Detail from *Rand, McNally & Co.'s Kentucky and Tennessee*, which is p. 124 (http://www.loc.gov/resource/g3700m.gct00314/?sp=124) of *Rand McNally & Co's business atlas : containing large scale maps of each state and territory of the United States, the provinces of Canada, West India Islands, etc., etc., together with a complete reference map of the world ... accompanied by a new and original compilation and ready reference index, showing in detail the entire railroad system of North America ... [Chicago : Rand, McNally & Co., 1878-9. ] (http://www.loc.gov/item/2011588339/)
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Birmingham owes its 1871 founding to the geological uniqueness of the Jones Valley, the only place on Earth where large deposits of the three raw materials needed to make iron—coal (for conversion into coke), iron ore, and limestone—existed close together. Named for the industrial heart of Great Britain, the city prospered and grew as the iron, coal, and steel industry expanded. But labor issues, economic constraints imposed by northern owners, and eventual overseas competition hampered development, and Birmingham never evolved into the world-class steel-making center that its founders envisioned.

In 1876, a small group of investors of the Eureka Mining and Transportation Company produced the first coke-fired iron at Oximo Furnace. Iron previously had been produced at the furnace with charcoal, which did not burn as efficiently or at as high a temperature and thus produced lower-quality iron. In 1880, several owners of the Pratt Coal and Coke Company, including Henry F. DeBardeleben, constructed Alice Furnace and produced its first iron. The initial success in producing iron for northern markets led the company to construct the larger Alice Furnace No. 2 ("Big Alice"), which began operations in 1888. The 1880s saw a frenzy of construction.
construct the larger Alice Furnace No. 2 ("Big Alice"), which began operations in 1888.

The 1880s saw a frenzy of construction, in which 19 additional furnaces were erected in or near Birmingham. In 1881, Colonel James W. Sloss founded the Sloss Furnace Company with two furnaces and became one of the city's greatest promoters. The Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company (TCI), from the Sequatchie Valley near Chattanooga, Tennessee, constructed four furnaces and quickly became the largest enterprise in the Birmingham District, as the region encompassing the mineral deposits came to be known. The Woodward Iron Company, headed by a group of investors from West Virginia, and the Pioneer Mining and Manufacturing Company, whose owners came from Pennsylvania, built a number of furnaces. The DeBardeleben Coal and Iron Company, an offshoot of Pratt, built four furnaces and an iron mill.

Each of these firms used a system known as "straight-line production," in which all steps of the production process followed one upon the other in an assembly-line that took advantage of the proximity to the raw materials to reduce transportation costs. The companies marketed their products to Cincinnati, Louisville, and cities in the Northeast, where furnaces were fired by less-efficient anthracite coal and could not compete with lower-cost southern rivals. The companies kept labor costs low by employing black workers, who came from depressed agricultural areas and supplied cheap labor. And the coal used to fire the furnaces was largely mined by forced convict labor leased to the companies at very low rates by the state and county governments.

The Birmingham firms were all financially successful except for the Sloss Furnace
Negro worker who had been cleaning hearth in turpentine kiln, Iron City, Alabama [1939, by Marion Post Wolcott] http://www.loc.gov/item/fsa2000032197/PP/
THE HIT OF THE SEASON!

THE GRAVEL TRAIN,

OR

RIDING ON TO GLORY.

As Sung by

PETE MACK,

With Thatcher, Primrose & West's Minstrels.

Words and Music by

HARRY C. TALBERT.

New York:
Published by T. B. HARMS & CO., 819 Broadway.
THE GRAVEL TRAIN

Words and Music by HARRY C. TALBERT.

1. Check my baggage on de gravel train
2. To follow me will give you joy
3. My happy home is in de sky
4. De gravel train's on golden track

Oh, oh come follow me,
Yes, yes we're coming,
If you

Oh, oh come follow me,
Yes, yes we're coming,
Give

Oh, oh come follow me,
Yes, yes we're coming,
And

Oh, oh come follow me,
Yes, yes we're coming,
When you

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chorus.

Sopr.

Dont be afraid of de wind and rain When you're

Alto.

Tenor.

Dont be afraid of de wind and rain When you're

Bass.

Piano.
The Gravel train, by Talbert, Harry C. [Harms, T. B., New York, 1884] p. 4
African American men, prisoners, with two mules working on roadbed (?) between electrical and telephone poles in Georgia [1899 or 1900] from the collection of W.E.B. Du Bois, http://www.loc.gov/item/99472409/
EXCERPT FROM

http://www.loc.gov/item/2006629762/

http://www.loc.gov/item/2006629762/
Established during the Gold Rush, San Francisco had the oldest black urban community in the West. But the number of African Americans in the city declined between 1890 and 1910 as many moved across the bay to Oakland, the city’s first suburb.

Most were laborers or domestic servants, but sailors, ship stewards, and dockworkers made for greater employment diversity than existed in inland communities. However, their meager wages did little to raise the overall prosperity, and most African Americans survived on the urban economy’s edge.

Despite their financial difficulties, black San Franciscans created a model for organized African-American community life in the West. In 1865, they could learn the “fine art of dancing” for $3 a month at Seales Hall. Four decades later, they could exhibit a flair for Shakespearean acting at Charles H. Tinsley Drama Club. These urbanites saw successful citizenship as linked to standards of Victorian civility and sought, through “refinement” and knowledge of the world, to gain the respect of their fellows, white and black.

By 1910, Los Angeles, with 7,599 African-American residents, had the largest black urban population in the West. The land boom of the 1880s had increased the city’s population, allowing a few early settlers to reap immense profits. Bridget “Biddy” Mason was one of them. She had purchased a house on Spring Street in 1866 for $250; fifteen years later she sold part of the property for $1,500. Mason established the city’s oldest black church, First African Methodist in 1872, and left behind a dynasty of African American real estate tycoons. Her son-in-law, Charles Owens, owned valuable parcels in downtown Los Angeles, and her grandson, Robert C. Owens, built a $250,000 six-story building in 1905 on the site of Biddy’s original home. The Colored American Magazine designated him “the richest Negro west of Chicago.” Robert C. Owens became a confidant of Booker T. Washington and a major contributor to Tuskegee Institute.

African American Los Angeles grew rapidly during the twentieth century’s first decade. In 1903, the Southern Pacific Railroad brought two thousand black laborers to break a strike of Mexican American construction workers. doubling the size of the community.
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African American Los Angeles grew rapidly during the twentieth century's first decade. In 1903, the Southern Pacific Railroad brought two thousand black laborers to break a strike of Mexican American construction workers, doubling the size of the community. Intense inter-ethnic rivalry resulted and, today, still lingers.

Hundreds of black Texans also migrated to the area. Familial networks encouraged emigration. "We came here in 1902." declared a Tennessee couple. "We were doing pretty well, so we went back home and told cousins to come along. When the cousins got here, they sent for their cousins. Pretty soon the whole community was made up of Tennessee people."

Urban boosters also helped attract new Angelenos. E. H. Rydall wrote in 1907, "Southern California is more adapted for the colored man than any other part of the United States [because] the climate... is distinctively African... this is the sunny southland in which the African thrives." The first black residential neighborhood began to evolve south of downtown, along Central Avenue. The mostly Southern-born migrants created a vibrant district, which eventually became known as the Harlem of the West.

The Evolution of Black Music in Los Angeles, 1890-1955 from Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California by Bette Yarbrough Cox and de Graaf, Lawrence B.; Mulroy, Kevin; Taylor, Quintard, eds.
The Negro in Yukon.

Mr. E. J. Terrell writes The Colored American an interesting letter from Dawson, Yukon Territory, in which he states that he has quit mining for the time being, and is running a high-grade restaurant, in which business he is achieving success. He encloses a bill of fare, showing a menu equal to anything found in New York or any metropolitan city in "the States." He says there are about one hundred and fifty Negroes in Dawson. Most of them work for wages, but as wages are very good, their condition is prosperous, and they are happy. Mr. J. W. Riggs is there with the Colored American, which, says Mr. Terrell, all the "boys" enjoy reading—it is like a letter from home. Mr. Terrell will pay Washington a visit about the first of September, and later in the fall expects to go to Africa to look over the field. At last, the Negro seems to be developing the pioneer spirit.