There were two economic realities for Blacks in Portland at the turn of the 20th century. One was a severely restricted list of job opportunities. Men could find work on the railroads and at the Hotel Portland as cooks, waiters, porters, boot blacks and barbers or could hire themselves out as laborers. Women were employed as domestics in private homes or at Meier and Frank. But access to white collar and professional jobs was closed in Portland’s segregated society.

The second reality was an antidote for the bitter pill that was Jim Crow. The growing number of Black workers flocking to the rail yards needed basic services: lodging, restaurants, grocery stores, and barbershops, as well as spiritual support and entertainment. If Blacks were denied these services by whites, enterprising members of the Black community would have to supply them. W.D. Allen’s Golden West was the most important example among dozens of new Black businesses.