



End of the Line: A History of Little Rock's West Ninth Street

Berna J. Love

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The Line was more than a street. West Ninth Street, known to locals as The Line, was a boundary that separated Little Rock's black and white societies. It was an artery of the city, a thoroughfare east and west, and a hive of activity - business, religion, and entertainment. Most notably, it was the heart of the black community. Its history began long before official Jim Crow laws enforced rigid restrictions between black and white relations in Arkansas and the South. The West Ninth Street community sprang from a log shantytown erected by the Federal Army to house former slaves who flooded Little Rock after Emancipation. By the early 20th Century, West Ninth Street was developing into a strong commercial district predominantly owned and operated by blacks. Whites ran businesses there and lived in "mixed in" neighborhoods in the area, but by the 1920's, Ninth Street was securely established as the civic, social, and commercial center of Little Rock's black population. But, prejudice and fear cut short success and security for the capital's black people. After the lynching of John Carter on the corner of Broadway and Ninth Street in 1927, many blacks fled and black-owned businesses fold-ed. Carrying hope for tolerance and aspirations for better educational and economic opportunities, many of Arkansas's black refugees followed the Great Migration north to big cities like Chicago and Detroit. In 1929, when the Great Depression gripped America, it gripped the Line. Many of the street's black entrepreneurs and professionals suffered failure and bankruptcy. World War II revived the street community, and it took on a new role as a safe haven and playground for black soldiers. During its heyday in the 1940s, Ninth Street never slept. It resembled a little Harlem, vibrant with music, money, girls, and good meals. Ninth Street would never have the same sense of excitement and community again. During this renaissance, Ninth Street heard a new tune-progressivism...

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