

# **Black Screven, Georgia in 1950: A Research Note on the Black Population**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the 1950 census with special reference to the Black population of Screven, Georgia. It also examines the total population of Black people in Screven, Georgia in relation to others. In addition, this paper examines the Morgan-Frazier family clan in the 1950 census, including the structure of the family units

## **INTRODUCTION**

On April 1, 2022, the U.S. Bureau of the Census released its 1950 census data in the United States of America (USA). Social scientists and genealogists eagerly awaited the 1950 census data for research purposes. People became able to see and analyze the 1950 census data in fruitful ways. That included people inside and outside of Georgia. The data for the 1950 census were collected in April 1950 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2022).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the 1950 census data with special reference to the Black population of Screven, Georgia. It will also examine the total population of Black people in Screven, Georgia in relation to others. In addition, this paper will examine the Morgan-Frazier family clan in the 1950 census, including the structure of the family units. The research methodology consists of a mixed-methods approach, which includes the case study method, secondary data method, participant observation, secondary data method (aka secondary data analysis), and a qualitative survey. The research techniques include content analysis of primary and secondary source documents, participant observation, and in-depth interviews.<sup>1</sup>

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

There are several important primary source documents related to the 1950 census in the USA. One document comes from the Bureau of the Census (1950a) and is titled the *Seventeenth Census of the United States, 1950. Schedule No. 1.—Population. Georgia, Wayne, Militia District 1217, Screven, Supervisor's District Number Enumeration District 151-6*. It was published on the form titled “1950 Census of Population and Housing.” The information on this Bureau of the Census document covers the population in the town of Screven, Georgia inside the city limits. A second document comes from the Bureau of the Census (1950b) and is titled the *Seventeenth Census of the United States, 1950. Schedule No. 1.—Population. Georgia, Wayne, Militia District 1217, Screven, Supervisor's District Number Enumeration District 151-7*. As was the case with the first document, it was published on the form titled “1950 Census of Population and Housing.” The information on the second Bureau of the Census document covers the population in the town of Screven, Georgia outside the city limits.

A third document comes from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1975) and is titled *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Bicentennial Edition, Part 1*. The 1975 document details that the classification of the population by race “reflects common usage rather than an attempt to define biological stock” (p. 3). The 1975 report also indicated that, “Through 1960, the classification of the population by race was usually obtained by the enumerator’s observation” (p. 3). In addition, the 1975 report stated that, “In the 1960 census, data on race were collected by a combination of self-classification,

direct interview, and observation by the enumerator; the classification rules were essentially the same as in 1950” (p. 3). Furthermore, the 1975 report said: “In the 1970 census, data on race were obtained primarily through self-classification” (p. 3).

A fourth document comes from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2022) and is titled *1950 Census: Official 1950 Census Website*. The 2022 document related that, “Taken every 10 years since 1790, the United States census provides a snapshot of the nation’s population. Because of a 72-year restriction on access to the records, the most recent census year currently available is 1950” (p. 1). It also informed us that, “On April 1, 2022, the 1950 Census was released, and users can access it for free through a dedicated website at [1950census.archives.gov](http://1950census.archives.gov). This population census is the 17th decennial census of the United States” (p. 1). In addition, the 2022 document revealed that, “The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has digitized and is providing free online access to the 1950 Census population schedules for U.S. states and territories, enumeration district maps, and enumeration district descriptions” (p. 1).

### **DEMOGRAPHICS AND SOCIAL LIFE IN SCREVEN, GEORGIA DURING 1950**

In 1950, Screven, Georgia was one of the many towns and unincorporated areas in Wayne County within the state of Georgia. The total population of Georgia in 1950 was 3,445,000. Of that total, 1,083,000 people were Black, 2,381,000 were White, and 1 were others. The total population of Wayne County in 1950 was 14,248. Of that total, 2,808 people were non-White and 11,440 were White. The total population of Screven, Georgia in 1950 was 752 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975).<sup>2</sup>

During 1950, Screven, Georgia was very racially segregated with three primarily Black areas. One area was known as Clay Street. A second area was known as the Quarters. A third area was known as the “Hill.” Members of the Morgan-Frazier family clan lived in all three areas of Screven. They also lived in other spots of the town as well. In the case of the “Hill,” it provided a village environment for the young people wherein all the adults looked after them and were authority figures.<sup>3</sup>

Members of the Morgan-Frazier family clan dealt with their spiritual lives by attending three churches. One church was St. James African Methodist Episcopal (aka St. James AME Church). A second church was First African Baptist Church. The third church was Mose Chapel Baptist Church. Traditionally, on Easter Sunday, members of the Morgan-Frazier family clan would attend a service at all three.

Another big event in Screven’s social life was the annual May Day event held at the segregated Eastern Elementary School (formerly Rosenwald School). The May Day event featured a May Pole. The norm was for the school-age boys and girls to pair off with the opposite sex and skip through the loop around the May Pole. Both sexes would spend time practicing their steps for the May Pole ritual.<sup>4</sup>

Whereas the children had May Day, the adults enjoyed spending time at local semi-professional baseball games and dances at the local juke joints. The local semi-professional baseball games would feature the local Screven teams against teams from neighboring towns. At those games, people enjoyed eating boiled peanuts and snowballs. In the juke joints, adults would play music on the juke box while they danced the night away. Just like the baseball games, people ate boiled peanuts and snowballs. A key local juke joint was known as C.T.’s and replaced an older one known as Ruthie Mae’s. The owner of C.T.’s juke joint was C.T. Hillman. It was customary for customers to have access to regular drinking alcohol as well as moonshine.<sup>5</sup>

A big custom in Screven was the Friday night fish fry. Often on warm Friday nights, the Black areas of Screven would hold a fish fry. At these events, fried fish would be shared along with grits, toasted marshmallows, hot dogs, and boiled peanuts. This was especially true of the Clay Street area. Another big custom was the making of syrup from sugar cane. In the case of the Morgan-Frazier family clan, Jordan Frazier, Sr. kept a physical building on the family property to process the sugar cane into syrup. He also grew a field of sugar cane on the family property.<sup>6</sup>

When people in Screven died, their bodies were usually prepared for burial by Royal Funeral Home in Jesup or Marshall Funeral Home in Blackshear. Both directors of those funeral homes were

longtime friends of people in the Morgan-Frazier family clan. Following the funerals at one of the Black churches, the deceased family members were usually buried in the Carter Cemetery, which is also known as Screven Community Cemetery. That cemetery includes members of the Morgan-Frazier family clan who were once enslaved. It also includes the final resting place of family members born after slavery. A very important member of the family buried in the Carter Cemetery is Jordan Frazier, Sr. Before his death, Jordan Frazier, Sr. was a casket maker and blacksmith as well as a syrup maker. Jordan Frazier, Sr. would make wooden caskets in which family members would be buried. He also made irons to press clothes as well as made shoes for horses and mules. After the death of Jordan Frazier, Sr., his son Augustus Manson Frazier continued the tradition of raising cane and making syrup on family property.<sup>7</sup>

To prepare for church services or recreation life at the baseball games or juke joints, the men usually headed to Snoot's Barbershop on the Hill. The owner of Snoot's Barbershop was Wille Jones, a member of the Morgan-Frazier family clan, and the husband of Eddie Mae Dixon Jones. The barbershop got the name from his basket name or nickname. At Snoot's Barbershop, men and boys could get a fresh haircut or shave. They could also sit around listening to Black folklore or playing with checkers while eating boiled or parched peanuts. Through this activity, the men engaged in social interaction and maintained social relationships that helped to sustain Black culture with Black African and Gullah Geechee roots.<sup>8</sup>

### **UNITS OF THE MORGAN-FRAZIER FAMILY CLAN IN SCREVEN DURING 1950**

When the enumerators conducted their survey in 1950, members of the Morgan-Frazier family clan lived in all three main Black areas of Screven and other spots in the town. Hence, they could be found in the Clay Street area, the Quarters area, and the Hill area. Nevertheless, many members of the Morgan-Frazier family clan lived in the Hill area. The original Morgan-Frazier family clan homestead is in the Hill area.

By the 1880s, Jordan Frazier and Matilda Morgan Frazier had united in marriage and begun to have children. Their first child was Minnie Frazier Dixon, a girl born in 1888. The second child was Emma Frazier, a girl born in 1891. The third child was Jordan Frazier, Jr., a son born in 1893. The fourth child was Sarah Frazier Gaffney, a girl born in 1895. The fifth child was Bennie Mae Frazier, a girl born in 1898. The sixth child was Sibbie Frazier, a girl born in 1901. Their seventh child was Augustus Manson Frazier, a boy born in 1903. The eighth child was Prunnie Frazier, a girl born in 1907. The ninth child was Mary Frazier McLean, a twin girl born in 1908. The 10th child was Mary Frazier McLean, a twin girl born in 1908. The 11th child was Alzada Frazier, a girl born in 1912 (Cromartie, 2013).

Another key unit of the Morgan-Frazier family clan who lived in Screven, Georgia was the family of orientation of Matilda Morgan Frazier. It consisted of her parents Alexander Morgan (1825-1938) and Sarah Wells Morgan (1833-1926). The children of Alexander Morgan and Sarah Wells Morgan consisted of Noah Morgan, a boy born in 1860; Matilda Morgan Frazier, a daughter born in 1862; Julia Morgan, a daughter born in 1864; Jane Morgan, a daughter born in 1866; Martha Morgan, a daughter born in 1868; Susie Morgan, a daughter born in 1879; Haven Morgan, a son born in 1886; Corene Morgan, a daughter born in 1889; and Zilfey Morgan, a daughter born in 1891. Some of those family members are buried in the Carter Cemetery located in Screven, Georgia (Cromartie, 2013).

By 1950, many members of the Alexander Morgan and Sarah Wells Morgan family were deceased. In contrast, many members of the Jordan Frazier and Matilda Morgan Frazier family were still alive and living in or near Screven. The 1950 census includes approximately 10 units of the Morgan-Frazier family clan in Screven. One family unit was a nuclear family headed by Augustus Manson Frazier and Gladys Frazier (aka Gladys McKiver). It included their son L.C. Frazier (aka Lucious Clyde Frazier); son Thomas Frazier; son Charles Frazier; daughter Betty Frazier (Betty Frazier Graham); son Jordan Frazier (aka Jordan Austin Frazier); daughter Florence Frazier (aka Florence Frazier Monroe); and daughter Martha Frazier (aka Martha Frazier Fuller). They lived in the Hill area (Bureau of the Census, 1950b).

A second family unit was an extended family headed by Martha Frazier (aka Martha Fisher). It was composed of her sister Sibbie Frazier; her uncle Alexander Morgan, Jr.; her niece Julia M. Brown; her niece Eleanor Frazier; and her nephew Charles Frazier. A third family unit was headed by Minnie Dixon. It included her son Vernon H. Dixon. A fourth family unit was an alternative family headed by Sarah Gaffney. It included her son John Gaffney, Jr. and her son Marcus C. Gaffney. A fifth family unit was an extended family headed by Willie Jones and his wife Eddie Mae Jones (aka Eddie Mae Dixon). It consisted of their daughter Nina; their son Willie Jones, Jr.; their daughter Mary Frances Jones (aka Mary Frances Jones Thomas); and their grandson James W. Wright. Each of those families lived in the Hill area (Bureau of the Census, 1950b).

A sixth family unit was a nuclear headed by Jimmie Cromartie and Julia Cromartie (aka Julia Frazier Cromartie Boyd). It was composed of their daughter Delores Cromartie (aka Delores Cromartie Lockhart). They lived in the Clay Street area. A seventh family unit was an extended family headed by Edward Hopps and Bobbie Hopps. It consisted of their son Robert Hopps; Edward Hopps's mother Mattie Moore; Edward Hopps's sister Leslie McMillian; Leslie McMillian's daughter Julie McMillian; Leslie McMillian's daughter Lurina McMillian; Leslie McMillian's daughter Eva Ka McMillian; Leslie McMillian's daughter Estes McMillian; Leslie McMillian's son J.R. McMillian; Leslie McMillian's daughter Gloam McMillian (aka Gloria McMillian); Leslie McMillian's son Maca McMillian (aka Maceo McMillian); and Leslie McMillian's daughter Christine McMillian. They lived in the Quarters area (Bureau of the Census, 1950a, 1950b).<sup>9</sup>

An eighth family unit was headed by Willie G. Dixon and Ada Dixon. It was a nuclear family composed of their son Willie G. Dixon, Jr.; son Charles R. Dixon; son John Lee Dixon; son Laurence H. Dixon; son Benjamin Dixon; and son Gean Dixon. They lived in the Quarters area. A ninth family unit was a nuclear family headed June Cromartie and Julia Cromartie. It included their daughter Helen Cromartie. They lived in the Clay Street area (Bureau of the Census, 1950a).

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the 1950 census with special reference to the Black population of Screven, Georgia. It has reported the total population of Black people in Screven, Georgia in relation to others. This paper also examined the Morgan-Frazier family clan in the 1950 census, including the structure of the family units. The analysis of the 1950 census revealed that those family units lived in the Hill area, Quarters area, and Clay Street area of Screven. In addition, the analysis revealed that some of them lived in other spots of the town.

As Theodorson and Theodorson (1969) pointed out, a family is a group of people related by blood, marriage, or adoption. The family has three types, namely nuclear, extended, and alternative. In the case of the Morgan-Frazier family clan, all three types existed in Screven. The Morgan-Frazier family clan was held together by strong ties that were reinforced each year in July during the family reunion. Between 1923 and 2023, the Morgan-Frazier family clan held a reunion every year. All Morgan-Frazier family clan reunions were held face-to-face in Screven except two. In 2020 and 2021, the Morgan-Frazier Family Reunion was held online in those years because of the COVID virus. However, in 2022 and 2023 the Morgan-Frazier Family Reunion returned as a face-to-face event. During 2023, the Morgan-Frazier family clan held its 100th family reunion in Screven.<sup>10</sup>

## NOTES

1. See Babbie (2004) for more information about the research methods and techniques.
2. The racial breakdown for Screven, Georgia was not provided by the U.S. Bureau of the Census.
3. Clay Street later became known as White Star Road. If one were to head directly south on that street for some two miles, he or she will see the remains of an old turpentine camp owned by Lindsay Grace, who was the richest White man in the area. Many Black men worked in his business as turpentine workers at

one time or another, including my father Jimmie Lee Cromartie, my grandfather June Steven Cromartie, and my grandfather Augustus Manson Frazier. By the time I was an adolescent, Lindsay Grace had shut down his operation, but the area was very popular for having numerous plum trees and grape harbors. My relatives spent many days walking to the remains of the turpentine camp to pick plums and grapes.

4. Martha Frazier Fisher, a sister of my grandfather Augustus Manson Frazier and a twin of Mary Frazier McLean, taught at Rosenwald School and Eastern Elementary School for over 40 years. She also raised tobacco as a cash crop and used the labor of her many family members. My great-aunt Martha Frazier Fisher was well known in the family clan for serving Hopping John and sweet tea to feed hungry stomachs. I attended the school where she taught for my first grade and a part of the second grade. When I was in the second grade, my mother moved our family from Screven, Georgia to Waycross, Georgia where I attended Bailey Street Elementary School. It was located almost across the street from the Bailey Heights Housing Projects where my family lived for many years. By the time I started school, Eastern Elementary School went to the seventh grade. To continue their education beyond that before the 1969-1970 desegregation year, Black people had to travel by car or bus to Jesup, Georgia located 12 miles to the northeast of Screven, Georgia. There they could attend Wayne County Training School which later became known as Northside High School. For more information about the eating of Hopping John among people with a Gullah-Geechee cultural heritage, see Pollitzer (1999), Cross (2008), Campbell (2008), and Cromartie (2013).

5. For more information about the juke joints among people with a Gullah-Geechee cultural heritage, see Campbell (2008).

6. During my childhood, a great joy was to be present when the adults were making syrup. They would hitch a mule to pole wherein the animal walked around a structure generating power for the grinders. The cane juice would go into a container before getting transferred to a huge black boiling vat heated by wood. As the juice heated up, it would be transformed into syrup. My cousin Glenn Frazier and I thoroughly enjoyed drinking pure cane juice by placing cups in the shoot that went from the grinders to the container. My grandfather Augustus Manson Frazier was the primary maker of syrup for our family clan, and it would be shared with other branches of the family to be eaten with biscuits and pancakes. My mother Julia Frazier Cromartie Boyd and my grandmother Gladys McKiver Frazier both made delicious biscuits.

7. For more information about the Carter Cemetery, which is also known as Screven Community Cemetery, see Cromartie (2013).

8. The Black African and Gullah Geechee roots of the local Black community are covered in Cromartie (2013). Many people in Screven had basket names, which are also known as nicknames or pet names. For more information about basket names among people with Gullah Geechee roots, see Turner (1949). Turner has informed us that:

Most of the Gullah people use two kinds of given names. One is English, and they call it their real or true name and use it at school, in their correspondence, and in their dealings with strangers. The other is the nickname, known also as the pet name or basket name. in their homes and among their friends and acquaintances they use the nickname almost exclusively. (p. 40)

Thus, Willie “Snoot” Jones was one of the many people the Morgan-Frazier family clan who had basket names. In the case of Willie “Snoot” Jones, he lived from May 7, 1911, to September 16, 2011, which was 100 years. Because of the location of Screven, many of its Black residents, including members of our Morgan-Frazier family clan, belong to the Freshwater Geechee category instead of the Saltwater Geechee category. For more information about Freshwater Geechees and Saltwater Geechees, see Cromartie (2021a, 2021b).

9. Leslie McMillian had her four youngest children with my grandfather Augustus Manson Frazier. Those children include J.R. McMillian; Gloria McMillian; Maceo McMillian; and Christine McMillian. Thus, during the 1950 census, Augustus Manson Frazier had four children in one house in Screven and another nine children in a second house with my grandmother Gladys McKiver Frazier. It should be noted that Julia Frazier Cromartie Boyd, the daughter of Augustus Manson Frazier and Gladys McKiver Frazier, was married at that time of the 1950 census and lived in a separate home with her husband Jimmie Lee Cromartie and their daughter Delores Cromartie. I am the son of Julia Frazier Cromartie Boyd and Jimmie Lee Cromartie, but I was not yet born.

10. As was the case with the 2013 Morgan-Frazier Family Reunion, I delivered a keynote address which covered the history of the Morgan-Frazier family clan at the 2023 Morgan-Frazier Family Reunion. It was a very special event because it was our 100th family reunion. I also sold many copies of my book titled *Morgan-Frazier Family Clan: Chronicles of a Black Family with a Geechee and Gullah Heritage in Essays, Interviews, Research Reports, Documents, and Photographs*. It should be noted that the Morgan-Frazier family clan was created when Jordan Frazier, a Geechee with roots in Camden County, Georgia, married Matilda Morgan Frazier, a Gullah with roots in Telfair County, Georgia. See Cromartie (2013) for more information about those two people who were born in slavery and their Morgan-Frazier family clan.

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