

The Railway Journey: The Spatial Transformation

The railway journey was America's journey, both catalyst and symbol of dramatic transformation in American life. The technological revolution that made rail travel a reality was part of a broader technological revolution that transformed the face of the country over the course of the nineteenth century. The stress and shocks that attended railway and streetcar accidents and near-misses were part of a broader pattern of stress and shock that had become a daily fact of life. In a third sense, as well, the railway journey was America's journey: railroads were catalyst for and symbol of a transformation in the "space" of the nation and the individual's place in it.¹

The transformation in the structure of the railroad system – both physical and in terms of corporate organization – what might be called the external space of public transport, literally bound state and region into nation and simultaneously contributed to railroads' increasing independence from the physical space through which they ran. The organization of the internal space of public transport reflected American democratic ideals of equality, opportunity, and autonomy (every man a free man), but also revealed long-standing contradictions to those ideals and reshaped those contradictions in modern American life. These two spatial elements – the internal and external – had dramatic implications for the relationship of the individual to corporate power and state authority and for status. The two came together most explicitly in the American South in the wake of the Civil War. There, from the end of the Civil War into the 1950s, railroad "space" shaped where black and white Americans would ride in public transit, the quality of the accommodations provided, and

¹ The work of social geographers is particularly helpful in thinking about the spatial transformation described here. For an introduction to the concepts of place, territoriality, and space in the literature of geography, see Nicholas K. Blomley, *Law, Space, and the Geographies of Power* (New York, 1994); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, Mass., 1991); Robert D. Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History* (1986); M. Gottdiener, *The Social Production of Urban Space* (Austin, 1985).

the gaps between company regulation or state statute and the daily realities of public transit. The relationship among space, status, and race on the railway journey both mirrored and shaped the relationship among space, status, and race in American society more generally at the turn of the century.

Over the course of the nineteenth century the transportation revolution would remake the spatial landscape of America. Already by 1840, Alexis de Tocqueville remarked that Americans had "joined the Hudson to the Mississippi and made the Atlantic Ocean communicate with the Gulf of Mexico, across a continent of more than five hundred leagues in extent which separated the two seas. The longest railroads that have been constructed up to the present time are in America."² In contrast to Europe, where railroads provided a different medium of transport to points already connected, already known, railroads in America crossed vast tracts of unsettled territory, connecting the previously unconnected. A European observer captured the difference between rail travel in Europe and America: "In Europe, the railroad system facilitates traffic; in America, it creates it."³ Railroads knit America's "island communities" into a nation. They re-created space.

Tocqueville was impressed, but in 1840 track mileage for the entire country was only 3,000 miles, all of which lay east of the Mississippi River. Nor could one in any sense refer to the early railroads as a "system"; American railroads were a jumble of discontinuous segments, exclusive track, different gauges, short runs. The local character of America's railroads at midcentury meant that interstate travel required elaborate planning, multiple connections, and transportation by steamer and stage as links between different rail lines.⁴

At midcentury, American railroads reflected the divisions between state and federal space. Early railroad promoters and investors were local men focused on local lines tying a local product to a local distribution point. State governments, cities, and state residents held almost all of the capital stock of railroads in their state, and men from the state dominated the board rooms and held the presidencies. For

² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols. (1840; rpt., New York, 1980), 2:157.

³ Quoted in Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (1977; rpt., Berkeley, 1986), 89. Schivelbusch describes the experience of rail travel as the "annihilation of space and time." I agree in terms of the physical experience of rail travel, but for Americans there was as well the contradictory effect of creating space. Ibid., 33. See also Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, 1983).

⁴ John Stover, *American Railroads* (Chicago, 1961), 19-21, 26.

example, the merchants of Louisville, Kentucky, secured a state charter for the Louisville and Nashville in 1850; one of Louisville's "first citizens," James Guthrie, pressed forward with the line built with private and state dollars; and local Louisville men dominated its board.⁵

Just as the early corporate structure of America's railroads reflected the localism of power, the internal space of the railroad car reflected America's geographic and political landscape at the level of the individual. It was a large open space that invited mobility. The standard American railway car at midcentury seated fifty to sixty passengers on bench seats in an open interior.⁶ A passenger could take a seat next to whomever he wanted and change places whenever he wanted during the journey.⁷ This physical mobility, so foreign to European travelers, seemed to embody American ideals of restless mobility, autonomy, and independence.⁸

Americans eagerly touted railroad travel as a demonstration of the American commitment to the equality of all. An 1852 article in *Scientific American* proclaimed, "[W]e have no second class cars for the inferior classes, because all our citizens rank as gentlemen and every man has his own coat of arms."⁹ A year later a trial lawyer in an important railway patent case scorned the exclusiveness that European compartment cars encouraged and extolled the single-compartment American car as "republican in its character because it allows persons to mingle freely."¹⁰ Foreign travelers, too, commented on the democratic nature of American rail travel. In his United States travels in 1847, Domingo Sarmiento described in detail the fundamental distinctions between what he saw as the class-bound travel in Europe and the classless railroad travel in the United States:

⁵ John F. Stover, *Railroads of the South, 1865-1900: A Study in Finance and Control* (Chapel Hill, 1955), 8-9, 148.

⁶ John H. White, Jr., *The American Railroad Passenger Car* (Baltimore, 1978), 30.

⁷ Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Travels in the United States in 1847*, trans. Michael Aaron Rockland (Princeton, 1970), 101.

⁸ In European rail travel, passengers entered and rode in a small compartment, isolated throughout their journey from all except those riding in the same compartment. Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 101-3.

⁹ *Scientific American*, Oct. 2, 1852, quoted in White, *American Railroad Passenger Car*, 203.

¹⁰ Argument of W. W. Hubbell in William Whiting, *Arguments of William Whiting, Esq., (Ross Winans v. Orsamus Eaton)*, Boston, 1853, quoted in White, *American Railroad Passenger Car*, 203. White describes the case in detail at pp. 18-20. Promoters also celebrated the democratizing potential of omnibuses (precursors of streetcars). See Glen E. Holt, "The Changing Perception of Urban Pathology: An Essay on the Development of Mass Transit in the United States," in Kenneth T. Jackson and Stanley K. Schultz, eds., *Cities in American History* (New York, 1972), 326-27.

In France there are three categories of railroad cars, in England four. One's nobility is measured by the money he can pay, and the managers, in order to make the man who pays little as miserable as possible, have lavished comforts and luxuries on the first-class cars and left thin, hard plank benches for those in the third-class cars. I do not know why they haven't placed pins on the seats to further mortify the poor.¹¹

In contrast, in the United States, Sarmiento explained, there was only one class of travel. "Since there is only one class in United States society - man - there is no need for three or four classes of coaches as is the case in Europe." "Thus, by the respect accorded every man, the sentiment of equality is diffused throughout the society."¹²

Americans extolling the democratic nature of rail travel in America might have seen a different picture had they looked more deeply at the origins of the railroad car or at the distinctions which existed in rail travel from its beginnings. The long, open American-style coach was cheap to build and, with two undercarriages placed at the ends of the car, well suited to the curves in the track that the cars had to accommodate.¹³ Its structural model - the riverboat saloon - was the antithesis of democratic space.¹⁴ It was expressly structured as a sort of showplace of privilege. An old riverman writing early in the twentieth century captured the connection between space and status in river travel: "Bearing in mind that all men are born free and equal, it is interesting to see how very unequal they were then on the boats."¹⁵ As his comment suggests, steamboat travel in America was sharply demarcated by class. The saloon was the exclusive preserve of the first-class cabin passengers, the "aristocracy" of steamboat travel. Its role was to "dazzle and astonish." Running the entire length of the first-class cabin, it served as dining hall, lounge, and showplace for the cabin passengers. Staterooms - private bedrooms - ran along both sides of the saloon, with doors opening out to the promenade and into the saloon. At the two ends of the saloon were special quarters, one for ladies, the other for gentlemen. The ladies' section included a parlor; the gentlemen's section included a bar and smoking room. The meals on the finer boats matched the splendor of the cabin appointments. Moreover, first-class passengers could indulge all their senses in relative peace of mind, for although deadly boiler explosions were a frequent occurrence in steamboat travel, the first-

¹¹ Sarmiento, *Travels in the United States*, 160.

¹² *Ibid.*, 134, 161.

¹³ White, *The American Railroad Passenger Car*, 8-18.

¹⁴ Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 98-103.

¹⁵ John Habermehl, *Life on the Western Rivers* (Pittsburgh, 1901), iii.

class cabins were generally located at the opposite end of the boat, far from the heat and danger of the boilers.¹⁶

The contrast between the cabins for first-class passengers and the quarters and conditions of life for deck passengers could not have been more marked. On the deck, steamboat owners treated human and other freight much the same. The quarters of the deck passengers were rarely separated from the cargo room by even a wall or partition. There were bunks for sleeping, but generally there were too few to accommodate all the deck passengers. More important, perhaps, since they were often alive with vermin, they were more to be avoided than fought over.¹⁷ There were no separate quarters for men and women, no saloon, "no gilt, no plush, no glass, no glitter – only the grimy and splintered planking of the deck and the bare or whitewashed surfaces of bulkheads, supports, and ceilings." As a rule, deck passengers had to provide their own meals. Where deck passengers were permitted to purchase cabin meals, they ate at the second or third table with servants and members of the cabin crew. For bathing, there was generally a bucket with which to scoop water from the river.¹⁸ As one would expect under such conditions, disease flourished; so did death. The greatest sufferers in steamboat accidents were members of the deck crew and deck passengers. Boiler explosions spewed scalding steam, water, and debris. When steamboats sank – which they often did from explosions, collisions, or hitting obstructions – the deck passengers, barely above the level of the water, often trapped by the cargo, had the least opportunity to escape.¹⁹

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was the twilight of steamboat travel. From roughly 1860 to 1930, the railroad was the most common means of inland travel in the United States.²⁰ Although Americans could rightly claim significant class differences between American and European rail travel, it was ignoring the obvious to fail to see the relationship between space and status even in early American

¹⁶ Louis C. Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History* (Cambridge, 1949), 391, 395–99. See also Basil Greenhill and Ann Clifford, *Travelling by Sea in the Nineteenth Century: Interior Design in Victorian Passenger Ships* (New York, 1974), passim; John Malcolm Brinnin, *The Sway of the Grand Saloon* (New York, 1971), 248.

¹⁷ U.S. House, 1875. *The Cholera Epidemic of 1873 in the United States. The Introduction of Epidemic Cholera Through the Agency of the Mercantile Marine: Suggestions of Measures of Prevention*. Report prepared by John M. Woodworth. 43rd Cong., 2d sess. Ex. Doc. No. 95, p. 52 (Washington, 1875).

¹⁸ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 419–25; Greenhill and Clifford, *Travelling by Sea in the Nineteenth Century*, passim; Brinnin, *The Sway of the Grand Saloon*, 248.

¹⁹ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 431–38.

²⁰ White, *American Railroad Passenger Car*, xi; Stover, *American Railroads*, 52, 171–74.

rail travel. One of the earliest spatial divisions was that between the "ladies' car" and the "smoking car." In his *American Notes* of 1842, Charles Dickens conceded that American railroads did not have first- and second-class cars as in England. But, he noted, "[t]here is a gentlemen's car and a ladies' car; the main distinction between which is that in the first, everyone smokes; and in the second nobody does."²¹ As Dickens's comment suggests, as early as the 1840s American railroads had begun the practice of setting aside for the exclusive use of ladies traveling alone or with a gentleman escort a car known as "the ladies' car."²² Based on the assumption that a railroad car for ladies should match the comfort and safety of a lady's parlor, a ladies' car might be equipped with a comfortable sofa or at the least seats covered with "plush." Ladies' cars often included an ice-water dispenser and, more important, had two water closets, one at each end of the car, so that women did not have to choose between waiting or suffering the embarrassment and sexual suggestion of using the same water closet as men riding in the car.²³ By allowing only men who were accompanying women to travel in the ladies' car, railroad companies made the space "safe" for women traveling alone.²⁴ Passengers' conduct in the car was also closely monitored to ensure that women were not exposed to smoking or rough conduct or language.

The positioning of the ladies' car – generally at the rear of the train – spatially reflected men's obligation to protect women's physical safety. In head-on collisions – an all-too-common occurrence in nineteenth-century rail travel – those most often sacrificed were in the cars immediately behind the engines, which slid one into another like a giant telescope slammed shut.²⁵ The distance of the ladies' car from

²¹ Charles Dickens, *American Notes: For General Circulation* (London, 1842), 145–46.

²² Major railway stations, too, provided ladies' waiting rooms and ticket windows, as well as gentlemen's waiting rooms. Jeffrey Richards and John M. MacKenzie, *The Railway Station: A Social History* (Oxford, 1993), 158–59; Walter G. Berg, *Buildings and Structures of American Railroads* (New York, 1900), 72, 78, 138, 345, 348; Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore, 1990), 76–87.

²³ White, *American Railroad Passenger Car*, 8, 14, 21, 66, 69, 205, 208.

²⁴ Ryan, *Women in Public*, 58–94; *Bass v. Chicago & Northwestern Ry.*, 36 Wis. 450, 460 (1874). Similarly gendered assumptions shaped design and marketing of early automobiles. See Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (New York, 1991), 36–37.

²⁵ The Silver Creek disaster of September 14, 1886, offers a good example. A Nickle Plate excursion train crashed head-on at full speed into a westbound freight. The baggage car of the excursion train completely "telescoped" into the smoking car, killing twenty passengers, all men. Robert C. Reed, *Train Wrecks: A Pictorial History of Accidents on the Main Line* (Seattle, 1968), 55–58. On the increase in accidents in general from the 1870s on, see Chapters 1 and 4.

the engine also meant that it had the cleanest air. The smoke and ash which poured into the cars immediately behind the engine had generally risen and dissipated before it reached the ladies' car.

Men bore the risks and suffered the discomforts from which women were protected. Whether traveling alone or because they wished to smoke, men rode in the "smoking car." Both the smoker and the ladies' car were in name "first class" cars. A man traveling in the smoker paid the same fare as a woman traveling in the ladies' car. But the smoker was a man's world. It created men's space in public travel equivalent to the tavern or the men's club. Women were not barred from the car; but just as "respectable" women rarely ventured into men's clubs, social norms operated as a bar to their entering the smoking car. The appointments – wooden seats at most covered with leather, broadcloth, or cane; bare floors; and spittoons – embodied the assumption of male ruggedness and practically acknowledged that the rougher habits of men – in particular, smoking, spitting, and drinking – required different coverings for seats and floors, both to avoid fire hazards and for ease of cleaning. For all its discomforts, the smoking car offered men an escape from the world of women. In the smoker, men could not only smoke, chew tobacco, or spit, they could also drink, talk freely, and enjoy the society of men. Even if a man did not want to smoke or otherwise engage in any of the rougher habits associated with his sex, if he was traveling alone, he represented a sexual danger to women traveling alone.

A second contradiction to the claim that rail travel reflected American democratic principles was the treatment of blacks. In the years before the Civil War, the idea that blacks should have access to the ladies' car in any other capacity than as servants traveling with white passengers would have shocked most Americans. The limits on black access to public transit marked spatially the status of blacks in American society. When the transportation revolution began in America, the vast majority of blacks did not even have the legal status of personhood; most blacks lived in the American South; there they were bought and sold and tallied up in estates, as so much property belonging to whites. Not all blacks were slaves, but slavery branded all blacks inferior. The spatial ordering of black travel reflected and protected the hierarchy of race. In the North before the Civil War, when railroads allowed blacks to ride at all, the vast majority of roads forced them to ride in partitioned baggage cars for half or even full fare.²⁶ On steamboats in the North, blacks were excluded altogether or offered only deck passage.²⁷ In the South before the Civil War, formal

²⁶ White, *American Railroad Passenger Car*, 203, 462–63; Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860* (Chicago, 1961), 106–9.

²⁷ Day v. Owen, 5 Mich. 520 (1858).

separation was less important; slavery cast its shadow over all blacks.²⁸ In rail travel, slaves accompanied their masters and mistresses; on steamboats, their accommodations were the floor of the saloon or, on larger boats, the servants' quarters. For "free" blacks, in both rail and steamboat travel, the picture was much the same as in the North: accommodations in "smoking" or baggage cars or no accommodation at all and deck passage on steamboats.²⁹

The lines of status were sufficiently clear in pre-Civil War America that there was room for a small measure of flexibility. A select few among free blacks North and South – because of lightness of skin, lack of "negro features," wealth, and culture – were allowed to enjoy some of the privileges of first-class ladies' and gentlemen's accommodations. "Since long before the war," explained a Mississippi steamboat captain and owner, they kept two rooms in the cabin for "colored people, some special people." As he put it, "[t]here are some colored people who wouldn't associate with other colored people."³⁰ This privileged few included wealthy black Louisiana planters who gave their freight to steamers and were rewarded with cabin passage. But even these privileged few did not enjoy the right to mingle freely in the saloon with the white cabin passengers; their cabin doors leading into the saloon were locked from the outside.³¹

Of the means of public carriage available on the eve of the Civil War, streetcars came the closest to being "classless." But in 1860, only a handful of cities – New York, New Orleans, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Cincinnati, and San Francisco – had streetcar lines.³² Streetcars of this period provide an elegant example of the interlocking relationship among technology, economy, and social norms. Steamboats, railroads, and streetcars present something of a hierarchy in the extent to which each replicated life. On steamboats all the

²⁸ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1974), 13.

²⁹ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 391 n. 3; Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1974), 322–26; Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820–1860* (New York, 1964), 267.

³⁰ Testimony of Cap't. V. B. Baranco (Mississippi steamboat captain and owner, witness for defendant), *Record in Decuir*, p. 64. See also Testimony of A. Duconge (witness for plaintiff), James E. Moore (ex-cabin boy and steward, witness for plaintiff), *ibid.*, 55–60, 60–64.

³¹ Testimony of P. G. Deslonde (witness for plaintiff), *Record in Decuir*, pp. 66–67. For a discussion of Deslonde's life and family history, see Eric Foner, *Freedom's Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders During Reconstruction* (New York, 1993), 62.

³² William D. Middleton, *The Time of the Trolley* (Milwaukee, 1967), 13–21.

processes of life were replicated. Passengers socialized, ate, bathed, and slept. Sleep – the most personal of acts, the act that left a person most vulnerable, the act so intimately connected with sexual intercourse – was an expected part of steamboat travel. Before the late 1880s life in this sense was lived less totally on railroads. On early streetcars, however, life was hardly lived at all. Horses could pull only one small car at a time, and most lines were short. Streetcars were conveyances and nothing more. Moreover, in contrast to the middle- and upper-class passengers who were the most common passengers in long-distance travel by train and steamboat, working-class women and men were probably the largest group of passengers traveling on streetcars.³³ In urban travel, “ladies” and “gentlemen” took private hacks and carriages. And so, it is not surprising to find that on streetcars there were no separate classes, no facilities segregated by sex.³⁴ But if streetcars were in some ways classless, they were not free of status distinctions. As a general rule, streetcar companies in Northern cities either excluded blacks entirely or allowed them to ride only on the platform, not in the interior of the cars.³⁵ The Civil War would bring an end to slavery, but it would not end discrimination against blacks in public transit.

During the Civil War itself, railroads were as central to Northern victory as they were to Southern defeat. By the war's end Southern railroads

³³ See Harold E. Cox, “‘Daily Except Sunday’: Blue Laws and the Operation of Philadelphia Horsecars,” *Business History Review* 39 (1965): 228–42, noting that the upper class did not use early Philadelphia streetcars and that ridership was dominated by the white working class. *Ibid.*, 231. As Holt notes, five-cent fares, the norm on streetcars, put streetcar travel beyond the reach of the poorest elements of urban life. Holt, “The Changing Perception of Urban Pathology,” 325.

³⁴ The few lines that experimented with “ladies’ cars” after the adoption of electricity as the motive power for streetcars quickly dropped them in the face of the combined force of some women’s hostility to the “privilege” of ladies’ cars and the lack of sufficient ridership and hence profitability of the special cars. Clifton Hood, *722 Miles: The Building of the Subways and How They Transformed New York* (New York, 1993), 118–19; Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (New York, 1991), 6–7. For a photograph of a streetcar reserved for the exclusive use of ladies, see Oliver Jensen, Joan Paterson Kerr, and Murray Balsky, *American Album* (New York, 1968), 297.

³⁵ Barbara Y. Welke, “Rights of Passage: Gendered-Rights Consciousness and the Quest for Freedom, San Francisco, California, 1850–1870,” in Quintard Taylor and Shirley Moore, eds., *African-American Women in the American West* (University of Oklahoma Press, forthcoming); Dorothy Sterling, ed., *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1984), 223–24, 254–55; H. E. Cox, “Jim Crow in the City of Brotherly Love: The Segregation of Philadelphia Horse Cars,” *The Negro History Bulletin* 26 (1962): 119–23.

were in shambles. Well over half of Southern railroads were destroyed or crippled in the war, culminating with Sherman’s calculated devastation on his “march to the sea.” What had not been deliberately destroyed simply had been worn out, used up.³⁶ In April 1865, the wreckage of Southern railroads – the mangled tracks, the charred ties, the tracks abruptly cut short on either side of the yawning divide of a river, the hulk of an exhausted locomotive – stood as so many monuments to Northern power and Southern defeat. White Southerners furiously embraced the task of rebuilding, both to cleanse the stain of Southern defeat from the landscape and because railroads seemed the key to regional economic revitalization. What Southerners, and Americans more generally, had little sense of in 1865 was that within two decades railroads – the first large corporate entities in America – would come to represent an entirely new type of space with powerful implications for status.

In the aftermath of the war, neither steamboats nor railroads felt much economic incentive to provide truly “first class” accommodations to black passengers. Although black travel increased significantly after the war, whites continued to make up the vast majority of passengers on public transport. They were “the traveling public.” In steamboat travel, whites generally accounted for roughly three to four fifths of the passengers.³⁷ Steamboat owners on the lower Mississippi River and the Chesapeake in the 1870s and 1880s insisted that separating white from black passengers was a financial necessity.³⁸ One steamboat captain summed it up: “You cannot get no [white] man to travel on a boat with [white] ladies where you would seat them [white ladies] alongside of colored people. They wouldn’t stand it.”³⁹ Other carriers, steamboats and railroads alike, throughout the South and over the years echoed these sentiments.⁴⁰

³⁶ Stover, *Railroads of the South*, 15–22, 54–63; Mark W. Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity: Aid Under the Radical Republicans, 1865–1877* (Princeton, 1984), 4–6.

³⁷ Testimony of John W. Cannot (master and owner *R. E. Lee*), D. E. Grove (clerk, *Governor Allen*), Thomas P. Leathers (master *Natchez*, all witnesses for defendant), *Record in Decuir*, pp. 19, 24, 29–30.

³⁸ Testimony of D. E. Grove (first clerk), Capt. John W. Cannot (master and owner *R. E. Lee*), John G. Benson (owner *Governor Allen*, all witnesses for defendant), *Record in Decuir*, pp. 24, 35–36, 43.

³⁹ Testimony of Cap’t. V. B. Baranco (Mississippi steamboat cap’t. and owner, witness for defendant), *Record in Decuir*, pp. 35–36.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Testimony of John S. Lawrence (agent and general manager steamer *City of Bridgeton*, witness for defendant), *Record in Hattie Green*, p. 2; Testimony of William Murray (conductor, witness for defendant), *Record in Wells* (Sept. 15, 1883, incident), p. 27.

After the war, carriers simply carved a space for black passengers from the already defined physical space. The existing structure of accommodations, coupled with the physical nature of the carriers, meant that the features of inequality imposed upon blacks would be different in kind and degree depending on the type of carrier involved. So it is not surprising that of all the modes of carriage steamboats were consistently the most segregated in the postwar South. Steamboats on the Mississippi River, in the Chesapeake Bay, and all along the Atlantic coastline took space previously used for second-class passengers or freight, constructed a cabin, and labeled it variously "the freedmen's bureau," "the colored bureau," or the "colored cabin." Carved from the existing space and located below the cabin for white ladies and gentlemen, the space, by definition, could not be equal. In an 1872 suit against a steamer on the lower Mississippi River brought by Josephine Decuir, the clerk admitted that the rooms in the colored bureau were smaller than those in the ladies' cabin and that because the colored cabin ran crossways, whereas the rooms in the ladies' cabin ran along the side of the ship, there was poor air flow and limited natural light below. In contrast to the ladies' cabin, which had one or more chambermaids to wait on the white women, the steward of the boat, a man, managed the colored cabin. Whereas women traveling in the ladies' cabin had a water closet of their own, the passengers in the colored cabin, men and women, shared one. If additional evidence were needed that steamers neither intended or even represented that they were providing blacks traveling first-class with equal accommodations to those provided for whites, the difference in fare supplied it: steamers charged "first class" black passengers only two thirds the fare charged "first class" white passengers.⁴¹

Carriers resisted the allegation that they relegated blacks to inferior accommodations. But if the accommodations they provided were not inferior, words had lost their meaning. Even in their protestations of equality, river and seamen voiced a deeply rooted belief in the inferiority of blacks. "I don't suppose there is a boat on the river that fed the darkies as well as the *Allen*," protested John Benson, the master of the *Governor Allen*.⁴² In a suit brought by four black sisters – Winnie and Martha Stewart, Lucy Jones, and Mary Johnson – against a Chesapeake steamer, *The Sue*, which ran between Baltimore and

⁴¹ Testimony of J. H. Mossoss (clerk, *Governor Allen*), John Cedilot, D. E. Grove (clerk *Governor Allen*, all witnesses for defendant), *Record in Decuir*, pp. 10–12, 13, 14, 24, 52, 53.

⁴² Testimony of John Benson (master, steamer *Governor Allen*, witness for defendant), *Record in Decuir*, p. 44.

Virginia in the early 1880s, the agent insisted that the "forward" and "aft" cabins had the same bed fittings, the same carpets on the floors, the same mattresses, the same sheets, the same blankets. In fact, the general manager of the line insisted, had conditions really been anything like those the Stewart sisters and their witnesses described, "Captain Geoghagan would not have been here to testify." But Captain Geoghagan was there, and he, too, insisted that when he checked the cabins, "every part was clean and in good order." When pressed, he admitted that there were "differences" between the cabins. No blankets were supplied except upon request in the colored cabin, on account of losing too many to theft. And the colored passengers did have to pass freight and sometimes cattle on their way down to their cabin. But they kept the boat as well as they could "with the travel we carried."⁴³ Blacks themselves told a different story, a story of a cabin that was so filthy and demoralizing that it was better to sit up all night rather than attempt sleep. Placed past the cows, horses, chickens, hogs, and other stock – in fact having to walk along a passageway through the livestock which was often overflowing with animal urine – black men and women understood only too clearly that they were seen as no better than animals.⁴⁴

The picture on railroads was different because the structure of travel was different. The dominant and immediate response of railroads across the South was to assign all blacks – women as well as men – to what had been in practice, if not in name, second-class accommodations: the smoking car, where they rode alongside white men. As historians have noted, this was the general practice of railroads in Georgia, Tennessee, and other Southern states from at least the mid-1870s.⁴⁵ In the Carolinas and Virginia, carriers found that they could protect the sanctity of the ladies' car by offering the alternative of second-class fare. The limited economic means of the vast majority of blacks led them to choose second-class accommodations where they

⁴³ Testimony of Asa Needham (agent), Reuben Foster (general manager), W. C. Geoghagan (captain, all witnesses for defendant steamer), *Record in Stewart (The Sue)*, pp. 43, 44, 46–47, 68–69, 89, 90, 96, 98. The black stewardess on the steamer got closest to the truth: "There are three cabins," she explained, "[t]hat is the gentlemen's cabin, and the ladies' cabin, and then the forward cabin." The "forward cabin" was assigned to blacks, men and women. Steamers on the Chesapeake simply refused to sell a stateroom – the most expensive and finest accommodation available – to blacks. Testimony of Elizabeth Francis (black stewardess, witness for defendant), *ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁴ Testimony of Novella Ryan (libellant), Nathan Dorsey (witness for libellants, the Stewart sisters), *Record in The Sue*, pp. 44, 68–69.

⁴⁵ Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865–1890* (Urbana, 1980), 183–84; Charles A. Lofgren, *The Plessy Case: A Legal-Historical Interpretation* (New York, 1987), 12.

were offered.⁴⁶ But in marked contrast to the accepted rule for first-class white travel, there was no separate place for black women traveling alone or accompanied by a man. Black women, along with their children, were expected to ride in smoking cars with men of color and white men. The cars were often filthy and smoke-filled; coarse jokes, drinking, and spitting were tolerated and expected.

On some lines carriers provided a separate "compartment," generally the front half or third of the smoking car, for black passengers, at full fare. The very act of partitioning the car, the car's physical location close to the engine, and the fact that the other half of the car was a smoker made "compartment cars" inferior to first-class ladies' cars. While blacks had paid first-class fare, no one believed they received first-class carriage. A porter on the Chesapeake, Ohio & Southwestern Railroad from Shelby to Memphis, Tennessee, explained in September 1883, "The rear coach was for the best passengers, and was the only truly first class coach we had, the front car was as our second class car."⁴⁷ Describing a compartment car on the Georgia Railroad in 1887, William H. Heard insisted that the car "was full of dust and dirt, the atmosphere was suffocating, there was just as much smoke in one end as in the other." On Heard's journey from Atlanta, Georgia, to Charleston, South Carolina, white men, as was so often the case, with little interference from railroad employees, treated the colored compartment as "their space." In contrast, Heard noted that the "rear coach" had cushioned seats, a carpeted floor, and ice water.⁴⁸

Railroads never achieved quite the same clear connection among space, status, and race that had early become settled on steamboats. Railroad practice of assigning blacks, women and men, to the smoking car meant that white men rode together with black men and women. Even company practice of reserving ladies' accommodations for whites was unevenly enforced. In the 1870s or '80s, a conductor on one train might bar a black woman from riding in first-class accommodations, while a conductor on the next train on the same line would allow her a seat in the ladies' car. Conductors excluding black women from the ladies' car on one occasion might allow them on the next or vice-versa.⁴⁹ For example, in December 1882, when the brakeman on the Memphis & Charleston directed Anna Laura Logwood, a light-skinned black

⁴⁶ Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861-1877* (Chapel Hill, 1965), 283-84; Lofgren, *The Plessy Case*, 12-14.

⁴⁷ Testimony of Dick Moody (black porter, witness for defendant), *Record in Wells* (Sept. 15, 1883, incident), p. 37.

⁴⁸ Petition, July 2, 1887, Testimony of William H. Heard (petitioner), *Record in Heard*, pp. 1-5.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Interrogatories of Lewis C. Pyncheon (witness for plaintiff Belle Smoot), *Record in Smoot*, n.p.; Testimony of Lola Houck (plaintiff), *Record in Houck*, pp. 1-7.

woman, to the smoking car for her trip from Huntsville to Courtland, Alabama, she appealed to the conductor, reminding him that she had always ridden on the ladies' car and had done so with him. When he, too, insisted that she ride in the smoker, Logwood waited for the next train on which the conductor allowed her into the first-class (ladies') car.⁵⁰ Where black passengers demanded their "right" to ride in "first class" accommodations they might find the demand honored, although perhaps belatedly, or the conductor might bluntly respond, "Either ride in that car or walk."⁵¹ Whether the "ladies' car" would be reserved exclusively for whites might depend on so apparently arbitrary a factor as whether a black passenger managed to take a seat in the car before the conductor or brakeman could block her path. As a brakeman on the Southern Pacific Railway in Texas conceded in 1887, we "had orders from the superintendent to keep colored people out of the rear coach, if they got in before the door was closed, they were to stay in, and were not to be forced out; but if the door was closed first, they would not go in."⁵² Although any of these examples could and did apply without regard to sex, the color line in ladies' accommodations was always clearer for black men than for black women.

In case after case, black men and women enumerated the stark inequalities between accommodations provided for whites and those provided for blacks, while railroad and steamboat employees and officers trivialized the differences in accommodations, ignored the sex of the passenger in assessing the equality of conditions, and spoke of rules made, not rules enforced. Yet starting with a belief in the inherent inferiority of blacks, many whites actually saw no inequality in inferior accommodations provided to people of color. As the answer filed by the owners of the steamer the *City of Bridgeton*, in Hattie Green's 1879 lawsuit put it: the accommodations which would have been provided her but for her "insisting to ride, where her situation in life did not authorize her to go; were good, ample, and sufficient for her, and all that she had any right to demand, or expect."⁵³

⁵⁰ Declaration, April 13, 1883; Deposition of Lewis Pyncheon (white), *Record in Logwood*, n.p. See also Testimony of Lola Houck (plaintiff), *Record in Houck*, pp. 5-6.

⁵¹ *Record in Robinson (The Civil Rights Cases)*, p. 8; Testimony of William H. Heard (petitioner), *Record in Heard*, pp. 1-5.

⁵² In his testimony, the conductor admitted that the instructions were verbal. "I don't think I could show you one scratch of a pen about it," explained the conductor. Indeed, he could not give any time or place in which he had been given the instructions, "but that was the custom and understanding." Testimony of Charles Oaks (brakeman), F. Farnsworth (conductor, both witnesses for defendant), *Record in Houck*, pp. 28, 32, 43-44, 45-46.

⁵³ Answer, Oct. 29, 1878, *Record in Hattie Green*, n.p. For a very similar statement directed at Mary Church Terrell, see Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World* (1940; rpt., New York, 1980), 296-98.

The instability of the interior space of the railroad car related directly to the successful legal challenges black women brought against carriers for the denial of first-class accommodations, but the instability related as well to dramatic changes in the exterior space of American railroads.⁵⁴ At the end of the Civil War, the American railroad network amounted to 35,000 miles. By 1870, railroad mileage in America had expanded to 53,000 miles. In each of the next two decades, the total railroad mileage came close to doubling, increasing from 53,000 miles in 1870 to 93,000 miles in 1880 and then to 164,000 miles in 1890. During the critical decade of the 1880s, railroad construction in the South matched, and at times outpaced, railroad construction in the nation as a whole. Between 1880 and 1890, rail mileage in the South increased from less than 15,000 miles of track to over 29,000 miles.⁵⁵ The dramatic increase in mileage meant that the railroad touched the lives of many Southerners, white and black, for the first time in the 1880s and connected them to other counties, towns, and cities. The proliferation of railroads created a new pressure for standardization of race relations.⁵⁶

The transformation of America's railroad network also fed the pressure, not just for standardization, but more pointedly, for assertion of state control. At the time of the Civil War, Southern railroads were physically separate from lines in the North. In the generation following the war, Southern railroads became integrated with railroads in the rest of the nation. Within the first decade after the war, bridges spanned rivers like the Ohio and the Potomac. More important, the South joined the rest of the nation, adopting in 1883 four standard zones of "railroad time" and in 1886 standardizing the gauge of railroad tracks. Before the massive conversion, Southern railroads had operated on twenty-one different gauges of track, hobbling connections between lines even within the South. Technological changes were encouraged by consolidation (through ownership and leases) of short, independent lines into massive railway systems. By 1883, for example, the Richmond & Danville stretched some 2,200 miles from tidewater Virginia to central Alabama, with branches to the state capitals and most of the principal cities in Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia.⁵⁷

State boundaries became increasingly obscured by the interstate character of American railroad corporations. The maze of tracks on

⁵⁴ The legal challenges of blacks to discriminatory treatment in public transit are described in Chapters 8 and 9.

⁵⁵ Stover, *Railroads of the South*, 144, 190.

⁵⁶ Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 137.

⁵⁷ Stover, *Railroads of the South*, 241.

NEW YORK AND MEMPHIS.				Nos. 25 and 26—Pullman Drawing-room Sleeping Cars between	
Memphis Special. Solid Through Train.				New York and Memphis and Observation Car between Washington and Memphis. Washington Car open for occupancy at Washington, southbound, at 10 00 p.m., and may be occupied northbound until 7 00 a.m. Dining Car service.	
No. 25	Drawing-room Sleeping Cars	No. 26			
*8 30 P M	lv. N. Penna. Sta. (P.R.R.) ar.	*7 13 A M			
8 30 P M	lv. N.Y. Hudson Ter. * ar.	7 15 A M			
11 42 P M	lv. North Philadelphia * ar.	4 53 A M			
12 15 Night	lv. Philadelphia... * ar.	4 45 A M			
12 19 Night	lv. West Philadelphia. * ar.	4 20 A M			
* 50 A M	lv. Baltimore..... * ar.	1 38 A M			
4 10 A M	lv. Washington (So. Ry.) ar.	12 15 Night			
9 10 A M	ar. Lynch-(So. Ry.) (So. Ry.) lv.	7 15 P M			
9 20 A M	lv. ? burg Sta. } (N. & W.) ar.	7 05 P M			
* 40 P M	lv. Bristol..... (So. Ry.) ar.	12 25 Night			
10 00 P M	ar. Chattanooga... * lv.	5 20 A M			
* 8 00 A M	ar. Memphis..... * lv.	* 8 00 P M			

NEW YORK, NEW ORLEANS & VICKSBURG.				Nos. 41 and 42—Pullman D. R. Sleeping Cars between New York and New Orleans, New York and Vicksburg and Washington and Vicksburg and Chattanooga. Dining Car service.	
No. 41	Drawing-room Sleeping Cars	No. 42			
* 3 38 P M	lv. N. Penna. Sta. (P.R.R.) ar.	* 1 00 P M			
3 34 P M	lv. N.Y. Hudson Ter. * ar.	1 00 P M			
5 32 P M	lv. North Philadelphia * ar.	11 24 A M			
5 44 P M	lv. West Philadelphia * ar.	10 26 A M			
8 20 P M	lv. Baltimore..... * ar.	7 57 A M			
10 10 P M	lv. Washington.... (So. Ry.) ar.	6 45 A M			
3 13 A M	ar. Lynch-(So. Ry.) (So. Ry.) ar.	1 45 A M			
3 25 A M	lv. ? burg Sta. } (N. & W.) lv.	2 35 A M			
4 15 A M	lv. Bristol..... (So. Ry.) ar.	6 25 P M			
1 45 P M	ar. Knoxville..... * lv.	2 10 P M			
5 55 P M	ar. Chattanooga.. * lv.	10 25 A M			
10 05 P M	ar. Birmingham.. (A. G. S.) lv.	6 10 A M			
* 2 50 A M	ar. Meridian..... * lv.	1 40 A M			
* 9 10 A M	ar. New Orleans (I. O. & N. E.) lv.	* 7 30 P M			
* 7 05 A M	ar. Vicksburg.... (A. & P.) lv.	* 9 20 P M			

FIGURE 7.1. The railroad timetables that passengers used in planning their travel, like these 1912 timetables for the Southern Railway, did not even mention the states through which they passed. Courtesy of the University of Chicago Library (*Official Guide of the Railways*, July 1912).

maps showing railroad lines obscured state lines.⁵⁸ As the maps indicated, state boundaries were irrelevant to the flow of passenger traffic. Passengers traveled from Norfolk to Greensboro, Richmond to Raleigh, Louisville to Memphis, Washington to Charlotte, Chicago to New Orleans.⁵⁹ In sharp contrast to the disjointed picture of rail travel from the 1840s, there was now a seamlessness to travel. "Coupon tickets" allowed a passenger to purchase a ticket from one point to another with passage on several different companies' lines, the passenger's baggage checked through from starting point to ultimate destination. Traveling from Vicksburg, Mississippi, to New York City in 1910 on a coupon ticket, Pearl Morris, a white woman, rode

⁵⁸ See, e.g., *The Official Guide of the Railways and Steam Navigation Lines of the United States, Porto Rico, Canada, Mexico, and Cuba* (July 1900), 734, 798 (showing Illinois Central and Southern Railways).

⁵⁹ See, e.g., *ibid.*, 736-40, 810-14 (showing lines of the Illinois Central and Southern Railways).

on several different railroads and passed through eight states. Yet, just as many traveling by air today would be unable to say what states they passed over on their journey from one point to another, Morris was unclear which states she passed through. She had bought a through ticket from Vicksburg to New York and did not think of herself as traveling anywhere in between. Railroad corporations had created a new experience of national geography.⁶⁰

Long-distance travel severed whatever ties railroads had had with the vision of rail travel as the great leveler. By the closing decades of the nineteenth century, rail travel epitomized Thorstein Veblen's portrayal of "conspicuous consumption."⁶¹ For those passengers who had the financial means, railroads offered increasingly stratified modes of travel in the form of parlor cars, different classes of sleeping car service, dining cars, club cars, and elaborate private cars. In 1880, nationwide, there were 130 parlor cars; in 1890, 370; in 1900, 500; and by 1920, 1,570.⁶² They were marked as exclusive cars, never representing more than 2.5 percent of the total American passenger car fleet.⁶³ They enabled the privileged to escape from, at the same time that they impressed their privilege upon, commoner Americans. The Pullman Company set the standards for luxury travel.⁶⁴ To ride on the "pullman" was a casual but unequivocal claim to status.

The availability of increasingly ornate accommodations marked one end of the departure from the egalitarian ideal; accommodations for blacks and immigrants marked the other. As the number of immigrants coming to America's shores multiplied geometrically in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, railroads increasingly sought ways to separate immigrants from "first class" travel. Immigrants found their way across the American continent crammed into cheap, dirty "emigrant cars." Some roads offered second- and third-class emigrant cars. Western railroads like the Union Pacific built separate lodging-houses and segregated eating-places at stations.

⁶⁰ Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 38. It is important to note, though, that the freedom to be oblivious to spatial markers such as state boundaries was itself racialized. Blacks quite simply did not enjoy the same freedom to be unaware of where they were; indeed, survival could depend on being attuned to the nuances of race from one community or state to the next. See Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana, 1989), 7-14.

⁶¹ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York, 1908).

⁶² White, *American Railroad Passenger Car*, 202-371, 658. See also Lucius Beebe, *Mansions on Rails* (Berkeley, Calif., 1959).

⁶³ White, *American Railroad Passenger Car*, 287, 658, and chs. 3 and 4 generally.

⁶⁴ The saloon of the steamboat was the model for the Pullman Company's "palace" cars. Lucius Beebe, *Mr. Pullman's Elegant Palace Car* (New York, 1961).



FIGURE 7.2. In promotional literature like this lithograph by Ballin and Liebler (New York) for the Chicago & Alton Railroad's Great Palace Reclining-Chair Route, railroads used white ladyhood as proxy for status, at the same time subtly highlighting the individual's dependence on American railroads. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Collection 216931, LC-USZ262-1376.

They even tried to keep immigrant and normal trains separate as much as possible. Large stations across the United States had separate waiting rooms – often designated “second class” – for immigrants. As in accommodations for African-Americans, in immigrant cars, women were huddled together with men. On roads lacking immigrant cars, immigrants desiring second-class rates were assigned to the “smoker.” The immigrant accommodations cordoned off in railroad stations and on the railway journey gave immigrants an introduction to the deep inequalities in American society.⁶⁵

Even as railroad expansion transformed the experience of the national landscape and the interior space on the railway journey modified the American egalitarian ideal, corporations themselves took on new form. The vast national network of railroads not only made other large-scale industries possible, their organizational structure provided the model for the development of American corporate capitalism.⁶⁶ Railroads were the first national corporations in the South and in the nation more generally. Size required new ways of doing business marked by internal hierarchy and formal rules. For the vast majority of Americans, railroads were the physical embodiment of industrialization.

Growth and consolidation of America's railroads were accomplished at the cost of local ownership. At the end of the war, Southerners could claim the railroads of the South as their own. Two decades later they could not. By 1890, Northern men and money controlled the majority of Southern railroads of over 100 miles. By 1900, the transition to Northern control of Southern railroads, in terms of men, money, and management, was complete.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Richards and MacKenzie, *The Railway Station*, 146–48. For a specific discussion of the practice, see *Fifteenth Annual Report of the [Massachusetts] Board of Railroad Commissioners, January, 1884* (Boston, 1884), 44–46. The hierarchy between immigrants and blacks could be surprising. In Jane Brown's 1880 lawsuit against the Memphis & Charleston Railroad Company, the judge emphasized that Brown, a black woman who had bought a first-class ticket, had been ejected from the ladies' car and forced into the smoking car, which was “crowded with passengers, mostly emigrants, traveling on cheap rates, with many women and children.” “On proof like this,” the judge noted, “I do not see how the jury could have found otherwise than a wrongful exclusion.” *Brown v. Memphis & Charleston R.R. Co.*, 5 F. 499, 502 (W.D. Tenn. 1880), 7 F. 51, 61 (1881).

⁶⁶ Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, 1977); Chandler, “The Large Industrial Corporation and the Making of the Modern American Economy,” in Stephen E. Ambrose, ed., *Institutions in Modern America: Innovation in Structure and Progress* (Baltimore, 1967).

⁶⁷ Stover, *Railroads of the South*, 206–9, 279–84.

As corporations dominated by Northerners, railroads were doubly foreign to Southerners.

Even as railroads occupied more space, they became increasingly distanced from local norms and state governmental power. The financial bottom line of the system, not local conditions, dictated policy, including the kinds of passenger cars that trains would haul and the stations at which they would stop. Before the Interstate Commerce Commission in 1887, the general counsel for the Georgia Railroad, Joseph B. Cumming, warned that if the ICC or a court told the railroad that it either must supply sleeping coaches to black passengers or allow black passengers to sleep in the coaches set aside for white passengers, “we may feel it best for the management of the road to take off our sleeping cars.” As Cumming explained, “[w]e could not afford to haul an extra sleeper for colored people, when there would not be a berth applied for perhaps once in six months, and when that case comes up we propose to meet it not by any claim that we cannot be compelled to furnish it, but that we have the option at least of not furnishing sleepers to anybody.”⁶⁸

Citizen petitions often ran headlong into the demand of staying on schedule. In 1898, for example, the Illinois Central rebuffed a citizen petition from Amite City, Louisiana, requesting that the railroad create a passenger stop in their town. As the company put it, “while the delay incident to making the stop at Amite may seem to be a small matter to you it would be rather a serious one to us in connection to making the schedule with such a train.” As if it would assuage the local citizens' frustration at being turned down, the company added, “when first-class service is furnished [to] through passengers they naturally think better of the county which they pass than if the service was indifferent.”⁶⁹ Railroad companies had become a thing apart from the physical space through which they passed. Their allegiance was not to the locale, but to the corporation.⁷⁰

The men who personified railroads – conductors, brakeman, ticket agents – lost a measure of their regional identity in the process of becoming corporate men. They were at the start and remained white men; born and raised in the South, they shared Southern white prejudices. Yet the systemization that marked corporate expansion left less room for the exercise of individual judgment. In 1873, a longtime steamboat captain and owner on the lower Mississippi River could say,

⁶⁸ Oral Argument of Joseph B. Cumming (general counsel, the Georgia R.R.), *Record in Heard*, pp. 34–35.

⁶⁹ William G. Thomas, *Lawyering for the Railroad: Business, Law, and Power in the New South* (Baton Rouge, 1999), 27–28.

⁷⁰ Edward L. Ayers, *Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (Oxford, 1992), 12.

"I don't propose to give up my steamboat to ... anybody ... white or black. When a passenger comes aboard my boat, he comes to get such accom'odations as I cho'se to give him, ... and if it doesn't suit, why, he doesn't go."⁷¹ The steamboat captain, the master, epitomized the autonomous man. On ship, his word was sovereign. Often owned individually or by a small circle of investors, steamboats in the 1870s and before contrasted dramatically with railroads. It is hard to imagine even what role an owner would have occupied on a railroad – engineer? conductor? Railroads exemplified the corporate form in which ownership and control were separated from daily operations.⁷²

The expansion of corporate authority created a space in which individual judgments were subordinated to the will of the corporation, voiced in company rules and procedures. As a conductor on the Georgia Railroad explained, when two black passengers pleaded with him to allow them into the rear, first-class (white) coach in 1887, he had to obey company orders requiring him to assign all black passengers to a separate coach; if he did not, they would get somebody who would.⁷³ He was no doubt right. Company rules replaced the discretion, the individual judgment of conductors and other carrier employees, and in so doing, allowed white employees to feel absolved of personal responsibility for racism. Lawyers representing white passengers injured by conductors' and other railroad employees' enforcement of company rules described the men as pawns of corporate power. These men no longer deserved the title "Southern men"; they were mere puppets moving at the will of their corporate masters.⁷⁴ The same was true for railroad lawyers. While railroad corporations generally had only a very small number of lawyers who were employees, they attempted to monopolize local talent with their promise of business. Lawyers, only too anxious for the sure source of income the railroad seemed to promise in a turbulent economy, exchanged their independence for retainers.⁷⁵

By the late 1880s, Southern railroads were no longer Southern. The shift was not simply in Southern railroads, but held true for

⁷¹ Testimony of Cap't. Thomas P. Leathers (witness for defendant, cross-examination), *Record in Decuir*, p. 30.

⁷² For discussion of railroads and the emergence of the modern corporate form, see Chandler, *The Visible Hand*; Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890-1916: The Market, the Law, and Politics* (Cambridge, 1988).

⁷³ Testimony of William H. Heard (petitioner), *Record in Heard*, pp. 3-4.

⁷⁴ Oral Argument of Hon. Pat Henry (lawyer for Pearl Morris, plaintiff), *Record in Pearl Morris*, pp. 92-93, 97.

⁷⁵ Thomas, *Lawyering for the Railroad*, 52-53, 55, 56, 247-49, 254-56, 258-59.

railroads throughout the nation.⁷⁶ As corporations, railroads represented a new type of space – corporate space. Although chartered in a given state, they seemed to explode, at the same time that they exploited, state boundaries.⁷⁷ The Pullman Company exemplified this phenomenon. When Pearl Morris purchased her through ticket from Vicksburg to New York City, she also purchased a berth on the Pullman sleeping coach that would be attached to the train. In the course of her journey, the Pullman coach in which she rode was attached to the trains of a series of different railroads, so that by the end of her journey she had "ridden" on the Alabama & Vicksburg Railroad, the Alabama, Vicksburg & Southern Railroad, the Southern Railroad, the Norfolk and Western Railroad, and the Pennsylvania Railroad.⁷⁸ The coach in which Morris rode, like all Pullman coaches, was owned by the Pullman Company. To maintain its standards of luxury, the Pullman Company entered into leasing arrangements with railroad companies for use of its cars, but retained ownership and control of the cars, hiring and training all employees (e.g., conductors, porters) and physically maintain-

⁷⁶ Street railway ownership and control underwent a similar transformation in roughly the same period. The shift to electricity as the principal motive power of streetcars beginning in the late 1880s required huge capital outlays leading to consolidation of lines and loss of local control of streetcar companies. By 1900 most large American cities had unified streetcar systems controlled and financed by investment capitalists in place of the local men and money which had established and operated horsecar lines. See Walter E. Campbell, "Profit, Prejudice, and Protest: Utility Competition and the Generation of Jim Crow Streetcars in Savannah, 1905-1907," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 70 (1986): 197-231. See also Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Special Reports: Street and Electric Railways, 1902* (Washington, D.C., 1905), 6, 120-25; Holt, "The Changing Perception of Urban Pathology," 334; Chandler, *The Visible Hand*, 192-93; Charles W. Cheape, *Moving the Masses: Urban Public Transit in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, 1880-1912* (Cambridge, 1980) (New York, Boston, and Philadelphia).

⁷⁷ On the transformation in the law of corporations over the course of the nineteenth century, see Morton J. Horwitz, *The Transformation of American Law, 1870-1960: The Crisis of Legal Orthodoxy* (New York, 1992), 65-107; Herbert Hovenkamp, *Enterprise and American Law, 1836-1937* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991); Lawrence M. Friedman, *A History of American Law*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1985), 511-25; Charles W. McCurdy, "The Knight Sugar Decision of 1895 and the Modernization of Corporation Law, 1869-1903," *Business History Review* 53 (1979): 304-42; William J. Novak, *The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, 1996), 105-11; James Willard Hurst, *The Legitimacy of the Business Corporation in the Law of the United States, 1780-1970* (Charlottesville, Va., 1970).

⁷⁸ Testimony of E. A. Stedman (ticket agent, Queen & Crescent System, witness for defendant railway), *Record in Pearl Morris*, p. 214.

ing its cars.⁷⁹ In contrast to railroad companies whose rails gave them a physical permanence in a state, there was an ephemeral quality to the corporate presence of the Pullman Company in every state where its cars were in use.

Railroads marked the modern experience of space. In the twentieth century, privately owned spaces would become centers of public life: amusement parks, department stores, malls, restaurants. The individual, the corporation, the state, and the nation no longer had neat borders. What were the limits of individual rights, corporate rights, state and federal governmental rights in the modern nation? For historians searching to answer the question of why Southern states began adopting separate coach laws in the late 1880s, here, it seems, are contributing factors. Separate coach laws were a dramatic reclamation of space, an affirmation of state's rights, as surely as secession had been almost forty years before.

Although there was significant variation among the states' laws, between 1887 and 1901 every Southern state mandated that railroads segregate white and black passengers in accommodations that were equal but separate. From there, Southern states moved to streetcars, steamboats, and other public accommodations.⁸⁰ Railroads could meet the terms of the statutes by setting aside whole cars for each race or by partitioning cars. Laws extending state-mandated racial segregation to streetcars required companies to post signs denoting which seats were for white and which seats were for black passengers and were required to erect partitions dividing the white from the "colored" section of the car.⁸¹ Reflecting the ebb and flow of streetcar traffic, they gave conductors the authority to move the partition to-adjust for the demands of the travel.

Looking at the laws alone misleadingly suggests completeness and finality where it did not in fact exist. Jim Crow did not transform Southern transit overnight. There was no stage curtain lowered and raised moments later on a new scene, now divided between "white" and "colored." The spatial transformation was far more gradual, contested, and unsure. It was over a decade before every Southern state had passed a separate coach law. Given the interstate character of railroad networks

⁷⁹ See Answer (The Pullman Company), March 16, 1908, *Record in Gaines*; Agreed Statement of Facts, June 11, 1915, *Record in Norton*, pp. 26–30.

⁸⁰ Florida adopted the first separate-coach law in 1887, followed by Mississippi in 1888, Texas in 1889, Louisiana in 1890, Alabama, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Georgia in 1891, and Kentucky in 1893. Between 1898 and 1901, North and South Carolina and Virginia, too, passed separate-coach laws. See Chapter 9.

⁸¹ See, e.g., Laws of Mississippi (1888), Ch. 27, pp. 48–49; Laws of Mississippi (1904), Ch. 99, p. 140.

this factor alone suggested a period of ambiguity. After all, traffic did not stop at state lines; it flowed between cities in different states, some North, some South. The Louisville & Nashville, for example, passed through eight Southern states, including states – the Carolinas and Virginia – which did not adopt Jim Crow until the turn of the century. Railroad companies' resistance also meant that the transition would not be immediate or, in fact, ever complete. The legal dimension of resistance to Jim Crow is explored in Chapter 9, but there was another dimension to resistance: simple, old-fashioned foot-dragging.⁸² The piecemeal construction of Jim Crow at the beginning of the twentieth century very much resembled the piecemeal dismantlement of Jim Crow half a century later.⁸³ Moreover, new forms of transportation meant that construction was an ongoing process that eventually overlapped the beginnings of dismantlement.⁸⁴

In the initial years of Jim Crow, blacks and whites boarding trains in the South discovered that physical conditions in the cars assigned to each race were much the same as they had been before the adoption of the laws. Kentucky had had a separate-coach law for two years when Robert Lander assisted his wife Fannie, both black residents of Hopkinsville, Kentucky, to board a train of the Ohio Valley Railway in their hometown in 1893. Yet the Landers discovered that little had changed. The "colored" compartment was the front third of a car immediately behind the baggage car and the engine; the rear portion of the car was a smoking compartment for white passengers, and the door between the two compartments stood open, allowing smoke to fill the colored compartment. The colored compartment was dirty and dark and during the journey would be filled with smoke from two directions: the engine and the smoking compartment. In contrast to the single small compartment walled off for blacks, the railway provided both a smoking compartment for whites and an entire additional passenger coach, the ladies' car. The Landers' experience was typical.⁸⁵

Separate-coach laws did not change the economic incentives that, in part, had led carriers in the first instance to shunt black passengers into what were, in practice if not in name, second-class accommoda-

⁸² Thomas, *Lawyering for the Railroad*, 129–33.

⁸³ See Catherine A. Barnes, *Journey from Jim Crow: The Desegregation of Southern Transit* (New York, 1983).

⁸⁴ See generally *ibid.*; Pauli Murray, comp. & ed., *States' Laws on Race and Color* (New York, 1950). For two cases that highlight the evolving character of Jim Crow, see *Corporation Commission v. Interracial Commission*, 198 N.C. 317 (1930) (suit to require state commission to adopt rules extending segregation to buses); *Brumfield v. Consolidated Coach Corporation*, 240 Ky. 1 (1931) (applying common law in absence of legislation extending segregation to buses).

⁸⁵ Petition, Testimony of Robert N. Lander (plaintiff), *Record in Lander*, pp. 1–3, 13–16.

tions. If anything, it increased those incentives by cutting down on black travel. In suits brought by black and white passengers against railroads, railroad companies introduced evidence showing that African-Americans accounted for less than 20 percent of local travel, a significantly smaller fraction of interstate travel, and an infinitesimal percentage of luxury travel. For example, in a suit brought by five bishops of the AME Church on behalf of African-Americans before the ICC in 1908, the General Passenger Agent of the Southern Railway Company, W. H. Tayloe, noted that blacks accounted for approximately 18 percent of their local travel and less than 10 percent of the company's interstate travel. James Martin, the Superintendent of the Southeastern Division of the Pullman Company, noted that blacks accounted for less than one thirtieth of 1 percent of the travel in his division.⁸⁶ The statistics produced by railroad companies must be used with caution. Railroads had an incentive to underestimate black travel whether they were arguing that they provided blacks space proportionate or even generous for their numbers or arguing against segregation as a "taking of property." They were as aggressive in arguing the numbers in suits brought by white passengers as in suits brought by black passengers.⁸⁷

The numbers, even if accurate, did not reflect actual demand. The law itself – the imposition of state-mandated segregated transit – and the legal as well as illegal adjustments that the law led companies to make undeniably curbed black travel.⁸⁸ Wealthy and distinguished black men like Wesley Gaines, a bishop of the AME Church, told of having to circumvent local ticket agents, who refused to sell Pullman berths to blacks, and make arrangements in advance through officials of the road with whom they were personally acquainted. Even then, as Gaines noted, the railroad agent might require him to pay for an entire drawing room, at twice or as much as four times the price of a single berth, to ensure that no white passengers would have to sleep near a black passenger.⁸⁹ For

⁸⁶ Testimony of James Martin (Superintendent, Southeastern Division, Pullman Company), W. H. Tayloe (General Passenger Agent, Southern Railway Company), *Record in Gaines*, pp. 338–49, 506, 507.

⁸⁷ See, e.g., Testimony of W. H. Tayloe (General Passenger Agent, Southern Ry.), *Record in Gaines*, pp. 505–8; Agreed Statement of Facts, June 11, 1915, *Record in Norton*, pp. 27–30.

⁸⁸ See Testimony of Bishop Henry M. Turner (petitioner), *Record in Gaines*, pp. 121–22. In the absence of segregated transit, Bishop Turner insisted that black travel would be three or four times higher.

⁸⁹ Testimony of Wesley J. Gaines (petitioner), *ibid.*, 23–25. See also Deposition of Mr. Harris (conductor, the Georgia Railroad), *Record in Heard*, pp. 10–11 (admitting that "every fair means would be devised to prevent a colored passenger from taking a berth in the only sleeping car" on a train).

those without special connections, the more common result was no seat in the Pullman at all.⁹⁰

Beyond the deliberate foot-dragging, the sheer magnitude of the task, the cost and complications of implementing separate accommodations, meant that the transformation would take time even had carriers been eager to enforce the laws, which they were not. By 1900, there were close to 35,000 miles of track in the South. Five major lines – the Southern Railway, the Louisville and Nashville, the Atlantic Coast Line, the Seaboard Air Line, and the Illinois Central – accounted for 20,000 miles of Southern road.⁹¹ The network of railroad traffic was complicated. For the year ending June 30, 1901, the Seaboard Air Line Railway had 2,592 miles of track running through six Southern states (Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Florida). During the year its passenger trains ran some 3.5 million miles, carrying over 1.6 million passengers for a total of 78 million passenger miles, all with only 176 passenger coaches.⁹² By 1900, the Southern Railway Company had 6,415 miles of track crossing eight Southern states. On the route from Washington, D.C., to Charlotte, North Carolina, there were 86 stops. On the route from Chattanooga, Tennessee, to Brunswick, Georgia, there were 90 stops.⁹³ Jim Crow imposed an additional level of complication on this already complicated picture. Genuine compliance with Jim Crow required railroad companies to measure their travel – white versus colored – between every stop on the line, factor in how that travel fit into longer lines, and make up their trains accordingly.⁹⁴ Even if the space provided had been adequate for the most part, somewhere along the line a revival, fair, or court day could throw the balance wildly out of kilter, as an unanticipated throng of white or black passengers surged

⁹⁰ See, e.g., T. Montgomery Gregory, "The 'Jim Crow' Car," *The Crisis* (Feb. 1916): 195–98; Testimony of Bishop H. M. Turner (petitioner), H. E. Perry (black insurance solicitor, witness for petitioners), *Record in Gaines*, pp. 120, 132, 172–226. See also *Crosby v. St. Louis-San Francisco Ry. Co.*, 112 I.C.C. 239 (1926); *Harden v. Pullman Co.*, 120 I.C.C. 359 (1926); *Williams v. The Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Ry. Co.*, 90 Kan. 478 (1913).

⁹¹ Stover, *Railroads of the South*, 275.

⁹² *First Annual Report of the Seaboard Air Line Railway for the Year Ending June 30th, 1901* (Norfolk, Va.), 3–4, 20–21, 24–25.

⁹³ *The Official Railway Guide of the Railways and Steam Navigation Lines of the United States*, 799, 806, 811.

⁹⁴ Lawsuits exerted at least periodic pressure on railroads to consider the ratio of black to white travel. See Testimony of W. H. Tayloe (general passenger agent, Southern Railway Company), *Record in Gaines*, p. 613. On the other hand, I have not found evidence that railroads responded to Jim Crow by purchasing new cars designed to meet its requirements. In the years between the 1880s and 1900, a single passenger coach cost roughly \$8,500. Luxury cars, such as buffet-library passenger cars and parlor cars, cost more – respectively, \$10,820 and \$14,350. John F. Stover, *History of the Illinois Central Railroad* (New York, 1975), 214.

onto a train on which racially divided space suddenly meant inadequate space for one race or the other.⁹⁵

Even planned events like excursions could generate an absurd juggling of passenger seating, musical chairs in black and white. An Illinois Central Railroad excursion from Aberdeen, Mississippi, to New Orleans in the spring of 1911 offers a typical example. Initially, the train had nine coaches, the first five behind the engine assigned to blacks and the last four to whites. In Jackson, the train picked up three new coaches attached to the rear of the train, changing the coach tally to five black, seven white. By the time the train reached Hammond, Louisiana, the coaches assigned to blacks were full. To give blacks another contiguous coach required moving all the white passengers out of the sixth coach – the first white coach immediately behind the colored coaches – and back to coaches further on the train.⁹⁶ Moving passengers of one race to create space for the other race rankled people of whichever race were asked to move.

Just as they had before the days of state-mandated segregation, railroads resisted claims that accommodations were unequal or that equal meant identical. They attempted to make of every example of inequality an exception, a joke, a lie.⁹⁷ When Augustus Redmond brought suit against the Illinois Central Railroad in 1917, the company insisted that contrary to Redmond's claim that he had not been given a seat, the conductor had removed the white passengers from the smoking compartment so that the black passengers could have the entire car. The company made light of his claim that he could not use the only toilet in the colored compartment because it was marked "Women."⁹⁸

Yet inequality was inevitable. Railroad stations highlight the architecture of inequality. Hundreds of small depots dotted the Southern

⁹⁵ Railroad companies went to great lengths in suits brought by African-Americans to prove that they received far more complaints regarding inadequate space from whites than blacks. See Testimony of W. H. Tayloe (general passenger agent, Southern Ry. Co.), *Record in Gaines*, pp. 503–8, 533. A few states specifically provided in their Jim Crow laws for flexibility in emergencies or unexpected overflow. See, e.g., Laws of Maryland (1904), ch. 109, sec. 6, pp. 186–87; Laws of Virginia (1900), ch. 226, sec. 7, pp. 236–37; Laws of South Carolina (1898), no. 483, sec. 5, p. 778. But the definition of "emergency" or "unexpected" was open to interpretation and contest.

⁹⁶ Testimony of R. D. Robbins (conductor, witness for defendant railroad), *Record in O'Leary*, pp. 124–30.

⁹⁷ A frequent response of companies to claims by black passengers of inferior accommodations was that a car had had to be substituted at the last moment because of some safety issue involving the regular coach. See, e.g., Testimony of W. C. Cason (conductor, Seaboard Air Line Ry.), W. H. Tayloe (General Passenger Agent, Southern Ry. Co., both witnesses for defendants), *Record in Gaines*, pp. 469–70, 518–24.

⁹⁸ *Illinois Central R.R. Co. v. Redmond*, 119 Miss. 765, 770 (1919).

landscape just as they did the rest of the nation. Under Jim Crow, railroad stations along thousands of miles of track had to be remodeled to provide racially separate spaces for white and black passengers. Blueprints for what the Illinois Central referred to as its "standard Southern style depot" showed two rooms of exactly the same dimensions, one immediately behind the other. Studying the blueprint one notes that the white waiting room fronted on the railroad platform with a door and window facing the tracks; the only door into or exiting from the colored waiting room was onto the platform at the side of the station. The structure of space allowed white passengers to remain in their waiting room and see the train arrive through the window provided. Blacks could not.⁹⁹

In execution, Jim Crow transit never reached the absolute clarity that the blueprint for a station or that the laws on the statute books suggested. Describing a train trip in the 1920s with a black YWCA coworker, Katherine DuPre Lumpkin noted that after each woman passed through the waiting room so painstakingly designated for her race, she came out onto the platform on which there were no signs.¹⁰⁰ The signs – "White" and "Colored" – at the door of the railroad car that seemed to mark space with such clarity and permanence masked the ephemeral nature of raced space, more generally. A simple flip of the sign revealed that white could become colored and colored white. For railroads, reversible signs simplified the task of executing Jim Crow. But for passengers, the reversible signs introduced a level of uncertainty, a potential for ambiguity. What of the sign that through some accident or deliberate malfeasance was reversed along the way?¹⁰¹ On streetcars the

⁹⁹ See, e.g., Letter from Ass't Gen'l Psgr Agent to Jno. Dwyer, Ass't Gen'l Freight Agent, Aug. 25, 1904, I.C. Supporting Papers, Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors, Illinois Central R.R. Company Records, Newberry Library, Chicago, Ill.

¹⁰⁰ Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, *The Making of a Southerner* (1946; rpt., New York, 1991), 133, 215; quoted in Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York, 1998), 134. The same point is graphically illustrated in photographs of bus stations in the South taken under the auspices of the Farm Security Administration and the Office of War Information between 1937 and 1945. See, e.g., LC-USW3-37973-E, LC-USW3-37974-E, File Location E-5153, F.S.A. Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division (Washington, D.C.).

¹⁰¹ For one incident in which a sign was turned around mid-journey, see *Payne v. Stevens*, 125 Miss. 382 (1921). The presence, absence, size, and content of signs figured prominently in lawsuits during the Jim Crow era. See, e.g., *San Antonio Traction Co. v. Lambkin*, 99 SW 574 (Tex. Civ. App. 1907) (white passengers moved sign on streetcar); *Weller v. Missouri, Kansas & Texas Ry. Co.*, 187 SW 374 (1916) (conductor insisted that he had posted signs designating car for black passengers, but that at Austin someone had torn the signs down); *Louisville & Interurban R.R. Co. v. Garz*, 209 Ky. 841 (1925) (conflicting evidence regarding whether coach white man was riding in when injured in fight with black passengers was marked "white" or "colored" when he boarded).

ambiguity was even more pronounced. Jim Crow streetcar laws gave conductors the authority to shift the color line as the passenger needs of the moment required. The shifting color line created what Katherine DuPre Lumpkin called "the twilight zone." Some states and cities attempted to mitigate the confusion, with little success, by requiring whites to board from the front and blacks to board from the rear. Noting the confusion, uncertainty, and resulting friction, Ray Stannard Baker observed in 1908 that "street-car relationships are, therefore, symbolic of the new conditions" – there was a color line that was not open to doubt, but "neither race knows just where it is."¹⁰²

Urban growth, national markets, and the railway systems that served them further undermined the clarity of Jim Crow. The Jim Crow South was not a closed system. Interurban electric streetcars made the six-mile trip between Cincinnati, Ohio, and Covington, Kentucky, and other cities like them on either side of the Jim Crow divide, dozens of times in a single day, day after day.¹⁰³ Along the Atlantic seaboard and cutting a deep swath through the Midwest, rail systems like the Seaboard Air Line Railway and the Illinois Central Railroad bore passengers, white and black, from states where it violated the law to divide passengers by race into states where it violated the law not to divide passengers by race. After the turn of the century, every major rail system had exclusive interstate trains that promised luxury, limited stops, and speed to long-distance travelers. The Southern Railway Company's "Memphis Special" – a solid through train made up of exclusively Pullman drawing-room sleeping cars and carrying only interstate passengers – ran from New York City to Memphis, Tennessee, crossing the borders of eight states along the way.¹⁰⁴ Interstate transit created a fault line that in time would provide the critical opening to bring Jim Crow crashing down. It was like

¹⁰² Lumpkin, *Making of a Southerner*, 134; Ray Stannard Baker, *Following the Color: American Negro Citizenship in the Progressive Era* (1908; rpt., New York, 1964), 30–31. See also Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 432–34, and Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 133–36. The fact that states continued to bring suits against carriers into the 1920s for failure to enforce separate coach laws powerfully highlights the fact that segregation was never complete. See, e.g., *Commonwealth v. Illinois Central R.R. Co.*, 141 Ky. 502 (1911) (failure to segregate passengers on Pullman sleeping car); *Nashville Ry. & Light Co. v. State*, 144 Tenn. 446 (1920) (failure to segregate passengers on streetcar).

¹⁰³ See, e.g., *South Covington & Cincinnati Street Railway Company v. Kentucky*, 252 U.S. 399 (1919).

¹⁰⁴ The eight states were New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Interstate luxury travel bridging the Jim Crow divide came from the West as well. See, e.g., *State v. Galveston, Harrisburg & San Antonio Ry. Co.*, 184 SW 227 (Tex. Civ. App. 1916) (Southern Pacific Railway train no. 10 running from San Francisco, Calif.

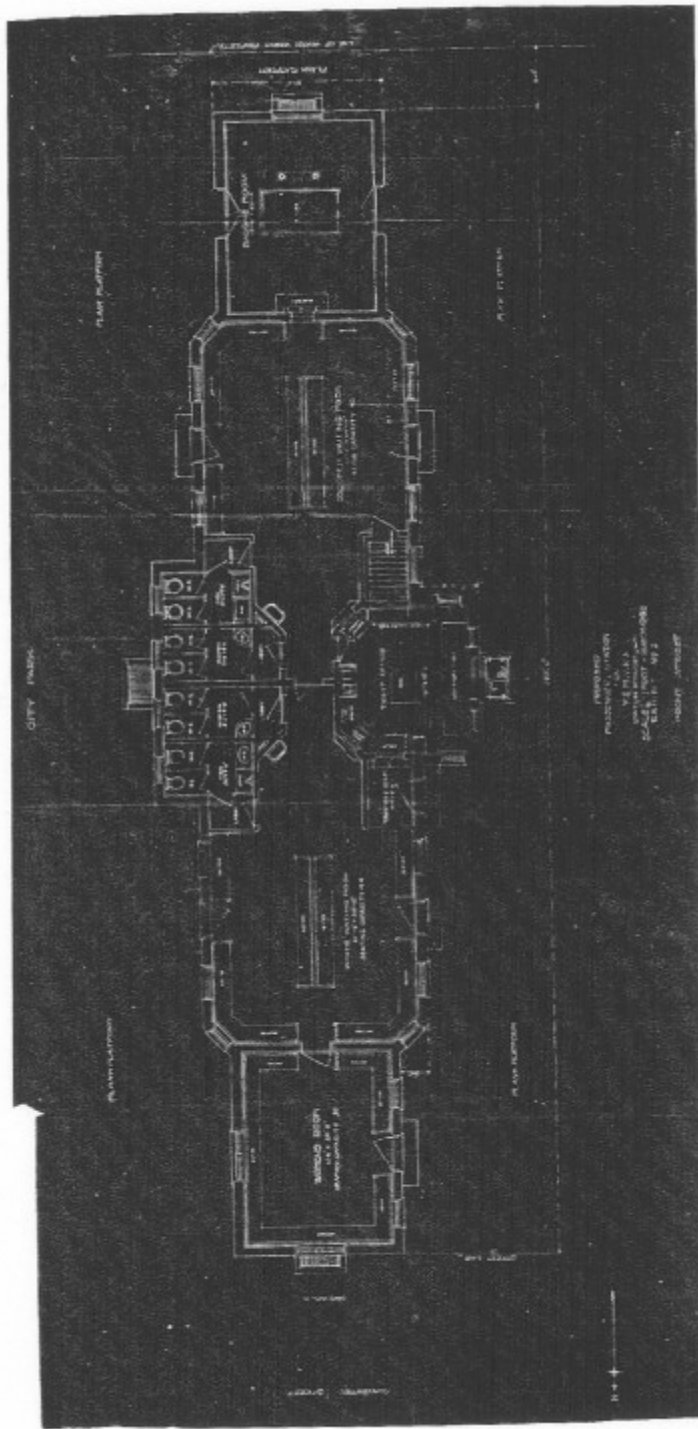


FIGURE 7.3. Larger stations, like this planned station at Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad of the Illinois Central, included not only a "white waiting room" and a "colored waiting room," but also a separate waiting room for white women. Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Illinois Central R.R. Papers.

the vine that as it grows along the brick wall cuts small fissures into the apparently impenetrable surface of the brick so that as one season follows another with wind and rain, cold and heat, the brick itself begins to crumble.

Railroads and other carriers resisted Jim Crow not out of any commitment to equality or human dignity, but for its undeniable economic inefficiencies and for the challenge it posed to their autonomy and authority. The irony is that railroads themselves – both in their structuring of the internal space of rail travel and in the transformation of the external space of rail transit – contributed to the pressures that generated statutory Jim Crow. But railroads did not act in a vacuum. From the outset, railroads and other carriers had responded to social and cultural norms in the division of space in public transit. As the provision of “ladies’ cars” for women and “smoking cars” for men suggests, public transit bore the imprint of gender from the start.