

ARTICLE 1

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**THE STRUGGLE  
FOR INDUSTRIAL EDUCATION  
IN THE "LOWELL OF THE  
SOUTH," COLUMBUS,  
GEORGIA, 1850-1930**

**Lauren Yarnell Bradshaw and Chara Haeussler Bohan  
Georgia State University**

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The history of Columbus, Georgia, cannot be separated from that of the local textile mills; the mills were important in defining the economic success, the social struggles, and the enduring legacy of southern industrial tycoons. Evidence of this industrial past can be seen on almost every street, school, and business located in the city along the river. Columbus, Georgia, situated on a prime hydroelectric location along Chattahoochee River fault line, boasted the title of the "Lowell of the South" for many

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**Lauren Yarnell Bradshaw**, Georgia State University, 924 Scott Circle, Decatur, GA, 30033, (T) 404-518-0321, (F) 404-413-8063, Email: laurenyarnellbradshaw@gmail.com. • **Chara Haeussler Bohan**, Georgia State University, COE/MSIT 30 Pryor St., 6th Fl., Atlanta, GA 30303, (T) 404-413-8402, (F) 404-413-8063, Email: cbohan@gsu.edu.

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years (Martin 1874, 15), and through this industrial foundation, the people of Columbus pioneered a vocational education system that became heralded at its inception as a model for industrial education.

Although the various monuments to this industrial history are widespread throughout the city, the group of powerful men who ran these industrial empires was actually quite small and incestual. European royalty of the nineteenth century often spread their families' influence to the thrones of multiple countries, and so too did the southern industrial aristocrats of Columbus, Georgia, serving as presidents of multiple (and sometimes competing) textile mills. Men such as G. Gunby Jordan, W.C. Bradley, and George Foster Peabody experienced so much success in each of their economic, social, and political ventures that many in Columbus began to question if it were ever possible for these men to fail.

While a national debate in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries concerning the purpose of education raged on among prominent educators like David Snedden and John Dewey, these men of southern industrial royalty exhibited their own interest in a "practical" education. By exercising their influence in various economic endeavors as well as most educational experiments that the city undertook in the early-twentieth century, Columbus's educational system began to resemble the stratified and paternalistic mill towns that were responsible for the wealth of these southern industrial princes. In this study we will examine how the history of the textile mills and other industrial enterprises of Columbus, Georgia affected the city, how this history is connected to education and the stratification of Columbus' society, and how the presence of the mills within the city gave birth to a specific kind of education in which vocational education enthusiasts heralded Columbus as an exemplar model for industrial education.

### **HISTORY OF THE MILLS IN COLUMBUS, GEORGIA**

Many revisionist historians have claimed that industrialization did not exist within the southern United States before the Civil War, but that allegation was not the case in Columbus, Georgia (Gagnon, 2012, 1-12; Lupold 1975, 2). The Chattahoochee River is the force behind this industrial success, as Tony Adams states the "water level drops over one hundred and twenty-five feet in two and a half miles," and this drop in elevation enables Columbus to generate over one hundred thousand horsepower of energy (Adams 2002). The official establishment of the city of Columbus occurred in 1828, nine years later in 1837 the first textile mill was established, and by 1860 Columbus was the second largest textile center in the southern United States (Lupold 1975, 2).

Of the many mills in Columbus, “no star would shine brighter than the Eagle and Phenix Mill;” the mill was first built and named the Eagle Mill in 1850 by a New York native William H. Young, and thrived throughout the Civil War (Adams 2002). The Eagle Mill was not alone in its economic success during the Civil War; many businesses in the city adapted their skills to fit the wartime needs: jewelers made swords, tinsmiths made pistols, grocers made shoes, and among other items, the Eagle Mill manufactured Confederate uniforms. Union forces, not realizing that Robert E. Lee had surrendered a few days earlier, arrived in Columbus April 16, 1865 and began burning the textile mills. The smoke had barely cleared before the people of Columbus began to rebuild, and christened the new mill the Eagle and Phenix as it had risen up out of the flames of Union destruction. Many Confederate veterans became presidents or owners of various industrial experiments around the area after the conclusion of the war, including G. Gunby Jordan who became part owner of the Eagle and Phenix Mill. By 1868, the mill was operating ten thousand spindles, and a hundred and thirty-five looms, and surprisingly the directors decided to build a second mill after only four months of being fully operational. The mills doubled their capacity and production (Lupold, 1975, 4-10).

By the 1880s, the Eagle and Phenix Mill was the largest mill in operation in the South, producing 1.5 million dollars worth of textiles every year, which was over eighty percent of the city’s industrial output (Lupold, 1975, 2-22). The Eagle and Phenix certainly dominated the economics of Columbus, and even became a quasi-tourist attraction. Visitors came to view the mill, postcards with photographs and paintings of the mill were sent throughout the United States, and poems were even written to pay homage to the mill’s thousands of workers. Matt O’Brien’s 1878 poem “The Bells of Columbus” paints a vivid picture of what life in the city of Columbus entailed in the late-nineteenth century:

... When a very loud bell sounded,  
 And a friends who was sitting nigh,  
 Said, “There’s a many a one who will hear that,  
 And waken with a sigh.”  
 ... Nearly 3,000 men and women,  
 Yes, and little children, too,  
 Are roused by its sounding  
 Sayi “Wake, ye’ve work to do!”  
 ... Then everything is quiet,  
 The street resumes its gloom.  
 The bell sounds out again  
 With a reverberating boom!  
 Then such a noise, and such a rattle!  
 Such as a din as if in battle

The calvary of the world were charging a run,  
 Such a hurly, burly clatter  
 Till you, in asking 'What's the matter?'"  
 Learn the Eagle and Phenix work's begun  
 ... Whene'r that bell you hear,  
 As its tone strikes your ear,  
 Think! It wakens these  
 Who make this city's wealth! (O'Brien 1878).

The mill continued to prosper, as did many other smaller mills located in the city. Rural migrants offered a never ending supply of cheap and renewable labor; advertisements such as "Factory Hands Wanted" of the Eagle and Phenix offered "steady work and good wages" and stated that "many families now living in the country would find it greatly to their advantage to engage with them" ("Factory Hands Wanted" 1880). Certainly, for many of these families, this offer was too good to be true, and this endless supply of tractable southern labor can be argued to be one of Columbus's greatest strengths (Lupold 1975, 22).

Mill towns began to emerge as little utopias, many complete with a benevolent dictator. Some of the mill dictators would inspire life-long loyalty among their workers; others accepted their generosity, but understood that with this kindness also came intrusiveness. Mill workers might find themselves reprimanded, kicked out of the mill village, or even fired over offenses such as not turning the lights off by a certain time, drinking, arguing, or even smoking on the front porch for female residents. One of the main punishments for offenses was Sunday school. Workers would be sentenced to seven or ten days of Sunday school classes where offenders would be encouraged to give up their sinful ways. Mill owners encouraged their workers to join Baptist or Methodist sects for their belief in alcoholic abstinence, and most village pastors were even on the company payroll (Dowd Hall et al. 1987, 115-125).

The regulation of employee morality could clearly be seen in Bibb City, a pristine mill village of the Bibb Manufacturing Company, which opened in Columbus in 1901. The *Bibb City Recorder* documented all of the utopian cheerleading that the company did to inspire good Christian values and loyalty to the company. In an article in the *Bibb City Recorder* from 1932 "Wiener Roast is Given to Class" the paper honors a Sunday school class that was granted a wiener roast for perfect attendance at Sunday school ("Wiener Roast is Given to Class" 1932), and an edition from the following year advertises that eighteen prayer meetings were to be held in Bibb City the upcoming week ("Bibb City Club Is Holding Many Prayer Services" 1933). In a section labeled "Ten Years Ago" from a 1933 edition, the paper announces a goal of two hundred had been set for Sunday school attendance, and the superintendent of the mill, H.W. Pittman,

offered "three cash prizes" to children who wrote essays concerning the history of Bibb Manufacturing Company ("Ten Years Ago" 1933). Loyalty to God and loyalty to the mill were the two virtues that the mill owners of Bibb Manufacturing Company desired, and for the most part they received all that they asked for; they were benevolent dictators in their little utopia.

Mill owners coveted an educational system that would instill the "proper" moral virtues within their workforce, one that would encourage their workers to place their personal desires below those of the company. Harry Harden embodied these principles in many ways; as an employee of Bibb Manufacturing Company for most of his life, he recounted in an oral interview in 1988 a story familiar to many white mill workers in Columbus, Georgia. His father, born in rural Alabama, came to Columbus because of advertisements that Bibb was hiring. His father helped to place the first machinery into the mill, and eventually retired from the mill. When Harden began working there himself in 1930, Bibb was already an established company, and Harden felt welcomed into the Bibb community. Harden recounted that

When I went to Bibb, they gave me a little blue book. It said "you are now a member of the Bibb family" and they weren't joking ... we looked after our own ... we didn't need any outsiders—we had our own post office, drug-store, grocery store, it's just an ideal place to work for. (Harden 1988)

Even though Harden speaks of his experience in Bibb City as a utopia, to an outsider it might not appear so. Harden worked sixty hours a week, from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm for a total of six dollars a week, yet he did not complain about these conditions as it was "just the way of life back then." Even when his pay was doubled four years later to twelve dollars and fifty cents a week and his hours reduced to eight a day, as a result of the National Recovery Act and a nationwide strike in 1934, he still found more fault with the federal government than he ever could with Bibb. When Bibb was shut down by "outsiders" the National Guard was brought in with machine guns and surrounded the mill. "What they were striking for, I'll never know," states Harden, he had no desire to strike against his company. He says that striking would be comparable to hitting one's parents, as the company treated them all so well, and they were a part of the Bibb family (Harden 1988).

Ophelia Perry, an African American who also participated in an oral interview in 1988, offered a different perspective on life in the mill. Perry, who began working at Bibb in 1940, described a segregated workplace with poor working conditions and very low pay. The heat of the mill was sweltering, and the areas where African Americans worked were the last to

receive air conditioners. Breaks were non-existent, and the work was dangerous; once she even had her dress caught in a machine and had to use all her strength to rip it out. Perry explained that African Americans were given harder jobs and were never really promoted. Although she did recall one African American boss at the mill, she noted that he had a reputation of being cruel and mean "cause he wanted his job" (Perry 1988). Stratification within the mill community was not only reflected within race relations, but also in gender discrimination and child labor practices; equality was neither expected nor earned within the mill "family." Upon devising an educational system to meet the moral and economic needs of the mill owners, the maintenance of this stratified society remained paramount to all endeavors.

Like education in the Jim Crow Era, the work environment of most African Americans was completely segregated from whites. African Americans were not allowed in the mill village at all; the one cafeteria in Bibb City which was open to workers was not open to African Americans; if blacks desired food from the cafeteria, they would have to enter through the back door. When the African American workers arrived at the mill they were not allowed to use the front door, they would "have to go in the side under the shed." There were separate restrooms as well. In regard to the white restrooms Perry states that "you could go in there to clean them up, but you weren't allowed to use them ... it was kind of rough, but you just got to keep on fighting" (Perry 1988).

The mills of Columbus were segregated in such a manner that most whites probably witnessed very little of the deplorable conditions that African Americans suffered in the South during this time. Bibb Manufacturing Company was not the only mill in Columbus to segregate its workforce in this manner. The Eagle and Phenix Mill mirrored this practice a few miles down the river, where distinct areas of the mill were segregated as "colored areas" and blacks worked the lowest jobs in the textile mill hierarchy ("Building Plans of Eagle and Phenix" n.d.).

The lasting effects that the mills had on the history of Columbus, Georgia, have long outlived their creators. The legacies of men like William Young who founded the Eagle Mill, G. Gunby Jordan who owned multiple mills including The Eagle and Phenix and Bibb Manufacturing Company, and W.C. Bradley who also owned multiple mills, including the Eagle and Phenix, can be felt in Columbus today. These mills gave purpose and a reason for the existence of Columbus. They inspired pride in those who believed in the paternalistic mill model, and discriminated against those who did not qualify to be a member of the mill family. All in all, the mills presented Columbus with a unique opportunity to shine, an opportunity that some people in Columbus were quick to exploit in the name of education.

## THE MILLS IN CONNECTION WITH EDUCATION

One of the direct effects of the mills bringing in thousands of poor rural workers into Columbus was that these poor rural workers brought with them their children; this phenomenon created the question of what these children would do to occupy themselves during the day. In the country, poor white children worked on the farm, while in the city poor white children found their employment in the mills. Many mills took advantage of the cheap labor and employed children directly in the mills. Child labor in the Columbus mills was documented by the child labor photographer Lewis Hine in 1913; just a few of the many mills in the city that utilized child labor were the Massey Hosiery Mill, Muscogee Mill, Eagle and Phenix Mill, and Perkins Hosiery Mill (Hine 1913). Although many children worked directly with the mills, there were a great number of other children who worked as "dinner toters." These children would carry baskets of food, sometimes several miles one way, to multiple workers in the mills and wait for the food to be eaten before returning home with the empty baskets. In 1901, the superintendent of Columbus schools, Carlton Gibson, conducted an investigation and found that in the three major mills of the city, there were over one thousand white children working as dinner toters; these dinner toters would eventually help to establish the first solid connection that mills would have with education (Telfair 1927, 40-41).

The defense of child labor continuously blocked the way of educational progress in Columbus; in the 1890s Fredrick B. Gordon, president of the Muscogee Manufacturing Company, stated that he hired children in his mill "as a matter of charity," and that by working they would hopefully be free from "learning the first lessons of a vagrant's life" (Gordon 1902, 148-149). The belief that child labor was a matter of charity was widespread in Columbus during the time; A.S. Matheson, who was then superintendent of the Eagle and Phenix Mill, claimed that if he did not hire the children that their "families would suffer" (Huntzinger 1992, 175-176).

Once the study by Superintendent Gibson was published, local interest grew in trying to find a permanent solution to the problem of educating poor white children of the mills. Local industrial giants soon became interested, and even those like George Foster Peabody, who no longer lived in the city, pledged their financial support. Among these early supporters was G. Gunby Jordan who had been involved in the education of mill children since the 1880s. Jordan is remembered in Columbus for many accomplishments. He was the organizer and/or president for various businesses within the city including: Georgia Midland Construction Company, Third National Bank, Columbus Bank and Trust, Eagle and Phenix Mill, Bibb Manufacturing Company, The Jordan Company, and Perkins Hosiery Mills. Jordan's political and civic responsibilities were just

as impressive; he was a member of Governor Stephens' staff, member of Western Atlantic Commission, member of the Georgia Railroad Commission, president of the Georgia Immigration Association, member of the Commission for Industrial Peace, member of The National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education, and many other civic associations. Jordan's involvement in business and politics gave him the unique opportunity to make lasting changes in Columbus, and he took advantage of every opportunity ("G. Gunby Jordan Passes Away at Country Home" 1930).

Many remember Jordan to be not only a great supporter of Columbus, but also a great supporter of education. Indeed, during his lifetime Jordan donated thousands of dollars to support of education, particularly industrial education. As an active member of the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education, Jordan fulfilled the society's motto of helping to focus "public opinion in favor of an educational system that would give boys and girls who enter at an early age upon industrial pursuits, an adequate preparation for industrial efficiency" (Wright 1909, 13). This industrial tycoon was even elected president of the Columbus Board of Education for his many efforts to promote industrial education, a legacy that continued even after his death. In his will, Jordan expressed his "admiration for the broad mind, sympathetic nature, high regard for real work, and sincere appreciation for education" of which his mother, Rachel Gunby Jordan, had inspired within him. He put this belief into action by donating to the teachers' retirement fund. He honored those teachers who "taught self-reliance and had a suitable respect for the dignity of work," which would be in alignment with his industrial ideals. In addition to his donations to the teacher's retirement fund, Jordan set up a trust for the Columbus Secondary Industrial High School that he had helped to found ("Last Will and Testament of G. Gunby Jordan" 1930).

Like the mills, the founders of the education system in Columbus sought to benefit the "deserving poor"; and while African American children were most certainly poor, the racism that existed did not allow them to be classified as "deserving" (Lupold 1975, 7). Superintendent Gibson and Jordan strove to maintain the class and race stratifications that existed within both the city and the mills. They did not seek to integrate poor children with middle-class children, and certainly not African American children with anyone else. Creating a public school system that would be clearly segregated by race and class helped to gain support among other Columbus elites to expand public schools within the city (Huntzinger 1992, 163).

Education became linked to the textile mills over the next few decades in Columbus. The never ending supply of cheap labor provided the city with a never ending supply of poor white children; the city had two

choices: continue the process of letting the mills use them for work or initiate an educational system designed for children of mill workers. With the help of men like Jordan, who had an unlimited pocketbook and unimaginable political and economic influence, the elite of Columbus chose to do the latter.

**A "PRACTICAL EDUCATION"  
FEATURED IN THE COLUMBUS LEDGER, MAY 9, 1930**

In a growing industrial city, the number of poor and uneducated children began to grow at an enormous rate; concerns over appropriate behavior and good moral character of these children began to rival the laissez-faire policy which had allowed for such a massive number of uneducated children to live in Columbus at the turn of the twentieth century. Yet, what exactly did education mean for the poor white children of textile workers? It certainly did not mean the same education that was intended for the middle and upper-class residents of the city who attended schools such as Columbus Seminary for Young Girls, which offered "elementary, academic, and collegiate" courses in "music, piano, violin, and voice," ("Columbus Seminary for Young Girls" 1912) or LaGrange College a few miles up the road which offered "literary, music, art," and "expression" courses while boasting "a new dormitory, gymnasium, and swimming pool" ("Lagrange College: A Good School for Girls" 1912). This genteel southern education was not at all what was intended for the poor white children of the textile workers; rather it was an education that promoted good moral character among children and instilled values of hard work that would ensure that they could find work in one of the many industrial centers in the city.

A few attempts were made to educate the children of the textile mills in the nineteenth century, but most schools lasted only a few years before having to close. One of the first schools began during the Civil War at the Eagle Mill, when the influx of new wartime industries allowed for many different employment opportunities around the city. The Eagle Mill's school was free and located in a building owned by the company, but the school burned down with the rest of the mill when Union troops destroyed the mill at the close of the war. When the factory reopened, newly named the Eagle and Phenix, another school for children of the mill was established by Mrs. E.J. Harlen and Mrs. A.E. Marble in 1867. The school served both young girls and boys, but closed by 1872 because of little support and small enrollment (Telfair 1927, 38-39). What constituted low enrollment? When the school opened in 1867-1868 there were one hundred and twenty-five pupils, from 1869-1870 there were eighty-

six, the following year there were eighty-three. While eighty-three students were enrolled at the school, truancy was a huge problem as daily attendance fell to twenty-seven; when attendance dropped to twelve in November 1872, the decision was made to close the school (Mahan, Woodall, and Nilan 1977, 116). These short-lived institutions were not only a problem for the children of the poor, but also children of the wealthy as well; schools for profit often closed when their proprietor died, or when enrollment numbers could not justify keeping the school open. Long-lasting educational institutions were difficult to find in the South during the nineteenth century (Farnham 1994, 112-116).

Social work and the education of mill children often went hand in hand. The desire of the rich to transform these cotton fluff covered children into little "missionaries" in their individual household inspired the birth of many social and educational organizations. The Free Kindergarten Association as well as the Head, Hand and Heart Society worked to establish kindergartens for the mill children, but stated that the ideals of "neatness" and "good living" taught in kindergarten would not take hold if the mill children continued to remain in overcrowded boarding houses ("FKA Minutes" n.d.; Huntzinger 1994, 174).

With the assistance of industrial benefactors, Peabody and Jordan, the city looked to open a primary industrial school. The belief that better education of poor whites would help the southern industrialists earn more financial support from the North greatly influenced many of these philanthropic decisions. Jordan himself stated that the uneducated workers of the mills continually hindered the mills in reaping greater profits, and, therefore, it was necessary to educate these children better. With the hope of Columbus' financial giants for industrial greatness, the Primary Industrial School was opened in 1901 along with manual training classes in all of Columbus' primary schools (Huntzinger 1992, 174-182; Daniel 1913, 8-11).

The Primary Industrial School was modeled more on the idea of a settlement house than an elementary school. Students were given the option of attending three separate sessions throughout the day, which allowed for them to work and still attend school. Traditional academic classes were replaced by those that taught the "mind, heart, and hand"; specifically, these classes included "basket weaving, nature study, cooking, gardening, and pottery [which] taught the children the basic branches of reading, writing, and arithmetic" (Huntzinger 1992, 182-186). Special attention was also given to cleanliness; the school included a "model bedroom" where children were instructed how to maintain a clean household. The school never closed, which added to its popularity as mothers could drop their children off at school in the very early hours of the morning on their way to the mills. Parents loved the school, with over a ninety-seven per-

cent approval rating, and truancy barely existed (*Annual Report of Public Schools of Columbus* 1907, 25, 45-47; Daniel 1913, 8-11).

The school fulfilled its goal of training children to be future mill hands. Yet by 1913, enthusiasm for the school began to dwindle; students did not continue their education past the primary school. They would attend school for a few years and then go on to work in the mills (Daniel 1913, 11; Huntzinger 1992, 187-189). The Primary Industrial School began to look like most other schools in the city. As academic attention was increasingly devoted to more traditional academic subjects, attendance then began to fall (Telfair 1927, 44).

The rise of the Secondary Industrial High School soon came next; it was the shining jewel of the industrial education program. Carleton Gibson, school system superintendent, claimed it to be the first publicly funded industrial high school in the nation, and yet without Columbus' great industrial benefactors the school may never have been built. As they had done in the past, Peabody and Jordan were great contributors to the school; yet the two industrialists were accompanied in their enthusiasm for the high school by the social efficiency-minded Gibson (Daniel 1913, 12). Gibson noted of Jordan's donation to the school that "the land and several thousand dollars were given by a public spirited citizen who had an especial interest in this type of education," but that "the entire city looks upon it as its property" and focused on adapting the schools to the needs "of certain classes of people" (Gibson 1909, 43-44). Jordan, along with Superintendent Gibson, traveled over much of the northeastern United States to try and find a school to model theirs after, although none could be found. Jordan and Gibson, therefore, created their own model for industrial education which would be embodied in the Secondary Industrial High School. The school was completed in 1905 and attracted great media attention; the Governor of Georgia and the Dean of Teacher's College at Columbia University were both in attendance at the ceremony where the placement of the cornerstone was celebrated (Telfair 1926, 48; Daniel 1913, 13). Columbus City Schools found itself at the forefront of the efficiency and industrial education movement a full seven years before John Franklin Bobbitt's renowned article "The Elimination of Waste in Education" had even been published (Bobbitt 1912; Kliebard 2004, 83; Kliebard 1999, 51-54).

Much of the machinery for the school was donated by local industries, and the power company even promised to send free electricity to the various school workshops. The school was officially opened in 1906 and included a multitude of classes; the curriculum included regular academic courses part of the day, and specialized classes in "forging, blacksmithing, machine work, carpentry, pattern making, a complete textile department,

various laboratories, commercial course, typewriting, dressmaking, domestic science, and millinery" (Telfair 1927, 48).

The school continued to expand, adopting additional courses to meet technical college requirements, and adding more teachers and buildings. The popularity and success of the school continued to grow as local businesses often sought graduates of the school even before they had completed their coursework. Many students were allowed to attend school for half days, and then work for the remainder of the day in whatever area of specialization they had chosen at the Secondary Industrial High School. One other distinguishing feature set the Secondary Industrial High School apart from traditional high schools: the amount of time students spent in school. The classes ran from the first Monday in September through the Friday closest to July 15. Each day's classes were longer than those at a regular high school as well; this extended schedule allowed for students of the Secondary Industrial High School to graduate in three years rather than four—the norm at Columbus' public high schools—and enter the workforce earlier (Telfair 1927, 49-52; Daniel 1913, 14-30).

Gibson boasted about the success of the Secondary Industrial High School in a 1909 edition of the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*; in his opinion the school was the epitome of a perfect balance between academic and technical education. Gibson stated that it is "an academic trade school of the highest rank"; English, history, science, and mathematics were taught in addition to a technical trade that the student chose upon entering the school. Gibson believed that this thorough academic education of the child was essential for the student's success. He stated that

there has never been any intention of teaching young people a trade without giving them good academic training, for this starts a young person in life with immediate earning power, but with an earning power that is very limited. The aim is to give that culture, intelligence and mental acumen which carry the skilled mechanic or trained accountant on to unlimited earning power. (Gibson 1909, 45)

For proof of this concept he noted that any boy who entered the school may have trouble adjusting to the strenuous nature of the classes at first, but once he graduated he would have no problem adjusting to a work schedule or life at a technical college if he so chose to attend one. He also confirmed the skills that the first graduating class acquired in the three year accelerated industrial high school experience—students attended school for longer hours and on Saturdays—by describing the itinerary of the graduation program: girls from the dressmaking trade drew out a pattern and constructed a dress on stage during the ceremony, a few boys from the business education department displayed rapid calculation fig-

ures, and others took down a dictation from a teacher and audience members while on stage to create a perfect business letter. For Gibson the lack of pomp and circumstance of regular high school graduations was an affirmation of his school's appreciation of practical and useful skills (Gibson 1909, 48; Daniel 1913, 14-30).

The Secondary Industrial High School acquired a significant amount of fame for its success; Arthur Page wrote in *A World's Work* in 1907 that "the city of Columbus, Georgia is the first municipality to meet the situation" of public vocational education "fairly" (Page 1907, 8552). Yet, the lines between public and private education within Columbus were often blurred. Although the maintenance of the school was administered by public money, the land, building, machinery, and equipment were all donated by influential mill and factory owners within the city (Telfair 1927, 45-50). The school created a partnership with many of these businesses in order to send the students to acquire some "practical" unpaid work experience in their senior year for which they were graded based on their "punctuality in attendance, persistence throughout the day, promptness in executing tasks, readiness in interpreting drawings and orders, relationship to fellow workers, and the nature and amount of the work done" (Gibson 1909, 47). In other words, students had to promise to be good workers.

At first glance, this school appears to have accomplished what so many supporters of vocational education claimed to have wanted; a school for a better society, a more democratic society where everyone has the chance to succeed. Yet Gibson, like most men of his time, valued a stratified society in which people would fit into their proper station in life. Herbert Kliebard argues in *The Struggle for the American Curriculum* that a central part of the movement toward social efficiency was social control, which is clearly illustrated in the curriculum of the Secondary Industrial High School (Kliebard 2004, 89). At the Secondary Industrial High School girls were not permitted to choose the same trades as boys, and they were all required to study home economics all three years as their management of the home would contribute to the overall "industrial efficiency" of the city. Blacks were not allowed to attend the same industrial school as whites, but were provided with an industrial education fitting of what Gibson and many southern whites saw as their proper place in society: "every negro girl is given a thorough training in home economics, cookery, sewing, and laundering ... every boy is given instruction in carpentry and blacksmithing," and could be extended to included "bricklaying," and "shoe and harness repairing. These areas of employment are open almost exclusively to the negro youth of the city" (Gibson 1909, 44; Daniel 1913, 7).

Yet pride in the vocational schools extended to employees of the mills as well as the superintendent. A former employee of Bibb Manufacturing

Company, Harry Harden, boasted that Bibb City Elementary was the best school in Muscogee County. The mill schools accounted for this excellence. According to Harden, although the teachers were hired by the county, Bibb supplemented their pay, making them the highest paid teachers in the county (Interview with Harry Harden 1988). This practice was not entirely uncommon; the Boylston Crown Mill in northwest Georgia also supplemented the pay that the county gave the teachers at the mill school so that they were the highest paid in Whitfield County (Thompson 1996, 52). Harden proclaimed that Bibb City Elementary had "some of the best teachers in the county and state" and that any teacher receiving a Bibb City Elementary student was "glad to have them" (Interview with Harry Harden 1988).<sup>1</sup> After graduating from Bibb City Elementary, students would continue on to the Secondary Industrial High School or Jordan Vocational High School (which the Secondary Industrial High School eventually became). Harden recounted how his own son would work at the mill on the night shift and attend the Secondary Industrial High School during the day; his daughter finished the Industrial High School at age fifteen, but had to wait until she was sixteen years old to be hired by the mill (Harden 1988).

In the *Bibb City Recorder* there were many examples of the pride that was shown toward education; educational honors given to former Bibb City residents at the University of Georgia, and an overwhelming pride in perfect attendance on the first day of school at Bibb City Elementary both made front page news ("Young Lady of Bibb City Paid High Honor for Her Work at Athens College" 1933; "School Resumes Monday Morning" 1929). The *Bibb City Recorder* even advertised industrial adult education classes including: "Practical loom fixing, Theory of Weaving and Cloth Calculations, and Cotton Mill Mathematics" ("Night School is On at Bibb City" 1929).

Nationally, a debate raged concerning the implementation of vocational education within schools, a concept that had been in practice in Columbus since 1901. Alliances were made between unlikely partners: the National Association of Manufacturers, the American Federation of Labor, the National Education Association, the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education, as well as individuals such as John Dewey, David Snedden, Charles Prosser, and even Jane Addams all rallied in support of Smith-Hughs Act of 1917 (although they disagreed as to its function and purpose). The act, which enabled federal dollars to be spent on the public vocational education training, was fully supported within the city of Columbus. It would allow the mill owners and the board of education (which was populated by mill owners) to further expand the vocational training that the city already had in existence (Kantor 1986, 402;

Kliebard 1999, 132-135; Wright 1909, 13; *Annual Report of the Public Schools of Columbus* 1906).

Educational opportunities abounded in Columbus for whites in the early-twentieth century. These opportunities took on a uniquely industrial shape that distinguished them from the traditional high schools of the time. One wonders what education would have been like in Columbus without the assistance and encouragement of the industrial giants of the city who controlled its wealth; whatever form it might have taken it is difficult to imagine Columbus without the mills. Industrial education in Columbus served the needs of many, but not all of the residents of Columbus; African Americans were continually displaced from the educational process and not allowed to attend Jordan Vocational High School (which replaced the Secondary Industrial High School) until its desegregation in 1971.

### CONCLUSION

Although every single mill that placed Columbus, Georgia, on the map is now closed, a person wandering the streets of Columbus today cannot help but feel the continued presence of these industrial giants. The textile mill owners had the perfect geographical conditions to create this dominant and prosperous city in the late-nineteenth century. While many other southern cities were slowly building their industrial factories, Columbus was immediately rebuilt after the devastation of the Civil War.

This prosperity came with its own specific rewards and problems. The influx of such a large number of poor whites overwhelmed many of the middle-class whites living in the city; chief among these concerns was what to do with the enormous number of poor white children of the mill workers. The solution first came in employing the children in the mills to keep them off the streets, and then in creating a unique form of education that would suit the poor children's perceived needs and prepare them for their stations in life; for most of these children, their station was to work alongside their parents in the mills.

With this unique population of poor white children also came the opportunity to try new educational experiments: kindergartens, manual labor training, and secondary schools. Columbus combined all three experiments and created primary and secondary industrial schools. Although the primary school was met with short-lived success, the legacy of the school would be felt for years to come as manual training courses were introduced to all primary schools in the county. The Secondary Industrial High School, like Bibb City Elementary, became points of pride for the people of Columbus, reflecting both the values of their benefac-

tors and the reality of the job opportunities available to students upon graduation.

The combination of a superintendent who embraced efficiency in education with self-interested benefactors blurred the lines between public and private education in Columbus. Yet, in a city where a few prominent families literally owned every major business, and participated in almost every level of government, it is difficult to imagine a way that these lines would not be blurred. This collaboration and exploitation is certainly the case in Columbus, Georgia; the names Bradley, Peabody, and Jordan are the ancestral industrial giants of the city, whom many young businessmen aspired to become and to whom the proponents of industrial education were indebted for many years.

### NOTE

1. He was not alone in his opinion of Bibb City Elementary; the school currently has a Facebook page proclaiming how it was the greatest school that ever existed in Columbus with over one hundred and thirty members (Bibb City Elementary 2012).

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