

Athens of the West: African American Associational Life in Lawrence, Kansas,
1861-1948

By

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Abstract

This study highlights the various organizations and strategies used by African Americans in a small semi-rural town to resist the institutionalized racism faced in their daily lives. The work argues that the "Free State" Myth was never a reality for thousands of the residents of Kansas. Lawrence is the focus of this study as a representative Black community in Kansas and a place where the culture and politics of African Americans throughout the country was transplanted in the wake of multiple migrations.

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Introduction

The project that follows demonstrates the ways in which the Black Community of Lawrence took proactive steps to gain social, economic, political, and cultural equality—if not necessarily integration at all times—with the White community of Lawrence, Kansas specifically and the nation in general. It retraces the history of African American associational life in Lawrence from roughly 1861-1948 as a way to understand the evolution of the Black community’s organizations and community assistance efforts in a small, semi-rural region that experienced clear class differences over a long period of time. This work argues that the Black community of Lawrence is representative of others throughout the country—like elsewhere, African Americans sought ways to mitigate the effects of discrimination and Jim Crow through the establishment of churches, clubs, and aid societies. The uniqueness of Lawrence lies within its centrality to the “Free State” mythology and the absence of any national or state African American organization for much of its early history. Although always interested in regional and national race matters, the Black citizenry of Lawrence chose to avoid involvement in any organization with a governing body until the 1920s, well after larger nearby cities like Topeka and Kansas City had done so.

This project builds upon a broad body of scholarship analyzing the local and regional-level contexts of racial and ethnic community-making in the United States. While numerous studies exist that explore the nature of larger national organizations and of African American community life in large urban centers such as Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York, the study of all-Black and interracial organizations in the Great Plains region is relatively new or devoted to short periods or narrowly specified subjects. In focusing on a small and largely agrarian community on the Great Plains, this paper focuses on scholars’ assertions that Douglas County

and its County Seat of Lawrence is perhaps a more representative model of the quintessential African American experience in America. In his study of Black Israelite religions, Jacob Dorman has noted that Kansas and the West “...bore a special place in Black memory as the land of Free Soil, abolitionism, and John Brown.”¹

African Americans imagined Kansas as a promised land because of the formulation and persistence of the “Free State” mythology of Kansas built during the state’s territorial period from 1854-1861. This myth of a racially egalitarian utopia was formulated by early Kansas residents as a way to differentiate their social outlook and views about labor from elsewhere in the South. Whites and African Americans in Kansas each utilized the “Free State” mythology in different ways. The white use of the term satisfied two basic needs; it distanced the Kansas from the South—a place known for its historic use of violent racism as a means to uphold their social order—and it secondly it provided a scapegoat for the use of racist and exclusionary practices used by White Kansans themselves. This hypocritical use of an ideology created by Free Soilers—White migrants who went to Kansas during the territorial period to influence Kansas’ entrance to the Union as a free state—masked their bigotry and contempt for African Americans behind a self-made narrative of resistance to slavery. It was not abolition these settlers sought, but an all-White utopia. Territorial representatives had even considered a ban on African Americans—slave or free—from entering the state of Kansas at the Wyandotte Convention in 1859. Not surprisingly then, Kansas had more in common with a border state than with the American Northeast.²

¹ Jacob Dorman, *Chosen People: The Rise of American Black Israelite Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 27.

² David J. Peavler, “Creating the Color Line and Confronting Jim Crow: Civil Rights in Middle America: 1850-1900” (PhD dissertation, University of Kansas, 2008), 33; Brent M.S. Campney, *This is Not Dixie: Racist Violence in Kansas, 1861-1927* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 41-42.

The use of the “Free State” narrative by African Americans, however, highlighted the contradictions within myth. Brent M.S. Campney has noted that “Rather than using it to obscure violence, they used it to highlight the disconnect between white mythology and black experience.”³ That disconnect was glaringly apparent in Lawrence, the capitol of the Free State movement where African Americans endured widespread institutionalized racism in their day-to-day lives. In addition to the segregation experienced in schools, restaurants, housing, and social activities Black citizens throughout Douglas County experienced thirteen instances of attempted or successful killings of African Americans by police or citizens between 1865 and 1913. Although African Americans served on the Lawrence Police Force and one, Sam Jeans was even made Deputy Marshall; they were unable to circumvent the “Free State” ideology that justified such instances of violence because the Republican Party during the 1890s felt compelled to court the Black vote throughout Kansas. During the whole of that period there were no documented instances of racist murders, although Eudora and Lawrence were each the site of intimidation when lynchings were threatened. The fugitive slaves and contrabands—escaped slaves that came under the protection of the Union army during the Civil War—who had fled from Missouri and Arkansas for freedom in Kansas did not find the racially tolerant home of John Brown they had expected where they could advance as a race after slavery, but were instead met with a racial climate on par with the South hidden behind the veil of the “Free State” mythology.⁴

Among the most effective ways Black settlers in Lawrence found to combat the effects of these experiences was to create their own institutions and organizations that satisfied their desire

³ Brent Campney, *This is Not Dixie*, 101.

⁴ Ibid, 220-243; Richard B. Sheridan, “From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas: The Influx of Black Fugitives and Contrabands Into Kansas, 1854-1865,” *Kansas History* vol. 12, no. 31 (1989), 33-36; also see: Brent M.S. Campney, “‘Light is Bursting Upon the World!’: White Supremacy and Racist Violence Against Blacks in Reconstruction Kansas,” *Western Historical Quarterly* vol. 41, no. 2 (Summer 2010), 173.

for social and economic advancement. In this respect, the Lawrence community is representative of other Black enclaves throughout the United States. Literary clubs, sewing circles, churches—and the various committees and clubs formed by them—as well as the establishment of Black-owned businesses each provided African Americans a means to parallel advancement. Several organizations that were formed elsewhere in the country were later transplanted to different areas in Kansas including Douglas County. One of the most significant of these groups was the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs that was established in 1896 by the fusion of the Colored Women’s League and the National Federation of Afro-American Women. Groups included under such organizations as this reflected the importance placed in literacy and community by African Americans historically. They were part of a long tradition of African American’s attempts at self-improvement and the improvement of their communities. The women of Lawrence fit within the general trend of Black women nationally who used literary clubs to provide an avenue for racial uplift. As Elizabeth McHenry has observed of African American literary clubs, “At the beginning of the nineteenth century they began establishing societies to promote literacy and to ensure that, as a group, they would not be excluded from the benefits associated with reading and literary study.”⁵

Class differences and geographic peculiarities influenced how African American women perceived national or even state associations for clubs. As Deborah Gray-White has illustrated, “...black women were never a monolithic group. Race and gender united them as often as class, religion, sexuality, and ideology pitted them against each other.”⁶

⁵ Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 3; Stephanie J. Shaw, “Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women,” *Journal of Women’s History* vol. 3, no. 2 (Fall 1991), 11-12.

⁶ Deborah Gray-White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 16.

The task of recreating the associational life of African Americans in Lawrence, Kansas and the surrounding area is not a simple one. While several of the organizations examined in the following pages have left a variety of source for use, several others have not. Many of the surviving archival materials for this project are housed at the Kenneth Spencer Research Library (KSRL) and were instrumental in plotting the direction of this research. Club yearbooks provided insight into the day-to-day functions of women's literary societies and their goals over the years. Church, club, and personal family histories of several institutions and individuals helped to recreate the club movement of Lawrence, Kansas and were instrumental in advancing the research. Also located at KSRL are a number of interviews of longtime Lawrence residents alive shortly after the turn of the century conducted by Donald Zavelo during the 1970s that have been helpful in better understanding the experiences and demographics of the diverse group of African Americans that populated the town. Another archival source of material was the Watkins Community Museum located in Lawrence. Housed here are a number of secondary scholarly articles written about different facets of the Lawrence community. It also contains correspondence, associational charters, and documents that have proven useful in better understanding the long, rich, and sometimes complicated history of African American and civil rights organizations in the area.

In addition, the African American associational life of the area was regularly reported on in the Black press. Local newspapers such as *The Historic Times* and *The Western Recorder* in addition to regional news outlets such as the *Topeka Plaindealer*, the *Leavenworth Herald*, and the *Kansas City Call* each helped to fill in gaps where the yearbooks and organizational materials of certain groups were not available. Newspapers were also an institution in their own right—print culture provided a group voice for African Americans and was important to the racial

consciousness and the progress of activism. Despite that, there is no attempt to fully explore newspapers or the Western Negro Press Association (WNPA) as an organization because there were no Black-owned newspapers in Lawrence itself after the 1890s, the only two in the town having closed their doors before the twentieth century. In addition to the lack of a longstanding Black press located in the town, the newspaper that did last for a substantial portion of the study period, *The Dove*, was campus-based and never a part of the WNPA. In addition to these, there are the historic and contemporary White-owned newspapers of Lawrence, the *Standard* and the *Lawrence Journal World*. The former, and others like it, have helped to show a glimpse of how the Black population was perceived by their neighbors.

The following study is divided into three chapters that represent seminal periods of African American life in Douglas County and that community's efforts toward economic, social, and -3rd thing- advancement. Each of these chapters involves subsequent waves of migration into the state, and also demarcate clear shifts in the focus and racial politics of the Black community. The first of these chapters occurs roughly from Kansas' admission as a state in 1861 and the influx of fugitive slaves and contrabands until the Exoduster migrations in 1879. Both these early migrations resulted in the rapid expansion of the Black community in Lawrence and the surrounding area. Additionally, 1861-1879 witnessed the establishment of Black churches in Lawrence, Kansas that served as the foundation for all the subsequent organizations that composed the Black associational life of the county-wide community. Their congregations provided many of the members and leaders of various social clubs and their physical edifices served as the spaces for meetings that allowed the Black community to flourish intellectually and express itself in a variety of ways.

Also located within this chapter is the establishment of women's aid societies such as the Ladies' Refugee Aid Society that sought to ameliorate the hardships experienced by migrants to Douglas County during and immediately following the Civil War that set the tenor for much of the charitable work done by women's groups in subsequent decades. Another organization, the local lodge of the Prince Hall Masons established in 1865 and received a formal charter in 1875. This fraternal order became a group to which many Black businessmen and professionals belonged. The Masons also invested in education and provided scholarship funds for students who were largely self-supporting. A women's auxiliary, the Eastern Star, was established shortly after in 1883. Together, the male and female orders of the Masonic order included within their membership several prominent citizens who remained deeply committed to the advancement of their race and provided yet another means of self-expression and community assistance.

Chapter two spans from 1880-1920 and focuses on the expansion of the club movement in Lawrence that coincided with the state-wide and national trends of African American women's involvement in literary societies and community engagement during the 1880s-1890s. This period witnessed the birth of a Black bourgeois in Douglas County as it coincides with a period when several African Americans matriculated from the University of Kansas and colleges in the South who alongside an increasing number of Black entrepreneurs became the identifiable elite of their community. This section focuses on the literary clubs—both all-female and coed—that formed during this period as well as their efforts to promote the racial uplift of their community well into the 1930s. The bulk of material on the Black sororities and fraternities that were established at the University of Kansas in the 1910s and 1920s is also in this chapter, which outlines their involvement on campus and as part of the wider associational life of the town.

The final chapter of this work focuses on the establishment of national organizations and city-wide groups in Lawrence and marks a shift toward the newer racial politics of direct action protest, legal challenges, and interracial groups that worked for civil rights from 1921-1947. This section shows how the establishment of several groups including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Lawrence League for the Practice of Democracy (LLPD), and the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) that used interracial cooperation to advance civil rights in Lawrence through a variety of means that included petitions, cooperatives, and sit-ins in the wake of World War II. Whereas the Lawrence branch of the NAACP points to the limited success of a national organization in the area, the LLPD and CORE each highlight the success of grassroots organization and protest in Lawrence during the mid to late forties.

Early Migrations and Organizational Foundations, 1865-1879

After the Kansas-Nebraska Act was enacted in 1854, thousands of Northern and Southern white immigrants flocked to Kansas Territory to determine if it would become a free or slave state. The next several years are known as “Bleeding Kansas,” a period that witnessed fraud, intimidation, and violence as these settlers battled over the fate of Kansas. It is this period that is used to justify the “Free State Mythology” of the state, since several of the early towns in the northeastern part of the state acted as stations on the Underground Railroad that helped to conduct escaped slaves in Missouri and Arkansas to their freedom.

Kansas became the 34th state of the Union on 29 January 1861. Soon after, the Civil War created a high level of confusion that allowed thousands of slaves in Missouri and Arkansas to escape for their freedom in Kansas. This migration lasted the duration of the war; many fugitives had attempted escape to several towns in Kansas because of their anti-slavery legacy created during the state’s territorial period. Towns such as Lawrence were attractive to runaways because of their roles as major centers of the anti-slavery movement. The overwhelming majority of Black migrants to Kansas during this period came from the slave states along the border, Missouri and Arkansas. Slaves in the boarder counties of Missouri and Arkansas took it upon themselves to secure their own freedom. “They did not wait for any proclamation, nor did they ask whether their liberation was a war measure or a civil process. The simple question was whether they could reach the Kansas line without being overtaken.”⁷

This migration of contrabands—slaves who had escaped across union army lines, considered confiscated “rebel property”—and fugitive slaves turned out to be economically advantageous to the white population of Kansas during much of the war. The steady wave of

⁷ Richard Cordley, *Pioneer Days in Kansas*, (Pilgrim Press, 1903), “Contrabands,” unnumbered pages.

African Americans that arrived in the state helped to address the labor shortage experienced by white-owned farms and businesses during the war, and in turn contributed to the burgeoning population of the state. Unlike the migration patterns of Blacks during the territorial period that generally passed through the state via the Underground Railroad, during the war years many stayed with the intent that Kansas would be their new home.⁸

Once contraband and fugitive migrants began to arrive in the area, they quickly began to work on local farms to help ease the labor shortage experienced during the war in Kansas. Since many of the county's White male residents had gone to join the Kansas regiments that served the Union forces, the influx of migrants was initially welcomed by farmers who needed assistance planting and harvesting their crops and in turn were paid a wage. This symbiotic relationship allowed contrabands and fugitive slaves to earn money for their labor—often for the first time in their lives—and provided the White population with a large and cheap labor force that could be used to maintain the economy. Rebecca Harvey, for instance, a fugitive slave from Arkansas, who along with her husband David worked on land in Douglas County until after five years when they were able to purchase several acres of land that remained in their family for generations.⁹

A minority of African American men found work in semi-skilled or skilled labor positions. Of these there were 8 blacksmiths, 2 stonemasons, 23 teamsters, 4 barbers, and at least one carpenter, harness maker, shoemaker, and a distiller. Although some came to the Lawrence area with marketable skills, a majority of the migrants —about 85 in total—worked as unskilled

⁸ Richard Sheridan, "From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas," 37; also note: "Contraband" refers to a term coined by Union General Benjamin Butler as he began the practice of confiscating slave property and allowing enslaved people to enter his camp as a means to financially weaken the confederacy and thus speed along the conclusion of the war.

⁹ Katie H. Armitage, "'Seeking a Home Where He Himself is Free:' African Americans Build a Community in Douglas County, Kansas," *Kansas History*, vol. 31, no. 3 (Autumn 2008), 154-156;

agricultural labor. The overwhelming majority of migrant women who settled in the area during the Civil War found employment in service roles. There were 27 laundresses, 3 cooks, and 7 housekeepers in addition to a number of servants. For a time, these self-emancipated freedmen were entirely welcome by members of the White population who enjoyed the benefits of a low-cost labor force and felt a sense of ease about having these men on their farmsteads. The labor of contrabands was widely used throughout the Civil War in Kansas, as well as in the Union Army which used escaped slaves as a support labor force for the duration of the war.¹⁰

After the Civil War, Lawrence had the second largest concentration of African Americans in the state after Leavenworth. In Leavenworth a more formal and widespread system was built to assist the transition of contrabands and fugitive slaves. In 1862, White citizens led by men including Richard J. Hinton and Col. Daniel R. Anthony, as well as free Blacks Rev. Robert Caldwell, Capt. William D. Matthews, Lewis Overton, and later Charles H. Langston formed the Kansas Emancipation League to assist former slaves with their transition to freedom in Kansas. They helped the contrabands and fugitives find employment and housing as well as assistance with education—several members of the league were schoolteachers and ministers deeply interested in education—and thus speed the destruction of slavery in general. Based in Leavenworth, the group opened an intelligence office on Shawnee St. to keep track of the migrants that entered Kansas so they could better match them with wage-labor throughout the state. It was reported by the League in *The Smokey Hill and Republican Union* that over 1,500 contrabands had arrived in Leavenworth and approximately 600 in Lawrence and its surrounding area. The League's Labor Exchange program helped to find these men work such as on the farm

¹⁰ Agnes Emery, *Reminiscences of Early Lawrence*, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, RH B1017; Richard Sheridan, "From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas," 33-36; see also: Kansas State Census, 1865: Douglas County Population Schedule. Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society: Microfilm, K-3

owned by the family of Agnes Emery near Lawrence, which helped to reduce the reliance on aid required by charity.¹¹

The White population, which had initially welcomed migrants as a source of low-cost labor, came to resent the growing number of African Americans in the town. The growth of the Black population caused a hardening of racial attitudes for Blacks that led the editor of the *Kansas State Journal* to complain “We already see more colored men than we ought about our street corners.”¹² As the charitable mentality of the White population began to erode, African Americans with the means increasingly began to assist their community on their own. As a result of such attitudes within the White community, the Black residents of Douglas County began to form their own institutions, and for the majority of them with only a few exceptions, continued to live in defined areas for the next several decades. The African American migrants to Douglas County had congregated in contraband camps once they arrived in the area throughout the Civil War; these camps were predominately located in the town of Lawrence near the old courthouse on Massachusetts Street. The contraband camps were populated and maintained by the escaped slaves themselves, and represented a newfound independence that helped to provide a sense of community and the formation of social networks of support despite their sub-standard living conditions. Increased racial tension and the need to provide for the most immediate needs of their race led the African Americans of the area to create organizations that allowed them help themselves in the absence of charity from whites.¹³

¹¹ Richard Sheridan, “From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas,” 41-43; Agnes Emery, *Reminiscences of Early Lawrence; The Smokey Hill and Republican Union* (Junction City, Kansas), 19 July 1862.

¹² *Kansas State Journal* (Lawrence, Kansas) January 9, 1862.

¹³ Priscilla F. Clement, *Growing Pains: Children in the Industrial Age, 1850-1890* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 24; Richard Sheridan, “From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas,” 47; Quintard Taylor and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, eds., *African American Women Confront the West, 1600-2000* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 9-11; Marilyn Dell Brady, “Kansas Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, 1900-1930,” *Kansas History* vol. 9, no. 1 (Spring 1986), 21.

Although the interracial Kansas Emancipation League had attempted to help the African American migrants secure housing and employment in the state, as the war drew on into 1864, the Black residents of Lawrence established three institutions that would, to some extent, reduce the necessity of their interaction with an increasingly racist White population. Two of these institutions—the Black church and a fraternal order of masons—had been established previously by the free Black population of the North. The third of these organizations, the Ladies’ Refugee Aid Society, was unique in that it had not been founded elsewhere and transplanted in the county. Each of these organizations did, however, reflect a tradition of faith and mutual assistance in the Black community that stretched back to the Antebellum Period. The first Black migrants that came to Lawrence established charitable organizations, a fraternal society, and churches that in turn became the framework for the later growth of the club movement and development of an African American entrepreneurial class in Lawrence.¹⁴

Upon their first arrival, many contrabands and fugitive slaves attended what contemporary Rev. Richard Cordley termed an “interracial” Congregational Church. This early attempt at worship in a shared space between Whites and Blacks was in fact segregated—White citizens had services during the day and the Black congregation held services at night. As early as late 1862, however, a Freedmen’s Church had been established specifically for the African American population in Lawrence and its surrounding area.¹⁵

The Black population began to form its own churches by 1865 at the latest in a process that lasted several years and various origin stories for the different churches. The Black population of Lawrence formed into a variety of different denominations that all featured various styles of worship. Migrants to Lawrence sometimes formed congregations with a handful of

¹⁴ Jacob Dorman, *Chosen People*, 74;

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 40; See also, Cordley, *Pioneer Days in Kansas*, unnumbered pages.

members that met in the homes of members to worship; however, over the course of two decades beginning at the end of the Civil War there were four churches that began to form houses of worship. These churches accorded the Black community opportunities for leadership roles and the growth of an associational life that expanded networks of mutual assistance for African Americans throughout the county. Two of these churches were African Methodist Episcopal—originally established in the city of Philadelphia by 1816, of which Richard Allen had been elected the first bishop. The other two churches were Baptist, and alongside the A.M.E. churches served as the primary sites of club activity in the town. The congregations of these four churches also included many of the notable members of the community who belonged to the fraternal societies, owned businesses in the town, and joined the clubs that composed the associational life of Lawrence. .¹⁶

There are conflicting accounts in the origin stories of each of these churches; however, by all accounts each congregation established itself and erected actual buildings for services at a later time. The St. James AME Church was organized in 1865 by a group of migrants. This church did not have a physical building until one was erected in 1884 at the corner of Maple St. and Main St. This original structure burned down and was rebuilt in either 1896 or 1897 at the same location. The second AME Church, St. Luke, was founded by 1868 and located south of the Kansas River in the East Bottoms, a section of Lawrence with a historically high concentration of Black residents that received its name due to its low elevation in contrast to areas further west. The physical building for this church that currently stands is located at the intersection of 9th St. and New York St. Both of these churches had a membership that remained consistent throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. The number of congregants began

¹⁶ Dorothy Porter, *Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1995), 168.

to fluctuate after 1900 due to an outmigration to find better opportunities in the North. St. Luke in the East Bottoms typically had the larger membership of the two AME churches, however, both had a high attendance that was likely due to the fact that they had programs designed to serve the entire community and also drew visitors from other towns.¹⁷

The two Baptist Churches that formed in the town of Lawrence toward the end of the Civil War were the Warren St. (later Ninth St.) Church and the First Regular Missionary Baptist Church. The first of these was organized south of the Kansas River, while the latter was established in North Lawrence for the duration of the study period. The Warren St. Baptist Church, so called because it was eventually sited at the intersection of Warren and Ohio Streets, had two varied origin stories. In the first, it was founded as the Second Missionary Baptist Mission in 1863 for African Americans under the direction of a white Minister named Father Bateman. By this account, the physical structure of the church was not deeded to an African American until the 1880s. Another version identifies 1855 as the year in which the land for the church was deeded to the Emigrant Aid Society of New England, which then transferred it to Isaiah Adams in 1882. Later it was again deeded to the trustee board of the Second Baptist Church that included Alexander Gregg, Edward Sims, and Gabriel Gray whose families remained active in the associational life of Lawrence for generations.¹⁸

The fourth church that formed in the wake of the contraband and fugitive slave migrations was the First Regular Missionary Baptist Church in 1868 when a group of African Americans decided to establish a Baptist church for residents north of the Kansas River. Although this church also has conflicting origin stories, the most likely is that Ishmael Keith was

¹⁷ Dorothy L. Pennington, "The Histories and Cultural Roles of Black Churches in Lawrence, Kansas," (unpublished report, University of Kansas, 1982), 7, 14-15.

¹⁸ Ibid, 9-11.

central to the church's establishment as he is the one who deeded property that allowed a building to be erected at 416 Lincoln St. not far from St. James AME. First Regular's first minister was Gabriel Gray, who had left Warren St. Baptist Church to lead his own congregation and thus become a leader within the Black community of early Lawrence.¹⁹

The impact of these churches on the community as a whole was far greater than their memberships alone would suggest since they were never the only churches that operated in Lawrence; a town that included a multiplicity of denominations and styles of worship. Each of these churches did, however, served three essential functions within their congregations and the community around them. The members of each of these churches formed trustee boards that looked after specific aspects of the church, sewing circles that allowed women to meet and have discussions while they created blankets and other items, in addition to Sunday schools that were taught by the congregants. These church-based groups allowed their members to practice leadership skills that could then be utilized outside the church walls. Sewing circles provided benefits to the community through charitable work and also acted as the precursor to the formation of literary societies that formed in Lawrence during the 1890s. In addition, sewing circles and Sunday Schools allowed members to mentor the youth of the church.²⁰

Sunday Schools also socialized the children and provided opportunities to teach them reading—many of the initial Black migrants to Kansas had learned to read through study with the Bible. The educational effort of churches was not restricted to regular attendees, however. Each church featured some form of public service that benefitted other members of the community. Baptist and AME churches alike also staged Sunday Forums that acted as educational public service announcements for the community where Black residents and

¹⁹ Ibid, 17-18.

²⁰ Ibid, 14.

congregants would be cautioned on health hazards by African American physicians and given other useful information relevant to them.²¹

These churches also served as focal points for the community's efforts to combat or at least shield themselves from racist practices and the inequalities of the color line in Lawrence. Community members were able to come together at basket meetings and love feasts that were open to all the residents and members of other congregations in the community. These events were mutually beneficial to the church organizations themselves as well as the attendees; they provided churches the opportunity to collect money from a wider base than their own membership and thus secure funds for their maintenance. The community was able to join together in a relaxed atmosphere to celebrate holidays important to the Black community, listen to different ministers speak, and enjoy music performed by the African American Beethoven Mandoline Club (which played at banquets for various groups throughout the region).²²

Similar to cities and towns throughout Kansas and the United States, the Black church in Lawrence also provided the physical space for meetings of various clubs that formed in the 1890s and later for civil rights groups that operated within their towns. These groups were also composed of church members and often led by their ministers. The church is one of the most visible symbols of African American mutual aid on the Great Plains and the Lawrence community is representative of the church's significance to the Black community.²³

²¹ *Topeka Plaindealer*, February 28, 1907; Dorothy Pennington, "The Histories and Cultural Roles of Black Churches in Lawrence, Kansas," 14.

²² *Ibid*, 14; "The Basket Meeting," *The Historic Times* (Lawrence, Kansas), July 25, 1891; "The Progressive Club Banquet," *The Historic Times*, August 1, 1891; for additional references to the basket meetings and pastors' involvement in see *The Historic Times* "Steineps Grove," July 25, 1891 and "City News," September 12, 1891.

²³ George Irving, "Book of Redemption of St. James A.M.E. Church," Ethel Moore family Collection, Kansas Collection, RH MS 559, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries; *Topeka Plaindealer*, February 28, 1907; Dorothy Pennington, "The Histories and Cultural Roles of Black Churches in Lawrence, Kansas," 14. 17-18.

The first charity and social organizations founded by African Americans in Lawrence, Kansas were the product of local church women who had themselves recently migrated to the area. The Ladies' Refugee Aid Society established in 1864, for example, was the first aid society formed by Black women in the state of Kansas to serve other members of their race in the area of Lawrence and provided a model for the charity work of later clubs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since African Americans no longer received the level of aid they initially had when they first crossed into the area, these African American women—many of whom were themselves recent migrants and employed in low-wage positions—helped later arrivals in the state through assistance with money, clothing, and food they collected from successful members of the community for the purpose of assisting their recently arrived brethren. This group also acted as a precursor to the women's clubs that formed in the 1890s.²⁴

The group also acted as a precursor to the women's clubs that formed in the 1890s the Ladies' Refugee Aid Society. Each of the women that formed this group had some form of employment, however meagre their wages might have been, and could arguably be identified as the middle-class of an impoverished early Black community. Additionally, this group also helped secure bibles for the recently arrived African Americans, which they used to teach the newcomers to read and write while it also reinforced their strong religious convictions. The dual commitment to education and the church became a central feature of all subsequent women's groups in the town and in other areas such as Topeka. The blankets and bibles provided by these women were practical, but also indicated the growth of an African American tradition in Douglas

²⁴ Kathie Schick, *The Lawrence Black Community*, unpublished manuscript, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas; Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 99, 219.

County where women helped provide for the intellectual growth of the black community as well as a means of racial uplift.²⁵

The men who settled in Lawrence formed organizations that served their need for brotherhood and mutual assistance as well. Nationally, the first African American masonic organization was founded by Prince Hall in 1775. This group was unable to receive a charter from the Massachusetts Freemasons for their Boston based organization, yet eventually received an official charter from the Freemasons of England and became African Lodge #449 in 1787. Masonic lodges soon became a feature in other cities where African Americans were concentrated. Since this charter had been granted by the order in England and not that of Massachusetts, the lodge was able to exercise a free hand to grant charters to other lodges in the Northeast and eventually in the West.²⁶

African American men established the first all-Black masonic lodge in the state, when in 1865 David G. Lett became the first grand master of the Western Star Lodge, no. 1 under the jurisdiction of the Ohio Grand Lodge of Prince Hall. A convention was held in March of 1875 for the purpose of establishing a grand lodge in the state of Kansas, which formed later that year with David G. Lett as its Grand Master, and other middle-class citizens of the black community as officers. The men of the Grand Lodge—titled the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of the Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, State of Kansas—were also churchgoers and members of a black entrepreneurial and middle-class that began to take shape in Lawrence during the 1870s. Much like the women's aid societies, the Black masons of Douglas County

²⁵ Ibid; Quintard Taylor and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, *African American Women Confront the West, 1600-2000*, 9-11; Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 99.

²⁶ Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*, 37; Jacob Dormer, *Chosen People*, 74.

were also committed to charity work and heavily invested in the education of their community and showed this through donations to scholarship funds for students. Several members of this lodge were also the men who helped form the interracial Kansas Emancipation League and also the men who formed a network of entrepreneurs and professionals throughout the region.²⁷

Efforts to change the legal standing of African Americans became increasingly necessary throughout the state and in towns like Lawrence by the end of the 1870s. The three waves of migration—during the Civil War, the mid-1870s, and those known as Exodusters who came in 1879-80 following Reconstruction—resulted in social conflicts that were exacerbated by a lack of economic opportunity and the differences in social standing among newcomers to the state and those whom had previously settled at the outset of the war. Added to these two groups were migrants that were not in fact “Exodusters” but African Americans that moved from along the border into Kansas. In the mid-1870s, Douglas County’s attempts to attract business and expand the railroad system through the area also resulted in an increase of bonded indebtedness that was a large portion of Lawrence’s land value. This economic trouble reflected the decline of local economies throughout the state and nationally, but African Americans suffered the effects most at the local level. One historian observed that “The response to new emigrants and their prospects for success also changed because of these economic problems.”²⁸ Whereas the Black migrants that arrived during the Civil War found a somewhat welcoming atmosphere because of their ability to supplement labor, during the late 1870s the Lawrence community had no such need. For that reason, there were migrants that arrived during the Exodus who found difficulty in securing a living. Reconstruction’s failures to secure social and political rights for African

²⁷ “Freemasonry in Kansas,” Watkins Community Museum vertical files; “The Black Directory of Douglas County,” Watkins Community Museum vertical files.

²⁸ Steven Jansen, “Conflicts within a Plains City: The Case of Lawrence, Kansas,” (Watkins Community Museum vertical files, 1979), 3.

Americans in the South and the hopes for a new start in the fabled home of John Brown undoubtedly attracted many of the migrants to Kansas. While it is undoubtedly certain that some of those that arrived included people who were economically disadvantaged and socially different in their manners than the community they came to join, not all were completely destitute and the migrations were well-planned. Nonetheless, the Black community of Douglas County, like other Black communities in the state, felt obliged to do what they could for the newer arrivals in the area and attempted to provide them with food grown by area Black farmers. White residents of Kansas also offered assistance, but many times this ended up being more lip service than anything else.²⁹

Not all the migrants were completely impoverished and in need of charity provided by White Kansans, however. Many of those that were actually Exodusters came to Kansas for specific reasons, and the migration itself was widely debated by African American leaders like Frederick Douglass and Blanche K. Bruce. The former voiced opposition to the migration and believed that African Americans should remain where they were and work for the improvement of their situation there rather than venture into the unknown. Other Black leaders were in favor of the migration, however, and made concrete attempts to provide opportunities for Southern Blacks' migrations to Kansas from 1875-80. The most recognizable of these men was Benjamin "Pap" Singleton of Tennessee who helped organize those that wished to transition west and established colonies in Kansas at Dunlap and Nicodemus. John Lewis Waller, an African American keenly interested in the improvement of conditions for his race was firmly in favor of

²⁹ Doretha K. Williams, "Kansas Grows the Best Wheat and the Best Race Women," 8; Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 1986), 26; David Peavler, "Creating the Color Line and Confronting Jim Crow," 193-195.

the population shift. Like other Black Kansans he believed that the Exodus provided the opportunity for their increased importance within the Republican Party.³⁰

Added to the issues posed by economic decline were the social differences of African Americans that came from Missouri, yet had lived in the Douglas County area for over a decade before the later migrants began to arrive from Tennessee and Kentucky in the mid-1870s following the failure of Reconstruction. While on the one hand the newer migrants represented the expansion of the Black client base in and around Lawrence, they also represented complications for the existing community's sense of respectability. The Black community of Kansas that initially welcomed the migrants of the mid-1870s and Exodusters became increasingly hesitant as well because they feared that Whites would judge all African Americans by the new arrivals and that would lead to increased discrimination over time.³¹

During what came to be known as the Exodus, there was an interracial welcome committee that attempted to provide relief to the newcomers through the provision of temporary housing and attempts to find them agricultural work in the area. This interracial committee also had the effect of reinforcing the "Free State" mythology of Kansas since it allowed the residents of Lawrence to publicly distance their social values from those of the South. Sympathetic rhetoric and half-hearted efforts were printed in the Republican newspapers of the town and placed them in direct contrast to the "terroristic and cruel" Southern Democrats. On the surface, White Lawrence residents and others in Kansas claimed to help the migrants who had left a rural situation in the South for what they hoped would be land of their own in the West. In truth few Whites actually supported the migration, yet some did, such as Gov. John P. St. John who

³⁰ Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters*, 112; David Peavler, "Creating the Color Line and Confronting Jim Crow," 195.

³¹ Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters*, 146-147; Randall Bennett Woods, *A Black Odyssey: John Lewis Waller and the Promise of American Life, 1878-1900* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1981), 25-26; Robert G. Atheran, *In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas, 1879-80* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), 40-41.

believed the Exodus from the South could be beneficial to the newly arrived and to those who stood to profit financially from their resettlement. More often than not, however, such calls for sympathy and assistance as those made at the meeting in Lawrence resulted in little more charity than the purchase of a train ticket to the next town. There was also a growing element in Lawrence that rejected the influx of additional migration and was openly hostile to it, the *Lawrence Standard*, a Democratic newspaper printed “...sooner or later the people of Lawrence will be forced to take steps to protect themselves from the dark-skinned invaders.”³²

Admittedly, the citizenry of Lawrence did provide for the Exodusters. However, both newspaper accounts from the times—such as those printed by the *Standard*—and reports of the city council show where the actions of the White community differed from their rhetorical sympathy of the impoverished African American migrants to the town. One report from late in 1879, for example, showed the expenditures on “paupers” to be “...\$4.10 for wood and sundries, \$2.10 for provisions and \$18.40 for railroad fares...”³³ Whereas the migrants themselves had come with the expectation that they would settle in what they believed to be a Biblical “land of Canaan” where they would live alongside whites whom they thought to have previously been abolitionists, they arrived to an altogether colder welcome than expected. White residents used the rhetoric of the “Free State” mythology, yet it was evident that in their mentality they were far more similar to a border state. While they did collect provisions for the migrants’ most immediate needs, there was a concerted effort within the town’s white population to make sure that the new African American migrants did not stay, but were shipped down the line to be the “problem” of towns further to the west. Despite efforts to prevent further African American settlement in the town of Lawrence, the Black population increased from just over 900 in 1865 to

³² Ibid; *Standard* (Lawrence, Kansas), 24 April 1879; Robert G. Atheran, *In Search of Canaan*, 40, 45.

³³ Steven Jansen, “Conflicts within a Plains City,” 4; Brent Campney, *This is Not Dixie*, 41-42, 101.

approximately 1,995 in 1880—the Black community had more than doubled in size as a result of these migrations at the same time the white population stagnated so that African Americans represented about 22% of the total residents by 1880.³⁴

Similar to the migrants of the 1860s, those a decade later clustered in specific areas throughout the county. Although there was no *de jure* segregation anywhere in the area at any point, migrants nonetheless tended to congregate in specific areas where they could live among the familiar, which had the added effect of reducing contact with the racist views of the white population. In Lawrence itself, this meant that there were defined Black neighborhoods North of the river and in the East Bottoms. Black residences were also scattered throughout the area near Kansas State University and further to the South. These areas of settlement were the sites of Black churches and the two schools for African American students in the town. These areas also represented the poorest neighborhoods in the town for decades, lending additional credence to the assertion that Black residents suffered worst from the rise and fall of the local economy.³⁵

Elsewhere in the area, African Americans settled in smaller towns near the county seat. Much of this was in very small numbers except in the town of Bloomington, a community established by Northern whites that had previously been a station of the Underground Railroad and the only other town in the area with a significant Black population during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During and after the Civil War, African Americans migrated to this largely agricultural township and settled alongside its white residents. As the numbers of Black migrants to the town increased, the white population declined so that it became a largely African

³⁴ Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society: Microfilm, K-3; Federal Census for Kansas, 1880: Douglas County Population Schedule. Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society: Microfilm, K-9

³⁵ F.W. Blackmar and E.W. Burgess, *Lawrence Social Survey* (Kansas State Printing Plant: Topeka, Kansas, 1917); note that the survey conducted by Blackmar and his team investigated the condition in areas of the city that were historically populated by African Americans; note that Kansas State University changed its name following its establishment and hereafter will be referred to as the University of Kansas for clarity.

American settlement near the turn of the century; however, the school for the area's children was interracial until this outmigration. Bloomington, like Lawrence, was the site of two churches with African American congregations—one Baptist and the other AME.³⁶ The residents of Lawrence and nearby Bloomington would remain closely associated through church and associational involvement in a variety of ways until the latter town became defunct with the construction of Clinton Lake.³⁷

As the Exoduster migrations wound down, the Black community began to solidify into a defined portion of the Lawrence population, which became a town in conflict. Economically and socially, African Americans began to rely more heavily on their own parallel institutions and neighbors of their race for mutual assistance and advancement of the race. Subsequent decades would witness the creation of a variety of Black-owned businesses and the growth of clubs and other organizations geared toward the advancement—economic, social, and intellectual—of the African American race. The early institutions built throughout this early period of African American settlement in the area would help to provide the opportunity for the expansion of a Black professional and business class that became the leaders of African American institutional and associational life in Douglas County.

³⁶ “The Nine Clinton Lake Communities,” (Watkins Community Museum, n.d.); see also: Goldie Piper Daniels, “Rural Schools & Schoolhouses of Douglas County” (Watkins Community Museum, n.d.), 1.

³⁷ Ibid.

United We Stand: The Growth of the Lawrence Club Movement, 1880-1920

The years between 1880 and 1920 represent another shift in the racial politics of Lawrence, Kansas and its surrounding area. In an atmosphere of heightened racist violence and Reconstruction's failures that caused the flight of African Americans to the West, Black leaders throughout the nation began to call for a nationalist approach characterized by accommodationist practices and parallel institutions rather than the protest through petition and open challenges to racist practices of the previous two decades. While the pursuit of accommodation was widely practiced by Black Americans, it was by no means the only ideology pursued nationally. African American leaders formed organizations that openly challenged lynching and segregation. Even in Lawrence clubs sometimes voiced their opinions through letter writing campaigns and statements of approval for actions they believed pointed to a triumph for race relations. The policy of parallel development, however, continued to be dominant locally until the 1920s.

Parallel advancement was a brand of racial politics that assumed Whites and Blacks could—and should—progress along parallel lines of social and economic development within the United States until such a time that race prejudice would naturally melt away. Among the most notable proponents of this form of economic Black Nationalism was the President of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, Booker T. Washington who personified the philosophy of accommodation, which believed that African Americans "...should withdraw from contact with whites, develop their own institutions and businesses, and uplift themselves along economic and moral lines." During this era of racial politics, African Americans in Douglas County reflected the national proliferation of Black Nationalist thought through the establishment of clubs, business leagues, and the Black press that served as the institutions of accommodation.³⁸

³⁸ John H. Bracey, Jr. et al, eds., *Black Nationalism in America* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), 223.

The continued racial tensions that followed the migrations to Kansas during the 1860s and 1870s caused the Black residents of Douglas County to create organizations that allowed them opportunities for self-expression politically, socially, and ideologically. This was helped along because of the basis provided by the churches and the examples of previous organizations. Over the course of the next several decades, various African American clubs formed in the town of Lawrence that included residents from nearby towns in Douglas County such as Bloomington (which had its own all-Black baseball team), Eudora, and Clinton. While many of these clubs were fairly short-lived—several only lasted one or two years before they dissolved—they do help to show that the Black community of the area was becoming increasingly aware of itself economically, intellectually, and politically in a similar fashion to other areas of the state and regions of the United States. Literary clubs, women’s rights organizations, and men’s political groups proliferated during this period in an atmosphere where Black men and women were excluded from national and state organizations that should logically have accepted them if not for the problem of the color line.³⁹

The decades that followed the Exoduster migrations witnessed the formation of numerous African American clubs that sought to raise the political consciousness of their members and the entire community. This expansion coincided with national developments among African American communities in the North and South. Locally, the establishment of all-Black clubs such as the No Name Club, The Fred Douglass Club, and the Young Men’s Republican Club were often reported in the Black-owned newspapers of Kansas with hopeful language although none of these enjoyed much longevity. Despite their short existences these clubs point to a

³⁹ Stephanie Shaw, “Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women,” 13, 20; Walter Belk, “The Lawrence Black Community and Its Relationship to Black Students on Mount Oread, 1870-1930,” (Sociology 165, University of Kansas, 1971), 8-9; Doretha K. Williams, “Kansas Grows the Best Wheat and the Best Race Women,” 115; Deborah Gray-White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 39, 41-42, 104.

growing sense of empowerment within the Black community. Several of these clubs and institutions that were established during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, remained active well into the 1970s and coopted members of defunct clubs into their groups.⁴⁰

One of the several clubs that not only lasted, but thrived, was the Sierra Leone Club founded by Mrs. Whitman in February of 1892. Like so many other groups of the period, the Sierra Leone Club was a literary group, and at least initially restricted their membership to Black married women from Lawrence and the surrounding area, several of whom were also mothers. Clubs like this were central to African American culture and thought because of their traditional roles within the community. Elizabeth McHenry points out that “Historically, African American literary societies have supported aspirations and the activism of those who wished to reform rather than leave American society; their membership believed that pursuing freedom and equality promised to all Americans in the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution was not only an opportunity for African Americans but also their greatest responsibility.”⁴¹ The Sierra Leone Club and others that followed it during this period of parallel development were the embodiment of attempts to uplift the race in the West as they sought to improve the middle-class respectability of the whole Black community in Lawrence through the study of the domestic arts and literature.⁴²

The Sierra Leone Club met regularly at the homes of its members where they recited and discussed literature, and made plans about how to best serve their community. This club that

⁴⁰ Note that numerous Black-owned newspapers in Northeast Kansas often reported on newly formed clubs, however, soon ceased to receive news to report on them. Of particular interest among these newspapers is the *Leavenworth Herald*, which featured a column on the social life of Lawrence, Kans.

⁴¹ McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 18-19.

⁴² *Ibid*, 210.

was specific to Lawrence quickly became known among the clubwomen in other towns throughout the state thanks to occasional visits by members of other groups to Lawrence and vice versa. These frequent visitations allowed members to open their homes to each other and have visitors as guests at their meetings where they had the opportunity to have discussions and share thoughts with other organizations—something made possible because of the relative ease by which members were able to travel throughout the region by rail. At each meeting, roll was called and the women, as was the case with other groups in Lawrence and elsewhere in the state, were expected to answer the call of their name with a quotation of literature. This was typically a quotation of their choice, but was sometimes narrowed to one specifically from the Bible, a noted poet, or an African American author. This method of calling meetings to order points to the women’s belief in the advantages of education, always a strong impulse within the Black community, and also a strong sense of race pride and desire to celebrate their own culture while maintaining an awareness of the dominant culture in which they were immersed.⁴³

The efforts of Lawrence clubs were influenced by the desire of their middle-class female members to promote the respectability of their race. The activities of the Sierra Leone Club were frequently reported in the Black press, which came to be an institution unto itself. The *Leavenworth Herald* editorialized that “The [Sierra Leone] club is doing a noble work toward elevating the young. There should be in each city a club of this kind.”⁴⁴ Beyond the study of the domestic arts and literature, the women of this group also attempted to provide racial uplift to the other members of their community. They helped expand the educational opportunities for African Americans in the area, in 1894—only two years after the group’s formation—club

⁴³ Ibid; Note that no evidence suggests that the Sierra Leone Club existed elsewhere in the country but was instead a product of the club movement in Lawrence.

⁴⁴ “The Women,” *Leavenworth Herald* (Leavenworth, Kansas), 8 December 1894.

members began efforts to help establish an industrial school in Lawrence. The *Leavenworth Herald* admiringly reported that “The Sierra Leone Club of Lawrence has made such an advancement since its organization, February 7, 1892, that its sole object is now the erecting of an industrial school for the benefit of those who are not fortunate enough to get employment otherwise.”⁴⁵ This school was eventually opened in 1902 and provided a place where youth were taught general housework, sewing, and cooking on Saturdays. The purpose of this school was to help members of their race gain employment. This commitment to education of one type or another for all classes and abilities was one of the several strategies used by clubs throughout the state to provide racial uplift for African Americans through the development and actions of Black social societies.⁴⁶

Another of the notable clubs that formed during this period was the Progressive Club, which was founded shortly after the Civil War. The Progressive Club accepted both men and women as members, and they always held their meetings in public spaces where anyone from the community who chose to attend could do so. This club also held events at area churches during the Sunday Forums where members would recite their own work and that of famous authors. Such events were often widely attended by the black community, which allowed an air of middle-class respectability to permeate the black society of Lawrence. These performances allowed opportunities for club members to showcase their work for the rest of the community through church networks and events like the Sunday Forums.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ “Lawrence Notes,” *Leavenworth Herald* (Leavenworth, Kans.), 19 May 1894.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 210-211; “Lawrence Notes,” *Leavenworth Herald* (Leavenworth, Kansas), 19 May 1894; “Lawrence, Kas,” *Wichita Searchlight* (Wichita, Kansas), 15 November 1902.

⁴⁷ “The Progressive Club,” *Historic Times* (Lawrence, Kans.), 18 July 1891; “Lawrence Kan., Notes,” *Times-Observer* (Topeka, Kans.), 16 April 1892; “Lawrence, Kan.,” *Topeka Plaindealer*, 22 December 1912; “Lawrence, Kansas News Items,” *Capitol Plaindealer* (Topeka, Kans.), 14 February 1937.

Founded by Samuel Henry Johnson and his wife, Lula Bell Johnson, the Progressive Club was formed to improve the lives of African Americans who had previously been enslaved in the South prior to emancipation and later migrated to Kansas during the war and Exodus. The couple taught reading, basic mathematics, and home economics to students and new club members, in addition to matters of race and religion. This club was also unique in that both genders hosted meetings and also held positions of leadership within the group. This coed group provided valuable benefits to the community at large that helped to uplift the race intellectually, economically, and socially. Similar to the other groups founded in Lawrence at this time, the members of the LPC were all middle-class residents with very few exceptions. All the same, groups such as this allowed the Black community to unite and stand against the institutional racism they faced such as when groups of Lawrence's Black residents met at the one of the Baptist churches to condemn the school board for "...alleged discriminations to the colored scholars attending the public schools."⁴⁸ Although this particular attempt was ill-organized, it shows a growing consciousness among the African American population of Lawrence about the potential powers they could collectively possess. Actual efforts of the Black citizens such as this only occur after the creation of African American clubs in the town.⁴⁹

The club movement also allowed Lawrence residents to work out the "Negro Problem" as they experienced it and perceived it elsewhere in the country. Papers were regularly read out on such issues as well as the use of politics to empower the community throughout the history of this organization. Club founder and occasional president S.H. Johnson helped to push the group in directions that took a stance on the issues experienced by other members of their race in

⁴⁸ "Lawrence, Kan.," *Times-Observer* (Topeka, Kansas), 28 November 1891.

⁴⁹ "'To Better Our World' KU Exhibit Features Area Black Americans in Community Life," *Lawrence Journal-World*, 18 February 1993.

different parts of the country. The group maintained a national awareness and willingness to make their opinions known on contemporary issues to officials inside and outside of the state as exemplified by a letter sent by the members of the LPC to the governor of Texas regarding attempts to end vigilante “justice” in that state. Further evidence for the lack of any real need for a city-wide federation is also shown through this letter by the fact that several other groups including the Eureka Club and the Sierra Leone Club undersigned the resolutions made by the LPC. Similar to the many other clubs that sprang up in Lawrence around the turn of the century, the LPC did not subordinate itself to any governing body, neither a state federation nor a city-wide umbrella organization.⁵⁰

The Progressive Club often staged events and hosted banquets that welcomed the entire community to enjoy themselves. At their meetings, they sometimes invited ministers and educators from elsewhere in the region to deliver lectures on several contemporary issues. Speakers travelled to Lawrence from throughout northeastern Kansas, Western Missouri, and sometimes from Black colleges such as Fisk. On occasion however, plays would be put on that would cast club members in different roles and were done for the enjoyment of the local community and visitors to Lawrence. The LPC members hosted dinner parties in the homes of businesspeople and educators who were members whenever they had a guest speaker or visitor at one of the local churches, these offered additional opportunities for the community to celebrate their anniversaries and discuss issues important to them.⁵¹

In 1915 the Self-Culture Club entered the social scene of Lawrence when it was co-founded by Gertrude Clark and Farinda Lambkin, two members of the A.M.E. church in

⁵⁰ “An Honor to the Negro,: *Atchison Blade* (Atchison, Kansas) 18 March 1893.

⁵¹ *Historic Times* (Lawrence, Kansas), 18 July 1891; Lawrence, Kan., Notes,,” *Times-Observer* (Topeka, Kansas), 16 April 1892.

Lawrence who would remain active in club work for their entire lives. This club was a product of the A.M.E. church and its membership was drawn primarily from that denomination and would also become members of another club—The Richard Allen Society—that was also formed from congregants of the two A.M.E. churches in Lawrence. Initially the club restricted its membership to twelve married women; this was eventually extended to unwed ladies as well, which allowed the daughters of existing members to join. Each of the charter members were the wives of Lawrence entrepreneurs, elected officials, or other members of the Black elite—several of them were also business owners in their own right. Gertrude Clark was listed in the *Directory of Negro Business Establishments* as a realtor and another member, Adelia Miller operated a recreation parlor at 628 Massachusetts St. Other members of the group represented the professional class of women in Lawrence. Once The Self Culture Club changed its charter to allow unmarried women join, students and educators entered its ranks. Both Ophelia Hopkins and Mary Dillard were schoolteachers in the area and further reflect the focus of this club on education and advancement of the race. The background of these women, and those that would at various times make up its membership, also show the dominance of middle-class politics within the Black community of Douglas County that coincided with national trends. At least one of the members, Mary Dillard, had also been a member of the Lawrence Progressive Club prior to joining a literary club for women had graduated from the Douglas County Normal School by 1897 and began her career as an educator with Pinckney Elementary School the same year and later became the principal of the all-Black Lincoln school.⁵²

⁵² George R. King, *Directory of the Negro Business Establishments of Lawrence, Kansas*; Self Culture Club, “50th Anniversary Self Culture Club, 1915-1965: Little Banquet,” Lawrence, KS: Kenneth Spencer Research Library, 16 March 1965; Kathe Schick, “The Lawrence Black Community,” 59-60; “Douglas County Normal School,” *Lawrence Daily Journal*, June 11, 1895; “Teachers Chosen,” *Lawrence Daily Journal*, June 8, 1897.

From its earliest inception, the Self-Culture Club concerned itself with “Child welfare, economics, politics, literature and arts” and met every first, third, and fifth Tuesdays. The group’s focus was “...to promote the culture and entertainment of its members, for social union among other clubs...” and “...to further higher intellectual, social, and moral conditions.”⁵³ Groups like the Self-Culture Club and the Sierra Leone Club accomplished these aims in a number of ways. One of the most direct impacts on the community is the school founded through the efforts of the Sierra Leone Club, however, in both clubs the mothers would regularly bring their children to the meetings where they would be exposed to literature and discussion. Such groups—as was also the case with the LPC—also staged events that were opportunities for club members to showcase their talents in front of the entire community. Finally, the groups also provided the opportunity for African American students at the University of Kansas to participate in a social life that included other members of their race since Black students were excluded from the fraternities and sororities on campus.⁵⁴

Although one of the central aims of the Self-Culture Club was to promote social unity with other clubs generally, it remained largely independent of the Kansas State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs throughout its history and no records exist to show that it was ever a part of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs either. Instead, the women of the Self-Culture Club met regularly to discuss different aspects of domestic life, such as the education and preparation of their children for a successful life after they left home.⁵⁵ While the

⁵³ Self-Culture Club, “Self-Culture Club: The Year’s Work, 1923-1924,” Lawrence, KS: Kenneth Spencer Research Library, 1923-1924.

⁵⁴ Paula Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood: Delta Sigma Theta and the Challenge of the Black Sorority Movement* (New York: Amistad Publishing, 2006): 17-18, 31; *The Jayhawker*, Graduate Yearbook 1931, 71; Note that none of the graduate yearbooks for the entire study period listed or pictured African Americans in White fraternities or sororities. Furthermore contemporary sources L.M. Pearce and Marcet Haldeman-Julius describe in detail the exclusion of Black students from social functions and societies.

⁵⁵ Self Culture Club, “50th Anniversary Self Culture Club, 1915-1965: Little Banquet,” Lawrence, KS: Kenneth Spencer Research Library, 16 March 1965.

state federation did have similar goals, and eventually adopted the national slogan of “Lifting as We Climb,” the federation initially hesitated to become a constituent of the state federation or the NACW. One historian has identified this as a primary cause of friction among the members of the state federation and the Black women’s clubs of Lawrence. There was also the concern among several Lawrence clubwomen—and to some extent the women of neighboring Kansas City—that the state-wide federation did not reflect their middle-class views because it included large numbers of agrarian women. “Whether due to the inclusion of rural women or the Federation’s reluctance to join the national organization, or the agricultural background of most of its members and the towns they came from, the clubs in the groups in Lawrence and a few in Kansas City shunned the notion of joining the Federation.”⁵⁶

Another peculiarity of the Lawrence clubs is that unlike in Topeka and Kansas City, the members of the Sierra Leone and Self-Culture Clubs never joined with any other groups in Lawrence to create a formal city-wide federation. This was unnecessary for the Lawrence women due to the smaller Black population in their town compared to the larger concentrations in the neighboring cities. Additionally, the women of several clubs often attended the meetings of other groups, both within the town of Lawrence and at churches in neighboring cities, where exchanges of ideas and talents took place. This coupled with the news disseminated by the Black press helped to keep the Lawrence women abreast of the activities of other clubwomen in the state and region. The Sierra Leone and Self-Culture Clubs also had an annual joint meeting that was scheduled in to their normal activities.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Doretha K. Williams, “Kansas Grows the Best Wheat and the Best Race Women: Black Women’s Club Movement in Kansas 1900-30” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 2011), 77-78; Marilyn Dell Brady, “Kansas Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs,” 28.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 82-83; Self-Culture Club, “Self-Culture Club, 1934-1935,” Lawrence, KS: Kenneth Spencer Research Library, 1934-1935.

The meetings of the Sierra Leone Club and the later Self-Culture Club each began their meetings by taking roll, the ladies of these groups responded with a quote from a written text of their choice. In addition to questions of domesticity, the women of this club also discussed current events at their meetings in addition to recitations and critiques of literature. They often discussed matters that affected the national black community such as the history and influence of the Ku Klux Klan and other racial matters, as well as the inter-dependence of man and woman and their own roles as organizers and leaders.

Since the vast majority of its members were mothers, they often took their children to the meetings as well, which reinforced their influence as mothers on matters of education. Remembering his mother years later, Herbert Mitchell stated that “She was a member of the Self Culture Club...and she hauled me along as a small one.”⁵⁸ Like the other groups in the Lawrence area, the Self Culture Club encouraged the participation of youths in the discussions of the Sunday Forums held at the Baptist and A.M.E. churches in town that supported scholastic achievement, and showed their hopes that subsequent generations would continue their work for the amelioration of racist discrimination.⁵⁹

Among the commonalities these clubs shared was one of a religious element. All of the clubs that were formed by women and for women in the town of Lawrence—and even those that were created for men only and the coed Progressive Club—were each created by church members. As a consequence of this affiliation, the church itself came to be the site of many of their activities, and their fellow church members became the beneficiaries of many of their activities. While there can be no doubt that they performed a crucial role for the entire

⁵⁸ “To Better Our World: KU Exhibit Features Area Black Americans in Community Life,” *Lawrence Journal World* (Lawrence, Kansas), 18 February 1993.

⁵⁹ Self Culture Club, “Self Culture Club Presents: Mother and Boy’s Day Program at Lawrence Sunday Forum,” Lawrence, KS: Kenneth Spencer Research Library, 8 May 1927.

community, such as the work done by the Sierra Leone Club to establish a school, or the longstanding tradition of Lawrence clubs to provide charity to other members of their race that dated back to the Civil War, much of the work done by these clubs had a religious basis that emanated throughout the rest of their community and beyond. Regardless of the type of social club—whether it be literary or fraternal—these groups regularly used the institution of the Black church to disseminate their ideals for society to their neighbors and to hold themselves out as an elite.⁶⁰

The suggestion that the Black professional and middle-classes were occupied predominately by lighter skinned African Americans does not accurately depict the experience of the race in Douglas County. Although several professionals are described as lighter skinned—a fact that no doubt aided them in their daily interactions with the white community—there are several other members of the Black bourgeois who are described as being darker in complexion and serve as counter-examples to the application of any notion of status and skin tone being intimately linked. Instead, socio-economic class appears to have been the primary factor in club membership and entrance into the Black elite. The vast majority of club members attended one of the four major churches in Lawrence and had some education or financial background. The aversion of the Lawrence clubwomen to the inclusion of rural women in the state federation supports the idea that the middle-class of the town saw themselves as the pillars of the community—which in many respects they were. Furthermore, despite their choice not to join the Kansas Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs (KFCWC) at any point, they were regularly in touch with other members of that body through visits to friends and family as well as the Federation’s decision to locate their annual convention in Lawrence on multiple occasions since

⁶⁰ “Lawrence Notes,” *Leavenworth Herald* (Leavenworth, Kans.), 19 May 1892.

their founding in 1900. Social jealousies and class friction during this period exposed the difficulties of middle-class organization for the Lawrence community and those around it .⁶¹

The Lawrence clubs did include rural women from North Lawrence or elsewhere in the county, and other male citizens listed as laborers were also able to join various clubs that were the domain of the Black elite. These people, however, did not altogether exist outside the middle-class. Many of the rural women included in the Sierra Leone or Self-Culture clubs, for example, were the wives of landowners whereas men who were listed as laborers in the census were able to join the Lawrence Progressive Club and can be found in the Black press listed as members of one political club or another. While this organization was composed primarily of professors, teachers, and entrepreneurs, there were also members in more menial positions. William Gray, the son of First Regular's pastor, Gabriel Gray, was singled out by the Black press as a member of the LPC, in which his three other brothers were also members. William moved freely in Black high society perhaps because each of his brothers was a member of the professional class and perhaps because his father was a minister, a position that carried considerable weight and influence within the Black community. An additional factor in what allowed citizens outside the middle-class to join such clubs—or at least eased their entrance into those circles—was their family's longevity within the community. Gabriel Gray had arrived in Lawrence during the earliest migratory periods, thus their family was easily identified as one of the oldest in the community. Another family, the Dillards, had also been in Lawrence for a considerable time. Jessie Dillard, the father of Mary "Mamie" Dillard, was enumerated as a janitor that had migrated from Virginia, yet was also a member of the LPC. He was able to

⁶¹ Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 9-10; Marilyn Dell Brady, "Kansas Federation of Colored Women's Clubs," 20-21.; note that several regional newspapers reported on the visits of Lawrence club members to women of groups in other towns where they were welcomed at club meetings.

purchase his home in Lawrence that was located at 520 Louisiana St., and his daughter later entered the professional class on the coat-tails of her father's janitorial position. What these examples identify is that social circles were dominated by the educators, doctors, ministers, and other professionals, it was not to the exclusion of other members of the community at large. However it was generally only those with longevity in the community or some connection to other middle-class citizens that were able to become actual members, and not merely observers, of groups such as the LPC, Sierra Leone Club, and eventually the Self-Culture Club.⁶²

As the Black community grew, more African Americans were able to identify themselves with a growing middle-class during this period as well; the largely impoverished Black migrants of the 1860s and 1870s had become an increasingly prosperous group by the 1880s onwards. While the majority of African Americans continued to occupy the lower strata of the socio-economic ladder in Lawrence, there was a growing business-class within the city of former migrants that had grown to prominence, whether they did so through the establishment of businesses, the purchase of land, or their entrance to the professional class following education at the University of Kansas or the state Normal School. From 1880 to the 1920s, several of these residents chose to establish socially oriented businesses that included barber shops and pool halls that were owned by several club members; and much like elsewhere in the nation provided yet another space for residents to meet and exchange ideas. There was a beauty salon owned and operated by Minnie Adams located at 745½ Massachusetts St., the Russell Barber Shop operated by Victor Gossett at 812 Vermont St. and another a short distance away at 629 Vermont run by

⁶² Schick, "The Lawrence Black Community," 59-60; *Lawrence City Directory, 1900-1901* (Chittenden Directory Company), Spencer Research Library (Kansas Collection), RH Ser C47; also see Self-Culture Club Yearbooks for list of club membership at KSRL, University of Kansas.

D.S. Gregg. Still others created businesses that provided recreational services and goods to the Black community.⁶³

Men typically owned pool halls, groceries, hauling companies, and one hotel—the King Hotel owned by Jim King at 831 Vermont St. Women, however, ran a variety of businesses that included bakeries, restaurants, laundry services, and boarding houses. Those that owned hotels and boarding houses provided a very practical and necessary service to the African American students who attended the University of Kansas since Black students were segregated from campus housing and instead lived with prominent club members as boarders, a trend that continued until student housing was finally desegregated. Similarly, the restaurants operated by prominent Black citizens also provided students and the entire community places to refresh themselves without the biting discrimination experienced at the majority of White-owned establishments in the town. Such establishments also kept Lawrence and the surrounding area rooted in the economy and society of the Black community of the state and region as a whole since they provided the logical places to stay for visiting speakers such as ministers and educators, club members from other towns, and others who occasionally visited Lawrence or held conventions in the town such as meetings of the KFCWC.⁶⁴

There were several entrepreneurial-minded citizens who were also professionals of one kind or another. This group included grocery stores such as the one owned by Fredrick Gleed and his wife Mabel at 1741 Massachusetts St., Alex Gregg who was a cobbler at 903 Tennessee St. The Lawrence community featured a variety of businesses that served different parts of the

⁶³ *Lawrence City Directory, 1900-1901* (Chittenden Directory Company), Spencer Research Library (Kansas Collection), RH Ser C47.

⁶⁴ Note that “boarders” were generally unrelated persons living with a homeowner rather than living with a landlord while they attended the University of Kansas or worked in Lawrence; George Henry Robinson in phone interview with Susan Pogany, 14 May 1992; Dell Brady, “Kansas Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, 1900-1930,” *Kansas History*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Spring 1986), 20-21.

town, and included blacksmiths, tanners, restaurateurs, clothing cleaners and repair, and bakeries. By the latter years of the nineteenth century two graduates of KUs law school, Robert B. McWilliams and John W. Clark had established a legal practice in Lawrence at 730 Massachusetts St. Another lawyer, LeRoy Harris, later founded a practice in town on the same block with offices at 743 Massachusetts St.⁶⁵

Each of these Black-owned businesses was supported by the short-lived African American newspapers in Lawrence, and throughout the period by regional newspapers as well. The Black citizens of Lawrence and Douglas County were often prodded to support Black-owned businesses as a way to evade or possibly erode the segregation faced in the White-owned businesses of the area. The editor of the *Historic Times*, one such Black-owned newspaper in Lawrence, wrote an editorial that decried the segregation imposed a local confectionary by its white owner:

Fellow citizens, isn't it a burning shame? Right here in the city of Lawrence, 'the Athens of the West,' 'neath the eaves of the great State University, and mid churches that preach out of one blood, God created all nations'...a Behemoth is allowed to run loose and defile the good name of the fairest city in the West...Now henceforth let each appoint himself a committee of one to see to it that not one red cent of our money go to fill the coffers of the Negro-hating establishment. He refuses to allow a colored gentleman or lady to occupy a seat at one of his tables even in the remotest corner, for the purpose of eating and politely tells us that he is willing to take our money but we must go outside to eat. This is God's country, and such heathenism will not be tolerated.⁶⁶

In response to such segregation, African American business-owners banded together to form the Community Welfare Club (CWC), which printed pamphlets that also urged local African Americans to support their neighbors rather than be victimized by the racist practices

⁶⁵ *Lawrence City Directory, 1900-1901* (Chittenden Directory Company), Spencer Research Library (Kansas Collection), RH Ser C47.

⁶⁶ "Burning Shame," *Historic Times* (Lawrence, Kansas), 1890.

that had become the norm such as the exclusion shown in the press. George R. King, the group's president and the owner of King's School Specialties—a business that sold aprons, white coats, and a rub for rheumatism—urged the recipients of his club's pamphlet to support the businesses listed. King made a public notice to the reader of his *Directory of the Negro Business*

Establishments of Lawrence, Kansas:

Labor organizations and prejudicial discriminations are making it more difficult for our youth to obtain employment even after they have prepared themselves for it. We must make some provision for them as well as for ourselves. The Negro business men of Lawrence are making an attempt to find a solution to this problem and believe they should have the cooperation of the entire race in this attempt. Better patronage, better business for them means more chances for employment for those seeking it. It means a better economic position for all of us.⁶⁷

The members of this organization clearly saw their role within the community to be leaders, and the community's best chance for economic mobility and freedom from race-based discrimination within their locality. Not only parallel institutions represented by the church and the several clubs in the area, but also a parallel business community was created in Lawrence to provide alternatives to racist practices.⁶⁸

While there is no evidence to suggest that the CWC was ever officially affiliated with the National Negro Business League (NNBL) founded in 1900 by Booker T. Washington, it did serve many of the same functions for the Black community. These businesses did, however, coincide with what has been termed the “proto-Civil Rights Movement” that was led by Black professionals such as the lawyers, teachers, and doctors in the town of Lawrence that served the needs of the entire county-wide community. These were all central figures in the club life of

⁶⁷ George R. King, *Directory of the Negro Business Establishments of Lawrence, Kansas*, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas (Lawrence, Kansas).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Lawrence—directly influential on the social, economic, and educational lives of the entire Black community and its youth. These businesspeople, politicians, and professionals created parallel institutions that “...offered black Americans not only private space to buttress battered dignity, nurture positive self-images, sharpen skills, and demonstrate expertise. These safe havens sustained relationships and wove networks across communities served.”⁶⁹ This national trend of Black professionals as the middle-class leadership of their community was reflected in Lawrence and the surrounding area by the careers of Clark, McWilliams, Henry, and Harvey. None of these men appear in the meeting minutes or the membership lists of the Topeka Branch of the NNBL, yet like many of the men in that body each was a member of a local Prince Hall Freemason lodge that allowed businessmen and newspaper editors from throughout the state to attend meetings and discuss strategies for their mutual improvement and that of their communities. Women were also central to the professional class of Lawrence, and several club members were business owners in their own right and educators such as Ophelia Hopkins and Mary Dillard—who eventually became the principal of the all-black Lincoln School.⁷⁰

Each of these professionals existed within a regional group economy that accorded the possibility of advancement to African Americans through parallel development and the reliance—especially in Lawrence—on the ward system that allowed concentrations of Black population to dominate local politics within their sections of the town. Black educators from Lawrence taught at the all-Black Lincoln Elementary School in that town and also in Bloomington, which eventually became an African American town due to the outmigration of its white citizens. The Bloomington school’s last white teacher had left in 1906 and by 1915 there

⁶⁹ Darlene Clark Hine, “Black Professionals and Race Consciousness: Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, 1890-1950,” *The Journal of American History*, vol. 89, no. 4 (March 2003), 1280.

⁷⁰ Kathe Schick, “The Lawrence Black Community,” 59-60.

were no white students in attendance at the school. Numerous of these teachers were the wives or daughters of the Black elite of Lawrence, and were consequently members of the various literary clubs in that town and the members of its school board also reflected the Lawrence middle-class. Between 1915 and 1948 when the Bloomington school district became defunct, the list of teachers coincides with several members of the Self-Culture Club for that period, including Mary Washington, Ophelia Hopkins, Mae Strode, Mary Dillard, and the KU graduate Thelma Hayter. These women translated their passion for education into practice through their work with the various area schools and their teaching reflected a tangible outlet for the discussions of their literary groups.⁷¹

Apart from education, several other club members and middle-class citizens also served in public capacities in Lawrence itself. During the latter portions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, at least three African American citizens were elected or appointed to public posts that provided them some influence in the wider community of Douglas County and proffered upon them standing among others of their race. The ward system used by Lawrence for much of its early history allowed African Americans to rise to prominence through the exercise of political power. The political weight of the Black community influenced policy decisions that had a city-wide effect. One Sam Jeans—the husband of a Sierra Leone Club member named Belle Jeans—had by the 1890s become a police officer in Lawrence, and had acquitted himself well enough that by 1894 he had been appointed as Assistant Marshall, in which capacity he exercised leadership over the entire police force during the illness of the sitting Marshall. This elevation of an African American to a city-wide position of authority occurred just two years after the brutal lynching of three Black men from the bridge leading into

⁷¹ Goldie Piper Daniels, “Rural Schools & Schoolhouses of Douglas County,” 1-2.

North Lawrence, and was made possible due to the political competition of the era following the formation of the Populist Party in Kansas that threatened Republican domination.⁷²

The University of Kansas, like the community that surrounded it, was also the site of institutionalized racist discrimination that barred Black students from housing and disallowed them of the opportunity to participate in the broader associational life of students on the campus. African American students at the University of Kansas experienced the ingrained racist attitudes of their fellow white students, administrators, and educators, and leaned on the Black community of Lawrence for social, religious, and logistical support. Black students had always been permitted to attend the University of Kansas in theory from its earliest foundation, yet not until 1870 was the first African American student, a woman, enrolled in preparatory classes and later admitted to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences in 1873. Over the course of the years, the university's Black student body was drawn from the sons and daughters of the African American middle-class and from Black citizens elsewhere in the state, yet many students also came from Missouri as well. Like the elementary schools, however, these students experienced segregation and exclusion that exposed a deeply ingrained contradiction between the "Free State" mythology and that ideal's application at what was and continues to be the flagship university of the state of Kansas.⁷³

The segregation at the University of Kansas—like that at the elementary level and high school—took a variety of forms. Firstly, while African Americans were permitted to attend the colleges, for much of the school's history they were not allowed to matriculate with certain

⁷² *Lawrence Journal* (Lawrence, Kansas), 21 and 25 January 1894;

⁷³ Larry M. Pearce, "Colored Students and Graduates of the University of Kansas," *The Graduate Magazine of the University of Kansas*, vol. 7, no. 8. (May 1909): 294; Marcet Haldeman-Julius, "What the Negro Students Endure in Kansas," *Haldeman-Julius Monthly* vol. 7, no. 2 (January 1928): 6; William Tuttle, "Separate but Not Equal: African Americans and the 100-Year Struggle for Equality in Lawrence and at the University of Kansas, 1850s-1960," in *Embattled Lawrence: Conflict & Community*, ed. Dennis Domer and Barbara Watkins (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Continuing Education, 2001): 144.

degrees, for example that would allow them to become medical doctors. Frederick Harvey, a noted leader in the community attended KU in in the 1880s, yet was required to finish his studies at Mehary Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee in 1892 before returning to Lawrence to practice medicine. His elder brother, Sherman, however, was able to get a Bachelor of Arts degree before teaching a number of years at the public schools. After a time serving as a Captain for the Black regiment in the Philippines alongside John Clark who had been elected one of the regiment's lieutenants, he was able to receive a degree from the Law School at KU after which he was elected as Clerk of the District Court. It is difficult to determine why one degree could, and another could not, be conferred on an African American by the university. What is certain however is that the social attitudes of the Lawrence community went a long way towards influencing campus policies and practices.⁷⁴

African Americans were routinely rejected from attendance at concerts or even to participate in chorus programs through the College of Fine Arts due to the racist whims of the white population in Lawrence. The wife of a Kansas publisher who often contributed to the monthly magazine printed by her family's press, Marcet Haldeman-Julius observed in 1928 that:

At Lawrence the town has made the University downright ridiculous. For it is the consensus of opinion that it is only because of the Lawrence people that the Negro students at the University must be humiliated whenever a world artist comes to town. At all convocations and concerts at which no admission is charged all the students have been permitted to sit wherever they wished. But at the moment the Lawrence people become an element in the situation the University becomes nervous, deprecating and ashamed of part of her children.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Edward Harvey "The Harvey Family," Kansas Collection, RH MS D31, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, 2.

⁷⁵ Haldeman-Julius, "What the Negro Students Endure in Kansas," 15.

Although there were certain exceptions to this rule among certain instructors at the university, the townspeople of Lawrence were able to bend the college to the racist attitudes of the white population. Other schools that restricted African American students were the Home Economics Department and also the School of Education, where Black students were not allowed to practice teaching among the primary schools of the town. Athletics was an additional site of exclusion for Black students. In much the same way that African Americans were largely excluded from participating in a chorus alongside white singers, Black athletes were also barred from participation in joining any of the sporting teams by the 1920s during the national height of Jim Crow. This policy change happened despite the ability of Black students—such as the Harvey brothers, each of whom lettered in college sports—to play sports during the 1880s and 1890s.⁷⁶

For the majority of the period between the 1870s and the 1910s, students at the University of Kansas continued to remain active in the club life of the community where they studied. The majority of the African American students who attended KU were from Missouri, Lawrence itself, or one of the nearby communities in Kansas. Students were members of organizations that included the Sierra Leone Club, the Self-Culture Club, and the Progressive Club in large part because there were no fraternities or sororities on campus that would accept them as pledges. This began to change in 1915 with the establishment of Alpha Kappa Alpha, the first Black sorority on campus. Three additional all-Black Greek organizations soon followed, which included the sorority Delta Sigma Theta in 1923 that provided African American students the opportunity to pursue goals collectively in service to their community and also enrich their educational experiences. The Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity formed at KU in 1917 after the original chapter at Cornell formed in 1906 had spread to other campuses. A second all-

⁷⁶ Ibid, 7; Edward Harvey “The Harvey Family,” 2-3.

Black fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi, was established on the campus in 1920 and was “...based on brotherhood with ‘achievement’...as its fundamental purpose.”⁷⁷

Several of the sons and daughters of African Americans who were active in one club or another themselves became members of these Black organizations on campus that continued to work alongside the town’s other groups and churches. This club involvement on the state university’s campus and the close affiliation of Black students with the surrounding community became necessary due to a racial climate on campus that was at best frigid and unwelcoming. The campus Greek organizations and the Black clubs and businesses of the town maintained a close connection in part because of the exclusion African American students experienced in local cafes and social activities like choruses and athletics. Prominent Black women such as Mrs. Clark, Mrs. Kiser, and Ella Bowers—each of whom had lived in Lawrence and actively participated in the community for years—served as the house mothers for the fraternities, which in turn often worked closely with the sororities and clubs of the town. The Greek organizations held a number of dances and formals that allowed them to socialize amongst each other and unwind. These were supported by the local Black-owned businesses that provided with services such as photography and musicians. In addition, the sororities held fashion shows that were also supported by entrepreneurs—whose businesses were well advertised in the programs and fliers for these events—that helped to raise money for educational advancement since so many of the African American students were typically self-supporting. In return, these clubs provided assistance to the Black community of which they were a part, staged plays and other cultural

⁷⁷ “Alpha Phi Alpha,” *The Jayhawker* (University of Kansas Yearbook, 1920), 168; “Founder’s Day Party: Mu Chapter Kappa Alpha Psi, 1920-1937,” Lawrence, KS: Kenneth Spencer Research Library; “Kappa Alpha Psi,” *The Jayhawker* (University of Kansas Yearbook, 1964), 178.

productions at which townspeople were invited, and served as a symbol to justify the long-standing focus on education of many club and church members in the town.⁷⁸

The effect of club life in Lawrence—and by extension Douglas County—had a profound effect on the lives of its African American residents. As the 1920s approached, the Black community of Lawrence and that of Douglas County had coalesced around their institution of the church, various clubs, and a group economy that provided a basis for society life. Although the parallel development of the race was not without its problems as manifested through issues of class and the racial attitudes that caused the out-migration of many African American citizens, it nonetheless created spaces and individuals that would help the community as a whole advance economically and socially.

Black churches, the oldest African American institutions in the community had a direct effect on the lives of all the Black citizens in the town, even those that were not regular members or attended church services irregularly. These churches provided opportunities for the communities they served to join in celebration of dates that were meaningful to the Black community, such as the August celebrations often held to commemorate Black independence in the West Indies and the Emancipation Proclamation. Very important matters were also the topics of discussion at the Sunday Forums held by the major churches. These forums allowed members of the community to gather and hear advice on everything from financial matters to sanitation and health, and while it is impossible to ascertain the extent to which such information helped to alleviate problematic issues of personal economy and living conditions, they undoubtedly provided a valuable service to those who attended. As time progressed, the four

⁷⁸ “Second Fashion Show: Auspices of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority,” Lawrence, KS: Kenneth Spencer Research Library (University of Kansas), 13 May 1933; “Alpha Kappa Alpha Presents Carolene: A Musical Comedy in Two Acts,” Lawrence, KS: Kenneth Spencer Research Library (University of Kansas), n.d.; “An Hour of Music,” Mu of Kappa Alpha Psi, Lawrence, KS: Kenneth Spencer Research Library (University of Kansas), 7 December 1941.

main churches in the town of Lawrence also came to be identified with an emerging middle-class and served as the basis for the clubs formed by their members.⁷⁹

Some clubs were the direct result of affiliation with one church or another, such as the various sewing circles that met at the churches. These circles eventually grew into church-based clubs like the Richard Allen Society at the St. Luke A.M.E. Church in Lawrence, which met for a variety of reasons. This group was founded in 1930 by Gertrude Clark and others to honor the founder of the national A.M.E. church. Like the other clubs that formed, the Richard Allen Society recited poetry and biblical scripture and collected dues from its coed membership to assist with the church and community engagement. Several of the leaders and committee members of this group were often women, who had free reign to decide the direction in which the group would go and were responsible for planning dances, recitations, and tea parties in service to their church. Many of the same female members were also a part of the Stitch and Chatter Quilt and Flower Club founded in 1934 that met to sew and quilt together, which helped to provide another source of income in support of the church and also the ability to donate their items for charity. In addition to these, there were a host of Ladies' Auxiliaries that were responsible for Sunday Schools, meal and event planning, and fundraising for the church.⁸⁰

Other groups were perhaps the product of church members, yet were not an arm of any one church and held their meetings outside of the institution in private homes. Despite their predominately middle-class membership, these clubs sought to provide a means of racial uplift that would benefit the entirety of the race within Douglas County. The efforts of such groups as

⁷⁹ Richard Sheridan, "From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas," 47; *Topeka Plaindealer*, February 28, 1907.

⁸⁰ "The Stitch and Chatter Quilt and Flower Club," Yearbook, Kenneth Spencer Research Library (University of Kansas), 12 October 1940; "Richard Allen Society, 1937-1938," Yearbook, Kenneth Spencer Research Library (University of Kansas), 1938; Note: There is no evidence to suggest that the Richard Allen Society was part of a wider AME trend in the region, but did participate in literary events staged at the area churches; for information on Richard Allen see, Dorothy Porter, *Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1995), 197.

the Sierra Leone Club helped to build a technical school that operated on a similar model as the Tuskegee Institute in the South, while several members of the various clubs themselves pursued traditional liberal arts educations, established businesses, and were elected to positions of leadership for the Black community and on occasion the entirety of Lawrence or the wider county. Historians have argued that the racist attitudes of the Democratically-minded residents of Douglas County led to an outmigration of African Americans for Black Meccas in the Northeast, the club movement helped to ensure that many decided to stay in the place of their birth to find some way to affect change in their local community. Although some talented Black residents did leave the area, those that decided to stay in Douglas County carved out a place for themselves as the leaders of the Black community in business and in politics. Graduates of the University of Kansas were at the center of the Black community and provided several of the services, spaces, and impetus that allowed the club movement to remain viable over the course of decades; and also made parallel development possible.⁸¹

The racist policies practiced by the townspeople of Lawrence and the administrators at the University of Kansas helped to ensure that African American businesses in Lawrence would prosper for several decades. The discrimination against Black students and residents, as well as their total exclusion from cafes and housing at the University of Kansas meant that many of the Black-owned restaurants received business from members of their own race. Newspaper editors and publications printed and distributed by the businessmen themselves argued for increased African American patronage at African American businesses. From 1879 to 1930, wide varieties of businesses were established in the town of Lawrence that provided the entire Black community of Douglas County services and entertainments. Black businesses included pool

⁸¹ William Tuttle, "Separate but Not Equal," 141.

halls and recreation parlors, laundries, hauling companies, blacksmiths, music studios, tanneries, masons, photographers, grocers, beauty parlors, and barber shops where Black or even White patrons frequented. Expectedly, several of these business owners were successful in an atmosphere of high racial tension and the continual abasement of African Americans through segregation practices that affected Black lives in education, in financial opportunity, and socially.⁸²

To this group must be added the many professionals that included lawyers, judges, policemen or sheriffs, doctors, and educators of primary and college students that formed the backbone of the Black elite in Douglas County through the decades and acted as a part of the proto-Civil Rights Movement in America's heartland. This group was an integral element of the group economy in Douglas County and situated within the larger framework of northeastern Kansas and western Missouri. This segment of the Black population was actively involved in the club movement throughout the study period and thus helped to prevent an exodus of Blacks from Douglas County. Politicians and scholars such as John Clark, Larry Pearce, Henry Fuel, and S.H. Johnson acted as the elite that remained in the area and were constantly involved in the efforts of the clubs to provide racial uplift to their neighbors and children. Each of these three groups—entrepreneurs, university students, and professionals—helped bond the community closer together. Very soon they would include themselves in national struggles for equality and join what has been argued to be where the community experienced another attempt at grassroots organization to combat the effects of Jim Crow throughout the nation.

⁸² Ibid.

New Racial Politics: Lawrence and Post-War Civil Rights Organizations, 1920s-1948

The return of Black troops from World War I heralded an end to the accommodationist era of Black racial politics. The Black community of Lawrence and Douglas County instead moved toward a reformist stance that openly criticized Jim Crow practices in the “Free State” and sought new ways to directly challenge racist practices. The 1920s represented a shift from the Washingtonian style of conservative racial politics pursued in the preceding decades for a more radical form that sought to agitate the existing racial climate in Lawrence that placed the local community within the national fight for equality.

One of the organizations that was established in Lawrence during the early 1920s was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This group formed nationally in 1909 and was preceded by the Niagara Movement. These groups, and the interracial members of the NAACP, rejected the accommodationist stance of Booker T. Washington and believed the best course was not to await acceptance by Whites, but to actively push for an end to discriminatory practices and racist violence such as lynching.⁸³

The racist violence of “Red Summer’s” immediate aftermath affected Kansas as well. There was the killing of an African American man by police at the town of Newton in 1919. Later in October and December of 1920 there were also race riots in Leavenworth and Montgomery counties. Clearly the racial politics of 1880-1915 had proven their ineffectiveness since the violent years of 1919 and 1920 had shown that African Americans would not be safe from racist violence and discrimination without citizenship rights. The nearby cities of Topeka and Kansas City had already established their own chapters of the NAACP, but it was not until

⁸³ Mark Robert Schneider, *We Return Fighting: The Civil Rights Movement in the Jazz Age* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 20-23

1921 that Lawrence residents petitioned for inclusion. That same year, the African American community of Lawrence, Kansas received its charter as an official branch of the NAACP.⁸⁴

Not surprisingly, it was several club members, ministers, property owners, and business people who formed this chapter of the NAACP. Many of the men, women, and students who had previously joined other city-wide clubs or Greek organizations on campus now for the first time joined a national organization that allowed them to do more than focus on their own locality and advancement alongside but separate from Whites. The charter application listed several students, entrepreneurs, ministers and members of the professional class whom had always been a part of Lawrence's club movement. In addition to these, a wider cross-section of the Black community was represented by the acceptance of housekeepers and common laborers who had only irregularly been included in the club movement when family connections or longevity in the community made this possible. Although members of the literary clubs that continued to function remained rooted in the middle-class and respectability politics, the Black community of Lawrence had by this time bonded together to form a more inclusive organization based on the national model of the NAACP. This new national association permitted the Lawrence Black community to indirectly influence the events that would help shape the next several decades through seemingly small, yet vital cooperation with the NAACP while it also provided them with valuable experience of grassroots organizations that would eventually come to be the primary form of racial politics and interracial cooperation.⁸⁵

The Lawrence branch of the NAACP was never at the forefront of any national struggle for equal rights during the 1920s to the mid-1940s when it temporarily dissolved. The Lawrence

⁸⁴ Brent M.S. Campney, *This is Not Dixie*, 237.

⁸⁵ Application for Charter, Lawrence, Kansas to NAACP Board of Directors, 8 April 1921; Letter to Henry N. Stone from Director of Branches's Office, 6 October 1921; Mark Robert Schneider, *We Return Fighting: The Civil Rights Movement in the Jazz Age* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 4.

chapter that enlisted its members from Douglas County did contribute indirectly to the national goals of desegregation in employment, education, and other social spaces through their attempts to organize and expand the local chapter. Inclusion of new members brought increased payment of dues that could be sent to the national office and also helped raise awareness at the local level that provided a wider foundation from which the racial status quo in Lawrence could be challenged. The payment of dues contributed to national struggles, of which the Lawrence members of the NAACP were kept fully aware of through regular reporting in the Black press and materials sent from the New York head office on matters regarding national focus. As Mark Schneider has argued, "...to understand African America in the 1920s, we must get off the A-train to Harlem and head out of Manhattan for points west and south. In the vast America beyond, three hundred to four thousand African-American branches of the NAACP fought for voting rights and education, against segregation and lynching, in a thousand battles both spectacular and quotidian."⁸⁶ For over two decades, the Lawrence chapter represented a portion of the movement that helped to drive the entire race toward inclusion and equality within American society.

In November of 1942, Reverend Wesley S. Sims and his wife, Rosa Sims became the new President and Secretary of the Lawrence Branch. One of their sons, Paul Sims was a student at the University of Kansas where he helped form a Youth Council of the NAACP on campus in March of 1943. Along with the student involvement of the Greek organizations formed over 20 years before, the Youth Council provided another avenue for collective action by African American students. This organization helped to fuel the activism of students who not long after

⁸⁶ Schneider, *We Return Fighting*, 4.

the establishment of the Youth Council challenged the segregation and sub-standard conditions they faced when attending Kansas University in noticeably direct ways.⁸⁷

In efforts to combat discrimination in Douglas County and the state, the Lawrence chapter of the NAACP held rallies and mass meetings where members would hear the presidents of other chapters speak—whether hosted by the Lawrence branch or the Youth branch, the keynote speaker at these rallies was often Rev. William H. Williamson who headed the Leavenworth chapter, was the minister of the Evangelist A.M.E. Zion Church, and a veteran of the Great War. The Sims typically held their meetings in the Ninth Street Baptist Church during the evenings, and the subject was usually centered on the personal experiences of racism in Lawrence and at KU. Members would also share thoughts and have discussions on how to fight back against that racism or at the very least circumvent the worst of it. One tactic involved moral suasion such as when the Sims family voiced the concerns of the NAACP and its Youth Council to Governor Frank Schoeppel. They cited several long standing discriminatory practices still in place at the University of Kansas, such as the ban on African American female students' residence in the Home Economics practice home, the segregated seating practices of the Memorial Union, and the prohibition against Black students living in residence halls. Each of these practices was defended by Chancellor Deane Mallott who claimed that such policies allowed the students to live and study together without undue hardship.⁸⁸

Rosa Sims was elected chapter President with Ms. Minnie Lucas as her Secretary in late 1943. The members of this group found no issue with a woman as the head of their local

⁸⁷ Kristine M. McCusker, “The Forgotten Years’ of America’s Civil Rights Movement: Wartime Protests at the University of Kansas, 1939-1945,” in *Embattled Lawrence: Conflict & Community*, ed. Dennis Domer and Barbara Watkins (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Continuing Education, 2001), 187; Folder on “Civil Rights” in vertical files at Watkins Community Museum of History, Lawrence, Kansas.

⁸⁸ Rosa Sims and Minnie M. Lucas, “Know the Truth” (NAACP flier), 8 January 1943; Paul Sims and Martina Washington, “Help Make Kansas Free of Discrimination Toward Negroes,” (Youth Council:NAACP flier), 19 February 1943; Kristine M. McCusker, “The Forgotten Years,” 187-188.

organization—the community’s long experience with women in a variety of leadership roles had singled them out as influential members of the town. As the wife of a church leader who had stepped down, Rosa Sims also had the prestige accorded to the wife of a minister. For perhaps another year the work of the group progressed somewhat smoothly, yet by 1944 rivalries within the Lawrence branch led to increased dysfunction and the breakdown of cohesion among the chapter’s membership that was plagued by internal strife. This prevented the group’s ability to present a united front against the issues it was initially established to fight against.

Correspondence between the local branch and the national office increasingly came to be problems over the issue of dues-paying members that had not received their membership cards and other administrative matters. The NAACP in Lawrence received materials on how to best organize their chapter and information about ways of approaching segregation, but there was no concrete movement to effectively challenge segregation in the town until after World War II. The chapter was plagued by an inability to ensure that members received their cards, an issue that proved problematic enough that Mrs. Sims was soon voted out of office for 1944, and likely owing to the problematic ways in which she influenced the direction of the Youth Council.⁸⁹

Sims was replaced as President by Reverend W.A. Jackson and his wife, Mrs. Corinne Jackson as secretary. By this time, the Lawrence branch exhibited an exasperating inability to function with any cohesiveness. Letters sent by Rev. Jackson to Walter White and Ella J. Baker complained of internal discord within his chapter during the same periods that Mrs. Sims also wrote to the national headquarters claiming that she was still president of the branch. Clearly the chapter had difficulties with presenting a unified plan to challenging the experience of

⁸⁹ The issue of membership cards arose frequently during Sims’ term as president and repeated requests for cards were sent directly to the national office by Lawrence members. It was partly issues arising from those missing cards and the accusation of embezzlement against Rosa Sims that led to the altercation between Sims and Jackson at the Ninth St. Baptist Church that required the intervention of the police.

discrimination in Lawrence due to the divided nature of the membership that supported one president or the other.⁹⁰

Frustrated with the deadlock of the local organization, Reverend Jackson wrote to Walter White that “I should like to call your attention to a deplorable conflict of personalities among the officers of the Lawrence branch of the N.A.A.C.P. For the past several months it has paralyzed the effectiveness of this chapter.”⁹¹ Jackson requested that representatives with authority from the national office be sent to help straighten out the difficulties of the Lawrence branch, which showed his understanding and experience that he was powerless to control the factions formed by his members. While there is no evidence that a representative was ever sent, the conflict of personalities had all but doomed the Lawrence NAACP and led to the temporary closing of the branch later in the 1940s. Members paid their monetary dues to the organization, but were reluctant to take an active part in the chapter’s business because of the icy tension between the Sims and the Jacksons.⁹² This tension led to alleged violence during one meeting in late 1944 when Mrs. Sims accused Rev. Jackson of battery during an argument in the basement of the Ninth Street Baptist Church. The charges were dismissed at trial, showing a lack of evidence on that charge; however, Mrs. Sims was herself accused and fined for a disturbance of the peace for the same incident. This altercation arose from an argument about the local chapter’s finances that occurred at the meeting; cards had not been sent to local members and seem to have never been requested during the tenure of the Sims family.⁹³

⁹⁰ Letter from Revered W.A. Jackson to Walter White, 13 February 1944.

⁹¹ Letter to Walter White from Reverend W.A. Jackson, 13 February 1944.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Letter from Ella J. Baker to Homer A. Jack, 25 August 1944; Letter from Ella J. Baker to Rev. W.A. Jackson, 1 December 1944.

Internal strife did not completely consume the time of the Lawrence NAACP, however. Serious efforts were made in the town to fight back against social inequalities. Wesley Sims Jr.—the brother of Paul Sims who had helped organize the Youth Council at KU—had gone to fight in Italy during World War II. Similar to the thousands of African American veterans who then returned from the war, Sims was immediately confronted with the social injustices he had gone to Europe to fight against. Upon his return from the war, Sims—a decorated veteran—went to see a movie with his wife at the Granada Theater operated by Ted Davis and was forcibly removed when he refused to move to a different section of the balcony. Sims himself pointed out the problematic disparity between the rhetoric used against the Nazis and the practices used against African Americans at home in a letter to the editor of the *Journal World* in 1945, he wrote that:

After having spent 3 years in the Army with over a year in combat in Europe, I returned home. While overseas in a non-democratic civilization I was treated like a gentleman. When in Rome and the Vatican City I met the Pope and played the organ in the Great St. Peters Cathedral, but when I returned to Lawrence, Kansas, and went to a theater with my wife and sat in the same seats we sat in before I went into the Army, the manager had the police put us, both members of the Armed Forces out, because we would not move over to the other side of the balcony.⁹⁴

Many of the theaters of Lawrence had always been segregated, and Wesley Sims had attempted to sit in the same section he always had when attending the theater, however, this incident sparked the desire of residents to finally end segregation in a town where the Free State myth of racial harmony was gospel. This incident involved two serious contradictions to the Free State ideology that the NAACP and other residents sought to challenge. First, the state of Kansas had laws that in theory were meant to prevent discrimination based on race in public places and schools—both had been consistently ignored by the city council of Lawrence since the 1860s-

⁹⁴ Letter from Cpl. Wesley S. Sims, Jr. to Editor of the *Journal World*, 26 December 1945.

70s. Secondly, the police had been used to eject Wesley Sims and his wife from the theater, which proved too much for a small number of sympathetic White citizens.⁹⁵

A number of letters were passed between members of the Lawrence branch with Rosa Sims as their spokesperson and the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund lawyer Thurgood Marshall concerning the best way to proceed. As of the 26th of December a petition had already been sent to the city council signed by over 600 residents that had the effect of forcing the city council to remove the police force from any obligation to intervene in the removal of African Americans from movie theaters. The council also removed the requirement of city licenses from the operation of theaters in Lawrence, which had the effect of perpetuating discriminatory practices. Marshall suggested the use of political action to elect a city council that would reinstate the licensure requirement to ensure the compliance of local theaters with the state anti-discrimination laws. This tactic failed, however, and a lawsuit was brought against Ted Davis in *State vs. Ted Davis* to provide legal redress and a model for other communities in Kansas to legally challenge such practices. Unfortunately for the cause, the case was dropped when Ted Davis died of natural causes before its conclusion, which prevented any precedent in the state of Kansas relating to the segregation of movie houses that could then have been used against similar practices at state universities—a practice also against the state laws and contradictory to the policies of the Board of Regents.⁹⁶

Aside from the failure to integrate local cinemas, the Lawrence NAACP's problem with membership cards continued into 1945, and so did leadership difficulties of the Lawrence branch

⁹⁵ Ibid; Letter from Mrs. W.S. (Rosa) Sims to Thurgood Marshall, 26 December 1945; "Veteran Meets Discrimination," *Lawrence Journal World*, 26 December 1945.

⁹⁶ Letter from Mrs. W.S. (Rosa) Sims to Thurgood Marshall, 26 December 1945; Letter from Thurgood Marshall to Mrs. W.S. (Rosa) Sims, 2 January 1946; "Veteran Meets Discrimination," *Lawrence Journal World*, 26 December 1945; "Nov. Term of Court Opens," *Parsons Sun* (Parsons, Kans.), 6 November 1946.

that combined with the unwillingness of the city council to hinder the group's ability to effectively mount any serious challenge to the segregation of public places. In that year Rev. Jackson had been replaced by a Mr. Bowers as president of the chapter with Amy Ewing as his secretary. Bowers ran into several of the same difficulties as his predecessor and by July 1945 Mrs. Ewing wrote Ella Baker to report that "Mr. Bowers, the president of our branch resigned in a fit of anger...He has never come back or taken part in any of the meetings."⁹⁷ After this, the NAACP in Lawrence limped on for about another year, by 1946-47, Fred Taylor had become president but the group quickly folded and ceased to exist. By 1948, H.N. Stone—the man who had regularly served as the chapter's secretary until the 1940s—wrote to the national office reporting that the chapter had been dead in Lawrence "for quite some time;" however, Stone reported that funds had been recently discovered. These funds, Stone hoped, would be turned over to Elisha Scott for the Legal Defense Fund's use in Topeka, Kansas and the remainder sent to the national office in New York.⁹⁸

The local chapter of the NAACP in Lawrence had folded under the weight of interpersonal friction among members and the presidents who attempted to lead the organization. Unlike the several clubs that came before it, the NAACP closed in Lawrence before it was able to accomplish much, and would not reopen for several more years. Despite its short life span, the Lawrence NAACP was able to accomplish two notable things. First of all, it was able to provide funds through the collection of dues for use by the organization's national efforts to bring precedents against segregation and thus financially support the movement towards the Civil Rights Era. Residents such as H.N. Stone and others recognized the significance of legal challenges to Jim Crow, this helped to bring them into the NAACP in the first place and is also

⁹⁷ Letter to Ella J. Baker from Amy Ewing, 17 July 1945.

⁹⁸ Letter to NAACP from H.N. Stone, 29 November 1948.

shown by the recognition that funds from their defunct chapter should be given to one of the lawyers who later argued in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case in Topeka, Kansas during the 1950s. In the grand scheme of things, the amount of money provided by the Douglas County community was not a staggering sum, but what they did provide helped to challenge inequality on a national level when combined with funds sent by other chapters. The second and more direct reality of the NAACP in Lawrence was the additional experience with grassroots organization that was built upon the decades of work already done in service to the community. African American students, professionals, and club members in addition to their allies had been presented with a local model for approaches to combat segregation. In the following years, Black and White residents continued to form interracial organizations that used a combination of direct challenges to Jim Crow practices, moral suasion, and cooperatives to change the social reality of Lawrence, Kansas. The NAACP in Lawrence was the longest lived civil rights group in the town and was yet another step in the creation of later groups that helped to end segregation in the town, a social reality that persisted well after the successful challenge of the *Brown v. Board* case in 1953.⁹⁹

Among those groups that formed during the decline of the NAACP was the Lawrence League for the Practice of Democracy (LLPD). The LLPD was an organization formed by citizens that included interracial membership and actively worked to end discrimination in the town. In late 1945 the LLPD was formed by a dozen citizens who had by this time become alarmed with the discriminatory practices they saw in their community after a war had recently been fought against fascism abroad. Their goal was "...to foster an encourage, by whatever means possible, the actual practice of the declared American principals of democracy, justice,

⁹⁹ Ibid.

and complete equality and opportunity, with particular emphasis upon better inter-racial understanding and cooperation, and good will, since it is in this field that these principals are at present most frequently violated.”¹⁰⁰ In response to what the group felt were violations of the racial harmony of Lawrence, they began the LLPD and began encouraging membership among their neighbors and White business owners. The organization met monthly and eventually grew to include over 500 members. The LLPD did not require any membership fees to be paid and instead relied on donations from those involved and other citizens around town who were sympathetic enough to donate to the causes outlined in the group’s pledge to resist and counteract racism—acceptance of which was the only requirement for membership. The LLPD also had a publication, the *L.L.P.D. Bulletin* that was printed and distributed monthly. This bulletin, like other organizations’ publications, kept the Lawrence community informed on the actions of the LLPD itself, as well as statewide and national efforts to combat racism and segregation. Far more than rhetoric, the members of the LLPD put their desires for racial equality into practice with cooperative initiatives such as the daycare it ran during the 1940s that continued to function well after the organization itself disbanded. To participate in this daycare, mothers simply had to volunteer their time on a rotating basis to look after the children and meet on weekends to help repair toys and clean alongside a small fee that bought juice and snacks for all the children.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰); “What is the LLPD?,” (brochure) Ethel Moore Family Collection, Kansas Collection, RH MS 559, KSRL, University of Kansas Libraries; “Membership Card,” Lawrence League for Practice of Democracy; “LLPD Constitution,” note that these and all subsequent LLPD documents come from the Ethel Moore Collection unless otherwise stated; “Lawrence League for Practice of Democracy” (Membership card), Kansas Collection; “LLPD Constitution,” Kansas Collection; See also William Tuttle, “Separate but Not Equal,” 147-148.

¹⁰¹ “21 Enrolled in Nursery Group,” *Lawrence League for Practice of Democracy Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 4 (September 1948); “What is the LLPD?,” KSRL Kansas Collection.

The LLPD made several such efforts that attempted to mitigate and then roll back racist practices in Lawrence during the 1940s, and for the entirety of its existence maintained a better cohesiveness than the NAACP chapter had even though several former NAACP members also joined the Lawrence League at an early stage. The club members who were involved in the African American club movement of Lawrence acted as a bridge between the various organizations that existed during this time. Gertrude Clark and Mary Dillard each acted as house mothers for African American Greek life at KU in addition to their involvement in church-based and literary groups, Black business owners George R. King, H.N. Stone, and Fred Taylor were also members. Much like the clubs that had come before it, the LLPD staged community town hall style meetings at which the diverse economic, social, and racial components that made up Lawrence came together to discuss what to do about the routinized discrimination that existed in their midst—at the University and in the many shops, restaurants, and theaters throughout the town. These calls for interracial community-wide discussions were sometimes met with sympathy or a simple curiosity by several business owners and prominent citizens, and at other times with outright disdain and dismissiveness. In January 1947, Reverend C. Fosberg Hughes of the Plymouth Congregational Church and President of the LLPD that year wrote extensively to local White businessmen and professionals urging them to attend a meeting at his church located at 945 Vermont St. The majority of these recipients respectfully declined. For the entirety of its existence in Lawrence, the LLPD membership was viewed as “outsiders,” out-of-town agitators who only sought to upset the status quo of race relations in the town. Many of the members were students and most were somehow connected to the university. While a number of its members were seen as temporary residents, there is no doubt that the majority of those involved in the LLPD were longtime or lifelong residents of Lawrence. Several members were

students, but there were also many professors, and ministers in addition to their wives that had all been longtime residents of Lawrence and actively involved in the social life of their community—multiple groups that had previously worked together continued to do so under the organization of the LLPD.¹⁰²

In the wake of World War II, students at the University of Kansas joined another national organization when they petitioned in early 1947 for affiliation with the Congress of Racial Equality that had been formed in 1942 to combat segregation. This move by university students in Lawrence and on other campuses in Kansas and Missouri again signaled a clear departure from the racial politics of the past and showed students were increasingly willing to take more direct challenges against the racial discrimination of their campuses and towns. At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) held May 3-4, 1947 in Cleveland, Ohio, Lawrence students who had been inspired to seek inclusion by the direct action tactics of Bayard Rustin and CORE's freedom rides in –date of rides- were formally accepted as an affiliate of the national organization. In accepting the Lawrence students, CORE continued their habit of establishing local chapters in the Midwestern states. Although CORE had aimed to create a nation-wide mass movement, by 1947 it existed as a patchwork of local organizations that were situated primarily in the Midwest, with the highest concentration in Ohio, Illinois, and Kansas. There were still fewer in the Northeast where three chapters existed in Syracuse, Philadelphia, and New York City.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Rusty Monhollon, "Taking the Plunge: Race, Rights, and the Politics of Desegregation in Lawrence, Kansas, 1960," in *Embattled Lawrence: Conflict & Community*, eds. Dennis Domer and Barbara Watkins (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Continuing Education, 2001): 195; Letter from C. Fosberg Hughes to A.B. Weaver, 25 January 1947; Letter from A.B. Weaver to C. Fosberg Hughes, 28 January 1947; note that C. Fosberg Hughes wrote extensively and received numerous replies, for more see Ethel Moore Collection, KSRL, University of Kansas.

¹⁰³ August Meir and Elliott Rudwick, *Core: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 23,56; Deborah Gray White et. al, *Freedom on My Mind: A History of African Americans with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2013): 567; Letter from George M. Houser to Wesley Elliott, 10 May 1947; "Congress of Racial Equality: Affiliation Blank," 17 January 1947.

The University of Kansas CORE was a group initially composed of a coalition between other campus and Lawrence organizations that included the LLPD, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the Negro Youth, and the staff of *The Dove*—a student run pacifist newspaper on campus. The group petitioned for federation with CORE in January 1947 and already had approximately 65 general members and three executive members, Frank Stannard as Chairman, Beth Bell as Vice-Chairman, and Wesley Elliott as Secretary-Treasurer and a rank-and-file member of the LLPD. Stannard, Bell, and Elliott were also white members of the pacifist newsletter the *Dove's* editorial board. This early cohort of CORE's local Lawrence chapter saw the benefits of building coalitions among the civil rights organizations in the area, but also felt that a group composed of students who worked for specific aims would benefit the movement. In their petition for inclusion in CORE, the group's leadership stated of their membership that "These people thought it would be best to form an independent organization to carry out direct action as outlined by Bayard Rustin."¹⁰⁴

A few months after the Lawrence group was adopted as an official local chapter of CORE, they set about challenging the discriminatory practices supported by the racist views held by much of Lawrence's White citizenry at local theaters and cafes. In July 1947, members of CORE led by their new chairman Beth Bell entered the office of Stanley Schwahn to insist that he allow African Americans to sit where they chose in the Jayhawker theater. Bell explained that the group had the backing of the LLPD—a group to which Schwahn was a financial contributor due to his sympathies for the racial injustices faced by African Americans in

¹⁰⁴ Letter from Wesley Elliott to George M. Houser, 14 April 1947; Letter from Catherine Raymond to Wesley Elliott, 18 April 1947; Letter from George M. Houser to Wesley Elliott, 10 May 1947; "Congress of Racial Equality: Affiliation Blank," 17 January 1947; "The Dove: A Liberal Journal of Campus Discussion, Permanent Staff," *The Dove* vol. 16, no. 2 (17 December 1947): 2; "Lawrence League for Practice of Democracy Membership List and Newspaper Clippings," KSRL RH MS D103, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

Lawrence. Shortly after a film started on the 21 July 1947, a group of Black and White CORE members arrived and began to sit in any seats they chose, including those reserved for Whites. They made no comment and there seemed to be no reaction from the rest of the audience; however, eventually Schwahn stopped the movie and entered the theater to explain the situation to the audience. He pointed out that segregation was bad for his business, since as the owner of the Patee—a theater he had reserved for African Americans only—he was forced to refuse White business when there were available seats. Similarly, if White sections of the Jayhawker were empty, he was unable to fill those with Black patrons because of the widespread policy of segregation. CORE members began to chant slogans from the balcony, which caused the “bewilderment” of the cinema’s patronage and caused a number of families to exit the theater. This early sit-in by the Lawrence students of CORE was done with the foreknowledge of management, and the group received assurances from Schwahn that he would investigate the matter of discrimination. So long as he remained cooperative Beth Bell stated, “...we intend to see him again to see what his intentions are. As long as we can negotiate with him there is no need for action on our part. But if he doesn’t want to cooperate, we will continue our activities.”¹⁰⁵

This action by CORE reiterated one particular reality the White population of Lawrence had neglected. White patrons found social contact acceptable to a point, yet what the students wanted—indeed what African Americans across the nation wanted—was more than social contact, they demanded equality and the promises of democracy. The action at the Jayhawker was well-planned and executed; it was done at the Jayhawker specifically because it was

¹⁰⁵ “CORE Awaits Action Results,” *Summer Session Kansan* (University of Kansas: Lawrence), 25 July 1947; “Film Interrupted: Demonstration by Racial Equality Group at Jayhawker,” *Lawrence Journal World* (Lawrence, Kans.), 22 July 1947; “CORE Theater Incident Opens Interracial Seating Question,” *Summer Session Kansan* (University of Kansas: Lawrence), 25 July 1947; Letter from Beth Bell to George M. Houser, 28 July 1947.

believed the patrons would include a more enlightened and thus sympathetic group, and CORE had the acquiescence of a manager who was outwardly sympathetic to their cause and a financial contributor to one of CORE's ally organizations. They had also attempted their action so that a precedent could be made. Several of the theaters were under the same management, so that a change in policy at any one of them would mean a change in policy for all of them.

Unfortunately, at subsequent meetings, Schwahn produced a letter he claimed to be from local businessmen urging him to "hold the line" against CORE and any form of integration. In truth, the letter was not written to him by any business league but his own creation. He had supported the LLPD and allowed the sit-in at the Jayhawker more out of unease about what to do than any real belief in racial equality. Like his many of his patrons, he accepted racial contact but drew the line at desegregation, only agreeing that he would investigate the idea of expanding the "Patee experiment" in his discussions with CORE. The students in the KU CORE also attempted disruption tactics in openly hostile environments. Their tactics were used to challenge segregations at the cafes near campus where they used non-violent direct action protest and were met with hostility and physical violence as well as the irritation of KU's administration.¹⁰⁶

Later in the summer of '47, several CORE members went home for vacation so that their numbers temporarily dwindled. Nonetheless, the group attempted to test the segregation policy of a café named the Cottage. The operator of this café was not as sympathetic as the operator of the Jayhawker, and the challenge to the segregation policy at this café revealed that even if he had been there would have been little recourse for him to alter the practice of excluding African Americans. The handful of CORE members that remained in town during that summer and attempted a sit-in at the Cottage discovered that the owner of the property had written a clause

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Beth Bell to George M. Houser et. al., 13 August 1947; William Tuttle, "Separate but Not Equal," 147.

into the lease that would have voided the contract had anyone of “African decent were served.”¹⁰⁷ Three more cafes were challenged in 1948, the Jayhawk, Rock Chalk, and Brick’s. The sit-in at Brick’s involved eight African American members and lasted approximately three hours before they were forcibly removed by KU football players after a period of verbal harassment.¹⁰⁸

During the Fall semester of 1947 and into 1948, members of CORE attempted an education program to educate the African American community on their purpose. Since their foundation, CORE members had also been a part of the LLPD and even helped distribute fliers for that organization. This alliance helped bring them into contact with community members that had been influential in the Black community for decades such as Gertrude Clark and Mary Dillard—both of whom had been involved in church-based and literary clubs as well as their role as house mother for the Black fraternities and sororities on campus who also had members in CORE. Leaders of CORE were also members of the LLPD, which allowed them institutional connections with an organization that included business owners, professors, ministers, and other influential citizens. Despite these connections, however, the university ceased to recognize CORE as a campus organization nearly a year after their formation due to the disruptive direct action tactics of the group. This move by the university administration proved detrimental to the success of CORE. The group effectively ceased to function by the 1950s due to the ban of their activities and the complications that posed for expanding their membership. Even while active, CORE experienced problems of members who only took an active interest when there was excitement—something Frank Stannard complained of in a letter to Houser by 1949. Besides this, the city council continued in their policy that had removed the requirement of local cinemas

¹⁰⁷ “Recent Activities of KU CORE,” Letter from Beth Bell to George M. Houser, undated.

¹⁰⁸ William Tuttle, “Separate but Not Equal,” 147;

to obtain a license to operate, which allowed those businesses to continue to circumvent the state anti-discrimination laws and full desegregation would not occur in Lawrence, Kansas until the 1960s.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Laurence C. Woodruff to George M. Houser, 30 September 1947; Letter from Frank Stannard to George M. Houser, 6 October 1947;

Conclusion

The Black community of Lawrence was one that was in constant flux from its establishment in the 1860s to the 1940s. Throughout a roughly 80-year period, migrants came to Douglas County seeking the social promise of a Land of Canaan because of their belief in the racial egalitarianism of Kansas—a belief borne of the “Free State” mythology and the efforts of white settlers’ desire to outwardly be seen as the opposite of white communities in the South. The hoped-for land of John Brown and of freedom in many ways proved to be an elusive dream for many African Americans that settled in the area. Instead of meaningful improvements in their lives they were confronted with a racial climate that was on par with that of Border states like Missouri or Tennessee and even places in the deeper South such as Mississippi where many migrants left to escape the rise of Jim Crow. What they found instead was unfortunately all-too-familiar to them. The apparent acceptance they found in the area served the needs of the white community, and admittedly those of the African American migrants as well. However, even the early welcome they received during the Civil War merely masked tensions between citizens of the two races that would eventually cause Lawrence and the rest of Douglas County to become an amalgamation of several sub-communities. While factions at times had similar goals—education, law and order, economic advancement, or attempts to gain additional rights—these were increasingly pursued along parallel lines of development, which precluded any meaningful interracial cooperation with very few exceptions.

The first migrants that arrived in the area quickly found they would be reliant on one another rather than any well-meaning intentions from the wider community. Despite the necessity for the community to bond together, the African American migrant population in Lawrence quickly experienced discord among themselves as even the conflicting foundational

histories of the Black churches show. Overcoming that difficulty, the Black community did bond together on issues of mutual aid, charity, and very strong beliefs in the value of education and spirituality. As a consequence of these motivations, the first African American women's group in the entire state of Kansas was established before the end of the war and the Prince Hall Masons established their first lodge in Lawrence as well. The relationship between church and society proved so strong that following generations would often build upon the examples of their forbears.

The pull of the mysticism surrounding the "Free State" and the familiar experience of Jim Crow in the South caused waves of African Americans to continually leave for what were hoped would be better racial relations and economic opportunities in Kansas over the course of three large migration periods. The escape of slaves along the border during the Civil War gave way to the Exoduster movement of the late 1870s. Like those that came before them, the Exodusters had been led to believe they would find assistance and acceptance from the white community; however the reality was that they entered into an already economically depressed environment. Problems caused by financial difficulty combined with a social disdain for African Americans felt by an increasingly xenophobic white populace to exacerbate the already difficult situation for newcomers. It is no surprise then that so many of the clubs formed in the town of Lawrence, which served not only that town but the whole Black community of Douglas County, should focus the majority of their early efforts on charity work and the amelioration of impoverished Black neighborhoods. Among their greatest motivations was to help improve living conditions for members of their race, whether that be socially, economically, politically, or in education. That among the first things these clubs sought to do was promote education is evident from their yearbooks and newspaper reports concerned with the attempts of clubs like the Sierra Leone

Club to establish a school for youths in Lawrence. Furthermore, each of the clubs founded in Lawrence that had more than a couple years longevity all raised money for the purpose of providing scholarships for their children who then went on to attend the University of Kansas or the Normal School to be trained as teachers.

Several of the graduates of Kansas residents remained in the community and active with the club movement for the majority of their lives. These professionals and entrepreneurs fit within a legacy of community engagement that lasted throughout the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries that kept the Black community engaged in a variety of local and national issues. Through church organizations and programs, political clubs, and fraternal societies the Black community attempted to work through the most pressing issues confronting them as a whole. Such efforts highlight the fact that the African American community of Douglas County did not act as a monolith, but had depth and a complexity of views on how best to approach politics and social issues. The rhetorical exercises staged by members of the Progressive Club allowed members to debate what roles they as a race should take in matters such as voting, political patronage, and the historical dilemmas they continued to grapple with. Among the most intimate issues faced was that of the family, and the several women's clubs that formed were focused on matters of home economics, the education and socialization of their children, and ways to improve their living conditions. The members of the Sierra Leone and Self Culture Clubs held special events for children in the church that featured their own talents and those of their youth. Even if there might have been dissension between the Lawrence groups and the state federation that formed in 1900, each of the Lawrence clubs maintained unity among themselves for the betterment of their locality. Lawrence members stayed in close contact with their relatives and other honorary members who went to live and work in nearby towns and elsewhere

in the country, and their homes were also the places in which visitors of other clubs and churches stayed while in town.

This connection between longtime residents and students at the University of Kansas also helped further the cause of civil rights in Kansas because they provided student movements with allies. Creation of the LLPD highlighted the fact that many White citizens were willing to actually practice the “Free State” mythology of racial equality and showed a willingness to work for the destruction of Jim Crowism in Kansas. Organizations like the NAACP and LLPD provided frameworks for students to pursue interracial organizations of their own when they formed Youth Councils of the NAACP and the Lawrence local chapter of CORE. Each group’s efforts were built upon the work of previous generations and show the progress of the African American community from slavery to the post-World War II Era. While the majority of their efforts did not come to fruition during their existence, these organizations nonetheless used a variety of methods against racist practices in Lawrence but were frustrated by the obstinance of influential members of the White community that prevented any lasting change until well after the precedent set in the desegregation case *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1953.

Students also tended to live with local notables while they attended the University if their family was not based in Lawrence. These students attended the churches and participated in the club work of the community they studied in. This tendency continued even after fraternities and sororities were founded on the campus. Each of the Greek organizations stayed in close contact with Lawrence residents through a variety of social events, which like those of area clubs helped to raise funds for education. The influence of club members was maintained by the fact that many of the house mothers of these groups were prominent and long-time club members of the area, a fact that further strengthened the bond between club members, local chapters of national

organizations, students, residents, and the business community of Lawrence. This close and intimate connection between students and residents persisted and was maintained when the Lawrence community first established a chapter of the NAACP in which students, laborers, tradesmen, ministers, and professionals were all members—until that time a rare occurrence that had hitherto only really occurred when familial connections or longevity in the community made this possible. As with several previous groups, the NAACP in Lawrence experienced dissention amongst its members and those that led it in the 1940s, however, that experience did lead to other organizations being founded on campus and in the community that had a wider base of support than the more exclusive clubs of the past in terms of membership. Several of these groups continued to challenge the status quo well after the 1948 temporary closing of the NAACP, and the disbandment of the LLPD and CORE in the 1950s. The years that followed were characterized by a more militant and confrontational path than previous generations had contemplated until the 1940s. These groups that formed in the wake of World War II maintained pressure that challenged and eventually eroded the segregation of cafes, student housing, and employment in the “Athens of the West.”

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