purchased some slender gilt rods and nailed them to the wall of the chief’s office. Then the photographs were installed in regular order and sequence and Heagney and the chief stood off and exclaimed, ‘Ain’t that the goods, though?’”

There was now a physical space that police authorities could look around and study a collection of portraits and identification information. The Weekly went on to describe how the Rogues’ Gallery was inextricably linked to the professionalization of a police department in any city in addition to the military. “In the larger cities an accurate record of all these circulars and photograph is kept indexed, as well as a record of all the deserters from the army and navy of the country.”

The professionalization of criminal identification was not just about forcing portraits and having them stored away. Byrnes, Bertillon, and McClaughry all asserted that it was recognition and an organized system that was the solution to distinguishing between first time offenders and repeat offenders.

By 1909, police in Evanston, Illinois—a suburb outside of Chicago—had advanced their identification technology through the use of a “vest pocket rogues’ gallery.” The advanced system was a form of surveillance that enabled police to capture photos of people on the street. According to an article in Chicago and shared with the Missoulian, “all detectives on the city’s police force will be equipped with ‘watch’ cameras, a developing room will be installed at the police station . . . When the street corner snap shots are developed they are expected to furnish a compact record of all ‘undesirables who may be so unfortunate hereafter to venture within the limits of Evanston.” Though the use of body cameras is often talked about as a 21st century police technology, systems like this appear to be instituted in law enforcement over one hundred years ago as a


156. Ibid.


158. Ibid.
supplement to Rogues’ Galleries and the surveillance of “undesirable people.”

**“Special Attention”**

The evolution of identification photography and Bertillonage—coupled with the racialized progressive era sexual politics — empowered detectives and criminal identification authorities to mug any Black woman accused of law breaking, especially for petty crimes. Raids on parties and gatherings and large scale arrests left any Black woman attending these events vulnerable to being displayed in the local Rogues’ Gallery. In an article titled, “Negresses Get Photos Taken,” the *Spokane Chronicle* revealed over two dozen women booked and photographed by a local detective in one afternoon.\(^{159}\) It described, “Detective George Cox, the Bertillon man of the Spokane police department was busily engaged Wednesday afternoon ‘mugging’ the 15 colored women who were arrested Tuesday morning in a raid near Colfax avenue and Market.”\(^{160}\) During this period—in the decade leading up to the First War—police raids on homes, dance venues, and other spaces that occupied groups of Black women were under constant threat of being Bertillonaged and exhibited in the a Rogues’ Gallery as undesirables and sex workers. In addition, campaigns to clean up red-light districts and vice also left street walking workers and any Black women presumed to be a sex worker or roller vulnerable to surveillance and police identification booking.

Even when police could not prove a crime such as soliciting or rolling a John, they still mugged Black women for their Rogues’ Galleries. When police in Sioux City, Iowa could not prove that Mamie Harris was the suspect that had committed a robbery that happened three months earlier, she was forced to plead guilty to vagrancy and “promise to leave town.”\(^{161}\) Mamie would not escape the local Rogues Gallery however. According to *Sioux City Journal*, “The Harris woman was ‘mugged’ and measured by the Bertillon system before being released.”\(^{162}\) This method of categorizing Black women as habitual sex offenders and using Rogues’ Galleries as a form of surveillance would only intensify with more Black migrants arriving to the urban city.

---


160. Ibid.


162. Ibid
The citywide targeting of rollers increased how police used identification photography and mugging as a racial and gendered surveillance tool. The theory that unescorted Black women on the streets at night were a threat to public safety led police in South Bend, Indiana to create a measure that would compel women marked as streetwalkers to have their portraits captured by Bertillon officials and added to the local Rogues’ Gallery. The year was 1912 and the first woman photographed under the new policy was a Black woman named Carrie Morgan that had traveled from Chicago.163

In an article titled “Street Walkers Will Go In Rogues Gallery,” the South Bend Tribune gives evidence that the new policy was specifically aimed at keeping a surveillance record of Black sex workers. It explained, “Special attention will be given to the photographing and cataloguing of descriptions of negro women who, as street walkers, have already given police considerable trouble.”164 A South Bend judge eventually punished Carrie with a $15 fine and forced her to leave the city by noon the next day or face a thirty day sentence in the local jail. Carrie’s case reveals how the rise of criminal identification was a process and a condition that gave police the power to surveil and keep tabs on Black women and the courts the power to banish.

**Fingerprints**

Judicial photography and Bertillon’s system were not the only biometric identification technologies that emerged as professional methods used in law enforcement and state and federal prisons prior to the first wave of the Great Migration. Dactyloscopy, also known as fingerprinting arose in the late 19th century. The beginning of fingerprinting in England was instituted by Charles Stockley at Scotland Yard and was followed by authorities across Europe and North America.165 During the first decade of the 20th century, fingerprinting had become a competitor in identification methods as Bertillon’s system came under fire for its inaccuracies,


164. Ibid. On Black sex workers in the late 19th and early 20th century, see note 25. For more on histories of sex work and progressive era anti-vice campaigns, see note 92.

particularly related to issues of race. The following reprinted images are the mug portraits that sparked the controversy surrounding Bertillon’s system.

Figure 1.5 Identification Portraits of Will West and William West reproduced from National Archives At Kansas City, Missouri
The Will and William West story is touted by the Federal Bureau of Identification as one of the most important cases in the history of fingerprinting in the United States. There are different rendering of the specifics and exact time period of the case but the gist revolved around two Black men incarcerated at Leavenworth federal prison with nearly identical Bertillon measurements. The clerk’s office at Leavenworth booked Will West in 1903 just like any other incarcerated person entering the prison. According to the clerk, there was something different yet memorable about Will. His face looked identical to an imprisoned man already serving a life sentence at Leavenworth for murder. When Will’s body measurements and portraits matched the profile of William West, it sent a sudden shock wave to prison administrators. Faced with a profile and portrait that looked identical to himself, Will still claimed he was not William West.¹⁶⁶

It was not hard to actually find out that William was already incarcerated at the institution and that the two men were totally different people. It is not surprising that Matthew Mc Claughry—son of Robert Mc Claughry—was the warden at Leavenworth at the time of the Will and William West incident. His father had spent decades professionalizing criminal identification methods and establishing local, state, and international Bertillon laboratories. Fingerprint was the perfect technology to distinguish between the two Wests. If Bertillon’s system was flawed, that meant Mc Claughry would have to challenge the very system that helped build his father’s career.

The case was settled when the two fingerprints came back different though nearly every other biometric identification marker in their files were similar. The Will and William West case revealed the inherent flaws in Bertillon’s system when two people had similar body measurements, complexions, and somewhat similar portraits. The story of these men lead to the theory that fingerprinting could distinguish between identical twins. The Will and William West case reveals a critical juncture in the professionalization of criminal identification in the United States and rumor holds that Mc Claughry himself called it the death of Bertillonage and discontinued the system the following day.¹⁶⁷ Within the next decade, fingerprinting had


become a successful method of identification across North America as Bertillonage saw its decline.

By 1907, Leavenworth became the central location for all federal Bertillon and fingerprint records. McClaughry wanted the Leavenworth laboratory to be a model for federal identification authorities to eventually take over. In Forgotten Reformer, Frank Morn described the Leavenworth operation:

Several case files cabinets were housed at Leavenworth. Over seven feet tall, six feet wide, and two feet deep, these cabinets held thousands of cards. In the beginning one case had over 5000 Bertillon cards of international criminals. Another held over 5000 cards of American career criminals. As dactyloscopy became more important, a separate cabinet held 3600 sheets of fingerprints.168

The description of the records housed at Leavenworth reveals how Bertillonage was combined with fingerprinting as viable methods of keeping track of alleged career criminals. Furthermore, the federal database illuminates the focus on law enforcement cooperation and the archiving of national and international identification records in a central location. Though Leavenworth housed less fingerprint records than Bertillon cards at the time, this would change during the second decade of the 20th century.

In 1912, the new technology of fingerprinting was first practiced in large scale on sex workers in New York. Over a three year period, under the Inferior Criminal Courts Act, authorities in New York gathered as many as 12,000 fingerprint records of sex workers, whom to police were habitual offenders.169 Fingerprinting was a lot easier than Bertillon’s methods which required learning how to use his special tools and instruments to measure bodies with precision. In addition, fingerprinting could take less than five to ten minutes compared to Bertillon’s labor intensive system that required ample training and time.

In February of 1920, the Edmonton Journal in Alberta, Canada featured an article titled “Canada Has Big Rogues’ Gallery of Fingerprints,” that broadly illuminates how the practice of criminal identification in North America was professionalized as a cooperative international network.170 The editor of the Police Bulletin


168. Morn, 244.


55
at Ottawa, Canada noted that local criminal identification archival processes should be a joint effort with
government officials at every level from the municipal to the Province up the hierarchy to authorities of the
total Canadian dominion. The Journal wrote, “[w]ith the fingerprint system of identification firmly established
in most of the Canadian and U.S. police departments, the next step has been to devise some system either of
centralization or of distribution by which the records of one city can be made available for all.”\(^{171}\) In Canada, all
criminal identification archives across the dominion were centrally housed in Ottawa. The goal in Canada was
not to just make identification archiving and police cooperation more effective across the provinces, but also to
confront the so called traveling criminal from the United States like Weems.

**The Intercommunicating Police Teletype System in California**

Following World War I, the further development of technologies that aided police cooperation and the
quick exchange of identification information coincided with the massive movements of Black and white
southerners.\(^{172}\) In collaboration with Canadian officials, identification professionals in the United States were
evolving the use of the latest technologies and methods of criminal detection. It is fair to assume that the large
database of fingerprints and identification records in Canada also included Weems’ records.

Law enforcement internationalism is illuminated when we examine Weems’ Vancouver arrest history
included in a police mug book constructed by local identification authorities in Sacramento, California, under
the alias Dollie Bibbs in 1925.\(^{173}\) The Bertillonage method of measuring the “criminal” body and the front face
and side angle portrait is evident. The numbers and letters in the top left corner represent Weems’ fingerprint
records that allowed police to correspond arrests with portraits. It is also important to note how many different
law enforcement agencies helped to construct this comprehensive record of police arrests from nearly every
region of North America from Chicago to Canada, Washington to California and even Texas.\(^{174}\)

---

171. Ibid.

172. On telegram systems and intelligence during the First World War, see note 84. Boghardt, *The
Zimmermann Telegram: Intelligence, Diplomacy, and America’s Entry into World War I* (Annapolis: Naval
Institute Press, 2013). For more on the exodus of Black and white southerners, see James, *The Southern
Diaspora*.


174. Ibid.
At the state level, the California Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation (CBCII) constructed a full arrest profile on Nettie Weems from 1915 to 1935. It had been at least 45 years since Bertillon’s system arrived in North America and over thirty years since fingerprinting had begun to replace it. Despite this transition, identification photography would remain central to the law enforcement profession. By this time, the CBCII had professionalized new strategies and tactics of rapidly identifying alleged criminal activities, arrests, and court outcomes across California and North America. The CBCII worked in the shadows of law enforcement and aimed to create a central agency that could support law enforcement and archive criminal profiles. This is evident by the diversity of cities, states, and countries of criminal detection illuminated in Weems’ arrest history, including the criminal identification profile constructed by local Sacramento police.

In a report published by the CBCII and submitted to California governor C.C. Young in 1928, authorities advocated for more money and resources to hire additional employees and strengthen departmental efficiency. Officials at the CBCII specifically wanted to add a Section of Investigation. The report stated that the new body would “consist of professionally trained criminal investigators . . . [t]hese investigators would assist municipalities and counties when called upon by officials and would also take up the pursuit of habitual criminals known to be operating in the state.” In other words, the CBCII was aiming to create an intelligence agency that stretched beyond the borders of California to catalog and keep track of alleged habitual offenders on the move.

In addition to adding more investigators, the CBCII wanted to institute a spatial network that rapidly coordinated with law enforcement in different cities, states, and regions. It described the benefit stating, “[t]his may be accomplished by the use of appliances for communication with all departments through a central agency.” The technological appliance that the CBCII advocated for was the teletype system that used radio transmission to send information between law enforcement agencies.

The Teletype system was imagined as a tool that could further develop a cooperative pipeline for law enforcement agencies.


176. Ibid.

177. Ibid.
enforcement to confront the increasing mobility of itinerants and alleged criminals on the move. The directors would mention this in their advocacy letter to the Governor in order to illuminate how they believed the intercommunicating police Teletype system could help to construct a rapid identification network.\footnote{178} The challenge to mobility was also important to California and the Pacific West coast with train routes running from Mexico to Canada.\footnote{179} In the biennial report, the Bureau highlighted how efficient the department had been over the past two years, which included dividing duties into eight separate bureaus.

The major section of the department was the fingerprint division, which authorities argued would be more efficient with a permanent teletype system.\footnote{180} The CBCII conducted the first trial of the teletype system in 1930. It wrote, “[p]erhaps the greatest forward step in police cooperation in California since the establishment of the Division itself, was made in the installation of the police intercommunicating teletype system, under the supervision of the Division of Criminal Identification and Investigation.”\footnote{181} The efforts of the CBCII to create a central information agency was a critical element to the growth of the department. Describing the massiveness of teletype system to state authorities, the CBCII stated,

\[t\]his system leased from the telephone company consists of 25 stations in 17 cities. While a more extensive system was originally projected, it was felt that the system actually allowed by the Legislature was sufficiently ample to demonstrate conclusively the value of the system and that when this value was shown additions could be made.\footnote{182}

In addition to documenting how other police agencies praised the teletype system, the CBCII used criminal
identification information, including thousands of fingerprints and portraits they had gathered, to encourage state officials to create a budget to fully institute the teletype system.

The thousands of criminal identification records on file and praises by police in several regions led to the birth of the Intercommunicating Police Teletype System in California. One police official from the Imperial Valley of California stated, “I believe this teletype system to be the surest, strongest, and most efficient weapon to fight crime that has come into use during the last 25 years.”

The teletype excited law enforcement and empowered the CBCII to become a central intelligence force unequaled by agencies across the country. There is no doubt that the institution of the Teletype system enabled the CBCII to track Weems in various different cities, regions, and even in Canada.

The CBCII constructed a record of Weems’ confrontations with the criminal legal system over a twenty year period. Her arrest history reveals that during this period, police in at least 12 different cities had booked and jailed her from Chicago, Illinois to Kansas City, Missouri; Colorado Springs to Denver, Colorado; Sioux City, Iowa; Vancouver and Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada; Snohomish, Washington; Galveston, Texas and five different cities in California. The record is evidence of a sophisticated police network that collaborated to identify Weems. Furthermore, there is a note at the top of the record that illuminates the collective effort between the CBCII and Washington Identification Bureaus.

At least thirty years before this record, Robert McClaughry had established the foundation for a cooperative international network of law enforcement. In addition to illuminating collaborative police networks, the record is filled with information that involves a chain of processes from arrests to jailing to court outcomes and release dates. Though the record only has 15 arrest entries, behind the scenes, identification officials had more archival sources from portraits to fingerprints in circulation. Below is a copy of an arrest history of Weems that would have only been possible through law enforcement cooperation and technologies such as the intercommunicating police teletype system in California.

183. Ibid., 174-75.

184. Florence Hicks no. 56866, Imprisoned, SQIF.
Figure 1.6 Arrest History of Florence Hicks, no. 56866
reprinted from San Quentin Inmate Files
Chapter Two

Black Women on the Move and Resisting Detection

“Sharp in Eluding Detection”

Rollers were not included in Professional Criminals of America published in 1886. At the time, the majority of Black Americans were still living in the US South. This would change with the southern exodus. As the urban roller industry evolved in the late 19th and early 20th century, Black women became more clever and intentional with the tactics needed in their trade. As a result, rollers forced law enforcement and detectives to adopt new procedures and methods of capture and criminal identification. Securing a pocketbook was only half of the job of a roller. One of the strengths of all good rollers was their ability to disappear from the presence of Johns without being fully identifiable. Most of the time this meant operating in places like alleys, at night, or in secluded locations—each its own coordinated space. As urban geographers, Black rollers possessed a certain intrinsic wisdom in these spaces and each job completed became another opportunity for rollers to master their craft and the spatialization of their working corridors.

An article titled, “Woman Takes Money And Vanishes,” published in the Oregon Daily Journal evidences how rollers used concealed spaces to dominate even the most prominent Johns. In this police complaint, the former Oregon Secretary of State, Harrison R. Kincaid was rolled by a teenage Black girl in a vacant house late at night. A young Black girl in an abandoned building with a white man was a risk that made her vulnerable to rape and assault. Nevertheless, at some point, the girl managed to pick Kincaid’s pockets and removed a wallet with $100 and some valuable papers. The Journal wrote, “Mr. Kincaid felt in his pocket to see if his wallet was still there. Finding it gone, he accused the woman of robbing him. She ran and escaped . . . Mr. Kincaid was unable to tell the officers much about the woman. He said it was dark when she accosted him.” Whether Black women and girls were selling sex or not, the key to rolling Johns successfully was often the illusion of sex for cash trade or at least an explicit sexual embrace to distract his attention just long enough to slip a hand in his pocket as quick as possible. Rollers recognized that Johns feared being seen in public with


186. Ibid.
Black women and girls, especially public streetwalkers, therefore dark secreted locations were the perfect spots to set a trap.

In the world of rolling Johns, especially within the boundaries of tenderloin districts, Black women used different disguises and forms of distraction to avoid detection or to help execute their plans. In 1906, a Black woman scored a major pay day in the tenderloin district of Buffalo, New York. In this report, the woman allegedly made herself appear distressed in order to grab the attention of a John walking through the district with another male companion. Or at least, that was the story told to detectives by the complaining witness.

According to the *Buffalo Commercial*, the man recalled walking toward the woman as she grabbed a hold of his coat during a conversation. Despite what was said or occurred during this alleged interaction, once he had left the scene, he suddenly realized that the personal items from an inside pocket were missing, including $20,000 worth of diamonds that he had recently inherited from his father’s estate in Italy.¹⁸⁷ When he returned to the district, the Black woman had disappeared.¹⁸⁸ On the other hand, there is a high likelihood of the possibility that she was not posing as a beggar, but perhaps a sex worker and during the exchange she managed to pick his pockets.

A roller soliciting sex trade in the tenderloin district was more likely than a Black woman posing in need of charity from a white man that was likely already marked as a trick. No matter how this woman solicited the complaining witness, the execution of her plan required ingenuity and on the spot improvisation and proved to be worth it. Regardless of the how she managed to pick his pockets, the fact that the complainant did not have a full description of her is telling. Though practically all roller jobs required some form of improvisation, many of Black women’s methods of concealment were intentional. One of the ways that Black women used transformative identities to evade prosecution was through the physical changing of clothes, wigs, hats, fashion

¹⁸⁷. Ibid.

¹⁸⁸. “Robbed in Street By Woman Thief: Negress Who Posed as a Beggar Got $20,000 in Jewelry From Diamond Cutter,” *Buffalo Commercial*, April 14, 1906, newspapers.com (accessed October 30, 2020). Financial losses like this amount were extremely rare and happened to be a lucky day for this Black woman. There were various Johns whose financial loss exceeded the normal roller jobs. How much money and property Johns carried with them was unpredictable. In addition, we usually only know what they reported to police. Some rollers might come away with a few dollars and others might catch Johns at the right time with most or all of their savings or paycheck in their pockets. It is important to note that some Johns also faced more egregious circumstances that involved assault and death stemming from roller plots or physical conflicts. These cases were few. I distinguish some of the aggravating circumstances that evolved out of the everyday plots to roll Johns from the everyday petty pickpocketing that most rollers participated in.
accessories, and makeup. This was the case of Stella Moore—one of the most wanted fugitives in Omaha Nebraska—identified in the figure below.

Figure 2.1 Stella Moore, “female highwayman . . . true western style” reprinted from *Spokane Press*, 1907
In 1907, Stella had rolled a series of men at gun point, “in true western style,” according to an article shared with the *Spokane Press*.\(^{189}\) Stella was a light skinned woman, identified as a mulatto. There was a suspicion that she was the alleged robber but based off her complexion, witnesses could not identify her as the so-called bandit. Each complaint identified the perpetrator as a “greasy black’ negress.”\(^{190}\) Stella was almost identical in appearance but not as dark as what police had gathered from witnesses. Then, one day, an officer decided to paint Stella’s face Black and presented her to witnesses. It was then that the complaining witnesses reportedly stated, “That’s the woman.”\(^{191}\) Stella performed Blackface as a method of resisting identification.\(^{192}\) Painting faces to avoid detection was not only a tactic used by Stella, many other Black women use this strategy to distort their true identities as well.

Some Black rollers used lighter shades of face paint to make themselves appear in the image of white women. This was the case in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada in 1913. Police detectives arrested two Black women as suspects on a charge of rolling a John for $200. With the headline, “Negresses Paint White: Change Colores to Elude Evidence in Case of Arrest,” the *Edmonton Journal* wrote, “[w]hen they arrived at the police station, the police officers discovered their faces were of a ghastly white color, and that it had been the habit of the two colored women to paint their faces so that a victim would swear that they were white girls in case the arrests should be made.”\(^{193}\) The changing of complexion was a clever tactic, especially since it made it harder for Johns, police, and prosecutors to accurately secure enough evidence that would lead to a felony conviction beyond a reasonable doubt.

Police in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada encountered a similar case of a Black women using face whitening to avoid identification. Mamie Ricardi was marked by local police and press as the “Golden-
“Wigged Lady.” According to the *Province*, “[s]he had obtained the appellation of the ‘woman with the golden wig’ some years ago, when she used to wear a heavy blonde wig, covering her natural black kinky hair.” Mamie had a long record of police arrests in Vancouver and was suspected by police of operating as a roller on several occasions. Mamie rolled her victims with the impression of being a white woman, according to press reports. The *Province* continued, “[o]ften she was suspected of picking pockets, but when the informant, accompanied by the police, went to her house, they found instead of the ‘blonde woman with rouged cheeks,’ an unmistakable negro, with the result that positive identification was difficult.” Black women’s use of face paint led to police and detectives having to shift how they searched for rollers.

As these reports reveal, Black women intentionally darkened their skin in addition to lightening their skin. These strategies were instrumental in the roller business where eluding detection was a necessity. One of the other methods that Black women regularly used to resist police capture and detection was through apparel and fashion accessories. Changing attire to roll Johns was particularly practical in early 20th century red-light districts where some Black women operated their trade inside of brothels, cribs, and saloons. This practice was a systematic tactic used in two “notorious” brothels in the tenderloin district of Seattle, Washington. Women in the Old and New Paris house—both predominately Black—were so successful in their business that on one occasion, the Mayor and police chief ordered a raid on the house and jailed eight women at one time. Based off of information from two night patrolman, the *Seattle Star* wrote “negresses are not only clever pickpockets, but also exceedingly sharp in eluding detection . . . After the victim has been ‘rolled’ and starts for police aid the offenders quickly changes clothes and wigs with one of her disreputable neighbors, and when the strong arm of the law takes possession of the case, the mystified ‘sucker’ cannot identify the dark-skinned spider into whose web he had wandered.”

The local prosecutor would eventually release each of the women arrested by police in the raid because the John could not accurately identify the correct perpetrator.


195. Ibid.

In 1907, the *Victoria Daily Colonist* in British Columbia, Canada published an article that described a roller that used wigs and gender performance to execute jobs. The article—originating from New Westminster, B.C.—featured a story about Mary Turner, a roller well known by police in the Pacific Northwest. It wrote, “[s]ometimes the woman wore male attire while conducting her operations on other occasions she disguised herself by wearing a thick fringe of false hair.” Mary’s practice of concealing her identity is another example of the ways that Black women used gendered performance in their trade. Another method of identity concealment that Black women regularly used was fictitious names whether the ones given to Johns or the names they gave police.

“A Negress who has Several Aliases”

Having a series of alternative names was an everyday practice for Black women working in shadow sex economies as police bookings became a frequent occurrence in the urban city. Take for example Sadie Goff, who was known by police in Chicago to use multiple tactics of changing her identity, including aliases. According to statements from the police, the *Chicago Chronicle* reported that Sadie had “with the aid of wig and paint, been assuming different characters for some time.” In addition to disrupting police and detective’s ability to connect women to roller jobs, Black women regularly reported different names to police when they were captured. This particularly had the potential to cause chaos in court rooms. One of the examples of this occurred in 1898 when Sadie appeared in court for trial. A judge was confused when she identified herself differently than what appeared in the court record. The *Chronicle* captured an exchange between Sadie and the judge, which started with him asking her name. “My name is Sadie Goff,” she responded with a smile on her face. The judge then shouted with frustration in his tone, “Where is Katie Wilson?” Sadie followed in laughter, “Why, I am Katie Wilson.” The judge looked to his clerks for more information but only Sadie and police officers that knew her could explain the discrepancy. She spoke for herself. “Why, I am both Sadie Goff and Katie Wilson, all in one . . . At least that is what the police say.” The judge was still puzzled until a detective stepped up in court and notified the judge that Sadie had multiple names on record with the police.


199. Ibid.
It was not an anomaly for judges to be confronted with Black women’s aliases or non-traditional names in court. In 1908, the *Arkansas Democrat* in Little Rock published an article titled, “Negress Booked As ‘Gee Whiz,’” that further reveals how judges responded with anger when Black women’s self-naming practices appeared to make a mockery of the court.200 “No Foolishness now, I want to know your name” the judge stated.201 Gee went on to tell the judge that the record was accurate. “Well Judge, I’se don’ tol’ you, it’s Gee Whiz.” The judge refused to go back and forth any longer and ordered her to pay a $5 fine for disturbing the peace.202 The *Democrat* featured stories about judges confronting Black women over their use of aliases on more than one occasion. When local police officers had arrested Bessie Gray, she reported her name as Violet Austin. The judges’ discontent was captured by the *Democrat*. It wrote, “I’m going to fine Violet Austin $300 and 60 days, and Bessie Gray $25, now which of those two are you?”203 The overwhelming reports of Black women’s aliases and confrontations with judges is evidence of the role detection and recognition played in marking people as repeat offenders.

When police in Anaconda, Montana jailed a Black woman for vagrancy, she told them her name was Bessie as well, though it was an alias specifically reserved for criminal legal authorities. The *Anaconda Standard* reported how this was a normal practice amongst local underground workers. It wrote, “The names given in police court usually have no bearing on the names by which these women are known in non-court circles.”204 Bessie chose to always give police a fictitious name when arrested on the streets. In court, a police officer referred to her by a another name and was immediately corrected by the judge “That isn’t the name on the complaint,” he responded.205 Following this, Bessie set her own record straight saying, “[t]he name on the


201. Ibid.

202. Ibid.


205. Ibid.
complaint is the one I give when I am brought up here.”206 The Anaconda Standard would go on to highlight how many women criminalized by police for vagrancy sought to be creative with their assumed identities. It wrote, “Some of the female vagrants used to let their imagination run riot in picking police court names for themselves.”207 The tactic of reporting numerous aliases to police across North America suggest that Black women’s practices were widely deployed in the urban city as a response to the rise of criminal identification technologies and the professionalization of policing.208

There are a host of reasons, in addition to avoiding police tracking that Black women used aliases. Some Black women used aliases to officially publicize their businesses in the underworld. Others working in illicit economies wanted to keep their private and working lives concealed from family shame and respectability politics, especially since the press was obsessed with printing Black women’s name.209 It is also possible that some Black women sought to create disorder in the official police and court records by reporting different names at each arrest.

The press in collaboration with police were largely responsible for the publication of Black women’s aliases, especially women police authorities dubbed as fugitives from justice. In 1910, the Jackson Daily News in Mississippi headlined an article, “Wanted At Collins: Negress With Many Aliases Arrested for Grand Larceny.”210 A Black woman by the name of Rosa changed her last name while she was a fugitive. In Collins, Mississippi, police knew her as Rosa Bennet and Rosa Johnson, and when police captured her in Jackson, she gave her name as Rosa Baggett. In 1911, the Topeka State Journal featured a similar article about a Black woman with numerous names that had jumped bail and fled from Lincoln, Nebraska to Chicago. The Journal wrote, “Jessie Robinson, a negress of many aliases . . . had several hundred dollars invested in her bond and the

206. Ibid.

207. Ibid.

208. The use of aliases was not exclusive to Black women. Many women working in the sex trade used aliases as well as men and others that police booked frequently.

209. On politics of respectability politics, see note 22.

Topeka police had worked on the case in an attempt to trace her.”211 Figuring out Black women’s alternative names was a formation of modern policing. It was someone’s job to track names back to the same person and uncover Black women’s alleged true identities using portraits, Rogues’ Galleries, and fingerprints.

News outlets promoted aliases as a trait of career criminals. It was usually women with long police records, especially noted rollers, that were typically highlighted in the press as having a host of different names in the police record books. Black women did not reveal all of their aliases to police during one booking. The diversity of aliases evolved with the frequency of police encounters. The professionalization of identification practices created the normalization of tracking aliases across time periods and regions. In many press accounts, editors used specific language to describe Black women with “several aliases.” For example, the Press and Sun-Bulletin in Binghamton, New York wrote “Mamie Dunn, a negress with 15 alleged aliases” was in court facing a roller complaint.212 At each booking, police would have subjected Mamie to mugging and fingerprint recording that tracked her alternative names. The Pensacola News Journal identified Ella Swann as “[T]he negress, who has several aliases.”213 The Dothan Eagle in Alabama described Della Davis in the press as “a negress, who had several aliases, and who has a bad character.”214 Similarly, the Sacramento Union described a Black woman named Mamie Gardner as “a negress who has several aliases and also a long police record.”215 Mamie, like Della, Ella, and many Black women and rollers that developed a normal alias practice was not new to police bookings and the criminal legal system. Practically all mug book entries eventually included a specific line for police inscribers to record aliases.

Tracking aliases was not only something conducted in local police departments in the United States, immigration authorities in Canada also documented the aliases of undesirables, the accused, convicted, and


especially people on the deportation list. By 1919, Canadian immigration authorities had deported Lizzie Moore, “negress of many aliases,” three times for “being a loose, idle and disorderly person.”\textsuperscript{216} In other words, police marked Lizzie as a \textit{prostitute} and an undesirable person, which meant that she had no legal standing in Canada. Each time police booked Lizzie, she gave a different name that authorities recorded alongside of mugshots and fingerprints logged in the local Rogues’ Gallery. Then, local authorities sent copies of these records to immigration authorities at Ottawa. Following the third time that police captured Lizzie in Canada, the Chief Immigration Inspector expressed “that should she ever attempt to enter Canada again she would receive a heavy prison sentence.”\textsuperscript{217} Lizzie’s case highlights how Black women used fictitious names to avoid surveillance tracking and deportation on an international level, especially once identification officials had marked them as undesirables.

Police cooperation on the United States/Canadian borders evidences how advancements in identification technology and telegram communication helped police agencies uncover the identities of itinerant rollers. In August of 1927, police in Windsor, Ontario, Canada received a complaint of a white man rolled for $30 in alley. Two local detectives would eventually arrest a Black woman one night “in an alley east of Glengarry avenue” where the alleged crime took place.\textsuperscript{218} The woman would become known by Windsor police as Susan “Pinkie” Daniels from Detroit. Susan would eventually plead guilty.\textsuperscript{219} Over a sixty day period, the \textit{Windsor Star} followed the development of the police investigation into Susan.

By September, Susan had admitted to rolling another white man. The courts eventually offered Susan a plea deal of vagrancy that would result in a 30 day sentence in jail, “at the end of which period she will be deported.”\textsuperscript{220} While detaining Susan in the local jail, Canadian investigators communicated with law enforcement in the United States and discovered that they had captured one the most notorious rollers in the

\begin{flushright}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{216} “Thrice Deported, ‘Lizzie’ Is Ordered To Leave Again,” \textit{Windsor Star} (Ontario, Canada), July 22, 1919, newspapers.com (accessed November 1, 2020).
\item \textsuperscript{217} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{218} “Woman Admits She Robbed Man,” \textit{Windsor Star}, August 27, 1927, newspapers.com (accessed November 29, 2020).
\item \textsuperscript{219} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{220} “Negress Is Jailed For Robbing Men,” \textit{Windsor Star} (Ontario, Canada), September 24, 1927, newspapers.com (accessed November 29, 2020).
\end{enumerate}
\end{flushright}
region. “According to Detroit officers, Susie is known on the other side of the Detroit river as the champion ‘alley roller.’”\textsuperscript{221} The \textit{Star} noted that Susan used the aliases Ethel Blanco, Julia Green, Bertha Calvin, and Dorothy and had a history of “65 arrests to her credit.”\textsuperscript{222} There are no details of how long Susan had been working in the game, but it was certain to police that she had earned the title of champion roller and they had the records to prove. The method of alias tracking was a critical component in the professionalization of criminal identification and policing across the globe. If Susan had 65 arrests on file with police, that meant she likely had a host of mug portraits as well. The press reports that reveal one person with numerous aliases also illuminate how frequent Black women encountered police bookings and archival recording.

In 1930, before a judge sentenced Jessie Waters to San Quentin prison in California for a roller conviction, he went over some of the details from a ten year background investigation constructed by local probation authorities. The Judge would go onto ask Jessie if all her aliases on file were true. He stated: “Are you the same person who has heretofore at different times been known by each of the following names: Mamie Jones, Marie Davis, Mary Davis, Jessie Hart, Marie Davies, Ethel Williams, Marie Brownlee, Bessie Robinson, Marie Martin, Atonette Martini, Marie Williams, Jennie Johnson, Tamea Larriean and Tenea Martin?” Jessie replied, “yes sir I am.”\textsuperscript{223} This court record is a part of the profiles constructed by the California Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation at the state level in collaboration with Washington identification officials. On a local level, a mug book profile shared with Sacramento officials reveal that many of Jessie’s aliases in Los Angeles were also recorded by Oakland authorities.\textsuperscript{224}

Carceral and press archives are evidence that Black women’s identification records circulated extensively between law enforcement agencies and courts in different cities, states, and even across the international borders. These sources offer valuable clues into Black women’s resistance practices such as the use of aliases, identity performance, costumes, fashion accessories, and crossing state and international borders. Black women responded to the normalization of police occupation, mugging, and surveillance in the urban city


\textsuperscript{222} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{223} Jessie Waters no. 49419, Imprisoned, SQIF.

by adopting creative disguises to evade detection and criminal prosecution. Without police tracking repeat
offenders and noted rollers through aliases, there was likely few collective reasons to have numerous different
names.

“Johnnie Bull’s’ Travels”

In June of 1889, police in Council Bluff, Iowa arrested Belle Henderson in connection with an alleged
“gang” of robbers wanted by police over a hundred miles south east in Kansas City, Missouri. Following her
capture, the Kansas City Times featured an article with the headline, “Johnnie Bull’ In Jail” that provides insight
into the collaborative effort between law enforcement in two different states to capture Belle and her co-
defendants. The Times reported, “[t]his gang committed a number of the boldest robberies that ever graced the
city and stowed nearly all their goods with ‘Johnnie Bull,’ where they were recovered.” 225 On September 20,
Belle and four other men indicted by Kansas City prosecutors appeared in court for trial. A jury found all of
them guilty and a judge sentenced each to serve jail or prison time up to ten years. The judge punished Belle
with five years in the Missouri State Penitentiary.

Not long after Belle arrived at the Missouri State prison in Jefferson City, the Deputy Warden used a
caveat in the law to lease her as a “convict” laborer in his home.226 While going back and forth between the
Warden’s house and the prison, Belle had a certain degree of freedom from the strict confines of the
penitentiary. During the final days of December, Belle managed to vanish from the Wardens house one day.227

225. “‘Johnnie Bull’ In Jail,” Kansas City Times, June 29, 1889, newspapers.com (accessed December
27, 2020).

226. For more on Black women, imprisonment, convict leasing, chain gangs, and escape see Sarah
Haley, No Mercy Here; Talitha L. LeFlouria, Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New
South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Micah Kater, “Unable to Find Any Trace of Her:
Black Women, Genealogies of Escape, and Alabama Prisons, 1920-1950,” PhD diss., (Yale University, 2022);
Dennis Childs, Slaves of the State Black Incarceration from the Chain Gang to the Penitentiary (Minneapolis:
University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Matthew J. Mancini, One Dies, Get Another: Convict Leasing in the
American South, 1866-1928 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996); David M. Oshinsky, "Worse
than Slavery": Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1996);
Douglas A. Blackmon, Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black People in America from the
Civil War to World War II (New York: Doubleday, 2008); Alex Lichtenstein, Twice the Work of Free Labor:
Kidnapping Club: Wall Street, Slavery, and Resistance on the Eve of the Civil War (New York: Bold Type

227. “‘Johnnie Bull’ Escapes,” Kansas City Star, December 30, 1889, newspapers..com (accessed December
27, 2020).
The following day, via the *Kansas City Times*, Marshal McGowan put out of a statement to make it clear that Belle did not escape from the state penitentiary. “I wish you would make the correction regarding the escape of the notorious Belle Henderson . . . Of Course there were no facilities there for keeping her and she had no trouble assuming a slight disguise and making her way out of the house and beyond the reach of officers. She had not been brought to the notice of the governor in any manner, and there was no thought of making her a trusty. She was known to be a bad woman and was locked up every night.” The *Times* would go on to add more details in the article by providing a brief criminal background description of Belle. It wrote, “Belle Henderson was one of the best known crooks in the city, going under the aliases of ‘Burt’ and ‘Johnny Bull.’”

Within 24 hours of Belle’s fugitive status, identification information and details from her case made its way from telegrams to the printed pages of press outlets across Missouri and the surrounding region.

On December 31st, the *Atchison Daily Champion* in Kansas provided more details into the law that enabled the Deputy Warden to lease Belle as a “convict” laborer. “The law permits the warden and deputy warden to take a certain number of convicts to their residences to be employed as domestics, and Belle Henderson was at the house of the deputy warden in that capacity. In the Evening she left the house to return to the prison and has not been heard of since.” The stories featured across multiple outlets were primarily identical in print, except the headlines were used in different ways to describe Belle and her escape. In the *Topeka Daily Capital*, the headline read, “A Female Convict Escapes.” The *Detroit Free Press* read “Where is Belle Henderson?” On the first day of January 1890, the *Independence Daily Reporter* wrote, “Escaped From the Pen.” In the days that followed, dozens of other outlets featured stories about Belle’s escape and

---


229. Ibid.


While the press were printing and sharing stories, Deputy Marshal J.B. McGowan was on the hunt for Belle and had come close to capturing her once. After three weeks of pursuing Belle, McGowan had police in Des Moines, Iowa to thank for capturing and detaining her in jail. The *Kansas City Star* featured an article that chronicled Belle’s capture and provided clues into what she had been doing since her escape and how she manage to evade authorities. The headline and subtitle read, “‘Johnnie Bull’s’ Travels: Dressed in Men’s Clothes, She makes Her Way by Gambling.” The *Star’s* report was based off information received from McGowan. It wrote:

Marshall McGowan found she hid in Jefferson City [Missouri] for a few days and then secured a suit of men’s attire. She came to Kansas City, [Missouri] walking most of the way. Here she got into a negro ‘crap’ game and ‘made a big killin’. ‘She continued to wear men’s clothes and went from here to Minneapolis [Minnesota]. Marshal McGowan tracked her throughout Canada and the Northwest. He located her at Des Moines [Iowa] a few days ago, where she was captured days before yesterday. This quote is another example of how Black women assumed different characters to resist police detection and capture. Belle used masculinity as a tool to make her nearly invisible as a fugitive woman. Marshal McGowan’s description of Belle’s travels also highlight Black fugitivity and mobility in the late 19th century. On the following page are two maps that provides a visual representation of Belle’s movements according to McGowan.

---


235. Ibid.
Figure 2.2 Map of Belle Henderson’s Travels as a fugitive, 1890
This map is a sketch of Belle’s movement directions following her escape. Though McGowan noted that Belle was said to be spotted in Canada and the Northwest, he did not have any specific places. The points above are a record of the locations that Belle traveled, hid, and was eventually captured by police in Des Moines, Iowa.
The specific focus on Belle’s travels is illuminating, especially in the context of late 19th century histories of Black women’s mobility and movements. Belle’s fugitivity and capture was only twenty five years after the emancipation of formerly enslaved people. The 1890’s was also marked with the development of print culture and telegram technologies which would have been different for a Black women on the run decades earlier. The period that Missouri authorities imprisoned Belle was at a time when Bertillon’s system and identification photography was on the rise.

There is no doubt that Belle was among the earliest cases of Black women that became a subject of Rogues’ Galleries and Bertillonage. The collaboration between penal authorities, Marshal McGowan, other police agencies, and press outlets to capture Belle was anticipated by the innovation of media technologies and the professionalization of identification technologies. Over the next few decades—as more Black people internalized movement as freedom—capturing Black women on the move would become an everyday job for law enforcement across North America.

“Kidnapped by Detectives”: A Teenage Black Girl Wanted by Police in Three Cities

The story of Estelle Williams rolling Johns and fleeing towns in the Northwest is evidence of the role geography and movement played in the everyday lives of itinerant rollers. In addition, the story of how law enforcement worked to capture and punish her is a testament to the methods and technologies police agencies developed to cooperate across state borders to track and pursue rollers on the move following the turn of the century. According to police and press reports in the Pacific Northwest, identification authorities began arresting and mugging Estelle when she was a teenager. Time after time, police officers jailed her, forced Estelle to sit for a set of portraits, and logged a local criminal identification record. One press account stated that Estelle “is looked upon as one of the most daring criminals in the northwest . . . good looking and intelligent.”237 By the time Estelle was 18 years old, at least ten different press outlets across the Northwest had published or shared special dispatched articles associated with her prosecution, fugitivity, and capture.

In 1900, the Spokane Chronicle and Spokesman Review published several columns between August and November covering Estelle’s encounters with law enforcement under the alias Inez Blanchard. In one roller

arrest, prosecutors reduced the charges to vagrancy where she paid a $15 bond and never returned to court to face the charges.\textsuperscript{238} Three months later, Spokane police jailed Estelle again for rolling a man visiting from Montana for $130.\textsuperscript{239} A judge later dismissed the case because the complaining witness reported he was not sure if Estelle was the woman involved.

Whether prosecutors found her guilty or not, it is certain that Spokane police authorities mugged Estelle for their Rogues’ Galleries, a technology that had been in place for a few years by this time. While praising the Rogues’ Gallery institution in 1897, the Spokane Chief of police stated, “[w]henever such a criminal falls into our hands we will photograph him and put him in the gallery together with a description of his record. Then also we will exchange photos with other cities and in this way detect noted criminals and learn much about their previous criminal records.”\textsuperscript{240} Pickpockets—which was synonymous with a roller—was one of the categories that police in Spokane considered a necessary qualifications for police photographing, particularly for future references.

Estelle would eventually leave Spokane likely to avoid local notoriety and persistent police harassment. By 1902, Estelle had made her way to Portland, Oregon where she continued her business. She did not work alone either. Around the first week of June, with the help of a male companion, Estelle rolled a “steamboat man” for $62.\textsuperscript{241} The complaining witness identified Estelle from a portrait in the police Rogues’ Gallery. By this time, in addition to Spokane, Estelle was also in the Portland Rogues’ Gallery as a highway woman and pickpocket.\textsuperscript{242} The Chief of police stated to the \textit{Oregon Daily Journal} that “[w]e have had this woman in here several times for North End touches . . . but have never been able to convict her.”\textsuperscript{243} The Chief of police would also go on to express his frustration with women like Estelle that had systematically rolled

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{238}“City in Brief,” \textit{Spokane Chronicle}, August 18, 1900, newspapers.com (accessed October 20, 2020).
  \item \textsuperscript{239}“Brevities,” \textit{Spokesman-Review} (Spokane, Washington), November 4, 1900, newspapers.com (accessed October 20, 2020).
  \item \textsuperscript{240}“A Thing of Beauty: Police Will Open a Photograph Gallery Saturday,” \textit{Spokane Chronicle}, November 24, 1897, newspapers.com (accessed October 21, 2020).
  \item \textsuperscript{241}“Hold Up: Clarence Atterbury a Victim of Colored Couple,” \textit{Oregon Daily Journal}, June 12, 1902, newspapers.com (accessed October 20, 2020).
  \item \textsuperscript{242}The term highway man was typically associated with men who robbed people on the highway.
  \item \textsuperscript{243}“Hold Up,” \textit{Oregon Daily Journal}.
\end{itemize}
Johns and forced prosecutors to prove it in court: “It is very discouraging, to say the least, to bring colored people in here time and time again and then have them beat us in the courts. With positive identification, I would not be surprised in the least to see these people, guilty as they are, escape punishment. How they do this I don’t know, but it makes me very tired.” The Chief was referring to Black female rollers and how they beat the system was largely up to the choices white male Johns made to hide details of their truths. In this case, Estelle plead not guilty and was ordered by a judge to stand trial on grand larceny charges.

The judge set the bond amount for Estelle and the man identified with her at $1000. Eventually she was able to come up with the money through a bail bondsmen though her accomplice could not come up with the cash and was detained until arraignment by authorities at the local jail. A few days after posting bail, Estelle fled the state of Oregon. When Portland authorities became aware that Estelle had forfeited bail and left town, the courts deemed her a “fugitive from justice” and shared her police portraits with law enforcement across the northwest region.

Portland authorities were said to have promised a $500 reward for Estelle’s capture prompting officers near and far to keep a look out for her. Two months after Estelle fled Oregon, the Chief of police in Butte, Montana received a portrait of her from Portland authorities. The Chief then gave a copy of Estelle’s portrait to patrolmen in the tenderloin district to keep on hand when walking through the so called “bad land” that was known to harbor Black rollers. One night, an officer was patrolling the district and believed he had spotted a woman that looked like Estelle in a sporting house. According to the Butte Daily Post, the officer “looked in an saw the woman which the photograph in his pocket represented.” The officer arrested Estelle and looked forward to collecting the reward money. At the police station, Estelle denied that she was the woman wanted in Portland until the Chief of police notified her that he had her portrait and identification information on hand.

244. Ibid.


247. Ibid.
Estelle eventually admitted to being a fugitive from justice but made it clear to Butte police that she would legally fight extradition to give her up to legal authorities in Portland.\textsuperscript{248}

It was not long before Butte police were forced to release Estelle from jail because “the Portland police could not get the requisition [extradition] papers to bring her back.”\textsuperscript{249} This ruling likely stemmed from the complaining witness refusing to testify. No witness, no case, that was the roller’s game. Estelle escaped prosecution again. After authorities released Estelle from custody, she left the city. Within sixty days of her release from jail in Butte, Montana, Estelle had secured a room in the red-light district of Helena, Montana. Not long after, Estelle was wanted by police there for rolling a man that “had gone to the tenderloin and was bewildered by the dazzling splendor of the surroundings.”\textsuperscript{250} Over the next few days, Helena news outlets dispatched a series of “Special Telegram” articles to various newspaper outlets in the region.

On October 18, the \textit{Anaconda Standard} featured an article postdated from the 17\textsuperscript{th} that was shared by Helena press outlets. It wrote, “May Lewis, alias May Blanchard, one of the dusky damsels of Helena’s red-light district, is alleged to have robbed [John], a returned Klondiker, of $500 in her crib on Clore street . . . After committing the deed she is alleged to have flown, bag and baggage, and in spite of the strenuous efforts of the police had not been located up to an early hour this morning.”\textsuperscript{251} The \textit{Missoulian} wrote “[w]ith deftness that

\begin{flushright}
248. Ibid.
showed experience,” Estelle had rolled a man in what “was one of the most daring that has been perpetrated in Helena in many a long day . . . She has successfully eluded all efforts to ascertain her whereabouts and it is thought she left the city on one of the early morning trains yesterday. The police would eventually find Estelle’s personal trunk at the Northern Pacific depot early Friday morning.”252 In the days that followed, police in Helena searched through Estelle’s trunk to find any clues about her or where she may have been headed.

In order to gather more information about Estelle, police detectives visited the tenderloin district and pressured other sex workers and anyone with information about the incident to come forward. Police got a tip that a Black man named Charles Fagen may have assisted Estelle in evading police and fleeing town. According to the Independent-Record in Helena, “It was learned from another Clore street woman, that Fagen had remarked that he had assisted the girl to escape by arranging with porters of the special ‘Florodora’ train to have her secreted on the train and carried through to Seattle . . . Chief Travis learned these facts and communicated them to the police department at Seattle.”253 Police now had a better idea of how Estelle had made it out of town and where she may have been headed.

In addition to learning that she was aided in her escape to Seattle, the Chief of police in Helena discovered more information to track Estelle after reading some of her personal letters left behind in her trunk. Estelle had wrote and received a series of letters from a man named George in Seattle. Detectives used this information to gain George’s address. After receiving the information on the telegram wire from Helena police, Seattle police put a surveillance team in the vicinity of George’s house to capture Estelle if she appeared. When Estelle arrived at George’s house a few days later, Seattle police captured and detained her in jail—under the alias Inez Perry—until Helena authorities arrived to extradite her. Estelle did not have any of the cash from the Helena job on her at the time and was likely successful at getting the roll to a friend or secreted in a good hiding spot.254

Estelle was not a first time fugitive from justice. It was the second time within four months that she had fled across state lines to avoid prosecution. While detained in jail, Seattle police booked Estelle. The Seattle

252. Ibid.


254. Ibid.
Star described, “Today her picture was taken by the police for future reference. She objected to the process and made all kinds of faces when put before the camera. However a good likeness was secure, and it will hereafter adorn the local gallery.” Estelle’s resistance to the capturing of her portrait reveals that she was aware of how law enforcement in various cities were tracking her. It is important to note that a police officer had a portrait of her in his pocket in Butte. In addition to being forced by Seattle police to take mug portraits, Estelle had to worry about being extradited back to Montana when police from Helena arrived in town.

In the past, Estelle had successfully escaped extradition back to Portland after forfeiting bail and fleeing to Montana. However, unlike in Oregon, Montana authorities by this time had received the proper requisition paperwork from the Governor to pursue Estelle in Washington. The next step was for the Helena Chief of police to travel to Olympia, Washington—the state capital—and get a final warrant from state officials to then pick up Estelle in Seattle. Estelle immediately hired an attorney to secure her release on a habeas corpus before Helena authorities arrived in town to extradite her.

During that week, the development of Estelle’s capture and extradition was featured in press reports from Seattle to various cities across Montana. On October 27, the Seattle Star published an article that demonized Estelle and provided more insight into how Seattle detectives were working with Helena police to keep Estelle in the chain of custody. The police in Seattle were well aware of how Estelle had escaped extradition in Oregon.

Inez Perry is recognized by the police of Portland as Estelle Williams, one of the cleverest ‘dips’ ever known there. Her picture is in the Portland rogue’s gallery. It is said by Chief McLaughlin of Portland, that the woman jumped her bail there last January in the sum of $1000, and went to Butte. There she was arrested, but Portland police could not get the requisition papers to bring her back.


It was also noted by the *Seattle Star* that the first writ of habeas corpus that Estelle’s attorney filed was approved and “did get her liberty for a few minutes only to be ‘grabbed’ by Detective Lane later.” Following this arrest, Estelle’s attorney filed another habeas corpus and awaited an immediate ruling from a judge.

A judge finally approved another writ of habeas for local prosecutors to release Estelle from jail. At this point, the courts freed Estelle from jail while the Helena Chief of police was securing the final paper work from Olympia and could not get back to Seattle in time to deliver the warrant to the local courts in person. However, detectives in Seattle in cooperation with Helena officers planned and successfully executed a “bold coup” and kidnapped Estelle despite a judge granting her release. According to details from the *Independent-Record* in Helena, “[a]s the woman walked out of the jail, she was met by Detectives Lane and Adams, who enticed her to enter a carriage and then spirited her away to a suburb of Seattle, 14 miles distant.” Estelle did not go down without a fight. One detective reported “[w]e told her to come with us. She thought she was to go to the police headquarters and did. A short distance away we met a hack, which we had ordered. We told the woman to get in. She refused. Adams threw open the door and seized her. She fought and braced her feet on the door sill. Lane opened the opposite door and dragged her inside.” Within hours after detectives abducted Estelle, her lawyer—after hearing that the Helena Chief of police was on his way to Seattle with extradition papers—had secured a new habeas corpus for her release but it was too late to locate her.

Estelle’s capture spread across the Northwest, especially since a portrait of her was in several Rogues’ Galleries in the region and up until this point no prosecutor had managed to convict her on felony charges. The *Spokane Chronicle* featured an article with the headline, “Wanted In Spokane, Too: Think That the Perry Woman May Have Robbed a Man Here,” that detailed a multi-city criminal identification profile and biographical sketch of Estelle. It wrote, “[w]oman highwayman, pickpocket and fugitive from justice—these

258. Ibid


261. Ibid.
are the charges the police of three cities make against her. In Portland they claim the girl, for she is evidently not more than 18 or 19 years of age, held up men in broad daylight. This she is said to have done time after time without falling into the hands of the police."262 The criminal identification process that was normalized in police bookings in different cities enabled police to construct a multi-state profile on Estelle despite judges dismissing all of the charges against her.

Based off the details learned from the Helena Chief of police, the Chronicle went on to describe how police in different cities recalled Estelle’s criminal history in their jurisdiction. “[T]he woman is wanted in Portland for jumping $1000 bonds. They found that she was reputed among Seattle’s detectives to be one of the cleverest woman thieves in that city. In Spokane they saw their prisoner greeted by the desk sergeant as a much desired suspect.”263 The criminal identification information collected by police is telling as it reveals how following the turn of the 20th century, the technologies of communication was emerging to track and trace people across regions, especially itinerant rollers like Estelle.

Helena authorities eventually extradited Estelle by train—likely handcuffed and guarded—from Auburn, Washington back to the Helena, Montana local jail where authorities detained her with no bail. Estelle plead not guilty and waited for trial.264 Over the next two weeks, the courts forced Charles Fagen—the man that aided her escape—to testify as a witness against her or face punishment for assisting a fugitive. Estelle would have had a difficult time winning a case at trial and eventually plead guilty to grand larceny. As a consequence, prosecutors punished her with a two year term in Montana prison. On November 18, Helena authorities shared a specially dispatched article to press outlets across Montana highlighting Estelle’s punishment. In the Great Falls Tribune, the headline read, “A Roller Sentenced: Helena Colored Denizen Given Two Years for Rolling a Sheepman.”265 In the Seattle Star, the headline was “Inez Perry Convicted.”266 Estelle’s conviction was seen as

262. Ibid.

263. Ibid.


a win for Johns, police, and the criminal legal system, especially since rollers were rarely punished with prison time.

Though the John did not testify as usual, prosecutors had to rely on threatening Charles Fagen into testifying against Estelle. After Estelle’s guilty plea, more details about how local law enforcement and detectives had worked behind the scenes to capture her surfaced. Most of the information about the crime and escape from Helena came from Charles Fagen who local authorities detained in jail as an accomplice. Fagen stated to the police Chief, “she came to me and told me that she had rolled a fellow and that it was up to her to get out of town. She showed me a big lot of money and gave me $60 of it to help her get away . . . I took her trunk from the house she had been living and hid it back of the World’s Fair saloon and went and got [it] back and sent it to the depot.” Without Fagen, the police and prosecutors would not have had any direct evidence about the crime or clues detailing how Estelle got out of town before they could capture her.

Police in Helena had several theories on how Estelle made it out of town, but none of them were accurate. Estelle had her own plan. Charles Fagen would eventually provide exact details from the night of her escape to the Chief of police. “The train was late that night,” he recalled, “and Inez took the one that was going to Butte. She was afraid that she could [not] get out by the other way. She stayed in Butte two days then went to Anaconda and from there she went to Seattle.” In addition to skipping town from state to state in the Northwest from Washington to Oregon to Montana, Estelle’s escape to Seattle illuminates how rollers planned and executed their getaway routes with payments to accomplices. Estelle’s fugitivity reveals how rollers used mobility and attorneys to evade police and prosecution. Over a two year period leading up to her conviction, Estelle had moved between several cities rolling Johns and defying police traps. Below, I constructed two maps that provide a visual representation of Estelle’s movements and arrest between 1900 and 1902.


268. Ibid.
Figure 2.4 Map of Estelle Williams’ Arrest history in the Pacific Northwest
Figure 2.5 Map of Estelle Williams’ Movements in the Pacific Northwest
“Negress Escapes”

Whether guilty or innocent of a crime, Black women’s geographies of escape illuminate important details about how they refused police arrest and confronted confinement and capture. Some Black women took extreme measures to avoid police arrest. For example, in 1905 the Moberly Weekly Monitor headlined an article, “Negress Leaped From Window To Escape Arrest,” that reveals an incident where the Chief of Police pursued a physical chase after a Black woman. Mandy Martin was well known by police in Moberly, Missouri and had recently been ordered by a judge to sweep the streets with a broom or to leave the city immediately and never return. Mandy refused the degrading labor and chose to leave, or rather that is what she impressed to the courts. Mandy was off the radar for a brief moment but was later spotted by an officer that was aware of her exile sentence from the courts. When the police Chief got word that Mandy was back in town, he decided to go after her himself. When Mandy saw the Chief approaching the location that she was at, according to the Monitor, Mandy “jumped through a window about six feet from the ground.” As Mandy fled on foot, the Chief fired a shot at her while she was running. Eventually, he captured Mandy and detained her at the city jail.

Police used whatever means available to them in order to spark fear in Black women and others deemed notorious and disobedient. Police using violence to stop Black women from escaping arrest was not an anomaly. All of Black women’s encounters with police were violent, especially since officers carried guns and other weapons. At any moment, an officer could use a gun to invoke fear in a woman resisting arrest. In 1909, the Spokesman-Review reported a story of an officer shooting at a fleeing Black woman similarly to the police Chief in Moberly. The article with the headline, “Fires At Sprinting Negress: Officers Capture Woman Who Gets 10 Days in Jail,” illuminates how an officer used a gun to intimidate and possibly injure Lu Lu Taylor, a known roller that had continuously escaped prosecution.


270. Ibid.

Black female suspects also made choices that put their own physical safety at risk to avoid police capture. In Oroville, California, a Black women jumped thirty feet from a bridge onto a set of railroad tracks below to flee an officer. The Oroville Daily Register wrote, “[s]he then ran toward the Western Pacific Depot, refusing to halt, despite the firing of one shot by Suender.”272 The threat of a bullet in the back is another example of how vulnerable Black women were to police violence and death if they did not submit to arrests. Unlike Mandy and Lulu, this woman managed to get away and her name or identity was not known at the time that the article was printed. Black women were aware of the petty criminalization that often landed them in jail. Despite the threat of police violence and death, resisting arrest was a split decision that Black women had to make. However, not everyone escaped unscathed like Lorraine Henderson in the mug portrait below.273

Figure 2.6 Lorraine Henderson #50786
reprinted from Sacramento Mug book, 1932-1934


The numerous press accounts in various regions of the country also provide insight into Black women’s spatial lives in flight. Fleeing from an officer was a physical effort that required movement and calculated geographical pathways towards a safe or more secure location. Take a case in Fort Worth, Texas for example. A Sanitation policeman had detained a Black woman for allegedly maintaining an unsanitary house. While waiting for a patrol wagon to come and export her to the local jail, she managed to slip away from the officer’s hold. According to the *Fort-Worth Star-Telegram*, “[s]he ran through a house and climbed a back fence,” in order to get away from the officer.\(^274\) As was revealed in the other cases, running away from an officer could be a death sentence.

An article with the headline, “Fugitive Negress Swims the Passaic,” highlights another example of the spatial and physical geographies that Black women navigated to avoid police capture. In Paterson, New Jersey, police raided the apartment of a Black woman for allegedly running a disorderly house. Police arrested 15 people during the raid. The owner of the apartment refused to be arrested and instead fled the house first and then jumped in the Passaic river “and swam 200 yards to the other shore.”\(^275\) Though police would eventually arrest her by having a team of officers awaiting to capture her at the shore, the mere attempt at fleeing by swimming across a river is telling. In addition, the river, from one side to the other provides insight into the role geography and survival played in Black women’s fugitivity.

Black women also helped their friends get away when police officers attempted to make arrests on groups. In an article titled “Negress Attack Officer and Prisoner Escapes: Officer Ford Had Arrested Woman for Robbing Man of $30 in Alley on Fourth Street,” published by the *Oakland Tribune*, a Black woman slapped an officer in the face when he was attempting to arrest one of her companions that was accused of being a roller. The woman that assaulted the officer was arrested as her friend managed to get away on foot.\(^276\) A similar

---


incident occurred in New Castle, Pennsylvania. A man on the streets accused a group of Black women of rolling him. When officers tried to detain the three women, one of them managed to flee the scene.277 Running away from officers at the point of arrest was just one way that Black women’s fugitivity kept law enforcement on the hunt.

The search for Teddy Wright, wanted by Sacramento police, led to a city wide all-night search for her whereabouts. Teddy initially attempted to catch a train to Marysville, California as soon as possible, but the train was delayed, possibly because police had made the Southern Pacific depot a part of their search range. Until the coast was clear, Teddy found refuge buried in a pile of sand located near the station where she waited all night for the train. Throughout the night six Black men were on guard “and kept her informed of the movements of police, while a seventh stood guard over her.”278 One of the men in the process of looking out was followed by an officer to the hiding place. It was the next day when police eventually captured Teddy “buried up to her neck in sand.”279 The search for Teddy, like all fugitive Black women kept police on the move, searching everywhere and surveilling any Black person that even appeared like they may be involved. This is reminiscent of the threat faced by anyone that harbored or aided the escape of Black fugitives—from runaway slaves to Estelle Williams and Charles Fagan in Helena.

Black women that were wanted by local police often fled town before being arrested. When Thelma Johnson rolled a man in Seattle and fled the city, a dispatch was sent out in the region to notify police to keep a look out for her. Police in Tacoma would eventually arrest her on sight with information from Seattle authorities. An article headlined, ”Hold Negress For Seattle Police,” was published in Tacoma that reveals how law enforcement cooperated with departments in other cities to capture Black women.280 The press helped to facilitate Black women’s capture to the public. When police in Newport News, Virginia arrested a Black woman that was a suspect in a case from Warwick county, the Daily Press featured an article with the headline,

---


279. Ibid.

Press accounts like this played the role of revealing to the public that local police had uncovered the identity of a criminal on the run and gave notice to law enforcement in other cities on the hunt for Black women on the move.

The use of criminal identification technology aided police officers in their quest to capture rollers on the move. This often resulted in Black women being detained by police as suspects wanted in other regions. A Black woman named Emma Brown was captured by police in Nashville, Tennessee as she was preparing to board a train to Louisville, Kentucky. A telegraphic message was sent to police in the city from Manchester, Tennessee to hold Emma on a warrant for grand larceny. Police then detained her in the local jail until the sheriff from Manchester came and picked her up. In cases like this as most collaborative efforts by law enforcement, the importance of technology is evident because it enabled police to communicate quickly with portraits, statements, or even criminal identification information long distance.

When police in Tampa, Florida received a warrant to arrest Lula De Loach for assault, she fled town immediately. Eventually police managed to trace Lula’s trail from Lakeland, Florida to Gainesville. Police there received a warrant from Tampa authorities and arrested her until the Sheriff arrived in town to take her back to face charges. A similar capture occurred in Arizona, according to an article titled “Negress Wanted on Coast Caught Here,” published by the *Tucson Citizen*. Local detectives had received “information and a picture contained in a circular from the Los Angeles Department” that provided the knowledge and warrant they needed to pursue and capture a fugitive from justice. While executing the search warrant police raided a hotel and arrested several Black women on vagrancy charges. During the raid, police jailed twenty one year old Johnnie Mae as a wanted suspect on a grand larceny charge from California.

In 1917, The *Montgomery Advertiser* featured an article, “Negress Fugitive Will Be Brought to Alabama,” that provides insight into the process authorities in one region had to go through to have one women


extradited from another country. It was not uncommon for police and sheriffs to capture Black women in other cities and states after posting cash bond. However, fleeing the country required more help and support for Black women escaping across borders. Willie Jennings was convicted in Dale County of assault with the intent to kill. After posting bail, before sentencing, Willie fled to the Nassau, Bahamas Islands. The newspaper does not reveal any details into how Willie managed to get to Nassau. However, the fact that she successfully made it that far illuminates Black women’s spatial and traveling support systems. It is possible that police were able to track her down by pressuring her bail bondsmen. Nevertheless, police had the technologies to track people outside of the United States, and not just in Canada or Mexico. In order to get requisition papers, the courts in Dale county had to appeal to the governor of Alabama who eventually issued the warrant to travel to Nassau and bring Willie back to Alabama to serve her prison term. The hunt for Black women on the run was a collective effort by police and identification officials on many levels.

The fugitive status of notorious rollers was more pronounced than women that were first time offenders and fled town. First off, roller complaints were felony indictments that followed a woman regardless of a conviction or not. It was often the mark of a career criminal. Press in collaboration with police locally and nationally found ways to construct Black women into varying intersecting “police characters” that signified the alleged nature of an habitual offender. Some of the characters constructed by detectives and police were prostitutes, badgers, rollers, alley workers, and fugitives.

Fugitive from justice was an identification marker that meant police were expected to detain on sight. An article published by the Detroit Free Press titled, “Nab Diamond Toothed Negress As Fugitive” illuminates this in 1916. It wrote:

With a small diamond set in nearly every tooth in her head, Mabel Walker, alias Mabel Small, alias Mabel McNeil, alias the Diamond Kid, was arrested at 204 Montcalm street, Monday and haled to police headquarters to the charge of being a fugitive from justice . . . Mabel, who is a Negress, 27 years old, is listed with the police of every big city in the country as the cleverest diamond snatcher and all around thief in the business . . . The woman is wanted in Chicago for pulling off a diamond robbery, according to Detective Garvin and Kettlehut, who arrested her.


This article also reveals that law enforcement across the country had shared an extensive record of Mabel in various cities, which also highlights the development of technologies used in criminal identification practices. Both Mabel identified in the article above and Weems were marked by Chicago authorities as a “fugitive from justice.” The note of evading justice meant that police were always on the hunt for these women until they were captured and caged. Nevertheless, both Weems and the Diamond Kid’s fugitivity from Chicago are emblematic of how detectives and criminal identification authorities cooperated to surveil and capture Black women on the move.

**Conclusion**

**Wanted in Chicago, Captured in Kansas City**

During the early days of January 1915, police in Kansas City, Missouri captured Weems. The details of her arrest and outcome of the pending charges are not on file in the record constructed by the CBCII. We may never know who aided her escape from Chicago or who may have supported her with shelter while she was a fugitive. We also do not know the exact details that led law enforcement closer to her whereabouts in another state. Weems’ arrest entry was documented on January 4, 1915 and only reads that she was wanted in Chicago for robbery and forfeiting her bail. There is no disposition in the case meaning the charge against her was likely dismissed. It is very possible that when Kansas City authorities extradited Weems back to Chicago, the complaining witness did not show up in court or there was not enough evidence to prosecute her.

Though the details surrounding Weems’ escape from Chicago and her subsequent capture in Kansas City are limited, the stories outlined in this chapter provide a better understanding of the different technologies and methods of identification that police had access to at the time. As chapter one revealed, the Chicago police department, where Weems’ arrest and fugitive status originated, was the first local law enforcement to establish a Bertillon identification laboratory under the leadership of Robert McClaughry. Weems’ spatial life as a fugitive is a part of a broader history of Black women on the run from law enforcement in the late 19th and early 20th century.

With the development of Rogues’ Galleries, detection, and recognition of repeat offenders as a modern feature of law enforcement, the professionalization of identification technologies anticipated the demographic shifts in urban cities across North America leading up to the First War. By 1915, the first wave of the Great Migration was just beginning to unfold and the movement to professionalize identification methods in policing
and criminal legal systems was well instituted and evolving in North America. In the following Part, we see what happens when modern policing, biometric information technologies, and identification photography coincide with Black women’s visible presence in the urban city. I uncover an extensive network of identification records and mug portraits that followed Black female rollers across city, state, regional, and international borders prior to and during the first wave of the Great Migration.
PART TWO

‘Has Pictures of Her Taken in Various Cities’

Both are negresses and Flossy Ash, alias ‘Diamond Flossie,’ has ‘done time’ in the East. Her companion, Alice Rowley, is also a crook and her picture adorns more than one rogue’s gallery in other cities. *Los Angeles Times*, 1904

Miss Brown—who has no relatives in Vancouver—is a colored person alleged to have a record as one of the most expert thieves and shoplifters on the coast. A few days ago Chief of Police Mahony was in town and met the young woman on the street. This morning Chief North received a letter from the Tacoma official enclosing a photo of Miss Brown and giving information regarding her career. *Province*, 1904
**Introduction**

As Alphonse Bertillon, Thomas Byrnes, and Robert Mc Claughry worked diligently to professionalize in the late 19th century, the organization of criminal profiles enabled police and identification officials to distinguish between first time offenders and repeat offenders. Naturally, migrating rollers were vulnerable to having their arrest histories and portraits in circulation amongst law enforcement in different cities. Rogues’ Galleries were galleries within larger databases of portrait collections. There is no way to practically unearth every portrait of Black women that was subjected by police. Local “Album[s] of Crime”—a title put forth by the *Vancouver Sun*—were organized, shared, and studied by police agencies and institutional partners. The collage below features various identification mug portraits of Nettie Weems captured by police and penal authorities in various cities.

---

That police and detectives captured multiple portraits of itinerant rollers on the move across North America was not happenstance—it was the centerpiece of her criminal archive as documented by law enforcement. The professionalization of identification photography empowered law enforcement to track people across time and spaces—to study each arrest and portrait in context with other supporting records. Despite the public availability, it is certain that any professional roller or woman with a long history of police arrests had a gallery of portraits, biometric identification records, and aliases that followed them from year to year, city to city, and over time like Weems.

Over a decade, Weems moved around from midwestern cities to Western cities. Many things had changed during this period. The First World War had come and passed by. Alcohol was now federally prohibited in the United States and illicit economies were more surveilled and criminalized as a result of progressive era anti-sex work campaigns and the Red Light Abatement movement. Another monumental moment in the United States was the advancements of the Women’s Suffrage Movement. On August 18, 1920, the 19th amendment of the US constitution was ratified, which granted women the right to vote. In addition, since Weems’ capture in Kansas City, hundreds of thousands of more Black Americans had now populated urban cities across the US.

Arrest records reveal that between August of 1923 and June of 1924, Weems had made her way from Colorado Springs to Sioux City, Iowa.288 Within a ten month period, police had booked Weems in two different cities for charges ranging from robbery to “Assault to Kill” before prosecutors dismissed the charges against her. At some point between late 1924 and the early months of 1925, Weems traveled across the Pacific Northwest border into the region of British Columbia, Canada. Weems’ presence in Chicago ten years earlier is a common story that we know well from in-depth histories of the Great Migration to the region. However, the story of migrating Black women moving to and through the Pacific Northwest and across the Canadian border

has not been examined thoroughly in Black migration histories. Below is a map that visualizes some of Weems’ movements from Midwestern cities to British Columbia, Canada between 1915 and 1925.

![Map of Nettie Weems’ arrest history between 1915-1925](image)

**Figure 3.2 Map of Nettie Weems’ arrest history between 1915-1925**

---

289. Florence Hicks no. 56866, Imprisoned, SQIF.

290. The map above does not reflect a direct journey from the Midwest to British Columbia. However, Weems’ arrest history does reveal that police booked her in each one of these locations. I use this map to give a view of Weems’ movements from a spatialized perspective. Based off an arrest profile constructed by the CBCII, authorities could not locate Weems over a 7 year period from 1915-1922.
From the mid 19th century up through the 20th century, Black migrants had funneled in and out of the British Columbia region seeking refuge, opportunity, and citizenship.\textsuperscript{291} The first Black emigrants to settle in the British Columbia province of Canada had come from California with a group of free Black people that had grown tired of racism, lawlessness, and increasing disenfranchisement led by democratic slave supporters in the state legislature. These free Black citizens were a part of the Gold Rush to California and had come seeking freedom and opportunity like many Americans. During the first decade of joining the United States Union, California had increasingly become a contradicting place of freedom and unfreedom for free Black Americans.\textsuperscript{292}

In 1858, when the word had come back that land was cheap and that Black citizens could attain the same rights as white citizens in British Columbia, several hundred Black Californians picked up their lives and relocated to Victoria at the specific invitation of James Douglas—the first Governor of Vancouver Island.\textsuperscript{293} There was also said to be gold discovered in the Fraser Canyon, which also pulled white settlers and


\textsuperscript{293} On Black emigrants that were a part of the California exodus to British Columbia, see Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, \textit{Shadow and Light: An Autobiography with Reminiscences of the Last and Present Century} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) ; Victoria Scott, Ernest Jones, and Karen Lewis, \textit{Sylvia Stark, a Pioneer: A Biography} (Seattle: Open Hand Publishing, 1992). Starks was born enslaved and moved to California as a young girl and then relocated with her family as a part of the California exodus of 1858. Another important event that played a role in the exodus was the case of fugitive slave Archy Lee. For more on this case, see Rudolph M. Lapp and Shirley Anne Wilson Moore, \textit{Archy Lee: A California Fugitive Slave Case} (Berkeley: Heydey Books, 2008). After the California courts eventually freed Archy, he would also join the Black Californians that would later settle on Vancouver Island. On James Douglas, see Dorothy Blakey Smith, \textit{James Douglas: Father of British Columbia} (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1971); Derek Pethick, \textit{James Douglas: Servant of Two Empires} (Vancouver, B.C.: Mitchell Press, 1969).
homesteaders to the British Columbia region.\textsuperscript{294} Weems’ migration across the western Canadian border was more than sixty five years later.

The traditional Black migration narrative has primarily uplifted a story of permanence and not the story of those that did not or could settle in one location for too long because of their working lives or due to the constant threat of policing and identification tracking. The practice of criminal identification and recognition empowered police to circulate Black women’s mug portraits through cooperative networks of law enforcement and judicial institutions. Throughout these two chapters I reveal how police identification records in the Pacific Northwest offer a nuance lens into the movements of Black itinerant women beyond the context of the Black migration settlement narrative in the United States.

Chapter Three

“Mugged a Number of Times”

“The Cleverest Pickpocket in the United States”

By the first decade of the 20th century, Diamond Flossie was well known in police circles across the country as an ‘all-around notorious crook’ according to press accounts in several cities. There is no way to be marked by police across North America without a trail of identification portraits and criminal profiles that followed. Following one arrest, the St Louis Globe-Democrat wrote, “[a] woman giving her name as Mrs. George Kells and her address as 2013 Olive street, but who according to the police is better known as ‘Diamond Flossie,’ because of the valuable gems she wore fifteen years ago was arrested yesterday.”

Even after judges had sentenced her to multiple terms in the state penitentiary, Flossie stuck to the script of earning wages connected to tenderloin districts. And the press frequently publicize her name and confrontations with police, prosecutors, and city leaders.

In January 1904, Los Angeles police detectives were faced with a series of complaints over a six week period that revealed two Black women rolling white men in the tenderloin district. In each case, the description and race of the perpetrators were the same—“both are negresses.” According to the Los Angeles Times, one man was said to have come “to Los Angeles to see the sights and wandered down into the red-light district.” He alleged that, soon after arriving in the district, he was approached by a “comely negress” that


299. Ibid.
lured him into a dark space before an accomplice “thrust a revolver against his body and commanded him to throw up his hands.”

Several city detectives were put on the case and before long believed they had a suspect in mind based off of criminal identification information available from other police agencies.

According to the *Times*, the operation and description of one of the suspects matched the identity of a notorious Black woman “known all over the country as a crook.” After searching through the a database of Rogues’ Galleries and the identification records of known Black female rollers, “[t]he officers learned that ‘Diamond Flossy’ was in this city and they knew if they found her they would have the robber, but did not know her companion.”

Over a six week period, the hold-ups occurred multiple times in one night and after committing a few at a time, Flossie and her accomplice Alice took a break for a week or two according to detectives. After one of the roller jobs, the victim followed the two women and got a look at the location of the dwelling unit where they were hiding out.

After a week working on the case and with a positive description and location, local authorities captured Flossie and Alice in what was said by detectives to be one of the most ground breaking arrest in the city in a long time. According to the *Times*, the two women practically admitted to the roller jobs. “The prisoners took their arrest coolly; they were accustomed to such experiences. But they knew they could not be convicted, and almost laughed at the officers . . . Diamond Flossy, has ‘done time’ in a number of prisons in the East. Her companion, Alice Rowley is also a crook and her picture adorns more than one rogues gallery in other cities.”

In the eyes of local police, the arrest of Flossie and Alice meant two notorious rollers were off the street.

Flossie and Alice plead not guilty and demanded a trial. As detectives gathered their evidence, some of the complaining witnesses could not identify them and stated to police that the reason was “[b]ecause ‘all coons looked alike to them.’” Another complaining witness feared admitting to being victimized by a woman and others just plainly refused to testify due to fear of being connected to Black sex workers in the tenderloin.

300. Ibid.
301. Ibid.
302. Ibid.
303. Ibid.
304. Ibid.
district. The detectives believed they were sure the women would be convicted, however, due to no witnesses testimony, prosecutors were forced to drop the felonies and instead charged Flossie and Alice with misdemeanor vagrancy. Both plead guilty. After spending one night in jail, the two women paid a bond fee and were released. Both were expected to appear in court the next day for sentencing. However, Flossie and Alice forfeited their bail money and fled Los Angeles.

Self-exile was at least better than having their presence in the city according to the article headlined by the Los Angeles Times, “Lady Crooks Driven Out.” In addition, each of the accompanying subtitles aimed to point out major themes of the story, such as “Police Get Rid of Two Dangerous Criminals . . . Negress Robbers With Bad Records Leave City . . . Victims Wouldn’t Testify, So Conviction Impossible.” 305 It was not uncommon for Black women to be faced with the choice of fighting misdemeanor vagrancy charges at trial or exile. It is important to note that this form of self-exile could be beneficial to itinerant rollers like Flossie and Alice who had no intention of settling in Los Angeles.

Later that year in October, police in Buffalo, New York arrested a woman that may or may not have been the same Flossie. The Buffalo Courier printed a copy of a mug portrait of this woman under a section titled “Pictures in Buffalo’s Rogues Gallery,” next to the images of two men police had also mugged for the gallery. The Courier mentions this woman’s aliases and a brief note as if she is notorious in police circles. 306 Beneath the portraits, a sentence in the paragraph reads, “[t]he negress is Flossie Douglass, alias ‘Thousand-Dollar Flossie.’” 307 The article does not reveal why police arrested and subjected Flossie to mugging, but it was likely for rolling a John.

In the image published in the Courier, as the photographer captures the photo, a hand reaches towards Flossie attempting to remove a hat from her head. Her facial expression is one of displeasure. The Courier went on to note that she physically resisted the police mugging process and “had to be held in order to get her picture taken.” 308 The forced photographing of Flossie also reflects the inherent violence associated with forcing mug

305. Ibid.


307. Ibid.

308. Ibid.
portraits as a professional practice. Despite if the woman was the same Diamond Flossie or not, her public portrait is evidence of the role identification photography and print culture played in publicizing notorious Black women in the newspaper. Below is Flossie’s mugshot portrait displayed in the Buffalo Courier.

Figure 3.3 Flossie Douglas, alias, ‘Thousand-Dollar Flossie’ reprinted from the Buffalo Courier, 1904
Not every Black women resisted police mugging. In fact, some used the spectacle of the camera to enhance their personal performance and unique identity. In an article titled, “Diamond Toothed Woman Is Jailed,” the *Pittsburgh Daily Post* described a Black woman well known by police based off a distinguishing identification marker—her smile. The *Post* reported, “[t]he diamond teeth is all that remains of a once prosperous period, according to the police. They are both one-half karat stones and in the upper front teeth. The prisoner smiled a number of times for the benefit of the officers so they could view the teeth.”

Pearl Hill—the woman local police subjected to a mug portrait—was well aware that the camera was being used to further memorialize her criminal history. Women like Pearl and Flossie—both known for sporting diamonds—were dubbed by police as career criminals and photographic identification was central to constructing a habitual offender identity.

In 1905, a woman by the name of Diamond Flossie would be featured prominently by press in another region—the Pacific Northwest. In Seattle, Washington, following the turn of the century it was a common occurrence and publicly known that Black women were systematically rolling white men in the tenderloin district, particularly in the Paris houses, a joint brothel occupied by predominately Black women. There were two businesses that made up the Paris house, downstairs was the New Paris house and upstairs Diamond Flossie was the owner of the Old Paris house. In one article, the *Star* summed up what a white man should expect when visiting these sporting houses. “The women in the Old and New Paris houses are in the habit of robbing men of considerable sums of money almost every night, but they immediately change their wigs and clothes and heretofore the victims have not been able to identify them.” The Paris houses infuriated the ranks of public officials from police to the mayor. The issue was that, despite all the negative publicity, while male slummers and tourist continued to visit the Paris houses nightly.

---


The naming of Black women affiliated with the Paris houses was intentional and often connected to negative reports and the language of racialized and organized crimes against white men in brothels. For example, when Mary Butler was arrested for larceny, the Star wrote “The woman is an inmate of the ‘Big Paris,’ a brothel chiefly tenanted by colored women.”313 In another article published by the Star titled, “Trusted Too Far: Colored Woman Decamps With Tacoma’s Man’s Bank Roll,” reporters once again noted that that the incident occurred in the Paris house. The woman this time however could not be identified and according to the Star, she possibly fled the city.314

By the summer of 1905, the almost nightly occurrences of traveling John’s reporting roller complaints in the Old and New Paris house had sparked outrage by city officials and police authorities. The Star continued their campaign of keeping the public informed about the war local authorities had waged against rollers in the district. In an article headlined, “Will Purge Tenderloin of Colored Parasites,” the Star laid out the details from a recent raid in the district that was commissioned by the Chief of police and Mayor of Seattle. Police arrested eight women after a Scandinavian minor complained of being “touched” for $75 in one of the Paris houses.315 “The police have determined to purge the tenderloin of the colored women who have been systematically robbing men,” wrote the Star. The cause of the police raid was to “Stop Systematic Robberies.”316 Two patrolmen gave the Star details on what they knew to be a clever operation of systematic robberies targeting white men in the Paris houses.317 Police detectives and patrolmen were aware of how difficult it was to make arrest on Black women that were intentional with their methods of rolling Johns.

On June 28, all of the Black women arrested in the raid on the Paris house were set free by the district attorney due to lack of evidence. The complaining witness could not or would not identify any of the woman or likely fled town. This act by the prosecutor sent shockwaves through the local police force. The Star featured


316. Ibid.

317. Ibid.
another article that day, this time one that revealed the frustration of police officers. “Where Are We At? Ask Police,” the headline read. Police officers felt like they were working for nothing if they were ordered to conduct a massive raid on a brothel only for the women to be released soon after with no consequence. The Star continued in reference to the prosecutor, “[i]n refusing to cooperate with the police in many instances has incited a small-sized rebellion among the officers who want to know what good it does them to round up criminals when the prosecutor will not see that the offenders are deservedly punished.” The Star agreed with the sentiment of the police officers that the prosecutor should have at least made an “example of the negresses, all of whom are old offenders.” Black women’s organized roller jobs forced Seattle prosecutors to dismiss cases and left police feeling powerless and wondering what the role of their job was.

Two months later, the Star featured another article with a caricature of Black women in the headline, “Gang of Female Fagins Ply Their Trade Fearlessly.” The numerous racial and gendered press stories centering on the Paris houses are examples of rollers using brothels as “rival geographies.” Though white men visited often, Black women dominated the space, under the leadership of Diamond Flossie and Lizzette Smith. Despite police raids and surveillance, rollers in the Paris houses continued their operations of rolling Johns. The Star wrote, “[h]ardly a night goes by but a victim reports robbery. The police wage war continually against her and her fallen women, but are handicapped by the methods of the ‘dips,’ who change clothing, rooms and names with lightning-like rapidity and profess ignorance at the clamors of the victims. As it is almost impossible to identify them, cases against them are being dropped frequently.” Identifying rollers was only half of the job for local law enforcers, despite an arrest, legal punishment was often left up to prosecutors with almost no evidence to secure a conviction.

The major benefit to rollers and women working in Seattle brothels was the fact that police could not arrests them nor could the Police courts punish them under Washington state misdemeanor vagrancy laws if

---

318. “‘Where Are We At?’ Ask Police,” Seattle Star, June 28, 1905, newspapers.com (accessed October 20, 2020).

319. Ibid.

320. Ibid.

they paid a monthly fee. This was not the case in most cities. The roller economies connected to the Paris houses confronted the power of Johns, police, and prosecutors through a legal permit granted by the Seattle Police Chief to operate a brothel for a monthly fee of $500. This allowed Flossie to invest in her trade. Licenses and strategic methods by rollers to prevent prosecution created the perfect opportunity to roll Johns almost with impunity. The normalcy of Black women rolling Johns in Seattle is more clearly illuminated by examining how the Star and other press outlets headlined their articles, such as “Another Big Robbery In Old Paris House.”

In this complaint a tourist miner reported that a Black woman had picked his pocket for $200 in the brothel operated by Diamond Flossie.

Two days after the previous report, the Star published another article that provided insight into what the prosecutors were up against in cases where men could not fully identify which Black woman in the Paris house had picked their pocket. First off, the typical legal solution in other cities to getting rid of Black sex workers and undesirable women would be to charge them with vagrancy and force them to pay a fine, serve jail time, or leave town, especially noted rollers. However, due to an ordinance passed in Seattle, “as long as women of the underworld pay their monthly fines, $10 each, the city cannot prosecute them.” The prosecutor would also give a statement to the Star about his frustration and racialized sentiment towards Black women. “It’s up to the state . . . If anyone gets robbed by these colored wenches then the state must take up the prosecution. My hands are tied.”

What the prosecutor was pointing out was the difference between police court and the higher state courts where felony roller charges were prosecuted.

When a case was dismissed in felony court, prosecutors had no power to reduce charges to vagrancy in Seattle if women had a legal permit, which basically gave Black sex workers the power to roll Johns regularly, especially men who were only in town for a short time and would not stay to testify. If all failed, Black women could force a trial date weeks and months away. This caveat in the law also explains the power that prosecutors in jurisdictions across the country had in terms of using vagrancy statutes to punish women accused of roller


324. Ibid.

325. Ibid.
charges even when a conviction could not be proved in court. One of the solutions proposed by the Seattle Police Chief was to create an action that would prevent women who were marked by police as rollers from paying their monthly fee and then arrest them on vagrancy charges. If there was a legal way to charge sex workers with vagrancy, Police magistrates could then banish women from the city under the state misdemeanor laws. 326

A few days after police jailed Lucy Green of Flossie’s house, prosecutors dismissed the case against her. The Star published a front page article featuring rollers in the Paris houses with the headline and subtitle, “Colored Women Thieves Laugh At the Law: Something ‘Rotten in Denmark’ When Notorious ‘Dips’ Ply Profitable Thieving Without Fear of Punishment.” 327 This was the second time that a press outlet had connected laughing at the police with a woman named Diamond Flossie or presumably the same Flossie. The recent case of the woman from Flossie’s house was a turning point in the hopes of ever punishing Black women for the robberies in the Paris Houses, particularly because the complaining witness had initially identified Lucy as the suspect. Following this, prosecutors and press began pointing the finger at the madams of the Paris House—Lizzette Smith and Diamond Flossie. After Lucy was freed, the Star wrote, “Lucy Green is at the old stand working under the tutelage of ‘Diamond Flossie, the cleverest pickpocket in the United States, whose criminal record reaches across the continent.” 328 Flossie’s experience rolling men in other cities positioned her perfectly to create a consistent revenue of income as a Madame during Seattle’s open city experiment. 329

Flossie was aware of how to execute roller jobs and subvert criminal punishment. She made good money, and the women in her house with the support of paid attorneys and police protection made good money rolling Johns too. 330 The Star printed how lucrative Flossie’s business was in just one week. “[H]er past week’s

326. Ibid.
328. Ibid.
329. For more on histories of sex work and tenderloin districts in the American West, see note 250.
330. “A Band of Female Crooks In Seattle,” Seattle Star, November 30, 1899, newspapers.com (accessed October 20, 2020). In this article, the Seattle Star described attorneys and police officers working together to help rollers that had allegedly imported their trade from New York, Chicago, and other eastern
work netted her, according to a statement made by one of her own kind, nearly $2000." If accurate, Flossie earned as much as a years worth of wages for the average Black woman working in formal labor economies at the time. In the tenderloin district, the Paris houses were prime real estate and Flossie had marked her territory with a thriving brothel and elicit night life experience.

In the eyes of press and the police, though Flossie had a long record of police arrests, in Seattle, she—and many of the women in her orbit—were practically untouchable under the current tenderloin policies. The *Star* continued in disgust towards Flossie. “This parasite was run out of Chicago and a number of cities where she fleeced victims systematically . . . In spite of the evidence against her she always has escaped and has profited by the experience imparting it to the pickpockets working under her.” Flossie, like many of the Black rollers in Seattle, was aware that police had no power to punish her under vagrancy laws even when she was guilty. This incentive likely empowered Flossie to work her business in the open unlike in other cities like Los Angeles where she was successful in securing cash but was eventually exiled under anti-vagrancy laws.

The Seattle press and police were now making the claim that Flossie was teaching the women that lived in her house the game of rolling Johns. The *Star* would also go on to describe the bigger issue at the heart of these roller jobs and the threat of an open town, especially with notorious madams like Flossie in town. The press accounts featuring Flossie’s business, though negative, likely made her business more of a sight to see. The *Star* went on, “Every laborer who comes to Seattle must of course, see ‘the sights,’ but he must also pay tribute to the ‘Diamond Flossie-Lizette Smith’ combine before he leaves, and it matters not if it is his last cent.” The combination of two predominately Black sporting businesses located in one big house in Seattle’s tenderloin district, likely with blues music, alcohol, gambling, dance, and women dressed in scant clothes was a

cities. The *Star* wrote, “A sergeant of police told the Star that one of the attorneys was at the police headquarters at 4 o’clock in the morning some days ago endeavoring to bail a colored female crook out of jail.”

331. “Colored Women Thieves Laugh At the Law,” *Seattle Star*. The amount of money that Flossie was alleged to make weekly was a large amount for that period. $2,000 in 1905 is more than $58,000 worth of buying power in 2022 according to the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics. [https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm](https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm).

332. Ibid.

333. Ibid.
place to visit.334 Flossie’s past confrontations with criminal legal systems in other cities gave her insight in how
to position herself legally in a city like Seattle where the women in her house could operate legally for $10 a
month. The work taxes from Madams and sex workers brought city officials thousands of dollars in cash
monthly from the Paris houses and all of the other brothels. To police and the press, however, this monthly
revenue collected by the Seattle Police Chief created a defect in the laws and basically gave Black women under
Flossie’s leadership, a license to roll Johns with impunity—and they did.335

A week later, the Seattle Star featured another front page headline, “Colored Inmates of Old and New
Paris Houses Rob Victims of More Than $15,000 In One Year.” On the one hand, the article is evidence—even
if an estimate—of the capital that flowed through the rollers economy associated with the Paris houses. On the
other hand, the article aimed to reveal the systematic and organized “criminal” nature of women associated with
Flossie and Lizzette’s business empire.336

The Star’s front page article mentioned Diamond Flossie by name and her practical and legal strategies
of hiring “shyster police court attorneys” to protect the women in her house.337 This press article exacerbated
the city wide call to banish rollers that operated in the Paris houses. One of the headline sections reads—in all
capital letters—“RECORDS SHOW THAT INFAMOUS DENS OF NEGRESSES HARBOR MOST
DANGEROUS TYPE OF THEIVES—TOO CLEVER FOR POLICE TO CATCH—ARE MENACE TO CITY
AND PROPRIETORS AND INMATES SHOULD BE RIDDEN OUT OF TOWN ON RAILS.”338 One of the
reasons police specifically targeted the Paris house was due to other brothels at least cooperating with police
when a man was rolled on their premises. The city wide public campaign to banish Flossie and women
associated with the Paris houses began taking shape with the slogan “Drive Em Out!”—led by the Star.

334. For more in-depth histories of Black sex workers in the United States, see note 25. On Black
women, labor, and leisure following the Civil War, see Hunter, To Joy My Freedom.


336. “Colored Inmates of Old and New Paris Houses Rob Victims of More Than $15,000 In One

337. Ibid.

338. Ibid.
When a gang of dissolute, unprincipled, worthless negro women can carry on a systematic scheme of wholesale thieving for years without paying the penalty, it's time to DRIVE 'EM OUT!

When the proprietors of the dives, in which the women thieves make their homes, protect the offenders and laugh at the police—it's time to DRIVE 'EM OUT!

When, after all attempts on the part of the police to stamp out this flagrant evil have failed because of the clever methods used by the negresses in covering up their tracks—it's time to DRIVE OUT THE GANG OF NEGRO ROBBERS!

Thousands and thousands of hard-earned dollars have been stolen within the past year by the inmates of the Old and New Paris houses, owned by disreputable, crooked colored parasites of the most odious stamp.

But to the protection accorded the criminals by "Diamond Flossie," who owns the Old Paris house, and Lizette Smith, proprietor of the New Paris house, the police, try as they might, cannot convict the offenders, who are also strongly aided by a crew of "shyster" police court attorneys.

In the face of all this—there is but one thing for Mayor Ballinger and Acting Chief Willard to do—DRIVE THESE PESTS, NOT ONLY OUT OF THE TEN-DERLOIN, BUT OUT OF SEATTLE!
According to the *Star*, there was an official movement from police and city officials to banish rollers with “bag and baggage.” Though Seattle authorities would not be able to punish Diamond Flossie with a long jail or prison sentence, her presence in the city led to a change in policy where the Chief of police proposed to refuse monthly fees in order to exile women as vagrants. There is no exact detail that reveals when or how Seattle authorities managed to run Flossie out of the city. By this time, she was an experienced itinerant and likely had earned more cash in Seattle on a daily basis than the average working class American.

Two years later, a woman known in police circles was highlighted in the press in an article in the *St Louis Globe-Democrat*, under the headline “Diamond Flossie Arrested.” This press account is not evidence that this is same Flossie from Los Angeles, Buffalo, and Seattle. However, based off of her history of itinerancy and her public notoriety, it was unlikely the press would feature her name in the headline unless she was well known broadly or at least locally by police. The article also notes that identification authorities had a criminal profile on Flossie that stretched back fifteen years into the 1890’s.

St. Louis police arrested Flossie for allegedly rolling a man one year earlier and noted that she had eluded arrest until she was captured in a Black barbershop sleeping in a chair. It is possible but highly unlikely that police had multiple Black women known as Diamond Flossie on record. In order for police to identify Diamond Flossie as a criminal in multiple cities, there had to be an entire gallery of her numerous portraits. Moreover, though we may never know what a conversation about Flossie was like in police circles, there is ample evidence that behind the scenes, she definitely sparked police cooperation in different regions. On the one hand, police across North America had numerous mugged portraits and stories of Flossie and professional rollers on record. On the other hand, the Rogues’ Galleries filled with case files and mug portraits of notorious women like Flossie is also a testament to their success in underground economies dominated by Black women the early 20th century.

339. Ibid.

340. On race and labor in the United States from 1865 through the 20th century, see Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*.

“Believed to be Noted Criminal”

Black women known in police circles in various cities could be revealed at any time with an arbitrary arrest and or a search through local and national Rogues’ Galleries and criminal identification archives. And that was often the case. In September of 1911, police in Little Rock, Arkansas arrested Julia Crews one night on the street as a suspicious person. The officers detained Julia at the police headquarters where she was initially “mugged” by the Chief of criminal identification as a street walker. The *Daily Arkansas Gazette* followed the investigation developments in an article titled, “Negress Believed to Be Noted Criminal: Little Rock Officers Arrest Julia Crews Who Is Said to Have Long Police Record.”342 Julia’s past record revealed that police in several cities had marked her as one of the most experienced roller in the United States.

According to law enforcement in Little Rock, Julia was a critical link to uncovering a gang of rollers that had allegedly come to the area planning to roll local Johns. The *Daily Arkansas Gazette* noted that there was a strong belief in the police community that by capturing Julia, “they have interfered with the plans of one of the cleverest negro criminal organizations that has ever operated in the South . . . [t]he negress is said to be widely known in the United States having police records in New York, Chicago, Denver, Fort Worth, Dallas, Omaha, Seattle, Oklahoma City, and Hot Springs.”343 The Chief of police identification in Little Rock was familiar with Julia’s business from Oklahoma City and had a criminal profile of her numerous confrontations with police in several regions.

Another local newspaper, the *Arkansas Democrat* featured an article that reveals evidence that criminal identification profiles and mug portraits from other regions were easily accessible to police departments. According to the *Democrat*, the Chief of identification stated that Julia “has pictures of her taken in the various cities.”344 Though the local police believed they had stopped a gang of rollers from getting started in Little Rock, the only charge they could book Julia on was solicitation. Though without evidence, as a non-resident marked by criminal identification authorities as a traveling roller, just being on the streets at night was enough

---


343. Ibid.

to presume Julia’s guilt of conspiring to roll a John, which under the law was solicitation. Julia was represented in court by an attorney and plead guilty to the solicitation charge. The Judge fined her $25 and forced her to leave town immediately. Though roller complaints were underreported, when Black women were accused, police were still able to compile identification information for Rogues’ Gallery profiles. The map below locates each of the cities that the Little Rock Chief of Police was said to have identified portraits and records of Julia Crews.

**Figure 3.5** Map of Julia Crews’ Police Identification Record in 9 Cities

This map traces the cities that Little Rock police stated they had a portrait of Julia. “The Negress is said to be widely known in the United States, having police records in New York, Chicago [Illinois], Denver [Colorado], Fort Worth [Texas], Dallas [Texas], Omaha [Nebraska], Seattle [Washington], Oklahoma City, and Hot Springs”

*Daily Arkansas Gazette, 1911*
The map of Julia’s arrest history is a visual sketch that highlights a network of police technologies and collaboration between officers and departments across the country. This map is also a spatial representation of what a cooperative police network looked like for Black women that were “mugged a number of times” by police in several regions. The arrows point to Little Rock, Arkansas where the Chief constructed an up to date background investigation into Julia in 1911. This meant the circulation of identification records between police in each of these separate regions. The mug entries, if accurate, also illuminate Julia’s movements to and through the Northeast, Midwest, South, Southwest, and the Pacific Northwest.

A few weeks after a judge banished Julia from Little Rock, Alice Anderson—a woman identification authorities noted as a member of Julia’s gang—was jailed by police for allegedly rolling a man for $17.00. Alice’s arrest reveals how police use surveillance tactics to target Julia and her known associates. After booking Alice and conducting a background investigation, the local police, reported by the Gazette, claimed that Alice was also known by police as a roller with a record in several cities. “[S]he has been arrested at Fort Worth, Oklahoma City and Dallas on similar charges. They state that her home is in Argenta [Arkansas], but that she left that city some years ago and has since been traveling as the companion of Julia Crews, one of the most notorious pickpockets of the country.” Several of the cities that police booked and mugged Julia, particularly in the US South and Southwest, were noted by the Gazette as locations police booked Julia and Alice as companions. The arrest of Alice was part of the mission of local police to punish and break up Julia’s alleged gang of traveling rollers.

Two days later, another local newspaper, the Arkansas Democrat featured a story that provided more details about Alice and her alleged criminal career. In addition to highlighting Alice as a “notorious pickpocket and alley worker,” the Democrat also publicized her numerous identities describing her as “a negro woman, who is known by several aliases, including Dago Alice, Alice Perry and Alice Page.” One of the other things highlighted in the Democrat was that police had noted in their records that “[Alice] has been ‘on the road’ for


346. Ibid.

several years.” Alice and Julia, similar to Alice Rowley and Diamond Flossie were marked by police as traveling “criminal” companions with portraits in more than one Rogues’ Gallery. By linking these women in criminal identification records as companions, police agencies were developing a new construction of Black female criminality—the professional itinerant gang of rollers on the move. Whether guilty or not, Black women marked in this category would be featured in Rogues’ Galleries in various cities in addition to their portraits circulating within law enforcement circles.

348. Ibid.
Chapter Four
All Kinds of Money in Vancouver

Weems arrived to Vancouver during the post war years when the first wave of the Great Migration was unfolding in the United States. By this time, immigration policies and citizenship in Canada was a highly contested issue. Long before Black migrants began leaving the US South in mass, British, Columbia and the larger Canadian jurisdiction as a whole had implemented racist immigration policies and strict laws on gaining citizenship.\textsuperscript{349} The discontent of Black migrants and other ethnic groups settling in Canada was the result of a white supremacist settler mentality.

Like many regions in the United States, the racism toward Black migrants was a direct result of the Southern exodus. In an article titled “Advanced Guard of Blacks Arrives in British Columbia,” the \textit{Vancouver Daily World} featured a page long column that revealed Canadian immigration authorities denying entry to a large group of migrants arriving from Oklahoma. There had always been a long growing discontent of Black emigrants settling in British Columbia following the homestead and gold rush period on Vancouver Island. The \textit{Daily World} went on, “a large number of negroes have taken up homes, which has caused much resentment by the white settlers. Letters of protest have been sent to the department of the interior at Ottawa protesting against the actions of the immigration authorities in allowing these people to enter the country.”\textsuperscript{350} Despite the increase in border control and immigration policies aimed at the alleged influx of Black people, migrants from the United States continued to cross the border into Canada and the British Columbia region.

The first area of Vancouver that Black migrants waged a community network was Strathcona, located on the east side of the city. The Black settlers in this community, which included African and Caribbean immigrants, built churches and fostered organizations, social outlets, entertainment, and business development


like many urban cities in the United States.\footnote{351} One of Strathcona’s Black residents that arrived during the early years of the Great Migration was Nora Hendrix, the grandmother of musician Jimi Hendrix. She was born in Knoxville, Tennessee and traveled to western Canada via Chicago to Seattle and across the pacific northwest border in 1911.\footnote{352} This was possibly a train route that Weems had traveled from the Midwest to the Pacific Northwest region. Nora’s interview about her life in British Columbia was featured in Opening Doors in Vancouver’s East End: Strathcona, an edited book with oral history interviews with various notable Black emigrants that had settled in the city during the years of the Great Migration. Like most cities in the United States, Vancouver offered few formal working opportunities for women outside of domestic work and jobs in the service sector.\footnote{353}

The Vancouver that Weems arrived to in 1925 would have been a different environment than most urban cities in the United States at the time. One of the big differences was the loose criminalization of vice under Mayor L.D Taylor and the end of prohibition in British Columbia that year.\footnote{354} In Vancouver, even women were now allowed to legally purchase beer in some hotels, which remained a contested ruling in British Columbia, particularly due to the possibilities of so called undesirable women patronizing hotels.\footnote{355}

\footnote{351} See note 2 on Black Vancouver. 

\footnote{352} An in-depth interview of Nora and other Black migrants in Vancouver can be found in Marlatt and Itter, Opening Doors, 84. For more on the Hendrix family experience in Vancouver and stories about Nora Hendrix, see James A. Hendrix and Jas Obrecht. My Son Jimi (Seattle: AJJas Enterprises, 1999).


\footnote{354} With the United States and British Columbia battling the prohibition of alcohol, the year 1925 would have been a watershed moment in the ban on liquor sales in the Pacific Northwest. For more on the shadow liquor economies and conflicts arising out of prohibition, see Rich Mole, Rum-Runners and Renegades: Whisky Wars of the Pacific Northwest, 1917-2012 (Victoria: Heritage, 2013); Rick James, Don’t Never Tell Nobody Nothin’ No How: the Real Story of West Coast Rum Running (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 2019).

In the US, the 18th amendment, ratified by congress in 1919 had imposed the federal prohibition of alcohol. The National Prohibition Act, informally known as the Volstead Act had forced alcohol and vice districts further into underground shadow economies.\textsuperscript{356} Just a train ride over the U.S border in Washington, possession of alcohol was punishable by fines or jail time. On the British Columbia side of the border, arriving by train, and a short walk up the street, one would be directly in the Hogan’s Alley district of Vancouver, which bordered Chinatown and the Strathcona community.

Hogan’s Alley offered various formal and informal wage earning and entrepreneurship opportunities for Black people from fried chicken restaurants to whiskey and rum dealing, gambling, and houses of sex work. Close access to the railways and boating docks was also one of the reasons that city officials eventually found the Hogan’s Alley district suitable for the deposit of vice in the city. The primary reason that most Black people lived in the Hogan’s Alley district on the east side was due to poverty, white supremacy, and racism from residents and housing authorities, especially on the west end of Vancouver—a signifier for white middle class.\textsuperscript{357}

Historian Adam Rudder argues that Black migrants were pulled to the Hogan’s Alley—like the State Street “Stroll” in Chicago—because of diverse businesses and spots that Black people owned, worked, and had access to from restaurants to night time leisure.\textsuperscript{358} In addition, one of the first labor opportunities for Black men in Canada was sleeping car porters which exposed them to Hogan’s Alley daily due to its close proximity to the


\textsuperscript{358} Rudder, “A Black Community in Vancouver,” 46-47.
Canadian Pacific Railway terminus.\textsuperscript{359} The multiethnic groups of people that lived in Hogan’s Alley protested the negative connotations that were usually associated with the east end of the city.

Wade Compton, a poet and historian of Black Vancouver argues that the small enclave of the city was more than a tenderloin district. Compton writes, “Hogan’s Alley was a black, Italian and Asian neighbourhood— a catch-all community of working-class immigrants, at the edge of Chinatown. Hogan’s Alley, and Strathcona beyond it, contained a community of blacks, living, working and worshipping together in a section of blocks between Union and Prior Streets, and from Main and Station Streets east past Jackson Avenue.”\textsuperscript{360} Though most recently arriving Black migrants were forced to live in Hogan’s Alley, the area sprung up with businesses that represented a cooperative thriving commercial, tourist, tenderloin, and residential district all located along two parallel alleys.

Mayor L.D. Taylor was instrumental in developing tolerated vice districts in Vancouver. Taylor served four terms [Between 1911 and 1934] during the first wave of the Great Migration. City officials, politicians, and many residents criticized Taylor over and over for loosely policing morality crimes and allegedly turning Vancouver into an “open city” filled with prostitutes, liquor drinkers, and gamblers.\textsuperscript{361} Despite what outsiders thought, districts like Hogan’s Alley—especially under Taylor’s tenure—offered Black women various pathways toward financial stability. Taylor was even said to have visited the area on several occasions to grab a drink or food.\textsuperscript{362} Vancouver was a port destination as well a central point of the Western Canadian Railway system which brought single and married itinerant workers and tourist in and out the city regularly to see the amusements in the tolerated tenderloin district.

\textsuperscript{359} For more on the history of Black sleeping car porters in British Columbia, see Mathieu, \textit{North of the Color Line}.

\textsuperscript{360} Divine, \textit{Multiple Lenses}, 289.

\textsuperscript{361} On Taylor’s legacy and criticism, see Francis, \textit{L.D.: Mayor Louis Taylor and the Rise of Vancouver}, 154. Francis writes, “L. D.’s very success worked against him. His experience began to seem like shrewdness; his hold on office suggested connections of the wrong kind. He was linked to the idea of an ‘open city,’ which his opponents claimed to mean a city that was wide open to criminal elements. Unlike many of his rivals on the hustings, L.D. did not engage in self-righteous moralizing. He did not believe in cracking down hard on morality crimes such as gambling, drinking, and prostitution.” On the Lennie investigation during Taylor’s term, see City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver Police enquiry report of R.S. Lennie, Commissioner.

In *Opening Doors*, Nora Hendrix would mention the role Mayor Taylor played in loosely criminalizing sex work and creating a designated area close to the railways and boat docks where sex workers could operate without constant harassment from Johns and police. Nora describes Vancouver under Taylor’s leadership:

That was what a lot of people liked about Taylor, having this red light district, because it did help to keep the people, you know, the what-you-ma-call women was all in this one category. And when the boats come in, when those fellows want to go somewhere for a good time, well they knew where to go. See, they go to this street in this neighbourhood, ’cause it was all set for them. And the women had these houses and they had these girls in there and they had doctors that looked after them and all that you, see. All that was when Taylor was in.\(^{363}\)

Nora highlights another possible reason why Weems may have traveled across the border to the Hogan’s Alley district in 1925. The money flowing through the Hogan’s Alley district created different streams of income for Black women.

Nora described the tolerated sex districts in Vancouver as a great opportunity for migrating Black women seeking formal and informal wage earning opportunities. She states,

> I know a lady and her daughter used to do the washing for the girls that worked in them houses, and they made all kinds of money washing them women’s clothes. Them girls didn’t have to do nothing. They had people, maids, to come clean up the house and all that. There was a lot of coloured girls that used to love to go there to work, cause it was good money. Sure. Go there and cook. I know a lady who cooked there and she made a thousand dollars, in a little while, and she sent back to the States and brought her family here. Yeah. A woman that’s looking for a job, to cook or to clean up, that’s where you could make your money. And nobody’d bother you. Cause the men in there they wouldn’t bother you, you were just a working woman around there.\(^{364}\)

Nora’s memories of Vancouver’s tolerated districts and stories of women sending money back to their family in the United States is illuminating in the context of the first wave of the Great Migration. However, despite the sight of the Mayor in the Hogan’s Alley district and the limitations of vice criminalization during his terms, the area still figured negatively in the imagination of white Vancouver.

Hogan’s Alley would eventually become the most racially criminalized zone in the city of Vancouver. According to Daniel Francis—Mayor Taylor’s biographer—the area became prominently marked with a criminal reputation in 1917 following the case of a Black man that wounded police officers and barricaded


\(^{364}\) Ibid.
himself in a rooming house with his girlfriend. Francis writes, “[t]his sensational incident, featuring drugs, prostitution, race, and murder, shocked and titillated the city, and Hogan’s Alley and its environs were fixed in the public imagination as the centre of Vancouver lowlife. Police went there in their off-hours to gamble and drink, and was widely believed that bribes were paid so that they would tolerate the illegal life."\footnote{365} Despite how middle class white Vancouver depicted Hogan’s Alley, the people that lived there called it home and argued that many of the problems in the area came from people that lived outside the district. Due to the de jure racial restrictions on living and working on the West End, most young working class and poor Black women had to find strategic survival tactics to settle on the East End of Vancouver.

Surviving Vancouver was one thing, punishment and policing was another. The following section examines Black migrant women in the Vancouver mug books. One of the few remaining mug books that are available was constructed during the tenure of Mayor Baxter who made a “campaign promise” to crack down on visible sex work in the city. It is not a coincidence that the criminalization of solicitation increased within his first couple of months in office.\footnote{366} The Vancouver prisoners’ records from 1912-1917 provide a better lens to understand Black women’s active roles in formal and informal labor economies in Vancouver and other regions in the Pacific Northwest. The mug portraits from this period also reveal Black women’s body politics that consisted of fashion choices from coats, jewelry, to unique stylistic hats.

**Vagrancy Arrests, Fashion Choices, and the Vancouver Mug Books**

Despite if Mayor Taylor was loose on vice criminalization during his terms, under the Canadian Vagrancy Law of 1892, it was impossible to be a “common prostitute” without breaking the law. Hence, sex workers and noted rollers were always under the threat of vagrancy policing, punishment, and deportation. This is evident from the many women booked by Vancouver police for vagrancy offenses related to lifestyle and illicit economies. Vagrancy arrests in Vancouver where a part of the larger Canadian criminal code. Similar to the United States—with roots in English Common Laws—courts and police across Canada used vagrancy

\footnote{365. Francis, *L.D.*, 119-120.}

statutes to criminalize and punish a range of behaviors and individuals from the unhoused and unemployed to common drinkers and sex workers.\textsuperscript{367}

Port city leisure economies like Seattle and Vancouver provided alternative pathways for women to earn off the books wages, however, the debates around race, gender, sexuality, and propriety was not absent in Vancouver and in fact spanned North America and other countries. Earlier campaigns in Vancouver, like most US urban cities during this period, centered around the moral panic of the sex trade, sought to save “fallen women” from a life of immorality.\textsuperscript{368} The criminalization of the sex trade in early 20\textsuperscript{th} century Vancouver was connected to the international movement to end the so called “white slave trade” that claimed virtuous young white women were being held hostage in brothels for the purpose of prostitution. This sensationalism of white slavery led to an increase in the criminalization of the sex trade across North America and Europe.\textsuperscript{369}

Vagrant was a status that could easily land a person’s portrait in the local Rogues’ Gallery. By 1902, the Vancouver gallery room was located downtown and every person charged or convicted of a crime was forced by police to “have their portraits taken for distribution amongst the rogue’s galleries of the Pacific coast cities.”\textsuperscript{370} Three years later, the \textit{Vancouver Daily World} published an article that filled an entire page titled, “Rogues’ Gallery and Why It is Kept.” The column aimed to inform the public about what a Rogues’ Gallery was, the importance, and how it helped police keep track of undesirable people. Many newspaper readers likely had come across press stories that mentioned mugging and Rogues’ Galleries. The \textit{Daily World} would also note

\begin{itemize}
\item 368. Ibid
\item 369. For more on the international “white slavery” movement, see note 92.
\end{itemize}
that detectives and patrol officers spent a large amount of time studying faces in the Rogues’ Gallery. In addition, various stories were shared that revealed the many different ways that Vancouver police had used portraits and the Rogue’s Gallery to catch and recognize so called undesirables from poor and unhoused people, to sex workers, thieves, and other alleged criminals. It should not be difficult to imagine how many women’s portraits were constantly familiarized by police and then used to identify alleged suspects or exiled undesirables that may be back in the country.

As penal administrators and law enforcement expanded criminal identification processing in the early 20th century, Rogues’ Galleries transitioned into police mug books which were mobile and easier to organize and sort through for quick recognition. In Listening to Images, Tina Campt writes, “these images were made to identify, classify, isolate and distinguish. Yet they are photographs that capture the transition from freedom to incarceration, from suspects to convicts, from individuals to captives.” In other words, compelled photos were another form of branding, surveilling, and unfreedom that was rooted in systems of power and social control.

Regardless of the outcomes of Black women’s court cases, the vagrant status left them vulnerable to police harassment, jail time, and deportation. The most lasting impact was the fact that Black women’s portraits would be added to Rogues’ Galleries and mug books and shared with law enforcement of the Pacific Coast cities. One of the other things that can be deducted from the Vancouver mug books is the fact that police had several records of migrating Black women from the United States. Though Vancouver police had frequently booked Black women as far back as the 19th century, and after 1917, this series offers a large collection of Black women arrested by Vancouver police over a five year period.

Vancouver identification authorities documented in the mug books, both a personal occupation and what they deemed a criminal occupation. The archived mug book entries during this five year period illuminate that Black women worked both in underground economies and other part time and full time jobs. Some of the


372. Campt, Listening to Images, 75.

373. Vancouver Prisoners’ Record Book, 1912-1917, City of Vancouver Archives.
occupations that Vancouver police listed of Black women in the mug books were housewives, domestic laborers, housekeepers, laundresses, dressmakers, hairdressers, maids, chambermaids, cannery workers, piano players (more than one woman), cooks, waitress, and other service related jobs. Some women’s alleged criminal occupations were also recorded by police as their everyday jobs as well. The criminal occupations listed in Black women’s mug book entries primarily ranged between vagrants to prostitutes, sporting girls, and street walkers, keepers of disorderly and bawdy homes, inmates of disorderly homes, liquor suppliers, and thieves, which was attributed to rollers under Section 229 of the Canadian Criminal Code as seen in Irene Benson’s profile below. The mug book is an example of the typical entry recorded by Vancouver authorities and most police across North America.

Figure 4.1 Irene Benson #L1990
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
As a woman police marked as a streetwalker and “thief” [roller] by occupation, Irene faced vagrancy criminalization on both sides of the border. Irene’s vagrancy arrest in Portland and Tacoma, included in her mug book file is more evidence that law enforcement in Canada had a cooperative relationship with police authorities in the United States. Vancouver authorities had learned of Irene’s aliases used in the United States. Her identification profile was a typical archive of Black migrant women police booked as vagrants in Canada and the United States. Like Irene, identification officials typically mugged people with and without hats to memorialize and keep a record of their changing identities. The forced portraits and cataloguing of Black women working in Vancouver’s underground economies are likely one of the most visible collections of their everyday dress and styles available from the period.

The dynamic of dressing up for illicit parties and off the books work illuminates what Stephanie Camp calls politics of the body in reference to Black women and pleasure. In plantation life, contesting curfews and sneaking to dance parties in the woods was an act of defiance and extremely punishable. Nevertheless, that did not stop enslaved people from participating in gatherings that allowed them to enjoy and represent their bodies as something that could exist outside of birthing labor, toiling labor, and physical violence.374

Camp illuminates the memories of one particular woman that was emblematic of many enslaved people attending the outlaw gatherings. She writes “[l]ike other women in attendance, Williams took great pride in her outfits at these illicit parties, and she went to great trouble to make them, adorning one dress with ruffles and dyeing others yellow or red. Her yellow dress had matching yellow shoes.”375 Though Camp’s study examines how enslaved Black women used their bodies and clothing as sites of resistance and pleasure, the importance of clothing and appearance in Vancouver’s tenderloin night life was rooted in the same politics of bodily representation, sexuality, and resistance.

That Vancouver and the Pacific Northwest was a place with all kinds of money for Black women to earn income is evidenced in the local mug books. One thing that sticks out about the overwhelming majority of

374. Camp, Closer to Freedom, 62-68. Camp argues that enslaved women had three bodies. “The first served as a site of domination; it was the body of the slaveholders . . . The second body was the subjective experience of this process. It was the body as vehicle of feelings of terror, humiliation, and pain . . . Again and again, slaves sought out illicit, secular gatherings of their own creation. They disregarded curfews and pass laws to escape to secret parties where sensual pleasures such as drinking, eating, dancing, and dressing up were the main amusements. This was the slave’s third body: a thing to be claimed and enjoyed, a site of pleasure and resistance.”

375. Ibid., 60.
Black women mugged by Vancouver police between 1912 and 1917 are their hats, coats, and other fashionable choices. While looking at the following portraits, pay close attention to Black women’s diverse fashion choices and facial expressions. It is difficult to find two Black women that dressed in identical styles and threads.\(^{376}\)

---


Figure 4.3 Ida Brown no. 417
reprinted from Vancouver Police Identification Photograph.378

Figure 4.4 Ida Stuart no. L516
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
Figure 4.5 May Thomas no. L611
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
Figure 4.6 Mamie Watts no. L613
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
Figure 4.7 Billie Burke no. L1254
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
Figure 4.8 Evelyn Vaughn no. L1139
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
Figure 4.9 Rebecca Saunders no. L1090
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
Figure 4.10 Dilly Finch no. L922
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
Figure 4.11 Rose Moore no. L485
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
Figure 4.12 Bessie Zigfield no. L1546
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
Figure 4.13 Ray Davenport no. L1732
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
Figure 4.14 Maggie Jeremey no. L1807
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
Figure 4.15 Cleo Madden no. L1838
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
Figure 4.16 Violet Landers no. L489
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
Figure 4.17 Frankie James no. L296
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
Figure 4.18 Mary Lee no. L1991
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
Figure 4.19 Ida McCormack no. L835
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
Figure 4.20 Alice Graham no. L343
reprinted from Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917
It is clear from the images that many Black women had their own dress styles and custom stitched hats that cost cash money to accumulate. Vancouver authorities mugged women wearing fur coats, blouses, and even some wearing ties and masculine attire. Black women’s portraits are compelling in many ways and not just from the perspective of powerless subjects. Despite not knowing what Black women went through to bring their wardrobes into fruition, one thing that is clear is the evolved politics of the body beyond the context of enslavement. Only a half century or more prior to these images, Black women did not have full control over their fashion choices and clothing. Police Rogues’ Galleries and mug books, when examined collectively reveal important details about how Black women fashioned clothing, hats, and accessories as a critical element of their everyday wardrobes.

Black woman understood that the process of booking was a form of punishment as well. Every portrait was connected to a criminal charge that could result in jail, fines, or a prison sentence. Images offer a sense of Black women’s emotions and frustrations from anger to resentment to the worry that came with jailing. Though Rogues’ Galleries and mug books mark the accused, captured, and punished—they also provide a compelling visual representation of Black women’s autonomous fashion choices and resistance to the policing of their bodies and working lives.

The select portraits highlighted in this part of the chapter are only a portion from the Vancouver mug books over a five year period. If the Vancouver mug book is an archive that illuminates a visual representation of resistance and pleasure through dressing up, it is fair to assume that all police captured portraits reveal important clues about Black women’s politics of the body. The confrontation between rollers, Johns, police, and the criminal legal system in 20th century Vancouver is well documented through the press and police mug books. This also means that criminal identification authorities had numerous portraits and archival records of Black migrant women in their database. The following section examines how the local press in Vancouver collaborated with police to report white male complaints and how the alleged epidemic of pickpockets and rollers in the city was used to construct a normalized system of racial and gendered profiling of Black women in Vancouver.

“Talks To Colored Women Are Costly”

Vancouver could be the best and worst place for a roller to work, depending if she could stay off the radar of local police. As Norah Hendricks and police mug books reveal, Black women were active workers in
the local tenderloin district both as formal and informal workers. The Vancouver press exacerbated a common theme to the public with headlines such as “Talks to Colored Women Are Costly.” Articles like this highlight how pressed used roller complaints to help construct a racial, sexual, and violent narrative that empowered a more aggressive and systematic effort of surveilling and policing Black women in Vancouver’s public spaces.

In April of 1907, Vancouver police charged Grace Hill with rolling a John for $65. The complaining witness reported that “he had been out seeing the town and he had bumped into Miss Hill when both were hurriedly turning a corner of Canton street.” It was normal for Johns to report their encounters with rollers as luck. The real story often was that Vancouver’ sex trade provided access to a host of Black women trading sex and a good time for cash. The issue was, not every Black woman played by the conventional rules of sex trade and entertainment. A roller would have been aware of a tourist or visitor out seeing the Vancouver sights and usually plotted accordingly.

When police did charge rollers with felony offenses, whether arbitrarily or with legitimate probable cause, rollers used the court room to expose the inherent contradictions associated with white men in the sex trade. Subverting felony punishment meant forcing the police detectives and prosecutors to prove guilt without a victim present. Rollers understood the benefits of legal representation and there was a certain cadre of “shyster attorneys” on call for this type of criminal charges. An overwhelming amount of rollers cases were dismissed by Judges and prosecutors in Vancouver. In an article with the headline, “Charge Is Dismissed,” the Province reported a court dismissal against two Black women accused of rollers charges because the judge did not think prosecutors had presented enough evidence to convict. The accuser claimed that he met the two Black women on the streets and soon after realized that $90 from his wallet was substituted by a laundry ticket. One woman claimed she was in her house on the night of the alleged incident and the other accused stated that she


was in Seattle, Washington at the time. Nevertheless, both women escaped punishment regardless if they were guilty or innocent.382

A week later, police jailed Magdalen Ripley for allegedly rolling a man for $26. The *Vancouver Daily World* wrote, “[t]he information suggests that this is another sample of the ‘badger’ game, which is getting altogether too frequent.”383 The badger game and “badger” as a police character was synonymous with the roller and another name accredited to women in the business of tricking the tricks. In the case of Magdalen, she was eventually acquitted by a judge after being detained in jail for a few days. However, immediately after the proceeding, prosecutors booked her on a vagrancy charge.384 The following month, another man in Vancouver reported a roller complaint. This time against two Black women. He alleged that after leaving their presence, his $55 in cash was missing. The *Province* featured the complaint in an article with the headline, “Met Women, Missed Money.”385 The article also noted that though police had “received a great many complaints of this nature recently,” they were never able to connect anyone to the charges.386

One of the hardships of Black women falsely accused of roller crimes was coming up with bail money to get out of jail until a trial date. When Vancouver police arrested Mamie Hall as an alleged roller suspect, she elected to have a speedy trial because she could not afford bail.387 A week later at Mamie’s trial, the discrepancy between police tactics and prosecutors power to punish rollers would come to light. The protests came from the Crown Prosecutor W.M. McKay, who urged the judge to make a comment on the roller cases that had recently been sent to trial from police court. He stated, “[i]t has inflicted a great hardship on these women to be arrested and placed on trial as well on several officers of the court to have to prosecute when there is no evidence against


386. Ibid.

McKay’s statement to the Judge broadly illuminates the hardship police inflicted on rollers whether they had enough evidence to convict or not. Jail and coming up with cash bail was inevitable. The desire of police and detectives to punish rollers led to a broader web of surveilling and policing Black women in public spaces.

To be clear McKay wanted to punish Black female rollers, but he also recognized how many Black women’s lives were upended and harmed by the collateral consequences from arrest to jail to trial procedures. His frustration was aimed at arresting officers. The dilemma was that police could not supply prosecutors with enough evidence to secure a conviction which reflected poorly on prosecutor’s court win-loss record and basically waisted tax dollars. Rollers overwhelmed court calendars by pleading not guilty and forcing prosecutors to reveal police evidence at trial.

It also came out in court that the previous week, another roller had been sent to trial from Police court without enough evidence and that in Mamie’s case, there was no witness that identified her as the roller. According to the Province, the John reported that “[a]ll he knew was that it was a colored woman who took it, and a police officer arrested Miss Hall afterwards on the strength of her color.” The Judge refused to comment any further in Mamie’s case but made it clear that his dismissal of the charge was evidence that the trial should have never made it to his court room. Mamie’s case reveals the role that racial profiling played in the lives of Black women. Instead of innocence until proven guilty, Black women were presumed guilty and then forced to prove their innocence through court trials. Primarily, the choice was, plead guilty in exchange for a lesser punishment or fight the charges in court. Choosing a jury trial did not feel the void of having to come up with bail money to avoid pretrial jail time. Despite the small number of rollers typically operating within a city, racial and sexual profiling intensified the policing of Black women’s bodies in public spaces.

There are a host of hardships inflicted on Black women that stemmed from racial profiling, false arrests, and facing court trials. The need to avoid jail while fighting a criminal charge would likely impact a

388. “Crown Counsel Made Protest In Court: Woman Had Been Sent Up For Trial Although There Was No Evidence Against Her,” Province (British Columbia, Canada), September 13, 1912, newspapers.com (accessed August 2, 2020).

389. Ibid.
woman with children or dependents in a different way than perhaps an unwed migrant woman with no kids. On the other hand, not everyone had support networks in Canada that could help with bail and cash fines. Some migrant women with no family or extended networks to pay fines, bail, or attorney fees were forced to sit in jail and often had to decide if pleading guilty to a lesser offense was worth it. The rollers that managed to hire lawyers had the advantage of legal representation to challenge police and prosecutorial evidence.

In January of 1913, Crown Prosecutor McKay was forced to dismiss another case against a roller that had requested a trial. An attorney identified as Frank Lyons represented this woman and an overwhelming number of Black women facing roller trials. It was not a difficult trial in this case and everyone understood why. McKay could not locate the primary witness. McKay was not alone however, prosecutors across North America faced the same dilemma of aiming to prosecute rollers and primary witnesses, ie John’s not wanting to file a legal complaint or not appearing at a trial. In another case, McKay was forced to request that two Black women be discharged from jail due to his primary witness disappearing. This was despite police marking both women as “alley workers” a few weeks prior. The local press in Vancouver—like most urban newspaper outlets—followed the dismissal of rollers charges and featured articles regularly from roller complaints, police information, and court outcomes.

In any region, a host of roller complaints in a short period could spark an alert and lead to an increased police presence in certain areas of the city. In Vancouver, this was typically prominent in the Hogan’s Alley district. In 1917, the Province featured an article that highlighted multiple roller complaints that were reported in one night. It wrote, “Negro pickpockets are again active in the city.” The incidents involving Black women


393. “Pickpockets Active: Three Cases of Theft From the Person Reported to Police Last Night,” Province (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada), April 6, 1917, newspapers.com (accessed September 2020).
happened on Powell street late at night. In addition to reporting the complaints, the *Province* also noted that some years prior to 1917, there was an “epidemic of pocket picking.” The Chief of police McRae—who was in an acting position—promised he would rid the city of women in this line of work.

As previous sections highlighted, the prevention of Black women working in sex trade was not absolute and certainly not the first worry of Vancouver authorities. However, theft from person was a risk that could result in a prison sentence at Oakalla Prison Farm. Though prosecuting rollers was difficult, that did not mean that everyone escaped punishment. There are several reports that reveal Vancouver judges sentencing noted rollers to jail or prison time with “hard labor.” Lilian Wilson faced the fate of the chain gang when police accused her of a roller complaint and found chloroform in her possession. Though she claimed it was for a friend who had an illness, a police magistrate sentenced her to three months in jail with hard labor. The case of Maxine Powell is a testament to roller outcomes when Johns actually appeared in court as victims. The Judge punished Maxine with three months in jail, including hard labor. Maxine continued to deny the charges against her and cried in court when the sentence was handed down. There are no details that reveal if Maxine was guilty or not, however the consequence of facing jail time and hard labor was a difficult punishment to face.

In 1912, a judge sentenced Grace Walton to one year in prison for a $35 roller complaint. In addition, according to the Province, “[t]he judge ordered that the woman receive hard labor while in prison.” One of the main reasons that the judge punished Grace with a term and hard labor was because police had marked her as a career roller on both sides of the border. “The woman belongs to the class of criminals known to the profession as ‘alley workers.’ She had recently come here from Seattle, and had substituted a roll of bogus bills cut from the pages of a Seattle newspaper.” Up until Graces conviction, Crown Prosecutor McKay had failed over and over to convict rollers in felony court. Her sentence was a message to all rollers, especially noted alley workers.

394. Ibid.


398. Ibid.
In the years that followed, Vancouver rollers identified by police as “alley workers” would face the threat of being connected to a law enforcement movement in Canada and the United States to rid cities of women marked in this line of profession. As the name signifies, alley workers lured Johns to alleys to execute their jobs more efficiently.

Vancouver press accounts particularly publicized stories about women marked by police as alley workers. In 1914, a judge sentenced Mattie Obert to one year in prison for rolling a man for $12 dollars. With the support of criminal identification authorities, prosecutors had more background information on women with past roller arrests on their records. In reference to Mattie, the Province wrote, “The woman is known in police circles as an ‘alley worker.’” In that year, the Province noted another Black woman as a “reputed alley worker.” In this case, Sallie Harris used a knife to defend herself against a John that tried attacking her to get his money back. The courts found her guilty. While imposing a three year prison sentence against Sallie, the judge verbally expressed his discontent for alley workers. “Women of your character are a menace in the community” he stated according to the Province. The labeling of rollers as alley workers was not just a caricature of Black women accused of a crime in an alley, it meant that police had records of roller complaints—typically occurring in alleys—in circulation from other cities and regions, especially the United States.

The rise of transnational police cooperation in the Pacific Northwest had taken shape in the late 19th century. The following and final section examines how the rise of police cooperation in the Pacific Northwest border region was used to mark and exile undesirable women, especially rollers. Despite the many times that rollers managed to force prosecutors to dismiss charges, police and identification authorities worked behind the

---


400. “Sallie Harris, a Negress Reputed to be an ‘Alley Worker,’” Province (British Columbia, Canada), November 24, 1914, newspapers.com (accessed August 2, 2020).

401. Ibid.

402. The next chapter goes more in detail about the rise of urban alley workers.
scenes to construct criminal profiles on women that would circulate between authorities in the Pacific coast cities and beyond.

“A Portrait in the Hands of Police”

By the turn of the 20th century, police in Western Canada and the United States had created a collaborative network of communication across the international border. This also empowered police to use Rogues’ Galleries and criminal identification information to construct surveillance tabs on undesirable people, especially itinerant rollers. In 1901, the Province published a column titled, “Will Keep Her Moving,” that reveals the role press coordination played in publicizing police criminal identification information collected on both sides of the international line.

Before Stella Nelson—a noted roller—even made it across the Canadian border from Washington, law enforcement in Vancouver and the local press had knowledge that Seattle authorities had profiled and banished her. The Province wrote, “Clothed in sealskins and silks, says the Seattle Port-Intelligencer, and adorned with numerous nuggets, the size of which would cause the envy of a Bonanza creek owner, Stella Nelson, alleged to be the most notorious and accomplished pickpocket that ever operated in the northwest, arrived in this city yesterday aboard the steamship.”403 Immediately after Stella landed in Seattle, police officers were waiting at the dock and took her directly to jail. The Chief of police in Seattle was well aware that Stella was a roller but noted that if no Johns came forward to report a crime, all he could do was banish her from the city.

Eventually, since no men had reported roller complaints against Stella, the Seattle Chief forced her to leave the city under the Washington state anti-vagrancy law.404 The Province would go on to reveal how law enforcement surveillance followed Stella across the border between Seattle and Vancouver where police authorities had already constructed a criminal profile of her. It wrote, “[t]he woman Nelson was in Vancouver about a year ago, and it is said one or two men who had lost money then lost it through her. It is stated that she is in the city today, having accepted the warning of the Seattle police to leave the city, coming over here by the


404. On vagrancy statutes and criminalization in the United States, see note 91.
Great Northern to Westminster, and tram from there here.” The record of Stella’s movements highlights how police information traveled swiftly across the United States and British Columbia borders both behind the scenes and through press accounts. Women marked by police as rollers or undesirables were always elevated in the press.

Over the next decade after police in Vancouver and Seattle exiled Stella Nelson, another professional roller by the name of Stella was publicized by press in Washington and across the border in British Columbia. Stella Brown, also known as Hattie and Hat Hayden was marked by police and press in several cities as one of most expert thieves on the Pacific Northwest coast. This is particularly illuminated by examining the ways that press outlets publicized her name in newspaper headlines. In 1904, the Tacoma Times published a press account with the headline, “Stella Brown In Jail Once More,” that is not only evidence of the ways Black women confronted the criminal legal system, but also the fact that many were known as professional underground workers and featured prominently in the public sphere. The Times reported, “the colored woman who has the reputation of visiting city jail oftener than any other woman . . . was arrested again last night on the general charge of suspicion.” Stella was on the streets during the overnight hours, which to police was a presumption that she was soliciting a John to roll. The goal of police was to detain her until they were sure no rolling complaints occurred that night.

In the case of Stella, known pickpockets, rollers, and any woman presumed to be a sex worker for that matter, there was no legal right to be on the streets at night, especially under anti-vagrancy statutes. It was almost a guarantee that police would detain them. Just two weeks before this arrest, Tacoma police had jailed Stella for rolling a John who was noted by the Times as a white man. As usual, the case was dismissed, and prosecutors were forced to release Stella. The fact that police had marked Stella as a professional roller meant

405. Ibid.

406. There is no evidence to correlate that Stella Nelson and Stella Brown are the same people. Nevertheless, both marveled the press enough to have their wardrobes and illustrious jewelry and accessories mentioned.


408. Ibid.
that she was always under the threat of detainment for vagrancy, whether she was found guilty of roller crimes in the courts or not.409

A few months later, Stella made the headline of a local newspaper again. This time, the headline read, “Miss Brown’s In Town,” and was featured in the Province located across the Canadian border in Vancouver. It wrote, “Miss Brown—who has no relatives in Vancouver—is a colored person alleged to have a record as one of the most expert thieves and shoplifters on the coast . . . This morning Chief North received a letter from the Tacoma official enclosing a photo of Miss Brown and giving information regarding her career.”410 The ability for police to exchange criminal identification information across international borders in early 20th century is insightful when we look at the ways police agencies shared mug books and rogue galleries between Canada and the United States.411 The use of telegram helped to expedite the investigation into Stella. It was not long before Vancouver police had a background profile from law enforcement in the United States.

One of the reasons that Stella stood out in Vancouver was due to fact that she was traveling without family or a male companion and had valuable personal items in her possession. In the eyes of spectators, a Black woman traveling in Vancouver with a “handsome sable fur, a gold handled umbrella, very elaborately designed, ruby earrings,” and other detailed personal items demanded attention. Detectives arrested Stella as a vagrant pending investigation of any recent crimes since she was in town, similar to her detainment by Tacoma authorities. Much attention in the courtroom was focused on her “brilliant apparel” including “a hat three feet and a half across the brim, so large that every time she moved her head this morning the police on duty at the door nearly had his cap blown downstairs” expressed the Province.412 In other words, according to prosecutors and police, Stella’s extravagant appearance of wealth, which had transcended the racial and class boundaries of Victorian respectable dress was evidence that she was a professional roller. Due to Stella’s alleged criminal history, the Judge allowed prosecutors to detain her for further investigation.

409. Ibid.


412. Ibid.
Two days later, Stella was back in court facing “a charge of being a streetwalker.”\(^{413}\) Local law enforcement had now come forward saying they had witnessed Stella soliciting men on the streets and one said that he had overheard a conversation between Stella and a man she approached on the street. Stella’s attorney questioned what the man’s name was and the insistence by detectives to protect his identity caused a stir and laughter in the courtroom. In an attempt to shield the identity of a possible prominent John, the detective stated “His name? . . . Well, he is a respectable man, and I do not wish to repeat his name. The woman commenced the conversation, or the man would never have said a word.”\(^{414}\) Stella was not new to challenging roller charges in court and her attorney used the prominence of the alleged man to propel him to appear in court. The case was continued until after the new year to give time for the man that Stella was supposedly soliciting to come forward.

Stella appeared back in court on January 3, 1905 and defended her character by giving her own testimony. Stella also, according to the Province, “denied that she was the original of a portrait in the hands of police,” and noted that she came to Vancouver to go Christmas shopping.\(^{415}\) Both reasons could have been true. Stella was possibly used to crossing the border to purchase clothing, furs, and other apparel items in British Columbia, which was a port city. In addition, as itinerant roller, Stella had mastered making money on the move.

Though the alleged man that Stella was supposedly conspiring to roll did not come to court, police detectives had forced a woman who owned a lodging house to give testimony about her knowledge of Stella’s movements while in town. According to the owner, Stella had paid for lodging but did not stay in the room “a single night.”\(^{416}\) The fact that law enforcement in the United States had marked Stella as a notorious roller meant that she had no legal standing in Canada. In Court, the Chief of police, with the final rebuttal of Stella, “declared that the picture the police have is none other than the photo of Miss Brown, alias Burns, alias

\(^{413}\) “Theatrical Man is Again in Toils,” Province (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada), December 29, 190, newspapers.com (accessed August 30, 2020).

\(^{414}\) Ibid.


\(^{416}\) Ibid.
With the Chief of police validating her career as a criminal, and the charge of being a streetwalker, the Judge sentenced Stella to three months in the local jail for violating the British Columbia, Canada anti-vagrancy statutes. Her punishment included “hard labor” on the chain gang.

In the context of race, gender, citizenship, and the rise of criminal identification, memorizing and identifying Black women in the Rogues’ Galleries was a modern development of policing in North America. Immigration authorities would have deported Stella after she was eventually released from hard labor. It would not be the last time police arrested and jailed Stella as a suspect of suspicious wealth. In 1911, Stella was back in a different Washington city were detectives in Spokane arrested her on the streets early one morning. According to the *Spokane Chronicle*, police noted that Stella had “over $1000 in valuables in her possession. The list of articles seized by police included a check for $500, a money order of $446, a diamond ring, watch, [and] a nugget pin. A Charge of vagrancy was placed against her to allow time for an investigation into the source of her sudden wealth.”

Detaining Stella for investigation meant that she would easily be revealed as a police marked itinerant roller in the Pacific coast cities.

For Black itinerant rollers like Stella, there was always the threat of being punished by police for alleged crimes in the past, especially when they were booked with property and cash in their possession. There was no other way that prosecutors could convict Stella on charges related to theft or grand larceny without a victim or complaint, so taxing her a $25 fine as a vagrant and exiling her was the solution in Spokane this time. What police did with personal items and cash seized from noted rollers is a mystery. Police knowledge of the itinerant nature of the roller business left any unescorted Black women vulnerable to harassment and potential property seizure under almost any pretense.

---

417. Ibid.

418. “Work on the Chain Gang,” *Vancouver Sun*, January 25, 1917, newspapers.com (accessed August 3, 2020). This article describes the Vancouver Police Chief advocating for work provided to people detained in the city jail with hard labor sentences. It writes, “Police Chief MacLennan asked the civic fire and police committee at its meeting yesterday afternoon to provide something for the chain gang to do.”


It was not uncommon for Black itinerant women traveling with money and property to be detained and interrogated by immigration agents. The Pacific Northwest was filled with port cities—from Victoria and Vancouver to Seattle, Tacoma, and Portland—and itinerant Black women were well aware of the cash—both formal and informal—flowing through the region. Unescorted Black women crossing the US/Canadian border, especially had to deal with the presumption of being identified as roller suspects and thieves regularly, especially since there was police evidence that Black women traveled to British Columbia to earn money in the burgeoning underground economies, including rolling men.

The same year that Spokane officials investigated and fined Stella, border agents in Seattle detained a Black woman crossing into the United States from British Columbia. In an article titled “She Carts Around $1000 in Gems,” the Seattle Star revealed that a border agent detained the woman because she possessed diamond rings and jewelry, which meant, like Stella, she was guilty of suspicious wealth.\(^\text{421}\) The Star wrote “[t]he tall young colored woman with about $1000 worth of sparkling diamonds blazing on her fingers and ears made customs inspectors sit up and take notice when the steamer Princess Adelaide dropped in from British Columbia ports last night.”\(^\text{422}\) After interrogation, the border agents eventually let the woman cross into the United States. Black women’s mobility and access to cash and personal property was a threat to white male hierarchies of capitalism and power. Most poor and working class white men did not have this type of wealth and personal property either.

There is no doubt that police in the Pacific Northwest possessed a criminalized portrait album of Stella Brown like Julia Crews and Diamond Flossie. In addition, the visualization of Stella’s wardrobe and personal items presented in the Vancouver court room and years later in Spokane are telling. From Stella’s fur coat, golden umbrella, and ruby earrings, to her three feet long hat brim in Vancouver to the diamond ring, watch, and nugget pin along with $500 cash found in her possession by police in Spokane—Stella’s appearance and personal property was evidence of an accomplished rolling career. Stella was draped in clothing and jewelry reserved for upper class white women. As a traveling roller, Stella was vulnerable to police harassment and seizure of her property, regardless if she was crossing the US Canadian border for work or to shop for new

\(^{421}\) “She Carts Around $1000 in Gems,” Seattle Star, August 28, 1911, newspapers.com (accessed October 20, 2020).

\(^{422}\) Ibid.
clothing and accessories for her wardrobe. Nevertheless, Stella’s portrait like many traveling rollers was collected by police and featured in Rogues’ Galleries and mug books in the United States and British Columbia, Canada, and particularly in Vancouver.

“The Most Dangerous Female Crook on the Continent”

Mary Turner was well known by police in various cities in the Northwest and throughout the Western part of Canada from Seattle and Spokane, Washington to Vancouver and New West Minster, British Columbia to Winnipeg, Canada. To be known in that many police circles meant that her portraits and Bertillon measurements were logged in several Rogues’ Galleries. In 1907, the Victoria Daily Colonist headlined an article with the headline, “Female Hold-Up Artist Had Record On Coast.” The Colonist noted that Mary was “supposed to be the most dangerous colored female crook on the continent” according to law enforcement in the region.423 The Colonist would also note that Mary is “accredited with holding up fifty citizens in less than three week”424 There is no evidence that reveals if Mary actually rolled that many people, but this was the narrative that police and press wanted to construct of her. It is important to note how often press identified various notorious rollers “as the most” dangerous or accomplished roller in a region, the United States, and or the entire continent as in Mary, Julia Crews, Estelle Brown, Diamond Flossie, and Detroit’s champion roller Susan Pinkie Daniels.

Mary and two male companions—one of the men, Alex Toole would later be reported by press as her husband—traveled across the border from Montana to Canada around 1906. One of the first cities police booked them in Canada was New Westminster. Soon after, Mary and her companions “was rushed out of town by police.”425 Following their exile by authorities in New Westminster, Mary, Alex, and their friend traveled to Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Time after time, Mary had challenged prosecution and forced the courts to dismiss the cases.426 However, in December of 1906, the courts in Vancouver punished Mary for having stolen clothes in her possession. As a result, the judge ordered Mary to serve six months of “hard labor” on the


424. Ibid.

425. Ibid.

chain gang. Not every sentence in Vancouver was combined with hard labor, it was typically a discretion left for the judge, similarly like the case against Stella Brown who was dubbed by police as a recidivist and one of the most accomplished rollers in the Pacific Northwest. Mary was marked by police as an expert thief on both sides of the border and had constantly escaped punishment which likely incentivized the courts to sentence her harshly while they had the chance.\footnote{427}

Mary would not end up serving her full sentence out in jail and was eventually “confined to the asylum on account of insanity.”\footnote{428} Nevertheless, despite how insane Mary performed for British Columbia officials, she escaped from the asylum on May 28, 1907—around the same time that her husband was released from jail—and remained a fugitive until police in Winnipeg, Canada arrested her in August of that year. In the days that followed Mary’s escape, authorities at the asylum were able to track her movements. According to the \textit{Colonist}’s reporting from the asylum, Mary was “[s]een at Cloverdale at 5:45 a.m. the following morning, at Blaine on May 30, in Seattle the following day. Later she turned up at Spokane, where she served a month in jail for robbery, being sentenced on June 22. After her release she made her way to Winnipeg.”\footnote{429} While police in Winnipeg, Canada detained Mary in jail, identification authorities and detectives worked to construct a criminal profile on her from multiple police agencies in the northwest region. Below is a map of all of the cities that law enforcement tracked Mary’s movements in the Pacific Northwest and Canada.


\footnote{428} “Prisoner Arraigned On Charge of Theft,” \textit{Vancouver Daily World} (British Columbia, Canada), May 10, 1907, newspapers.com (accessed August 30, 2020).

Figure 4.21 Map of cities police tracked Mary Turner in the Northwest and Canada, 1906-1907
It is difficult to visualize Mary’s spatial movements over this short period of time without looking at a map from a Northwest regional perspective. Mary’s movements from Montana to and through British Columbia to her escape from the asylum and back to Canada via Winnipeg, Manitoba is evidence of how Black women used the border and geographical knowledges as a catalyst in their working, spatial, and fugitive lives prior to the first wave of the Great Migration. Furthermore, like many rollers with police records on both sides of the international line, Mary would join a growing list that Canadian immigration officials deported to the United States following the turn of the 20th century.

**Confronting Deportation and Canadian Immigration Laws**

As a part country of Canada, British Columbia operated under the broader Dominion immigration laws and systems of deportation that exiled and prevented certain people from settling permanently. As immigration debates around citizenship in Canada expanded during the first decade of the 20th century, so did the ability for police and prosecutors to advocate for deporting so called “criminals and undesirable characters.”

One of the most lasting Canadian immigration reforms in early 20th century was an Act Respecting Aliens that empowered police and immigration officials to target people convicted of crimes or those marked by police as undesirable citizens, especially sex workers or women earning wages in underground economies.

According to the *Province*, in January of 1905, Alice Anderson was the first person that Vancouver authorities deported under the new act based on the “ground that she was too undesirable a character to be running around loose in this city.” The new provisions added to the Canadian immigration debate meant that all sex workers and rollers were vulnerable to deportation and ineligibility to gain citizenship, especially if local police on either side of the border had recorded their criminal records.

Up until this point, police in Vancouver booked sex workers over and over and many times women paid fines or served short terms in jail and then returned to their trade. Under this setup, a cash fine was more like a license to trade sex for money since many of the punishments did not involve long jail sentences. The *Province* went on to explain how Vancouver police collaborated with immigration officials to deport Alice.


431. For Canadian immigration policies, see note 349.

432. “Ridding City of an Undesirable Character.”
“The police were at their wits’ end to know what to do with the woman when Dr. McAlpine and Medical Inspector of the port, came to their rescue. He investigated her case, and concluded she had no right in Canada.” Following the ruling, two Vancouver detectives walked Alice to the Port gangplank and paid for a ticket on a Seattle steamer ship heading to the United States. The question of citizenship and policing the North Western borders was an operation that required law enforcement cooperation on both sides of the border.

For Black women on the run from law enforcement in the Pacific Northwest, crossing the international border served as a possible refuge to evade prosecution and police surveillance in the United States. However, this did not stop police from communicating with authorities in British Columbia to capture fugitives. In 1905, two Black women that worked in one of the Paris houses in Seattle were facing prosecution for rolling a John and fled across the U.S/Canadian border. Victoria, British Columbia police captured and detained Ruth and Ray not long after arriving on the other side of the international line. Canadian immigration authorities charged that they had no right in the country and held them until Seattle police arrived to export them back to the United States. The Victoria Daily Times wrote, “An officer will arrive from Seattle this afternoon and will accompany the two across the boundary, re-arresting them, it is believed, when they come within his jurisdiction.” With police collaboration and tracking technologies evolving in the Pacific Northwest, crossing the border did not guarantee the evasion of prosecution or avoidance of identification tracking and capture.

In 1908, immigration authorities in three Port Cities in the Pacific Northwest refused a woman entry into their jurisdiction because she was marked by police as an undesirable person. When referencing women, this term usually targeted unwed women and those working in the sex trade. At the time, she was not able to leave a Steamer ship because no country would give her entry. Her exile started when Victoria authorities deported her in June of that year. The Vancouver Daily World wrote:

> [t]he U.S. immigration officials at Victoria knew of her and warned the authorities at Seattle. There she was refused landing, so the Princess Royal brought her to Vancouver, but Inspector Elliot said ‘No,’ and she was carried back by the Princess Royal to Victoria but Dr Milne would not allow her to land in that city again.

433. Ibid.


The woman was not mentioned by name in the article but her story of how police and immigration officials collaborated to deny her entry into different jurisdictions is revealing. Furthermore, her case is also an example of the intimate connections between immigration, citizenship, and the rise of criminal identification in the Pacific Northwest.

In December of 1912, Vancouver police arrested twenty four year old Virgil Thurman and two other women for entering a sporting house. In the police mug books, her occupation is listed as “Prostitute” from the “USA.” As a woman marked by police as a known sex worker, entering a house marked as “bawdy” or “disorderly” was a prompt for deportation.\textsuperscript{[436]} The police mug book served as a special catalyst to keeping up with undesirable people on the deportation list like Virgil. There are numerous Black women in the Vancouver mug books with “deported” as the result of court outcomes related to illicit economies.\textsuperscript{[437]}

The case of Nora Woodward illuminated and challenged the way deportation operated in the context of the criminal legal system in Canada. In December of 1912, a Vancouver judge sentenced Nora to thirty days in jail for violating the Canadian vagrancy law and the Chief of police referred Nora’s case for deportation, which made its way to the superintendent of immigration at Ottawa.\textsuperscript{[438]} In February of 1913, Vancouver authorities deported Nora to the United States for “flagrant immorality,” or in other words, visibly working in the sex trade.\textsuperscript{[439]} By November of that year, Nora had returned to Canada where Vancouver authorities arrested her for reentering the dominion as an “illegal alien.” Under the Canadian immigration law, Nora faced up to one year in prison and “Mr. J. Malcom Reed, immigration superintendent declared that it was the intention to prosecute cases of this nature to the full extent of the law.”\textsuperscript{[440]} The judge eventually convicted Norah for coming back to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{[436]} Virgil Thuman no. L116, Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917.
\item \textsuperscript{[437]} See Vancouver Prisoners’ Records, 1912-1917.
\item \textsuperscript{[438]} “Officer’s Authority to Deport A Woman Called in Question,” \textit{Vancouver Sun}, January 29, 1914, newspapers.com (accessed August 2, 2020).
\item \textsuperscript{[439]} “Norah Woodward, A Colored Woman,” \textit{Province} (Vancouver, British Columbia), November 17, 1913, newspapers.com (accessed August 2, 2020)
\item \textsuperscript{[440]} “Dorothy Jones, alias Nora Woodward,” \textit{Vancouver Sun}, November 12, 1913, newspapers.com (accessed August 2, 2020).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Canada illegally and punished her with six months’ imprisonment with “hard labor” and deportation after serving her sentence.\textsuperscript{441}

Several news outlets followed Nora’s case and nearly all mentioned the fact that Nora had numerous aliases in the police record on both sides of the border. The \textit{Province} highlighted that Norah had “half a dozen aliases.”\textsuperscript{442} The \textit{Victoria Daily Times} wrote, “[t]he woman is colored and bears a number of aliases and is well known to authorities here and across the line. She was sentenced for returning to Canada after deportation.”\textsuperscript{443} The \textit{Vancouver Sun} actually printed Norah’s aliases: “Dorothy Jones, alias Nora Woodward, alias Annie Smith, alias Senora Boyd, alias Nora Palmer, alias Mrs. P Palmer, was tried in the police court yesterday on a charge of having returned to Canada after having been deported last February.”\textsuperscript{444} Press outlets got their information about criminal cases and identification histories primarily from police reports and courts sessions.

Over the next two months, Nora’s attorney filed an appeal claiming that under the Canadian Immigration Act, only the Minster at Ottawa had the power to grant a deportation and everyone else only had the power to order a board of inquiry to follow up on a report. W. D. Scott, superintendent of immigration at Ottawa gave the instructions to deport Nora after law enforcement had examined her character. During Nora’s appeal to overturn the conviction for reentering the country, her attorneys argued that her initial deportation by a Vancouver judge was illegal on the grounds that Scott and everyone in the immigration chain of command lacked authority to make a ruling on deportation. The Crown Prosecutor in Vancouver did not directly have a response regarding the power of police court magistrates to order a deportation.\textsuperscript{445}

Two days later, Judge McInnes “quashed the conviction” against Nora and upheld the argument that her initial deportation was invalid. Under the Immigration Act, cases for deportation were expected to go

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{441} “Norah Woodward, A Colored Woman,” \textit{Province} (Vancouver, British Columbia), November 17, 1913, newspapers.com (accessed August 2, 2020).
\item \textsuperscript{442} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{443} “Deportation Must Be By Minister’s Order: New Point Raised at Vancouver Upheld by Judge McInnes in Woodward Case,” \textit{Victoria Daily Times}, (British Columbia, Canada), January 31, 1914, newspapers.com (accessed August 7, 2020).
\item \textsuperscript{444} “Dorothy Jones, Alias Nora Woodward,” \textit{Vancouver Sun} (British Columbia, Canada), November 12, 1913, newspapers.com (accessed August 2, 2020).
\item \textsuperscript{445} “Officer’s Authority To Deport A Woman Called In Question,” \textit{Vancouver Sun}, January 29, 1914, newspapers.com (accessed August 2, 2020).
\end{itemize}
through the Canadian minister of justice. Nora’s court battle was a win for many women that had been marked as undesirable and deported by courts and other immigration officials that lacked legal authority to make a deportation ruling. But that was only if they were aware or had the resources to hire an attorney to make that case. After serving over two months in the Vancouver jail, local authorities were forced to release Nora. According to the *Victoria Daily Times*, after her release, there was no effort of police or immigration officials to recharge her.

Nora’s challenge to the Canadian immigration law illuminates one of the many ways that Black women contested the criminal legal system. This would not however prevent police from surveilling and arresting her as a vagrant at any point in the future. If anything, the numerous press accounts that followed Nora’s case made it more difficult for her to work her trade or remain in Vancouver unnoticed. There are no official documents that detail if and or when Nora may have left Vancouver. Her police record on both sides of the border is also testament to the mobility of itinerant Black women and their resistance to the legal punishments that were inextricably linked to their everyday working lives. Nevertheless, the police and press collaboration to uncover and publicize Nora’s identity and arrest history on both sides of the border is a testament to the professionalization of criminal identification in North America. The fact that Black women used a host of alternative names that Canadian and United States identification authorities had on file reveals that there was a very specific racial, gendered, and geographic dynamic to studying the criminal profiles of itinerant Black women.

**Facing Prison and Deportation**

On the night of April 9, 1925, Weems rolled a John for $85 dollars in the Hogan’s Alley district. The following day, during the early morning hours, two Vancouver detectives captured and detained her as the primary suspect. Theft “from the person” over $10 was a felony offense punishable by a term at Oakalla Prison Farm in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada if convicted. Later that day, Weems appeared before a magistrate in Police court and arranged a cash bail through a bondsman for her release. It was not long before the local newspaper was following the outcome of Weems’ case. The *Vancouver Sun* first wrote an article the day after Weems was released on bond titled “Woman Is Arrested on a Theft Charge” and then three days later after

---

Weems’ court hearing published another article titled “Remand Given in Pickpocket Charge.”447 Though Weems’ was out of jail for the weekend after bonding out immediately, authorities likely ordered Weems to remain in jail on this day due to uncovering her record d in the United States.

According to the Sun, “[John Doe] alleged that Mrs. Weims [sic] accosted him on Union street, and while speaking to him managed to sneak the $85 in bills from his trousers watch pocket.”448 The detectives allegedly corroborated John’s story with testimony from a friend of his. Based off the Vancouver Police Court Calendar, there was an interpreter sworn in which means the John likely spoke a foreign language other than English.449 Weems plead not guilty and the judge set her trial date for a week later. Weems would now forever be marked by law enforcement on both sides of the border whether a jury found her innocent or guilty. In addition, based off the customs in Vancouver, her portraits would be added to the local Rogues’ Gallery and distributed amongst law enforcement in various Pacific coast cities. While Vancouver authorities detained Weems in jail awaiting trial, the John must have left town and was not able to testify. On April 21, 1925, a Vancouver prosecutor dismissed the charges against Weems and ordered her release from jail.450

The success of the roller business in the Pacific Northwest, especially in Oregon, Tacoma, Seattle, and British Columbia can partly be accredited to the multifaceted dynamics of Port Cities, particularly in the area of leisure, tourism, and the grey area of legal and illegal sex economies during the first few decades of the 20th century. Weems’ case is emblematic of the various stories shared throughout this chapter. On the one hand, police had records of Weems on both sides of the international line regardless of a conviction. This also meant the addition of another police portrait added to a collection of portraits and criminal identification records that circulated amongst the Pacific Northwest cities and other regions where law enforcement booked Weems. Rolling a John in Vancouver had many outcomes including prison time and hard labor. It could also be a lucrative endeavor, specifically due to the abundant forms of formal and informal cash flowing through the


448. “Remand Given In Pickpocket Charge.”


450. Ibid.
Hogan’s Alley district. Despite if Black female rollers escaped punishment or not, the evolution of identification technologies and police cooperation made it nearly impossible to fully stay off the radar of police in any city or region. It would not be long before Weems got the “traveling blues” and just picked up her life and left Canada.
PART THREE

“Police Have Declared War”

Several months ago the police department practiced extreme measures against this class of criminals with considerable success. A detectives’ automobile cruised about the streets and whenever a woman known to be an “alley worker” was spotted the car was stopped, she was loaded into it and sent to jail.

*Des Moines Tribune*, 1915

Alley working is regarded as a regular business and it is worked successful in the larger cities, which afford greater opportunity for operation, and a greater number of choice victims to be plucked. Alley workers are women and their plan of operation is to attack white men, the worker generally being colored women.451

*Hartford Courant*, 1917

**Introduction**

Weems managed to escape prison and deportation in Vancouver. Over the next week, she traveled south across the border back to the United States. Some of the first major urban cities along the train routes of the Pacific Northwest railway was Everett and Seattle Washington. To the southeast of Everett was the city of Snohomish, where Weems says she went to see a friend.\(^{452}\) In addition to operating with labor autonomy in local urban sex economies, the freedom to choose itinerancy over permanence enabled unwed rollers like Weems to also employ mobility as strategy to increase wage earning opportunities and the ability to evade constant surveillance.\(^{453}\) The following figure maps Weems’ migration from British Columbia to Washington State.

---


453. On Black women and human geographies, see note 90.
With portraits circulating through Rogues’ Galleries in several cities, itinerant rollers were well aware that police could detain them and construct a background check rapidly in any city, rendering their business too risky and unpredictable. Leaving a place by choice after being mugged by police was likely a much easier avenue for itinerant rollers. However, Weems had not been out of jail for a full week before police in Snohomish were on the hunt for her. There are no details about how many men she may have rolled before Snohomish police marked her as a roller suspect. In this complaint, a John accused Weems of assaulting and rolling him for $30. When she realized police were looking for her, she immediately fled Snohomish and later stated, “then I went by bus to Everett.” Fleeing towards Everett gave Weems a better opportunity of escaping the region. Everett’s geographical location with train stops along the Pacific Northwest railway could take Weems as far as Mexico or back to Canada.

Taking into account the direction she fled, it appears that she was heading back toward the Canadian border. With some description about Weems from the complaining witness, police authorities were able to track and capture her before she crossed the border. Weems recounts that she “was arrested on the way, was taken back to Snohomish Station, and then to Everett County Jail.” At the local jail, police booked Weems and forced her through the normal identification process just like each of the other police departments that constructed a criminal record of her.

While police and prosecutors were focused on her criminal background, Weems plead not guilty to grand larceny and demanded a jury trial. According to a prosecutor’s statement, “[Weems] approached a man upon the streets of Snohomish and took a pocket-book away from him, at the same time grabbing the man by the testicles and giving them a jerk . . . [t]he poor fellow with a cry of pain tried to protect his pocketbook but was unsuccessful.” The actions reported in this job perhaps reflects Weems’ growing resentment toward white men she encountered in the business who sought to devalue her labor. Or it is possible that the John tried to rape Weems which was always a possibility in the roller business. From the description of the complaint, Weems was responding to something sexual or maybe she wanted to inflict pain to secure the roll she was seeking quicker.

454. Nettie Weems no.13400, Corrections Department, Washington State Penitentiary.
455. Ibid.
456. Ibid.
In addition to the police complaint against Weems in Snohomish, local officials would eventually—through cooperation with police agencies in other cities—track other roller arrests and court records connected to her. In a statement advocating for Weems to be caged in a Washington prison, the prosecutor in Snohomish stated “[t]his woman’s record is a bad one.”457 In May of 1925, a jury in Snohomish convicted Weems of grand larceny, a felony offense that was punishable by an indeterminate sentence up to fourteen years in Walla Walla State Prison in Washington.

Weems refused to accept the guilty verdict and prison term. Detained in the local jail awaiting sentence, Weems began to work on a plan to secure her freedom. Weems was not considering a legal appeal. No, she was plotting escape. After being detained by Snohomish authorities for around thirty days, Weems disappeared from the local jail. This was the second time within a month that Weems was in flight mode from law enforcement in Washington. The first time, she appeared to be attempting to escape toward Canada before her arrest. This time however, was after a jury had found her guilty of a felony roller charge. While the particular details of her escape are a mystery, she was now a “fugitive from justice” again—facing up to 14 years in Walla Walla prison.

In 1922, Marie Washington escaped from a women’s reformatory in Minnesota. This particular case was three years before Weems escaped from jail. Wanted posters are emblematic of the work law enforcement went through to capture escaped fugitives like Weems. Identification officials had marked Marie’s occupation as a pickpocket [roller] and racist remarks on the poster read, ”Typical bad nigger.”458 In addition, the poster illuminates some of the racist details law enforcement noted about Marie and most of the details on the record are nearly identical to a Bertillon identification card and a more evolved fugitive advertisement that included more than words and a sketch. Marie’s fugitive poster on the following page is an example of a telegraphic document that would have circulated between law enforcement.

457. Ibid.

Figure 5.2 Marie Washington Wanted Poster, 1922
reprinted from Sacramento Police Department
Ethnic Groups Wanted Bulletins, 1917-1927
One thing in Weems and most roller’s favor was the fact that rolling Johns was an underground economy that could be worked on the move. Now that Weems was a fugitive from law enforcement in the Northwest, she definitely had to leave the region and work her trade as concise as possible. During the summer or early fall of 1925, Weems arrived in Sacramento assuming the name Dollie Bibbs at a time when other urban cities such as Oakland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles were absorbing a large percentage of Black migrants that were a part of the Southern exodus to California. There is no exact answer why Weems chose to hideout in Sacramento or if she knew anyone that lived there.

Figure 5.3 Map of Nettie Weems traveling south on the Pacific West Coast as a fugitive, 1925

Weems’ journey south on the Pacific Coast is geographically counter to the typical Black migration story to California with most migrants arriving from the US South, Southwest, and Midwestern regions. The map below provides a visualization of Weems’ southern migration as a fugitive from Washington to California.\textsuperscript{460} I would argue that there is likely a dearth of maps that would illuminate Black migrants traveling south on the Pacific West Coast.

Sacramento is a city in California that absorbed one of the earliest waves of Black migrants in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Black communities in Sacramento first sprung up during the years of the Gold Rush.\textsuperscript{461} In 1850, a total of 212 free Blacks were recorded by census takers in Sacramento, and only 17 of which were Black women and girls. Though Black migrant men substantially outnumbered women, by 1860, out of 468 “free colored” people, 160 were listed as female, almost ten times more than eight years prior.\textsuperscript{462} While most Black Americans were still under the regime of enslavement, free Blacks, triggered by the discovery of gold joined the movement to western states such as California.\textsuperscript{463} By the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, other demographic groups, including ethnic whites, Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican families shared a community with Black Sacramentans. This dynamic however made it more difficult for Black women and girls to find sustainable working opportunities in the local domestic and service industry.

The Black population of Sacramento settled along the riverfront and was known as the Lower End and eventually the West End.\textsuperscript{464} Racial segregation and restrictive housing covenants forced Black migrants to find strategic social and political organizing tools to create the foundation for a sustainable self-determined middle class that adopted the philosophy of race men like Booker T. Washington. The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, coalitions of fraternal organizations, and Black clubwomen helped fulfill the race goals of

\textsuperscript{460}. The city of Sacramento is over 800 miles distance from Everett, Washington.

\textsuperscript{461}. On free Black communities in Gold Rush and pre-Civil War California, see note 292.

\textsuperscript{462}. U.S Census Bureau; 7th Census of the United States, California, 1850/52; 8th Census of the United States, Sacramento, California, 1860; generated by jub Sankofa; using ancestrylibrary <www.ancestrylibrary.com> (12 June 2019).


building cooperative community businesses, property ownership, and Black political power in Sacramento. Historian Clarence Caesar coined the period from 1880 up to 1940 as Black Sacramentan’s “settled years” as the population did not change much with more migrants making their way to San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles.

According to William Burg’s history of Sacramento, if a person came to learn about the waterfront district through press accounts only, it was likely they had latched on to the progressive-era demonization of the Lower End as an informal red light district. The tenderloin, as it was called in Sacramento, “ran along L Street and Second Street, through the West End” and shared a proximity with the riverfront multi-racial residential communities. In this district, a host of legal and illegal amusements existed from saloons, dance halls, brothels, sporting lodges, and other outlets for urban sex trade and liquor. Upper class patrons visited “parlor houses” and most Black women and streetwalkers worked out of “cribs,” described as “upstairs rooms in rooming houses or located above businesses.” During the first two decades of the late 19th and early 20th century, many other urban cities throughout the country, small and large, had vice tolerated districts from Chicago to New Orleans to Hogan’s Alley to the Barbary Coast in San Francisco. In two different regions with histories of tenderloin districts—Chicago and Vancouver—Weems had a history of arrest already. Another city with a long history of Black women engaged in illicit urban economies was Sacramento. There is no sustained study of Black women’s informal wage earning and experiences with policing in Sacramento, especially the business of rolling Johns.

Dance and music, both forms of Black resistance followed formerly enslaved people out of the US South into Sacramento and urban cities across North America. According to historian Tera Hunter, the growing number of working class Black people patronizing nighttime venues at the time led moral and social reformers

466. Ibid., 91.
468. Ibid.
469. Ibid.
470. For more on prominent red light districts and sex work studies, see note 92.
to crack down on dance hall venues. Dance halls were not only a platform for sex workers to solicit clients, but also provided sites for formal wage earners to reclaim their bodies as sites of pleasure and joy outside of domestic labor, and especially the gaze of predominately white employers.\textsuperscript{471} The rise of Black owned saloons and dance halls on L street and the Lower West End of Sacramento added to the controversial amusements available to Black working class people, especially since respectable citizens associated dance halls as sites of crime, liquor drinking, and underground sex trade.

Some of the social reform laws and police harassment in Sacramento during the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century specifically targeted Black dance halls. In 1912, Charles Bliss, the commissioner of public health enacted the Bliss Ordinance that prevented alcohol from being associated with dance halls. One of the concerns of serving alcohol at dance clubs in Sacramento was the so called influence on interracial mingling and sexual deviance, especially at venues such as the Eureka Club, Serra Hall, the Churchill and other rooming house owners that local authorities accused of conducting houses of prostitution and gambling.\textsuperscript{472} According to William Burg, commissioner Bliss would call for Churchill to lose its dance permit not solely because of the sale of alcohol but because of the increase in white customers, especially white women.\textsuperscript{473} Churchill would eventually reopen a year later, with a license permit to sale liquor. However, “with the condition that women could only visit the club once per week, and white women were never allowed to enter.”\textsuperscript{474} The year after the Bliss Ordinance was instituted, California authorities latched on to the nationwide movement to close red light districts.\textsuperscript{475}

In 1913, Governor Hiram Johnson—a Sacramento native that won his campaign in 1910 on a progressive platform—signed the Nuisance Abatement Proposition.\textsuperscript{476} Over the next year, the Red Light Abatement Act, would finally become the law in California. Following the passage of the law in California,

\textsuperscript{471} Hunter, \textit{To 'Joy My Freedom}, 170.

\textsuperscript{472} Burg, 48-49.

\textsuperscript{473} Ibid., 50-51.

\textsuperscript{474} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{475} The movement to close red light districts across the US began in Iowa in 1909, and by 1913 California authorities had latched on to the campaign. On Light abatement movement in the United States, see Hennigan, “Property War.”

\textsuperscript{476} Burg, 22-23.
resorts, brothels, and any house of sex trade were forced to shut down operation immediately and permanently. The vote in favor of the Abatement Act was put forth by Democratic Senator Edwin E. Grant. If upheld, the Act proposed that “any citizen may proceed against a house of prostitution as a nuisance. If the nuisance be proved, the house must be closed for one year unless the owner furnished a bond that the house shall be used only for lawful purposes.” Grant argued that the Abatement Law was a preventive measure that would give any citizen the power “to drive prostitution out” of residential districts.478

With the license to arrest and surveil, police in Sacramento increasingly weaponized California vagrancy laws to target Black sex workers’ housing arrangements under the California Red Light Abatement Act. Ross Robinson, a Black barber and operator of a boarding house, accused police of harassing him in regards to Black women renting rooms at his place. Police had first jailed Robinson for allegedly running a house of prostitution. A jury would later find Robinson not guilty. Later that year, police raided the Robinson residence again and charged him and his wife with conducting a house of prostitution in addition to charging several women with vagrancy and detaining two Japanese men as witnesses. This time however, Robinson’s response was featured in the Record-Union. He complained:

Why do the police pick on me? I know and they know there are at least 30 houses of ill-fame being conducted in this city between Front and Tenth streets. These girls that were arrested in my house pay me $10 a week for room and board. I have a Chinese cook to prepare their meals. They have their own rooms and I do not know who their friends are or who they entertain in their rooms. I cannot understand why the police keep picking on me when other people are allowed to conduct such a house as I do.480

Robinson recognized that he was being racially targeted by police. Robinson’s rooming house was certainly not the first nor the last to be monitored by police and city officials for allegedly harboring Black sex workers. The criminalization of Black sex workers in Sacramento played a critical role in the Progressive Era harsh policing

477. Edwin E. Grant, Abatement of Nuisances, California Proposition 30 (1914), http://repository.uchastings.edu/ca_ballot Props/63.

478. Ibid.


and punishment tactics. Sacramento however, was not an anomaly in this category and certainly not in the available legitimate working outlets for Black women.

By 1920, the total Black population in Sacramento was under 700 people. Unlike for Black men, the World War did not significantly change the occupational opportunities available to Black women across the state. Majority of the available employment for Black women across the country, and particularly in California, was primarily concentrated in two labor forces. In 1910, more than 80 percent of Black women across California worked domestic and service jobs in some capacity from servants to laundresses, including middle class and clubwomen. Historian Shirley Ann Wilson Moore writes, “[b]y 1920, more than half of California’s employed African American women still worked as servants and nearly fifteen percent as laundresses.” The other industry that provided many Black women in California and across North America with a steady flow of cash was the sex trade, including rolling Johns. The following chapter charts the social construction of the urban roller and alley worker in North America from the turn of the 20th century up through the first wave of the Great Migration.

481. See note 92.


484. Ibid.

Chapter Five

“Negresses Prey on White Men”

The formation of roller wages into a shadow economy was linked directly to white men’s leisure and sexual desires and Black women’s wisdom to know the difference between business and pleasure. The spatial concentration of liquor, gambling dens, saloons, and the commercialization of sex trade gave men with disposable income an opportunity to explore various levels of leisure. Black women were well aware that white men roaming in certain areas had particular intentions and more than likely pockets filled with rolls of “greenbacks.” The rise of urban policing and city wide campaigns aimed at punishing rollers is a testament to Black women’s success in the shadow wage earning economy. During the first decade of the 20th century, local police in several cities across the country waged war against Black sex workers and rollers operating in tenderloin districts.

“All Suspicious Characters of Dusky Hue Will Be Driven From the City”

News articles provide insight into how law enforcement and city officials targeted rollers as a criminal class. In 1903 in Portland, Oregon—a port city on the Pacific west coast, police issued an ultimatum to Black owned saloons and community business leaders that if Black women did not stop rolling white men, “all suspicious characters of dusky hue would be driven from the city.”486 The police Chief called for all hands on deck—including city officials from the court house and bails bondsmen—to prevent Black women from systematically rolling Johns and evading prosecution. “The Judge and attorney assured the chief they would give him their cooperation in breaking up the gang of female thieves” reported the Oregon Journal.487 A few months later, the Journal complained that police were not doing enough to rid the city of rollers after a miner was robbed of $1000 at Sallie White’s brothel.488

In an article titled “Stranger Robbed; Police Apathetic,” the Journal wrote, “[i]n spite of the avowed intention of Chief of Police Hunt to drive all the negro women thieves out of business, they are still robbing


487. Ibid.

488. Ibid. $1000 in 1903 is more than $28,000 worth of buying power in 2022 according to the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics.
strangers in Portland.” The woman mentioned in the article could not be identified like many rollers that used discreet ways to avoid detection. Police authorities often responded by conducting massive raids on sporting houses and threatening or legally banishing Black women from the city under vagrancy laws.

“Negro Pickpockets Must Leave Spokane”

The racial and gendered headlines covering Black women accused of rolling Johns that follow were expressed in the Spokesman-Review, Spokane Chronicle, and the Spokane Press. These articles and titles were not an anomaly and often made the headlines of press outlets across North America. Some of the headlines were, “Colored Pickpocket,” “Negress Robbed Business Man,” “Negress Jailed; Police Happy,” “Police Nab Colored People,” “Negress Held as Robber: Alleged To Have Record As Expert Pickpocket,” “Colored Women Caught By Police,” “Negress Is Held On Theft Charge,” “Negress Caught In Diamond Robbery,” “Negress Charged With Robbery,” “Held Up By A Negress,” and many others including detailed subtitles. In other cases, rollers and organized crimes against white men led to a series of articles focusing on particular women for all of the charges.

In 1903, the Spokane Press published an article titled “Negro Pickpockets Must Leave Spokane,” that detailed the Chief of police and city authorities intentions on rounding up known and suspected rollers.

“Following nightly turns by negress pickpockets Chief of Police Reddy and Commissioner Lilienthal today


490. See note 91.

decided to rid the town of all negro ‘dips.’” The Spokane Press also highlighted what police believed to be the solicitation method of local rollers. It explained that rollers “intercept strangers” on the street and lead them to a saloon or resort location under the assumption of pleasure and an eventful night. The Press continued with their view of how Black women used sexuality to victimize white men. It explained, “[t]he women become affectionate and during the Romeo-Juliet scene at close range became attached to pocketbooks.” Despite surveillance and aggressive policing, rollers managed to strategize new tactics of securing rolls from Johns.

Figure 5.4 “Negro Pickpockets Must Leave Spokane” reprinted from Spokane Press 494


493. Ibid.

494. Ibid.
As long as tenderloin districts were visited by Johns looking to drink liquor and purchase sex from Black women, rollers found ways to stay in business. In an article titled “Tough Element Is Sneaking Back,” the Chronicle reported, “[s]everal months ago Chief Waller ordered all negroes out of the buildings, and for a short time the order was obeyed . . . One by one the woman have returned until conditions at present are said to be worse than they were originally . . . The police regard the negro women generally as thieves.” According to the Chronicle, the biggest obstacle to police arresting rollers was the usual Johns either neglecting or hesitating to file criminal complaints. The numerous unsuccessful prosecutorial outcomes of criminal proceedings against rollers left police and city official with the feeling that the only solution was to force Black women to leave the city. The other social construction surrounding Black female rollers in the early 20th century was the gang of rollers that allegedly preyed on white men as a part of larger conspiracy to increase their income wages—a bonus of sorts.

“Beaumont Man Hunters”

One of most nationally sensational cases of an alleged “gang” of Black women systematically rolling Johns occurred in Texas in 1902. During the early months of the year, more than 12 men were reported as “missing” after visiting Beaumont, Texas. In January, officers discovered dead bodies floating in the Neches river. In March, after a fourth body was found floating in the river, police officers began to suspect there was a gang of robbers and murderers luring men to the territory before taking money, killing them, and dumping the bodies in the water.

The fourth victim was first suspected of dying by suicide by some. However, the mysterious nature of being found only in his underclothes sowed doubt on that theory, especially since he was last seen wearing a “fine suit of clothes and had between $50 and 100 in cash and a gold watch on his person.” The thought of a serial killer and white men disappearing after visiting Beaumont sparked outrage and fear. Moreover, it baffled officers who did not have a suspect.


In the second week of March, police officers arrested Mattie Bennet, a Black woman who allegedly confessed to luring men to her house to roll. Soon after, newspapers across the country began featuring articles that headlined the alleged murders and robberies in addition to centering Mattie as the leader. In the days that followed, press in several different cities shared a special dispatched from Beaumont with competing headlines. On March 13th, the Salt Lake Herald headlined a column titled, “Negress Leads Gang of Oil Cut-Throats.” In the Pittsburgh Daily Post, the press account read “Business Made of Murderers: Gang of Negresses and White Men Took Human Life For Money.” In the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the titled was “Beaumont’s Murderous Band.” In the days that followed, newspapers in various cities headlined the Beaumont case and doubled down on the racial and gendered constructions of Mattie as the leader of the alleged gang.

On March 14th, another series of press accounts spread across the country. The Spokesman-Review in Spokane, Washington shared an article on the front page titled “Beaumont Man Hunters” with the subtitle that read “Members of Her Gang Would Go Out to the Saloons and Street Corners and Bring Men With Money to Her Den—The Rest Was Easy—Has Been Going on for Six Months.” In the Topeka Daily Capital, the headline “Almost Like the Benders: Work of a Texas Gang Unearthed,” was used to draw a comparison to a family convicted of multiple murders in Labette County, Kansas between 1871 and 1872. In the Northeast as far as Massachusetts, the Fall River Globe labeled their article “Band of Murderers: Negro Women and White Men in Texas with Bloody Instincts.” These articles reveal how law enforcement and newspapers across the


country worked together to construct terror campaigns against Black women. From these demonizing reports grew the theory of fatal seduction—that white men not only risked their wallets but their lives.⁵⁰²

After two months or so had passed, two more dead bodies were found in the river making the total six since the start of the new year. The sixth body found floating in the river was identified as a painter and paper hanger. It was reported from Beaumont investigators that his body had been in the water anywhere from two to three weeks. By this time the entire city was on edge as a massive crowd of people stood around witnessing a dead body removed from the river. Investigators and police had explored the idea of exploding dynamite in the water to possibly surface more bodies that might be at the bottom of the river.⁵⁰³

As news spread across the country, everyone arrested or said to have been involved became dubbed in the press as the “Mattie Bennet gang.”⁵⁰⁴ The Vicksburg Herald in Mississippi featured a column titled “The Beaumont Thugs: Three Other Members of the Gang in Custody.”⁵⁰⁵ In Sumter, South Carolina, the Watchman and Southron headlined an article titled “Gang of Texas Murders: Explanation of Fifty Men From Beaumont, Texas,” that highlighted Mattie’s confession given to a reporter that visited her in the local jail.⁵⁰⁶ Mattie noted that the rolling operation conducted from her house had been going on for about six months corroborating the earlier reports. She stated, “[t]he men would go out to the saloons and street corners and find men that had money. They would bring them to my house and I and the other woman would give them beer with knock-out drops in it . . . I don’t know how many men I have drugged; too many to remember, and all of them were robbed.”⁵⁰⁷ Mattie denied being involved in the actual murders and physical abuse of the victims and noted that

⁵⁰² Mattie’s case was very distinct from the average petty pickpocketing roller jobs. The tactics of soliciting Johns from saloons and using sleeper drops was a typical method in brothels and cribs, however, most roller jobs did not result in physical violence or death. Though Mattie’s case was an anomaly, the press reports only added to larger construction of the urban roller as inherently dangerous and violent.


⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.
her role was primarily showing the men a good time at her house while fixing their drinks with sedatives. Despite not committing any of the actual murders or physical assaults, the press demonized Mattie as the center of a murderous gang of rollers. In most cities across the country, the commodification of rolling Johns as a consistent income earning opportunity gave rise to the social construction of monstrous Black “prostitute” gangs and organized crimes against white men.

“Prey of Negress Gang”

Racialized terror campaigns, facilitated by print stories about organized groups of Black rollers was reported by press in nearly every region of the United States and Canada. For example, following a series of roller complaints to police in Plymouth, Indiana, the *Weekly Republican*, published a column titled “Negress Band of Robbers,” that was aimed at inciting fear and the threat of organized Black women on the loose in the tenderloin district.508 “As a result of the wide open policy of South Bend the city is virtually having a reign of terror” wrote the *Republican*.509 In other words, Rollers were disrupting the grey area sex economies in the tenderloin district and escaping punishment as usual. According to police, many complaints gave varying descriptions of the alleged perpetrators. The *Republican* continued on that note, “[t]his gives rise to the theory that there is an organized gang of negresses operating in South Bend.”510 Another theory that I posit, is that there may have also been a cadre of individual Black women switching clothes, wigs, makeup and other accessories.

In addition to the theory of organized groups of rollers, there was the practical arm of the industry that actually worked as a team to roll Johns. This would also help support police profiling surrounding the social constructions of Black women and organized gangs targeting white men. In 1907, the *Buffalo Enquirer* exacerbated the language of a “gang of negresses” that reportedly held up a man up in a hallway. The local police would eventually capture three women alleged to be responsible.511 In Canonsburg, Pennsylvania a

509. Ibid.
510. Ibid.
front-page article read, “Italian is Robbed of His Money: Three Negresses and Companions Hold Up Foreigner in East Canonsburg Saturday Night.” After receiving possible identification of the women, police were on the hunt for a group of Black women. The Daily Notes wrote, “The Canonsburg police searched for the other members of the gang all day and yesterday without success. Last night they received word that two negresses answering the descriptions of those wanted had boarded a car near the scene of the holdup . . . They are believed to be members of the gang.”

Itinerant rollers could stop through a town and roll a few men before skipping town.

The public theories that spread about rollers and alley workers can partly be attributed to press accounts that narrated Black women in this line of work as the living embodiment of the Greek mythological legend of the Sirens who were said to lure men to an island using songs before stealing all of their property. In other versions, Sirens are depicted as seducing men for all of their wealth before eating them. The analogies that the press used to equate rollers with the mythological figure of the Siren exacerbated a broader sexually monstrous trope aimed at demonizing Black women.

The Daily Notes would began an article stating, “The Siren’s song was too much for [John] . . . and while he was under the magic spell he was touched for his loose change, which amounted to $48.” The John reported that three Black women stopped him on the street and one of them stated, “I believe I could learn to love you.” He reported to police that he stopped to entertain this woman and realized soon after that he was the target of a roller job. Following the report, an officer says he arrived to see the group laughing and they all fled. He was able to capture one of the women, who later revealed that the group had traveled from Pittsburgh to Canonsburg by train.


513. Ibid.

514. Morris Silver, Sacred Prostitution in the Ancient Greek World. From Aprhodite to Baubo to Cassandara and Beyond (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2019), 122.


516. Ibid.
Black women in the sex trade and those operating in the roller business at times worked together to protect each other from Johns and police arrests. In an article featured in the *Oakland Tribune*, police detectives claimed they had broken up a gang of Black female rollers. In reference to a woman that had slapped an officer in order for her co-worker to flee the scene, the *Tribune* wrote, “[t]he woman is believed to be one of a gang of negress pickpockets, who have been robbing unsuspecting white men in this city for some time past.”517 The complaining witness alleged that the women had lured him into a dark alley and picked his pocket. The police were not able to capture the woman who escaped the scene without detection.518

In 1909, the *Quad City Times* in Davenport, Iowa used the sensational journalist tactic of constructing Black women roller reports into organized crime in an article titled, “Horseman Is Prey of Negress Gang”519 One of the suspects involved was a fifteen year old girl said by police to be used as bait by the alleged group of Black women. According to the *Times*, “[t]he Lampkins girl dresses neatly and is attractive and has been used as a ‘scout’ by a band of negresses that room on East Fourth Street.”520 Police believed the group allegedly got together that night with the specific goal of rolling men. After police booked the group at the station, one woman was said to have a “notorious police record,” meaning identification authorities in another city had marked her more than once as a roller.521 It would later come out that there was not enough evidence to charge her outside of her past record. The magistrate eventually dismissed the larceny charge and sentenced her to thirty days in jail for “street walking.”522 Cases like this also reveal how police used the socially constructed organized gang trope to harass and jail groups of Black women and investigate their background while in custody and despite if there was evidence of a crime or not the courts still had the power to punish women as street walkers

---


518. Ibid.


520. Ibid.

521. Ibid.

522. Ibid.
In a similar journalist tactic as the Quad City Times and many others, the El Paso Times headlined an article that similarly played the role of sensationalizing race, gender, and the gang of rollers trope. The column was titled “Negress Gang Broken Up: Made Practice of Robbing Gullible Men in Evil Resort.”523 In this case, a group of women rooming together were accused by police to have committed “numerous robberies of men on Utah street.”524 The police arrested four women from the house on vagrancy charges since they could not get roller complaints to stick in court. One of the women was pressured by police to tell of an incident where her friend had just rolled a John and then handed a roll of money to a separate party to hide before the police came. She stated to police, “I asked her what she did that for, and she said ‘I don’t want the officers to find it when they search the house.’”525 The details given to police likely under the threat of punishment reveals how rollers shared strategies of resistance amongst each other. This is another example of how rollers used the rival geography of urban networks to work their trade.

It is also important to note that based off the statement, the roller was aware or at least prepared for the moment that police would come raid the house. Meaning, in the roller business, especially when locally stationed, a house raid was always a possibility. What is also revealing is how difficult it was to secure evidence of criminality without using witnesses close to or within the orbit of other rollers. There was not enough evidence for prosecutors to convict any of the women on grand larceny charges, especially without the complaining witness. However, a judge convicted three of the women with a misdemeanor vagrancy charge and ordered them to spend most of the year in the county jail.526

The language of Black female roller gangs was not only expressed by police and white press in the United States. In 1908, the Gazette, a newspaper in Montreal, Canada published an article titled, “Alley Workers In Toronto,” that described Black women caught in a house raid by police as a traveling gang. “They are part of a gang from the United States, who because of the peculiar methods of robbing intoxicated and


524. Ibid.

525. Ibid.

526. Ibid.
susceptible men, are known as ‘alley workers’ . . . Five other members of the gang were run out of town.”527 In order to be dubbed by police as traveling alley workers, Toronto identification authorities would have had a copy of mug portraits from police officials in the United States on each woman.

In Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, the Edmonton Journal also used the racially explicit language of describing rollers as a predatory gang in an article titled, “Gang Of Negresses Prey On White Men.” The column opened up by stating, [i]n the arrests and conviction of Mamie Harris, a big negress, yesterday in police court, the city police believe they have practically broken up a gang of colored women.”528 Similar to other cities where multiple Black women were accused of rolling white men, the press and police framed the outcome as splitting up a gang that systematically rolled Johns. In this case, police alleged this group of Black women were luring drunk men to a concealed location before picking their pockets or attacking them physically. It was not untrue, but the discourse that grew out of it empowered police to target groups of Black women systematically.

In March of 1919, the Pittsburgh Press headlined an article “Negress Band Together For Theft Purposes.”529 The article claimed that according to the Police Commissioner, local Black sex workers had resorted to strong arm robberies to get easy cash after police had interfered with their trade. In reference to Black sex workers, the Commissioner stated to the Press that they “have been arrested so often and fined so heavily, as well as imprisoned for living immoral lives, that they decided to branch out in new directions. Sometimes they work two or three together. They will watch for men who seem unfamiliar with the locality, and entice him into a dark alley or doorway.”530 In order to surveil local rollers, the Pittsburgh police department brought officers from other districts to wear plain clothes and act as Johns soliciting sex workers. The article in the Press was featured in 1919, at a time when Black migrants were beginning to arrive in cities

527. “Alley Workers in Toronto,” Gazette (Montreal, Quebec, Canada) , September 17, 1908, newspapers.com (accessed June 20, 2019).


530. Ibid.
across the country in mass. As the roller economy in the urban city grew, so did the formation of a criminalized language that described the systematic nature of the roller business.

A close examination of numerous press reports featured across North America from the turn of the 20th century up through the Great Depression reveal that alleys were one of the most economically consistent racial geographies for Black women working in highly surveilled and criminalized sex trade. As an everyday practice, especially after sunset, rollers used the alley to exploit Johns and the politics of disposable income, sexual labor, and racialized geographies. With this knowledge, rollers by design shifted the power dynamics between Johns and in many ways rendered the police useless in preventing pickpocketing by Black women. Historically, the alley as a result, however, in cities across the country, emerged in the 20th century as one of the most demonized and racially surveilled spaces in the urban city.

“Caught White Man in Alley”

In January of 1900, the *Kansas City Times* published an article with the heading and subtitle “Woman Holds Up A Man: An Employe[e] of the Savoy Hotel Robbed by a Negress.” The title is an example of how press used headlines and subtitles to racialize and gender the practice of rolling white men, especially those that occurred in alleys. In addition to highlighting Black women in headlines, press reports helped to criminalize specific geographical locations in the urban city. In this case, by marking “Susie Duffy, a negress, in the alley near Eleventh and Wyandotte streets last night,” the *Times* was facilitating the construction of racial and gendered zones that white men should fear and stay away from. In addition, press accounts like the *Times* notified Johns to beware of Black women named Susie. John’s thought they could “master” the alleys and wield power over Black women in these secluded spaces. Black women’s awareness of John’s vulnerabilities allowed rollers to dictate and control the alley as a familiar working space.

Later that year in 1900, an anonymous “American Citizen” wrote a column in the *Topeka Plaindealer* that expressed their thoughts surrounding reports of white men being rolled by Black women in alleys. It is apparent that the writer had read press accounts in other cities that reported Johns being rolled in alleys. They wrote “The Kansas City Journal, of a recent date, speaks of a white man being worked by ‘the nigger in the alley’ game. This old game has been as much of a chestnut as the old brick game, except that it catches more

succors.” The writer’s reference to the old game highlights that, by turn of the 20th century, rolling Johns in alleys had emerged publicly as a phenomena and not just an on and off occurrence.

The title of the article was “We’d Like To Know, Too.” The author was possibly asking why do white men follow Black women into alleys if they know they will be robbed? The theme of this article and the authors words are evidence of the racial, gendered, and sexual politics of white supremacy. “In the first place what business has a white man in an alley with a Negro Woman? . . . The second place no Negro woman could make a white man go in an alley or any place, unless he was overly anxious to go . . . a white man who will go in an alley with a Negro woman certainly went there for no good intentions.” The writer also aimed to note that they did not believe Black women should escape punishment, however, they argued that white men who followed Black women into alleys did not deserve sympathy. They wrote, “[w]hen white men quit going in alleys and other places with Negro women then they will not be ‘touched.’” This sentiment was likely shared frequently amongst the general public and the police.

In 1905, the Shreveport Journal in Louisiana reported a roller complaint with the headline, “A Black Magdalen Held For Robbery.” Subtitles such as this and the following illuminate how press creatively used the extra word space to draw attention to particular details. It read, “Charge Made By a White Man That He Was Held Up By a Negress and $150 in Alley in Rear of Fire Station No. 2.” This is another example of a press outlet highlighting race and a roller complaint involving an alley as a part of the headline or subtitle. In 1907, the Quad-City Times featured an article titled, “Caught White Man in Alley.” In this case, police arrested a Black women as a suspect in a recent roller complaint that occurred in a local alley. Headlines and subtitles like the Shreveport Journal and Quad-City Times articles illuminate how press helped to publicly criminalize and mark the alley as a racialized threat zone for white men.

---

532. “We’d Like To Know, Too,” Topeka Plaindealer, December 14, 1900, newspapers.com (accessed November 29, 2020).

533. Ibid.

534. Ibid.


In 1911, the *Sioux City Journal* in Iowa featured an article with the headline, “White Man is Lured.” In this complaint, a farmer visiting the city reported that a Black woman “lured him into the alley” located behind a local hotel known as the Vendome.  

Articles like this were a heads-up warning for men staying at the Vendome that may run into Black women in the area at night. The message was to stay far away from Black women, or you might lose your “hard earned money.” In 1913, the *Dayton Herald* headlined an article, “Robbed in Alley By Colored Girl.” In this complaint, a John reported to police that he met a Black woman “in an alley off of Pearl street Thursday night,” another local geography in Dayton that would become a surveilled and criminalized site for Black women. What all transpired in this job was not revealed in the press account, except “the experience cost him $45 in cash and two checks, totaling $29.” It was not a mystery that white men were vulnerable to roller jobs when engaging Black women in alleys.

In 1914, the *Altoona Tribune* in Pennsylvania published a column titled “Smoky City Holds Ups” that was shared from a press account in Pittsburgh. In one story, a man that worked as a wine agent in Warren, Pennsylvania accused a Black woman of rolling him for $300 in a location called Dante Alley. Though other robbery incidents were included in the article, the subtitle read “Negro Woman Figured In One Hold-up in an Alley.” As was usual in reports like this, the *Tribune* wrote that John was “lured into the alley.” Centering Black women in headlines despite featuring other stories was a choice made by press editors. Another example of this is represented in an article featured in the *Des Moines Register* in Iowa. Though “Burglars, Robbers, and Auto Thieves Busy,” was the headline, the *Register* chose to center descriptions of a roller in the subtitle. It

---


538. Ibid.


540. Ibid.


542. Ibid

543. Ibid
wrote, “Visitor From Carroll Reports to Public He Was Robbed of $50 by Negress.” These articles are examples of how press covered multiple stories in one column, yet the subtitles marked roller complaints as a central focus.

In 1915, the *Austin American* in Texas headlined a column, “San Antonio Man Robbed of $50 by Negress In Alley.” Anyone reading this would be forewarned that the “alley near East Fifth and Brazos Streets” was a danger zone and a site to surveil suspicious Black women. The story reported to police and the story that followed by press accounts were often the same despite city or town. A white man “says he was accosted by the negro woman in the dark.” Many of the roller jobs were aimed at men from other cities and states staying at local hotels looking to go slumming.

In 1917 the *Sioux City Journal* published a headline and subtitle that aimed to capture a story about a Black woman, a white man, and a local alley. The subtitle read “Reports Negress Stole $90 from Him in Alley.” Just like many of the other articles, the press detailed a location of the crime and used the “accosted” term to describe Black women’s alleged method of soliciting men. In this city, “an alley near Third and Jackson streets” was now marked as a zone for white men to be cautious and aware of street walking Black women, especially at night time.

In 1918, the *Edmonton Journal* in Alberta Canada featured a press story titled, “Handsome Negress Lures Newlywed To An Alley, Robs and Assaults Him.” According to the report, the newly wed man took a walk around the block from his hotel while his wife was getting dressed. After hearing a “feminine voice” in the alley asking for help, he claimed that he entered the alley and was grabbed by a Black woman by his neck while


546. Ibid.


548. Ibid.

she extracted a roll of bills from his pocket. Articles like this added fuel to violent roller trope and the caricature of the urban Siren.550

The reporting of John’s shaped the public discourse around alley workers, despite if the story was fully accurate or not. The question of why so many white men followed Black women into alleys was not a public mystery. Despite if pressed mention it or not, the one fundamental theme of most accounts was the song of the Black female siren—an unmatched ability to lure a white man into an alley, despite if it meant him losing his last dollar. The same year as the Edmonton Journal used the luring trope to describe the methods of an alleged alley worker, an article in the Los Angeles Times, “Negress Robs Two Men of Valuables,” also uses the discourse of luring and enticing. It wrote, [John Doe] “reported to the police yesterday that a negress had enticed him into an alley on pretense of needing help and there abstracting a pocketbook from his coat which he said contained $144.”551 The language of luring, enticing, seduction and Black women’s sexual power over white men was not a 20th century phenomenon—it goes back to enslavement and was used by enslavers to justify rape and sexual violence Black women and girls.552

One thing to note in reports like this are how John’s complaints attempted to shield themselves from the immediate presumption of sex trade with Black women. The alley, white men, and Black women together was already publicly known to be a sight of pleasure seeking and a potential threat to white men’s property and cash. As the article in Topeka noted, the real story is that white men followed Black women into alleys with intentions. Black women’s wisdom of white men’s secrecy and embarrassment made it easier to use the alley as the perfect trap.

In 1920, the Rock Island Argus in Illinois headlined an article, “Negress Works White Man For Easy Pickings” that illuminates press specifying the racial and gendered criminal identification language of rolling a white man. In addition, the article reflected how normalized rolling Johns had become in the public imaginary. It wrote “[t]he negress is alleged to have ‘rolled’ a white man of $85 in an alley between Second and Third

550. Ibid.


avenues and Twenty-second and Twenty-third streets.” In addition to highlighting the geographical location of the complaint, the Argus also revealed one of the dilemmas white men faced when they reported roller jobs to police—their name and the story would possibly be featured in the press. Johns feared their wives and families would find out about their infidelities and even worse—that the woman was a Black sex worker. The Argus wrote, “[a]rriving at the police station he gave his name as John Jones, which the police say was given in a clumsy attempt at an alias. Although the officers were able to learn that the man is from Clinton, Iowa, they were unable to learn his right name, they said.” The possibility of being exposed publicly in the press forced Johns to grapple with their own secrets and what was possibly at stake if they followed through with police complaints.

An article published in the Topeka Daily Herald with the head line “Got His Just Due: White Man Robbed by Negro Woman of $50,” reveals what gave rise as one of the central threats to punishing Black women accused of roller jobs. The Herald wrote, “The man did not want his name to be mixed up in the case and said he would not prosecute the woman if he would be compelled to appear against her.” Johns realized that a complaint to the police did not guarantee they would receive their money back. Black women charged with roller felonies often plead not guilty in order to force John’s to show up as witnesses at trial. The key to punishing a roller meant coming out of the shadows and more than often, the embarrassment was too much for Johns forcing prosecutors to dismiss charges despite evidence.

Johns went to extreme measures to keep their names out of the public and the press helped them conceal their identities. The Shreveport Journal featured an article “White Man Robbed: Negro Women Arrest on Suspicion of Taking Money,” that evidences how press protected Johns while publicizing Black women’s identities. “A white man whose name was not recorded has reported to the police that he was robbed last night


554. Ibid.

555. Ibid.

of $140” the Journal wrote. Though the John’s name was shielded, the Journal had no problem publicizing two accused Black women’s names in the article despite if they were guilty or innocent. In another report in Muncie, Indiana, the Star Press revealed a common form of resistance from Johns. The headline read, “Wouldn’t Sign Affidavit” and the editors did not print his name and instead wrote, “a middle aged man, refused to sign any affidavit against the woman because of the publicity he might receive.” Despite the article illuminating the negress in an alley trope, it was clear that the frustration from police and prosecutors was that fact that many rollers knew it was a good chance they could escape full legal punishment.

In 1915, the New-Journal in Lancaster, Pennsylvania animated an article featuring two rollers and a white man in an alley. The title, “I Lubs You Honey”—Gone 143 Bucks,” aims to tell a popular story of how rollers used sexual embraces to solicit clients. In addition to title that mocks Black women’s language in a racist way, the subtitle “Victim of Amazon Hold-Up In Marion Alley,” aimed to exacerbate the colored amazon and white male victim in the alley trope. The complaining witness claimed that one Black woman followed him then enticed him with words before suddenly wrapping her arms around him. Following this, another Black woman then “rifled his pockets” before both disappeared into the night. Marion Alley was also now a local geography that was memorialized as a white male vulnerability site and a geography in need of police safety and public surveillance.

Eventually, police and criminal identification authorities across North America declared local wars against rollers and developed a language that marked alley workers as a professional criminal working class. The construction of alley work into a racial, gendered, and criminalized underground economy can be better understood by examining how press accounts in various cities collaborated with police to label specific rollers in mug books and identification records. To be marked by police as an alley worker meant that there was a trail of past complaints in that city or a criminal profile in circulation amongst local police and other regions. Law


560. Ibid. See Gross, Colored Amazons.
enforcement developed surveillance strategies to track and identify rollers and also invested citywide resources aimed at surveilling and punishing women noted as alley workers.

**The Battle Against Urban Alley Workers**

In 1906, the *Dayton Herald* featured an article about a Black women local police had dubbed as a noted alley worker. The officers detained and investigated Mamie Jackson who was in town from Cincinnati on charges of suspicion. According to the *Herald*, “[h]er game is to lure any one whom she believes has money or jewelry into an alley and rob them. The Jackson woman is about 45 years of age, well dressed and attractive.” Dayton police had received a criminal profile of Mamie from law enforcement in another city—likely Cincinnati, which means detectives there had already marked her as an alley worker. In other words—a career criminal. However, since no evidence of a crime committed in Dayton was uncovered, police officials were forced to release her from custody. Mamie’s story of police harassment and investigation illuminates Black women and especially noted alley workers’ vulnerability to being detained and or falsely accused by police. Despite if Mamie had stopped the alley worker business or not, her past arrests and police portraits followed her from other cities.

The criminal construction of the urban alley worker profession is more telling when we examine the use of the term in Canada as well as the United States. This illuminates how police cooperated across city, state, and international borders to mark alley workers in official records and certainly at international police conferences where criminal profiles and methods of identification where shared and exchanged. Police chiefs, wardens of prisons, detectives, and police attended local and international law enforcement conferences. In the eyes of police and press, the alley roller was a threat to any city, especially when moving. On the other hand, alley workers were not just itinerant by nature, they were often women banished by police and city officials and marked in official police records as someone always to be surveilled or caged.

Itinerant alley workers, especially in regions along the Northern US border evaded Canadian immigration laws to operate on both sides of the international line. However, with police cooperation expanded across North America, this did not always help alley workers conceal their past records. Police and criminal identification departments from the West coast of Vancouver, British Columbia, to the eastern part of Toronto,

---

Canada used the language of the alley worker to describe mark alley rollers. In 1908, the *Gazette* in Montreal titled an article “Alley Workers In Toronto,” that described officials in that city noting an alleged traveling gang of Black women that crossed the Canadian borders from the United States to work their business.\textsuperscript{562}

The *Gazette* would follow the case and a week later publish another article with the headline, “Alley Worker, Sentenced.”\textsuperscript{563} The article was referring to the punishment of one of the women involved with the so-called alley worker gang uncovered by Toronto police. For police and prosecutors in many cities in the US and Canada—it was easier to dub women as vagrants and used that as punishment as oppose to focusing on felony indictments which were difficult to secure a conviction and prison sentence. The presumption that any Black women could be a roller or alley worker empowered police to stop and harass Black women as suspicious characters and street walkers.

For traveling rollers working in Canada, if they were able to post cash bail, some fled the country back to the United States. In 1916, the *Ottawa Journal* in Ontario featured an article about a Black woman marked by local police as an alley worker that had forfeited a $25 cash bond and fled town. Sometimes the incentive of getting away with cash was the ability to bond out or have a friend pay a bail bondsman in order for rollers to get out of jail until their trial date. This was not always the case but having cash on hand could be the difference between taking a plea bargain as a conditional sentence of banishment just to avoid jail or just taking the cash loss and leaving on their own terms—as a fugitive from justice. Despite if Black women intended on coming back to court or not, by fleeing across the border, prosecutors in Canada either had to commission police to capture women in the United States, or just let the case go, and since roller convictions were not easy to secure in the first place, efforts could still prove fruitless. Black women in border regions especially knew how to go back and forth across regions of Canada without getting caught. Deportation did not stop Black women from coming back to Canada illegally either. This is evident in the case of Lizzie Moore who Canadian officials

\textsuperscript{562} “Alley Workers in Toronto,” Gazette, (Montreal, Quebec, Quebec, Canada), September 17, 1908, newspapers.com (accessed October 12, 2020).

\textsuperscript{563} “‘Alley Worker’ Sentenced,” Gazette (Montreal, Quebec, Quebec, Canada), September 25, 1908, newspapers.com (accessed October 12, 2020).
deported three times. If a Black woman was even suspected of being a roller, police and courts many times forced them to leave city despite if there was enough evidence to convict.

When Stella Johnson was suspected of being a roller in Sioux City, police picked her up and charged her with vagrancy in order to question her about the night of the alleged crime. The Sioux City Journal wrote, “[w]hile there is no proof that she was implicated in the robbery of Lemstock, her movements on that night will be investigated. It is probable that she will be given the opportunity to leave the city.” The local police courts would eventually find her guilty of vagrancy. Police did not need evidence of her involvement in a roller crime, just being marked as “an all around crook” was enough evidence to warrant her detainment under vagrancy statutes. While the courts detained Stella in jail, the Police Judge ordered her to “furnish good behavior bonds in the sum of $500 or go to jail for one year.” This was a result of the knowledge police now had that authorities in South Omaha had exiled her three months prior. In Stella’s court hearing it would come out that she wanted to go back to Chicago instead of being detained in jail. Not only did she have to remain in jail until the courts ruled, if she even wanted to stay in Sioux City, she would have to pay a hefty fine. Stella’s case reveals the vulnerability of any Black woman that police suspected of being a roller.

Not all suspicious arrest occurred after roller crimes, some happened even when Black women were witnessed near alleys with white men. This was the case in an article titled “Thought To Be Alley Workers,” headlined by the Democrat and Chronicle in Rochester New York. Police arrested two Black women on vagrancy charges after witnessing them entering a location called “Patridge Alley.” Police had jalled them based off the description of two noted rollers police had on file. In the eyes of police, they had just prevented a roller job in the process. Cases like this also reveal how police used specific forms of racial, gendered, and geographic surveillance against Black women. One of the other things that is commonly noted in articles about

---


alley workers was police information that also recorded where Black women were traveling from. In the case above for example, one of the women had recently come to Rochester from Buffalo and the other came from Delaware. Working in pairs is also a testament to the relationship and partnerships Black women developed with friends and associates in the roller business.

In 1912, the Democrat and Chronicle in Rochester, New York featured the case of a man that was lying in bed when he discovered his roll missing. Following this he speedily made his way to the police station to report that a Black woman he had spoken with earlier had picked his pocket for $45 cash and two checks worth $57 total. The officers were not able to follow the complaint details and catch the woman. According to the Democrat and Chronicle, all police could say was that she was “a practical ‘alley worker.’”\footnote{568} The police knew there was nothing they could do at the moment without an accurate description. This was the experience of Johns regularly, realizing their cash was missing after entertaining a Black woman in an alley or secluded area, and then going to police with limited or intentionally misleading details.

A headline in the Butte Minor reveals how women marked by police as alley workers were publicized in press outlets. It read, “‘Alley Workers’ Picked Up By Police: Negro Wenches Are Suspected of Being Responsible for Recent ‘Touches.’” If police alleged that Black women were guilty of “touching white victims” for their money, they usually detained them while communicating with other agencies to build a profile.\footnote{569} The battle against urban alley workers and the surveillance that followed was a local and wide reaching campaign that stretched across North America that was specifically aimed at Black women.

In 1913, the Commissioner of police in Detroit launched a campaign to crack down on vice and crime in the city. The first step in the campaign according to the Detroit Free Press was to target “Negresses, known in the underworld as ‘alley workers.’”\footnote{570} In the days leading up to the article, the Police Commissioner and local detectives toured the district where reports of roller complaints occurred and used the “search light” on the


\footnote{569} “‘Alley Workers’ Picked Up By Police Officers: Negro Wenches Are Suspected of Being Responsible for Recent ‘Touches,’” Butte Minor, August 8, 1909, newspapers.com (accessed October 12, 2020).

police vehicle to illuminate alleys where Black women worked their trade. As a result of the street sweep, the Police Captain had four women arrested and booked as suspected alley workers. While detaining the women in jail, a Lieutenant would give their criminal profiles to the police Captain, which revealed some details about their history as noted alley workers according to police agencies in other cities.\textsuperscript{571}

The solution to getting rid of alley workers according to law enforcement leaders in Detroit was banishment, and the four Black women were the first example. The Captain would eventually ask the women how long it would take them to get out of town. When one woman said it would take a week, the Captain revealed that the only place any of them would remain in the city was jail. The first women immediately spoke up replying that she could leave the city first thing the next day if he released her from jail. The other women also agreed to leave immediately. The Captain responded, “All right. If you are caught in Detroit five minutes after 12 o’clock Monday you’ll be brought in here and it will not go easy with you.”\textsuperscript{572} In addition to directly speaking to the Black women, the Chief gave orders to his officers to memorize their faces and to arrest them immediately if they were ever spotted in the city again.\textsuperscript{573}

The criminalization of alleys and the professionalization of recognition as a method in criminal identification left alley workers vulnerable to police arrest at any time if they were spotted by police under alleged suspicious circumstances. An example of this occurred in Dayton, Ohio when a police officer “happened to spy Reno Smith, known as an ‘alley worker,’ coming out of an alley. He remembered her countenances, and feeling sure she was there for no good purpose, sent her in.”\textsuperscript{574} When a roller was marked by local authorities, and the alleys surveilled, it was more difficult to create a consistent source of income in the shadow sex economies. The construction of the urban alley worker into a criminal class is evidenced by the numerous press outlets that headlined articles featuring the specific categorization.

\textsuperscript{571} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{572} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{573} Ibid.
In December of 1913, the Richmond Item in Indiana published a column with the headline, “Alley Workers.” 575 The article highlighted information from local police who had designated the title of alley workers to Black women that had the city on high alert with a series of frequent roller complaints occurring in alleys. According to the Item, the alley workers in Richmond “are causing a great deal of anxiety for the police.” 576 Police feared they could not protect the rolls of Johns or secure evidence for conviction, especially since sometimes it could be difficult to even file warrants against alley workers. In one recent incident in Richmond, police believed they might have at least cracked a case against one woman when a young man on the street reported being rolled in an alley. Police targeted a woman they believed to be responsible. When they first approached her, she fled on foot and was captured by police a block away. By the time police had arrested her and approached the police station, the complaining witness had disappeared and could not be identified or found by police. Since rolling Johns, and alley work complaints were victim crimes, despite guilt, the disappearance of Johns meant that prosecutors often did not have a witness to prove a crime.

An article featured in the Fort Wayne Daily News in Indiana provides an example of how police communicated across state lines to investigate rollers. Two Black women had recently rolled a man in Fort Wayne. After posting a $350 bail, the two women fled Indiana and was later detained by law enforcement in Chicago who contacted Fort Wayne police via telegram to inquire if the women were still wanted there. The headline of the article “We Don’t Wanted ‘Em” reflected the attitude of Fort Wayne police and the Daily News. 577 Though the complaining witness failed to move forward, the forfeited bail was at least some form or recourse that police could extract from rollers. To local police, sometimes it was better to just have rollers out of sight than to pursue charges that likely did not end in prosecution. Nevertheless, skipping town and losing out on cash was always the possibility of a roller, especially if it meant evading prosecution.

In an article headlined “Alley Worker Badly Wanted,” the News-Journal in Mansfield, Ohio detailed how local police had communicated with departments in other cities to uncover the former police record of a

575. “Alley Workers,” Richmond Item (Indiana), December 1, 1913, newspapers.com (accessed October 12, 2020).

576. Ibid.

roller. According to the *Journal*, “the woman was committed to the county jail and police sent descriptions and circulars throughout the country giving the facts concerning the woman as they knew them.” The telegram message did not go unnoticed either. “She’s an ‘alley worker’ . . . [t]his was the word received this morning from officials of Newark, N.j., who are interested in the negress who gave the name of Madeline Rivers when arrested here . . . [t]his morning a photograph of the woman, together with the additional data, was received at the headquarters,” wrote the *Journal*. Police authorities in Newark had forwarded criminal identification information that included all of Madeline’s aliases known to police there and knowledge that she had served prison time in the past for a roller conviction. In addition, Newark police had requested that Mansfield police notify them when Madeline was released so that they could prosecute her for a past roller complaint. In other words, Madeline was still a “fugitive from justice” in Newark when Mansfield police jailed her. The details of this professional identification process reveal that women dubbed as alley workers had criminal profiles and portraits in circulation between various departments across the country.

It was a normal police practice to reach out to other departments for cooperation in uncovering the identities of rollers, especially since many were known by police as itinerants. There was always more to unearth about rollers according to law enforcement. A Chief of Detectives found this out in Binghamton, New York following a roller telling a local judge it was her first time being arrested. According to information received from police departments in other states, she had a record in Scranton and Pennsylvania. The *Press* and *Sun-Bulletin* wrote, “In Philadelphia she was arrested for larceny after she had been caught relieving a man of his wallet. She is considered an ‘alley worker’ by the police of the Pennsylvania cities.” Reports such as this offer more evidence of a professionalized process of police cooperation that focused on alley workers. In addition, the cooperation between police in different regions further illuminate the traveling nature of rollers and alley workers.


579. Ibid.

Despite if a roller was prosecuted in the courts or not, behind the scenes, police were using a broad law enforcement database to construct detailed profiles of rollers. For example, one method of operation alleged to be used by alley workers was to keep a separate stash of wallets filled with fake paper rolls of cash. This ensured that a John would not notice his wallet had been exchanged until later. An example of police revealing this type of roller method is highlighted in the *Des Moines Tribune* in Iowa in 1914. Police jailed May Smith not long after she had departed a train arriving from Chicago. The Tribune went on to report that police alleged that May ran when she saw them and was later captured with a suit case filled with “men’s purses stuffed with paper.”

Based off of numerous recent reports of men revealing that their wallets were filled with paper, Des Moines police believed May was a professional alley worker traveling from Chicago.

According to the Tribune, local police stated “that Miss Smith is doubtless a member of the class known as ‘alley rollers.’” The Des Moines police investigation into May was not about a complaining witness reporting a crime, but rather the idea of her harboring tools that were marked by law enforcement as a roller’s modus operandi (mode of operation). Or in other words, it reveals that the alley work trade was always identified by police as a conspiracy to commit a crime in the future. What else is telling is how the Tribune described rollers as a membership based class.

In February of 1915, the Tribune featured a long article with the headline, “Police Made War To Rid City of Gang of ‘Alley Workers.’” The war against rollers was an ongoing process, especially since police were aware that alley jobs were underreported. Though it was not up to police to prosecute rollers, they still had the power to harass women marked as alley rollers. The first strategy in the latest Des Moines war against alley workers was a massive arrest of women known to have a roller identification profile. After rounding up six rollers, local police, under the orders of the Chief were given profiles of each woman and expected to arrest them on sight at any time they “were seen acting in the least suspiciously.”

---


582. Ibid.


584. Ibid.
the Des Moines Chief noted that his method of punishing alley workers was to make them suffer whenever they were at the local jail or even arbitrarily detaining them just because.

The current campaign was just another phase of a long war against alley workers in Des Moines according to the Tribune. It writes, “[s]everal months ago the police department practiced extreme measures against this class of criminals with considerable success. A detectives’ automobile cruised about the streets and whenever a woman known to be an ‘alley worker’ was spotted the car was stopped, she was loaded into it and sent to jail.” As a result of Black women’s success in the roller business and lack of prosecutorial convictions, police officers shifted their focus to more aggressively targeting and harassing women on the streets. This shift maps a critical period in pre-conviction punitive processes. An alley worker that police booked in the past was likely the most vulnerable to harassment under any pretense based of the past measures laid out by the Des Moines Police Chief.

By August of 1915, despite the war waged by police and city officials, alley workers still had the city and police on edge. In the context of urban warfare, continuing to roll Johns might be understood as guerilla tactics. As a response, local police had intensified their mission to rid rollers from the city. In an article headlined, “Police Go After The Alley Workers,” the Tribune wrote “[p]olice have declared war on negresses who practice robbing men in dark alleys.” The article stemmed from the police “capture” of two women identified as alley workers that were alleged to have attempted to roll a man staying at a Kirkwood hotel.

Local police in Des Moines even worked undercover as white male Johns in order to surveil alley rollers. The previous night, police had jailed two other rollers for soliciting officers in plain clothes. Two days later, the Tribune headlined “Roll Of $170 Is Taken By Negress,” that featured the complaint of a man staying at the Elliot Hotel. It wrote, “[a]nother Negress ‘alley roller’ made a big haul last night.” The city

585. Ibid.

586. See note 51.


588. Ibid.

wide war against alley workers did not stop Black women from working their trade, especially since visiting Johns continued to fall into the roller trap. Over the next few months, Des Moines police were faced with more complaints of visiting Johns rolled by Black women. In an article titled “Visitor Touched For $100,” the Des Moines Register wrote, “[t]hat the ‘alley workers’ are still active was brought to the attention of the police last night.”

The framing of the Des Moines campaign against rollers as a war by the local press is also illuminating, especially since this period was during the early years of the First World War.

An article featured in the Hartford Courant in 1917 provides insight into how police and press articulated alley workers as a professional class to the general public. One of the most important things the Courant wanted its readers to know was that, “Alley working is regarded as a regular business and it is worked successfully in the larger cities, which afford greater number of choice victims to be plucked . . . their plan of operation is to attack white men, the worker generally being colored women.” This message was no different than how press in the redlight districts of the early 20th articulated the rise in roller complaints that occurred in resorts and brothels and the social construction of the ‘gang of negresses organized to rob.’

Based off several press accounts, the discourse of the alley worker profession appears to emerge around the same time as the progressive era movement to shut down tenderloin districts.

During this period the alley became one of very few sites were white men could still be entertained by Black women in a concealed location. The Courant would continue describing how alley workers specifically looked for a John, “whose dress is suggestive he would make a good picking.” According to the Courant, alley work could be conducted in groups or alone, but the object was to always get as much valuables out of John’s pockets before vanishing, including rings, jewelry, and other personal items. As part of the investigation of a group of Black women alleged to be itinerant alley workers, city officials in Hartford, Connecticut learned new information about the traveling nature of the alley worker profession after investigating a group of Black


593. “Old Time Alley Workers in Toils.”
women that was said to have traveled to Connecticut from Philadelphia. The Courant reported, “One of the woman was known by the police in several of the larger cities of the country and she had been many times arraigned for the same sort of work. She had served time in different penitentiaries and there were records against her where she had jumped bail in other cities.” In addition to this woman, police believed that some of the other Black women they had recently arrested were professionals in alley work business as well.

In 1918, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram in Texas headlined an article “Alley Workers Rob Strangers in City.” In the past few days leading up to the publication, police had received numerous complaints of Black women rolling strangers in a specific area of the city. The article also noted that police had taken several Black women into custody for alley work crimes. However, police often got the same result in terms of Johns reluctance or inability to identify rollers. Sometimes despite if a John did come forward to identify alley workers as the perpetrators of crimes, Black women managed to conceal their identities enough to avoid police detection by operating at night or assuming different characters. This was a strategy of Black women in the roller game and why the alley worker profession as a whole gave police anxiety all over North America.

In March of 1919, the Los Angeles Times featured a story that stretched across two pages with the headline and subtitle, “Alley Rats Defy Police Traps: Remarkable Women Criminals Reap Rich Harvest Here and are Seldom Caught; Victims are Loth to Testify, the Official Record Shows.” The second page of the article had a separate title and groups of subtitles—each that spoke to a different understanding of the Los Angeles alley worker also dubbed by police as alley rats. The second page headline read, “Alley Rat Is Odd Animal,” and the subtitles that followed sought to further dehumanize and demonize rollers. “Dark Places Her Habitat; Fat Purses are Her Prey,” one read. The second and final subtitle read “Living Proof of Bromide of ‘Female of Species,,’” and “Police Find Woman Criminal Hard to Deal With.” In addition to constructing alley

594. Ibid.
596. “’Alley Rats’ Defy Police Traps: Remarkable Women Criminals Reap Rich Harvest Here and are Seldom Caught; Victims are Loth to Testify, the Official Records Show,” Los Angeles Times, March 9, 1919, newspapers.com (accessed September 22, 2020).
workers into animalistic caricatures, the *Times* article revealed that capturing and convicting alley workers in Los Angeles had long been one of the toughest jobs of local police, detectives, and prosecutors.  

The column was split up into themed sections from “Cannot Get Them,” “Clever Pickpocket,” “The Essentials,” “How They Work,” “Cases of John Smith,” “Can Do Anything,” “Pauline Is Dead,” and “Same Everywhere.” The local Captain would also provide some insight into one of the reasons alley workers were so successful in Los Angeles courts. It was the racial and wealth geographical divide in the city. White men with disposable income and prominence were well aware that certain areas of the city were marked as the underworld and according to police, these Johns made up ninety percent of the unreported cases. The Captain continued, “[t]he man from Wilshireville, if he gets stung by a high-class alley worker, keeps still as a rule, and his loss, usually large, will find its recording place in his memory shelf, but not our records. He can afford to lose the money.” The *Times* also learned from local police that from their knowledge, the ten percent of alley worker jobs that were often reported to police were white poor and working class men that internalized the cash loss more than any embarrassment that came with filling a complaint. Johns knew they were not going to get their money back and often accepted the fate.

The article also noted how very few people outside of police and Johns knew the real local history of alley workers. Police archives were the official source of alley worker history in Los Angeles, according to the *Times*. They wanted their readers to know that the numerous stories of rollers and how they managed to separate men from their cash really happened and the local police had the Rogues’ Galleries and mug books with the evidence to show. The *Times* explained, “They will bring down the big dusty books in which alley worker history is written—the old ‘Twenty-one’ or the ‘Nineteen,’ or any of the imposing array piled up on the fireproof cabinet—and show you reports that hear out the old stuff about truth vs. fiction.” In the article, there was multiple stories of men that had been rolled in the city on various occasions and also stories shared by

597. Ibid.

598. On histories of sex work in Los Angeles, see note 297.


600. Ibid.

601. Ibid.
police about a notorious roller named Pauline that had passed away by this time but was well documented in alley roller history in Los Angeles.

One of the more memorable stories the Times shared featured two friends who realized they had both got rolled. The first one reported that his money was missing to police, and then as his friend who was now showing sympathy had reached into his own pocket, he realized his cash was missing as well. The Times reenacted his response, “[t]he benevolent smile froze on his face. He rubbed his eyes and then his head. He grinned and then frowned. ‘It can’t be done,’ he grasped, and then gurgled, clutching at his Adam’s apple. ‘It can’t be done, but it was.’”602 As the reports throughout this dissertation have made clear, roller complaints and pickpocketing Johns was a phenomena that occurred in cities and regions across North America. This means that even the stories uncovered in this dissertation make up only a small fraction of alley worker history.

Learning the ins-and-outs of the alley work business was a part of the learning curve for up and coming officers in California. An article shared by the Los Angeles Times and the San Bernardino County Sun reveals what police learned about Johns and alley workers in the academy. Both outlets featured the same story with different headlines. The Times titled their article “Police Brand Stories False.” In the County Sun, the title was “Police Taught Stories of Women Bandits Sticking Up Men Should Be Taken With Big Grain of Salt: Lady Stickups Generally Very Brunette, Says Officer, Killing Blonde Theory.”603 The report covered a lecture given by San Francisco police Captain Thomas L. Hoertkorn before a room filled with patrolmen. According to a press release of the event, there was several hundred officers in attendance.604

One of the lessons of the day focused on a common belief about a particular type of crime—white men reporting roller complaints. Hoertkorn expressed to the group that when a white husband told his wife or the police that he had been robbed by a woman, based off his experience with investigations, the complaint was almost always “highly inaccurate.”605 What Hoertkorn was highlighting is the fact that Johns often lied and

602. Ibid.


604. Ibid.

605. Ibid.
concealed information to their wives and police about losing their rolls, especially incidents that occurred in alleys with a Black sex worker. From Hoertkorn’s experience, Johns had often reported a blonde woman as the suspect when trying to avoid embarrassment and exposure. He went on “the woman who got the money probably was very, very brunette. Negro women known as alley workers.” Moreover, Hoertkorn added, “some men don’t know enough to go straight home when they have a lot of money are responsible for most of these robberies.”

Similar to the article shared in the *Topeka Plain Dealer*, there was a common belief—whether spoken or unspoken—that white men were partly responsible for their own misfortunes. The high intensity of roller and alley worker reports is evident that many Johns arrived home with all of their cash missing and likely needed a story to tell their wives. This would have been a daily issue white men had to grapple with, especially married and prominent men who risked their secrets being exposed.

Alley Worker was not just a made up term, it took shape within law enforcement circles in every region across North America as is evidence by the articles featured throughout the United States and Canada. The implications were consequential and punishable and part of a criminal identification history constructed by police and disseminated by the press. The entries included throughout this part are incomplete and only represent articles that appeared in the digital database newspapers.com. The archive was uncovered by typing in “alley worker” between 1890 to 1940. Despite its incompleteness, the articles are emblematic of the spatial networks of police cooperation and press collaboration across North America. In addition, the wide geographical range of press and police that used the discourse of the alley worker suggest a more cooperative process of constructing racial and gendered criminal identities. The following chapter provides a local history of a “constant war” against Black sex workers, rollers and alley workers that anticipated Weems’ arrival to Sacramento.

606. Ibid.
607. Ibid.
608. We’d Like To Know, Too,” *Topeka Plaindealer*, December 14, 1900, newspapers.com (accessed November 29, 2020).
Chapter Six

“Constant War on Prostitutes”:
Spatial Policing and Racial Surveillance in Sacramento, 1870-1925

“Sirens of Dusky Hue”

More than fifty years before Weems arrived to Sacramento, the L Street district and the Lower West End of the city had been marked by police and the general public as a racialized geography that harbored Black sex workers and various other women dubbed as repeat offenders and notorious characters. Sacramento was no different than any other urban city that provided very few employments opportunities for Black women outside of domestic labor, laundry, and service jobs. The sex trade and underground economies in the Lower West End however, for Black women provided a source of income and labor autonomy. Extra cash and working outside of domestic spaces in Sacramento afforded Black women working in underground economies more autonomy over time, labor, and the spaces they earned wages in a period where most Black Americans were still living in the South.

As early as the 1870’s, Black women’s “shebangs” in Sacramento would become a curated space for liquor drinking, late night parties, dancing, interracial mingling, and sexual liberation.610 By hosting illicit dance parties, Black women’s homes reflected the rebellion of free women against the continued policing of their bodies and space. The public spectacle of Black women dressing in scant clothing, hanging around saloons, “street walking” on L St, and hosting parties, sparked a moral panic in Sacramento and gave birth to the first anti-Black surveillance apparatus in the city. In addition, the California’s anti-vagrancy statutes empowered police to surveil and harass any one marked as a vagrant.611 The rise of the urban roller in Sacramento—like most cites—emerged with the formation of tenderloin districts, sexual labor economies, and migration in the late 19th century.

Black women engaged in the Sacramento leisure district were featured prominently in the local press. One of those people was Lizzie Belmont—also dubbed by the press and police as “Big Liz,” “Big Cassino” and “an L street siren.”612 Lizzie was also reported in the local newspapers as “the center of attraction” in police


611. See note 479.

612. “The Husband Repented”, Pacific Bee (Sacramento, California), Apr 11, 1889, newspapers.com
court, with several charges against her ranging from disturbing the peace to “exhibiting” too much body, vagrancy, and rolling Johns on several occasions.\textsuperscript{613} The \textit{Sacramento Bee} specifically described Lizzie’s body in a periodical subtitled “The Type of Embonpoint, Miss Lizzie Belmont.”\textsuperscript{614} The \textit{Bee} wrote, “the real trouble seems to be that Lizzie, who is a gay and festive siren built on the Big Bertha principle of anatomy.”\textsuperscript{615} The newspaper column covered a charge made by a woman who claimed Lizzie was disturbing her peace because her husband was staring at Lizzie in public.

The \textit{Record-Union} featured Lizzie in an article that detailed a judge, prosecutor, and police department’s determination to find a visitor that was in town from Fresno that reported a roller complaint to police. It wrote that the John “claimed to have been robbed of $80 on Saturday night in the crib of the notorious Lizzie Belmont (‘Big Liz’) of L Street . . . [John’s] story was that he counted out $160 in the presence of the woman; that she then got some liquor, of which he drank twice; that he once became unconscious (or fell asleep), and when he woke one half of his money was gone.”\textsuperscript{616} When her trial date neared, the complaining witness had left town, forcing the judge to dismiss a grand larceny case against Lizzie again.\textsuperscript{617}

The local press in Sacramento continued to amplify their public concerns of Johns being rolled by Black women in local cribs. In an article titled “Another Dive Robbery,” published by the \textit{Sacramento Bee}, reporters documented the details from another incident on L Street, noting, “Shortly after dark yesterday evening with more money than discretion [John Doe] entered the crib of a colored prostitute on L Street with $80 in his pocket . . . While in the woman’s company, she shoved her hand into her visitor’s pocket and grabbed

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{613} “Police Court,” \textit{Record-Union} (Sacramento, California), June 7, 1886, newspapers.com (accessed June 29, 2020); “Police Court,” \textit{Record-Union} (Sacramento, California), March 24, 1892, newspapers.com (accessed June 29, 2020).
\item \textsuperscript{614} “Judge Cravens is Anxious to Interview Fresno Man,” \textit{Record-Union} (Sacramento, California), March 24, 1892, newspapers.com (accessed June 29, 2020).
\item \textsuperscript{615} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{616} “Judge Cravens is Anxious to Interview Fresno Man,” \textit{Record-Union} (Sacramento, California), March 24, 1892, newspapers.com (accessed June 29, 2020).
\item \textsuperscript{617} “Failed To Appear: The Fresno Miller Keeps Away—Lizzie Belmont Discharged,” \textit{Record-Union}, March 30, 1892, newspapers.com (accessed June 29, 2020).
\end{itemize}
a handful of coin . . . Up to the latest accounts he had not received his money nor had any arrest been made." With men often carrying large amounts of cash, rollers collaborated with friends to help create a distraction while others were securing cash and personal items.

In 1895, a John reported that two rollers had picked his pocket in a crib on L street. The suspects, as narrated by the *Sacramento Bee* were Lillie Dorsey and Mamie Copeland, “two sirens of dusky hue.” Police authorities eventually released Lillie, but detained Mamie—also known in by police and press as “Black Diamond”—in jail to face charges since the incident occurred at her crib. The newspapers had marked Lillie and her sister Dorsey as notorious sex workers so her involvement was immediately suspicious. The complaining witness would eventually testify against Mamie because he did not have anything to lose. It would later come out that the testifying witness had stolen the ten dollars that Mamie took from him. In a separate case, a judge sentenced him to San Quentin. The *Bee* wrote, “[s]ome weeks ago [John Doe] visited her bagnio, and during his call she picked his pocket of $10.” A jury eventually also convicted Mamie and a judge sentenced her to serve one year in San Quentin state prison.

After serving time in prison, Mamie returned to L Street in Sacramento. As a formerly incarcerated woman, Mamie was automatically under the surveillance of press and police. That did not stop her from operating her sporting business or rolling a John when the opportunity was available. In 1898, a well-known white man from out-of-town was Mamie’s alleged victim. In an article titled, “El Dorado Man’s Tough Experience,” the *Sacramento Bee* wrote of the incident:

> [John Doe], an El Dorado County man, who is said to be quite prominent in the locality in which he resides, came to Sacramento last Saturday, and shortly after his arrival here he started out to see the sights in the tenderloin district. He wandered into the house of a notorious colored woman named Mamie Copeland, on lower L Street. Sometime afterward Peterson reported at the police station that he had been drugged in the Copeland woman’s house and then robbed of $135 . . . He wanted to avoid notoriety, and refused to identify the L Street crowd as his companions.

---


Though press did not reveal the true identities of prominent men much, the public indictments against Black women without a guilty verdict reveal how the roller business was based off the presumption of guilt as opposed to innocent until proven guilty in court. A judge eventually dismissed the charges against Mamie, meaning she was $135 richer, which was as much as six months of formal wages for the average working class Black person at the time.623

The *Sacramento Bee* on several occasions featured stories of Black women rolling Johns in cribs on L street and the court hearings that followed. Over and over Johns made the same plea to police and press—please conceal my identity. In one article titled, “Lost Money in Notorious House,” the *Bee* wrote:

Last Wednesday a colored woman named Claude Ballet, who lives in a ‘crib’ on lower L Street, was arrested on suspicion of having robbed a young man of $75 while he was paying her a visit . . . When the [John] discovered that his money was gone he rushed to the police station and told his tale of woe . . . [John] was very anxious, however, that his name should not be made public although he was willing that the suspected culprit should languish behind the bars of the City Prison.624

Though John wished to punish Claude and recover his money, it was impossible unless he faced her in court—that was the roller business—it was a catch 22. The city attorney would eventually dismiss the case against Claude because the accuser “declined to swear a complaint.” 625 The John that did not want to be identified was a “City Water Assessor” in Sacramento and eventually tried to change up his tell of troubles. According to *Bee*, the “[John] said that he had been out having a ‘good time,’ and he did not really know where he had lost his money . . . he was not willing to let the matter go so far that he would have to appear in the role of prosecutor” implicated with a Black sex worker.626 In the business of rolling Johns, Black women used the spectacle of the courtroom to expose white men and the racial and gendered contradictions of the urban sex economy. Legal representation helped rollers avoid plea bargains.


625. Ibid.

626. Ibid.
In addition to paying bondsmen cash to secure freedom while fighting cases, local rollers challenged charges against them in an open court trial. When Willette Burum “faced trial twice for picking pocket of Rev. [John Doe] and securing $70 roll of bills,” a jury “failed to agree on a verdict” at both of her trials, likely because his story could not be corroborated or persuade a jury. Nevertheless, the judge still punished Willette as a vagrant with the maximum six month penalty because the courts had previously convicted her of being a “common prostitute.”

With intoxicating liquors involved in the process, Black women and their attorneys could use this as evidence in court that the complainants could not beyond a reasonable doubt prove when, where, or how they lost money. In 1906, Lou Morrison, ostracized by press and law enforcement for wearing masculine clothing, was jailed by police for a roller complaint at her crib on L Street. The *Sacramento Bee* reported, “[a]ccording to the story to police and vouched for by the complaint on file, the woman last night met [John Doe] and the two went to her room. While in the room [John] alleges Morris woman robbed him of $75 in gold and then left the building . . . He also claimed that a valuable gold watch had disappeared.” A judge placed Lou under a $2000 bond in order to be released from jail while awaiting trial. She could not come up with the money and served one month in jail before it finally came out that the complaining witness was too intoxicated at the time of the alleged incident to recall exact details. “It was explained to the Court that the man was drunk he was not sure where or how he lost his money.”

In the business of rolling Johns, alcohol not only served as a catalyst for setting the scene and mood of the night, but also as a survival practice to make the job easier in addition to obscuring court testimony.

---


In the years that followed, Sacramento prosecutors made it more difficult for women accused of rolling Johns to just get away without punishment just because men feared court testimony. Even after Black women forced prosecutors to dismiss felony charges, California anti-vagrancy laws continued to leave marked women vulnerable to police harassment and jail time. Unlike the legal caveats exploited by rollers in Seattle during the same period, a not guilty felony verdict in California did not exclude a misdemeanor punishment that ranged from cash fines, to jail time, or exile. This was the result in the case of Annie Wilson following a prosecutors dismissal of a roller complaint in court. According to the *Sacramento Bee*, “[Annie] was arrested at first on complaint of [John Doe], a white, who claims that she robbed him of $350 when he visited her room.”631 Despite the case being dismissed, Annie “had no sooner stepped out of the City Jail that she was rearrested by Patrolmen Pennish and Tharp. A charge of vagrancy was placed against her.”632 Though Annie’s roller job had turned into a huge pay day bonus, she could not avoid serving a harsh jail sentence as an alleged common prostitute, which was always attributed to any woman marked as a roller.633

In the post-war Sacramento that Weems would arrive to, soliciting white men was more threatened by police occupation and legal punishment. Around 1920, the former tenderloin district in Sacramento would officially close down after nearly 40 years of operating in a grey area of legal and illegal economies. With prohibition and red light abatement laws in place, local police criminalized vice and Black women more aggressively. However, this did not stop Black women from engaging in sex trade. The local press elevated the concerns of community members who argued “crime was almost unrestricted in the lower part of town.”634 The *Sacramento Bee* wrote, “[p]rostitutes ply their trade unmolested in the old section of the city, and by their brazenness are driving respectable families from their homes.”635 Speaking directly to law enforcement, the


632. Ibid.

633. Ibid.


paper continued, “[t]hese present the most vicious evils demanding your attention.” The request by local press outlets and community members fueled city officials to commission a more aggressive police program aimed at surveilling, capturing, and banishing all sex workers and especially rollers from the city.

By July of 1920, H. Hugh Sydenham had just begun his tenure as Chief of Police three weeks earlier. Sydenham, like his predecessor Chief Ira M. Conran, vowed to abolish the sex trade in the city. He expressed that the industry was “temporarily suppressed” following a series of raids recently conducted by a moral squad that he commissioned. In an article titled, “Police Purifying City of Parasites,” the Bee reported on Sydenham’s campaign, which he noted had investigated as many as 150 locations in search of sex workers. The paper wrote, “The moral squad under his direction continues its round of the city for prostitutes . . . investigating every rooming house, dive and hotel form the waterfront to Thirteenth Street . . . Nine women have been taken into custody on similar [vagrancy] charges and after Health Department investigation, were given notice to leave.” Judges used vagrancy “floater” penalties, which meant a person was forced to float out of sight of police and out of town or face jail time.

On July 1, 1921, the leadership of the Sacramento police department transitioned from Sydenham to Police Chief Hugh Barney McShane who implemented new methods and police squads to drive his Lower End police cleanup program. One of the first official changes made by McShane was to abandon the moral squad title used by his predecessors. His new team of police officers—organized to target and confine sex work geographies—would become officially known as “the alley squad.” The name did not come from anywhere either, many of the homes in the Lower West End were located in the alleys. McShane spoke to the Sacramento Bee during his first few days on the job, stating, “In placing the police about the city I have endeavored to give the city the greatest amount of protection possible.”

636. Ibid.


638. Floater was a term used as a form of suspended sentence agreement, where a defendant could avoid a fine or jail time in exchange for leaving the city for a set amount of time. In the case of Mamie, the courts required her to stay out of Sacramento for six months or face jail time.

McShane’s violent tactics that centered on Black women.

Within his first week on the job, McShane would lead a massive police raid in the Lower West End targeting Black sex workers and others engaged in vice. The *Sacramento Star* featured a front page article headlined, “50 Are Jailed in Lower End Raid.” According to the paper, McShane’s raids would lead to “[t]he largest court calendar in the history of Sacramento’s police court.” The judge ordered a banishment sentence to everyone who plead guilty to vagrancy, meaning as previously noted, only if they immediately departed the city would they avoid jail time. The *Star* continued, “A number of negro women vagrants and several white women were given suspended sentences on their promise that they would leave the city within 24 hours.” On the night of the raids, without notice, McShane’s squad of police—broken up into units with particular targets—marched through the entire Lower West End and raided “two negro clubs and a number of houses suspected of being occupied by negress prostitutes.” The *Star* went on, stating “[a]fter the squad officers had started on their rounds Tuesday night, the lower end ‘closed up,’ Chief McShane said Wednesday.” After raiding Black-owned clubs, under the command of McShane, “[t]he officers then visited houses occupied by negresses and ten of them were arrested.” The article published by the *Star* reveals that the raids were meant to be a search primarily aimed at capturing and exiling Black sex workers and bringing havoc to any business that aided or supported their wage earning.

The *Star* also noted McShane’s frustration and ambition to abolish the sex trade like all of his predecessors. He stated, “We did not get near all of the prostitutes . . . [a]s soon as the word spread that we were raiding the houses many of the places closed up and the inmates made their escape . . . [t]his is only a starter. While we arrested twelve women, we did not get one-fourth of the prostitutes who are operating down there . . . [t]he defendants who seek to fight conviction will meet with strong opposition on my part. I am going to the limit in seeking to convict them.” McShane’s aim was not to cage every sex worker for long periods and


641. Ibid.

642. Ibid.

643. Ibid.
overcrowd the local jail, but to force anyone proven or associated with vice out of the city. In the same article, McShane stated that his early July raid on the Lower End, “is merely the commencement of the campaign he will conduct to rid the city of undesirables.” Despite McShane’s excessive police force, sex workers responded accordingly to protect their labor and income.

Though police officers knew most of the common sex workers in the Lower End, as residents paying rent and operating out of their homes, Black women learned that they had some protections against police raids and arrests without a warrant. The Sacramento Bee reached out to the Chief of Police McShane to get a word on the campaign against sexual labor in the city. McShane replied that new efforts to “rid the city of [sex worker’s] presence . . . [were] being prosecuted vigorously by the Police Department.” The Bee noted that, according to McShane, “The campaign will be continued . . . as long as there is any evidence to be followed that fallen women are plying their trade here . . . [and that] the police are watching various parts of the city and not all of them in the lower end where there is reason to believe the law is being violated.” The paper reflected on tense statements by McShane, noting, “many of these cases he pointed out it is difficult to secure the necessary evidence to warrant arrest.” Prosecuting Black women engaged in informal wage earning, especially when they evolved their resistance strategies was not as simple as an arrest and conviction, unless they were dubbed by police as known vagrants, which first required evidence that could lead to prosecution.

Under the direction of the City Managers and McShane, beat officers in Sacramento were ordered to “wage constant war on prostitutes and houses of questionable character.” Exile and eviction were among the various forms of punishment that the Sacramento courts used to support the city wide cleanup. Judges also continued garnishing Black sex worker’s wages with excessive cash bail and fines. In an article titled, “Raid in Lower End of City,” the Sacramento Bee wrote, “[s]ix colored women and two colored men yesterday were arrested in raids conducted by a squad of detectives led by Arthur Ryan in the lower end of the city. They were


645. Ibid.

646. Ibid.

647. Ibid.

all charged with vagrancy and held in jail until bail of $100 each secured their release. The raid followed reports that negro prostitutes were plying their trade in that section of the city.”

Despite detailing how many sex workers managed to escape the full pressure of legal punishment, McShane would go on to praise the work of his ground troops in the Lower End cleanup. The Sacramento Star stated that “During the past month, McShane reported, the moral squad has arrested 25 women charged with being prostitutes. In spite of obstacles encountered, McShane reported conditions are constantly becoming better . . . two houses have been closed during the year under the redlight abatement act, while proceedings against 10 more places are pending.”

Thus, despite the failure of the courts to legitimately convict these women, McShane saw the shuttering of their bases of operation as a success. In other words, eviction and exile was his solution. Chief Sydenham and McShane led only a fraction of the law enforcement campaign against Black women leading up to and following the First War in Sacramento.

No matter if the courts found Black women guilty or not, the professionalization of the Sacramento Bureau of Criminal Identification meant that law enforcement had access to a more organized robust system of recognizing and tracking repeat offenders. Beginning in the early 20th century, every person booked by Sacramento police were subject to the Bertillon-inspired system of identification, including mugshot portraits, body descriptions, arrest histories, and other criminal identification and biographical markers as witnessed throughout this dissertation. These identifying elements were logged and classified into mug books that resulted in Black women being instrumental to the rise of criminal identification and movement to professionalize police in Sacramento.

“The Man Who Never Forgot a Face”

The Sacramento police department was founded in 1849 and fifty years later, in 1899, Max P. Fisher would go on to establish the Sacramento Bureau of Criminal Identification. Fisher worked his way up to


650. Ibid. For more on Sacramento police history from 1860 to 1993, see the Sacramento Police Department Collection created by Max P. Fisher. https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c869799w/admin/.

the ranks from beat officer to police detective by the turn of the 20th century to become one of the nation’s leading experts in criminal identification. His knowledge of identification methods led to several different regional and city authorities, including Sacramento officials offering him the role of Chief of police. Each time, he turned the offer down to focus on his expertise in visual and biometric recognition. According to the authors of *Sacramento’s Boulevard Park*, Fisher was known as “the man who never forgot a face.” As Fisher did not retire until 1932, press outlets in Sacramento had covered many of his arrests and police identification work in the city for over thirty years. Throughout his career, Fisher called on his expertise in photo recognition to identify alleged criminals he believed he had memorized from police mug books. With the large presence of police occupation in the Lower West End and daily arrests, it is fair to assume that a large portion of local police work was dedicated to booking Black women.

In 1911, a San Francisco real estate operator accused May Johnson of rolling him for $520 during his visit to the Sacramento. John Doe, according to an article published in Sacramento, and shared with the *Oakland Tribune*, claimed “he was kissing and caressing [May] in an alley in this city several days ago . . . He said that a comely young woman had asked to escort her home.” By the time he realized his cash was missing, May had disappeared with the other woman. It would later come out that law enforcement had already marked May as an alley worker that had completed a four-year sentence at San Quentin for a roller conviction. Police would later capture May in southern California. According to the *Tribune*, “A white bulldog led by the woman was the means of identification. She arrived in Los Angeles by steamship.” The increasing technologies instituted in local policing at the time made it more difficult for women to avoid capture even when they fled town.

In the years that followed, Fisher and the Sacramento police department would add fingerprint technology to the tool kit of identification methods used in local policing. This was around the same time that other urban cities like New York began requiring police to record the fingerprints of all sex workers under the


654. Ibid.
locally mandated Inferior Criminal Courts Act.\textsuperscript{655} In 1912, the \textit{Sacramento Star} praised Fisher for his efforts at establishing an efficient fingerprinting system within the Sacramento Bureau of Criminal Identification.\textsuperscript{656} Fisher used his criminal identification techniques to “pegg” several rollers with past arrest histories. To be pegged by Fisher meant that they were identified as a repeat offenders—and thereby a vagrant with no legal standing in California.\textsuperscript{657}

Former San Quentin women, when uncovered in the mug book archives, were automatically marked as vagrants, especially if there was a trail of arrests from police in other cities. In a press account titled “Negress Has Bad Record,” the \textit{Sacramento Star} praised Fisher while labeling a roller as an undesirable. It said, “Max Fisher has identified Lena Jones, a colored vagrant, who was given a 100-day sentence in the county jail by City Justice Anderson, as Lurline Mackey, who was sentenced to serve 1 ½ years in prison at Los Angeles on a grand larceny charge.”\textsuperscript{658} The \textit{Star} continued, “one of the means of identification was a big scar on her wrists.”\textsuperscript{659} In addition to fingerprints and mug book portraits, Fisher would call on a Bertillon-feature of identifying people through peculiar body marks to "pegg" Lena.

Press reports chronicle how police tracked and captured rollers in the midst of fleeing town. In 1917, Sacramento police booked Dorothy Clifford on the complaint of a John “who accuses the woman of taking $160 from him. The woman was arrested early yesterday morning aboard a Pullman car at the Southern depot on her way to Redding . . . Matron Garrahan found $15 on the woman and a ticket to Redding. The [John] is being held at the city jail pending the hearing of the case.”\textsuperscript{660} It was difficult for Black women to avoid the pressure of pleading guilty when police forced Johns into the ultimatum of jail time or testimony.

\textsuperscript{655} Cole, \textit{Suspect Identities}, 153-54.


\textsuperscript{658} “Negress Has Bad Record,” \textit{Sacramento Star}, Apr 9, 1912, newspapers.com (accessed May 19, 2020).

\textsuperscript{659} Ibid.

In addition to capturing rollers fleeing town, Sacramento police captured women who were also wanted in other cities for unprosecuted roller crimes. Myrtle Hughes Russel was wanted by police in Stockton, California on a roller charge. However, while out on bail, she fled the city and had been hiding out in Sacramento. Like most of the women booked on felony charges by police in Sacramento, Max Fisher would be the one to uncover her alleged true identity as a formerly incarcerated roller and wanted fugitive. According to the *Sacramento Star*, in addition to being pegged as a wanted suspect in Stockton, Fisher had noted that Myrtle “robbed a Redding attorney in Sacramento about six years ago, for which she served a year in San Quentin.”

The roller business, as an illegal enterprise, kept Black women in a state of fugitivity.

When Anne Joyce and another Black woman rolled a John of $100 one night on the streets of Sacramento, the two women immediately fled when the John detected his cash missing. He chased after Anne and was joined by “a crowd of men who heard the victim’s outcry.” Anne was able to outrun the crowd until local Night Inspector of Police Desefants arrived on the scene. According to the *Sacramento Union*, Desefants alleged that he witnessed Anne “throwing money into the gutter” when she saw him. After police booked her at the local jail, Anne was pegged by Fisher as one of a pair of women that allegedly rolled “several men in the western end of the city during the past two weeks of sums ranging from $20 to $315.” Press accounts usually documented particular details from court records. Police mug books on the other hand were more detailed and organized which facilitated police's tracking, surveillance, and the uncovering of roller and alley worker identities.

Many woman highlighted in the Sacramento police mug books as notorious sex workers had long arrest histories and often multiple felony charges for rolling Johns in different cities. The mug book and press trail of Mamie Gardner is broadly emblematic of Black itinerant rollers and police archival practices. Mamie would become one of the most studied Black women known to Sacramento police during the first three decades of the 20th century. In the Sacramento mug book, nearly every line available for handwritten notes is filled up

---

663. Ibid.
664. Ibid.
with her past arrests, local jail classification numbers, and court outcomes for as many as fifteen charges primarily related to roller complaints. Prosecutors dismissed most charges against her because Johns “declined complaint” or police could not corroborate their story. Mamie’s roller career—behind the scenes and illuminated in press reports—evidences the ways that police and press collaborated to keep tabs on Black women on the move. Like all noted rollers, in the eyes of local police and prosecutors, Mamie’s existence was a crime, especially as a repeat offender under California anti-vagrancy laws.

Local police had marked Mamie not only as a career roller but also as an armed and dangerous Black woman. In an article titled “Negress Makes Attack on Officer With Knife,” the Sacramento Union revealed how police surveilled Mamie and also recorded her response to being targeted by a patrolmen. It stated, “Mamie Woodruff, a negress, is in the city jail charged with an assault with a deadly weapon, following an attack with a knife shortly before midnight last night on Patrolman Frank J. McDermott of the Gignac service who told her to leave the alley, between Third and Fourth, L and M streets.” For some time, McDermott had been surveilling Mamie, and according to the Union stated that “the negress had been walking the streets on his beat in the lower portion of the town . . . He says that when he told her to go home, she drew a pocket knife and made a thrust at him.” Mamie claimed self-defense and would go on to assert how she really felt about McDermott’s harassment once she was at the police station. The Union went on to note that Mamie “declared that she was protecting herself, profanely adding that ‘she wished she had driven the knife into his heart.’” A police officer in an alley with a gun confronting a Black woman was always a violent encounter. A judge would eventually force Mamie to leave the city for six months as an exiled vagrant “floater.”

By the summer of that year, 1912, Mamie returned to Sacramento after her exile sentence expired. The Union would once again highlight Mamie’s criminal profile and aliases to the public following a court proceeding that stemmed from a new roller complaint. It wrote, “Mamie Woodruff, a negress who has several


667. Ibid.

668. Ibid.

669. Ibid.
aliases and also a long police record, was sentenced to six months in the county jail by City Justice Anderson yesterday morning for vagrancy." Two Though the prosecutors could not secure evidence to convict Mamie on a felony roller charge, as a known roller, prosecutors could still punishment her with a misdemeanor under the California anti-vagrancy law, especially since a judge had exiled her from the city before for the same charge.

According to the Sacramento police mug book, in 1914, a judge in San Francisco would sentence Mamie to a one year term in San Quentin State prison for a grand larceny conviction related to a roller complaint. Immediately after prison officials released Mamie a year later in 1915, the *Oakland Tribune* published an article featuring Mamie. It wrote, “Last week Mamie Gardner emerged from San Quentin penitentiary after serving a long term for grand larceny. Today she was picked up again on the same charge.” Mamie would eventually escape a roller conviction and another prison sentence, though Oakland authorities would banish her as a vagrancy floater.

Under anti-vagrancy laws, floater penalties ensured that city officials and police could at least disappear Mamie as a “4 mos floater” or “6 mos floater.” After nearly fifteen years in the roller business, judges, particularly in Sacramento began using all their power to banish Mamie as fast as possible. In 1920, a judged forced her “to leave city by to-night or go to jail.” With no other choice, Mamie “promised to go.” It was not the last time, that a judge in California or even an official in Sacramento would convict Mamie of vagrancy and/or order her to float out of town.

One of the unique accessories that stands out in Mamie’s carceral portraits from the early 1900’s through the 1930’s, is her style of hats which were often recorded with different aliases. In nearly every available mugshot of Mamie that I uncovered, she is wearing a different styled fashion hat from the images captured by a San Quentin photographer as a young woman up to her last prison mugshot during her third term

---


674. Ibid.
at San Quentin when she was almost fifty years old. The other significant form of Black women’s resistance made visible through mug books are the use of aliases, which builds on the “Assuming Different Characters” tactic examined in chapter two. Every name that Mamie gave police was classified with a number that was reflected with each alias. At some bookings, Mamie changed only her last name or the spelling, but in many others she made up completely fictional names such as Thelma Jackson, Thelma Wood, and Jessie Moore. Below is Mamie’s identification profile as inscribed in the Sacramento mug books and a portrait in the San Quentin mug book for imprisoned women.

![Mamie Gardner](image)

**Figure 6.1 Mamie Gardner no. 26304**
reprint from Sacramento Police Department copy of San Quentin State Prison Women Mug Book, 1911-1926

Figure 6.2 Mamie Gardner no. 11070
reprint from Sacramento Police mug book, 1925-1927
The Sacramento police mug books, especially the bookings that were filled with handwriting, illuminate police criminal identification details and provides a behind the scene look at the racial and gendered construction of urban rollers and alley workers. In the Sacramento police mug books, the alley emerges as a central focus of the rivaled geography between Black sex workers, Johns, and law enforcement. I read police officer’s concentration of the “alley” in mug books as a visible sight of anti-Black surveillance. Mug books only documented the story of Johns, therefore silencing Black women in the historical record. Even when Johns did not follow through with legal complaints, police inscribers still marked Black women as suspected rollers or alley workers in the mug books, which followed them even after their release.

In addition to the Sacramento roller’s archive, mug books that Fisher kept on hand from other police agencies constantly marked certain Black women’s case file with the “alley worker,” “suspected alley worker,” and “roller” title in cities such as Denver, Oregon, Long Beach, Oakland, San Francisco and others. In some of the Sacramento mug book copies from police departments such as San Francisco, rollers were marked by police as an “alley creeper” or “alley rat” as their criminal status. In the previous chapter, the Los Angeles Times revealed that this was also a term used in Los Angeles. The mug book entries on the following pages are reflective of the broader roller identification profiles that circulated amongst law enforcement and institutional partners across the United States and Canada. On the following pages, I provide a glimpse into the archives housed within the Sacramento Bureau of Criminal identification under the leadership of Max P. Fisher.

676. See Sacramento Police Department copy of San Diego, Long Beach, Tacoma, and Denver mug books, 1922-1928, Internet Archive.
Figure 6.3 Grace Jackson no. 4825, “Suspected Alley Worker”
reprinted from Sacramento Police Department
copy of San Diego, Long Beach, Tacoma, and
Denver mug books, 1922-1928677

677. Grace Jackson no. 4825, Sacramento Police Department copy of San Diego, Long Beach, Tacoma, and Denver mug books, 1922-1928, Internet Archive,
Figure 6.4 Ruby King no. 4820, “Suspected Roller” reprinted from Sacramento Police Department copy of San Diego, Long Beach, Tacoma, and Denver mug books, 1922-1928

Figure 6.5 Josephine Allen no. 4788, “Alley Worker”
reprinted from Sacramento Police Department
copy of San Diego, Long Beach, Tacoma, and
Denver mug books, 1922-1928679

679. Josephine Allen no. 4788, Sacramento Police Department copy of San Diego, Long Beach, Tacoma, and Denver mug books, 1922-1928, Internet Archive,
Figure 6.6 Beulah Smith no. 10287, “Alley Rat” reprinted from Sacramento Police Department copy of Oakland mug book, 1923-1927.

Figure 6.7 Marie Martin no. 10353, “Alley Rat”
reprinted from Sacramento Police Department
copy of Oakland mug book, 1923-1927\

Figure 6.8 Nellie Dempsey no. 9956, “Alley Creeper” reprinted from Sacramento Police Department mug book, 1921-1923682

---

The Sacramento mug book entries that marked Black women as “rollers,” “suspected rollers,” “alley workers,” “suspected alley workers,” “alley creepers,” and “alley rats” provide a lens to view police documents that circulated between other departments and institutional partners. Mug book entries were working documents that helped to construct and facilitate a racial, gendered, and geographic surveillance profile of Black female alley rollers. The Sacramento mug books are emblematic of law enforcement and identification practices that were fully institutionalized in major police departments across North America prior to and during the first wave of the Great Migration.

Conclusion

“Arrested Here, Wanted in Washington”

Arriving by train, de facto segregation in Sacramento would have forced Weems to find temporary lodging in the Lower West End. A single Black female stranger roaming alleys in the district would no doubt arouse police suspicion, but Weems nevertheless had experience with sex economies on the road and earning cash wages in racialized segregated districts, such as Chicago’s “Stroll” and Hogan’s Alley in Vancouver. At some point in October of 1925, Weems became a wanted roller suspect by Sacramento law enforcement. When local police eventually captured Weems, she disguised herself as a “waitress” and plead not guilty. According to the Sacramento Bee, the complaining witness came forward and charged that “[Weems] picked his pocket on the street of Sacramento, obtaining his pocketbook” containing $2 cash.683

While police detained Weems in the local jail, Max Fisher began working to construct a more complete criminal profile. Just like all of the noted rollers and alley workers documented on prior pages above, Weems’ mug book entry is filled with information that originated from multiple bookings and police departments outside of Sacramento. Handwritten in pencil, Max Fisher’s department had specifically pegged Weems as an “alley creeper” in the mug book archive, inscribing that she, “[c]arressed white men in dark places, abstracted their purses.”684 Her mug book profile lists several of the names she used in various cities including Nettie Weems in Washington. In addition to reporting her name as Dollie Bibbs in Sacramento’s court system, the mug books reveal several of Weems’ other aliases she reported to police in at least five

684. Ibid.
different cities, from Mary Anderson to Grace Jones, Grace Hanson, and Pearl Jones.685

The *Sacramento Bee* featured a column on Weems that reveals how criminal identification and fugitive information rapidly circulated between police departments in different regions and eventually to print press outlets. The article titled “Woman Arrested Here, Wanted In Washington,” stated:

Should Dolly Bibbs, alias Nettie Weems, a negress, be acquitted in a Sacramento County Superior Court, on the charge of robbing [John Doe], laborer, she will be sent to Everett, Wash., where she escaped from the county jail last May. Information that Miss Bibbs is wanted at Everett, where she escaped upon being sentenced to the state prison after conviction of grand larceny, was received to-day by Captain Max P. Fisher of the police bureau of criminal identification. Confronted with a telegram received from the sheriff at Everett, Miss Bibbs admitted she is the woman known to officials of that city as Nettie Weems, that she broke from the county jail just before being transferred to the state penitentiary.686

Despite Weems deploying her normal tactic of providing aliases to identification authorities—portraits, biographical data, and teletype technologies would help local police investigators uncover some of her other identities and a trail of roller charges in several regions. The construction of Weems’ criminal background was not just conducted by any officer or identification official, but the man known to never forget a face—Max P Fisher.

On October 5, 1925, Weems appeared before a Sacramento judge again. At this time, with knowledge that police now had access to her criminal identification profile, especially from Washington, Weems decided to plead guilty but had not yet decided if she would allow an attorney to represent her in court for sentencing. The judge continued the case and gave seven days to make up her mind while detained in jail until her next court date.687 A week later, the *Sacramento Bee* featured another article regarding the updates in Weems’ case. Prior to sentencing, Weems had plead to authorities to allow her to go back to Washington state and face punishment there. That would not sway a Sacramento prosecutor from recommending prison time in California. Weems would finalize her plea agreement and according to the *Bee* “was sentenced to an indeterminate term in San

685. Ibid.


Within five months during the year 1925, Weems had confronted multiple Johns, police, and served jail time in three different regions.

The amount of cash that Weems secured in each job during the year 1925 varied and so did the consequences. In Vancouver, Weems escaped British Columbia with no punishment and $85 in cash. In Washington, a $30 job, turned into an indeterminate sentence of up to fourteen years, a crime which she had not served prison time for yet. And, in Sacramento, Weems’ conviction of rolling a man for $2 led to a term in San Quentin state prison—under the California Indeterminate Sentencing Act—until penal authorities found her suitable for release. The final part of this dissertation follows Weems to San Quentin and maps her post incarceration movements over a six year period on the Pacific West Coast during the Great Depression.

PART FOUR

“Comet in its Orbital Track”

Maud Allen, negress alias Nellie Weens and Curly Hicks, escaped convict from Everett, Wn. prison, where she was sentenced to three years for grand larceny, was convicted in the county court here by Judge Barker this morning and sentenced to two months for pickpocketing. 

*Vancouver Sun,* 1930

Police opened an account for her in 1918. Two entries and she passed from the local horizon until the opening month of 1928, since which time the entries have been numerous. From January of 1919 to May of 1927, she seems to have disappeared like a comet in its orbital track, passing out beyond the planet outposts. Where she was or what she was doing, is not definitely known.

- San Francisco Probation officer, 1934

The trains at the station, I heard the whistle blow, I done bought my ticket and I don’t know where I’ll go . . . I’m dangerous and blue, can’t stay here no more. Here come my train, folks, and I’ve got to go.689

Ma Rainey, “Traveling Blues”

689. See note 76 on Rainey’s “Traveling Blues.”
Introduction

Three days after Weems plead guilty in Sacramento, sheriffs exported her to the California state prison at San Quentin. Weems had spent around six weeks in the local Sacramento jail. There is no doubt that the Sheriffs would have made a note to secure the vehicle and bound Weems in some way whether with handcuffs and or shackled chains on her feet. Weems’ background and fugitive profile would have warranted a plan to make sure she did not escape. Over the previous ten years she had encountered a plethora of carceral spaces in addition to her own spatialized traveling from the Midwest to the Pacific West Coast. Weems’ confinement at San Quentin was her first documented experience with prison life and an indeterminate sentence.

Figure 7.1 Map of California Sheriffs exporting Nettie Weems to San Quentin State Prison, 1925


691. The California Indeterminate Sentencing Law of 1917 established minimum and maximum sentences for all people convicted of felonies in the state, such as zero to five years or one to ten years, determined by the California Board of Penal and Parole Authorities. On parole in California, see Sheldon L. Messinger et al., “The Foundations of Parole in California,” Law and Society Review 19, no 1, (1985): 69-106; https://doi.org/10.2307/3053395; Simon, Poor Discipline.
Weems entered San Quentin State Prison on October 16, 1925, under the name Dolly (Dollie) Bibb and prison officials documented Nettie Weems as her alias. On that day, prison authorities subjected Weems to the typical identification process, which included invasive body procedures, capturing multiple portraits, and recording fingerprints. Prison was not jail. There was no bail release and most institutions were located in isolated areas. San Quentin was not called the “Walled City” for nothing.692 Though this concluding part is not about Weems’ incarceration experiences, it is important to note that San Quentin represented an entirely different spatial and physical confinement that was also a part of her life during this period.

Under the California Indeterminate Sentencing Act, San Quentin penal and parole authorities required Weems to serve a minimum of one year up to a maximum term of ten years in prison.693 On October 20, 1926, Weems had her first hearing before the board of directors to receive her tentative sentence. California authorities would have had access to any identification records of Weems’ past arrests. In the statement of facts, Mark E. Noon, the Secretary of the Board of Prison and Paroles at San Quentin wrote, “[d]efendant picked the pocket of [John Doe] on the streets of Sacramento, obtaining his pocketbook which contained some articles of personal property and $2.12 in money.”694 Though the cash lost was not a huge amount, Weems’ career as a roller and fugitive would have been examined by the parole board.695

It was not only Weems’ trail of arrests across North America that the parole board would have addressed at her hearing. Within her first six months at San Quentin, Weems became the first woman ever to attempt an escape from the “Walled City.” On April 14, 1926, the San Francisco Examiner published an article titled, “Woman is Foiled in Break From Jail.”696 Weems was plotting her escape for some time and had used material given to women prisoners to make dresses and created her own attire to wear while she was making her


693. Florence Hicks no. 56866, Imprisoned, SQIF.

694. Ibid.

695. Ibid.

move. Weems ditched the women’s prison uniform and changed into a pair of men’s clothing she had hidden beneath her dress. At the time, according to the *Examiner*, the other incarcerated women were going for a weekly walk, while Weems “had hidden herself in the underbrush for twenty-five minutes and donned a pair of men’s trousers.”697 The *Examiner* also noted that after the Matron captured Weems hidden in the underbrush, a car was waiting outside the gate and sped away when a prison guard approached.698 Though Weems did not get away, this escape attempt was added to Weems’ fugitive profile and most likely played a role in the four year sentence ordered by the parole board.

The following chapter examines how vagrancy laws empowered police, prosecutors, and Judges to use banishment as a solution to undesirable Black women in the United States. In order to better understand police and judicial power during the years of the Great Migration, I provide an overview of the 1972 Papachristou et al. vs City of Jacksonville ruling that overturned vagrancy statutes. This chapter is a story about forced migrations and migration choices. On the one hand, I reveal how exile forced Black women out of housing and into destitution and itinerancy. On the other hand, I highlight the ways that some itinerant rollers benefited from plea deals that would allow them to leave a city rather than face jail time and expensive fines.

697. Ibid. Though we have only the details from the news articles, Weems’ attempted escape from the Walled City is reminiscent of fugitive Linda Brent, aka Harriet Jacobs. For more on Brent, see *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Seven Years Concealed* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 1861). Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds* chapter two, “The Last Place They Thought Of: Black Women’s Geographies” is a great source that further examines the importance of interrogating Brent’s autobiography and hiding place in the garret. Though Weems did not hide in the underbrush for nearly as long as Brent nor did she have the same stakes in terms of chattel bondage, her attempted escape speaks to the landscape and spatial constraints of the modern penitentiary and what McKittrick calls Black women’s “cartographies of struggle.” Weems’ flight from Chicago and her escape from a jail in Washington has showed over and over that she refused capture and confinement on various levels.

698. Ibid.
Chapter Seven
“Song of the Open Road”

“Unfettered Discretion”

Hundreds of years before the emancipation of Black Americans, police, prosecutors, and judges across North America weaponized vagrancy laws as a legal remedy to control and punish undesirable people. In every jurisdictions across the United States and Canada, by legal definition, a sex worker and a police noted roller was always marked as a vagrant as a consequence of their arrest histories and criminal identification status. Anti-vagrancy statutes in the North America existed in nearly every region up until the mid-20th century. On February 24, 1972—around the time when the first and second wave of the Great Migration was coming to an end—the Florida District Court of Appeal reversed the longstanding Jacksonville vagrancy ordinance. By this time, police and local jurisdictions across North America had criminalized, punished, and booked hundreds of thousands of citizens for a host of behaviors and lifestyles deemed undesirable.

In Papchristou et al. v. City of Jacksonville, the federal courts centered their ruling around eight defendants combined from 5 cases of vagrancy conviction in Jacksonville. The courts argued that the Jacksonville law was “void for vagueness, in that it ‘fails to give a person of ordinary intelligence fair notice that his contemplated conduct is forbidden by the statute,’ it encourages arbitrary and erratic arrests and convictions, it makes criminal activities that by modern standards are normally innocent, and it places almost unfettered discretion in the hands of police.” The court’s ruling against vagrancy laws provides insight for

699. See note 91.

700. Papachristou et al. v. City of Jacksonville, 405 U.S. 156 (1972), 156. For more context on who was a vagrant in Jacksonville, see the official language of the statute documented in the Papachristou notes: “Jacksonville Ordinance Code 26-57 provided at the time of these arrests and convictions as follows: ‘Rogues and vagabonds, or dissolute persons who go about begging common gamblers, persons who use juggling or unlawful games or plays, common drunkards, common night walkers, thieves, pilferers or pickpockets, traders in stolen property, lewd, wanton and lascivious persons, keepers of gambling places, common railers and brawlers, person wandering or strolling form place to place without any lawful purpose or object, habitual loafers, disorderly persons, persons neglecting lawful business and habitually spending their time by frequenting houses of ill fame, gaming houses, or places where alcoholic beverages are sold or served, persons able to work but habitually living upon the earnings of their wives or minor children shall be deemed vagrants and, upon conviction in the Municipal Court shall be punished as provided for Class D offenses.”
examining police power and the criminal legal system in the context of Black migration history in the United States.\textsuperscript{701}

In addition to arguing that vagrancy laws gave police “almost unfettered discretion” to arrest undesirable people, the courts also illuminated the fact that citizens had the right to move about freely without police officers dictating guilt of a criminal action based off pass or future crimes. The courts wrote, “[o]f course, vagrancy statutes are useful to police. Of course, they are nets making easy the roundup of so-called undesirables. But the rule of law implies equality and justice in its application. Vagrancy laws of the Jacksonville type teach that the scales of justice are so tipped that even-handed administration of the law is not possible.”\textsuperscript{702} In the opinion of the courts, vagrancy laws prevented citizens from due process and the presumption of innocence, and in the process, gave police the authority to punish people without probable cause.

Law enforcement used vagrancy ordinances to criminalize mobility and surveil people. For example, under the Jacksonville vagrancy ordinance, a person could be stopped for suspicious activity, arrested, and convicted of vagrancy for wandering from place to place without having a lawful reason. Similarly to the Jacksonville ordinance, in California for example, the anti-vagrancy statute of 1872 identified 12 different categories that criminalized personhood and not necessarily a criminal action. Some of the people it deemed a vagrant were “every person without visible means of living . . . every person who roams from place to place without lawful business . . . every person known to be a pickpocket . . . every lewd or dissolute person . . . every person who lives in and about houses of ill fame . . . every drunkard . . . every common prostitute . . . [i]s a vagrant, and is punishable by a fine of not exceeding five hundred dollars, or by imprisonment in the county jail not exceeding six months, or by not such fine and imprisonment.”\textsuperscript{703} The California statute and most other states had similar language like the Jacksonville ordinance that overturned in 1972.

The impression of the courts in their opinion was that citizens, protected by the 4\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th} amendment, should not have to give an account of where they are going or prove to police they are not engaged

\textsuperscript{701} On the Great Migration, see note 15.

\textsuperscript{702} Papachristou et al., 17.

\textsuperscript{703} California Anti-Vagrancy Statute of 1872, For more on who was a vagrant in California, See note 479.
in criminal activity. Though Papachristou et al. v City of Jacksonville included Black petitioners, Black women have never been the subject of court challenges and rarely centered in studies about the systemic impact of vagrancy punishment. Papachristou et al. was a local case, however, the “unfettered discretion” outlined by the Florida courts was emblematic of police power broadly. According to the courts, mobility and the freedom to travel without suspicion and arrest was a critical element of the American Dream.

The courts argued that certain amenities of freedom such as strolling, walking, or wandering were difficult to argue as criminal acts, even if a person was unemployed. In the contrary, the courts noted that “[p]ersons ‘wandering or strolling’ from place to place” was a law of the land even though not mentioned in the Constitution or Bill of Rights. The courts wrote, “[t]hese unwritten amenities have been in part responsible for giving our people the feeling of independence and self-confidence, the feeling of creativity. . . [t]hey are embedded in Walt Whitman’s writings, especially in his ‘Song of the Open Road.’” For many Black women however—and especially itinerant rollers—street walking, jail house, and traveling blues were more in tune with the melody of their lives. Vagrancy studies and the Papachristou ruling have primarily centered police abuse of powers and arbitrary arrests, but prosecutors and Police Judges also weaponized vagrancy statutes to banish citizens from certain cities.

Despite the traditional Black migrant settlement story, police and courts had a dramatic impact on Black people’s lives. Due to the broad categories of behavior that defined a vagrant, police had the power to choose who, when, and how they weaponized vagrancy arrests. Black settlement and the mobility of anyone deemed undesirable by police or community members was conditional and punishable by jail, fines, or exile. The study of vagrancy laws and policing have remained primarily a local examination. With nearly all states in the North America having vagrancy statutes during the years of the first and second wave of the Great

704. For more on vagrancy history and court rulings in the U.S, see Goluboff, Vagrant Nation and note 91.

705. Papachristou et al., 164.

706. Ibid. For more on Whitman and the “Song of the Open Road” poem, see Walt Whitman and Harold Bloom, Leaves of Grass (New York: Random House, 2016).

707. Some states also used parole to exile Black women back to the US South. See Hicks, “ She Would Be Better off in the South: Black Women on Parole to Their Southern Kin, 1920-1935,” in Talk to You Like a Woman.
Migration, including Canada, most Black populations were under the threat of jailing, cash fines, and exile from the Jim Crow South to any jurisdiction they arrived. For noted Black sex workers and rollers——just walking on the streets or visiting the wrong city at the wrong time could mean breaking the law. In other words, under anti-vagrancy laws, these women were misdemeanors on the move.

“I don’t care where you go . . . but the police insist you must leave”

The case of Sarah Nathan reveals what happened when Black women resisted the criminalization and policing of their bodies and behaviors in a public context. By the late 1880’s, Sacramento police had marked Sarah as a vagrant sex worker and public nuisance, which meant she was a frequent guest at the local jail that press featured regularly. In 1894, the Sacramento Bee published an article titled, “Naughty Sarah Nathan.” In this case, a judge punished Sarah with a $5.00 cash fine for calling a police officer out of his name. In another publication, “No Christmas For Them,” the Bee described Sarah as “a notorious colored woman” and “a street walker.” In this case, the judge sentenced Sarah to 60 days in jail for violating the California anti-vagrancy law as a common prostitute. After her release from jail and despite being placed under a $5000 bond at one point, Sarah continuously resisted all forms of social control and refused to abandon her work and life of leisure in the L street tenderloin district of the city.

Black women’s confrontations with the criminal legal system can be better understood by examining Sarah’s subtle and direct forms of resistance to the policing and punishment of her body, lifestyle, and work. Eventually, a judge in Sacramento would punish Sarah with banishment. In an article titled, “Her Feet Were Sore,” published by the Record-Union, Sarah plead guilty to vagrancy, which meant that the punishing power was up to the discretion of the judge. According to the judge, a guilty plea for Sarah meant immediately leaving the city after she was released from jail—before the end of the working day. When the judge asked Sarah in court how long it would take her to leave town, she replied that she needed two days. The judge refused, “[t]hat


710. “Sarah Is Sad,” Record-Union (Sacramento, California), Apr 28, 1898, newspapers.com (accessed Downloaded on Jun 30, 2020).
won’t do . . . If you are not out of town by 3 o’clock you will have to go to jail.” Sarah directly refused the judges punishment of immediate exile. She responded, according to and narrated in a racially mocking tone by the Record-Union, “Well, I ‘specs I’se gwine ter jail, for my feet’s too sore, an’ I jes’ aint gwine ter walk outer dis yer town, nohow.” The judge would go on to say, “[v]ery jail it is for six months, if you don’t go before 3 o’clock.” Sarah’s confrontation with the judge over immediate exile is one example of how Black woman challenged the discretion of vagrancy punishment.

Authorities at the local jail eventually released Sarah after court with the expectation that she would pick up her life and immediately leave town. The vagrant label was an automatic surveillance apparatus, especially if a person was known by police and the public to have been sentenced to exile. If that person was spotted, police could jail them at any time, even though under the anti-vagrancy law police already had power to arrest women marked as common prostitutes without warrants. Once the courts convicted a person of vagrancy, that person was considered to always be a vagrant.

Following her banishment sentence, Sarah as she promised, did not leave the city by the time prescribed by the judge. In another press account with the headline and subtitle, “Defiant Sarah Nathan: ‘No White Trash Can Make Me Get out of Town,’” the Record-Union reported:

The female nuisance promised to leave the city, but instead of doing so she has been parading herself about the streets in a drunken and acting as if she thought she owned the town . . . Last evening Officer Bagley met her and demanded to know why she had not obeyed the order of the Police Court. The woman tossed her frizzled head into the air and declared that ‘no white trash could make her git out ob dis hyar town.’

Sarah’s dismissal of the judge and awareness of racial politics is telling. She knew the officer was using his power to surveil and racially profile her.

Sarah’s resistance to exile and regulation of her labor and leisure reveals how Black women made claims to place and space, in addition to the public confrontation with police, vagrancy laws, and the racial and sexual politics of the urban city. Nevertheless, marked by police and the courts as an undesirable woman, Sarah was vulnerable to police harassment and a jail sentence at any time when it “dawned upon” them that she was a


712. Ibid.

There is no record that reveals where Sarah may have went following her banishment, though we know it would have been almost impossible to remain in Sacramento. Sarah’s story illuminates the role vagrancy laws played in court sanctioned exile and forced migrations prior to the turn of the 20th century.

There are a host of press reports across the country published before and during the first wave of the Great Migration that featured Black women’s banishment sentences as the headline of an article for resisting police control. For example, in 1903, the *Sioux City Journal* read, “Miss Pfaff Must Leave: Obstreperous Negress is Obnoxious to the Police.” The *Journal* explained, “[t]he chief and his assistants have come to the conclusion they have had all they want of the Pfaff woman. In fact, they have decided that she will have to ‘blow the town,’ and yesterday Police Judge Page issued a warrant . . . She was arrested and released upon signing a bond for $300 and must leave the city.”

The other reason that police wanted to disappear Pfaff was because a judge had punished her with prison time in the past and she was known to have escaped from confinement more than once and had persistently showed no signs of adhering to law enforcement.

In 1910, the *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader* and the *Evening News* featured an article that reported a police raid on a Black sporting house. Police captured four white men in this raid as well and made each pay a “$10 security” bond to secure their freedom. None of the men showed up in court. In other words, for ten dollars, these white men escaped punishment and public embarrassment. However, the subtitle highlights the collateral consequences for the Black women that lived in the apartment that was raided by police. The subtitle read, “Proprietress, Who is a Negress, Promises to Leave Town and is Not Held Under Bail.” In order to avoid

---


715. “Miss Pfaff Must Leave: Obstreperous Negress Is Obnoxious to the Police,” *Sioux City Journal*, August 5, 1903, newspapers.com (accessed December 7, 2020). There is no evidence to distinguish exactly which cities were more likely to banish Black women than others. However, as this chapter illuminates, every region in North America featured articles covering Black women’s exile.

cash bail or jail time, the judge ordered her to sign an agreement to “vacate the premises before Saturday.” She had two days to pack up her life and hit the road.

On August 29, 1911, the *Salina Semi-Weekly* headlined an article “Negress Ordered to Leave Town.” Police jailed Minnie Phillips for “street walking,” which was another way of criminalizing Black women as sex workers even if they were not witnessed soliciting or engaging a customer. Vagrancy statutes and the presumption that all Black women were potentially sex workers or rollers empowered police to stop, frisk, and detain under any pretense. In the case of Minnie, since she could not afford to pay a $25 fine, the only space a judge would allow her to stay in Salina was in a jail cell. The other option was leaving and never returning.

To pick up your life and just move on was not as easy as planning to travel or finding home in another city. In 1912, a judge in Alton, Illinois ordered Geneva McNeill to leave the city as a part of suspended sentence plea following a raid conducted by police at her house. Though two other Black women that were friends of Geneva took the deal and left town, Geneva decided to refuse immunity and noted that she would tell “what she knew” in court. Geneva possibly wanted to expose others involved in the underworld which could have also been police officers. She refused to being singled out by police and punished with banishment without a fight.

A closer examination of banishment sentences by the courts illuminates a collection of under examined stories of race, gender, criminalization, and forced migration. In 1913, the *Richmond Item* in Indiana headlined an article, “Profane Negress Fined And Ordered To Leave City After Out Of Jail.” The police complaint stemmed from an argument that ensued between Bessie McMurray and her aunt where the latter filed a police complaint against her niece for using profanity. Regardless of what consequence or solution to verbal conflicts family member sought from police, once the complaint reached the criminal legal courts, Judges held the discretion to punish accordingly. In this case, the Judge ordered Bessie to serve thirteen days in jail and then leave the city soon after. This report is an example of how the criminal legal system and punishment had

717. Ibid.


become the social solution to conflicts between family members. For the everyday banished Black woman and girl, migration was less settled and compounded with the conditions of starting a new life in a new land on unpredictable terms. For example, in December of 1913, police in Joliet, Illinois charged Ann Cummings with running a disorderly house. She was marked in police circles as “Loco Texas Ann’ Cummings, better known as ‘Texas Kid.’” Her southern migrant status was illuminated in addition to criminality and the central theme of the article—banishment. The Joliet Evening Herald-News headlined the article, “Notorious Negress Must Leave Town.” Ann was faced with a typical dilemma that any person banished by the courts had to survive. Depending on the family connections and social networks that Ann had in the region, her next route could be anywhere from another city in the Midwest, east coast, or heading back South to Texas if she still had family there.

Banishment was typically a part of a suspended sentence that was discretionally used by prosecutors and judges across the country as a result of vagrancy plea deals. For example, take the case of Lottie Knox in Pensacola, Florida in 1913. The judge suspended Lottie’s sentence under the condition that she either pay a fine, serve jail time, or “leave the state before Sept. 22 and remain away permanently.” The exile time period given in court was actually the next day which gave Lottie twenty four hours to find her way out of police sight and out of town.

In many vagrancy cases, court officials forced Black women to promise and sign immunity deals on condition of banishment. But that did not mean Black women followed every court order. Black women’s resistance to court ordered exile would have been more than likely in the case of women that had established themselves with a home, room, or community networks in a city over time like Sarah Nathan in Sacramento.

Black women’s exile sentences were not private affairs either, press broadly across North America centered Black women as the focus of their stories. In 1914, the Daily Herald in Dayton, Ohio used the subtitle

721. For a further examination of wayward laws and the convergence of the criminal legal system as a solution to family conflicts and controlling young Black women in the urban city, see Hicks, Think Like a Woman and Hartman, Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments.


723. Ibid.

of an article to highlight “Sycamore Street Negress Promises to Leave City Forever.” In 1915, the Nevada State Journal reported another story of a Black women facing court sanctioned banishment. The article headlined, “Negress Ordered To Leave Before Sundown,” was designed to speak for police and to the Reno public that Flossie Edwards was not to be in the city any time after dark that night. A judge threatened Flossie with a long prison term if she did not abide with the order. Sundown laws have primarily focused on lynching and Black men. Due to the dearth of scholarship on the topic, we can only imagine what police officers did or had the power to do to Black women, and especially Black sex workers if they were captured in the city after dark.

In 1917, the Lima Gazette and the Lima Republican in Ohio featured an article about Grace Meyers who plead guilty to “conducting a disorderly house.” In other words, police had marked her home as a site of criminalized racial leisure and a part of the underground vice economy in the city. In the title, the words of what could be called the defacto motto for Black women’s public exile read, “Negress Ordered to Leave.” The entering of the US in World War I that same year would only intensify the surveillance, policing, and banishment of women, especially sex workers.

One police Sergeant was questioned at a jury trial and spoke of an anti-sex work operation he led during the war. He explained, “In May of 1917 Patrolmen McKinney and I were assigned to work preparatory to running prostitutes out of Sacramento. In this work we listed every house of prostitution and all of the women in order to know where they would be likely to go should they be run from one place to another. In this clean up


729. Ibid.
130 women were run out of town.\textsuperscript{730} The war time narrative that depicted sex workers spreading venereal diseases to soldiers fueled national and local campaigns to quarantine and rid cities of undesirable women.\textsuperscript{731}

The utility of the criminal legal system to force migrations was not only a practice in the United States, but Canada as well. In 1917, Mary Chambers was marked by Vancouver local police as a vagrant sex worker. The judge told Mary that she had one day to pack up her belongings and leave town. Mary responded that she would need help getting her things to the train station. According the Vancouver Daily World, “Magistrate South very obligingly informed the dusky beauty that he would give her the assistance of the police. Who would also see her safely on the train, en route to her destination and she was to stay away from Vancouver in the future.”\textsuperscript{732} There are numerous stories across Canada—from the Western region to the Eastern—that evidences local and Dominion law enforcers deporting Black women as was revealed in other chapters with Lizzie Moore in Quebec, various women in Victoria and Vancouver, and Detroit’s Susan Daniels in Windsor. Deportation would also be included in the system of exile in Canada.

In 1918, the El Paso Herald in Texas featured a headlined article, “Negress Ordered to Leave.” Police there arrested Louise Scaggs at a Black club in the city and jailed her on vagrancy charges. The judge sentenced her under the condition of immediate banishment.\textsuperscript{733} In 1922, a Spokesman-Review in Spokane, Washington, headlined the article, “Negress Must Leave Town.”\textsuperscript{734} In this case, a vagrancy conviction was dismissed as long as twenty two year old Olive Ball disappeared from the city. In another article published a week later in the


\textsuperscript{733} “Negress Ordered to Leave,” El Paso Herald, March 12, 1918, newspapers.com (accessed December 7, 2020).

Black women’s court outcomes were always positioned as a future sentence as well. In other words, for these women and many alike, migration and settlement was conditioned on assimilation. Underground labor and leisure was not an option without consequences.

Many local police departments encouraged the courts to exile Black women that resisted traditional labor, spent time at dance parties, liquor drinkers, and typically women with long local arrest records. In one account in Raleigh, North Carolina, a judge banished Carrie Meyers for drunkenness after forcing her to spend a night in lockup. In line with many of the other press accounts highlighted in this part of the chapter, the News and Observer publicized the outcome in the subtitle with the statement, “Negress Banished From City.” This article also reveals the often varying punishments Black women and men received in court. Police had also arrested and charged a man known as “Dancing Lucas” with vagrancy because he could not show he had visible means of income. The judge sentenced him to 30 days on the local chain gang. Nevertheless, for Carrie, the punishment was exile. In the case of Carrie and most sex workers, it was not that they could not show visible means, but rather their form of wage earning was criminalized. In fact, many sex workers made consistent wages, paid their bills, and had other material possessions from their trade. In addition, just because the judge did not force Carrie to work on the chain gang does not mean that Black women were excluded from jail terms with hard labor. The varying punishment also does not mean that undesirable men where not banished by judges, but rather it points out the discretion that judges had to punish under vagrancy laws.

A publication in the Herald-Press in Saint Joseph, Michigan in 1928 is an example of how the press publicized the exile of Black women known in police circles. “Sally Vernon Says She Will Seek New Town; the title read “Orders Negress To Leave Town: Fine Suspended.” At every turn, Black women’s court outcomes were always positioned as a future sentence as well. In other words, for these women and many alike, migration and settlement was conditioned on assimilation. Underground labor and leisure was not an option without consequences.

---


736. The courts banished white women and other women of other ethnic backgrounds as well.


738. Ibid.

739. Sally’s punishment did not mean that Black women were immune from the chain gang economy. For more on Black women and southern chain gangs, see Haley, No Mercy Here; LaFleur, Chained in Silence.
Escapes Jail.”⁷⁴⁰ According to the Herald-Press, Sally responded in court in opposition to the choice of a jail sentence and stated, “I think I’ll leave.”⁷⁴¹ Sally’s response to the judge was based off the choice of either spending the maximum six months in jail, or picking up her life and leaving from the city. The judge granted Sally one week to “sell her household effects.”⁷⁴² In a column published on May 3rd, the News Palladium headlined another article, “Negress Ordered to Leave Town, Is Arrested Again.” During the week that the Judge gave Sally to prepare for exile, police raided her home again. The Palladium wrote, “[a] farewell party for Sally Vernon colored, at her home at 115 Lake street, was broken up by the police last night.”⁷⁴³ This time, police charged Sally with disorderly conduct two days before she was set to leave the city. Sally’s story is also evidence of the ways that vagrancy exile punishment separated family and friends during the years of the Great Migration.

The following month the Palladium featured another article regarding a local Black woman with the headline, “Negress Ordered to Leave County.”⁷⁴⁴ In this case, a judge punished Clara Richmond with a one dollar fine in addition to an order to leave the city. Clara’s banishment was a result of two much alcohol drinking according to police. Sally and Clara’s stories illuminate that banishment was not an anomaly in Benton Harbor, Michigan. In August of 1928, a Judge in Pensacola, Florida “exile[d]” Mattie Hall from Escambia county.⁷⁴⁵ The subtitle modeled the typical press report featuring Black women’s public sentence of banishment. “Sends Negress Away Never To Return,” it read. In press account after press account, the story was the same, the legal punishment prosecutors and judges presented to Black women was either cash, jail, or banishment.


⁷⁴¹ Ibid.


⁷⁴³ Ibid.


The other discretion held by judges was how much time they gave Black women to pick up their lives and leave town. In Reno, Nevada Helen Smith was ordered by a judge to leave town "before 9:30 o’clock tomorrow.” The publication of the article with the headline “Negress Banished As Trouble-Maker,” is evident of the intent of public accounts featuring exile sentences. The *Journal* wrote that the ration for Helen’s punishment was based off the evidence that she “has been in trouble with the police before, and in it was decided to banish her from the city.” Helen’s exile punishment stemmed from a disturbance created by two men fighting over her and the knowledge that she was labeled by police as an unwed woman and a trouble maker.

Punishing Black women under vagrancy laws was a social and legal avenue that empowered police, prosecutors, and judges with some discretion rather through recommendation or judicial power to order banishment. As chapter five reveals, alleys were a site of racial and gendered criminalization in the urban city. Black women relying on the geography of alleys to serve as a working space were left vulnerable to surveillance in any city with legal banishment as a possible consequence. Any Black woman witnessed or captured by police in the alley with a white man was vulnerable to forced migration.

In 1923, Binghamton police officers arrested Buela Spivey for vagrancy after witnessing her and a white man gathered in an alley. The racial and gendered politics of punishment is telling as well. "The man was allowed to go but the negress was arrested and locked up in jail.” Buela had not been in the city long and revealed her emotions in court. Despite if the press captured this affect or not, exile was a devastating occasion—it was unpredictable, precarious, and required at least a glimpse of hope to survive. Her response is different than women like Flossie and others that laughed at police before choosing to leave cities. The courts banished Buela just for being seen with a white man in an alley. The following figure is a reprint of the article featured in the *Press and Sun Bulletin*.

---


747. Ibid.

Dusky Vamp Told to Leave Binghamton

Negress Is Arrested as Vagrant When Found Loitering with White Man in Alleyway—Commitment Withheld on Penitentiary Sentence

Beula Spivey, 29 years old, a negress, who, police say, came to Binghamton Sunday night, was arrested late last night by plainclothesmen Frank B. Casey and William May on a charge of vagrancy.

The officers were driving past a warehouse on Prospect avenue when they saw two figures loitering in an alleyway. They stopped their car some distance away and going back surprised the negress and a white man.

"Is you 'Dicks,' honey?" said the negress to Plainsclothesman May.

"Yes, honey," replied May, "what are you going to do about it?"

At this the negress and her companion attempted to get away. The man was allowed to go but the negress was arrested and locked up in the city jail.

She pleaded guilty to the vagrancy charge when arraigned in police court this morning and was ordered to leave the city after commitment was withheld on a sentence of six months in Onondaga county penitentiary.

The woman lamented her banishment from the city so soon after arriving.

Three men and a woman arrested charged with public intoxication pleaded guilty and paid $10 fines.
There are various ways that police, prosecutors, and judges used vagrancy laws as a form of social control. This is evident from Sarah Nathan in the 1890’s to the policing and surveillance policies commissioned during the war years to Buela in the mid 1920’s. Aside of women who leveraged exile, being forced to leave a place was devastating. The various reports published in cities and regions across North America enable scholars and historians to nuance studies of vagrancy laws and policing outside of the context of forced labor and Southern Black Codes. Racializing and Gendering vagrancy studies illuminates how vagrancy laws impacted people differently. Banishment played an active role in Black women’s mobility and lived experiences. This untold story is much larger than the pages have allowed this part to highlight. Nevertheless, the collection of press reports reveal how Black women confronted vagrancy policing and punishment from the late 19th century through the Great Migration years. The final chapter traces Weems’ life after San Quentin prison as she faces the challenge of surviving the Great Depression as a formerly incarcerated woman.
Chapter Eight

Mapping Black Women’s Geographies, 1900-1935

Mabel Jones, colored woman, with several aliases, and a police record, was today sentenced to two months in Okalalla on a charge of theft of thirty dollars from the person, Aug 21st. The accused elected speedy trial, and will be deported after serving sentence.
-Nanaimo Daily News, 1930

In June of 1928, a large group of incarcerated people applied for parole release from San Quentin. Weems had served three years in prison by this time. Multiple newspaper outlets shared articles that included Weems, under the alias Dolly Bibb. The Sacramento Bee’s publication headline read, “73 Felons Seeking Parole, Including Sacramento Negress.”

Weems was known by press and law enforcement in Sacramento, especially since local authorities had captured and convicted her while she was still a fugitive from Washington. The headline of the above article is also telling in the way it singled out Weems. The Bee continued, “[a]nother prisoner seeking freedom is Dolly Bib, Sacramento, negress, serving a term for grand larceny. She has the record of being the only woman ever to attempt an escape from San Quentin.”

The editors emphasized the section about Weems with bold letters. At her hearing, the California parole board set her release date for October 16, 1929.

After four years, Weems was released from San Quentin. Following her release, Weems married Lincoln Hicks in San Diego later that year. According to the 1930 federal census, Weems and Lincoln were living in Las Vegas, Nevada as of April 28th. The census takers listed Weems’ name as Curley Hicks—Lincoln’s wife, and her place of birth along with both of her parents is recorded as Nebraska. On the other hand, Weems reported to California prison authorities that she was born in Oakland, California around 1899. Lincoln’s occupation is a barber and Weems’ employment box is empty, which meant that she was considered to be a housewife. Weems and Lincoln would not remain in Las Vegas for long and by the summer of 1930, had


750. Ibid.

751. Florence Hicks no. 56866, Imprisoned, SQIF.
moved to Tacoma, Washington.\footnote{U.S Census Bureau; 15th Census of the United States Federal Census, 1930, Las Vegas, Clark, Nevada; Curley Hicks; generated by jub Sankofa; using ancestrylibrary < www.ancestrylibrary.com > (19 August 2017); Canadian Immigration Service, Report of Admissions and Rejections at the Port of Pacific Highway for the Month Ending August 31st 1930; Lincoln Hicks; generated by jub Sankofa; using ancestrylibrary< www.ancestrylibrary.com > (19 August 2017). In in a section for U.S address and closest relatives, Lincoln mentions “wife Curley Hicks on 1954 ½ Jefferson St. Tacoma Wash.”}
Within a few months of arriving in the Pacific Northwest, Weems traveled back across the border to Vancouver, Canada. Weems was familiar with the underground economy and local landscape of Vancouver. It had been five years since she was last in British Columbia. Though it was during the early years of the Great Depression, Vancouver’s Hogan’s Alley likely provided more discrete opportunities for a woman engaged in Weems’ line of work than cities in the United States. Plus, she likely knew her way around the district. It would not be long before Weems was back on the radar of British Columbia authorities. On August 8th, police in Vancouver jailed Weems for “theft over $10.” Three days later, prosecutors in Vancouver dismissed the case against Weems and released her from jail. Weems left within the next week and did not return to the United States this time, instead she traveled to the neighboring province of Nanaimo, British Columbia.

Figure 8.2 Map of Nettie Weems traveling from Vancouver to Nanaimo, B.C., 1930
In Nanaimo, Weems registered for a room at the Commercial Hotel under the alias Ann Smith. While Weems was in town, she rolled a man for $30 dollars. Local police were able to track Weems back to the hotel. On August 22, police raided her room and booked her on a theft from person charge. Now that Weems was in the custody of local police, investigators would submit her identification profile in circulation with law enforcement in the British Columbia region and the United States.

The day after Nanaimo authorities booked Weems, Canadian Immigration officials admitted Lincoln Hicks to cross the border via the Pacific Northern train to Vancouver as a visitor of Ray Simpson. By this time, Ray—documented as a neighbor on the Las Vegas 1930 census—had moved to 227 Prior street in Vancouver. Ray’s address was located directly in the heart of the Hogan’s Alley district. On Lincoln’s immigration document, a section required him to “give name, relationship and address of your nearest relative in the country from which you came.” He listed his wife—Curley Hicks and a home address on Jefferson St. in Tacoma. Somehow, Weems was possibly able to get a message to her husband which might explain him crossing the Canadian border the next day. It is possible that he was coming to pay her cash bail or provide a support network for her. There are no details that reveal if Lincoln was able to visit his wife or not since there is no record that he made it to Nanaimo.

On September 11th, 1930, Nanaimo officers escorted Weems to her trial where the courts convicted her on one count of “theft from person.” The Nanaimo Daily News reported the story following the court ruling. It wrote, "Mabel Jones, colored woman with several aliases, and a police record, was today sentenced to two months in Oakalla on a charge of theft of thirty dollars from the person, Aug 21st. The accused elected speedy trial, and will be deported after serving sentence." This was the first time that British Columbia authorities had managed to convict Weems and her ultimate deportation signaled a change in her ability to enter the region legally.

Though Weems’ conviction occurred in Nanaimo, British Columbia, Vancouver press shared an account from the Nanaimo press in a column titled “Woman Throws $30 From Her Window.” The story

---


provided further details involving Weems’ case and status as an escaped fugitive from justice in the United States. According to the article, the police report revealed that “[t]he sum involved was $30 in bills which evidence showed she threw out of window of the Commercial Hotel.” After detaining Weems, police would later find the alleged $30 in cash laying on the ground in an alley below her room window. The cash was used as evidence of her guilt. By this time, Weems had an extensive identification record on the Pacific West Coast and was also a formerly incarcerated woman in the United States.

British Columbia officials were well aware that Weems had not been brought to justice in Washington for a roller crime and jail escape that happened five years earlier. By this time, international police cooperation in the Pacific Northwest had been in existence for decades. The Sun article provides more evidence of the collaborative efforts of identification officials and their ability to rapidly construct criminal profiles of people on both sides of the border and the efficiency of those efforts to travel from police to the press. Nevertheless, with a felony conviction in British Columbia, Weems would now serve another prison sentence, this time outside of the borders of United States. Oakalla Prison Farm was located to the east of Vancouver in Burnaby, British Columbia.


756. Ibid.
Figure 8.3 Map of British Columbia officials exporting Nettie Weems to Oakalla Prison Farm in Burnaby, 1930
Oakalla Prison Farm was erected in British Columbia in 1912. It primarily functioned as place of punishment where British Columbia officials sent people to serve out prison terms of less than two years. There was also a smaller portion of incarcerated people serving longer terms, those appealing federal convictions, and for forty five years or so, the facility was a site of death row for the British Columbia province. Oakalla would get its inspiration from modern penitentiary models that practiced discipline and punishment as a form of rehabilitation. According to the author of *Hard Place to Do Time*, “Oakalla reflected the American ‘Auburn’ model of penology: inmates would be subjected to harsh discipline and strenuous work during the day, and segregated in individual cells at night.” The function of the prison as a farm was also imagined as a better solution to local chain gang sentences, especially since the labor and punishment could exist within a confined perimeter to prevent the possibility of escape.

By the 1920’s, social reformers in Vancouver argued that the conditions at the prison called on the need for a separate quarters for men and women. Weems’ incarceration, though only a couple of months, came at a time when many prison reform groups where calling out the prison conditions of institutions across North America. There is no detailed history of incarcerated women at Oakalla Prison Farm during the period that Weems served her term.

Following her prison term at Oakalla in November of 1930, British Columbia officials deported Weems to the custody of law enforcement in Snohomish, Washington to face punishment for her conviction.


758. For more on the American penitentiary system, see note 44. On Auburn prison from the perspective of a formerly imprisoned man in the 19th century, see Austin Reed et al., *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict: The Recently Discovered Memoir of African American Life and Incarceration in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Random House, 2016).

759. Anderson, 47.

760. Ibid., 134.


762. For a study of women at Oakalla later in the 20th century, see Dorothy Mae Coutts, *An Examination of the Social Structure of the Women's Unit, Oakalla Prison Farm* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1961).
and escape in 1925. Now that Snohomish authorities finally had Weems back in custody, it is certain they made sure not to let her escape again. The prosecutor in Snohomish made a scolding statement about Weems:

Defendant after the verdict, but before being sentenced, escaped jail, and has been a fugitive since, but during most of the time has been incarcerated in the State Penitentiary in Calif. . . . any period of incarceration simply means that the public will be protected from her for that period of time.\textsuperscript{763}

During the time that Weems had been a fugitive from Washington, she continued committing roller crimes in several regions, likely making the case for her capture even more imperative. After serving a little more than two weeks in the Everett County jail, Weems would prepare to serve an indeterminate sentence of 18 months up to 14 years in the Washington State prison located in the city of Walla Walla. On November 29, Everett County law enforcement transported Weems to Walla Walla state prison.

According to Weems’ prison records, Washington authorities also had her listed under the alias Nettie Bibbs. She reported to penal administrators that she was a housewife and native of Texas.\textsuperscript{764} There is no evidence that reveals if she was born in Texas or not. In addition, between the California record, the federal Census, and the Washington record, Weems had reported she was born to in Oakland, Nebraska, and Texas. I would argue that Weems had developed a habit of giving contradicting information to the census or penal administrators. It makes perfect sense that she would not give her true name or accurate information to census recorders in 1930, since she was still a wanted fugitive under the name Weems. She may have also reported Texas as her nativity to Washington authorities because her husband Lincoln was a native of Texas.

Two days after Weems arrived at Walla Walla, the \textit{Semi-Weekly Spokesman-Review} published an article that detailed all of the people that had recently been shipped to Walla Walla. Out of a group of 25 other incarcerated people, likely all men, the newspaper highlighted Weems’ case: “Nettie Weems, who escaped from the Snohomish county jail in 1925, but recently was caught.”\textsuperscript{765} Around the same time that Weems was serving her time, Washington State authorities were just beginning the process of separating incarcerated men and

\textsuperscript{763} Nettie Weems no.13400, Corrections Department, Washington State Penitentiary.
\textsuperscript{764} Ibid.
women within the gates of the Walla Walla state prison.\textsuperscript{766}

After serving the one year and a half minimum prison term prescribed by law, Washington authorities granted Weems a parole release for May 18, 1932. There is no detailed record of where or what exactly Weems did following her release. Leaving prison this time would likely be no different than when Weems left San Quentin in 1929. The Great Depression was just beginning to unfold with the collapse of the U.S. economy. The 1930’s reflected a moment that many Americans struggled to survive yet alone start a new life in a new city. For Black Americans, the Great Depression was even more devastating with limited working opportunities, savings, and lack of support from local and federal agencies.\textsuperscript{767}

According to the identification record constructed by the CBCII, Weems headed back South on the Pacific West coast. Approximately two weeks after Weems left prison in Washington, she was back in the custody of law enforcement. This time, police in Vallejo—a port city in Solano County, California jailed her for vagrancy. There are a host of reasons that law enforcement may have booked Weems under the California anti-vagrancy statutes.

It is possible that she was charged with loitering or soliciting or presumed to be a sex worker and was jailed by police. She could have rolled a John, who refused to file a complaint, therefore the local Police magistrate could have used the discretion of the vagrancy law to punish her. On the other hand, it is also more than likely that California Bureau of Criminal Identification authorities were able to effectively identify Weems through mugshots and fingerprints. We know from the first chapter that by 1930, the Police Intercommunicating Teletype System in California was being touted as the best technology in 25 years to aid police in the rapid identification of habitual offenders.

During the years of the Great Depression, California saw an increase in migrants arriving to the borders and moving through the state. For the criminalized, exiled, and unhoused Black woman on the move, the Great Depression presented more precarious challenges than migrants that at least had housing and family networks to lean on. Law enforcement in various regions of California weaponized the states anti-vagrancy


\textsuperscript{767} On Black Americans and the Great Depression see note 12.
statutes during this period. Many Black women that encountered criminal legal courts—like the previous chapter illuminates—were forced to agree to suspended sentences in order to avoid fines and jail time.

In 1932, the *Bakersfield Californian* published an article with the headline, “Negress Departs at request of Justice.” Police in Bakersfield California jailed Bobbie Clark for petty theft. When the witness did not come to court, prosecutors could not indict Bobbie on a roller felony charge. There are not many details that remain about the person who filed the report, which means it was likely a John. This dynamic, which has been witnessed over and over in other chapters is the dilemma that prosecutors and judges were constantly faced with in their quest to convict Black women in the roller business of felony offenses. Despite the evidence to convict Black women, the courts found ways to force Black women to plead guilty to reduced charges of misdemeanor vagrancy under particular conditions.

In the case of Bobbie, a judge offered her three alternative punishments. The first choice was for Bobbie to pay a $250 fine. The second option was to serve 125 days in jail. And finally, the judge presented Bobbie the opportunity of banishment under the condition “never to return.” What the punishment actually reveals, is that the real goal for local police, prosecutors, and the judge was to banish Bobbie and to make her realize the only way she could possibly remain in the city was to either pay a large sum of cash or spend four months confined in the local jail. The following year, the *Californian* headlined a different case of a local Black woman titled, “Negress Ordered to Leave Kern County.” Similar to Bobbie Clark the courts found Mickey Lawrence guilty on a vagrancy charge and offered her immunity if she left the county within forty eight hours of accepting the vagrancy floater sentence.

A month prior to the *Californian* article in Bakersfield, the *Star-Gazette* in Elmira, New York headlined a column, “Vagrant Negress Ordered to Leave.” Police had arrested nineteen year old Winnie Bell Johnson. Police had presumed her to be a sex worker and investigated her background. The *Star-Gazette* focused on information about Winnie’s recent legal divorce and the fact police stated she was living with another man in Elmira. This also reveals the particular ways that single, unwed, and separated Black women were vulnerable to surveillance and vagrancy punishment. The Judge banished Winnie and admonished her in


court according to the *Gazette*.\(^{770}\) The judge stated, “I don’t care where you go . . . but the police insist you must leave Elmira. You’ve got to go today and don’t come back.”\(^{771}\) The criminal legal system and vagrancy laws exacerbated the poverty and unhoused life conditions that left young Black women like Winnie vulnerable to exile and floating on her with life in the Great Depression. Weems was vulnerable to this type of policing and exile in almost any city she traveled like Winnie.

By 1932, Weems had served prison time in three different regions in seven years. Under the California anti-vagrancy statutes, she had almost no legal standing to resist punishment or police arrests. The local Police judge in Vallejo convicted Weems of vagrancy and forced her to serve 30 days in the county jail. According to Weems’ identification record, after her release, she made her way to Texas.\(^ {772}\) Weems’ husband Lincoln could have been there waiting for her in Galveston or it is possible that she notified Washington penal authorities that family in Texas would provide her a home where she would be expected to remain until she was discharged from parole.

As a part of the indeterminate sentencing process, parole authorities required that someone guarantee a so-called safe and crime-free place for her to stay. Nevertheless, it was not long before police in Galveston detained Weems for vagrancy and placed her under investigation. Texas did not require many reasons to detain Black people, especially since there had been a long history of vagrancy laws being used to socially control and extract labor under Black codes dating back to the post Civil War years.\(^ {773}\)


\(^{771}\) Ibid.

\(^{772}\) Galveston, Texas is over 2000 miles away from Walla Walla Washington and over 1500 miles distance from Vallejo, California where Weems’ was traveling from.

Figure 8.4 Map of Nettie Weems from Walla Walla, Washington to Vallejo, California to Galveston, Texas, 1932
The Police court in Galveston convicted Weems of being a vagrant and fined her “$25 & Costs and given hours.” This punishment likely meant that local authorities forced her to do some form of “convict labor.” Despite what Weems was doing at the time of her arrest, as a woman with a past record and multiple prison sentences, her existence was a crime in nearly every region of North America at the time. Based off Weems’s arrest history—which represented a surveillance trail for law enforcement—Weems seemed to stay off the radar of police while she remained on parole release from Washington. In March of 1934, the Washington state penal authorities finally fully released Weems from the control of parole authorities. Immediately after her discharge, Weems made her way to the Bay Area region of California.

Figure 8.5 Map of Nettie Weems from Galveston, Texas to Oakland, California, 1932-1934

774. Florence Hicks no. 56866, Imprisoned, SQIF.
775. Ibid.
As usual, Weems stuck to the script of rolling Johns. On April 27, police in Oakland arrested her for petty theft. A judge in Oakland would eventually release Weems from jail. There are limited details surrounding the charge. The arrest record reveals that a judge likely dismissed the case because the complaining witness was afraid to testify or feared exposure like most roller complaints. Following this incident, Weems left Oakland and traveled to San Francisco, another Bay Area city with a historical tenderloin district and a history of Black sex workers, rollers, and alley workers confronting the police and criminal legal courts.  

![Map of Nettie Weems traveling from Oakland to San Francisco, California, 1934](map.png)

Figure 8.6 Map of Nettie Weems traveling from Oakland to San Francisco, California, 1934

---

With San Francisco police surveilling Black sex workers and quick access to criminal profiles, Weems would not get the opportunity to remain off the radar of police in the area for too long. In San Francisco, police officers disrupted Weems’ business plans when they jailed her for “vagrancy and soliciting prostitution.” In the mug book record, Weems’ name is recorded as May Jones and her alias is listed as Dolly Bibbs, which means San Francisco law enforcement had uncovered her past confrontations with the criminal legal system. By this time, California state identification authorities had already marked Dolly Bibbs as a formerly incarcerated woman, a career roller, and the only woman to ever attempt an escape from San Quentin. The San Francisco courts later convicted Weems of vagrancy and ordered a suspended sentencing of 30 days on both charges. In other words, the courts forced Weems to choose between leaving town immediately or serving jail time.

California vagrancy laws gave police and courts the power to detain and force people to leave the city, especially a former fugitive and San Quentin woman like Weems. If police arrested Weems for vagrancy within the city limits again, a judge would order her to serve thirty days in the San Francisco county jail. In the roller business, being in a city under the threat of a suspended sentence and constant surveillance was risky and less profitable. Weems did not take the judges threat lightly. She was accustomed to forced migrations and bouncing around from city to city after confrontations with police and the criminal legal system. She left the Bay area and took her business to Los Angeles.

777. Florence Hicks no. 56866, Imprisoned, SQIF.

Figure 8.7 Map of Nettie Weems traveling from the Bay Area to Los Angeles, 1934
Weems arrived in California when most formal working jobs for Black people in Los Angeles were likely at its lowest point since the start of Great Migration. However, in the South Central district—like Chicago, Vancouver, and Sacramento—trading sexual favors with white men was one of the most lucrative income earners for Black women working in underground economies before and during the Great Depression. With limited working opportunities already for the Black women that called Los Angeles home, it was imperative for Weems to find a source of quick cash. This was often the conundrum and double edge sword of itinerancy. Just because sex work offered alternative wages does not mean it was not a highly surveilled and punishable offense. Not long after arriving to Los Angeles police arrested Weems for soliciting prostitution and a judge ordered her to serve fifteen days in the county jail. If Weems was to survive in Los Angeles she would have to stay under the radar, which was almost impossible with the presence of police and undercover cops dressed in plain clothes in the South Central District. Despite the criminalization of the sex work, Black women working in the trade likely had a better opportunity of securing cash, especially from white men slumming in the district.

Black sex workers in Los Angeles were very aware of white men crossing the color line into the South Central district. Not long after serving two weeks in the Los Angeles county jail, police jailed Weems again. This time however, a white man accused Weems of a roller charge. The following is a statement provided by the Deputy District Attorney that details the complaint:

> On the 25th day of September, 1934, defendant approached victim, [John Doe], and asked him if he wanted to spend some money. He told her ‘no’. She tried to hug him several times and he kept shoving her away. On the last occasion he noticed she had a hand on his pocket book. She started to walk away. He noticed that the $82.00 he had in his pocket book were missing. He caught up with her and asked her for the money. She said she did not have it, whereupon he walked along with her until he encountered a


780. On histories of sex work and the criminalization of Black women in Los Angeles, see note 297.


782. See Ervin, “The Participation of the Negro in the Community Life of Los Angeles.”
radio car. Officers, after taking her to the police station, upon opening the door of the radio car, saw $51.00 in bills fall from the defendant’s coat. A further search showed she had about $74.50 in her possession and found two ten dollar bills in her mouth. The other money was scattered about her in her shoes and other places. 783

When Los Angeles police booked Weems, she told them her name was Florence Jones. It would not be long before Los Angeles police identification authorities had quickly uncovered Weems’ identity as Dolly Bibb.

The intercommunicating police teletype system and the development of rapid criminal identification would have made it extremely easy for Los Angeles investigators to streamline Weems’ past arrest records across North America, which was likely the case in Vallejo, Oakland, and San Francisco. With prior prison sentences in Canada, Washington, and California and a white man threatening to testify, Weems could not chance a felony grand larceny conviction at trial and eventually plead guilty to a lesser petty theft charge with priors. Under indeterminate sentencing, Weems now faced up to a five year term in prison that was solely determined by the California parole board. After serving a month and a half in the Los Angeles county jail and another birthday passing by, sheriffs exported Weems to the California Institution for Women at Tehachapi on November 14th, 1934.

Figure 8.8 Map of California Sheriffs exporting Nettie Weems from Los Angeles to the California Institution for Women at Tehachapi

783. Florence Hicks no. 56866, Imprisoned, SQIF.
During this prison sentence, Weems would not have to serve time in the “Walled City” now that the state had resurrected the first separate prison for women. Between August and November of 1933, penal authorities had transferred all incarcerated women to the California Institution for Women. The new facility at Tehachapi was located closer to Southern California, unlike San Quentin, which was located in the northern region of the state. The women’s institution had only been in operation for over a year but was still under the control of San Quentin officials. Like every other booking, California penal authorities transferred Weems’ body into a branded information technology under the name Florence Hicks, no. 56866, also “[s]ame as “S.Q. #41364 – Dolly Bib.” Like Weems, many of the incarcerated Black women caged at Tehachapi in the 1930’s had histories of moving around before their prison sentences. Majority of these women were not born in California, which meant they were on the move during the first wave of the Great Migration. They recalled migration histories to several cities and also reported moving with their families out of the South as youth before undertaking their own migration journeys that eventually ended up in California.

To map these women’s movements forces us to see them as a part of a larger movement and as individuals with their own distinct geographies of survival. Broad maps that capture millions of people on the move are not capable of visualizing the migration histories of migrants that traveled to more than one city. For example, the two maps on the following pages are cartographical representations that always come up in an online search for Great Migration maps.

---

784. For more on incarcerated women in California and the transition from San Quentin to the first women’s institution in the state, see Kathleen Cairns, *Hard Time at Tehachapi: California’s First Women’s Prison* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006). 180.

785. Florence Hicks no. 56866, Imprisoned, SQIF.

Figure 8.9 Great Migration Map, 1916-1930
reprinted from Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
Figure 8.10 Great Migration Map, 1910-1970
reprinted from alabamabackroads.com

787. Figure 8.10 was retrieved from https://www.alabamabackroads.com/the-great-migration.html.
The arrows and lines on the map directly above, for example, projects that migrants from Texas only went to Los Angeles or San Diego or perhaps all one-way journeys to California. Though reflective of some migration patterns, these maps and most cartographical representations of the Great Migration are limited to telling a broad one dimensional story. All in all, these maps reflect Langston Hughes’s theme of the “One Way Ticket.” In addition, It is almost impossible to fully analyze Black spatial histories from the post emancipation period up through the first wave of the Great Migration without including the impact of the movement to professionalize police and criminal legal institutions. There is likely few maps that locate jailed and imprisoned people on maps associated with Black migrants in the early 20th century.

Majority of the available Great Migration maps tell a story of millions of Black people in transit to various geographical locations across the United States. Some of the questions guiding this inquiry into Black migration maps are: What do arrows on maps represent? Families? Men? Heads of households? Is it possible for one arrow to adequately reflect thousands of varying geographical journeys? Do traditional Great Migration maps obscure more than they reveal about individual migrations patterns? In an online search of Black migration or Great Migration maps, the figures that always appear are all primarily broad quantitative analyses that center the Southern exodus of Black Americans as the central theme. These geographical patterns are important for understanding the epic magnitude of the Great Migration and the impact of the exodus of southern Black people on the shift in demographics across North America.

Several of the Black women that were incarcerated at Tehachapi in the 1930’s were convicted as rollers and had police records in multiple cities, states, and regions. In addition to Weems, the CBCII compiled extensive background profiles on Jessie Waters, Margaret Campbell, and Eileen Sparks. The following graph provides a better look at the some of the information I extracted from prison case files to construct a geographical story of these women’s migration and carceral histories.
### Criminal Identification Profiles CBCI, 1915-1935

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Born, State</th>
<th>Migration</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Vagrancy/public ordinance arrests</th>
<th>Roller Arrests</th>
<th>Different Cities Arrested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nettie Weems</td>
<td>Oakland, California</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessie Waters</td>
<td>Tampa, Florida</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eileen Sparks</td>
<td>Lincoln, Nebraska</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Campbell</td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8.11 A graph created from information extracted from 4 incarcerated women’s San Quentin Inmate Files. 114 total arrests: 29 Roller arrests, 79 vagrancy arrests: 24 different cities. 2 Cities that each woman served jail time: Oakland and San Francisco.
The arrest histories of Weems, Waters, Campbell, and Sparks offer a unique window into Black women’s geographic lives—forced and unforced migrations—pushes and pulls that have remained invisible in Great Migration studies and cartographical representations of Black mobility. The records compiled by the CBCII illuminate the frequency of police bookings and encounters with jail, courts, and criminal legal courts in various urban cities beyond their reported birth cities and jurisdictions where their convictions took place. What is obscure when looking at Black women’s jail and prison records, are the criminal identification processes conducted by law enforcement each time a person was in custody. Despite when, where, or why law enforcement or penal authorities jailed or imprisoned Black women, the protocol would have been to subject each person to fingerprinting, body measurements, mugshot photos, and the recording of other biographical information.

Each time police booked these women reflected a different process of punishment, surveillance, and identification information that was then transported through carceral networks across North America. For example in the case of Jessie Waters with “32 items of police record.” Or Margaret’s arrest history, which reveals that police booked her 41 different times. Police in several regions had arrested Eileen Sparks a total of 27 times. And Weems had a string of arrests in as many as 12 different cities. The prison case files of these women constructed by the CBCII illuminate a compelling continuity of anti-Black surveillance and biometric identification processes used to racialize, brand, and track Black bodies on the move that had dramatically evolved from the slave advertisements witnessed in chapter one.788

The graph above highlights some of the reasons why police officers across the west may have praised the advanced capabilities of the Intercommunicating Police Teletype System instituted by the CBCII a few years earlier. When calculated together, between 1915 and 1935 law enforcement jailed these four Black women a total of 114 times in 24 different cities from the Midwest, South West, North West all the way across the international borders of Western British Columbia, Canada. These women’s migration histories—when visualized through maps—highlight Black women constantly on the move from one city to another and crossing state lines and international borders. I reconstruct these arrest records and migration histories that Black women

788. See San Quentin Inmate Files, Florence Hicks no.56866 ;Eileen Sparks no. 55119; Jessie no. 49419; Margaret Campbell no. 54561. The Teletype could be used on any citizen to construct criminal identification profiles. For an open source of fugitive advertisements, see freedomonthemove.org.
provided to California penal authorities into cartographical sketches that illuminate and spark new geographic inquiries into Black women’s mobility and constraints during the first wave of the Great Migration.

“Thirty Two Different Items of Police Record”

Jessie Waters arrived to San Quentin on December 20, 1930. In her mug book portrait, penal authorities captured her wearing a mink coat, which likely reflected her life and style in South Central district of Los Angeles. Jessie had come a long way from her childhood days in Florida and Oklahoma. At her intake booking, she told California penal authorities that she was born around 1898 in Tampa. When she was a young girl her family migrated to Oklahoma where she attended school until the age of 16. Jessie dropped out of school after completing the ninth grade and began working as a domestic laborer. In 1916, when Jessie was 18 years old, she left her family and migrated westward to work as a housemaid in Wyoming. Jessie lived in Wyoming for a short time and then moved to Missouri where she remained for four years. By the time Jessie arrived on the Pacific West coast in the early 1920’s, she had lived in four states.789

According to an arrest history constructed by the CBCII, Jessie’s first vagrancy arrest in the American West was in 1920. Police in Tacoma booked Jessie for vagrancy under the alias Mary or Marie Davis. After police searched Jessie and retrieved her personal items, the arresting officer alleged that she had stolen property in her possession. Vagrancy laws gave police the discretion to assume a search based off of suspicion or to detain any woman marked or presumed to be a sex worker. Nevertheless, after spending six days in jail, a judge punished Jessie with a $50 fine. Soon after, Jessie left Tacoma and headed south along the Pacific North railways.

Over the next month, Jessie migrated to Vancouver, Washington. Soon after, police booked Jessie for vagrancy, this time, under the alias Bessie Robinson. The courts caged Jessie in the local jail for ten days until she came up with $25 cash to secure her bail release until trial. Instead of vagrancy laws fixing a so called criminal problem, women like Jessie were out of as much as one month worth of formal wages. This could be devastating for everyday both working class Black women and itinerant women whose formal working opportunities were limited. Jessie would eventually forfeit the $25 bail in Vancouver and never returned to court. In fact, from her arrest history, it appears she may have never returned to the county again. Instead, she counted the bail money as a lost, picked up her life, and took a train heading further South along the pacific

789. Jessie Waters no. 49419, Imprisoned, SQIF.
By the early 1920’s, Jessie had settled in Los Angeles, California. The underground world that Jessie navigated there was a space occupied by police, booze, gambling, commercial sex, and corruption like many other urban cities. Before law enforcement had ever opened a profile on her in Los Angeles, an undercover police officer attempted to rape Jessie by forcing her “to accompany him to a room.” In June of 1923, Jessie filed a complaint to Chief Jackson of the LAPD alleging that a policeman accosted her when she was walking across the street. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that “Police officer [Frank] Geraghty is charged with having attacked Mrs. Jessie Hart, a negress, at First and Sanford streets, and threatened her with a pistol.” When Jessie spoke with a Lieutenant, she reported that Beraghty—dressed in plain clothes—started harassing her and questioning her as she was walking across the street. “He insulted me and when I told him he was mistaken he pushed me into a darkened corner . . . there he started questioning me about a woman named Jean and when I told him I knew nothing of her informed me he was an officer and displayed his badge. He told me if I didn’t tell him about Jean and go to a room with him he’d arrest me.” When Jessie did not provide Beraghty with information and sex, she recalls “he then pulled his gun on me and informed me I was under arrest.” In addition to Jessie’s complaint, four other people confirmed that they saw Beraghty attacking Jessie. Though the LAPD would later dismiss Beraghty, Jessie on the other hand had to live with the trauma of his attack and further surveillance by police in the coming years. Later that year police booked Jessie on a roller charge that was later dismissed.

790. See note 781.


793. “L.A. Policeman is Dismissed As Girl Attacker.”

794. Ibid.

795. It is important to note that just because Beraghty was dismissed does not mean this was the norm for all police officers who assaulted Black women. Beraghty was a Black officer in Los Angeles at a time when the LAPD and larger Los Angeles city was majority white.
On January 24, 1925, police in San Francisco booked Jessie for vagrancy and solicitation. The judge dismissed the case likely under the condition of banishment. Before the end of the year Jessie had made her way to the neighboring Bay Area city of Oakland. There, police detained Jessie while investigating her background. The courts eventually dismissed the case against Jessie and was likely aware of her arrests in San Francisco for prostitution. An Oakland judge eventually released Jessie from jail. Following this Jessie left Northern, California and traveled back to Los Angeles. Within four months, police in Los Angeles had booked Jessie twice on vagrancy charges. Each time, the judge dismissed the case. Three weeks later, Jessie had made her way back to Northern, California. Police in San Francisco, as before arrested Jessie on vagrancy charges. Not long after, Jessie was back in the same cycle of jailing in San Francisco followed by a booking in Oakland.

During the early days of March, 1926, police in Oakland booked Jessie again for vagrancy. The case was eventually dismissed. Less than a week later, police in Oakland jailed Jessie again. This time however, the complaint came from rolling a John. After the case was eventually dismissed, at some point over the next few months, Jessie traveled back to Los Angeles where she married David Waters on May 18, 1926. Over an 8 month period, Jessie traveled back to San Francisco, where police had jailed her twice. The story there was the same. Police jailed Jessie again for vagrancy followed by a court dismissal. By the end of the year, Jessie was “wanted on vagrancy warrant” in Los Angeles. After the courts eventually released Jessie in Los Angeles she made a trip to San Francisco and on the way back police detained and booked her on a charge of “vagrancy Enroute to L.A.” Jessie may have started the year 1927 off in a San Francisco county jail but by the end of the year, it was law enforcement in Los Angeles that would give Jessie the most trouble in the years that followed.

In June of 1927, Los Angeles police arrested Jessie for violating the Wright Act, which was a California state law that made possession and distribution of alcohol a misdemeanor that carried heavy fines and up to six months of jail time. The courts ordered a suspended sentencing of 25 days in jail and a $150 fine. In other words, if police arrested Jessie again for possession of alcohol, the judge would make her face the first suspended sentence. Five days after the judge dismissed the alcohol possession charge against Jessie, a police officer arrested her again for possession. This time the judge ordered Jessie to serve 25 days in the county Jail. By December, Los Angeles police had jailed Jessie again, this time the courts charged her with vagrancy. Under these statutes, the courts had a more broad range of behaviors that could be used to convict Jessie. The courts
jailed Jessie for sixty days following this conviction.\textsuperscript{796}

Not long after Jessie’s jail sentence ended, police harassed Jessie again. The courts charged Jessie with possession of alcohol and ordered sixty day suspended sentence. Over the months that followed, police had booked Jessie two more times for possession of alcohol. The next time police jailed Jessie, stemmed from a warrant for her arrest following a party she held at her house. The \textit{Los Angeles Times} published details that captured Jessie’s court hearing and her response to the judge. According to the article, “Mrs Jessie Watters, 29 years of age, negress, was ‘just having a little party’ at her home” when police raided and charged her with “possession of a half-pint bottle partly full of moonshine.” According to the Los Angeles Times, in court Jessie begged the judge “Please go easy on me . . . as she admitted two prior convictions of liquor possession.” Despite Jessie pleading for a lighter sentence, the judge punished her with “[a] $500 fine and ninety days in jail.” When Jessie first heard the fine, she was relieved and said, “Thank you, judge . . . and then, as the full import of the sentence sank in-- and ninety days, oh! . . . [hysterical] she was taken from the court room to jail by Bailiff Rosso to begin her term.”\textsuperscript{797} If ninety days in jail shocked Jessie, it would only be a matter of time before she learned what the reality of a California prison sentence meant under the Indeterminate Sentencing Act.

Jessie’s prison sentence stemmed from a roller conviction in Los Angeles. Though Los Angeles police knew Jessie “as having ‘rolled’ a number of men” in the South Central district, majority of the cases against her were usually reduced to vagrancy with fines and short jail sentences or dismissed by the courts. This time however, a John came forward to testify against her in a felony charge that led to her conviction.\textsuperscript{798} Below is a cartographical sketch of her migration patterns from a young teenager leading up to her imprisonment at San Quentin.

On the map below and those that follow, there is a house marker followed by a series of arrows. The house represents the birth places that Jessie reported to prison officials and the arrows represent the migration narrative she provided along with arrows representing her arrest history in multiple cities. This map illuminates

\textsuperscript{796} Jessie Waters no. 49419, Imprisoned, SQIF.


\textsuperscript{798} Jessie Waters no. 49419, Imprisoned, SQIF.
a sketch of Jessie’s movements out of the US South into the American West prior to her first encounters with law enforcement and her movements up and down the Pacific West. Even if we do not know exactly what Black women were doing in the locations they traveled or an exact time frame they remained, we do know that Black women were on the move and constantly jailed by police in different regions.

Figure 8.12 Map of Jessie Waters no. 49419
migration and arrest history, 1898-1930
“Pirate in Her Business”

Margaret Campbell entered the Walled City of San Quentin on August 14, 1933. Prior to her conviction in San Francisco, a probation had conducted a fifteen year background report on Margaret for prosecutors. It would not be difficult to construct a demonizing report against Margaret who police had booked over forty times during this period. The probation officer wrote, “[a] close inspection and comparison of the record will show her to be a pirate in her business, very rough and rugged, predatory by nature, a very pronounced and marked exemplar of her ancestors from the Gold Coast. It will be noted that she was fortunate in having most of the Complaints filed against her dismissed in police court.”

The role of probation officers as extended investigators added another layer of gendered and racist language that were involved in the social construction of Black female rollers as a professional criminal class in need of surveillance, containment, and caging.

One of the other important details pointed out in Margaret’s background investigation were the historical gaps in police surveillance that failed to uncover her exact whereabouts. The probation officer went on:

> police opened an account for her in 1918. Two entries and she passed from the local horizon until the opening month on 1928, since which times the entries have been numerous. From January of 1919 to May of 1927, she seems to have disappeared like a comet in its orbital track, passing out beyond the planet outposts . . . Where she was or what she was doing is not definitely known. It may be she crossed the International Line into Mexico, as some of the aliases under which the Local Police recorded her would indicate.

Margaret’s background report reveals how police and institutional partners focused on movement and aliases tracking in their quest to construct criminal identification histories on Black women. Itinerants especially forced detectives and criminal legal authorities to expand their law enforcement partnerships and networks of surveillance. The reports of local authorities was only a fraction of the background investigations conducted on Black women incarcerated in California.

In her intake biographical sketch, Margaret claims that she was born in North Carolina around 1900 and brought to California by her grandmother as a young girl during the decade leading up to the first wave of

799. Margaret Campbell no. 54561, Imprisoned, San Quentin Inmate Files (SQIF).

800. Ibid.
the Great Migration. By the turn of the 20th century, San Francisco had become a beacon of hope in the Black West. Margaret was married at the age of fifteen and birthed one child before separating from her husband. Margaret worked several jobs as a “chambermaid, cook, bed maker, and relief worker.” At some point—out of work or imagining alternative forms of wage earning—she turned to the sex trade, where her confrontations with police, jail, and courts were frequent. San Francisco law enforcement opened up a criminal identification profile on Margaret when she was a teenager. In 1918, San Francisco police first jailed Margaret for prostitution and assault with a deadly weapon. There are no details from this incident, which likely stemmed from a confrontation with a John. A judge would later drop the charges against Margaret.

Not long after police booked Margaret for the second time, she picked up her life and left San Francisco. When Margaret “disappeared like a comet in its orbital track,” she had picked up her life and migrated to the Pacific Northwest region. Though San Francisco authorities did not have record of Margaret when she was off of their radar. That did not mean that further investigations would not uncover more information about her movements during this period. The CBCII noted that that Margaret had “played the circuit of the coast, Puget Sound to LA” when she was not in San Francisco. Margaret may have been off the radar of police in San Francisco when she disappeared from the local scene, but she was far from the wrath of vagrancy punishment. In 1925, police in Portland, Oregon arrested Margaret for vagrancy. A judge convicted Margaret and sentenced her to four months in the local jail. At some point after Margaret was released from jail, she left Portland and traveled to Tacoma, Washington. Police there arrested her for indecent conduct—which was usually another name for sex work related charges. A judge fined Margaret $100 and ordered her to be held in jail for “Board of Health.” Margaret eventually was forced to leave Tacoma and made her way to another city in the Northwest.


802. Margaret Campbell no. 54561, Imprisoned, San Quentin Inmate Files (SQIF).

803. Ibid.

804. Ibid.

805. Ibid.
By 1927, Margaret traveled to Seattle, Washington. Police there—like many of other cities that she traveled—jailed her for vagrancy and soliciting sex work. The judge eventually dismissed the case. However, later that year, police in Seattle would jail Margaret again as a disorderly person. A judge would eventually release her but likely conditioned her release on leaving the city under anti-vagrancy laws. Forced migration that stemmed from criminalization was one thing. And returning to a familiar place was another thing, yet the same for women marked as undesirable and notorious in multiple regions like Margaret.

By January of 1928, Margaret had picked up her life again and migrated back south along the Pacific Northwest coast to San Francisco. Immediately upon arriving in California, local police began surveilling her activities. Over a five-day period in 1928, San Francisco police arrested Margaret twice for vagrancy and soliciting sex work. Both cases were eventually dismissed. Later that year, Margaret traveled to Oakland where police there also arrested her for vagrancy. After Margaret was forced to serve a brief stint in jail, the Alameda county courts dismissed the case and forced her to leave.

Over the next four days, Margaret traveled back to San Francisco. Police continued their criminalization of Margaret and arrested her for vagrancy once in July, and then between August and November of that year, San Francisco police had jailed Margaret for vagrancy three more times. The year 1929 was nearly identical for Margaret in terms of how often San Francisco police arrested or jailed her. Between February and November, San Francisco law enforcement arrested Margaret fourteen different times and charged her with vagrancy.

Sometimes police arrested Margaret weeks apart and others resulted in multiple arrests in as little as three days. In one instance, police in San Francisco raided Margaret’s home. Police accused her of theft and charged her with “KEEPING A DISORDERLY HOUSE AND VAGRANCY.” A judge would later dismiss the case after Margaret was jailed for a few days. However, police continued to surveil and harass Margaret. Over the next three years, San Francisco police officers would jail Margaret ten more times for vagrancy. Despite San Francisco police jailing Margaret over thirty times, the courts had dismissed most of the charges against her or sentenced her to short terms of confinement in the San Francisco jail. Local police had excessively criminalized Margaret with a range of punishable vagrancy offenses from “soliciting prostitution,” “disorderly person,” “keeping a disorderly house,” “disturbing the peace of the public” to “resisting an officer,” and a host of other petty crimes. The map below is a sketch that includes all of the geographical locations listed throughout
Margaret’s prison case file in California.

Figure 8.13 Map of Margaret Campbell no. 54561
migration and arrest history, 1898-1930
and arrest history, 1900-1933
“She was a Drunk Roller and Alley Worker”

Before settling on the West Coast, Eileen Sparks had lived in various different cities. She noted to prison administrators that she was born January 18, 1898 in Lincoln, Nebraska and lived there with her family up until the age of two. In 1900, Eileen’s parents moved to Joplin, Missouri until she was about 12 years old. When Eileen was a teenager her family moved again, this time to St Louis for a few years and then to Springfield, Illinois. When Eileen finally left Springfield for good, she traveled to several cities in the South West, from Texas to Denver to California. Over a fourteen-year period, Eileen moved around to various cities in the West. She worked both in formal and informal labor economies. A trail of arrests records reveals how often police harassed her and the numerous times she was arraigned by courts and judges on vagrancy charges. Police in at least ten different cities had booked and jailed Eileen twenty-six times through the 1920’s and early 30’s. In the year 1923 alone, Eileen had confronted police in four different cities and made several trips from city to city frequently.

On May 19, 1923, police in Denver, Colorado arrested Eileen for violating vagrancy laws. A judge ordered her to pay $10 before releasing her from jail. Law enforcement wanted to send a message to women like Eileen. Sex work was punishable by jail and or a fine. Six days later, Denver police arrested Eileen again for vagrancy. This time, the judge enhanced the penalty and ordered Eileen to pay “$25 and Costs.” Finally, the judge suspended Eileen jail sentence, likely under the condition that she leave the city. Over the next few weeks Eileen traveled to Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, like Denver, police surveilled and jailed sex workers and made it more difficult for Eileen to earn money in her line of work. On June 6, 1923, police in Los Angeles booked Eileen on solicitation charges. A judge convicted her and ordered a suspended sentence of sixty days charging her with vagrancy.806

Similar to the rulings against Eileen in Denver, Los Angeles authorities wanted to send a warning message to Eileen that sex work and rolling Johns was illegal and not tolerated. Within the next two weeks, Eileen left the South Central district of Los Angeles and traveled back to Denver. Police in Denver harassed Eileen again and the judge punished her by enhancing her suspended sentences from fines to thirty days in jail. Holding jail time over the head of people convicted of vagrancy charges, especially Black women gave the courts the authority to push people out of town while empowering police to make their lives worse if they

806. Eileen Sparks no. 55119, Imprisoned, San Quentin Inmate Files (SQIF).
continued behaviors deemed punishable, especially selling sex and rolling Johns. Fines and fees could be an incentive for some sex workers to get out of the game in fear of being constantly harassed or thrown in jail. For unemployed poor and working class people, having the options of paying a $10 or $25 fine or serving jail time was not an option at all. When Black sex workers like Eileen paid fines to avoid jail time, judges became aware that fines did not always work as punishment. For some Black sex workers however, just because they did not work in informal employment did not mean they were all poor or cashless and couldn’t pay fines to secure their release.

It had not been a full week since a judge released Eileen and police in Denver had jailed her again for vagrancy. The judge refused to give Eileen anymore suspending sentences. The judge ordered her to serve sixty days in the county jail. In the eyes of law enforcement, women like Eileen had to be forced out of town or jailed. After the courts released Eileen from jail this time, she left the city and went back to California. In a short period in 1923 alone, Eileen made trips to four different cities. In May of that year Eileen was in Denver. Two weeks later, Eileen had made her way to Los Angeles. Over the next two weeks, Eileen would travel back to Denver and then to San Francisco and Oakland later that year.

By 1924, Eileen was back in Los Angeles and would make frequent trips to various different cities in the West. Eileen not only moved up and down the Pacific coast and within the State of California but she also traveled from Los Angeles to Phoenix. By this time, Eileen had developed her own migration circuits with Los Angeles as the central location. Eileen’s migration patterns in the American West and within the State of California was similar to Weems, Waters, and Campbell’s itinerant movements of leaving and returning to certain locations.

The Great Migration cannot be viewed only as a settlement story. Examining short distance travels and city to city movement illuminates the transient pathways that Black people created for themselves in the West as well as those that were forced upon them. Geographically, un-centering Black migrations out of the US South also opens the window for examining Black mobility in more nuanced ways. Waters, Campbell, and Sparks all traveled to and from different cities after locating to the West. Black people already born in the West moved around to different regional cities as well. Below is a map that uses geographical markers located in Eileen’s criminal identification profile constructed by the CBCII.

807. Ibid.
Figure 8.14 Map of Eileen Sparks no. 55119
migration and arrest history, 1898-1930
and arrest history, 1898-1933
Florence Monahan was the first official Warden at the California Institution of Women beginning in the 1930’s. By this time, Monahan was one of the leading penologist in the country and had served as the Warden of several women’s prisons. In her book, *Women in Crime*, published in 1941, she spoke about her experience at Tehachapi and published one of few first-hand accounts of imprisoned women in California at the time. Monahan claimed that Black women—segregated in Culver Cottage—usually caused the most trouble out of all the incarcerated women at Tehachapi. Though she only mentioned Black women a few times, her memory provides insight into their collective demands to administrators over food portions and other issues. In addition, Monahan would go on to state that many of the Black women “fight easier and harder than others do” under the guise of self-protection.808

According to Monahan, she was told many stories of “brawls” that occurred in Culver Cottage before her arrival. Ironically, there was one specific tale that she recalled in her book. She wrote:

For a number of years Aileen and Florence had maintained a fighting friendship, both in and out jail. They were in the midst of a row when, one morning before breakfast, Florence slipped outside armed herself with a three pronged rake. Returning to the cottage, she crept up on Aileen, sitting rocking in the Culver cottage living room, and brought the implement down on her head with such force it broke the rake. The blow knocked Aileen over but not out. She came up fighting mad. The cottagers took sides and there was a free-for-all, with several individual fights going at once. Vases were smashed and chairs were thrown.809

Monahan did not reveal why Weems became angry enough to strike Sparks [Eileen] in the head with a rake. However, fights like this could lead to the Parole Board denying Weems’ release and ordering a longer prison term, especially since a brawl she was involved in turned into a larger conflict and the destruction of institutional property.

After serving six months of her sentence at Tehachapi, the truth about the roller complaint against Weems in Los Angeles surfaced. The John—Emory Bradshaw—confessed in a written letter to the California parole board that he fabricated the complaint and made up a common narrative propagated by police and the


809. Ibid., 194.
typical John reporting a roller crime—a Black prostitute solicited and victimized a white man. Bradshaw never told police officers that he had a relationship with Weems prior to the alleged charge. “I had known this girl about three weeks . . . she and I had been on intimate terms,” he wrote. On the night of September 26, Bradshaw recalls that he and Weems had been drinking liquor and took a walk together. At some point, they “had a quarrel” and Bradshaw became so angry that “I had her arrested for spite.” The admission of perjury by Bradshaw illuminates the inherent power that Johns had if they actually testified against Black women.

Bradshaw would also go on to note specifically how he had framed Weems for grand larceny. Once he flagged a police squad car on the night of the alleged crime, the officers detained Weems immediately and made them both ride to the police station in the same vehicle. This gave Bradshaw the perfect opportunity to plant evidence against Weems. “I had eighty dollars in the roll in my pocket which I threw on the floor of the car to make it appear as though she dropped it as I had told the officers she had robbed me.” While Weems was awaiting trial, Bradshaw sent her a message urging her to take a plea deal. He was not afraid to lie to police officers and the courts in-order to punish Weems. He wanted to show her how much power a white man possessed. His confession continued, “I sent her word she had better plead guilty because the Judge wouldn't take her word against that of a white man.” Bradshaw was absolutely right and Weems took his threat seriously and plead guilty to petty theft with priors in order to avoid a longer indeterminate sentence in prison.

Weems was not the only Black woman at Tehachapi falsely charged by a white man in Los Angeles. Maize De La Cruz maintained that she was innocent too. However, the presiding judge in her case refused to believe a Black woman who had been “convicted in as many as 25 or 26 cases involving moral conduct and other violations” in Los Angeles over a white man with “unquestionable character.” Maize claimed that she had known Everett True for over five months and that “he often stayed all night with her.” She would also note that prior to her arrest “Mr. True tried to get her to go with him to Stockton to live on a ranch, but she had

810. Florence Hicks no. 56866, Imprisoned, SQIF.
811. Ibid.
812. Ibid.
813. Maize De la Cruz no. 50033, Imprisoned, SQIF.
814. Ibid.
refused; that he had been over to her house the night before and gave her $10.00 to pay on a furniture bill.”

Black women like Maize and Weems—who attempted to build more intimate long-term relationships with white men were still vulnerable to punishment when these men realized they could not control them. While True was at Maize’s house, a Black man came by to visit. According to Maize, True then “became angry and said that he would get even with her.”

Maize maintained that, True got even by making up a false robbery story—a felony that led to Maize’s imprisonment. Unlike Maize, Weems, though wrongly imprisoned this time, was amongst the professional roller class and her twenty year multi-region criminal identification profile was the evidence. Regardless of Bradshaw admitting to perjury, Weems’ prison term and release was under the control of the California Board of Penal and Parole authorities.

The following month after Bradshaw wrote his letter to the parole board, Weems managed to get her brother in law Roosevelt M. Patrick to agree to employ her as a domestic housekeeper if parole authorities released her from prison. Roosevelt also agreed to provide Weems a place to live in Los Angeles and pay her a wage of $15 per month. Weems, like most rollers were used to getting lump sums of cash in one night and the freedom to live where they chose. At the heart of parole, indeterminate sentencing, and the prison reform movements in the 1930’s was the question of labor and post release control. Monahan most definitely made it her goal to transform Tehachapi into a leading prison reform institution for women. She took pride in developing the first working schedule for women at Tehachapi. She writes,” [a]t once I put everyone to work with favors for none . . . [t]he women were given an opportunity to learn things that would help them learn a livelihood after their release. We adopted a realistic training program, for I have always believed that there always will be a chance for women who can prepare food—salad makers, short-order and pastry cooks.”

Despite if Weems learned to become a better domestic worker in prison, or if employment and housing was offered, or the fact that her alleged victim had admitted perjury, the parole board still had the power to sentence her anyway that felt suitable up to five years.

On June 21, 1935, without knowledge that Bradshaw had already confessed, the Los Angeles Cop’s Office detailed their case against Weems. “This subject ‘picked up’ a man on the street, steered him into a

815. Ibid.
816. Ibid.
817. Monahan, 191.
vacant lot; propositioned him for an act of sexual intercourse; during negotiations and preliminaries, she picked his pocket, taking therefrom the sum of $85.\footnote{818} By August, Weems remained incarcerated at Tehachapi. During this period, she began seeing the prison psychologist as a part of her application for parole release. There is no detailed notes on what Weems may have revealed about life her life except that she had left home as a teenage girl and got into trouble easily when she was unemployed. Weems reported to the prison psychologist that she “wants to go to Texas and farm with Father and brother.”\footnote{819} In addition, Weems stated that she had “taken up religion” and “will lead a strait life.”\footnote{820} Weems likely realized this was what parole authorities wanted hear. However, the prison psychologist did not believe that Weems was capable of changing. Dr. Schmidt wrote that Weems was “inferior with moron intelligence and poor adjustment prospects.”\footnote{821} For women like Weems who had rejected domestic, servant, and “respectable” labor most of their lives, the prison and parole system operated as a form of racial and gendered labor discipline.

California parole authorities eventually released Weems from prison in the fall of 1935. According to her last reported age, she would have been around thirty six years old. There are no post release parole files on Weems which means she did not have to check in with parole authorities following her release. If Weems lived by the plan that she relayed to prison authorities, she would have left California and moved to Texas in midst of the Great Depression. There is not enough available information to know what the rest of Weems’ life amounted to or if she ever settled in a particularly city with Lincoln Hicks. After 20 years of running from law enforcement, in an out of police squad cars, fighting court cases, serving time in jails and prisons, and long train rides across North America, it is possible that Weems had grown tired and exhausted from the toll it took on her body, mental health, and life experiences. What did it mean for Weems to lead a strait life in the midst of the Great Depression?

It was important for this dissertation to locate Weems in space and time within the story of millions of Black Americans on the move during the first wave of the Great Migration. This project was structured in a way that allowed me to center Weems’ experiences while using the stories of other Black women to generate

818. Ibid.
819. Ibid.
820. Ibid.
821. Ibid.
knowledge about rolling Johns, migration, policing, and the criminal legal system that would not be known if I only examined Weems’ story. The vast amount of press and police sources used throughout this project bring us closer to a better understanding of the impact of policing and the criminal legal system in the lives of migrating Black women.

Over a twenty-year period, according to the records constructed by the CBCII, Weems traveled to at least fourteen different cities from the Midwest, North West, Western Canada to California. Between 1925 and 1935, she had migrated up and down the Pacific West coast and across the US Canadian border and served four prison terms. In one year—1925, Weems traveled to British Columbia, Canada and back across the border to Snohomish and Everett in Washington down the pacific coast into Sacramento, California. If Weems was born in Oakland like she reported to penal authorities, her family migration to Everett and Seattle when she was a young girl would have given her certain geographical knowledge of the Pacific West coast, especially with close proximity to British Columbia, Canada. Weems’ family leaving Oakland in the first decade of the 20th century and migrating to Everett and Seattle, Washington is a Black migration story that primarily occurs in the West and does not fit into the traditional southern exodus story.

My dissertation has shown that the Great Migration and Black travel was not always static in the early 20th century. Furthermore, a conversation about Black migrants on the move without examining the movement to professionalize police and the criminal legal system fails to illuminate certain factors that restricted mobility and forced migrations. The one-way ticket and Black migrant settlement story, though reflective of the overarching Great Migration narrative overlooks how certain urban experiences impacted migrants differently. In addition, most public and scholarly maps of the Great Migration reveal a primarily generalized story of Black movement at the expense of marginalizing individual migration patterns like Nettie Weems.

I wanted to close out this dissertation with a map that broadly visualizes Weems’ migration patterns and confrontations with Johns, police, jail, prosecutors, and criminal legal courts across North America. Without qualitative migration maps, the complexity of Black women’s spatial histories remain invisible, obscured, or articulated only as general migration experiences. Weems’ cartographic sketch, like all of the maps displayed in this dissertation, offer visual evidence that Black women’s migration histories in the early 20th century are more nuanced than spatial studies have revealed. Qualitative mapping and tracking the spatial lives
of itinerant sex workers broadens the Great Migration narrative to include the histories of Black women on the move and the varying push/pull factors that impacted their experiences in each city they traveled.

Figure 8.15 Map of Florence Hicks (aka Nettie Weems) no. 55119 migration and arrest history, and arrest history, 1899-1935
Without the surveillance and carceral tracking that was instrumental to the professionalization of criminal identification in North America, Weems and many other Black women’s working, personal, and carceral histories may have remained invisible or forgotten in the traditional Great Migration settlement narrative without the reconstruction of carceral and press documents that framed their lives in the historical record. The scattered and extensive migration patterns of Black migrant women would not otherwise be illuminated if we never looked at a map. The map above charts Weems’ arrest history, institutions she served prison time, and the migration story she noted to prison authorities from the turn of the century to 1935. The map is not a biographical or linear year to year sketch. However, the arrows and various points of geographical movements from region to region are counter to almost any Great Migration map that exists.

The goal of “All Kinds of Money” was not to write a biography of Weems, which is difficult with the scattered records of her life and her constant evasion of carceral surveillance. As a primary subject, Weems’ life and experiences however opens the door for new multi-disciplinary analysis in Black women’s history, sexual labor and migration studies, carceral studies, and spatial histories in the early 20th century. Weems was a woman of many names and identities that are likely impossible to uncover due to her intentional practices of evading detection. In fact, I have no evidence that her birth name was even Nettie Weems either. She reported different ages and biographical information to different carceral archivist at times when it suited her. From all the records sought for this project, her birth city changes from Kansas City to Nebraska to California to Texas. What the records demonstrate, however, is the importance of aliases, performance, disguise, and mobility in the world of urban rollers and sex workers in the early 20th century.

In Nanaimo, British Columbia, Weems became Anne Smith when she registered a room at the Commercial Hotel. She was a fugitive from the United States at the time. It is likely that in each city where she found short term lodging and worked her business, she would have had a host of names that changed accordingly. The fact that British Columbia, Canadian authorities had a record of many of Weems’ aliases suggest a sophisticated network of cooperation with police in the United States.

From the available archival traces, identification officials across North America tracked the following names back to Weems: Nettie Weems, Nettie Bibbs, Dollie Bibbs, (Dolly Bib), Anne Smith, Mary Anderson, Grace Hanson, Grace Jones, Pearl Jones, May Jones, Mable Jones, Florence Jones, Florence Hicks, Curley
Hicks, and Maud Allen. Weems’ self-naming practices highlight the varying disguises she performed in each city where she claimed to be a different person for the sake of her business and evasion of police identification. In other words, aliases tracking in itself reveals a geographical story that provides more evidence of a more nuanced Black mobility story in the early 20th century.

Throughout this dissertation, I have taken as many archival traces of Weems’ life and reconstructed these sources into a broader history that generates specific knowledge about Black women whose migrations and encounters with urban Johns, police, and the criminal legal system where similar to her experiences. By examining urban life from the perspective of Black female rollers, my dissertation illuminates how the professionalization of policing and print media in the urban city reproduced and legitimized stereotypes about migrating Black women. This project also illuminates how massive the roller’s economy was across North America, especially with knowledge that a substantial amount of financial losses were unreported.

Despite what is interpreted from roller reports—the declaration of war by law enforcement across North America is evidence of the intricate connection between rollers and the formation of a particular type of racial, gendered, and spatial policing in the urban city. The stories uncovered in this dissertation have highlighted only a fraction of Black women “tricking the tricks” and “rolling” Johns and their extensive traveling from city to city during the first wave of the Great Migration. My dissertation has demonstrated the need to further examine race, gender, underground sexual labor, and mobility in the context of Black migration history and the movement to professionalize police and the criminal legal system in the early 20th century.
Bibliography

PRIMARY SOURCES

Archive and Manuscript Collections

Sacramento, California
California State Archives
San Quentin Inmate Case Files, Department of Corrections. Office of Secretary of State. California State Archives, F3750:

San Francisco, California
San Francisco Public Library

Washington State Archives

Vancouver City Archives

Sound Recordings

Ma Rainey, “Traveling Blues”; "Leaving this Morning”; Runaway Blues” ;“Lost Wandering Blues”
Bertha “Chippie” Hill, “Streetwalker Blues”
Bessie Smith, “Jail House Blues,”; “Sing Sing Blues”

Newspapers and Periodicals

Arkansas Democrat
Alton Evening Telegraph
Altoona Tribune
Anaconda Standard
Atchison Daily Champion
Austin American
Buffalo Evening News
Buffalo Commercial
Buffalo Courier
Buffalo Enquirer
Billings Weekly Gazette
Bakersfield Californian
Butte Daily Post
Butte Miner
Chattanooga Daily Times
Californian
Chicago Tribune,
Chicago Chronicle
Daily Arkansas Gazette
Daily Press
Democrat and Chronicle
Daily Notes
Dayton Herald
Des Moines Register
Des Moines Tribune
Detroit Free Press
Daily Picayune
Dothan Eagle
Edmonton Journal
El Paso Times, Texas
El Paso Herald
Fort Wayne Daily News
Fall River Globe
Fort Scott Republican
Fort Worth Star Telegram
Gazette and Daily
Gazette
Great Falls Tribune
Hartford Courant
Herald-Press
Independence Daily Reporter
Independent-Record
Jackson Daily News
Joliet Evening Herald-News
Kansas City Times
Kansas City Star
Liberty Vindicator
Lima Gazette and Lima Republican
Los Angeles Herald
Los Angeles Times
Los Angeles Evening Express
Missoulian
Moberly Monitor-Index
Montgomery Advertiser
Moberly Weekly Monitor
Nanaimo Daily News
News-Journal
New Castle News
Nevada State Journal
News-Palladium
News and Observer
New-Orleans Argus
News-Journal
New York Times
Oregon Daily Journal
Oroville Daily Register
Oakland Tribune
Pensacola News Journal
Pacific Bee
Pine Bluff Daily Graphic
Province
Press and Sun-Bulletin
Pittsburgh Daily Post
Pittsburgh Press
Quad-City Times
Record-Union
Richmond Item
Rock Island Argus
Reno Gazette-Journal
St. Louis Globe-Democrat  
St. Louis Post-Dispatch  
Salina Semi-Weekly Journal  
Sioux City Journal  
Seattle Star  
Sacramento Star  
Sacramento Bee  
Sacramento Union  
San Francisco Call  
San Francisco Examiner  
San Bernardino County Sun  
Shreveport Journal  
Sioux City Journal  
Seattle Post-Intelligencer  
Spokane Chronicle  
Spokane Press  
Spokesman-Review  
Semi-Weekly Spokesman-Review  
Salt Lake Herald  
Star-Gazette  
South Bend Tribune  
Star Press  
Topeka Daily Capital  
Topeka Daily Herald  
Topeka State Journal  
Topeka Plaindealer  
Tennessean,  
Tucson Citizen  
Tampa Tribune  
Tacoma Times  
Vancouver Sun  
Vancouver Daily World  
Victoria Daily Colonist  
Victoria Daily Times  
Vicksburg herald  
Wilkes-Barre Times Leader, Evening News  
Weekly Republican  
Windsor Star  
Watchman and Southron
Books


Boghardt, Thomas. The Zimmermann Telegram: Intelligence, Diplomacy, and America's Entry into World War I. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2013.


Daly, Christopher B. *Covering America: A Narrative History of a Nation's Journalism*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012.


Sowande’ M. Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea: Terror, Sex, and Sickness in the Middle Passage* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2016);


**Secondary Sources**


**Dissertations and Theses**


Websites

https://lawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org/.
https://freedomonthemove.org/