
Foundations for a Future

Civil War and Reconstruction
African American Populations
and Homelessness

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York

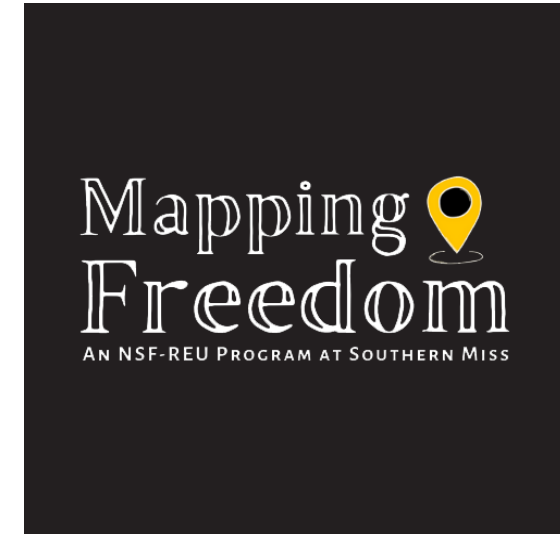




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Context and Thesis

CHAPTER VI.

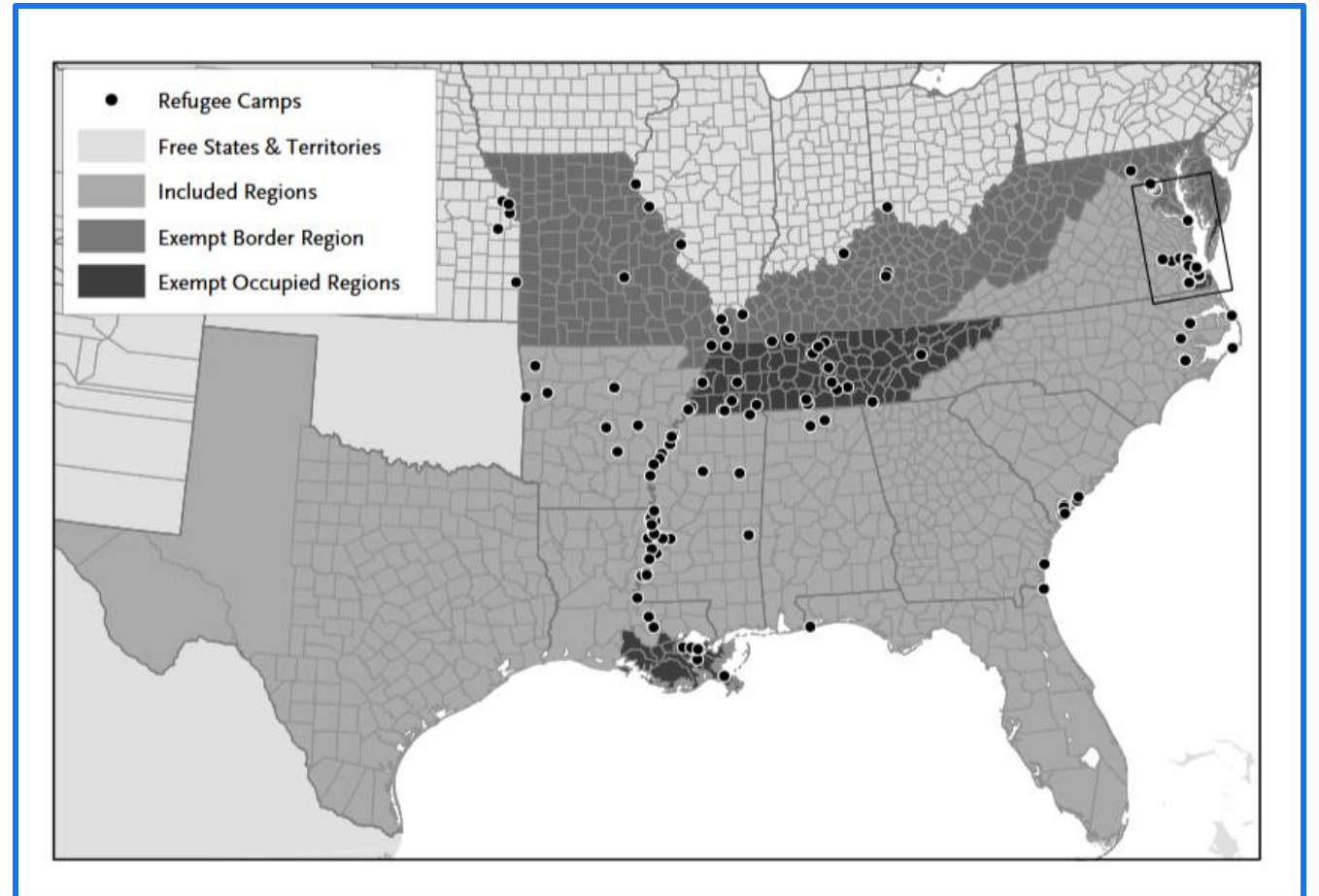
AN ACT to amend the Vagrant Laws of the State.

Who consid-
ered vagrants. SECTION 1. *Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Mississippi, That all rogues and vagabonds, idle and dissipated persons, beggars, jugglers, or persons practicing unlawful games or plays, runaways, common drunkards, common night-walkers, pilferers, lewd, wanton, or lascivious persons, in speech or behavior, common railers and brawlers, persons who neglect their calling or employment, misspend what they earn, or do not provide for the support of themselves or their families, or dependants, and all other idle and disorderly persons, including all who neglect all lawful business, or habitually misspend their time by frequenting houses of ill-fame, gaming-houses or tippling shops, shall be deemed and considered vagrants under the provisions of this act, and on conviction thereof shall be fined not exceeding one hundred dollars, with all accruing costs, and be imprisoned at the discretion of the court not exceeding ten days.*

- Refugees and contraband camps during the Civil War
- Vagrants, effective re-enslavement, and the word "homeless" during Reconstruction
- Thesis and research goals
 - The lack of consideration for **basic needs** after emancipation for the formerly enslaved in urban areas
 - Homelessness comes from the legacy of enslavement, according to the letters in the CWRGM collection

Literature Review

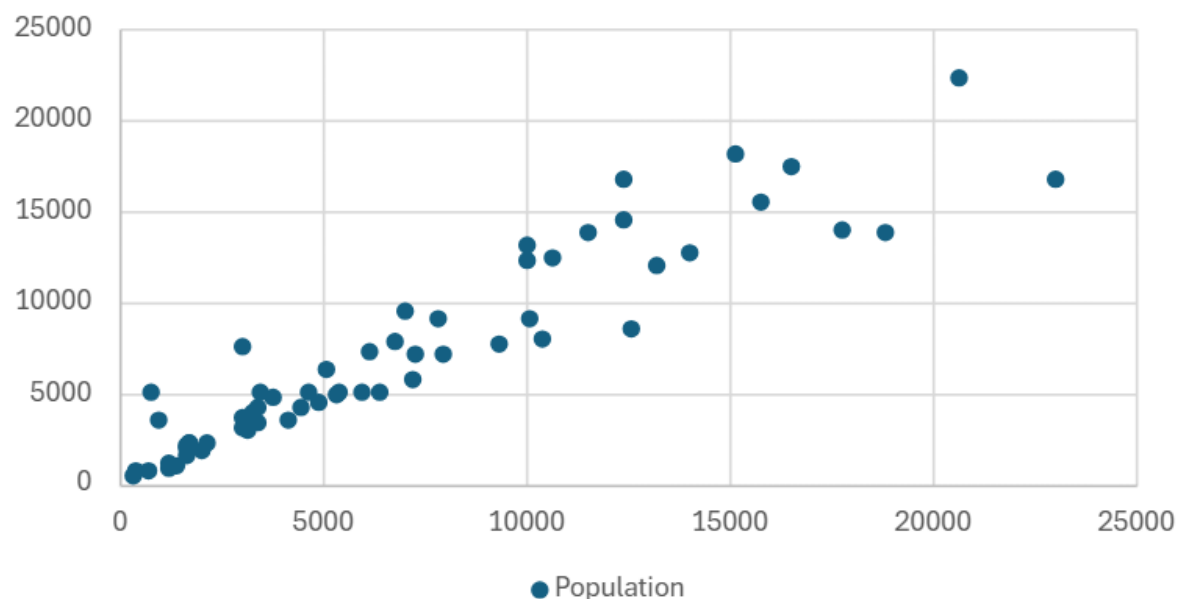
- Walker (1974) and Murrell Taylor (2018)
 - A history of refugee and contraband camps in Mississippi
- Mannheimer (2014)
 - A history of vagrancy laws and the liberal discretion they allowed police to re-enslave African Americans



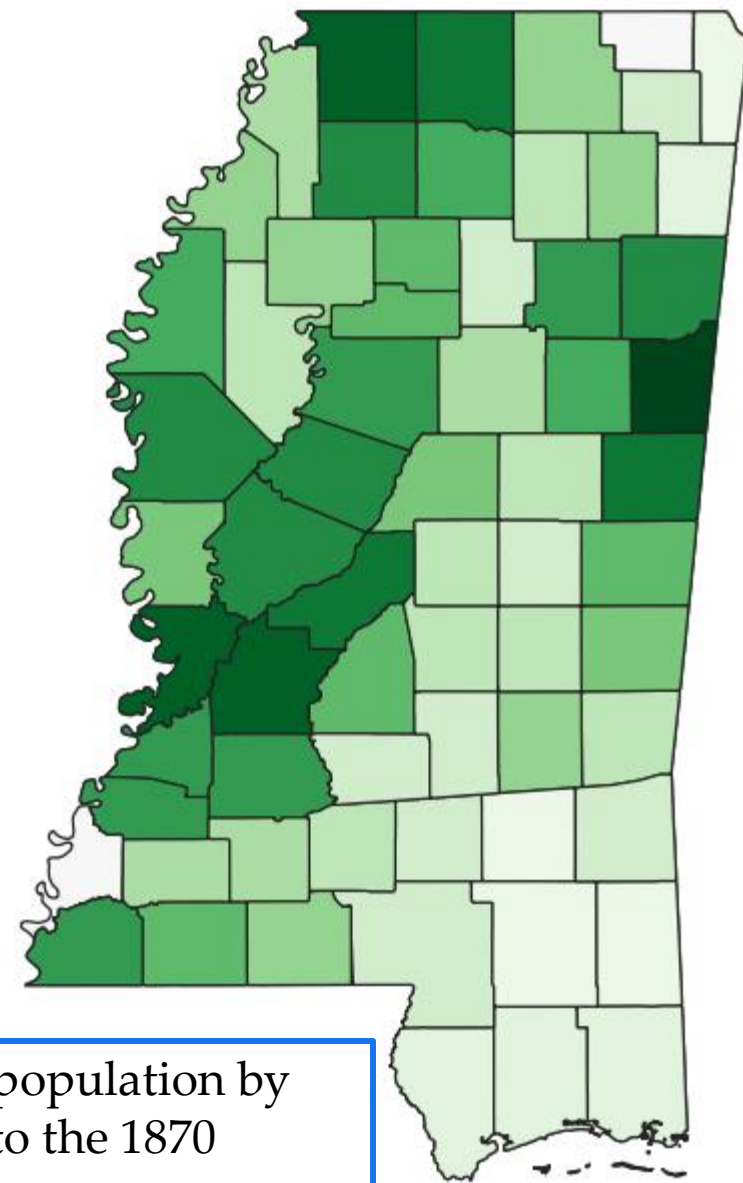
Amy Murrell Taylor. *Embattled Freedom : Journeys Through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018. <https://research-ebsco-com.lynx.lib.usm.edu/linkprocessor/plink?id=4e2eee2f-e7cf-335f-8c0e-64ca4044a35e>. Pp. 58

Results

Correlation: Enslaved (1860) and AA Pop (1870)

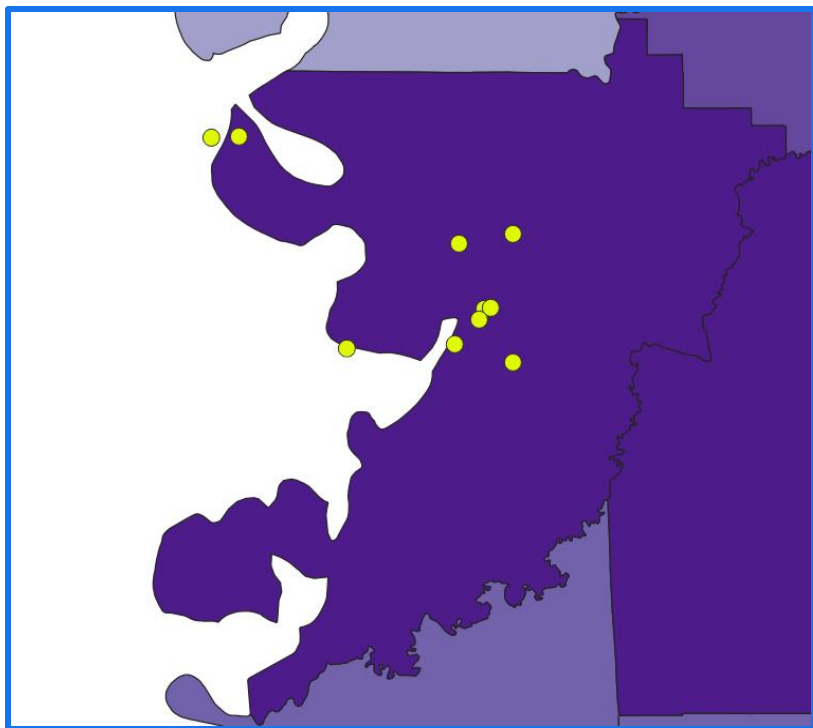


Correlation map between the enslaved population by 1860 and the free African American population by 1870



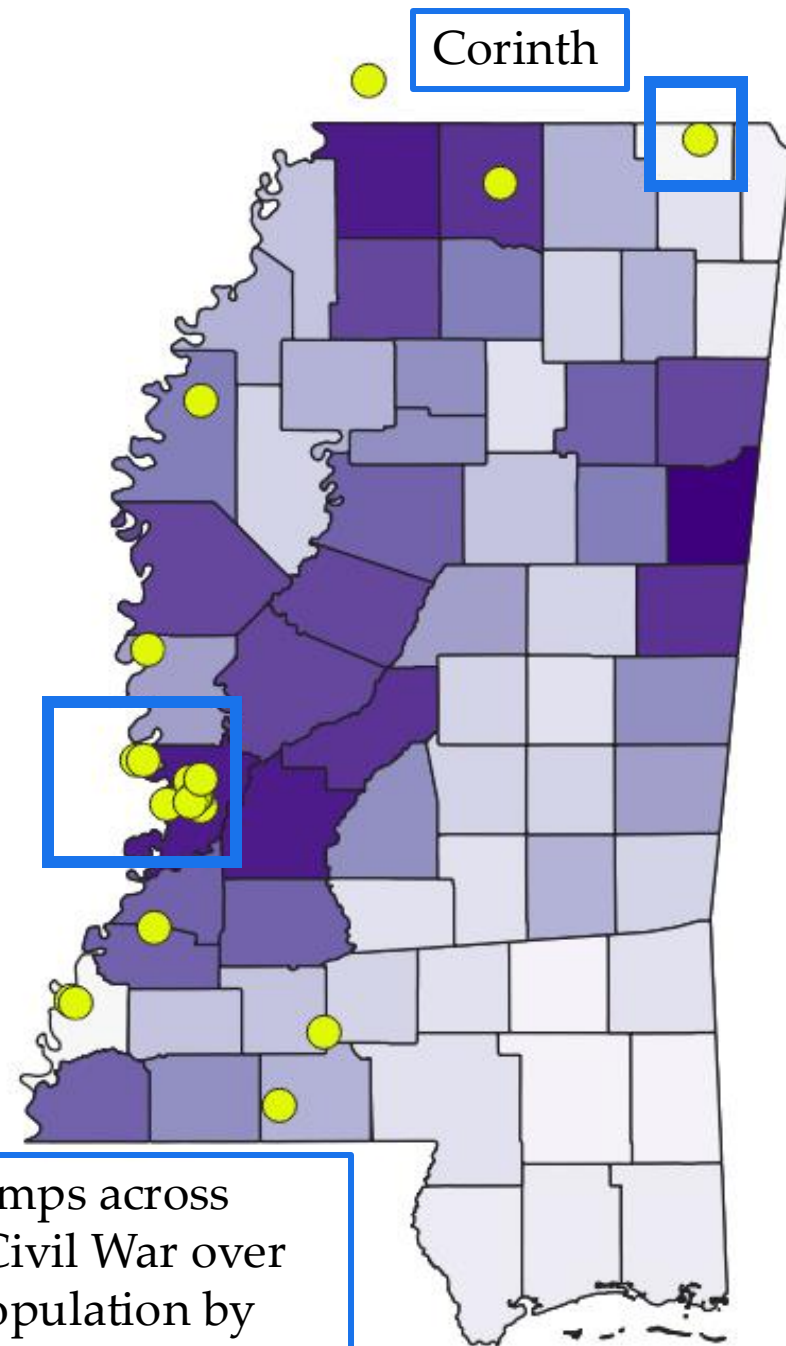
African American population by county, according to the 1870 census

Results



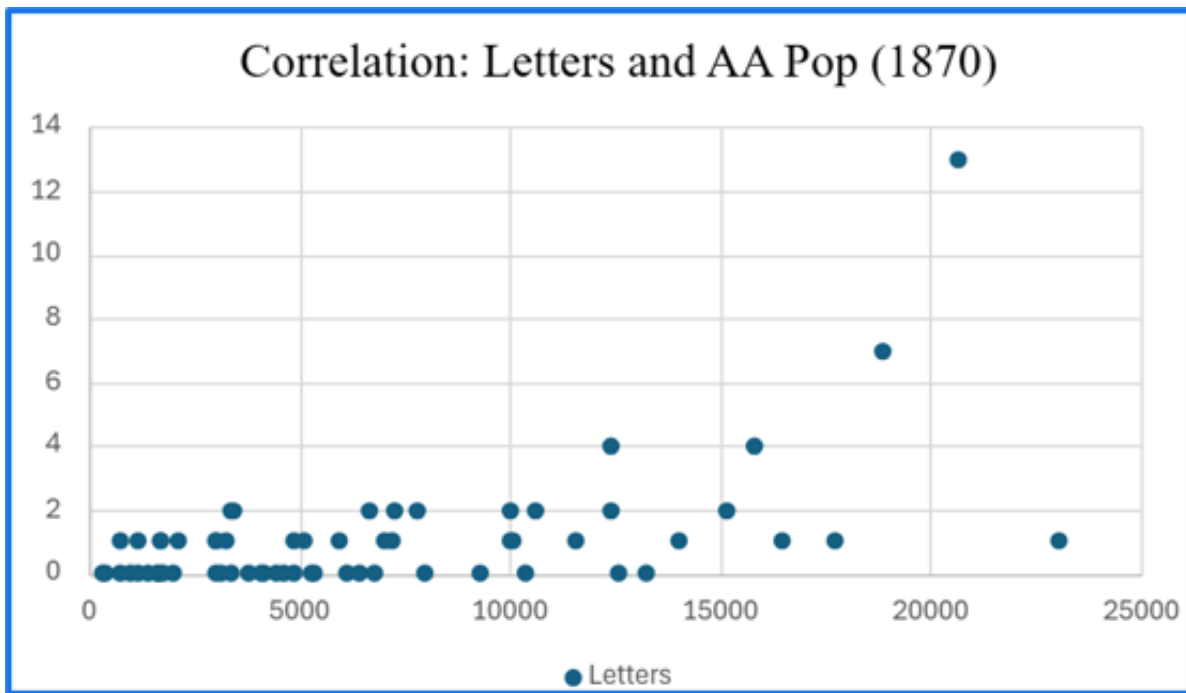
Warren County

7/18/2025

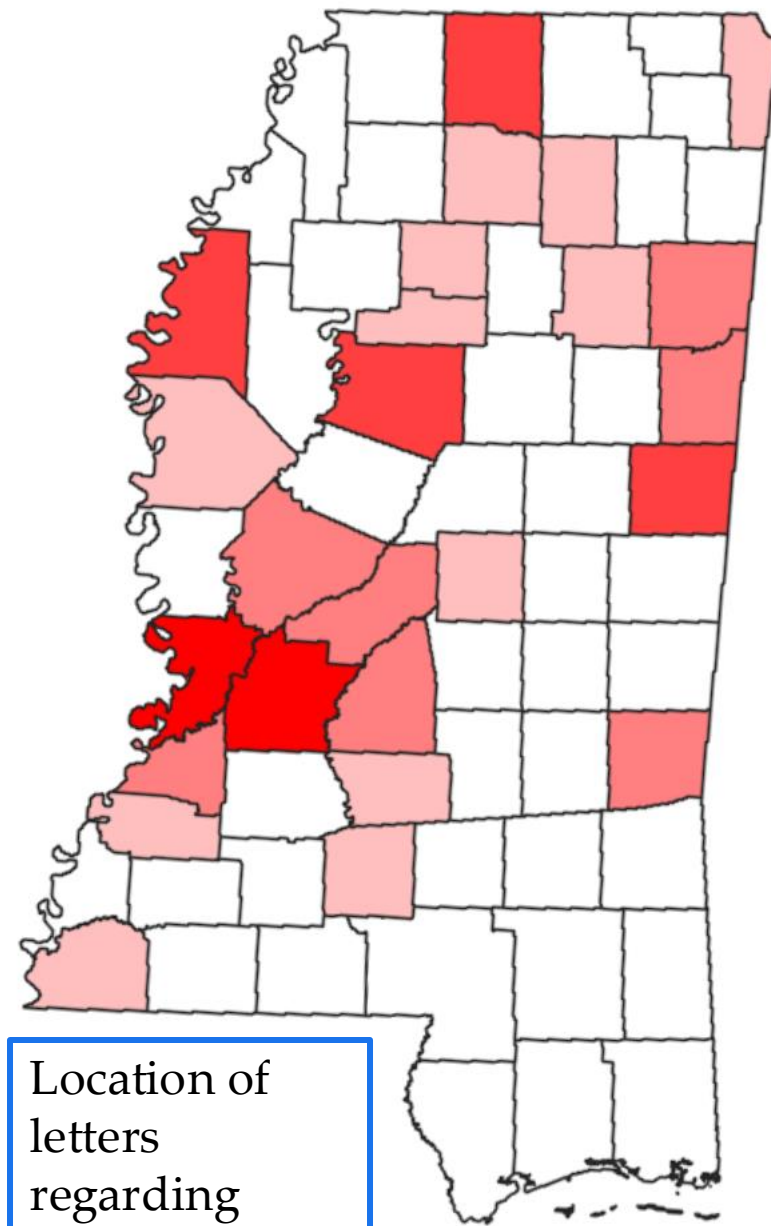


A map of contraband camps across Mississippi during the Civil War over the African American population by 1870.

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Correlation map between free African American population and the origins of the letters discussing homelessness



Location of
letters
regarding
homelessness

Discussion

- Legislation was not corrective or provided a foundation for a future: **contraband camps and vagrancy laws were a reaction to a housing crisis, seeking to temporarily correct and control**
- However, many African Americans sought their own means of community protection
 - **Mass racial violence in November of 1875**

Burris, Abraham B., "Letter from Abraham B. Burris to Mississippi Governor Adelbert Ames; October 13, 1875," Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Ames Series 803: Box 997, Folder 10 in *Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi*, accessed July 14, 2025, https://cwrqm.org/item/mdah_803-997-10-19.

Vietsburg Oct 13 1875
Gov Ames
Honored Sir
It grieve me to the greatest extent
to relate to you the dastardly murder
of my friend Johnson who was
such a true and as brave as
a baby. The chaos which we
are surrounded needs a great
deal of attention. We all have sign
our names to the Militia roll and
only want arms. Now we has
the cry of all we are poor and
cannot afford to buy guns
and expect on down some pro
tection they will kill me. Every
one of us. But give us guns and
we will show the elements that
the colored people will fight. We have
nothing of this kind at least we have not
seen so bad is not now. But you know Sir
the colored people is being trampled down
for years they have committed outrages
upon outrages upon them and they
have around them to an armed mob.
Jury Young and I will volunteer
my service to protect the lives of this
disinherited race the colored people



Limitations and Methodology


- Many African Americans mentioned in the letters could not/did not write letters on their own behalf
- **Many homeless people are not mentioned in Census or population records**
- Small sample size (60 letters)
 - Locational data mapped was from letters and data pulled from census records
 - QGIS for mapping



Conclusion

How did this synthesize and add to the literature?

What are some areas for future research?



Thank you! Questions?



Works Cited

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