MORE THAN A MATTER OF NICKELS AND DIMES: S.H. KRESS STORES IN THE NEW SOUTH

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT……..……..iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS…..…….…….iv

LIST OF FIGURES……..…v

INTRODUCTION- METHODOLOGY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF A DIME STORE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE STUDY ……..……..…1

CHAPTER I- S.H. KRESS & CO: A HISTORY OF AN AMERICAN INSTITUTION…….14

CHAPTER II- A MODERN INSTITUTION IN THE NEW SOUTH……..27

CHAPTER III- MRS. AND MS. KRESS: CREATING SPACES FOR WOMEN……..……47

CHAPTER IV- CONSUMPTION BY COLOR: THE SEGREGATED KRESS STORE……...64

CONCLUSION - INTERPRETING THE KRESS LEGACY…….....87

BIBLIOGRAPHY……....……...…....……..99

ABSTRACT

Since the opening of the first S.H. Kress five and dime store in 1896, founder Samuel Kress became notorious for selling low-price variety goods in architecturally significant stores. With his company's in-house architectural division, Kress stores were distinct from their competitors as their elaborate facades were visually appealing additions to Main Street America. The architectural legacy dominates literature about Kress stores, which while significant, does not explain the other historical influences on the buildings. This thesis fulfills this mission through a cultural landscape study of the stores, identifying major factors that influenced the built environment of Kress.

This is a regional study focused on the southern United States where Samuel Kress opened his first set of stores. This significance of this decision is that the American South in 1896 was distinct from other parts of the country in several ways. Kress was faced with a region still feeling the effects of the Civil War and reconstruction in the political, economic, and social scene. The influences of New South modernization movements, increased female consumerism, and racial segregation, weighed into Kress's southern operations.

Until the company's closure in the 1980s, Kress stores bore witness to events in urban, retail, and social history. Of particular recognition is their role as venues for sit-in protests in the 1960s. These events, combined with the significance of historical influences on the store's physical environment, provide a fascinating legacy to interpret. However, as aforementioned, the primary heritage of Kress is architectural. This thesis also contends for a more inclusive legacy of the chain's history through the preservation and interpretation of these remaining spaces.

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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

1.1 Goldsboro, N.C. Kress building……..…….…….…….21

1.2 “Main Street looking East, Durham, N.C.” Postcard……..…….……..43

2.1 Greensboro, N.C. Kress building……...……44

3.1 Interior of Anderson, S.C. Kress store……...……57

4.1 Interior of Montgomery, AL Kress store showing segregated drinking fountains……....82

INTRODUCTION – METHODOLOGY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF A DIME STORE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE STUDY

Historian Bernice Thomas begins her book on the architecture of the S. H. Kress five-and-dime stores with an anecdote. Driving in downtown Albany, Georgia, Thomas was so captivated by the pale-golden, intricately ornamented Kress building, she felt compelled to stop her car and admire it fully.[1] This thesis originated in a similar fashion. On a summer day in downtown Asheville, North Carolina, I first noticed the city's Kress building, a four-story corner structure covered in yellow brick and adorned with orange and blue terra cotta rosettes on the frieze and window bays. With three sides exposed, the building seemed to stand on its own, distinct from the neighboring commercial edifices through its design. Yet with a similar setback and massing, the building still seamlessly integrated into the downtown streetscape. My curiosity in this striking building - rehabilitated into an art gallery and condominiums - prompted my search for other Kress buildings in the state and eventually country. The large quantity of these buildings that continue to stand proudly across America's Main Streets thus served as a starting point for this study. Since my research interests lie in the interaction between society and the built environment, and an architectural history of the Kress buildings had been completed, this took the course of a cultural landscape study.

J. B. Jackson defines a cultural landscape as "a composition of man-made or man-modified spaces to serve as infrastructure or background for our collective existence."[2] Studies in the field of cultural landscapes interpret particular landscapes with considerable history of human use. Jackson's studies and the works by other scholars employing a similar method, argue that

[1] Bernice Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores: The Kress Legacy*, (Washington, DC: The National Building Museum, 1997), xi.
[2] J.B. Jackson, "The World Itself," in Jackson, *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*, ed. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 305.

places created by people in America carry significant public meaning. Buildings are not simply built without attention to and influence by the historical context in which they are built.

The public meaning of the built past is a long contested subject, involving opinions of varying disciplines. In 1975, the *New York Times* opinion pages hosted a sample of this debate between architectural historian Ada Louise Huxtable and urban sociologist Herbert J. Gans. Their debate centered on the type of buildings designated by New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission. Most designated structures were designed by professional architects, located in Manhattan, and used privately. Huxtable, then the architectural critic for the Times, supported the preservation of these "architectural monuments," arguing that "esthetic singularity is as important as vernacular expression." Yes these buildings only represented a small portion of New York's history, but their status as great achievements of architecture and design in the city warranted their preservation.[3]

Gans disputed that in landmark designation, preservation becomes a public act supported by public funds, and thus should take a broader and more inclusive approach. He supported the preservation of vernacular urban structures, such as boarding houses, tenements, and warehouses. This debate echoes among historic preservationists, architects, sociologists, urban historians, and among other professionals and invested citizens today. What prevents people of these differing disciplines from agreeing on the future of the built past is their varied training and terminology. As Dolores Hayden writes in *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, "Architecture, as a discipline, has not seriously considered social and political issues, while social history has developed without much consideration of space or design. Yet it is the

[3] Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 8-9.

volatile combination of social issues with spatial design, intertwined in these controversies, that makes them so critical to the future of American cities."[4]

The Kress store buildings are similar to Huxtable's preferred buildings in that they were designed by a professional architect and in many cases serve as the archetype of a certain architectural style in cities where they stand. Yet as spaces open to and designed with the public in mind, they fit Gans's criteria of preserving places with extensive social history. Therefore, as Hayden advocates, a history of these buildings offers an opportunity to reveal the interconnected social and spatial issues that influenced Kress design and legacy.

The only existing study of S. H. Kress stores, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores: The Kress Legacy*, was written by Bernice Thomas and published in 1997 by the National Building Museum. The work is an architectural history of the buildings that the company erected and modified across America. As Richard Longstreth writes, "commercial" has been a "dirty word" in architecture for much of the twentieth century. When classifying a building as "commercial," the idea is the architect's work has been compromised by marketplace demands, emphasizing the profitability over style in design. In commercial design, the use of decorative elements or motifs was assumed to catch a customer's eye rather than suit a particular architectural aesthetic. Therefore Thomas's book aims to engender respect in the architectural community for this particular commercial enterprise by typifying Kress buildings as means of artistic expression. She argues that amid visually incoherent Main Street retail landscapes of the early twentieth century, Kress buildings stood as works of civic art.[5]

Like Thomas, modern day architectural historians have begun to expand their esteem for commercial architecture as these buildings gain historic significance. Downtown revitalization

[4] Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 8.
[5] Richard Longstreth, Foreword to *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores: The Kress Legacy*, by Bernice L. Thomas (Washington, DC: The National Building Museum, 1997), viii-ix; Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores*, 168-169.

campaigns of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have increased appreciation for historic Main Street landscapes. Longstreth himself has pioneered this resurgence, writing on the commercial built environments of Los Angeles and Philadelphia. This trend is by no means widespread, as many professional journals remain committed to classifying commercial architecture as a product of compromise. Yet this compromise, or influence from various external pressures on commercial architecture, is the interest of this study.[6] With an in-house architectural division, which will be discussed in-depth in the next chapter, the Kress Company designed and built to suit the majority of its stores. As a result, every physical aspect of the store was designed by employees of Kress, approved by the founder, and reflected the mission of the company. For this reason, the chain lends itself to the discovery of the political, economic and social influences that manifested in the store architecture. [7]

Longstreth continues to say that Thomas's book is on a serious subject and is not looked at through nostalgic eyes, yet his conclusions are contrary. He writes, "At a time when the underlying premise of capitalism was in greater doubt than ever before, Kress stores were beacons of faith in free enterprise as a beneficent as well as economically rewarding endeavor. Kress stores are more than pretty designs. They are commitments to a better everyday world, to civic pride, to the bounties of democratic society."[8] This thesis argues that the historical record and legacy of southern Kress stores focuses on the architecture and merchandising method of the chain, excluding significant physical aspects of the stores that challenge Longstreth's claim of the company's commitment to a "better everyday world." While the architectural history of Kress stores is significant, this thesis expands existing Kress literature to include the study of urban cultural landscapes and social history, particularly in the southern United States. Though

[6] Longstreth, in *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,* viii-ix.
[7] Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,* 20-22.
[8] Longstreth in *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,* ix.

he was Pennsylvania born and raised, Samuel Kress opened his first set of stores in the eleven former Confederate states. The explanation and significance of this decision will be explained in Chapter One, which provides an institutional history of the Kress Company and the dime store enterprise. The southern Kress stores were designed and erected around particular historic influences – postbellum modernization, the rise of the female consumer, and racial segregation. Writing about Kress stores simply as architectural vestiges denies these historic influences, which manifest in each store and are just as visible as the type of cornices on a store's exterior. After arguing the prevalence of these factors in Kress history, this thesis will contend for a more inclusive interpretation of the Kress legacy in the South.

As another scholar, Paul Groth explains, landscapes are "the interaction of people and place: a social group and its spaces, particularly the space to which the group belongs and from which its members derive some part of their shared identity and meaning."[9] This idea of shared group identity derived from a public place assumes minorities experience a place similarly as the dominant race, gender and class. Yet historically, the way people think about and memorialize physical places is affected by their personal experience. Dolores Hayden writes, "The power of place- the power of ordinary urban landscapes to nurture citizens' public memory, to encompass shared time in the form of shared territory- remains untapped for…most ethnic history and most women's history."[10] Public space introduces personal memories, tied with the collective memories of the respective society. As Hayden contends, typically the societal collective memory is for the population that was considered the appropriate public for the space. As five-and-dime stores, these establishments did not discriminate against low-income populations. But

[9] Paul Groth, "Frameworks for Cultural Landscape Study," in *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1.
[10] Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 9.

physical evidence of segregation in the southern stores shows the chain preferred white customers, not all members of society.

While this thesis argues the influence of societal factors on the physical environment of all southern Kress's, an attempt to interpret local significance will be made through deeper research into particular stores. Therefore this thesis will provide a comprehensive study of Kress stores in the South, but with an emphasis on North Carolina. The majority of examples will be from stores in this state, chosen because of availability of resources but also because the diverse sample of stores that existed. The state hosted fourteen stores in cities and towns with a variety of population size and historic influences. Kress stores were located from New Bern, the state's oldest city, to Charlotte, a 'New South' city that exponentially grew after reconstruction. In addition, North Carolina was the state in which the Civil Rights dime store sit-in protests originated in 1960.[11]

This thesis is unique, as a landscape study of a dime store has not yet been attempted. Aside from Thomas's architectural history of Kress stores, company histories have been written for F. W. Woolworth & Co. and S. S. Kresge Company. These are mostly glorifying institutional histories, and though Jean Maddern Pitrone's *F. W. Woolworth and the American Five and Dime: a Social History* claims to be more; the social history she uncovers is that of the Woolworth family. Other literature on dime stores focuses exclusively on their role as a stage for Civil Rights protest. These works recognize the implications of segregated public spaces, but do

[11] Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps for Asheville, Charlotte, Durham, Fayetteville, Gastonia, Goldsboro, Greensboro, High Point, Raleigh, Rocky Mount, Salisbury, Wilmington, and Winston-Salem, NC, North Carolina Map Collection, http://www.lib.unc.edu/dc/ncmaps/sanborn.html.

little to interpret the creation of these racialized landscapes and their significance in preceding decades.[12]

A number of likely explanations exist for the neglect of this type of study. These include the varying ideas of architectural merit of commercial buildings and the irrelevance of dime stores to present day retail. However the primary reason is the notion of nostalgia associated with dime store history, which will be expanded on in the next chapter and conclusion. This thesis reveals facts that challenge the wholesome, democratic, American ideals and memories the majority of shoppers associate with dime stores. Yet the contribution to various fields of history is significant, as Kress stores witnessed important themes and events in architectural, retail, social, southern and urban history.

First, the study of southern Kress stores contributes to the field of business and retail history. Literature on the history of department stores is widespread. A series of institutional histories of various chains were written in the mid-twentieth century, including Ralph Hower's *History of Macy's of New York, 1858-1919* and Norman Beasley's *Main Street Merchant: the story of the J.C. Penney Company.* Yet the historical questions of department stores' influence on twentieth century retail and consumer landscapes were not addressed until the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, with works like William Leach's *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture* and Richard Longstreth's *The American Department Store Transformed*, which were helpful in determining the retail climate of the time period this thesis addresses.

The five-and-dime store however is not technically classified as a department store. The two enterprises shared many qualities, including the gender classification of employees and

[12] Jean Maddern Pitrone, *F. W. Woolworth and the American Five and Dime: a Social History* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2003).

customers, geographic locations, high volume and wide variety of merchandise, and both were typically part of a larger chain. Yet the low price points of the five-and-dime expanded their clientele beyond the middle and upper classes who frequented department stores. Therefore dime stores merit a separate study because they attracted a wider consumer base. The historical analysis on dime stores is limited beyond the few institutional histories aforementioned. The 1963 work, *Chain Stores in America, 1859-1962* is a comprehensive, but dated, assessment of the major American retail chains. A chapter dedicated to dime stores traces the founding and business activity of the major chains, but expands little on other social and historical influences.[13]

The location of Kress stores in the central business district of each city contributed to the stores' role as Main Street institutions. America's thriving downtown areas of the early twentieth century are an increasingly popular historical topic. Especially as more of these districts and individual buildings become eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the awareness of their historic significance continues to grow. Yet not only the physical downtown landscape, often referred to generally as 'Main Street', but the experiences and interactions that occurred within the setting are an important part of modern American history. Alison Isenberg's *Downtown America* is the most comprehensive and serious examination of this phenomenon. Isenberg's work is goes beyond the archetypal tale of Main Street's rise and fall. Topics she unpacks include the gendered origins of the landscape, the use of postcards to promote a particular visual ideal for a downtown, the various economic players of the retail landscape, the logic of urban renewal, and the implications of prejudice in assumed public space. Since Isenberg's work is a national survey, there is room for expansion on these themes in a solely

[13] Godfrey Lebhar, *Chain Stores in America, 1859-1962* (New York: Chain Store Publishing Corporation, 1963).

southern context. Therefore *Downtown America* was an inspiration for many themes which this thesis uses Kress stores to explain.[14]

Since the focus is stores in the American South, "More than a Matter of Nickels and Dimes" will contribute to studies of the region in the era between Reconstruction and the end of the Civil Rights movement. Literature on the New South, particularly urbanization, industrialization, political changes, and race relations is widespread. Kress stores bore witness to several of these themes that affected the development of the postwar South. Thus the stores give insight to the conditions of shopping in southern towns and cities and the historical influences that shaped them, which few works cover comprehensively.

Sophie Kress, relative of Samuel Kress and contributor to the Kress Family History book, recalled about Samuel, "He had great confidence in the development of the South and his first step was the establishment of a store in Memphis, TN in 1896."[15] The decision to open the chain's first stores in the South was not a choice of convenience or accessibility, but rather a conscious judgment to capitalize on the market of newly organized, or reorganized, cities and towns. Southern cities, particularly new cities that originated after the Civil War, were the prime market for Kress's business. Yet the New South was not a new market free of historic influences. The southern Kress stores were constructed with three interconnected influences in mind.

First, the economic and political climate in the New South influenced the stores to emit a public image and physical environment that reflected modern values. Kress strived for his stores to be contemporary establishments, in keeping with the New South rhetoric encouraging departure from all Old South enterprises. Another historical change brought by the New South era was the growing public presence of southern women in the postbellum years. The formation

[14] Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).
[15] von Frank zu Doefering and Roberts, *Kress Family History*, 541.

of cities and increased transportation methods created accessible and safe environment for females to travel to and patron. Families began to obtain greater expendable income as southern wealth was no longer confined to agriculture, but other industrial and commercial methods. As a result, Kress stores were catered to this prime female customer base. However, because of the third influence, Kress's ideal clientele was restricted to white females. The racial climate lingering from the Civil War and Reconstruction led to the creation of a segregated marketplace, either through practices or attitudes. Adhering to Jim Crow laws and customs created additional work for the architects, builders, and employees of Kress stores, which was done without question in order to please the southern market and avoid legal trouble. Chapters Two, Three, and Four explore these three themes in more depth and explain how modernity, feminine appeal, and racial exclusion were on the forefront of Kress store designers' minds.

The periodization for this part of the study is primarily between 1900 and the onset of World War II. During these decades, the most building and remodeling activity was done by the company. Since conclusions will be drawn about the historical influences that manifest in the Kress physical environments, this time period is the most significant because it was when most stores were constructed. This thesis will contribute to the fields of urban, gendered and racialized landscapes. Jessica Sewell's *Women and the Everyday City: Public Space in San Francisco* on the gendered landscape of early twentieth century downtowns explores the separate but merged spheres of work and leisure. If the male sphere consisted of offices, the shopping institutions were spaces for females. The Kress stores were created as feminine environments based on the historical trend of women as primary material consumers. Various studies exist on the long-standing association between women and consumption which this study complements. These include Elaine Abelson's *When Ladies Go a Thieving*, Lizabeth Cohen's *A Consumer's*

Republic, Susan Benson Porter's *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers and Consumers in American Department Stores, and* Jennifer Scanlon's *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies' Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture.* Chapter Three will contribute to this literature through in-depth analysis of a particular type of southern feminine consumerism.

This thesis substantially contributes to the study of African American consumerism, retail employment, and methods of segregation. Grace Hale's *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South* and Robert Weem's *Desegregating the Dollar* are two relevant studies on the African American struggle to exert consumer power in a prejudice environment. This thesis uses Kress as a specific example of themes addressed in these works, specifically through looking at Kress's black customer bases and employees. Southern Kress stores used methods of Jim Crow architecture, strategies outlined in the article, *The Architecture of Racial Segregation: The Challenges of Preserving the Problematic Past* by Robert Weyeneth. Chapter Four will identify the approaches taken by the Kress Company to separate the races, through physical and behavioral barriers. Various changes over time in the physical environment of Kress stores will be shown, and how these changes were reflections of external influences.

This thesis concludes with the final years, eventual closing, and present-day opportunities for preservation and remembrance of southern Kress stores. The decade before the chain folded hosted defining events in the Civil Rights movement. Using findings from the previous chapter, the Kress lunch counter sit-ins will be explored in their significance as black consumer protests in an environment clearly created for white, female customers. Finally, the recent preservation and National Register designation of Kress buildings will be addressed. Here this study will attempt to contribute to the field of Public History by advocating for recognition of these places

for more than simply architectural significance, but as contested spaces with profound social history.

Like in typical cultural landscape studies, the richest source of information is the landscape itself. Therefore the Kress buildings themselves, including photographs, architectural drawings, and the physical structures contributed a wealth of information to the study. However, Kress stores were at peak relevance in the early 20th century and the historic Main Street landscapes they inhabited have changed significantly since. Other main primary sources consulted include city directories, Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, and newspaper advertisements. These sources work dependently to recreate a model of the historic downtown landscape. Southern city directories were racially distinguished, using either an asterisk or the letter "C" to note a person or business as African American. As a result, these directories are a wealth of information about black populations and presence in Southern cities.

The S. H. Kress Company building records collection, located in the archives at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C also supplied a volume of primary sources in this study. Hundreds of photographs, correspondence, architectural drawings and blueprints were consulted. However, like many for-profit companies, complete archival records of all business documents were not preserved for public use. Therefore information about the inner-workings of the company, employment standards, policies and procedures were found in trade journals, and from the studying physical environments and public presence of the company.

In her career as an architectural critic, Ada Huxtable published an article about the decline of the five-and-dime store. In it she wrote, "It was not the marketing of opulence. It catered to anything except expensive excess. It was an idea based on frugality and the most for the least. It was, in fact, a matter of nickels and dimes; it was the great American institution, the

five-and-dime."[16] The Kress Company challenged the cheap stigma first associated with variety stores, elevating five-and-dimes to institutions of American achievement through their opulent design and civic appeal. The physical environment of Kress stores were responses to the era's popularity of modern merchandising and feminine consumption. But the legacy of this institution – one of architectural distinction, achievement, and nostalgia – does not represent the experience of all customers. In reality, southern Kress stores were more than a matter of nickels and dimes.

[16] Ada Louise Huxtable, "Remnants of an Era: Two Silent Stores," *New York Times* 8 Nov. 1979, sec. 3, p. 1.

CHAPTER 1- S.H. KRESS & CO: A HISTORY OF AN AMERICAN INSTITUTION

At the time of their creation, chain stores were modern institutions, encouraging departure from the tradition of individual, locally owned stores. The chain store system was birthed in 1859 by the A&P grocery chain, then known as the Atlantic Pacific Tea Company. Five years after the opening of the first A&P, the company operated twenty-five stores, initiating the chain movement in America. The years between 1859 and 1900 marked the early development of chain stores, as pioneers in important chains began their endeavors. During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the system rapidly expanded into a wide range of merchandising outlets. Department, drug and grocery store chains were preceded by independent merchants of the same enterprises who were captivated by the chain system. Yet the five-and dime-chain was a novel enterprise, a new type of merchandising method created in the midst of the chain store model's rise to popularity.[17]

F. W. Woolworth developed the five-and-dime store business model when he opened his first variety store in 1879. Woolworth's idea of the variety store stemmed from retail experience and the belief there was a market for one-stop shopping establishments to save customers from visiting multiple stores. The nickel and dime price marks fell into his philosophy that this type of store should be accessible to a greater audience. Dime stores "made it possible for each customer entering their stores to become rich for the moment, able to say, 'Anything I see and want, I can buy".[18]

From Woolworth's conception, nine additional nationwide five-and-dime chains opened by 1920, collectively referred to as 'The Big Ten.' These included W. T. Grant Co., H. L. Green

[17] Lebhar, *Chain Stores in America*, 24-26.
[18] Alan R. Raucher, "Dime Store Chains: The Making of Organization Men, 1880-1940," *The Business History Review* 65, no. 1 (Spring 1991), 137;Lebhar, *Chain Stores in America*, 36-37.

Co, S. S. Kresge Co., S. H. Kress & Co., McCrory Stores Corporation, McLellan Stores Co., G. C. Murphy Co., Neisner Brothers, Inc., J. J. Newberry Co., and F. W. Woolworth Co.[19] The pioneers of these major chains shared similar upbringings. With the exception of the Neisner brothers who were Jewish, these businessmen were old-stock Americans, Protestant, and raised small towns in New York, Pennsylvania, or New England. Most had modest schooling, learning the business from practical experience.[20]

Samuel Henry Kress was born July 23, 1863 in Cherryville, an unincorporated community in the Lehigh township of Northampton County, Pennsylvania. The second of seven children born to John Franklin and Margaret Dodson Kress, Samuel ultimately followed his father's career footsteps in the retail field. After saving his earnings from working as a schoolteacher since the age of seventeen, Kress bought his first store in 1887. The stationery and novelty store was located in Nanticoke, Pennsylvania, about sixty miles from his hometown. Three years later, Kress was able to buy a wholesale stationery business in nearby Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, which he named Kress Stationery Company. Kress kept his early businesses local to Nanticoke and Wilkes-Barre, though was inspired by his business peers to expand the business into a chain store. The chain expanded the original company inventory to include more than just stationery and notions.[21]

The first store opened under the chain name, S. H. Kress & Co. five-and-dime, was in Memphis, Tennessee in 1896. Memphis was then a thriving cotton port and would "offer the maximum potential and minimum risk for the introduction of the Kress idea."[22] For the next decade, Kress only opened stores in former Confederate states with the exception of Oklahoma,

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[20] Lebhar, *Chain Stores in America,* 398-404; Raucher, "Dime Store Chains," 137.
[21] Karl Friedrich von Frank zu Doefering and Charles Rhoads Roberts, *Kress Family History* (Vienna, Austria: privately printed by the authors, 1930), 541.

which was a territory during the Civil War and predominately sided with the Confederacy. After Tennessee, stores expanded to Alabama (1897) and Georgia (1898) before the turn of the century. Kress's opened in the first years of the twentieth century in Florida (1900), Texas (1900), North Carolina (1901), Arkansas (1901), Virginia (1902), Mississippi (1903), Louisiana (1904), Oklahoma (1904), Kentucky (1905) and South Carolina (1905). In 1905, the chain began expanding to the border and Midwestern states of Kansas, Illinois and Missouri. With the exception of two stores opening in Colorado and Arizona in 1911, it was not until 1918 that Kress took his operations north or further west.[23]

Meanwhile by 1900, just over twenty years after the first Woolworth's opened, the chain had fifty-nine stores, including a major New York City branch, and cleared over five million dollars in yearly sales. McCrory stores, also begun in Pennsylvania, grew from one store in 1881 to twenty in 1900.[24] The major five-and-dime chains garnered such immediate popularity that any competition, whether old-fashioned notions stores or attempts at locally owned dime stores, was crushed. The pioneer chains dominated this new field, and though seven of 'The Big Ten' had company headquarters in New York City, like Kress, they often occupied separate markets. For example, Kress and Kresge had a gentlemen's agreement not to operate stores on the same city block to avoid confusion from the chains' similar names.[25] Additionally, certain chains were more common in particular regions. Kresge, headquartered in Detroit, had a higher concentration of stores in the Midwest. The G. C. Murphy Company opened stores in mining towns in Appalachia, to give residents an alternative to coal company-owned stores.[26] As aforementioned, Kress began business in the Southeast and remained a dominant presence in the region. Though

[23] Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,* 172.
[24] Lebhar, *Chain Stores in America,* 38.
[25] James S. Hudgins, *We Remember Kress* (Lynchburg, Va.: privately printed by the author, 1987), 103.
[26] Raucher, "Dime Store Chains," 134; G.C. Murphy Company Foundation Inc., "A Short History of the G. C. Murphy Company," G. C. Murphy Memories, http://www.gcmurphy.org/history.html (accessed February 5, 2012).

Kress was never the most profitable or largest chain, from 1896 to 1960 the company ranked first or second in greatest profits per store, meaning the chain preferred quality over quantity of stores.[27]

Between 1914 and 1930, variety chain stores in America expanded by 400 percent, with an 800 percent increase in number of stores and 1500 percent increase in volume of business. The growth was greater than any other type of retailing. The five-and-dime business model was simple in economic terms. The chain bought large quantities at discount prices, allowing products to sell for prices as low as a nickel or dime. The ability to set prices so low was dependent on mass buying of merchandise with high turnover. Mass buying was kept profitable when a company had multiple stores to stock the merchandise. Therefore the five-and-dime model was most successful as a chain store operation. This was all made possible by improved transportation and production methods in the 19th century that allowed faster shipments, stocking, and expanded markets and consumer goods. Even more successful were stores with layover stock on premises, allowing greater quantities of products to be purchased without storage expenditures.[28]

Dime stores also kept prices low by setting wages low. The work force was composed of an overwhelmingly female sales force. Saleswomen were initially paid two or three dollars a week and expected to have a high turnover rate. Most saleswomen were 'in transition,' either only employed until they found a husband or in this position for experience before finding a more lucrative career. With low wages and no experience required, most dime store saleswomen were young, unmarried, and ranged from working to middle class. In order to manage the sales

[27] Lebhar, *Chain Stores in America,* 36-38.
[28] Malcolm P. McNair and Eleanor G. May, *The American Department Store, 1920-1960* (Boston: Harvard University, Graduate School of Business Administration, Division of Research), 166; Lebhar, *Chain Stores in America*, 47-48;

force, competent managers were required in each branch. Five-and-dime chains recruited a particular type of male to fit this role, promoting the managerial position as an opportunity for high income and social prestige in the community.[29]

Qualities for successful managers included loyalty, trust, and the ability to abide by corporate polices yet use discretion to adjust polices to the particular setting. Promotion pyramids existed in most chains, with men starting at the bottom in store stockrooms as "learners" and progressing through the managerial ranks. These men experienced low initial salaries, frequent transfers and close supervision on the job. In 1904, four years after the Kress in Wilmington, North Carolina opened, the manager R.C. Rubright was transferred to the manager position at the Macon, Georgia store. In his place came Willis Scudder, then manager of the Greensboro, North Carolina Kress.[30] Filling positions in-house meant saving time and cost on training and employment searches. Formal qualification for managers differed among chains. Kress preferred young high school graduates rather than college educated men for these positions.[31]

S.H. Kress & Company was officially incorporated in 1907, after moving headquarters from Nanticoke to New York City in 1900. Samuel Kress's business soon became a family affair. Of his parents' six children to live to adulthood, all three of Samuel's brothers were involved in his business at some point. Palmer Kress, his younger brother closest in age, worked for three years as manager of the Nanticoke store before pursuing a medical degree. Samuel's two youngest brothers, Claude and Rush, were more involved and continued leadership of the company after Samuel's death.[32]

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[29] Raucher, "Dime Store Chains,"138-139.
[30] *Wilmington Morning Star*, February 9, 1904.
[31] Raucher, "Dime Store Chains," 144.
[32] von Frank zu Doefering and Roberts *Kress Family History*, 545.

Claude worked in the Nanticoke store from 1893 to 1907 when he became Vice President of the Kress Corporation. In 1924, he was promoted to President, living on Park Avenue in New York City. Yet Claude developed ties to the South while living in New York. He married an Atlanta native and split time at his plantation near Yemassee, South Carolina. Claude Kress's connection to the South reached beyond the chain store when he pursued agricultural experiments on his plantation. His reclamation of former rice plantations to produce narcissus bulbs earned him an award from Clemson Agricultural College in 1926.[33]

The youngest brother Rush also served in high positions of the company since 1900, including Vice President and treasurer. Like his brothers, he and his family lived full-time in New York City, though kept connections to the southeast by also marrying an Atlanta native. Additionally, after spending five years in Asheville during the construction of the new store, Rush Kress continued to hold membership in the Biltmore Forest Country Club. Though native Pennsylvanians, the two youngest Kress brothers held ties to the southeast beyond the Kress business endeavors, unlike the company's founder Samuel. Samuel's disinterest in the South as anything beside a profitable market may have stemmed from his favor for European culture.[34]

Although Kress's stores promoted low price points and expanded shopping practices to lower classes, Kress himself was a wealthy and prominent member of society. He remained a bachelor his whole life, living at 1020 Fifth Avenue after moving the company headquarters to New York City in 1900. He was a Mason, and member of the Sons of the Revolution and the Lutheran church. Additionally, he belonged to several leisure clubs, including the Automobile Club of America, the New York Athletic Club, and country clubs in Tarrytown and New

[33] von Frank zu Doefering and Roberts *Kress Family History,* 548.
[34] von Frank zu Doefering and Roberts *Kress Family History*, 549; Asheville, North Carolina city directory (Piedmont Directory Company, 1922-1926).

Rochelle, New York and Palm Beach, Florida. Kress's passion for Italian art and culture took form in his extensive collection of rare Italian furniture, paintings, marbles, and velvets.[35]

Kress's relationship with Italy extended beyond a hobby. The October 1, 1929 edition of Italian newspaper *Il Messagero* reads, "The Head of Government today received at the Palazzo Venezia Cavaliere Samuel H. Kress of NY, well known merchant and collector of art - an old and tried friend of Italy and fervid admirer of the Duce and Fascismo."[36] Kress's admiration for Mussolini's government led him to fund the restoration of several noteworthy monuments in the country, "as homage to the Duce and the Nation." Kress's relationship with fine Italian culture appears at odds with his profession as a dime store owner, yet the Kress stores merged the two interests through their architecture and design. While the merchandise the store carried was mass-produced and inexpensive, Kress's fondness for upscale design manifested in the store's elaborate facades and interior fixtures.[37]

The connection between Samuel Kress's personal design aesthetic and his chain store buildings was manifest in the stores' architecture. The earliest stores were located in rented or purchased existing buildings. Transformation into a Kress store simply involved installing the standard red and gold exterior sign, notifying customers of the establishment. Yet in 1905, the company employed its first architect, creating a formal architectural division in the 1910s. By this time, Kress was an established business and household name especially in the South. The company used their success to spend additional money on new, elaborate buildings that outshined other variety chains.[38]

[35] von Frank zu Doefering and Roberts *Kress Family History*, 544.
[36] von Frank zu Doefering and Roberts *Kress Family History*, 544.
[37] von Frank zu Doefering and Roberts *Kress Family History*, 544.
[38] Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,* 20-21

Figure 1.1 The Goldsboro Kress building, built in 1909, is an example of the standard yellow brick store of a "simplified neoclassical" style. *Kress Collection, National Building Museum*

Julius H. Zeitner, the first recorded architect, initially made renovations on existing buildings. The first new construction of a store was in 1909 in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. That next year, another architect, Seymour Burrell, joined Zeitner in designing North Carolina's first built-to-suit stores in Goldsboro and Salisbury. Designing buildings in-house established a set of features that would appear in every store, regardless of location. This simplified store operations for both employees and customers, especially those transferring from different stores. Additionally, a typeset of exterior was adopted in the 1910s and 1920s. Bernice Thomas described the standard style as "simplified neoclassical." The buildings were pale yellow brick with off white trim and a central parapet hosting the Kress logo. Additional brickwork, terra-cotta elements and contrasting trims added variation to the standard, streamlined format in

different cities. Over fifty stores are documented with this basic style, including those in Goldsboro and Salisbury, North Carolina.[39]

More elaborate store designs appeared under E. J. T. Hoffman beginning in 1918. Hoffman's stores included the Italian Renaissance influenced structure on Third Avenue in New York City, a sophisticated geometric brick creation in Birmingham, Alabama, and the four-story terra-cotta adorned Asheville store. Erecting these more elaborate designs came with a hefty price tag. The 1926 store built in Portland, Oregon cost the company $500,000, which was typical of new Kress construction. But Samuel Kress refused to spare any expense for buildings to reach his aesthetic standards. As an art collector, the buildings became works of public art to Kress, often incorporating regional and iconographic symbols to stand out from surrounding commercial buildings. The Greensboro and Winston-Salem Kress buildings included tobacco leaf ornamentation, representative of the surrounding state's economy.[40]

George Mackay led the architectural division in the 1920s. The buildings designed during his tenure were in classical or historical European styles, similar to Samuel Kress's preferred artistic styles. The addition of Edward Sibbert to the architectural division in 1929 marked a transition toward new, modern styles of architecture. Sibbert remained with the Kress Company for twenty-five years, designing buildings with modern influences from his education at Pratt and Cornell University and early professional career in Miami. Around fifty Kress stores constructed in the 1930s and 1940s can be attributed to Sibbert. Among these are two of North Carolina's most modernistic buildings, let alone Kress stores, in Greensboro and Durham.[41]

Though they made their living on nickels and dimes, the top chains accumulated large fortunes, which many displayed publicly. Samuel Kress's art collection, known as the Kress

[39] Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,* 21-23, 30-31.
[40] Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,* 37-38.
[41] Thomas , *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,* 69-73.

Collection, includes over 3,000 works of European art and is distinct for its Italian Renaissance pieces. The collection was donated to art museums throughout the country between 1929 and 1961. The National Gallery of Art received the largest gift of the collection, including 390 paintings and over 2,000 sculptures. Additionally, Claude Kress funded the Kress Collection of Business and Economics located in Harvard Business School's Baker Library.[42] Yet it was the creation of opulent buildings and classical European architecture that prided both Kress and his competitor, Woolworth. Woolworth's built their grand fifty-two story office building in the center of downtown New York City, which in 1913 stood as the nation's tallest skyscraper. Additionally, the flagship Kress store, opened in 1935 on Fifth Avenue in New York City, was considered by an architectural critic, "the most imposing structure ever built for the exclusive use of a 5-10-25 cent store."[43] For stores that sold nothing priced over a quarter, was the expense necessary to create such extravagant and admirable buildings? For wealthy, upper class Americans like Samuel Kress, the answer lies in the validation of class status in this era.

The changing American economy of the late 19th century restructured the American class system, expanding the middle class to include a lower middle class, primarily consisting of former working class individuals. These individuals with newfound wealth threatened existing social standings with their aspirations for education, culture, and higher social rankings. The view from upper classes of this change as a social threat is not distinctly American. The Victorian bourgeoisie lamented the expansion of suburbs, loss of English countryside, and infiltration of the increasingly literate lower classes into their schools- all evidence of spatial and cultural intrusion into their elite lives. Wealthy Americans as a result strived to preserve and

[42]"The Kress Legacy," Kress Foundation, http://www.kressfoundation.org/about/kress_legacy/ (Accessed February 5, 2012); "Kress Collection," Harvard Business School Baker Library and Bloomberg Center, http://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/collections/kress/ (Accessed February 5, 2012).
[43]Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,* 117-118.

exert their cultural heritage in public, looking to classical European art and architecture as a guide. The styles of Kress buildings were attempts to uplift and reform the growing lower classes by exposing them to 'acceptable culture'. With exteriors in classic Italian, Greek, and Victorian styles, Kress buildings catered to the masses as well as attempted to enlighten them.[44]

Though consumer activity lessened during the Great Depression, business activities of the major five-and-dime chains were not substantially changed. Since success depended on multiple stores, each of "The Big Ten" continued to open stores throughout the span of the depression. For Kress, at least one store opened each year between 1929 and 1945, with the exception of 1936. Yet that year, total annual sales were still higher than the preceding year. Other chains seemed more immune, like Woolworth's which opened between an additional five and fifty-six stores each year from 1929 to 1940. But for others, the Depression required major changes including corporate reorganization. The chains hurt the most were those with too many small and low volume stores.[45]

A 1938 article in *Business Week* commented on the growing resemblance between dime stores and department store basements, as dime stores were abandoning their coin price points and department stores increased their discount operations. Different chains experimented in adding merchandise for a quarter or dollar in the early 1900s. By the 1930s as all major chains followed suit, "five-and-dime" became a symbolic term. The article suggested dime stores reevaluate their operations to define their own niches. For Kresge, the losses in the depression from too many unprofitable stores required this. Kresge successfully restructured the business into a larger discount store with a wider variety of priced goods, K-Mart. Yet for the five-and-

[44] Rita Felski, "Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class," *PMLA* 115, no. 1, Special Topic: Rereading Class (January 2000), 34-37.
[45] Lebhar, *Chain Stores in America,* 398-404.

dimes that withstood the Great Depression and ignored the article's advice, their success was short-lived after changes in retail patterns post World War II.[46]

Automobile transportation and suburbanization recreated the American consumer landscape, making Main Street and its enterprises irrelevant. Five-and-dimes on Main Street faced competition from suburban shopping centers, which were conveniently accessible by car. Few chains attempted to follow the expansion of the city's center, including Kress. In 1973 Kress built a store in the new Darby Acres shopping center in Charlotte, North Carolina leaving the downtown store, built in 1941, to face eventual decline.[47]

For Kress, the major signifier of postwar changes on the chain was the renaming of the Architectural Division to the Building Division in 1944. No longer did Kress employ professional architects to erect stores in strip malls. This change signified the declining emphasis on design, which was vital to attract customers in downtown stores, and the increasing emphasis on convenience and profitability. Additionally, the chain released the control over every physical aspect of the store they previously had when working with in-house architects. Full control over retail operations was relinquished beginning in 1963 out of economic necessity. By the next year, Kress became a subsidiary of Genesco, Inc. Genesco operated remaining Kress stores until liquidating and closing the struggling operation beginning in 1980.[48]

Besides geographic relevance, five-and-dime stores lost popularity as a retail enterprise. Ada Louise Huxtable writes, "What occurred was a total revolution in the American way of living and buying. Stores grew to warehouse size, and aisles of goods became acres of

[46] *Business* Week, March 26, 1938, 38-40; Raucher, "Dime Store Chains," 162-163.
[47] Drawings for Darby Acres Kress Store, February and March 1973, oversized documents in Kress Collection, National Building Museum.
[48] Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores, xi.*

products."[49] With Sam Walton's creation of Wal-Mart in Rogers, Arkansas in 1962, the discount store became the more modern alternative to the five-and-dime variety business. No longer confined to small city blocks, discount stores benefitted through greater size capabilities while populating suburban strip malls. Just as five-and-dimes gained popularity as the new modern shopping enterprise, they lost relevance as discount chains borrowed and updated their business strategies, using modern automated technology to appeal to middle class suburban shoppers.[50]

Before their demise, five-and-dime stores changed the American standard of living by extending a variety of goods at affordable prices. The stores earned an early reputation as 'poor person's department stores.' However through opulent exteriors and a novel concept, five-and-dimes reached nationwide popularity by the 1920s.[51] In 1960, Robert C. Kirkwood, then president of the Woolworth Company wrote a history of the business. In his eyes, the Woolworth's story was "truly representative of the thrilling romance of America – of America at its best." Additionally, he calls the company a tribute to the free enterprise system of America.[52] Yet the events of 1960 at Woolworth and Kress lunch counters prove the businesses were not examples of freedom for everyone. The historic interpretation of dime stores is dominated by nostalgic ideas like Kirkwood's, clouding their more complicated history.

[49] Ada Louise Huxtable, *Architecture Anyone? Cautionary Tales of the Building Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 202.
[50] Sharon Zukin, *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture* (New York: Routldge, 2004), 80-82.
[51] Raucher, "Dime Store Chains," 131.
[52] Robert C. Kirkwood, *The Woolworth Story at Home and Abroad* (New York: Newcomen Society in North America, 1960) 5.

CHAPTER 2- A MODERN INSTITUTION IN THE NEW SOUTH

Out with the old and in with the new

Since C. Vann Woodward's publication of *The Origins of the New South* in 1951, debates among historians regarding the reality of the era have taken the forefront. Major questions center on the true differences or rampant myths of the Old South and the New South.[53] This thesis does not attempt to side with any scholars on these debates, but rather use defining characteristics of the period referred to as "The New South" to place the development of southern Kress stores in context. Of primary importance is the image New South promoters created that would have reached a northern entrepreneur like Samuel Kress. Whether this image was an accurate representation of the condition of the South in this era is a separate historical inquiry. Nonetheless, Samuel Kress opened his chain stores in the era as a reaction to New South propaganda and then became a New South promoter himself through his enterprises.

Defining characteristics of the antebellum South – slavery and a plantation based economy – contributed to the lack of urban development in the region. The 1850 census recorded only thirty-four places in the eleven soon to be Confederate states with a population of over 2,500.[54] The South's population was dispersed across rural areas, with antebellum cities organized to facilitate trade. Surrounding rural populations ventured into towns for various services and business opportunities. Still, on the eve of the Civil War, only six cities in the South ranked in the fifty most populated US cities. Furthermore, out of the largest one-hundred cities, only ten were in soon-to-be Confederate states.[55] The arrival of railroads began to spur urban

[53] C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); Davis, Harold E. Davis, *Henry Grady's New South: Atlanta, A Brave and Beautiful City* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990) 17.
[54] Population of 100 Largest Urban Places: 1850, U.S. Bureau of the Census, http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab08.txt (Accessed February 5, 2012).
[55] Population of 100 Largest Urban Places: 1860, U.S. Bureau of the Census, http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab09.txt (Accessed February 5, 2012).

growth in the 1850s; however progress was stunted by the Civil War. The aftermath of the Civil War left the South in ruins – from its landscape to economy and political structure.

Yet urban development of the South did not occur directly after the war. The period between 1865 and 1880 served as a time for agricultural recovery. Attempts to revive the traditional plantation system met challenges of destroyed land and lack of cheap labor. Progress was stunted in focusing on old ways during these decades. The population residing in southern cities increased from 9.6 percent in 1860 to only 12.2 percent in 1880.[56] After reconstruction ended in 1877, the South was left to rebuild its society. While some areas reverted to traditional ways, calling for the return of local agrarian economies, other southerners realized recreating the Old South was impossible after the drastic changes the Civil War created.

Those promoting departure from the plantation economy included an emerging new, young, merchant class, eager to regenerate the region through alternative economic methods. One result was the organization of isolated areas in South into towns and cities, functioning as centers of economic production. Between 1880 and 1910, the population living in southern villages or towns grew by five million. Villages by definition were settled places with less than 2,500 residents; towns and cities had greater populations. The railroad boom attributed to urbanization, allowing convenient movement across the southern landscape. Combined with the turn of the century industrial era which generated sawmills, textile factories and mines, distinctions between rural and urban areas were visible.[57]

Even the few southern cities organized prior to the Civil War were dependent on agricultural cycles. New Orleans, the largest southern city in 1850, buzzed with activity only in

[56] David R. Goldfied, *Region, Race, and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 276.
[57] David R. Goldfield, "The Urban South: A Regional Framework," *The American Historical Review* 86, no. 5 (December 1981), 1013-14; Don Harrison Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 8-11.

cotton or tobacco shipment seasons. The city's social and cultural calendars were synchronized with the seasons as well.[58] New South cities were distinct in their greater dependence on manufacturing and industry and less on the surrounding agriculture. As economist William Nichols writes, "Southern cities, in short, were full-fledge members of the urban nation, distinguished only by latitude and pace." Though they lagged behind in development, cities in the South adopted characteristics of northern urban areas more increasingly in the earlier decades of the twentieth century.[59]

The largest cities of the Old South included Charleston, New Orleans, Richmond, Mobile, Louisville and Savannah. These cities were highly populated by the South's standards, yet between 1790 and 1860, New Orleans and Charleston were the only two to be among the nation's ten most populated. The most populated town in North Carolina on the eve of the Civil War was Wilmington, with 9,552 residents. Yet during the decades of urban growth beginning in 1880, antebellum cities were nudged out of population ranks by cities that barely existed prior to the war. Though the population of Charleston, once the largest city in the South, grew every decade following the war, the pace was so comparably slow that in 1920, it no longer ranked among the hundred most populated cities in the nation. On the other hand, Atlanta, Georgia, with 9,554 residents in 1860, was rebuilt after the war to host 89,872 people by the turn of the century. The growth was not short lived. In 1930, over 270,000 people lived in Atlanta, one of the New South's model cities. Atlanta represented complete recovery and departure from its antebellum days. Other New South cities with similar growth patterns included Birmingham, Alabama and Charlotte, North Carolina. The population shift away from the coasts and into

[58] Goldfield, "The Urban South: A Regional Framework," 1013.
[59] William H. Nichols, "Southern Tradition and Regional Economic Progress," *The Southern Economic Journal* 26, no. 3 (January 1960), 194.

piedmont regions was a reflection of the changing southern industries. With textiles and steel becoming an integral part of the New South economy, the emphasis on was shipping weakened. New South promoters used the stunted postwar growth of antebellum port cities to their advantage.[60]

Besides population, a signifier of southern urban growth was the prevalence of Main Street landscapes. Based on a northern industrial model, various southern industries became more efficient and numerous through methods of mass-production. As more industries and commercial enterprises entered cities, a need arose to organize varying institutions into a coherent business district. Interplay between real estate interests, developers, city planners, bureaucrats and retailers created downtown landscapes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Though southern cities' downtowns varied by their specific institutions and establishments, the goal of representing the city's achievements and civic identity was forefront.[61]

New South rhetoric

Despite the region's gradual transition to the northern industrial model, the backwards stigma associated with the Confederate states lingered. The term "New South" was made popular in the 1880s by Henry W. Grady, the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* newspaper who used rhetoric to promote an updated, modern version of the region. Grady propagated an antithesis between the Old South's unsustainable dependence on slavery and agriculture and the New

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[60] Population of 100 Largest Urban Places: 1790, U.S. Bureau of the Census, http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab02.txt (Accessed February 5, 2012); Population of 100 Largest Urban Places: 1860, U.S. Bureau of the Census, http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab09.txt (Accessed February 5, 2012); Population of 100 Largest Urban Places: 1920, U.S. Bureau of the Census, http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab15.txt (Accessed February 5, 2012); Population of 100 Largest Urban Places: 1930, U.S. Bureau of the Census, http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab16.txt (Accessed February 5, 2012); Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 37-39.

[61] Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 7-9.

South's power in industry and prosperous modern national economy. The *Atlanta Constitution* during the 1880s was one of two southern newspapers regularly read and admired in the North. First published in 1868, its longevity and financial success gave it northern credibility. Grady joined the newspaper staff as a journalist in 1876, rising to managing editor in 1880. At this time, the weekly paper had 7,000 subscribers. By December of 1889, almost 200,000 readers subscribed to the *Atlanta Constitution*, with patrons in every state. Henry Grady's views and plans for the future of the South were read nationwide, and for some faraway readers, the only source of information coming from the region.[62]

For northern readers of the *Atlanta Constitution*, it was difficult to distinguish whether the paper was an accurate portrayal of the South's conditions, or simply hollow promises of white elites that industrialization would make the South prosperous. Another southern paper, *Manufacturing Record*, boasted the progress of production in the New South. Yet in 1908, the *Southern Lumberman* questioned its claims in writing, "If all the saw mills, cotton mills tobacco factories, new towns and other enterprises and undertakings which it has heralded to its advertisers and subscribers as having been started up in the various state of the South, had really been erected and put into operation, there wouldn't be surface room for them to stand on."[63] In fact, the prosperity of the New South was limited to certain populations, divided by race and location. Yet optimistic northern readers and investors viewed the new perspective on the old region positively. A region characterized by tradition and lore had become forward thinking. Eager to participate in the South's successful future, northern investors proved their belief in the promise of the New South by extending capital to the region.[64]

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[62] Davis, *Henry Grady's New South*, 53.
[63] Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 104.
[64] Nichols, "Southern Tradition and Regional Economic Progress," 188-191.

The move to modern merchandising methods

Conditions of new southern cities invited progress, invention, and new institutions, including outside investments in areas looking for revitalization. One example came in the form of new retailing methods, particularly the modern department and variety chain stores. Southern urbanization led to the demise of traditional country stores, the earliest retail method in the South. The country store was the first commercial enterprise in a settled area; responsible for providing customers with foodstuffs and manufactured goods they were unable to produce on their farms. Since primary southern crops were cash crops, like cotton, tobacco, cotton, and sugar, farming households relied on food and materials from others. Not only did country stores provide materials and foodstuffs, they extended credit to farmers and served as social gathering places. The provision of credit was of extreme importance to antebellum farmers, as seasonal agriculture did not provide a constant cash flow. Country storeowners extended credit, but exclusively to regular customers who they knew personally and trusted. These functions of country stores were undermined by conditions of the urban New South.[65]

The postbellum expansion of mass production was a national phenomenon. In the South, agriculture, textile and manufacturing industries became more profitable as a result. Mass production of the late nineteenth century shifted society from production-oriented to consumption-centered. This profound historical change expanded the middle class, principally in urban areas. Not only did the population with expendable income grow, the amount of expendable income per household rose. As Susan Benson Porter writes, "For more and more people, consumption ceased to be a matter of barely satisfying urgent basic needs and became a matter of choice – very broad for some, narrower for others"[66] Department stores catered to

[65] Richard W. Stoffle, "Whither the Country Store?" *Ethnohistory* 19, no. 1 (Winter 1972), 64-66.
[66] Benson Porter, *Counter Cultures*, 75-76.

upper and middle class populations with broader limitations on their money. Conversely, the variety store served as a place of consumption for classes with a narrower realm of spending.

Department stores in the South have an antebellum history; with the opening of Talheimer's in Richmond and D. H. Holmes Company in New Orleans in 1842, and Lowenstein's in Memphis in 1855. Around the turn of the twentieth century, department stores began to consolidate as part of a general trend toward corporate expansion, following business trends of the era. Many department stores, like variety stores, began as family businesses. As the companies expanded geographically and in volume, consolidating under modern corporate entities was in each chain's economic and future interest. Modern department stores promoted of lavish and conspicuous spending and delivered mass culture to even the smallest southern town.[67]

In some North Carolina city directories, including Goldsboro's 1934 listing, five-and-dime stores were included in the department store classification. Distinction between the variety stores and traditional department stores was made through this notification, "Department Stores – 5c to $1.00," yet they were still considered in the same category as their upscale counterpart. In fact, department store executives identified dime stores as significant threats. The two enterprises shared the same market for various goods, particularly those sold on the ground floor at lower-end department stores, like costume jewelry, notions, and daily-use kitchenware. The stores' stock included versions of luxury items found in department stores, but without the luxury brand name or price tag. While the merchandise at dime stores may have been dismissed as cheap to

[67] Longstreth, *The American Department Store Transformed*, 251-255.

upper class shoppers, for middle and working class customers, it allowed them to participate in the popular consumer market.[68]

The circulation of mass culture, via movies, magazines and advertising, connected southern women, historically characterized as separate, to national consumption trends. Women from cities, small towns and even rural areas became more conscious of style and new products. Southern stores felt the pressure to carry nationally known brands and products that their increasingly aware customers desired. Yet locally owned stores struggled to stay abreast of current fashions because of their distance from the trend-setting north. Therefore nationwide chain stores had an edge over local competition. The Kress headquarters were located in New York City, the center of consumer trends. All communication and decisions flowed from city executives to stores in the widest reaches of the country. Richard Longstreth wrote that the Kress "stores (functioned) as a window to the world outside their localities."[69] These businesses connected the South to modern American society, particularly the successful urban cities that New South cities aspired to become.

Kress's southern beginnings

The first Kress store opened in 1896 in Memphis, Tennessee at 321 South Main Street. The store was small, only a single retail unit. Between 1890 and 1900, the population of the city grew 58.6 percent to host 102,320 residents.[70]. Later that year, Kress opened his second branch in Nashville, Tennessee, the second largest city in the state. In 1897, an additional Tennessee

[68] Hill's Goldsboro city directory (Hill Directory Company, 1934); Longstreth, *The American Department Store Transformed,* 9, 34-35.
[69] Richard Longstreth, Foreword to *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores: The Kress Legacy*, by Bernice L. Thomas (Washington, DC: The National Building Museum, 1997), viii-ix.
[70] Population of 100 Largest Urban Places: 1890, U.S. Bureau of the Census, http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab12.txt (Accessed February 5, 2012); Population of 100 Largest Urban Places: 1900, U.S. Bureau of the Census, http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab13.txt; Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,* 41; Photograph of Memphis Tennessee store, 1896, Kress Collection, National Building Museum.

store opened in Knoxville, solidifying the chain's presence in the state. That same year, operations were taken further south to Alabama. Three stores opened in the state's largest cities over the next two years- Montgomery in 1897, then Birmingham and Mobile in 1898. Also in 1898, Kress stores opened in Augusta, Columbus and Macon, Georgia. The proximity of first Kress's nine stores kept the chains early starts profitable. Transport costs were kept low by only shipping between three states.[71]

With the turn of the twentieth century came further expansion, this time into Florida and Texas. Stores opened in Jacksonville, Houston and Dallas in 1900. The next year, Kress's opened in North Carolina and Arkansas. By the time the Wilmington, North Carolina store opened on June 15, 1901, the Kress chain boasted over a dozen stores in six states. A newspaper article before the Wilmington store's opening read, "Their stores are welcome establishments in any and every city and Wilmington is fortunate having been selected for one."[72] This type of rhetoric was deemed necessary to pacify those in opposition to anything connecting the South to the national economy, even a northern based chain store. The antagonists to New South prophets were Southern Agrarians, adamant against the changing economic conditions of the postwar South. Agrarians longed for the Old South, specifically the financial success of the slave-run plantations which composed the independent southern economy. Their frustrations with postbellum changes were directed at New South proponents and northern industrialists, who furthered the divide between the economy of the Old and New South.[73]

As Grace Hale writes, "Despite the Agrarians' own need to use the South as 'a pastoral rebuke' to the nation, many white southerners welcomed the proliferation of goods and were

[71] Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,*172; *Wilmington Morning Star*, June 14, 1091.
[72] Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores, 172; Wilmington Morning Star,* June 14, 1901.
[73] Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 140-144.

enchanted by 'the brilliant (if wayward) spectacle of the business or money era."[74] Kress stores promptly opened across the state, next in Greensboro and Charlotte, two cities with rapid postwar growth. For both residents of cities and their hinterlands, these downtown stores were not just shopping destinations, but sights to see. In a 1924 article, journalist Gerald W. Johnson reported a Saturday scene in Greensboro when nearby mill village workers experienced "the magic of mass-produced abundance." A family with their two children stood amidst the human traffic, "taking in the spectacle." He wrote that they were not "enraptured, but calming and judiciously admiring."[75] Enchanting downtown shopping establishments, like the Charlotte Kress, described as the "most magnificent 5 and 10 cent store in the country" in 1911, represented the region's success within the national economy. For consumers who benefitted from the inexpensive wide array of goods Kress stores offered in a spectacular setting, the mythical Old South seemed distant and outdated.[76]

Additionally, Samuel Kress promoted himself as devoted to enhancing the economic success of the region within the national economy. A region wide advertisement used in the late 1930s contained the following passage:

> Since the opening of the first Kress store by Mr. S.H. Kress, in Memphis, Tennessee, more than forty years ago, Kress stores have been closely identified with the interests of the South and it has always been the policy of S. H. Kress & company to give customers as great a value for the money…as close cooperation with manufacturers and economical and efficient operation of its stores, especially through the elimination of waste, will permit; consistent with fair treatment of its employees."[77]

This public dedication to individual southern states became more significant as greater resistance to the South's involvement in the national economy arose. This time it was the anti-

[74] Hale, *Making Whiteness, 141.*
[75] Gerald W. Johnson, "Greensboro, or What You Will," *Reviewer,* April 1924, as quoted in Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 141.
[76] "S.H. Kress & Co's Magnificent New Building" *Charlotte Times*, February 12, 1911; Greensboro city directory, 1903-1904;
[77] *Wilmington Morning Star*, June 27, 1930.

chain store movement, popularizing in the 1920s and 1930s. Opposition to chain stores originated in the South during the Great Depression, supporting taxation on chain stores with a certain number of branches. The leaders of chain-store opposition fell into two groups – small, rural, southern merchants and southern politicians with lingering populist beliefs. Chief motives included suspicion and fear of large businesses, combined with the need for the revenue chain store taxes provided. Though anti-chain store movements spread nationally, they met their demise because of the lack of support from individual consumers. As Carl Ryant writes in *The South and the Movement Against Chain Stores*, "The consumer, whose name appeared often in the rhetoric of chain-store opposition, remained ambivalent in his actions. His fear of monopoly was balanced by a desire for low prices."[78]

Though the threat to chain stores did not actualize, Kress attempted to appease the opposition by proclaiming their support for local economies. Kress ran advertisements in North Carolina papers in 1930 with the following footer: "During 1929 Kress paid to NC manufacturers $2,962,388.11 for merchandise and other products."[79] This public dedication to the state's economy reflected Samuel Kress's economic investment in the South, as well as his need to prove his commitment as an outsider.

To ease the transition for Agrarian opponents, Kress attempted to capture the country store feel. An ad campaign, "Meet your friends at Kress" beckoned customers to the store to experience the same social environment felt at a community store. Additionally, evidence shows the chain employing managers from the community in smaller stores. Ideally, familiar faces would make customers less weary of stores that were not locally owned. While southern anxiety

[78] Carl Ryant, "The South and the Movement Against Chain Stores," *The Journal of Southern* History 39, no. 2 (May 1973), 210.
[79] *Wilmington Morning Star*, June 27, 1930.

over modernization sparked continuous debates between agrarian and merchant sectors, most southern consumers accepted the appeals of the new world of shopping wholeheartedly.[80]

Though New South cities offered more unclaimed real estate, Kress stores also opened in antebellum cities. In these locations, the company mediated modernity with tradition by still promoting the stores as modern establishments, but using classical architecture to temper the transition. Montgomery, incorporated in 1819, became Alabama's state capital in 1846 and briefly served as the capital of the Confederacy in 1861. Though the city was the first in the nation to install a city-wide electric streetcar system, creating a strictly commercial downtown by the 1890s, southern traditions persisted among Montgomery's long-time residents.

In cities of the Old South, like Montgomery, Alabama, transition to modernism was less swift. A new store was built in 1929 to replace its predecessor which burned the year before. The *Montgomery Advertiser* described the store: "To conform with the type of architecture that through the years has been associated with cities of the Old South, a Colonial design was employed by George E. Mackay, supervising architect. Mr. Mackay showed understanding and insight by choosing the Colonial style to interpret the spirit of the South."[81] Contrarily, another full-page Kress advertisement read, "Everyone is invited to come today and inspect the most modern and complete example of building and business efficiency."[82] The Kress Company attempted to strike a balance between traditions of the southern market and the chain's image as progressive and contemporary.

Variety stores were also progressive in championing the 'one stop shopping' concept, providing convenience for the customer that traveled downtown to shop. Stock of typical Kress

[80] Photograph of Memphis, Tennessee store with sign, "Meet your friends at Kress," 1926, Kress Collection, National Building Museum; Raucher, "Dime Store Chains," 153.
[81] Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,* 50.
[82] Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,* 51.

stores included house furnishings, glass, silver and woodenware, notions, stationery, postcards, dry goods, lace embroideries, ribbons, flowers, hairbrushes, popular novels, jewelry, and toys. In order to provide such a diverse collection, the stores' interior required organization and efficiency. The chain used glass cases and central display fixtures to give order to the potential chaos. Store interiors were also divided into departments, including jewelry, candy, house wares, and paper products. Kress officials in a Wilmington newspaper article advertised, "Every arrangement has been made for the convenience of the customer."[83] A flock of well-groomed salesladies provided customer service for any questions that arose despite the customer-friendly layout of the store.

As the architectural division began constructing built-to-suit stores in the twentieth century, achieving this flawlessly designed space became more controllable. Interior architectural drawings included floor layouts of merchandise, giving every type of product an intended place inside the store. Additionally, company architects designed standard display cases, lighting, and other fixtures to standardize store interiors. An article written on the new Greensboro store in 1936 read, "The new Kress store with its enlarged space, new fixtures, new lighting system, new front, and many other features provides you with the most modern, efficient, convenient and comfortable shopping facilities"[84] Words like "newer, better, and bigger" were commonly found not only in Kress signs and advertisements, echoed the rhetoric of New South promoters.

One "newer, better, and bigger" selling point for the chain was the state of the art candy department. In 1911, Kress debuted a new method of candy packaging and distribution after fourteen years of painstaking effort. An advertisement boasted it as "an almost perfect

[83] *Wilmington Morning* Star, June 27, 1930.
[84] *Wilmington Morning Star*, June 27, 1930.

development of the modern method of selling confections." The advertisement further explains the method to customers:

> Every piece of candy is guaranteed for quality and purity, carefully packed in attractive containers, factory sealed, and from the minute the package leaves the factory till the moment when with the bonbon tongs you lift the candy from its paraffin container, you may be sure that not one piece of the delicious confection which you will enjoy so much has seen the light of day, but have been carefully tucked away awaiting the time when it may find grace in your sight.[85]

Instead of explaining the complicated mechanics that make this method possible, Kress flaunted the modern aspects to lure in customers. The candy was new, fresh, and a product of innovation, features that attracted a contemporary southern crowd.

Another contemporary aspect of Kress stores was a testament to southern achievements. Soda fountains and lunch counters became part of Kress operations in the 1920s after advancements in soda distribution technology. Both Coca Cola and Pepsi were products of southern invention. John Pemberton developed the original Coca Cola formula was developed in Columbus, Georgia and began selling the beverage in 1886 Atlanta during Prohibition. Meanwhile Pepsi Cola was developed and first sold in New Bern, North Carolina in 1898. By offering these newly popular southern products, Kress appealed to their southern customer's tastes and pride.[86]

The installation of "Soda and Lunch Departments" coincided with the new construction period in the 1930s. During the years of the depression, stores not only increased in size but features, filling niches left behind by dining establishments hardened by economic times and less disposable income from past customers. New North Carolina stores built in this decade, including Greensboro and Durham, were erected with lunch counters. The popularity of the soda and lunch fountains peaked in the 1940s, with most stores hosting eating facilities of varying size

[85] *The Charlotte Times*, July 14, 1911.
[86] Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 100-102.

by the 1950s. Like the rest of the store, food and drink was priced below a dollar. Quick service options included soft drinks, ice cream, sandwiches, hot dogs, French fries, and other American classics.[87]

Soda and lunch departments varied considerably in size. In existing stores where the facilities were later added, they were typically located in a corner, smaller in size, consisting of a counter with a dozen stools and a few booths. In smaller built-to-suit stores, this was also typical. Yet in some larger stores, the lunch area filled half of the first floor. In the Honolulu, Hawaii store, the counter formed an "S" shape, seating over sixty people. In the company's flagship store on Fifth Avenue, the entire basement was devoted to a full cafeteria. As this was Kress's prize construction, it is not surprising such effort was made in creating this facility. Yet a similarly sized cafeteria existed in the San Antonio store, built in 1939. One of Sibbert's creations, this multi-level superstore was evidence of the chain's expansion toward low-end department store status.[88]

The consistency of customer experience in different Kress locations was remarkable in the early twentieth century. Since advancements in transportation increased travel, Kress stores became familiar icons to travelers in different cities. The chain store idea meant the same merchandise, customer service and overall experience in a distant city would be encountered as it would in one's hometown. A shopper from New Bern could visit the Kress store in Asheville and be familiar with the layout and prices, without visiting the store before. This concept is so widely accepted today, yet it was a new and cherished phenomenon in this era. The chain store culturally impacted the South through homogenization of an area historically defined as separate from the rest of the nation.

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[87] North Carolina city directories, 1930-1948.
[88] Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,* 122-23, 158-159.

Another way Kress promoted a modern public image was through the production and sale of postcards. The Main Street postcard trend depicted similar scenes of clean and picturesque streetscapes populated with businesses, despite the location. Isenberg writes the nationwide during this era, "Creating a new, beautified vision of the American downtown through postcards and civic plans became an obsession of Main Street businesses, city leaders and investors."[89] Arguably, this obsession was more significant for investors of New South cities. The trend in the postcard business allowed cities to promote the view of their city they wanted outsiders and residents to see. The popularity of postcards increased in the nineteenth century with advancements in photography and communication. Early postcards were typically created from black and white photographs and tinted by hand. For the recipient, postcards gave a glimpse into a distant setting. Nineteenth century Main Street postcards were remarkably different than their twentieth century counterparts. The early twentieth century postcards still originated from landscape photographs, but were drastically enhanced by artists, often eliminating less pristine aspects like crowds, cars and utility poles. According to Isbenberg, "They documented Americans' ideals of how their beautified central business districts should appear in a new commercial order."[90] From these postcards, we can determine that commerce, civic intuitions, and cleanliness were favored in the New South city.

Not only did Kress stores sell their respective city's Main Street postcards, they sponsored cards of their own. These typically began as photographs of the streetscape where the local Kress stood, but altered, highlighting the store in the foreground while fading the competitive businesses. Kress supported idealizing the views of the downtowns they inhabited,

[89] Isenberg, *Downtown America,* 42-43.
[90] Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 45.

meanwhile attempting to evoke the same feelings of fantasy and perfection with each individual store.[91]

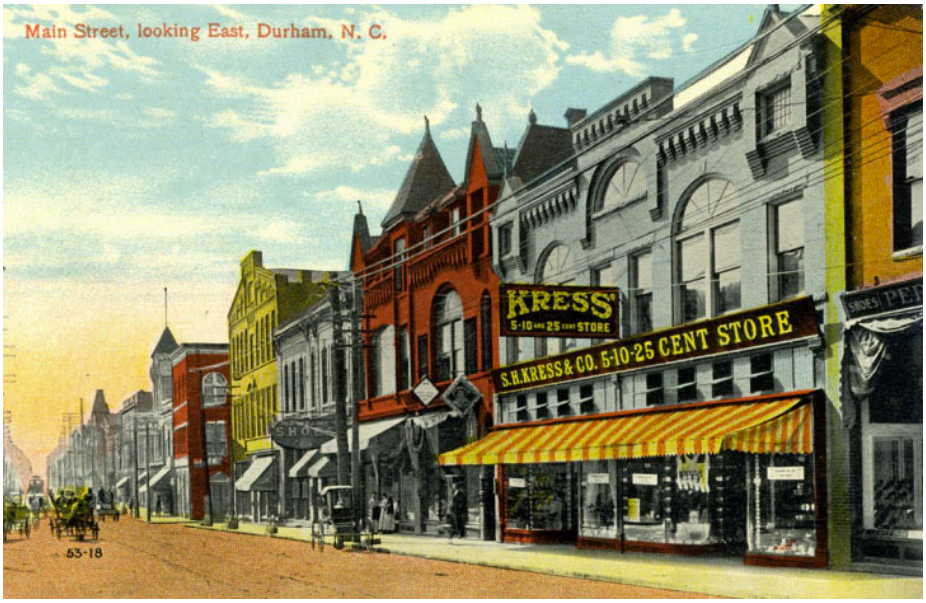

Figure 2.1 "Main Street, looking east, Durham, N.C." Postcard published by the Kress Company circa 1905 portraying an ideal Main Street scene with the Kress store in the center. *Durwood Barbour Collection of North Carolina Postcards (P077), North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, UNC-Chapel Hill.*

The use of postcards as travel propaganda was not unique to the South; however for companies like Kress, enticing visitors to their southern stores required refuting views about the South promoted elsewhere. For example, in David Jansson's study of National Geographic written about southern states between 1907 and 1962 reveals that the magazine's coverage of the region confirms a view of the South as 'other' and 'backward'. Jansson concludes,

> In the pages of *National Geographic*, the New South's progress is measured by the steps it takes away from the Old South. In highlighting the improvements made within the South, the articles provide subtle hints that the legacy of segregation, intolerance, racism, and poverty continues to haunt the region. The articles set up a spatial distinction that construes these evils as inherently southern problems, which implies that however far the New South moves away from the problematic legacy of the Old South, it will never quite reach the American ideal.

[91] North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, also accessible http://www.lib.unc.edu/dc/nc_post/.

Thus the Kress postcards aimed to capture an archetypal downtown scene without any of the South's less admirable features.[92]

In addition to advertising, rhetoric, and business practices, Kress quite literally exemplified the image of modernity through the use of modernistic architecture. With the addition of Edward Sibbert as architect in 1929, stores began to feature more modern styles. Sibbert's professional experience in Miami and New York City influenced the contemporary features in his designs. The Greensboro Kress building, erected in 1930, featured new Art Deco elements. In this design, Sibbert reinterpreted the standard Kress exterior signage, adding a metal logo with backlighting. Similar striking effects were employed in the Durham store, also designed by Sibbert in 1930. The buildings of this era were intended to impress the passerby, enticing them to step inside and see what the building held.[93]

Figure 2.2 Greensboro Kress building. *Kress Collection, National Building Museum*.

[92] David Jansson, "American National Identity and the Progress of the New South in National Geographic Magazine," *Geographical Review* 93, no. 3 (July 2003), 350-351.
[93] Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,* 70-73.

The trend toward elaborate modern exteriors coincided with the Great Depression. As Isenberg writes, "The depression added urgency to the ordinary pressures to upgrade store attractiveness, since in the supercompetitive real estate environment, a modest modernization might keep a business in the black."[94] Additionally, for those who had the money, low material and labor costs during the depression encouraged rebuilding. Brand new buildings in novel styles looked even more impressive next to the many empty downtown storefronts, forced to close by the depression. Kress's increased building activity represented faith in modern retailing and economic recovery.

For Kress, the location of a store was as important as the physical building. Headquarter representatives were often sent to towns to scout locations for a new store or a better location for an existing one. Claude Kress arrived in Wilmington in 1906 to look for a larger building as the current store was outgrowing its space. Yet the store, located three storefronts from the main downtown intersection, was prime real estate and considered in an 'enviable position.' As the store was located in the Masonic Temple Building, Kress used his Freemason connection to retain this prime commercial space. He alternatively signed a lease for an additional fifteen years in the same building with approval to remodel and expand into the entire first floor.[95]

All of the original Kress stores in fourteen North Carolina cities and towns were located in the central business district, either along Main Street or the area's equivalent. Furthermore, stores neighbored streetcar and bus lines. The field of retail geography influenced Kress company executives when choosing locations. In the 1920s, the realty concept of the "100% district" became widespread among retailers, especially chain stores who did not know the conditions of every market in which they operated. The 100% district of a town typically

[94] Isenberg, *Downtown America,* 143.
[95] Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,* 23; *Wilmington Morning Star,* January 3, 1906.

encompassed Main Street, areas around public buildings, and places with easy accessibility. In fact, the main determinant of the 100% district was pedestrian traffic, but female pedestrians in particular. It was male promoters of the New South who influenced Samuel Kress, yet his investment in the area was directed for females. The stores appealed to the modern southern customer generally, but Kress's physical environments and advertising were tailed for specifically for women.[96]

[96] Isenberg, *Downtown America,* 80-81; No company-created comprehensive list of Kress stores and their locations exists, so these locations were determined through studying city directories and Sanborn Fire Insurance maps in each of the fourteen cities.

CHAPTER 3- MRS. AND MS. KRESS: CREATING SPACES FOR WOMEN

Founder of Filene's Department store, Edward Filene, referred to his store as "an Adamless Eden."[97] Variety stores, like department stores, were female territories. During the first half of the twentieth century, socially determined gender roles cast women as consumers; store practices encouraged and strengthened this trend. Kress stores fall into the category of 'gendered spaces,' a term referring to a space used particularly by men or women. Rather than a place used exclusively by one gender, like a men's club, barber shop, or women's fitness center, these spaces are open to both genders but have a significantly higher visitation by one gender. Other examples are pool halls or fabric shops. These establishments are not gender exclusive, but have become gender specific by the nature of their services and goods.[98]

In the early twentieth century, southern women forged a greater public presence as workers and shoppers, which in turn helped shape new gendered spaces. Downtowns became webs of female landscapes, from transportation modes, to streets, to the interior spaces of stores. The increasing presence of women in southern cities and towns was a contemporary trend; the result of several factors outlined below. Kress stores were examples of environments created with regards to a large female presence. Not only were females the bulk of the stores' workforce, they comprised the majority of the customers. Though sources attesting to demographic make-up of customers did not survive, we can surmise this based on Kress's female based products and advertising campaigns. As a reflection of a strong female presence, the interior space and functions of the stores were designed to welcome and accommodate females inside, both as employees and consumers.

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[97] Benson Porter, *Counter Cultures,* 76

[98] Jessica Sewell, "Gender, Imagination, and Experience in the Early-Twentieth Century American Downtown," in *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies after J.B. Jackson*, ed. Paul Groth and Chris Wilson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 239.

Scholars have produced countless works on white women during the antebellum and Civil War South, yet few comparable works exist based in later years. Jane Turner Censer's *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895* introduces a view of the postbellum white southern woman different from the common conception as sympathizers of the "Lost Cause" for the racial and sexual privileges it provided them. Censer argues southern women became more independent and goal-oriented because of the Civil War, embracing opportunities of the New South more than clinging to traditions of the Old South. White women, particularly elites, exerted autonomy as educators, citizens, homemakers, authors and property owners. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler's *New Women of the New South* builds on these conclusions about southern women's new role as participants in the suffrage movement. Yet this thesis proves southern women's greater public presence began earlier, as shoppers on Main Street.[99]

The abolition of slavery left white households with less consistent help and the need to reorganize household responsibilities. While most upper-class and middle-class could afford to keep African American domestics to perform household work and shop for provisions, these duties fell into the hands of many other middle and working-class women. Instead of viewing the "new domesticity" post-war as withdrawal into the protected private sphere, she argues it was their chance to master a new ground. Censer claims white women took pride in their new domestic power, writing, "White women from the old elite believed they were freeing themselves from a dependence on African American workers and thought little about the new domestic tasks they had more thoroughly assumed."[100]

[99] Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003); Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Women's Suffrage Movement in the Southern States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
[100] Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895*, 80.

Yet this approach was not true across all white southern women because of generational differences. The first generation, born before 1820, included Confederate widows and those resistant to postwar changes. It was the second generation, born between 1820 and 1845, that pioneered the new economic, social and public possibilities which the third generation, born between 1850 and 1869, fully experienced. Thus this third generation and their subsequent children, with little or no experience of the Old South, comprise the female consumer base of the New South.[101]

Increased female consumer activity resulted in increased public presence of southern women. Victorian era etiquette books include advice on appropriate street behavior for women. In 1879, the *Ladies' Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness* wrote, "A lady who desires to pay strict regard to etiquette, will not stop to gaze in at the shop windows. It looks countrified."[102] Instead, it was proper for middle class women venturing downtown to dutifully perform their errands without stopping and gazing, as that would create a confused appearance and draw attention. Window-shopping was historically a lower class activity, popular among people unable to afford the goods they longed for behind the glass. Leisurely strolling the streets in a noticeable fashion was typical of working-class women who used the streets as a place of social interaction. The term "rowdy girls" referred to Victorian era women in the working-class who preferred a pleasure-oriented culture over any domestic responsibilities. Prior to the early twentieth century, middle and upper class women heeded social etiquette and avoided these behaviors. Yet a number of factors changed the presence of women, regardless of class, on public streets post-Victorian era. Southern women did not populate antebellum streets primarily because there were not many streets to populate during this era. The widely dispersed population

[101] Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood,* 217-225.
[102] Florence Hartley, *Ladies' Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness: A Complete Handbook for the Use of the Lad in Polite Society* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1879), 112-113.

in the southern states lived primarily in rural areas. With transportation limited to livestock and carriages, antebellum travel into the few urban areas in the South was a rare and privileged occasion.[103]

The growth of southern urban areas and the accessibility to them created new opportunities for women to venture into a downtown district. In addition to specific urbanization and the railroad as described in the previous chapter, the streetcar system attributed to women's downtown presence. The first horse-drawn streetcar line opened in the South was in 1834 in New Orleans, then the most populated southern city. The introduction of electric streetcars in the 1880s made the cars more reliable and independent of animal labor. This new inexpensive mode of transportation also gave rise to 'streetcar suburbs'. Communities outside of a city's downtown developed along streetcar lines, allowing people to live outside of the city and commute to work. Early suburbanization itself contributed to gendered landscapes. Separating the residential and business activities in a city was a societal reflection of classifying the home as a feminine landscape and the city as masculine. Yet the streetcar bridged this division, allowing women to commute from the domestic suburb into downtown to stores like Kress. Since streetcars required payment, were local and smaller than trains, they were generally accepted as safe modes of transportation for middle-class southern women.[104]

Twentieth century middle-class ideology determined men and women as fundamentally different, with separated roles and spheres of interest. Downtowns created in this era reflected this separation. The male dominated sphere of downtown was the office landscape. The male

[103] Hartley, *Ladies' Book of Etiquette*, 112-113; Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 34; Sewell, *Women in the Everyday City,* 3-6.
[104] Sam Bass Warner Jr., *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870*-1900 (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 20-24; Sewell, *Women in the Everyday City,* 6; Sewell, "Gender, Imagination, and Experience in the Early-Twentieth Century American Downtown," 239.

presence in downtown was found in commercial and government offices. Characteristics of offices fit the realm of masculinity – power, efficiency, modernity, and urgency. Contrastingly, the female presence dominated the shopping establishments. This feminine realm was characterized by consumption, leisure, and spectacle. Jessica Sewell classifies the paradigmatic buildings of these separate spheres as the skyscraper, for the metro business landscape, and the retail store, for the shopping landscape.[105]

The infiltration of conspicuous consumption and mass culture into the New South redefined Victorian working-class norms of street behavior as now modern and middle class. As Thorstein Veblen wrote when he introduced the phrase 'conspicuous consumption' in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, "Women were responsible for maintaining and expressing their family's status in an increasingly anonymous world, something they accomplished primarily through consumption."[106] Not only was shopping downtown a necessity for single women and housewives, it became a social desire and often an aimless activity. Women purchasing groceries and housewares considered it as part of their domestic work. However, as Elaine Abelson writes, "Stores provided a use for leisure time that necessitated neither rationalization nor apology."[107] A housewife may venture downtown for a specific household errand, but easily, and apologetically, take her time browsing the windows and enjoying shopping as a method of leisure.

As publicly announced by the Department of Commerce, women controlled national consumer spending by the 1920s. Statistics showed women spending eighty-five percent of America's income alone, while also helping men spend an additional ten percent.[108] Early twentieth century manufacturers and advertising agencies had yet to use market segmentation, or

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[105] Sewell, "Gender, Imagination, and Experience in the Early-Twentieth Century American Downtown,"241-242.
[106] Thorstein Veblen, as quoted in Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings*, 195.
[107] Elaine Ableson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 21-22.
[108] Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 78.

dividing the female market and target groups differently by characteristic. Widespread use of market segmentation did not begin the late 1950s.[109] Instead, appeals were based on the "average" American female consumer, an ideal customer imagined by various retail enterprises. This stereotype has been historically disputed, and this thesis does not attempt to side on that discussion, but rather proves that Kress stores operated under this assumption when attracting customers. Based on longstanding connections of women and emotion-based reactions, stores employed a variety of techniques to lure in female customers and encourage spending. Historically, department stores, groceries, and specialty stores manipulated female customers through an array of sensory appeals. Ideally, female shoppers would forget rationality when met with beauty and spectacle. Kress stores used various sensory appeals in both their stores' exteriors and interiors.[110]

Kress's gendered public presence

Kress was renowned for its spectacular buildings that exemplified modernity, success and aesthetic appeal on southern Main Streets. In addition to the architecture, Kress exterior lights, windows and signs lured in female customers. Electrically lit signs and window accents were hallmarks of modern technology, but also served to catch the eye of the visually stimulated woman. A Wilmington reporter described the effect created by the store's lighting: "Enclosed arc electric light suspended in the vestibule last night brilliantly lighted the front and hundreds of people passing by stopped to gaze at the magnificent display."[111] With the latest technology and strategic placements, Kress enticed pedestrians from the street to venture inside.

[109] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 314.
[110] Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings*, 197-198.
[111] *Wilmington Morning Star*, June 14, 1901.

Once the passerby decided to turn inside, an equally extravagant scene greeted them. The Wilmington store entrance and windows were described as follows: "Pretty vestibule entrance with tile floor and on either side are large plate glass show windows that have been most artistically decorated with beautiful and useful goods in every variety."[112] Both the doorways and shop windows were designed to lure in customers. A common style of Kress stores was the recessed entrance, set back around three feet from the edge of the shop windows. The bent plate glass of the windows curved into to frame the store entrance. The directionality of the curve pointed customers inside the store. For a moment, as customers walked up to open the doors, they were immersed in the dramatic scene of the windows. This feature was characteristic of Kress stores designed under Edward Sibbert, yet even the earliest photographs of the original Memphis and Augusta stores show this feature.[113]

Obvious similarities exist between shop windows and paintings, which Samuel Kress was a devoted collector of. Both are clearly framed, set behind glass when exhibited, exert a particular message, and are meant to draw in viewers. Kress windows epitomized excess and spectacle. They echoed what Ada Louise Huxtable termed the five-and-dime's merchandising creed, "More is more."[114] The windows, which sometimes flanked the entire first floor exterior, were filled to the brim with merchandise. To give order to the potential chaos, Kress's employed window dressers, usually male, to move, lift, and arrange the scene. In the 1920s, the company began using an advertising slogan, "Watch Kress Windows." With such prime downtown real estate, the windows were one of the most viewed forms of advertising the company could

[112] *Wilmington Morning Star*, June 14, 1901.
[113] Photograph, Birmingham, Alabama store, Kress Collection, National Building Museum; Photograph, Memphis, Tennessee store, 1896, Kress Collection, National Building Museum; Photograph, Augusta, Georgia store, 1899, Kress Collection, National Building Museum.
[114] Ada Louise Huxtable, "The Death of the Five and Ten," in *Architecture Anyone? Cautionary Tales of the Building Art* (New York: Random House, 1986), 315.

employ. These shop windows, designed with excess and spectacle, provided emotional appeals to the modern female window shopper.[115]

For the more rational shopper, the Kress signage became a familiar symbol of consistency and value. The company adopted the prototype dime store exterior sign, first used in Woolworth stores. The signs were long narrow red rectangle positioned above the first floor with the words, "S.H. Kress Five and Ten Cent Store" in gold lettering. As other chains mimicked Woolworth's pattern, replacing their store name, F. W. Woolworth initially thought about taking legal action. Yet he realized the widespread use of similar signs was good advertising, as the red and gold "Five and Ten Cent" sign became ubiquitous with a variety chain. The signs flaunted chains' discount prices to attract the most modest customer and inform them they too could spend conspicuously when prices were set so low. The uniformity in signage also guaranteed the same prices and quality in every store; an aspect of Kress's modern business model.[116]

Aside from advertising through the store's exterior, other major advertising was done in local newspapers. North Carolina's newspapers printed Kress ads typically every Sunday, with additional articles and special advertisements in other issues. Many of these advertisements featured sketches of females, dressed in accessories found at Kress. Additionally, newspapers ran ads for special events and sales at the store with feminine appeal. On opening day in Wilmington, a promotion ran for every female customer to receive a 'pretty souvenir' for the occasion. The article does not state that male shoppers will not receive a gift, but makes the assumption that attendees of the opening will be female.[117]

In 1911, the annual notions, fabric and embroidery sale in Charlotte was advertised heavily. The undoubtedly female appeal to the sale was heightened on; ads boasted the array of

[115] *The Charlotte Times,* February 2, 1911; Sewell, *Women in the Everyday City,* 4.
[116] Thomas, *America's 5&10 Cent Stores,* 6-7.
[117] *Wilmington Morning Star*, June 14, 1901.

beautiful and inexpensive materials flown in especially for the sale. Also, the ads indicated that additional female sales force had been hired to attend to the needs of the ladies attending the sale. Other deliberate female advertising techniques took the form of spots in female college newspapers. An ad for Kress ran in Bennett College's *The Bennett Banner* amidst fashion columns. The Kress Company created a distinct public presence that exemplified female customers' desires, through traditional print advertising and using the building's exterior as its own advertisement.[118]

Interior spaces for female shoppers

The interiors of Kress stores lived up to the promise of excess and spectacle used in their exteriors and advertisements. Photographs of store interiors show thousands of items, placed in every corner, along every wall, and atop every counter inside. As dime stores, the excess they could achieve was in quantity rather than quality. While department stores promoted excess through expense and opulence, Kress necessitated a different approach. As recalled about items in the Wilmington store, "The extraordinary pictures which will prove fine ornaments for the most artistic housewife, at ten and twenty-five cents each, would deceive the experienced every of a connoisseur."[119] The stores appealed to the more economically sensible woman by providing her goods that appear expensive.

Kress architects also used symbols associated with wealth and aristocracy to attract customers with high-end tastes. The Kress coat of arms, a design which company architect George Mackay modeled after the Kress family arms, appeared both on the exterior and interior of stores built in the 1920s and 1930s. While displaying the heraldry signified pride in the Kress

[118] *The Bennett Banner*, May 1947; *The Charlotte Times,* October 7, 1911.
[119] *Wilmington Morning Star,* August 31, 1907.

family and their achievements, it suggested wealth and prominence to customers. These symbols signified distinction and success, where the merchandise and prices could not.[120]

Custom-made fixtures were designed by store architects to be attractive and increase selling efficiency, uniting retail's two goals of beauty and consumption. Edward Sibbert designed fifteen separate light fixtures for the Greenville, Texas store in 1938. The fixtures were given style numbers, suggesting similar designs were standardly used in other stores, but the specific measurements were tailored to fit each store. Jewelry counters were just as extraordinary, often illuminated with similar overhead lighting.[121]

Kress's patented candy counters were not only technological marvels but spectacular attractions. A reviewer of the Wilmington store describes, "The candy department is a revelation and it will be a favorite one with the children and ladies. Chocolate creams, chocolate peppermints, bonbons, chocolate caramels are also on the bargain list."[122] The mahogany and glass paneled cases stood about four feet tall, sometimes extending the length of a store wall. The candy was displayed at an angle behind glass cases, showing off the quantity of the candy stock. Beside fixtures, every aspect of the interior's visual appearance was calculated down to the company's own manufactured paint colors which they provided to contractors. Wooden or marble floors and pressed metal ceilings provided an appearance of understated elegance in each store. Working under assumptions of female shoppers as visually stimulated, Kress architects spent as much time and effort in making the interiors as aesthetically pleasing as the exteriors.[123]

Kress stores also appealed to shoppers' auditory sense by playing music in the store. Evidence of individuals employed as 'pianist' or 'musician' exists in eleven of the fourteen

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[120] Thomas, *America's 5&10 Cent Stores,* 55-59.
[121] Lighting fixture designs, Edward F. Sibbert, Greenville, Texas store, 1938, Kress Collection, National Building Museum.
[122] *Wilmington Morning Star*, June 14, 1901.
[123] Thomas, *America's 5&10 Cent Stores,*16-19.

North Carolina stores. The reporter covering the opening of the Wilmington Kress in 1901 commented on the 'enjoyable music' for the occasion. The interior music contrasted sharply with the street noises of cars, animals, and general clamor.[124]

Figure 3.1 Female sales force on the main floor in Anderson, S.C. Kress store. Also visible are the company-made candy and jewelry displays. *Kress Collection, National Building Museum.*

Aside from sensory appeals, Kress drew in female customers simply through the types of goods they carried. Whether for practical household uses or status symbols, the majority of items Kress sold were for females or for people that housewives would shop for. These included jewelry, cosmetics, dishes, cookware, linens, hosiery, hats, flowers, and sewing patterns. In

[124] North Carolina city directories, 1901-1960; *Wilmington Morning Star*, June 14, 1901.

advertisements, the most commonly mentioned merchandise were notions, stationery, cosmetics, and house furnishings – all materials with feminine appeal.[125]

The stores stocked also variety of children's products to attract the housewife shopper. The toy section was a magnet for children shopping with their mothers. The stores carried books, toy planes, dolls, puzzles, and a variety of small trinkets. In addition to toys, the candy department was a foremost attraction for children. With everything priced in coins, children could afford some items from their own small pockets or convince their mothers more easily to make purchases for them. Kress stores made shopping with children in tow easier for housewives, by occupying a child's attention and ensuring their demands would be affordable. A mother could simultaneously run household errands at the store and entertain her children, saving money on hired help.

Variety stores mimicked practices of department stores by offering non-retail services to attract women. Department stores offered an impressive array of services including parlors, children's nurseries, post and telegraph offices, hair and nail salons, public telephones, and lunch rooms. The degree of services offered varied with the size and income of the store, with the larger and higher end stores offering the greatest accommodations. The department store attempted to monopolize shoppers' downtown time by offering these non-retail services inside. Customers could accomplish their downtown tasks in one convenient location. For the stores, this meant not only additional income from in-house services, but theoretically more retail activity if customers remained inside the store longer. As discussed previously, the most common and typically sole non-retail service at dime stores was the lunch counter.[126]

[125] Thomas, *America's 5&10 Cent Stores*, 5-7;*Wilmington Morning Star*, June 14, 1901.
[126] Sewell, *Women and the Everyday City,* 245-247.

Also common to Kress store were ladies lounges, providing shoppers a safe place to rest. The women's lounge in the Birmingham, Alabama store was carpeted, with a large sofa, loveseat, and four wingback chairs. Lamps, plants, and side tables stood alongside seating. A large mirror and various pieces of framed artwork adorned the white walls. The living room furniture and comforts of these facilities alluded to domestic environments.[127]

Analysis of restroom location and size gives insight into which gender was favored in an establishment. The newly designed Wilmington store in 1930 provided a ladies restroom and lounge on the ground floor, but no comparable facilities for men. The revision plans for the Gastonia store in 1955 showed restrooms for both genders on the first floor, but differentiation between public and employee facilities. A large female restroom was located in the back left wing of the store, presumably for customers. The only male toilets were in the back near the receiving room. While female toilets were also located alongside, the location away from the shop floor suggests these facilities were only for employees, and not intended for male or female shoppers. Thus the rarity or inexistence of male restrooms conveyed the message that women were more welcome and enjoyed full privileges inside the stores.[128]

Kress made another significant attempt to create a female environment by occupying entire buildings. This was made easier for the company since they preferred to construct their own buildings and design them to function exclusively as Kress's. Being the sole establishment in a building provided additional space for storage, offices, and amenities, but more importantly it prohibited any other type of business in the building. Often retail stores were located on the first floor of a structure under various offices. In order to access the building, office-going men

[127] Birmingham, Alabama women's lounge photograph, Kress Collection, National Building Museum.
[128] Architectural plan for Wilmington, NC store, 1930 and Gastonia, NC store, 1955, Kress Collection, National Building Museum.

and shopping women inevitably interacted. Kress stores further reduced the presence of men in their stores through this preferred practice.[129]

Pink collar positions: the Kress employee force

The preceding characteristics of the Kress store environment were influenced by the female shopper, yet another type of female presence prevailed in the store. Common of department stores and other variety stores chains, the overwhelming majority of Kress employees were female. The male managerial staff discussed in Chapter One was responsible for local store operations and managing the staff. Other male employment at Kress was limited in number and position. Store typically employed a male book keeper and porter. In larger stores with on-site stock rooms, men were responsible for the receiving and organization of stock. On rare occasion, a male clerk or "floor walker" existed; otherwise the male employee presence on the main retail floor was virtually nonexistent.[130]

Aside from the few years when only store managers were listed in the directories, female employees outnumber male employees in every North Carolina Kress store since 1903. Female employment as Kress was in typical "pink collar" positions. The most common position for women at Kress was the saleswoman, sometimes referred to as saleslady or clerk. The sales staff had formidable influence over the success of a retail operation. Any advertising, either by the chain nationally or by the manager locally, depended on the skill of the saleswoman to deliver what promise attracted the customer. The saleswomen were the primary human link between customers and company. Therefore the company recruited a particular type of woman to represent itself.[131]

[129] Sewell, *Women and the Everyday City,* 246; Thomas 15, 24.
[130] North Carolina city directories, 1901-1960.
[131] Benson Porter, *Counter Cultures,* 124-125; North Carolina city directories, 1901-1960.

As mentioned in Chapter One, saleswomen at Kress, and similar retail operations, fit a particular physical and social mold. The most important and obvious feature was their gender. Since Kress customers were typically female, the saleswomen could relate to shoppers presumably in ways which executives and managers could not. Advice on selling from a writer in 1911 stated, "Shop *with* the customer, not *at* her."[132] Managers emphasized interaction between saleswoman and customers in an attempt to make shopping at Kress a common female experience.

The majority were younger, unmarried women of middle or working class. For most, this was their first job as they transitioned into finding a husband. The older saleswomen were almost exclusively working class and dependent on this job, either as widows or generally unmarried. Saleswomen wore a standard uniform, further unifying their image. To ensure a customer did not feel underdressed or inferior to the employee, Kress uniforms were simple unadorned dresses. Another unifying factor, especially in the South, was their race. Until the late 1960s – at earliest – no African Americans were hired as saleswomen. The significance of this fact will be further explored in the next chapter.[133]

The second most common positions were cashier and assistant cashier. Cashiers were solely responsible for money transactions, not any other type of customer service. Women also filled administrative positions, specifically office assistant. In larger stores with on-site stock rooms, the administrative staff was larger and thus provided greater opportunities for females in positions outside of sales. As the chain grew and departments expanded, few managerial positions opened for women. In 1928 in Asheville, Miss Bernice Porter was employed as a department manager. Miss Augusta Campbell became Head of Soda and Lunch in the Charlotte

[132] Benson Porter, *Counter Cultures*, 130
[133] Raucher, "Dime Store Chains," 146; Anderson, South Carolina store interior photograph, Kress Collection, National Building Museum; North Carolina city directories, 1901-1960.

store in 1930. Also in these decades, a "floor lady", "head saleslady" or "forelady" was hired to oversee the operations on the sales floor.[134]

In Kress stores, separation of genders existed both in the work setting and break setting. Women were primarily restricted to jobs on the main sales floor; men filled office or stock room positions. Potential gender mixing during breaks was avoided through separate facilities. Like the restrooms, the female break facilities – sometimes marked as 'coat room', 'break room', 'locker room', 'lunch room' – were substantially larger than the male counterparts. These additional considerations for female employee affirm the dominance of the gender in the Kress workplace, but also the significant influence female employees carried on architects' minds when designing the stores.[135]

From these conclusions, the question of regional importance arises. Were different strategies taken in making southern Kress stores feminine environments than in northern, Midwestern, or western stores? This thesis is written under the conviction that the Kress Company created feminine spaces based on a national linkage between women and shopping. We know that various exterior architectural forms, interior colors, designs and fixtures, advertising campaigns, and merchandise were standard across all Kress stores nationwide, creating a similar experience for shoppers regardless of location. This was an aspect of the modern chain store the company prided itself on. Then what is the significance of these feminine spaces in the South? The answer is part of a defining characteristic of the New South – racial segregation. As will be fully explained in the next section, gender segregation became a rationale for racial separation. The importance of protecting white southern womanhood in feminine

[134] North Carolina city directories, 1901-1960.

[135] Store plans for Gastonia, NC, January 1930, Durham, NC, February 1930, Wilmington, NC, March 1930, and Rocky Mount, NC, September 1934, Kress Collection, National Building Museum.

spaces like Kress stores justified limiting the presence of African Americans – men and women. This next section explores how Kress limited the presence of African Americans in their southern stores, both in behaviors influenced by law and societal views, including sexual stereotypes.

CHAPTER 4- CONSUMPTION BY COLOR: THE SEGREGATED KRESS STORE

The management of race in southern Kress stores was a consequence of the status of African Americans in postbellum history. The emancipation of slaves transformed the South, as well as northern and western regions of the United States. After Reconstruction, the reconciliation of the North and South was economically beneficial to both regions. The South had resources and newly formed markets for a northern model of industry to be implemented. Yet after the Compromise of 1877 ended military reconstruction, former Confederates were again enfranchised and the southern political climate changed from Republican to Democrat led. The Southern Democrats rising to power were predominately white supremacists, aiming to 'redeem' their government from the Republicans and African American leaders who gained political representation post-war. Therefore as David Blight argues in *Race and Reunion*, the reconciliation of the North and South came at the expense of African Americans. Northern investors abandoned the post-war promise of an integrated South, in order to sustain a working relationship with the white supremacists in power in the South.[136]

As a result, the postbellum South continued as an environment in which African Americans were in a lower social position than whites. The fourteenth amendment guaranteed black citizenship in 1868, yet in the South, African Americans were relegated to second-class citizen status. Additionally, political representation was restricted by various voting restrictions on African Americans. At the turn of the twentieth century, the majority of African Americans were of a lower socioeconomic status than whites, making up a rural, southern and relatively impoverished group. However, changing population demographics of the early twentieth century threatened this hierarchy. In 1863, less than eight percent of the country's black population lived

[136] David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

in northern or Midwestern regions. This demographic changed drastically over the next century, especially between 1910 and 1930 during the period known as the Great Migration. During these decades, the black population in the north grew by almost forty percent. African American exodus from the South took them to northern and Midwestern cities for better employment, housing and living standards. The pattern of rural blacks also relocating to southern cities began even earlier, as the formation of New South cities in the late decades of the nineteenth century created employment alternatives to sharecropping and tenant farming.[137]

The most drastic relocation occurred during the early twentieth century. Southern urban black populations increased by 32 percent between 1910 and 1920, and 41 percent between 1920 and 1930. Of the 80 American cities with black populations over 10,000 in 1930, 51 were located in the South. In the decade from 1920 to 1930, cities typically associated with the Great Migration experienced sixty to one hundred percent increase in their black populations. These included Philadelphia with a 63.6 percent increase, Cleveland with 108.7 percent, Chicago with 113.7 percent, New York City with 114.9 percent, and Detroit with 194.0 percent. Urban resettlement of blacks in the South carried similar impact. Increase in black population in Charlotte, North Carolina was 71.9 percent, Chattanooga, Tennessee was 76.2 percent, Monroe, Louisiana was 82.5 percent, Jackson, Mississippi was 95.5 percent, Asheville, North Carolina was 99.5 percent, Greensboro, North Carolina was 135.2 percent, and Durham, North Carolina saw a 144.5 percent increase.[138]

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[137] Robert L. Boyd, "Black Retail Enterprise and Racial Segregation in Northern Cities before the 'Ghetto,'" *Sociological Perspectives* 53, no. 3 (Fall 2010), 399; Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 84-85.

[138] Weems, Desegregating the Dollar, 7, 12-15; Paul K. Edwards, *The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer* (College Park, Md: McGrath Publishing Company, 1932), 5-6.

Innovations in transportation increased black mobility; railroads and streetcars made day trips from rural to urban areas possible. Combined with the exodus of blacks to new urban areas, both in the North and South, Main Streets became increasingly integrated landscapes in the early 20th century. The influx of African Americans into southern urban areas resulted in methods employed by white government and business officials to limit their presence on white dominated Main Street. John David Smith writes, "Encouraged by the prevailing legal system, individuals and businesses constructed their own segregationist practices that became institutionalized over time and were as powerful as legal precedents."[139] The term "Jim Crow" originated via minstrel shows in the 1820s, yet by the mid-nineteenth century became a derogatory term for all things African American. Thus by the 1890s, "Jim Crow" referred to the rigid set of rules and legal codes which physically separated the races in the South. A greater quantity of urban black citizens meant a greater number of black participants in all aspects of society – as residents, employees, entrepreneurs and consumers. Jim Crow laws and customs were created and enforced to relegate African Americans' positions in each of these roles. The 1896 Supreme Court decision of Plessy v. Ferguson upheld the constitutionality of state racial segregation laws and encouraged the practice of creating "separate but equal" facilities.[140]

Jim Crow took the form of a varying number and type of laws, differing by state or localities, assigning restrictions and separate residential, educational, recreational and social services to blacks. In the North Carolina state constitutions, articles existed requiring grade schools separated by races and prohibiting intermarriage of whites and blacks. Additionally, statutes required various facilities separated by race, including cemeteries, textbooks, higher education facilities, fraternal orders, hospitals, library reading rooms, state militia, prisons, and

[139] John David Smith, *When Did Southern Segregation Begin?* (New York City: Palgrave, 2002), 9.
[140] Brook Thomas, ed., *Plessy v. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 41-43.

railroad waiting rooms. In addition to legal restrictions, the dominance of Jim Crow ideology led to informal regulations as well as codes of racial etiquette. Both legal and customary products of Jim Crow were executed in southern Kress stores, segregating black customers spatially and by privileges.[141]

Additionally, the absence of civil rights legislation was just as influential on a state's racial climate as restrictive codes. For example, eighteen states in the northeast, Midwest and west coast approved statutes protecting minority rights in public accommodations. The statutes generally prohibit discrimination and denial of privileges in restaurants, hotels, libraries, parks, and other public places. Part of New York's Civil Rights law is below:

> All persons within the jurisdiction of this state shall be entitled to the full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities and privileges or any places of public accommodations, resort or amusement…No person, being the owner, lessee, proprietor, manager, superintendent, agent or employee of any such place shall directly or indirectly refuse, withhold from or deny to any person any of the accommodations, advantages, facilities or privileges thereof…to any person on account of race, creed, color or national origin.

The law continued by specifying the types of public accommodation it covers, including hotels, retail stores, soda fountains, hospitals, bath-houses, barber shops, theatres, music halls, skating rinks, public libraries, golf courses, parks, gymnasiums, and public education facilities. Possible loopholes are accounted for by protecting aspects of buildings which could be construed as privileges, like elevators and lunch counters. Amended several times, a law of this nature existed in New York State since 1913, corresponding with the influx African Americans to the state during the Great Migration.[142] Southern states were not violating any laws by denying equal public accommodations based on race, because no civil rights laws existed in their state

[141] Pauli Murray, ed., *States' Laws on Race and Color* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Woman's Division of Christian Service, 1951), 329-348.
[142] Murray, *States' Laws on Race and Color,* 303-304.

constitutions. So while prejudice existed nationwide, the existence of Jim Crow laws and the lack of civil rights legislation allowed it to manifest more publicly and commonly in the South.

In addition to Jim Crow, racial prejudices in the South took the form of violence. The practice of lynching, execution for presumed offenses without due process of law, gained greater popularity after the Civil War. Typically in the form of mob violence enforcing white supremacy, around 3,500 African Americans were lynched in the United States between 1882 and 1968. The number of lynching incidents peaked at the end of the 19th century, concentrating in the states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.[143]

The ideology behind lynching as an appropriate punishment was political and social. Violence intimidated African Americans, controlling their political voice and resulting in the post-reconstruction ability of white supremacists to again disenfranchise blacks. Social motivations for lynching involve sexual stereotypes reinforcing the need to separate black men from white women. South Carolina governor Benjamin Tillman spoke on both motivations, "We of the South have never recognized the right of the Negro to govern white men, and we never will. We have never believed him to be the equal of the white man, and we will not submit to his gratifying his lust on our wives and daughters without lynching him."[144] The desire to protect the purity of white southern woman was justification for lynching African American men who posed a threat to this ideal. Under this mindset, segregation of the races in feminine landscapes became more justifiable.

Gender segregation of railroad cars also served as an analogy and justification for racial segregation. Barbara Welke writes that "social assumptions about white ladies and men made it

[143] "Lynchings: By State and Race, 1882-1968," University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law, compiled from statistics in the Archives of the Tuskegee Institute, http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/shipp/lynchingsstate.html.
[144] Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 19.

necessary to separate the two when traveling."[145] The sexual consequences of mixing genders in certain spatial environments became even more pervasive when interracial mixing became a possibility. Yet Welke looks beyond the reasoning for separating black men from white women, to conclude why black women, who do not pose the same sexual threat, were also segregated in rail cars. She writes, "Statutory Jim Crow was for women, the gender equivalent of disenfranchisement of black men." The status of a black woman determined the status of the men related to her. Therefore denying black women the privileges extended to southern 'ladies,' in railroad cars or shopping environments, excluded all African Americans from the world of white respectability.[146]

History of racialized spaces

The roots of racialized spaces in the United States predate the Jim Crow era. The 'Negro pew' was common in antebellum New England churches. Thus the ideology of space segregated by race has long been a solution to controlling a population of free blacks. Robert Weyeneth classifies the architecture of segregation into two different strategies – isolation and partitioning. Architectural isolation was the attempt to minimize racial contact by building places that kept blacks and whites separate. This creation of separate racial spheres included businesses and facilities mandated as 'white space' either through law or custom.[147]

Explanatory signs reading "Whites Only" or "No Negro Allowed in Building" were often markers of these spaces. Similar signs were less visible on the landscape as time progressed and 'white space' became more recognizable.[148] This was prompted by legal segregation, which first began widespread on a government level in public schools. With state and local ordinances

[145] Barbara Welke, "When All the Women Were White, and All the Blacks Were Men: Gender, Class, Race and the Road to Plessy, 1855-1914" in *When did Southern Segregation Begin*?, 143.
[146] Welke, "When All the Women Were White, and All the Blacks Were Men,"148.
[147] Weyeneth, "The Architecture of Racial Segregation," 12.
[148] Weyeneth , "The Architecture of Racial Segregation," 13-14.

mandating separate schools – public and often private, libraries, hospitals, retirement homes, orphanages, prisons, cemeteries, playgrounds and beaches, signage was replaced by customary acknowledgement of what race spaces were intended for. This recognition was typically visible as existing white facilities were replicated for blacks. Though created with the "separate but equal" mentality, these duplicated spaces were inferior. The public facilities were assisted with limited state and local government funding, another product of prejudice of the era.[149]

It was unrealistic to aspire for the complete avoidance of blacks by whites. Not all public and private facilities could be duplicated, which led to various forms of architectural partitioning to segregated facilities inevitably shared by the races. These included courthouses, railroad stations and streetcars. Contact between the races was managed by compartmentalizing the setting, typically though separate entrances and interior spaces. In Lenoir, North Carolina, a 1912 architectural drawing of the town's railroad station reveals separate waiting rooms drawn into the plan in order to satisfy the state requirement. Some separation was less fixed, like a rope dividing black and white business in a courthouse, or the malleable partition of whites in the front of streetcars and blacks filling in from the back.[150] Finally, behavioral separation was another strategy of segregating space. Weyeneth describes this strategy which "was to delineate appropriate from inappropriate activities when a place was theoretically open to both races."[151] Each of these strategies was executed in southern Kress stores. Using Weyeneth's terms, the southern Kress stores were "conceptualized and erected as a self-conscious architecture of segregation."[152] But before expanding on the specific methods, we must further explore the role of the African American southern consumer and his or her tendency to visit Kress stores. This

[149] Weyeneth, "The Architecture of Racial Segregation,"15.
[150] Weyeneth, "The Architecture of Racial Segregation," 19-22.
[151] Weyeneth, "The Architecture of Racial Segregation," 23.
[152] Weyeneth, "The Architecture of Racial Segregation," 28.

can be done through looking at the history of African American residential, employment, and consumer trends during the Jim Crow era.

The "other" side of town

Beyond Jim Crow, controlling African Americans as residents and employees was a nationwide practice. Housing and employment restrictions could be created by private interests. Since Jim Crow was a southern phenomenon, northern segregation was done independently of the law. Additionally, races were historically separated in these two aspects. Antebellum spatial segregation existed in the form of separate residential areas. Prior to the Civil War, cities with substantial black populations employed what historians Paul Groves and Edward K. Muller term "backyard" or "back-alley" segregation. Free blacks and urban slaves not living on the premises lived in close proximity to wealthy whites or their masters, typically in alleys. This pattern, sustained longer in the South than North, contributed to postbellum residential segregation. The Great Migration resulted in the creation of distinct African American neighborhoods, notably Harlem in New York City, Roxbury in Boston, Black Bottom in Detroit, and The South Side in Chicago. Prior to the rulings of their unconstitutionality in 1917 and 1948 respectively, municipal resident segregation ordinances and restrictive covenants attributed to the creation of these enclaves. The single black neighborhood pattern originated in Northern cities, then reached the South through a more evolutionary process.[153]

On the eve of the twentieth century, most black populations in southern cities were widely dispersed, filling in various clusters on the outskirts of towns, often in bottomlands or near riverbeds. The distinction between black and white neighborhoods was not always clear

[153] Paul A. Groves and Edward K. Muller, "The Evolution of Black Residential Areas in Late Nineteenth Century Cities," *Journal of Historical Geography* 1, no. 2 (1975), 173; John N. Ingham, "Building Businesses, Creating Communities: Residential Segregation and the Growth of African American Business in Southern Cities, 1880-1915," *The Business History Review* 77, no. 4 (Winter 2003), 640.

during the decades immediately following the Civil War, creating what historian Tom Hanchett called, "Salt and Pepper districts." Hanchett's study of pre-industrial Charlotte reveals blacks and whites living and working side-by-side up for two decades after the war's end. The city of Charlotte in 1879 was designed on a grid divided into four wards. Of these wards, two had a majority of black residents; two had a majority of white residents. Yet in the wards with a greater number African Americans (1,091 in the second Ward, 1,026 in the third Ward), high numbers of white residents also existed (623 in the second Ward, 881 in the third Ward).[154] . In Charleston, geographer John Radford termed the trend "micro-segregation." A few blocks would be predominately one race, but as a whole, the area did not follow a racial pattern.[155] Similar residential racial intermingling existed in Atlanta, Houston, Louisville, New Bern, and other southern cities until the 1890s. Then as racial tensions mounted at the end of the nineteenth century, primarily through the rhetoric of white supremacy, black residential patterns became increasingly segregated. Through red-lining and denial of home loans in certain regions, real estate interests restricted areas for blacks to inhabit.

Some African American neighborhoods arose organically from the pre-twentieth century clusters that formed immediately after the Civil War. African Americans clustered into areas of town undeveloped by whites. These uninhabited lands, though not in prime locations by white standards, provided fresh opportunities for housing and civic life. Others were created intentionally, often by white initiative. Real estate investors were the primary agents in creating racially divergent areas. In Charlotte, the strategy of 'directed opportunity' effectively created

[154] Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City*, 42.
[155] Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City,* 122.

distinct black neighborhoods by 1910. Their strategies included white-financed housing developments, shotgun houses built as rentals, and even a planned streetcar suburb.[156]

In other southern cities, law-makers were responsible for African American neighborhoods. In 1913, Winston-Salem, North Carolina followed a method created in Richmond, Virginia of designating city blocks as black of white, according to the block's population, then forbidding anyone of another race from inhabiting the block. Greensboro and Asheville followed suit. This rigid legal method did not actualize across the South, but was employed in certain cities.[157]

African American residents were not all constrained to these large neighborhood developments. Fringe communities continued to exist in southern urban areas, as shantytowns, public housing projects or other clusters.[158] Yet the larger communities are significant as they simultaneously hosted the respective city's black civic, cultural and commercial life. In North Carolina, black neighborhoods took the form of Biddleville and Brooklyn in Charlotte; Hayti in Durham; Warnersville in Greensboro; Washington Street district in High Point; Frog Pond in New Bern; Idlewild in Raleigh; Brooklyn in Wilmington; Happy Hill and Reynoldstown in Winston-Salem, among others.[159]As Hanchett writes, "White property owners subtly forged the new pattern of hard-edged black districts by closing off opportunities in certain areas while

[156] Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City* , 122 – 124.
[157] M. Ruth Little, "The Other Side of the Tracks: The Middle-Class Neighborhoods that Jim Crow Built in Early-Twentieth-Century North Carolina," *Perspective in Vernacular Architecture* 7, (1997), p 269-272.
[158] Little, "The Other Side of the Tracks ," 270.
[159] Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City*, 117; Little, "The Other Side of the Tracks ," 273-274; Leslie Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class, and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 31; Eddie Huffman, "Washington Street Revisited: Revitalization effort drives interest in the High Point neighborhood," *Greensboro News & Record*, January 2, 2011, http://triadhomes.news-record.com/content/2010/12/30/article/washington_street_revisited_revitalization_effort_drives_interest_in_high (Accessed February 5, 2012).

opening possibilities in others."[160] The limitations of segregation paradoxically spurred the growth of black business districts, extending new entrepreneurial opportunities.

In antebellum southern cities, business ownership was rare among free blacks. The low population of free blacks contributes to this fact. Additionally after emancipation, until separate black neighborhoods emerged in the late nineteenth century locations for businesses in town were limited to white dominated Main Street. Therefore the limited number of black-owned businesses on Main Street both before and after the Civil War fell into certain categories. The most common black entrepreneurial route was the barbershop. The barber occupation fell into the tradition of blacks providing services for white customers. In Wilmington in 1877, five African American barbers operated shops in the central business district, compared to two white barbers. In 1897 this number grew to eleven, overwhelming the three white barbershops.[161] But evidence shows as some blacks pursued traditional service opportunities; others began to operate varying businesses in black neighborhoods, for black customers.

John Ingham argues that African Americans southern cities with developed black business districts fared better economically during early 20th century racial hostilities than in those cities with traditional backyard residential patterns. In these cities, since residential patterns were not altered, neither were business practices. Blacks continued to pursue traditional enterprises, like barbershops, blacksmiths, and tailor shops, which were located along Main Streets and dependent on white clients. With mounting racial tension, these businesses struggled with Jim Crow ideologies. Not only were white patrons lost, but the location of these businesses on white-owned Main Streets meant there was no African American population base to draw from. Therefore the end of the nineteenth century witnessed a declining population of black-

[160] Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City*, 116.
[161] Wilmington, N.C. Directory and General Advertiser (Sheriff's, 1877-78); Directory of Wilmington, N.C. (J. L. Hill Printing Company, 1897).

owned businesses on Main Street as entrepreneurs took their operations to forming black neighborhoods.[162]

In North Carolina, Parrish Street in Durham, referred to as "Black Wall Street" hosted the largest African American owned business in the country, North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company. Begun in 1898, North Carolina Mutual offered accident, health and life insurance to Durham's large black population.[163] Though racial attitudes played a part in the decision to establish his business in a separate part of town, founder John Merrick was not legally mandated. Regardless of the cause of their establishment, black business districts were a landscape of accomplishment, challenging their supposed inferior status.[164]

In the Brooklyn neighborhood of Wilmington, black-owned businesses included an automobile repair shop, a fish dealer, moving companies, ice cream parlors, and several groceries. Fayetteville Street, the main thoroughfare in Durham's Hayti neighborhood, hosted black-owned barbershops, dry cleaners, groceries, a bakery, a drug store, a blacksmith. Additionally, aspects of black civic life centered in Hayti, including three churches, a school and the colored library branch.[165]

Black business districts evolved both through the initiative of black entrepreneurs as well as through the mandates of white city officials. In 1929 in Little Rock, Arkansas a city plan established separate commercial districts for African Americans and whites. Restrictive covenants disallowing blacks to open on certain downtown commercial blocks was also common, giving black entrepreneurs no other choice than to open a store elsewhere. Though not always mandated by law, the creation of stores in black neighborhoods, either white or black-

[162] Ingham, *Building Businesses, Creating Communities,"* 641-648.
[163] Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham*, 111-114; Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City,* 250-251.
[164] Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham,* 120-121.
[165] Wilmington, NC city directories, 1897-1940; Durham, NC city directories, 1898-1938.

owned, is an example of isolation, as Weyeneth would claim. White-owned replications of Main Street stores opened in African American districts, ranging from groceries to drug stores, locally owned or chains. The A&P Grocery chain operated a location in downtown Wilmington as well as Brooklyn. Creating these stores was a strategy to isolate the African American population's shopping habits away from downtown white consumers.[166]

However, the number of southern blacks – urban and rural– owning businesses was comparatively miniscule. Problems with securing capital to organize businesses, gaining training and experience prevented the success of more black owned businesses. In each of North Carolina's fourteen cities with Kress stores, no black-owned five-and-dime equivalents existed. Additionally, in a study of the South's seventeen largest cities in the 1930s, none revealed black-owned variety stores. The nonexistence of these enterprises is for a few reasons. First, the success of a five-and-dime was correlated with chain store operations. Keeping prices so low required buying in bulk, which was only profitable if the store could afford to stock the remaining merchandise, or if there were multiple store locations. With the difficulty African American entrepreneurs faced in securing capital for one business, it was unimaginable to be able to launch a chain business large enough to sustain such an operation.[167]

Though separate black districts created opportunities to begin businesses which otherwise could not have opened downtown, the segregated market also had its drawbacks. Businesses in black districts were limited to black clients. As Paul Edwards noted, "Some stimulation to sales is possible on the plea of race pride, but unfortunately for these merchants the purely racial plea for support seldom outweighs the economic argument of cheaper goods elsewhere."[168]

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[166] Weyeneth, "The Architecture of Racial Segregation," 13; Wilmington, NC city directory, 1911; Isenberg, *Downtown America,* 109.
[167] Edwards, *The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer*, 5.
[168] Edwards, *The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer,* 134.

Additionally, African American buying power was limited by low wages and employment discrimination. In 1910, 76.4 percent of employed blacks worked either in agriculture or domestic service. Nationwide until the 1940s, blacks commonly occupied service, domestic or unskilled general labor positions. The situation was disproportionately worse in the South. Despite lower wages and limited opportunities, postbellum changes allowed blacks nonetheless became participants in the consumer economy and shop at white-owned businesses like Kress.[169]

African American consumption prior to World War II

As Charles McGovern argues in *Sold American*, consumption became the cornerstone of both national and state economic policies during the 20th century. Purchasing goods was seen as patriotic and key to American identity. Theoretically, shopping is a democratizing practice. Money transactions are objective – they are able to occur regardless of racial or class divisions. Bobby Wilson describes money as "disembedded mechanism that removes any intrinsic differences of persons from the circuit."[170] Yet the United States free market stands in contrast to the restrictive policies of segregation.

For African Americans, citizenship was as much about securing labor and production rights as consumer rights. Participating in the consumer marketplace represented freedom from slavery.[171] Edwards asserted that the unique historical experience of African Americans affected their consumption patterns. Buying motivations based on "needs," such as the need for belonging and gaining a particular status, take greater urgency in blacks. Because of the history of oppression, consumption satisfied the need to buy respect and status.[172]

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[169] Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar*, 14.
[170] Charles McGovern, *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 14; Bobby M. Wilson, "Race in Commodity Exchange and Consumption: Separate but Equal," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95, no. 3 (September 2005), 590.
[171] Boyd, "Black Retail Enterprise and Racial Segregation in Northern Cities before the "Ghetto," 24.
[172] Edwards, *The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer*, 27.

In 1912, Monroe Work of the Tuskegee Institute began publishing *The Negro Yearbook and Annual Encyclopedia of the Negro*. This resource, published frequently until 1950, presented achievements, economic and otherwise, by blacks in the preceding years. Work placed numbers on entrepreneurial achievements, noting black operation of 64 banks, 100 insurance companies, 300 drug stores, and over 20,000 dry goods and grocery stores in 1911.[173] The first edition of *The Negro Yearbook* estimated the total wealth of African Americans in 1911 at $700 million. Nationally, the race was documented at adding $20,000,000 to $30,000,000 to their overall wealth each year. Interestingly, the findings show this wealth was not limited to urban blacks. Between 1900 and 1910 southern blacks farm properties increased in value by 177 percent, to $492,898,218.[174]

Nonetheless, most of the statistics reported in *The Negro Yearbook* were national surveys, not accounting for differences in the South. Therefore in 1932, Paul K. Edwards released a study which established collective black spending power in the seventeen largest cities in the South. Edwards calculated the annual income of the 890,000 African American residents in these cities to be $308 million in 1929. This figure accounted only for those living in these cities, not the rural blacks who were remote consumers. Edward's in-depth study centers on Nashville, where in 1929, the city's blacks combined annual income was $14.6 million, or about $347 per capita. Of that income, the average black family in Nashville spent 27.2 percent on food, 14.9 percent on clothing, 12.4 percent on housing, 4.7 percent on utilities, 1.4 percent on furniture and household items; then 7.5 percent put into savings. This left 31.9 percent for miscellaneous items not accounted for.[175]

[173] Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar*, 9.
[174] Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar*, 9.
[175] Edwards, *The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer*, 38-39.

Edward expanded his study to the entire region, based on additional research in Birmingham, Atlanta and Richmond, to determine that urban southern blacks per year spent $83,776,000 on food, $45,892,000 on clothing, $38,192,000 on housing, $14,476,000 on utilities, $4,476,000 on furniture and household items and $23,100,000 on savings and insurance. Edwards did not calculate the miscellaneous expenditures, which accounted for $99 million in 1929.[176] Purchases at Kress stores would fall into this category of miscellaneous expenditures. Though these statistics show African Americans had money to spend at these establishments, Kress and other chains followed the general tendency of white businesses to view blacks as appendages of the white market. By the 1950s, the "Negro Market" was an integral part of the national economy, though still viewed as separate in the South.[177]

In the postbellum South, the commodity circuit allowed social relations that were problematic to the existing racial structure. The African American population went from slaves or free blacks with little or no money, to emancipated members of society, acting as both wageworkers and consumers. Places of consumption became places of racial mixing. White interaction with blacks occurred more in stores or adjacent sidewalks and streets than in schools, churches, or the workplace. While full integration of blacks into the southern commodity circuit would defy the racial hierarchy, full exclusion of blacks as consumers was detrimental to any growing southern cities' economy. Thus, as with the case of schools, transportation and other public facilities, segregation became the answer in controlling the black consumer.[178]

Methods of segregating the black consumer took physical and behavioral forms. Replication of white downtowns in the form the black business districts was a strategy, yet blacks continued to shop downtown, primarily because that was where chain stores were located.

[176] Edwards *The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer*, 39-42.
[177] Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar*, 46-50.
[178] Wilson, "Race in Commodity Exchange and Consumption," 588.

Black customers also frequented white-owned stores because of their preference for chain stores and national brand merchandise. For African Americans like Ralph Thomas, growing up in Memphis during the 1930s and 1940s meant restricted privileges as a consumer. He recalled, "You go to a store, and you're standing there and a white person walks up, and they'll wait on that white person and just make you stand." Even when given attention, some stores made it known they did not want African Americans' money. Thomas said, "I'd go to Thom McAn to buy shoes, if I had a $20 bill, they would check that $20 bill like it was counterfeit. I couldn't walk into a Thom McAn shoe store and buy a pair of shoes because they didn't want to take my money."[179] As Thomas' story proves, "The racism of community merchants was a tangible lived experience, and many African Americans placed comparatively more hope in a national market which displayed less clearly defined racism."[180]

African Americans were attached to national consumer culture – or mass standards of living and social conventions shared by virtually all citizens – for its democratic appeal. Nationally produced goods in contrast assured the same quality in every container, and because they were sealed outside the local market neighborhoods, retailers had no opportunity to adulterate the ingredients. Edwards' survey results coincide with this trend, showing black preferred brand name goods, regardless of their socioeconomic status.[181] Additionally, shopping at chain stores was preferable because of their association with promoting equal rights among shoppers. Just as the merchandise and prices were standard in any branch of the chain across the nation, the service was expected to be as well. But southern blacks were reminded of their

[179] William H. Chafe, Raymond Gavins and Robert Korstand, eds, *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans tell about Life in the Segregated South* (New York: New York Press, 2001), 205-206.
[180] Paul R. Mullins, "Race and the Genteel Consumer: Class and African-American Consumption, 1850-1930," *Historical Archeology* 33, no. 1 (1999), 26.
[181] Mullins, "Race and the Genteel Consumer," 25-26; Edwards, *The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer*, 205-209.

inferior identity when they encountered dividing practices in stores. While their dollar still carried equal importance, it was known their presence would not guarantee the same service or appreciation.[182]

Geography and architecture of Jim Crow

The historic drawings and blueprints for southern Kress stores contain evidence of Jim Crow architecture. Among plans for stores in other southern states, drawings for seven of the fourteen stores in North Carolina are preserved in the Kress collection. The plans for stores in Durham, Gastonia, Goldsboro, High Point, Rocky Mount and Wilmington pre-date the Civil Rights movement and all show evidence of built-in spatial segregation of blacks and whites. These plans combined with employee listings derived from city directories create a narrative of Kress's policies toward public and professional African American presence in their southern stores.

The chief physical method for delineating African American customers was separation. Drinking fountains were segregated by race, a common practice in southern state in various public places. In North Carolina, plans for the Durham (1930), Gastonia (1930) and Goldsboro (1936) stores include two separate drinking fountains on the first floor. Photos from the Montgomery, Alabama Kress store show the words "Colored" and "White" etched into the marble wall above the separate drinking fountains. The architects in the company not only intentionally built this racial separation into the store, but by marking it in the wall in a permanent method, did not anticipate southern race relations changing.[183]

[182] Wilson, "Race in Commodity Exchange and Consumption," 588.
[183] Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,* 52-53; 1930 architectural drawings for Durham, NC store, 1936 architectural drawings for Goldsboro, NC store; Kress Collection, National Building Museum, Washington, DC.

Figure 4.1 Interior of Montgomery, AL Kress store. Seen on the bottom right of the photograph are the separate drinking fountains, distinguished by race. *Kress Collection, National Building Museum.*

Additionally, lunch counters at Kress were segregated racially. In accordance with Jim Crow laws, if businesses were to serve diners of both races, separate seating areas must be defined. At Kress, as well as other five-and-dime stores, the lunch counter was designated for white patrons only. In Montgomery, even the entrances to the Kress store were segregated by race. The Kress storefront was located on Dexter Avenue, the main shopping street for whites. Yet the store backed up to the equivalent black business strip, Monroe Street. The façade on Monroe Street was less elaborate than the principal storefront on Dexter Avenue, providing separate and stylistically unequal entrances. In the 1940s, the Montgomery store added a take-out

lunch counter on Monroe Street for African Americans, extending the store's eating capabilities yet still denying blacks the privilege of dining in the store.[184]

Analysis of restrooms gives insight into the dominant race in the space, just as it did gender. Separate public women's toilets are drawn in each of the available floor plans for stores in Durham, Gastonia, Goldsboro, High Point, Rocky Mount and Wilmington. As aforementioned, limited male bathrooms suggested men were not the store's main customers, either white or black. Thus African American shoppers either encountered separate rest facilities or none at all. The segregation of these basic amenities in the stores reiterated southern blacks' second-class citizen status. Since Kress executives strived to create uniform store interiors, these particular divisions of race became standard, even in states where relevant formal laws did not exist.[185]

In addition to segregating their customers, the Kress Company differentiated the roles and treatment of their employees by race. Southern Kress stores employed black men since their founding. However, they filled positions that kept them off the main sales floor. As porters and dishwashers, black males had no opportunity in their jobs to interact with the white female customers. Since the company employed blacks, they were subject to further Jim Crow laws in particular states.[186] The North Carolina statute regarding separate toilets for places of business employing both races was as follows:

> All persons and corporations employing males and female in any manufacturing industry or other business employing more than two males and female in towns and cities having a population of one thousand persons or more, and where such employees are required to do indoor work chiefly, shall provide and keep a cleanly condition separate and distinct toilet rooms for such employees, said toilets to be lettered and marked in a distinct

[184] Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Store,* 50-53
[185] Architectural drawings, Kress collection, National Building Museum.
[186] North Carolina city directories, 1900-1948, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

> manner, so as to furnish separate facilities for white males, white females, colored males and colored females.

Passed in 1913, the statute continues to specify that separate facilities must be in separate parts of the building, or separated by "substantial walls of brick or timer." Additionally any employee who willfully uses the other race's toilet could be found guilty of a misdemeanor and fined five dollars. If the corporation fails to comply with these provisions, they could also be found guilty of a misdemeanor and fined or imprisoned, or both. This particular architectural evidence of Jim Crow was legally mandated. Separate bathrooms for African American employees are drawn on Kress blueprints, typically upstairs or in basements. Rest facilities for black employees were also smaller than their white counterparts, evidence of separate but unequal treatment.[187]

Initially, males were the only African Americans hired at the stores. Kress's expansion into hiring a greater number of African American employees coincided with the inclusion of restaurant facilities in the stores. North Carolina Kress stores first began employing black females in 1929. This year, city directories listed black females as cooks and maids in Kress stores. Additionally buildings plans from 1930 for stores in Wilmington and Durham include rest facilities for black women on the second floor, amongst the other employee accommodations. The addition of lunch counters opened domestic positions for black women to occupy. Black women did not fill the same visible, customer-service oriented jobs as white women did. Additionally, they were not employed in office or record-keeping work, as white women were. The restricted employment of black women in the stores solidifies southern traditions of black women relegated to domestic work roles, as well as the segregated landscape of Kress by keeping black female employees off of the main sales floor. In addition to lower ranking

[187] Murray, *States' Laws on Race and Color,* 341-342.

positions, black employees were denied other privileges in the company, including lunchrooms, which were a privilege of white female employees.[188]

Segregated employment is not a distinctly southern phenomenon. African Americans in northern and Midwestern states were also subject to lower ranks of employment on a basis of widespread racial discrimination. However the significance of southern employment segregation in businesses like Kress was the endurance of the trend. Greater documented efforts and successes in challenging segregated employment practices exist in other areas of the country. In particular, in Chicago in the late 1920s a series of "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaigns began and quickly spread across the country. Championed by NAACP leaders, African Americans in thirty-five cities boycotted white-owned stores that did not employ blacks. As a result of these early challenges to discrimination, changed hiring policies were documented in various businesses. In Chicago, the creation of 3,000 new white-collar jobs for blacks included new saleswomen positions at Woolworth's. Other cities with success included Cleveland, Detroit, Toledo, New York City, Baltimore and Washington, DC. In Baltimore, Tommy Tucker & Goodman's, two local five and dime chains agreed to hire black clerks to save their businesses. Additionally, the regional director of the A&P chain traveled to the city to compromise with protesters, and eventually allowed black college graduates to be hired as clerks. However, this was as far south as the movement's successes reached. Before changes to employment practices in white-owned southern stores were possible, blacks had to overcome the other limitations placed on them in stores.[189]

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[188] North Carolina city directories, 1900-1948, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; 1930 architectural drawings for Durham, NC store, 1930 architectural drawings for Wilmington, NC store; Kress Collection, National Building Museum, Washington, DC.

[189] Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 44-47; Andor Skotnes, "Buy Where You Can Work": Boycotting for Jobs in African-American Baltimore, 1933-1934" *Journal of Social History* 27, no. 4 (Summer 1994), 739-745.

Consumer culture in the early 20th century connected the South to nationwide trends. Yet meanwhile it helped solidify the southern trend of segregation, by creating venues where separate racial identities could be furthered. Blacks and whites shopping in the same stores for the same products with the same currency undermined the white supremacy. But businesses, in small towns especially, could not afford to simply exclude blacks as customers. Therefore for the South, the way to preserve economic activity and mass consumption was not deny African Americans the right to shop, but to segregate the experience to reinforce the notion of inferiority. While segregation could not revert a middle-class well-dressed black man to poor and unkempt, it demoted his social status by denying him the same facilities as middle-class, or even poor whites.[190] Southern blacks became accustomed to segregation and modified their daily routine around it. Blacks took preparatory measures before embarking on the theoretically simple excursion of shopping downtown. Ralph Thomas remembers, "If we went downtown and they had the colored drinking fountain and white drinking fountain…my mother would always tell us to drink water before we left home." Similarly, using the restroom at home prevented the inconvenient and less desirable experience of using the designated 'Colored' bathroom.[191] Nonetheless, the association with material consumption and citizen privileges was strong for southern African Americans. Blacks saw consumer culture as a way to express social aspirations and class struggle. For this reason, the 1960s saw waves of black activity confronting racism in consumer environments, like Kress stores.

[190] Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 107-112.
[191] Chafe, Gavins and Korstand*, Remembering Jim Crow,* 205-206.

CONCLUSION- INTERPRETING THE KRESS LEGACY

On February 1, 1960, four young African American students sat at the Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, N.C. requesting service. In accordance with the state's segregation laws, the lunch counter staff refused to serve the customers based on their skin color. The peaceful sit-in protest spread, within two days reaching Woolworth's competition five-and-dime and drug stores. Among these was Greensboro's S.H. Kress & Co. five-and-dime.[192] Standing in the center of the downtown shopping district, the four-story building exerted its prominence on the city's landscape as well as consumer market.[193]

Yet as the black protesters prove, Kress, like the majority of businesses in the 1960's South, was not a welcome environment for all citizens. Jim Crow laws, economic concerns, and the concern for protecting the white female clientele led to racial restrictions on consumption. The significance of this spatial segregation was evident in the 1960s sit-in movement, when African Americans asserted their buying power and challenged the limitations that historically separated them from the white consumer landscape.[194]

For Kress, like other national chains, remaining profitable in the southern market meant altering stores to include the segregation of blacks and whites. Though the northern decision makers of the Kress Company had no local attachment to Jim Crow, protecting their white clientele was foremost. Since the store catered to female consumers, the justification behind lynching and Jim Crow of protecting white southern womanhood was relevant. Because of this racist assumption of black men as sexually threatening to white women, their assertive presence in 1960 at Kress lunch counters not only challenged physical segregation, but the ideologies that led to it.

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[192] Martin Oppenheimer, *The Sit-In Movement of 1960* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc, 1989), 38.
[193] Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores,* 70-72.
[194] Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 324-325.

From its origins in Greensboro on February 1, related sit-in movements quickly spread to multiple Kress stores in the southeast. In North Carolina, sit-ins at the Durham Kress began on February 8th and at the Charlotte Kress the next day. Throughout March, large-scale sit-ins occurred at Kress counters in Atlanta, Jacksonville, Nashville, Savannah and Baton-Rouge, as well as in towns on a smaller scale.

The protesters themselves were initially young African American male college students, a trend set by the original four North Carolina A&T students in the Greensboro protests. As the movement grew, women, both black and white, joined. The fact that these early organizers were college-educated, well-dressed, and peaceful, challenged racial stereotypes, just as the existence of middle-class black consumers had in previous decades. Additionally, as a group of men, they were seen as intruders to the feminine dime store landscape. To prejudice minds, they revealed southern white men's worse fears by undermining the Jim Crow adage of black men as dangerous, unruly, and second-class. Also, the combined effort of blacks and white women undermined the gender-based need to separate the races.[195]

The Durham sit-ins for example were conceived during a student meeting on the campus of North Carolina College at Durham, now North Carolina Central University. In the presence of two-hundred students, a plan to follow the peaceful tactics of the Greensboro protests was adopted. The participants were "advised to accept any abuse dealt out by non-sympathizers of the protest movement." Lacy Street, one of the seventeen participating NC College at Durham students, said that their actions would be "hurting the cash register, and when you hurt the cash register you are bound to get results."[196]

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[195] Oppenheimer, *The Sit-In Movement of 1960,* 41-43.
[196] Willie G. Hall, "Results unknown on negotiations," *The Campus Echo,* North Carolina College at Durham, February 26, 1960.

Results were achieved, yet with initial struggles. The initial reaction by storeowners was to refuse service to the protestors. Yet they continued to sit and assert their right to service as paying customers of the establishment. The Durham students who began their protest at Woolworth's met an obstacle when they reached the Kress store. Minutes after their arrival, management closed the entire store for the day, forcing not only the demonstrators but all Kress customers to leave. Lunch counters at all downtown establishments closed the next day. However, shutting down operations at lunch counters and entire stores was only a temporary solution to the problem, as the economic effects of the boycotts were unavoidable.[197]

Additionally, as the sit-in movement spread, dime stores were placed in the national spotlight and public opinion began to weigh in. An editorial in the *Durham Morning Herald* titled "Isn't there a Better Way?" was published the day after the Durham protests began. The editor claimed Durham was a town with a friendly racial climate and that the demonstrators should have attempted negotiations first. The city's African-American newspaper *The Carolina Times* published a response, called "Yes, There is a Better Way." The editorial stated that the only better way of integration would occur "if men of good will sit down together as equals and discuss in the spirit of brotherly love their problems." Responses to the sit-ins across the South revealed the absence of "brotherly love" and the naiveté of those who believed a "friendly racial climate" existed.[198]

Immediate results of the protests varied from a headline-making boycott of downtown merchants in Nashville to an arrest of 400 students in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Though at the expense of hundreds of arrests and police violence, integration of lunch counters began to occur during the summer months as merchants felt the economic effects the boycotts spurred by the sit-

[197] Hall, "Results unknown on negotiations."
[198] "Isn't There a Better Way?" *Durham Morning Herald,* February 9, 1960; "Yes, There is a Better Way," *The Carolina Times,* February 13, 1960.

ins. Nashville and Winston-Salem's lunch counters were integrated in mid-May, with Greensboro's and Charlotte's soon to follow in July. Not only were the lunch counter racial policies changed, other public facilities were integrated. The 1961 architectural drawing for a renovation of the Wilmington Kress store no longer includes customer restrooms marked by race. For a company like Kress, change created by political and social movements affected the design of the consumer landscape. Unlike educational facilities, dime stores did not need a Supreme Court case to become desegregated. Just as their segregation was primarily dictated by custom rather than law, their integration was the result of the masses rather than lawmakers.[199]

However, just years after these stores witnessed defining moments in Civil Rights history, their doors were shut and their operations moved or ceased completely. By 1964, Genesco, Inc., a public footwear retail company, acquired ownership of the S. H. Kress Company. Stores continued operation as Kress's, often relocating from their Main Street iconic buildings to the new centers of consumer activity. The consumer marketplace had followed residents to the suburbs, but at a slower pace. Early suburbanites were accustomed to walking or taking public transportation downtown to shop. Suburbs were built along streetcar lines and roads for this purpose. This accessibility attributed to the rare inclusion of shopping districts in prewar planned suburbs. The trend caught momentum in developments after World War II, including Levittown in New York and Park Forest, Illinois. Planners of these communities included shopping at the core of the settlement, with residences extending outward, mimicking the patterns of urban cities. However these examples were large-scale communities that functioned as towns themselves. More common smaller-scale suburbs did not include integrated consumer marketplaces until the mid-1950s. Therefore downtown shopping landscapes remained

[199] Townsend David, *Weary Feet, Rested Souls: A Guided History of the Civil Rights Movement*, (New York City, W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 309-313; Oppenheimer, *The Sit-In Movement of 1960,* 179-180; 1961 architectural drawings for Wilmington, NC store, Kress Collection, National Building Museum, Washington, DC.

relevant though initial postwar suburbanization, until merchandisers began shifting focus of their market to where their customers lived.[200]

In 1980, Genesco began liquidating the company and closing the remaining Kress stores. Other chains faced similar fates, including W. T. Grant, which filed for bankruptcy in 1975. As aforementioned, Kresge reinvented itself as Kmart in 1977, evolving into a general suburban discount store. Woolworth, the first and most profitable chain, held on to classic variety store operations the longest. Yet their struggled venture into the discount retail arena in the 1970s inevitably led to the company's decline and closure of the last stores in 1997. As asserted by Kurt Barnard of Barnard's Retail Marketing Report, the company actually had "died many years ago, but it just wasn't buried."[201]

The end of the variety store era conjured an unexpected sense of nostalgia in former customers. Though by the last two decades of the twentieth century, there was nothing in variety stores that you could not buy at a convenience or discount store, their prior significance and unique appeal continued to resonate with the public. The remaining devoted customers were primarily older, with decades worth of memories that fostered loyalty to the establishments. Their surviving memories and stories – and the passing down of these memories and stories- serve as some generations' only connection to dime stores. Thus a legacy of nostalgia inevitably accompanies the history of Kress and other chains.[202]

Urban renewal projects and the closure of downtown commercial establishments transformed the Main Street landscape, becoming unrecognizable from its early twentieth century peak. Proactive reactions to urban renewal's destruction began as early as the 1970s with the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Pilot project. The Trust applied

[200] Cohen, "From Town Center to Shopping Center," 1051-1055.
[201] Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 262; 301-302.
[202] Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 261-263; 302-303.

principles of preservation to commercial revitalization in smaller towns. Other more recent strategies in preserving Main Street are evidence of the nostalgic trend. The New Urbanism movement of the 1980s and 1990s supported the resurgence of pedestrian neighborhoods, harkening the social downtown centers of the early century. Various initiatives of Main Street commercial revitalization attempt to recreate an idealized version of the historic landscape, too often ignoring the legacy of contested space. Both Christine Boyer and Alison Isenberg critique that real estate interests have "perverted historical sensibilities and historic preservation to serve their financial interests." Developers exploit nostalgia to increase consumption, hoping to provide a setting that attracts customers attached to the past. Isenberg summarizes Boyer's views, writing, "The result is not just bad history, but the crass commercialization of a public realm that was previously shaped by diverse values and interests." Especially in southern towns, the former diversity of Main Street is more easily hidden by particular historical agendas.[203]

Despite the impact of urban renewal on downtown landscapes, dozens of former Kress buildings remain on southern Main Streets. These enduring structures provide opportunities for preserving the physical environment of an important era in American history. Yet they draw the attention of preservationists as classic examples of traditional and modern American architecture, rather than settings of New South modernization, feminine consumption, and racial segregation. The dilemma of interpretation and selective preservation hounds Public Historians daily. Opposition arises when preserving vestiges of a disturbing historical period, as Kress stores were for some. Yet as time passes and the concept of Jim Crow becomes increasingly foreign, the remaining physical evidence serves as vital historical knowledge.

[203] Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 255-256, 258-259; M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Achievements* (Cambridge: MA: MIT Press, 1994), 419-423.

For various reasons, surviving landscapes of segregation are numbered. A major reason is because many were intentionally erased. Just as the Civil Rights movement targeted job and voting discrimination, it embattled the physical manifestation of segregation. Thus desegregation included spatial reform in addition to economic, legal and political reform. Separate restrooms, waiting areas, drinking fountains, and other public accommodations were removed during the following decades. Signs marking segregated facilities were trashed or returned to their manufacturers. As for the black commercial districts that arose during the era, integration reduced the significant role they held. As discrimination in public places and employment was outlawed, black businesses lost customers who began integrating into a formerly restricted market. Finally, governmental programs were responsible for leveling African American clusters in towns during the era of urban renewal. Durham's once vital Hayti neighborhood met its demise in the late 1960s as it was demolished to make space for the new Durham Freeway.[204]

Another reason the remnants of segregation seem few is that they are often difficult to recognize. For example, without indication of its former purpose, the separate door for African Americans to enter the Montgomery Kress store today simply appears to be a side door. Yet the primary cause in the lack of preserved remnants of Jim Crow architecture is the issue of selectivity. As the debate between Huxtable and Gans exhibited, those with resources control the agenda of preservation. The people with resources -money, power, or both- are the major decision maker in historic preservation. Lingering racial tensions today, especially in the South, affect the interpretation and preservation of local history.[205]

The architectural integrity of Kress buildings has been advantageous. More buildings have been preserved and rehabilitated, providing opportunities for broader interpretation of their

[204] Weyeneth, "The Architecture of Racial Segregation," 38-39.
[205] Weyeneth, "The Architecture of Racial Segregation," 40.

history. Yet few instances exist where this approach is taken. Rehabilitated Kress buildings function as condominiums, banks, hotels, offices, event spaces, retail establishments, art galleries, and even nightclubs. In North Carolina the former Greensboro Kress is reinvented as Kress Terrace, a special event rental venue that advertises "unique modern amenities with historic Art-Deco ambience." The Salisbury store became Kress Plaza, offering commercial space and five renovated condominiums. Kress Plaza's promotional materials proclaim the site as "Downtown Salisbury's Icon of Beauty," narrating the story of Samuel Kress as an avid art collector and creator of "architectural gifts" to communities. These rehabilitation endeavors champion the Kress name for its association with architectural achievements, rather than exploring any other significance of the former store's history. As with all instances of rehabilitation, profitability determines the historic building's new use, and beauty sells. However historical interpretation can coexist among these varying new functions.[206]

In 2011, the former Montgomery, AL Kress building was sold and rehabilitated into condominiums, office space and an art gallery. In architect Mike Watson's designs, he proposed leaving the "Colored" and "White" marble etchings in the wall on the first floor. The controversial decision highlights the darker history behind the century-old building. As the wall is located in the building's new art and performance gallery, Watson decided to construct an interpretive plaque on the wall, creating an improvised history exhibit. Having the approval of the developer and investor made this historic tribute possible, though controversial. Yet this simple preservation of a piece of history draws attention to the Main Street legacy, not as an idealized landscape, but as a setting for racial segregation and unrest.[207]

[206] Kress Terrace website, http://kressterrace.com (Accessed April 17, 2012); Kress Plaza website, http://www.kressplaza.com (Accessed April 17, 2012).
[207] John Shyrock, "Historic Kress building officially sold," *Central Montgomery News*, August 3, 2011, http://centralmontgomery.wsfa.com/news/arts-culture/historic-kress-building-officially-sold/105220 (Accessed

To date, twenty-five buildings constructed as Kress stores in the first half of the twentieth century are individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Countless others are designated as part of historic districts, on the national, state, and local level. Each of these buildings is determined historically significant either for age or architectural distinction. Since externally these buildings are symbols of architectural trends and Main Street nostalgia, their significance as environments of contested racial relations is diminished. Kress as a visible icon of economic progress in the New South is a more digestible version of the store's history. Yet Watson's simple interpretation in the rehabilitated Montgomery store is evidence that the preservation of Kress buildings can also serve an educational purpose.[208]

In the 1990s, boxes of Kress Company files were discovered at the Genesco headquarters in Nashville, providing an opportunity to research and commemorate the chain. The collection was donated to the National Building Museum in Washington, where it was processed and stored by staff. Curators seized the opportunity this historic collection provided and created an exhibit on Kress stores. Since the collection was primarily composed of architectural drawings and records of the building division, the exhibit focused on the stores' architectural history. This has been the typical approach taken when presenting the history of S. H. Kress & Company to the public.[209]

Since the Kress Foundation funded the National Building Museum exhibit, curators had to mediate between historical integrity and pleasing the family. Curators did attempt to interpret

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August 18, 2011); Julie Bennett, "Old Kress building's rehab will pay tribute to its history – the good and the bad," *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 11, 2011.

[208] The National Register of Historic Places lists the following individual Kress stores: Alabama: Anniston, Birmingham, Huntsville; Arizona: Nogales; Arkansas: Blytheville; California: Long Beach; Florida: Daytona Beach, Sarasota, St. Petersburg, Tampa; Georgia: Columbus; Idaho: Idaho Falls; Kansas: Emporia, Wichita Falls; Louisiana: Baton Rouge; Missouri: Columbia; New Mexico: Albuquerque; North Carolina: Durham, New Bern; Ohio: Youngstown; Oregon: Portland; South Carolina: Columbia; Texas: Fort Worth, Houston, Lubbock. http://nrhp.focus.nps.gov/natreghome.do (Accessed February 7, 2012).

[209] Thomas, *America's 5 and 10 Cent Stores*, xi.

a more inclusive history by including a recreated Kress lunch counter in the exhibit. The interpretive text read:

> *Variety store lunch counters were a popular gathering place in the 1920s and 1930s, especially for downtown businessmen. By the 1950s teenagers were also congregating at five-and-dimes. During the 1960s, lunch counter sit-ins, such as the one at the Greensboro [North Carolina] Woolworth, played a central role in racial integration. Today, fast-food establishments have replaced lunch counters as social centers, just as suburban discount stores have replaced five-and-dimes.*[210]

Though the lunch counter is in an exhibit about Kress, no reference to actual sit-ins at Kress stores exists. The interpretation also does not explain the regional or historical significance of segregation, which may not be known to the visitor. The final sentence laments the disappearance of lunch counters and five-and-dimes as social settings rather than their reinforcing role in southern segregation. While the reference to the sit-in movement is an advancement towards broader presentations of social history, the tendency to interpret the Kress stores either as beacons of nostalgia or architectural shrines persists.

Despite the limited interpretation, the exhibit at the National Building Museum conjured up difficult memories and heated discussion, as evident in the exhibit's visitor comment book. Many responses were reactions to the architecturally-centered exhibits, lamenting on the present-day difference in appearance of commercial establishments. These visitors recognized the aesthetic appeal of Kress stores that the exhibit promoted, and then associated the design, elegance and civic pride with corporate responsibility. Wal-Mart was often mentioned as evidence of how this has changed. Other visitors left with pleasant rekindled memories, writing, "It was a rare nostalgic treat." In confirming this thesis' argument, the presentation of Kress artifacts resonated less pleasant conversation. After one visitor wrote, "Memories of a happier,

[210] Julie H. Ernstein, Review of "America's 5 and 10 Cent Stores: The Kress Legacy," by Bernice L. Thomas and "A Guide to the Building Records of S. H. Kress and Co. 5-10-25 Cent Stores at the National Building Museum," by Susan Wilkerson and Hank Griffith, *The Journal of American History* 85, no. 1 (June 1998), 183.

kinder world- a world that was safe" another replied in the margin, "Yes, before all the dangerous negroes ruined everything." The visitor commentary on segregation continues, with a decidedly split audience on the effects of integration. Does simply writing these comments down without discussing them benefit any visitor? The commentary proves that an alternative legacy to Kress stores does exist in the minds of the public. There is in fact an audience for a more inclusive interpretation of the chain, which sees Kress stores as important for reasons other than architectural distinction. Additionally, from the nature of the comments, this audience could benefit from education about the historical influences that led to the stores they remember as "Kress."[211]

In 1892 when Tena Nichols, a black schoolteacher from Raleigh, asserted, "Women are crowding the avenues once open only to men," she may have been speaking specifically about education.[212] Yet the physical avenues of southern downtowns, once reserved for females accompanied by men or black domestics, became places for all women to visit. The commercial landscapes of southern downtowns in the 20th century were spaces of formal and informal distinctions, both in regards to gender and race. Shopping venues attracted white females as their ideal customers, justifying the cause for limiting the presence of both black women and men. The evidence of racist attitudes and practices in downtown stores like Kress, included specialized advertising, spatial distinctions by race, and employee discrimination. By the 1960s dime store sit-ins, the protestors carried greater significance as black males challenging a white feminine landscape. The desegregation of Kress and other southern consumer facilities was a tangible milestone in the Civil Rights movement because it was a transformation of public space and

[211] Visitor comment books 1 & 2, "Main Street Five-and-Dimes: The Architectural Heritage of the S. H. Kress & Co. Stores," National Building Museum Comment Books, May 1997-March 1998, National Building Museum archives, Washington, DC.
[212] Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 31.

therefore public attitudes. This legacy is significant in the modern downtown preservation movements, yet has been widely excluded from interpretation because it challenges the nostalgic ideal of Main Street and the success of New South cities.

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