

CREATING THE COLOR LINE AND CONFRONTING JIM CROW:
CIVIL RIGHTS IN MIDDLE AMERICA: 1850-1900

BY

© 2008
David J. Peavler

Submitted to the graduate degree program in History and the
Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

Jeffrey P. Moran, Chair

Rita Napier

Jonathan Earle

Kim Warren

Shawn Leigh Alexander

Date Defended _____

The dissertation committee for David J. Peavler certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

CREATING THE COLOR LINE AND CONFRONTING JIM CROW:
CIVIL RIGHTS IN MIDDLE AMERICA: 1850-1900

Jeffrey P. Moran, Chair

Rita Napier

Jonathan Earle

Kim Warren

Shawn Leigh Alexander

Date Approved _____

© by David J. Peavler 2008
All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

CREATING THE COLOR LINE AND CONFRONTING JIM CROW:
CIVIL RIGHTS IN MIDDLE AMERICA: 1850-1900

APRIL 2008

DAVID J. PEAVLER

B. A. EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

M. A. EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Ph.D., UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

Directed by: Professor Jeffrey Moran

This dissertation examines the creation of the color line and the ways that African American communities confronted it throughout Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska. A detailed search of school board minutes, newspapers, court records, manuscripts, census data, and other archival sources in over twenty Midwestern cities and rural communities reveals the existence of mass meetings, boycotts, and legal challenges throughout the 19th century. As a result, this work challenges the historiography of Post-Reconstruction America as an “era of accommodation” to Jim Crow. This survey also demonstrates that the racial assumptions of Midwestern whites varied little from their Southern contemporaries, yet demographic factors and the activism of black communities limited the creation of the color line in Middle America.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	2
1.EXCLUSION TO SEGREGATION, 1840-1865.....	25
2. RECONSTRUCTION AND THE COLOR LINE, 1865-1879.....	99
3. THE EXODUS IN HISTORY AND MEMORY, 1879-1880.....	193
4. DEMOGRAPHICS AND THE COLOR LINE IN THE 1880s.....	292
5. CONFRONTING THE COLOR LINE IN THE AGE OF JIM CROW.....	363
CONCLUSION.....	459
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	469

Introduction

One year prior to the *Brown v. Board* decision, the House Committee on Un-American Activities compelled Langston Hughes to defend himself and his poetry. Hughes told the committee that they should focus on the Midwest instead of Moscow because his poetry was inspired by his childhood experiences in Lawrence, Kansas rather than by Communist ideology. Much has been written about Hughes, *Brown v. Board*, and Lawrence's abolitionist heritage, yet the question of how a childhood in the Midwest would inspire Hughes's compelling lines about race in America remains unexplored. This dissertation seeks to answer this question through an exploration of race relations in the schools and communities of Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska between the Civil War and the turn of the century.

In writing the first regional survey of the Great Plains, it is my hope to demonstrate that the study of race in America is incomplete without an investigation of the entire nation. While the South and Urban North have been incorporated into the historiography of American race relations, the West and especially the Middle West has been largely ignored. In addition to the obvious need to survey the entire nation, these regions offer a unique perspective into the way racial barriers were constructed and confronted during the Civil War and Reconstruction era. Historians have demonstrated that antebellum traditions of exclusion and segregation continued in the North while statutory requirements mandating Jim Crow emerged in the South. But racial lines were being constructed and confronted for the first time in states like Kansas, Iowa and Nebraska as the nation experienced war and reconciliation. Given

the absence of effective legislation regarding race in each of these states, the question of the color line was engaged on a local level by whites and blacks who had recently migrated from both sections.

Kansas offers a unique opportunity to study the tension between Northern ideals and Southern practices by investigating communities whose racial demographics were in flux following the Civil War. Northern-born Republicans dominated both the political and economic centers of power in most of the state's leading communities. But unlike Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Philadelphia, San Francisco and New York, where whites represented between ninety-seven and ninety-nine percent of the population; black communities in Kansas represented between ten and twenty-five percent of the urban population between 1875 and 1900. Historians have speculated about the sincerity of Northern leaders who called for greater egalitarianism during Reconstruction, yet have largely ignored Atchison, Leavenworth, Lawrence, Topeka, and Kansas City—the only Northern cities whose black populations exceeded ten percent during the 19th century. As historians have demonstrated that segregation was essentially an urban phenomenon, Kansas is a logical place to study the emergence of Jim Crow.

Given the region's historic conflict regarding slavery during the antebellum period, the study of Kansas and its Northern neighbors offers a particularly intriguing view into the connection between the rejection of chattel slavery and the acceptance or rejection of racial segregation. Black migration to the region during the 1870s and 1880s occurred at a time when white Midwesterners took pride in their states'

egalitarian identities regardless of their own commitment to abolition during Bleeding Kansas. Demographic changes created a unique situation, especially within Kansas, when small towns and leading urban communities were transformed from the nearly all-white demographics of the urban North to a population base that mirrored some of the South's leading cities. For example, black New Orleans accounted for 27% of the city's residents in 1880 compared to 26% in Topeka. Blacks represented between twenty and thirty percent of residents in a handful of smaller towns in Kansas such as Galena and Oswego. Southern cities such as Baltimore, Biloxi, Louisville, and Dallas had smaller percentages of black residents, ranging from fifteen to twenty percent during the late 19th century. While St. Louis possessed a large black community in the 20th century, only six percent of the city's residents were black between 1880 and 1900. The total black population of leading cities of the South and urban North were still significantly larger than those of Kansas, yet the racial demographics of emerging cities such as Leavenworth were similar to that of Little Rock in both size and percentage in 1880. In fact, the total black population of Kansas in 1880 was nearly as large as the combined population of four of the five leading Southern cities Howard Rabinowitz surveyed in his study of the Urban South during Reconstruction.¹

A comparison between Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa demonstrates the importance of demographic change. Leading cities in Iowa and Nebraska followed the trend of Northern communities such as Detroit and Chicago in dismantling

¹ Howard Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). Rabinowitz surveyed Atlanta, Montgomery, Nashville, Raleigh, and Richmond. The combined black population of the first four cities was slightly over 46,000 while the black population of Kansas in 1880 was slightly over 43,000.

segregated schools after the Civil War. While black protest was the catalyst for integration in Omaha and Des Moines just as it was in Chicago and Detroit, demographics must be taken into consideration. Similar to these Northern metropolises, Iowa and Nebraska's urban communities were between ninety-six and ninety-nine percent white. Blacks within smaller communities such as Keokuk and Nebraska City also protested against Jim Crow after the Civil War but failed to achieve integration. Largely due to the fact that these towns possessed larger percentages of black residents, integration did not occur until after the demographics of these towns changed.

The black population of Kansas, however, grew in both relative and absolute terms between the Civil War and the end of Reconstruction. As a result, many of the smaller cities of Kansas did not integrate their schools until the early 20th century, when the migration of blacks to larger cities made the operation of two school systems economically inefficient in many Kansas towns. Nearly every city in Kansas that still possessed large black communities after World War II practiced school segregation at the time of *Brown v. Board*. A number of these communities even practiced de jure segregation after the *Brown* decision, while de facto segregation reduced the significance of the Supreme Court's ruling in the leading cities of the entire region.

Middle America was unique beyond its demographics, as demonstrated by the "delicate" rhetoric that was utilized by segregationists to justify their schemes. From Davenport to Dodge City, whites justified their support for Jim Crow in terms of

opportunities for black teachers, incentives for black pupils, and the unfortunate character defects of *other* whites who might abuse black scholars. Despite the clear desire of most Midwestern whites to model Southern patterns of separation, the activism of black communities in exposing the duplicity between their rhetoric and actions played a determining role in defeating or at least modifying these campaigns in ways that limited Jim Crow's presence throughout the region.

The color line was particularly unpredictable when private businesses were involved. When asked whether their establishments drew the color line, white proprietors utilized a variety of ambiguous responses designed to discourage black patronage without admitting racial prejudice or violating Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska's comprehensive Civil Rights laws. Segregation at theaters and baseball games were particularly ambiguous. For example, blacks and whites sat in segregated clusters in a non-segregated stadium in Wichita in 1925 while an African American club defeated a team sponsored by one of the city's local chapters of the Ku Klux Klan.

The story of Middle America not only fills an important gap within the larger historiography of race relations, it reflects the themes of the finest scholarship in the field and supports some of that field's most important recent developments. In recent years, historians have expanded the boundaries of our understanding of the black freedom struggle, extending chronology and broadening geographic boundaries beyond the South and the 1960s. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall recently suggested that historians must make the story of Civil Rights "harder to simplify, appropriate, and

contain” by incorporating more than the epic victories which occurred in the 1950s and 1960s. While this narrative inspires nationalistic pride, Hall explained, it obscures the much longer fight that has been and continues to be waged against forms of racism too insidious to be contained by color-blind laws and the repeal of overtly racist practices. While Hall praised the recent work of a new generation of historians who are expanding the study of Civil Rights into the early 20th century, I believe that my work makes a case for the extension of the Long Civil Rights Movement to the last decades of the 19th century.²

The 1880s and 1890s are often portrayed as both the “nadir of race relations” and an “era of accommodation” to the social and cultural manifestations of white supremacy. The former label was first applied by Rayford Logan in 1954. Closely related to this idea is the “Woodward thesis” posited by Southern historian C. Vann Woodward the same year in *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. Woodward argued that racial segregation emerged only after a period of uncertainty and experimentation which ended in the 1890s. At this point, race relations reached the nadir when Southern Redeemers passed Jim Crow ordinances and statutes intended to disfranchise black voters. Woodward modified his argument and acknowledged the importance of segregation by custom in later essays, but the view of Reconstruction as a time of flux and the late nineteenth century as both the nadir and age of accommodation persists. Even historians who disagree with the Woodward thesis,

² Jacquelyn Doyd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1235.

(such as William Cohen who argues that race relations were not as fluid as Woodward claimed), continue to view the late nineteenth century as the nadir.³

Among Woodward's valuable contributions to the study of Southern race relations is the argument that segregation followed a "strange career." Jim Crow originated in the antebellum North, Woodward explained, and spread to Southern communities after the war but was neither uniform nor complete until the 1890s. Howard Rabinowitz was critical of Woodward's chronology, documenting the existence of segregation from the antebellum period through Reconstruction. Woodward was mistaken in his conclusion that Jim Crow did not emerge until the 1890s, Rabinowitz explained, because Woodward viewed the expansion of segregation statutes as the beginning of Jim Crow's career. Rabinowitz searched through city council records, school board minutes, state and local statutes, and the records of Southern orphanages and asylums to demonstrate that the color line was firmly drawn long before white Redeemers recodified their statutes in the 1890s. Rabinowitz also looked at the origins of segregation in an ideological perspective, asking what attitudes and practices preceded the emergence of legal segregation. Finding that Southern blacks were typically excluded from schools and institutions of public charity, Rabinowitz demonstrated that segregation actually represented a progressive step that was often demanded by black communities. By exploring the

³ Rayford Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901* (New York: Dial Press, 1954); C. Vann Woodward, *The Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955); C. Vann Woodward, "Strange Career Critics: Long May they Persevere," *Journal of American History* 75 (December 1988): 857-868; William Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control 1861-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991).

actions of black communities rather than the laws constructed by white redeemers, Rabinowitz challenged the notion of the turn of the century as an era of accommodation. His work drew upon the case studies of August Meier and Elliot Rudwick and documented the existence of black protest during the “nadir” that included direct action campaigns against both exclusion and segregation.⁴

Meier’s own work enriched the historiography by placing black leaders and black communities at the center of his studies. This practice was certainly not novel, having been demonstrated by historians such as Carter Woodson and W. E. B. Du Bois, yet Meier was still one of only a handful of historians who followed this approach at the time of Woodward and Logan. While Meier’s greatest contribution might be the wealth of local studies he authored with Rudwick and others, he is best known for his 1964 study that detailed the ideological struggle black leaders faced between autonomy and integration. Meier demonstrates how the increased hostility blacks faced at the close of the nineteenth century mitigated the optimism once espoused by national black leaders and intellectuals. Yet Meier also demonstrates that integration and equality remained the primary goals of black America. The disillusionment black leaders experienced may have led to the espousal of racial solidarity and economic achievement as prerequisites given the capitalistic nature of American society, yet even the ambitious Booker T. Washington is presented as a

⁴ Howard Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*; Howard Rabinowitz, *The First New South: 1865-1920* (Arlington Heights, Ill: Harlan Davidson, 1992).

introspective figure whose private actions and public statements demonstrated the complexity of the color line at the turn of the century.⁵

While the methods of protest utilized by black leaders often fluctuated, Meier, Rabinowitz, Leon Litwack and Joel Williamson demonstrated that Woodward exaggerated the degree of flexibility and fluidity in race relations prior to 1890. Litwack demonstrated the tenuous balance between master and slave that existed during slavery. The Civil War might have destroyed slavery, Litwack argued, but not the attitudes it was predicated upon. As a result, Reconstruction was typified by exploitation and violence. Meier countered the arguments of historians who portrayed Reconstruction as a revolution turned aside by white Redeemers through studies that demonstrated the continuity of racism, exclusion, and segregation throughout the 19th century. Segregation was not the worst possible scenario for Southern blacks in the late nineteenth century, Rabinowitz argued, because the possibility of being completely excluded from schools, hospitals, and public transportation represented a greater concern. While Southern black communities demanded schools and other services, they recognized that even the most liberal white Northerners working in the South opposed integration. As a result, many black communities openly advocated segregated schools as a progressive measure and hoped that future campaigns would ensure equal funding. Joel Williamson demonstrated the failure of such optimism by deconstructing Jim Crow as an ideology. Williamson argued that segregation was a both a byproduct of racism and essential to its maintenance. Williamson also

⁵ August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964).

demonstrated that segregation was not a creation of the late 19th century and had its roots in both Northern and Southern antebellum law and culture. Rabinowitz and Williamson both argued that laws were seldom necessary to enforce segregation until the late 19th century, with whites passing these statutes in response to the continued agitation Meier and Rudwick documented. More recently, Edward Ayers utilized a wealth of personal narratives to demonstrate custom rather than laws governed race relations in the rural communities where everyone knew their “place.” Because most Southern communities were relatively isolated until the late 19th century, segregation laws were in little demand until the transportation revolution reached Dixie.⁶

Woodward himself acknowledged the validity of Rabinowitz and other critics by editing many of their ideas into later versions of *Strange Career*.⁷ Woodward later conceded that he had mistakenly emphasized the chronology of segregation statutes at the expense of their deeper context. While this approach may have resulted in an excessively optimistic depiction of Reconstruction, Woodward defended his work by explaining that his primary goal was to demonstrate that “race relations had a

⁶ August Meier, “Negroes in the First and Second Reconstructions,” *Civil War History* 13 (January, 1967): 114-130; Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965); Howard Rabinowitz “From Exclusion to Segregation: Southern Race Relations, 1865-1890,” *Journal of American History* 63 (September, 1976): 325-250; Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Knopf, 1979); Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*, (New York: Knopf, 1988); Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁷ For example, compare the two paragraphs acknowledging the existence of segregation by custom in Woodward’s 1955 edition of *Strange Career* appearing on page 15-16 with the seven pages dedicated to the same subject in the 2002 version. Specifically, Woodward acknowledges Joel Williamson’s argument (but does not mention Rabinowitz) that “separation had crystallized into a comprehensive pattern which, in its essence, remained unaltered until the middle of the twentieth century.” C. Vann Woodward, *Strange Career of Jim Crow* 3rd rev. ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 25.

history.” Woodward claimed that most Americans in 1954 believed that segregation had always existed and therefore was part of the natural order. Assuming that views about race were static and that “race relations ‘had always been that way,’” Woodward explained, most Americans believed that segregation did not have a history.⁸

Woodward’s work succeeded in this regard as it has produced a historiography that acknowledges change and complexity throughout Southern history. And yet the belief that segregation “was just the way things were” still prevails in the popular imagination of most Americans. These attitudes are not limited to the South. Conversations with residents from Davenport to Dodge City reveal that Midwesterners believe that segregation “was just the way things were.” Perhaps more disturbing, these conversations reveal that Midwesterners believe that their community has no black history beyond a few old residents, who presumably have no history either. As a result, generations of Americans believe that segregation was a Southern phenomenon that was not challenged until a handful of black leaders convinced a few black parents in Topeka to confront Jim Crow in 1954.

This work shares Williamson and Rabinowitz’s perspective in that it looks beyond statutes to investigate customs and practices within individual communities. Most importantly, it seeks to place the ideas and actions of African Americans at the center of the narrative to the fullest extent allowed by extant sources. Black communities in Kansas, Iowa and Nebraska protested against both exclusion and

⁸ Woodward, “*Strange Career Critics*,” 861.

segregation through mass meetings, petitions, boycotts, and legal challenges. Northern and Southern communities utilized similar strategies, yet Middle America was unique in several ways. First, protests against exclusion occurred during or shortly after the first public schools were organized. Second, although a handful of antebellum black communities requested separate schools, each of these communities pressed for integration as soon as separate facilities were acquired. Third, Midwestern whites at least verbally supported the idea of providing equal facilities. The financial burden of operating truly equal schools, however, exposed the gulf between rhetoric and reality. Fourth, black protest in the Midwest was particularly well-organized and often led to integration due to interest convergence. By eliminating de jure segregation, whites could maintain the appearance of egalitarianism while lowering the operating costs of their schools. Fifth, statutes and court decisions in the late 19th century offered a mechanism to challenge segregation in Iowa, Nebraska and some Kansas communities. The fluctuating and irregular laws of Kansas, however, also served to enforce the color line in larger cities.

Black protest in 19th century Middle America only occasionally resulted in dramatic victories. An exploration of the ideas and actions of these communities, however, challenges the idea that the late 19th century was the nadir of postbellum race relations or an era of accommodation to white supremacy. Logan and Woodward's studies missed this spirit of agitation because they focused heavily on the actions of national political figures and Southern whites. Recent studies of race relations that also share this perspective. Michael Klarman produced an outstanding

survey of Constitutional history. But like Woodward, his sources led him to view the late 19th century as a “long downward spiral” due to the actions of the United States Supreme Court. Harvard Sitkoff’s survey of early 20th century political history likewise offers a negative interpretation of the era. By focusing on national political scene, he makes disenfranchised Southern black communities appear impotent. These and other national surveys are important additions to the historiography as these perspectives remind us of the limits of local activism. Without such works, historians might be tempted to exaggerate the importance of decisions rendered by state supreme courts and programs administered by cities and counties.⁹

The dramatic increase in the number of local studies conducted within the last three decades, however, demonstrates that these perspectives are equally valuable. While national surveys and sectional studies typically overemphasize the importance of political leaders and national figures, local studies have both enriched and challenged the historiography by placing individual black communities at the center of their own narrative. This change in perspective has deepened our understanding of history. For example, LaWanda Cox’s *Lincoln and Black Freedom* is a fine study of the president and his lieutenants. By focusing on these men, Cox portrays the national context that Lincoln faced as he experimented with the possibilities of black suffrage. James Hollandsworth’s recent work on New Orleans enriches this narrative by including the actions of the black leaders whose protests culminated in a direct appeal

⁹ Michael J. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal For Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

to the President himself. Hollandsworth demonstrates that the black community of New Orleans circulated petitions calling for voting rights as early as 1862. More important, Lincoln broke his silence on the issue of black suffrage only *after* black community leaders appealed to him directly during the following year.¹⁰

A survey of books and articles that detail the experiences of individual Southern and Northern black communities reveals a much more positive interpretation of the late 19th century than typically appears within national surveys of race relations. National surveys and regional studies support Logan's view of the era as a nadir, while local studies reveal greater complexity. While the limits of a national survey prevent authors from providing the kinds of detail needed to present black communities as historical actors, local studies are fortunate in this regard. Just as the change in perspective from national surveys of slavery to the daily operation of individual plantations revealed a high degree of agency among individual slaves, local histories of the late 19th century demonstrate agency rather than accommodation. This change in perspective is best demonstrated by the work of Meier and Rudwick. Although the two men spent much of their careers documenting local histories that demonstrated the activism of individual black communities, these authors were forced to marginalize these stories within their 1976 master narrative of the black experience in America. In this work, the authors suggest that "the dominant

¹⁰ LaWanda Cox, *Lincoln and Black Freedom: A Study in Presidential Leadership* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1981); James G. Hollandsworth, "'Damned Sons of Bitches': The First Demonstrations for Black Civil Rights in the Gulf South," in *Sunbelt Revolution: The Historical Progression of the Civil Rights Struggle in the Gulf South, 1866-2000*, ed. Samuel C. Hyde (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 21-41.

trends in Negro thinking shifted gradually from protest to accommodation,” despite a lifetime of demonstrating the limitations of this very conclusion.¹¹

Both classic works and recent studies that focus on individual black communities within the South demonstrate the existence of petitions, boycotts, and other demonstrations from Reconstruction to the beginning of the Modern Civil Rights Movement. Houston Roberson demonstrates that Montgomery’s Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, famous for its role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, actively challenged the color line throughout the 19th century. Paul Ortiz details black organizational efforts that were waged in Florida despite the era’s brutality. Glenda Gilmore’s work illustrates the complexity of race relations within a number of individual communities, showing the activism of black women despite their political disenfranchisement. Although the narratives of Ortiz and Gilmore do not provide readers with case studies demonstrating clear victories, they demonstrate both the complexity of race relations and the activism of black communities and leaders. Local studies also challenge the chronology of civil rights history. Robert J. Norell identifies civil rights agitation within the heart of Dixie during the early 1940s while Gilmore’s latest study finds the roots of the movement within the hearts of Southern dissidents two decades prior.¹²

¹¹ August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *From Plantation to Ghetto* 3rd ed., (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 212.

¹² August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, eds., *Along the Color Line: Explorations in the Black Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976); Meier and Rudwick, “Negro Boycotts of Jim Crow Streetcars in Tennessee,” *American Quarterly* 21 (Winter, 1969): 755-763; Meier and Rudwick, “The Boycott Movements Against Jim Crow Streetcars in the South, 1900-1906,” *Journal of American History* 55 (March, 1969): 756-775; John Blassingame, *Black New Orleans: 1860-1880* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973; Houston B. Roberson “Accommodating Activism: Dexter Avenue

Glenda Gilmore describes the ubiquity of civil rights agitation with an anecdote involving an interview that took place in the early 1990s wherein a historian asked an elderly black man when he joined the Civil Rights Movement. “Been involved in the movement all my life,” the man reportedly answered. Yet with few exceptions, historians have only been interested in a small piece of that life. Local histories often pretend to cover long periods of time but rush through the “nadir” of race relations as if it were merely prologue. A recent work entitled *The Hardest Deal of All: The Battle over School Integration in Mississippi, 1870-1980*, offers only a handful of pages on the nineteenth century. While readers are treated to a detailed narrative of the post-Brown period, such a cursory treatment of the origins of segregation reinforces the ideas Woodward sought to confront. Histories of the urban North are particularly susceptible to such oversight. Histories of metropolises like Chicago and regional hubs like Grand Rapids get interesting only *after* the Great Migration and the 1920s.¹³

Too often, the era is completely ignored. For example, a recent collection of essays on the years between 1850 and 1950 all but completely neglects the period

Baptist Church and Robert Chapman Judkins, *Workers That Needeth Not Be Ashamed, 1883-1920*,” in *Sunbelt Revolution: The Historical Progression of the Civil Rights Struggle in the Gulf South, 1866-2000*, ed. Samuel C. Hyde (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); 73-101; Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Robert J. Norell, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008).

¹³ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 2; Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Charles C. Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All: The Battle over School Integration in Mississippi, 1870-1980* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005); Randal Maurice Jelks, *African Americans in the Furniture City: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Grand Rapids* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

between Reconstruction and World War I. The result of such oversight is demonstrated in the popular imagination of the era as void of historical significance. Mark Robert Schneider remarked that colleagues were bemused upon hearing the title of his book "*We Return Fighting: The Civil Rights Movement in the Jazz Age*," as they did not believe such a movement existed. Such sentiment among non-specialists is understandable given the dearth of scholarship that might cast light upon the nadir's shadow. Yet perpetuating the myth that the battle for civil rights began in 1954 gives credence to the view that the movement ended in 1968. As Jacquelyn Dowd Hall explained, allowing the black freedom struggle to be so narrowly defined supplements the arguments of those who would deny its significance as a defining theme in every epoch of American history.¹⁴

The utility of the history of race is also limited by its present regional boundaries. While it is reasonable to expect the bulk of scholarship on race relations in 19th century America to focus on the South, the hegemony of Southern history in the study of Jim Crow should not result in complete domination of the field. With precious few exceptions, those studies that detail black communities beyond the Mason-Dixon line are limited to urban communities east of the Mississippi River. Only a handful of historians have explored the Modern Civil Rights Movement in Wichita, St. Louis, and Kansas City, Missouri. In addition, scholarly journals have

¹⁴ Charles M. Payne and Adam Green, *Time Longer than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850-1950* (New York University Press, 2003); Mark Robert Schneider, "*We Return Fighting: The Civil Rights Movement in the Jazz Age*" (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 3-5. Although Schneider utilizes stories from a variety of cities, his work would have been vastly improved had he followed his own advice and utilized primary sources from each community he describes.

published at least two dozen articles on antebellum race relations, the Underground Railroad, and the African American experience in the Civil War within Middle America. Yet the period between Reconstruction and World War I has been almost completely neglected beyond a handful of chapters in studies of major cities like Chicago, Boston, Detroit that accept the notion of the era as a period of declining race relations in response to increasing black migration. The most notable work on Jim Crow in the North is Davison Douglas's *Jim Crow Moves North*. Douglas provides an excellent survey of segregated schools throughout the North, but his reliance on secondary sources limits his exploration of communities east of the Mississippi River. In addition, his noble attempt to cover so much time and territory naturally limits his ability to detail the origins of segregation and the measures utilized by black communities to confront the color line.¹⁵

Meier and Rudwick provided the research for a number of case studies Douglas cited. Their brief study of Alton, Illinois illustrates many of the tendencies of 19th century communities in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa. Minor demographic changes led a number of white segregationists to create separate schools in the late 19th century. Although the state law forbade such a practice, neighboring towns

¹⁵ Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas, 1865-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Gretchen Cassel Eick, *Dissent in Wichita: The Civil Rights Movement in the Midwest, 1954-1972* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Sherry Lamb Schirmer, *A City Divided: The Racial Landscape of Kansas City, 1900-1960* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002); Thomas Cox, Kenneth S. Jolly, *Black Liberation in the Midwest: The Struggle in St. Louis, Missouri, 1946-1970* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Davison M. Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North: The Battle over Northern School Desegregation, 1865-1954* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); David M. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (University of Illinois Press, 1975); Alan B. Anderson and George Pickering, *Confronting the Color Line: The Broken Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986); Mark R. Schneider, *Boston Confronts Jim Crow: 1890-1920* (Boston: Northeast University Press, 1997).

throughout Southern Illinois operated separate schools irrespective of statutory authority. Segregationists mirrored their intentions and attempted to mask their racial antipathies, justifying their campaign as part of a measure to relieve overcrowding. Economic motives also provided a mask as well as a tangible benefit, as segregationists defended their scheme as a method to protect property values and prevent white flight to the segregated districts of St. Louis. Members of Alton's black community launched a vigorous protest, however, with boycotts, mass meetings, and legal challenges succeeding in revealing the racial attitudes of Jim Crow's allies yet failing to expel him from Alton. Although the Illinois Supreme Court ruled for the plaintiff, school officials evaded the decision and verbally attacked black plaintiffs.¹⁶

While whites in Alton wore masks that hid their racial antipathies, they clearly preferred segregation and shared the basic assumptions about race as held by their Southern counterparts. Although Northern and Southern laws were markedly different, communities throughout Middle America negated these differences by ignoring the law. Within the South, Jim Crow evolved from custom to statute as white segregationists responded to black efforts to integrate. In Middle America, however, black activism led to the creation of civil rights laws that banned Jim Crow in schools and public accommodations. While one might be tempted to conclude that the patent differences in Northern and Southern legal history reflect differences in racial attitudes, other factors must be considered. Jim Crow was both formally and informally incorporated into every aspect of Middle America irrespective of the law.

¹⁶ August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, "Early Boycotts of Segregated Schools: The Alton, Illinois Case, 1897-1908," *Journal of Negro Education* 36 (Autumn, 1967): 394-402.

White politicians approved civil rights laws in order to win the support of black voters and avoid being labeled racist, yet these same officials made few efforts to enforce the law or appoint judges who would punish violators. Legislators typically sought to frame racially-neutral laws because they wished to allow for segregation without publicly acknowledging their position. Mandates requiring integration were rare and explicitly framed in such a way as to apply only to communities where separate schools were not cost-effective. With few exceptions, school segregation was legal and practiced within Midwestern communities that possessed large black populations where dual systems could be maintained with efficiency.

Each of these findings are supported by a body of scholarship known as Critical Race Theory (CRT). One of the leading themes of CRT is Derrick Bell's theory of interest convergence. Bell argues that advances in civil rights occur only when it is in the best interest of white society. Although CRT scholars rarely provide historical examples to validate their ideas, many of the best historians have demonstrated the importance of interest convergence. For example, Kathleen Butler, Winthrop Jordan, and Joanne Melish each demonstrate that emancipation only occurred when it advanced the economic and political interests of leading whites. Eugene Berwanger and Robert Dykstra likewise reveal that slavery was rejected in the American West for similar reasons. Bell himself reminds us that emancipation only occurred when white political leaders determined it was critical to Union interests while "Radical" Republicans viewed black enfranchisement as the only way to prevent Democratic resurgence after the war. Even *Brown v. Board*, the "holy

grail” of civil rights history, has been criticized by historians such as Mary Dudziak and political scientist Azza Salama Layton. These scholars offer a wealth of compelling evidence that demonstrates that the executive branch’s sudden shift in favor of civil rights legislation was the result of a worldwide public relations campaign to redeem America’s image among people of color throughout the world in hopes of preventing the spread of Communism. In each of these examples, CRT scholars explain, whites masked their actions in liberal rhetoric and later created a fiction that elevated symbolic gestures into substantive actions.¹⁷

Readers should know that my original aspiration for this study was to produce an inspirational survey of Middle America that would demonstrate that the Civil Rights Movement had Midwestern roots. As is usually the case with any study such as this, four years of primary source research has changed my perspective and informed me the my subject is more complicated than I had assumed. School records, old newspapers, court documents, and correspondence scattered throughout the small towns and urban communities that compose Middle America have corrected years of

¹⁷ Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Kathleen Mary Butler, *The Economics of Emancipation: Jamaica and Barbados, 1823-1843* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Joanne Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and Race in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Robert R. Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star: Black Freedom and White Supremacy on the Hawkeye Frontier* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Eugene Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery, Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967); Bill Cecil-Fronsman, “‘Advocate the Freedom of White Men, As Well As That of Negroes’: The Kansas *Free State* and Antislavery Westerners in Territorial Kansas,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 20 (Summer 1997); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Azza Salama Layton, *International Politics and Civil Rights Policies in the United States, 1941-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* 2nd ed., (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

my personal miseducation. As a white youth learning about the worst aspects of Southern life each February, I had assumed that Midwestern racial attitudes were radically different than the South. After studying my region intensely, I now realize that my perspective was distorted by years of casual study of traditional Civil Rights historiography and the dichotomy it presents between the lynchings of the “nadir” and the dramatic victories of the Civil Rights Movement. I had been taught, at least by implication, that the problem of the color line was the problem of a distant time and region. Yet as I traveled throughout my region and read the words of my white ancestors who sought to justify the creation of the color line, I was struck more by the similarities between their racial assumptions and those of the white Southerners I was taught to despise. Even more painful for me was the discovery that the fundamental attitudes that led to the creation of the color line had not really changed in the last century.

The author subscribes to the belief that historical experiences must not be subsumed to a set of overarching theories or manipulated in such a way as to demonstrate a preconceived thesis. As a result, I have included those examples that demonstrate the limits of this work’s central arguments. While it is my hope that readers will draw their own conclusions from the scores of case studies that appear in the next four hundred pages, I believe several themes are clearly demonstrated throughout this study. First, Jim Crow did not simply “move west,” but rather was created by white Midwesterners and confronted by Midwestern black communities in ways that anticipated the Modern Civil Rights Movement. Second, white

Midwesterners favored separation but recognized the inconsistencies between segregation and their professed ideals and shared regional identity. As a result, most whites avoided discussions about race while even the most ardent segregationists attempted to justify Jim Crow in a variety of ways. Third, because black communities exposed and confronted these attempts to sanitize the injustice of segregation, white Midwesterners endeavored to create the color line in subtle ways that made the region unique from the South. Fourth, although black communities confronted the decision to create the color line throughout the Midwest, demographic factors were the leading indicator of whether their campaigns would be successful. And lastly, racial liberalism occurred only when and where it served the economic or political interests of whites.

Chapter 1: Exclusion to Segregation, 1840-1865

A nine-month tour of America in 1831 convinced Alexis de Tocqueville that white and black Americans in the North were thoroughly segregated in all aspects of life. In addition, Tocqueville opined that “the prejudice of race appears to be stronger in the states that have abolished slavery.” Tocqueville’s observations of discrimination in the antebellum North have been confirmed through historical evidence collected by Leon Litwack and others, yet whites who lived in the antebellum North were sensitive to Tocqueville’s observation. Harvard professor Francis Bowen edited one of the most influential of Tocqueville’s collected works, inserting a clause that claimed the French observer was mistaken in his comments about race. Other Northerners endeavored to sanitize the racial past of their communities by constructing history on the basis of a false dichotomy. By focusing on the evils of slavery and the epic struggle of the Civil War, Northerners have created a myth that asserts by implication that whites living in their section of the country were more liberal on issues of race. The problem is less based on the accuracy of such conclusions than the lack of inquiry into their veracity.¹⁸

¹⁸ Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Francis Bowen (Cambridge: Server and Francis, 1863), 460-461; Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1961). Even antebellum Boston featured residential segregation and Jim Crow in schools and public accommodations. James and Lois Horton’s study reveals that even Frederick Douglass was routinely ejected from rail cars and eating houses in Boston. Although Douglass and other blacks protested and resisted such abuse, even the courts of Massachusetts seldom provided relief. For example, see James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1999), 73-86.

Joel Silbey accurately summarized territorial Iowa as a “contradictory entity” given its Northern location yet simultaneous attachment to the racial mores of the South. Its territorial government, formed in 1838, banned slavery but also passed “An Act to Regulate Blacks and Mulattoes,” which required all African Americans to provide documentation of their freedom and a \$500 bond before stepping foot in the territory. The act prescribed peonage for violators, empowering territorial officials to sell labor contracts for illegal black aliens and fines up to one hundred dollars for whites who employed such persons. This exclusionary law met little opposition in the territorial legislature and was approved by the governor without comment. The lack of opposition may have been the result of a lack of publicity, as the law became a point of controversy only two years after its passage when a group of citizens petitioned the legislature asking for its repeal. The rhetoric of this petition anticipated Silbey’s characterization of the territory, as they labeled the exclusionary law “a pointed contradiction” of Northern principles and the egalitarian beliefs espoused in the Declaration of Independence. Stating their belief that the law was “unjust and offensive in its nature,” thirty-six residents of the territory demanded its repeal.¹⁹

The following year over a hundred residents circulated counter-petitions that opposed any alteration of the law. Additional petitions presented during the winter of 1842 mirrored this sentiment and copied the earlier petition’s warning that any

¹⁹ Joel Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa: 1838-1861,” *Iowa Journal of History* 55 (October, 1957): 289-318; Robert R. Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 26-29; “Petition to the Council and House of Representatives of the Territory of Iowa,” Records of the Secretary of State of Iowa, Petitions to the General Assembly, Box 2, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines. This petition was undated but has been labeled with the year 1840. Dykstra’s work documents the organization of the Denmark Anti-Slavery Society, the territory’s first anti-slavery organization, in this same year with thirty-three charter members.

loosening of the present statutory restrictions would “flood our territory with a colored population.” This sentiment was far from universal, however, as petitions poured forth from Henry County’s Quaker communities labeling the exclusionary law as a violation of both God’s law and the region’s political heritage. Despite the existence of the law, over twenty of the approximately two hundred blacks who had migrated to the territory by this time signed their names to a similar petition notwithstanding the personal risks of self-identification and arrest.²⁰

Although the early courts of Iowa famously issued a series of decisions that declared freedom for former slaves residing in the new territory, territorial Iowa recognized few rights beyond freedom from chattel slavery for its black residents. The territorial legislature outlawed interracial marriage in 1840 and declared such unions void within its borders. Two years later, territorial authorities explicitly denied governmental assistance to the few blacks who lived in the territory who were otherwise eligible for relief. While interracial marriage remained taboo, a growing number of white Quakers and other religious groups in Iowa mobilized in opposition to the Territory’s exclusionary law. These whites petitioned the delegates of the 1844 Constitutional Convention, once again requesting the repeal of the law. A number of African Americans likewise drafted a series of petitions, calling for a color-blind constitution that granted the all the rights of citizenship to all Iowans. Delegates also

²⁰ “Petition to the Council and House of Representatives of the Territory of Iowa,” 1841, “Petition to House of Representatives, December 24, 1841,” “Petition to House of Representatives, January 22, 1842,” “Petition of Citizens of Washington County to the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Iowa, November 29, 1841,” “Petition of Citizens of Henry County for the Repeal of the Law Regulating Blacks and Mulattoes,” Records of the Secretary of State of Iowa, Petitions to the General Assembly, Box 2, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines; Bergmann, *Negro in Iowa*, 10-11.

received a rather colorful resolution that called for a Constitutional provision against black migration. This resolution stated that failure to pass such a provision would “change this shining time of our Territory to the Yellowness of Autumn and the Blackness and darkness of winter would forever blight the Fair Country and shroud it in a veil of Brown.” A special committee investigated all of these petitions and concluded that the most expedient course would be to make no declaration either for or against the rights of African Americans. A land dispute delayed the passage of the state constitution until 1846, its final version limiting suffrage and other rights of citizenship to whites but making no regulations against black migration. “It was clearly understood,” historian Carl Erbe concluded, “that [the migration] was most unwelcome and undesired.”²¹

Five years later, a Kentucky-born legislator named William Haun introduced an exclusionary law into the Iowa legislature. The measure directed law enforcement officials throughout the state to notify all blacks who entered Iowa to leave the state within three days. If these men and women refused to leave by this time, Haun’s law called for their arrest and imprisonment as well as a potentially hefty fine of two dollars for every day they had lived in the state after being notified to leave. The measure so divided Haun’s colleagues that its committee gave no recommendation either for or against its passage and many sought to table the measure rather than

²¹ Carl H. Erbe, “The Bill of Rights in the Iowa Constitution,” (M. A. thesis, State University of Iowa, 1924), 48; Benjamin Shambaugh, *History of the Constitutions of Iowa* (Des Moines: Historical Department of Iowa) 1902; Laws of Iowa, 1840 Chapter 27, Section 13; Laws of Iowa, 1846-7 Chapter 99, Section 6; Journal of the Convention for the Formation of a Constitution for the State of Iowa, 1844 p32-35; Petition to the Council and House of Representatives of the Territory of Iowa,” undated, Records of the Secretary of State of Iowa, Petitions to the General Assembly, Box 2, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines. [Underline in Original].

discuss it. Although it passed the House, a number of delegates opposed the measure as a violation of the very principles the state was dedicated to uphold. A leading Whig who opposed the law attempted to defeat the measure by offering an amendment to change the law's title from "An act to Prohibit the Immigration of Free Negroes into this State" to a more lengthy moniker that declared the Iowa Constitution inoperable. Despite this protest, the bill passed the Senate by a 9-7 vote. The only amendment that was added to Haun's bill was a provision that it must be printed in the *Iowa True Democrat* before it could take effect. The leading historian of antebellum Iowa, Robert Dykstra, concludes that this amendment was meant as an inside joke against the measure's Democratic supporters, as the *True Democrat* was actually sponsored by the Free Soil party. As the editor of the *True Democrat* had opposed the measure, the amendment effectively gave its opponents a pocket veto. The legislature passed the exclusionary law with this proviso, yet the Democrat never published the law. The resulting technical legal quandary as to the legality of the exclusionary law reflects the complexity of race relations in Iowa. The inaugural address of Governor James Grimes a few years later was equally ambiguous, opposing both slavery and abolitionism. Although Iowa Democrats warned that the state would become "the great receptacle of free Negro trash" if the new Republican party succeeded their Whig antecedents in office, neither electoral nor legislative events altered the demographics of the state as Iowa's black population represented less than one percent of its total throughout the 19th century.²²

²² Laws of the Territory of Iowa, 1838-39, 44; Robert R. Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 106-117;

As a result, white Iowans likely felt that enforcement of Haun's law was unnecessary regardless of their views towards black migration. The only known evidence of the law's enforcement occurred when a Keokuk city marshal threatened to expel the city's entire black community. The marshal quietly shelved his campaign after it was discovered by civic leaders who opposed the enforcement of the exclusionary law on the grounds of economic self-interest. Keokuk's leading men believed that it would be better to keep the town's tiny black population invisible rather than risk the negative publicity that might arise from a wholesale eviction as the town was simultaneously courting Northeastern investors. Despite the exclusionary law, Iowa's black population rose from 333 to 1069 during the 1850s. Non-enforcement did not remove the negative stigma the law represented to black Iowans who again petitioned for the repeal of the law in 1855. The legislature tabled their request, yet evidence suggests that their protest was successful in terms of preventing the law's enforcement in communities throughout the state. At least one group of white exclusionists along the Missouri border were completely ignorant that such a law existed as evidenced by a petition of Wayne County whites who requested the passage of a law to prevent black migration to Iowa. Once again, the language of this petition is instructive. Admitting no racial prejudice, the petitioners asked protection against "the imminent danger of a large influx of negro population to this

Benjamin F. Shambaugh, ed., *The Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa*, vol. 2 (Iowa City: State Historical Society, 1903): 12-14; Leola Nelson Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa* (Des Moines: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1969); Louis Pelzer, "The Negro and Slavery in Early Iowa," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 2 (October, 1904), 471; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, June 28, 1859; Benjamin F. Shambaugh, *The Constitutions of Iowa* (Iowa City: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1934), 141-144.

state” on economic grounds, predicting that black migration would reduce wages while increasing taxes. Exclusionary measures, whether enforced or not, proved so popular that a convention of white Methodist clergy tabled a resolution calling for the law’s repeal. The matter was not resolved until a few days after the Emancipation Proclamation took effect, when a white resident of Delaware Township attempted to enforce the law. Archie P. Webb refused to leave the state and challenged his resulting incarceration. The District Court agreed with the defendant that the 1851 law violated Constitutional guarantees of interstate travel.²³

Prior to Lincoln’s Proclamation, most blacks viewed Iowa merely as an obstacle between the South and Canada. Contemporary reports suggest that very few Iowans were associated with the Underground Railroad, while many others viewed such a network as dangerous and dishonest. Aiding fugitive slaves, many white Iowans believed, was immoral not only because it encouraged theft of property and lawlessness, but also because they believed that slaves were content with their lot and would actually worsen their condition by escaping. A handful of the state’s antebellum leaders traveled to Iowa with their slaves and retained their support of the institution of slavery even after relinquishing their human property. Many whites in southeastern Iowa continued to support the Fugitive Slave Law until the final years of the Civil War. Only a small minority of white Iowans were devout abolitionists who

²³ Petition to the General Assembly of the State of Iowa,” undated, Records of the Secretary of State of Iowa, Petitions to the General Assembly, Box 2, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines; James Hill, “Migration of Blacks to Iowa: 1820-1960,” *Journal of Negro History* 66 (Winter, 1981): 291-2; Iowa House Journal 1855: 319; Petition of the Colored Citizens of Muscatine County, January 1855, Records of the Secretary of State, Petitions to the General Assembly, Box 2, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines; *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, January 24, February 2, 1863; Robert R. Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 198-200.

assisted slaves via the Underground Railroad. Although the historic identity of Iowa continues to stress the commitment to abolitionism of its early residents, Robert Dykstra concludes that Territorial Iowa was the most racist U. S. territory north of the Mason Dixon Line. One might at least partially explain this contradiction by pointing out that the Underground Railroad only traveled *through* Iowa. As a result, the contradictions between the lofty rhetoric of abolitionists and Free Soilers were not exposed until the Civil War threatened to permanently alter patterns of black migration.²⁴

The intent of Popular Sovereignty was to place the question of slavery's expansion in the hands of white settlers in Kansas and Nebraska, yet it was the slaves themselves who cast the deciding vote for freedom by making the institution unprofitable in these territories. The economic viability of slavery depended upon secure borders because slaves refused to remain in bondage. Contemporary observers in territorial Kansas and Nebraska understood that the institution would be unprofitable in their territories because slaves could and would easily escape as had occurred in the Coastal South prior to Florida's statehood. Although "Bleeding Kansas" continues to enjoy a special niche in the region's mythology, the only practical question was whether the territory would mirror Iowa and the Old

²⁴ Robert R. Dykstra, "White Men, Black Laws: Territorial Iowans and Civil Rights, 1838–1843," *Annals of Iowa* 46 (1982): 403; Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Ground* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996): 68; "Biographical Notes," Alexander Clark Papers; Eugene Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1967); Robert R. Dykstra, "Dr. Emerson's Sam: Black Iowans Before the Civil War," *Palimpsest* 63 (1982); *Bloomington Herald*, November 18, 1848; *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, July 17, 1858, February 21, 1863; *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, September 2, 1854, Alexander Clark Papers.

Northwest's racially exclusionary policies.²⁵ Following the electoral defeat of pro-slavery forces, Kansas delegates to the Wyandotte Constitutional Convention of 1859 considered an amendment prohibiting all people of African heritage from entering the state. A speech by Representative William C. McDowell characterized the attitudes of many in attendance:

...Now I propose to make this not only a free State, but a free white State. We do not propose that this state shall be the receptacle of free negroes and runaway slaves. ... We propose to nip this evil in the bud. We stand upon the record as believing that God Almighty, for some high purpose, has established this inferiority of the black race, and stamped an indelible mark upon them. Between the two races there is an unfathomable gulf that cannot be bridged. ... The black race should not be allowed to live in this Territory, as we do not propose to have slavery in the new State of Kansas.²⁶

Although Free Staters approved a similar measure at both the Big Springs Constitutional Convention and the Topeka Constitutional Convention, the measure was narrowly defeated at the fourth and final Constitutional Convention at Wyandotte in 1859. The following year, exclusionists introduced a measure in the state legislature that would have banned black migration to Kansas. As demonstrated at the Wyandotte Convention, Midwestern whites strongly supported black exclusion as a

²⁵ The history of Bleeding Kansas has been well documented by a number of historians. Although I disagree with the continued emphasis on "white-on-white" violence as a leading factor in the defeat of pro-slavery forces, recent works by Nicole Etcheson and Tony Mullis provide an excellent narrative of the period. For example, see Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); Tony R. Mullis, *Peacekeeping on the Plains: Army Operations in Bleeding Kansas* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004). For a critical examination of the mythology of "white-on-white" violence, see Dale E. Watts, "How Bloody Was Bleeding Kansas?: Political Killings in Kansas Territory, 1854-1861," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 18 (Summer 1995): 116-129. While the historiography of slavery has emphasized and perhaps even exaggerated the agency of slaves as historical actors within their own plantations, national surveys that confront the issue of slavery's extension continue to focus almost exclusively on the agency of whites in determining the fate of the peculiar institution. Such an approach neglects the simple fact that it was the agency of slaves that made slavery untenable in the American West. For an excellent summary of the actions of whites regarding slavery's extension, For example, see Michael Morrison, *Slavery and the American West* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

²⁶ "Debate Over Segregated Schools, Wyandotte Constitutional Convention, 1859," Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

matter of principle but generally opposed the practice as a matter of policy. As was the case in Iowa, Kansans had engaged a variety of mechanisms aimed at discouraging black migration irrespective of the law. For example, Kansans generally opposed the Dred Scott decision yet cited the Supreme Court's ruling that blacks were not citizens in order to prevent free blacks from claiming land under pre-emption laws. Even the most liberal white Kansans, such as those belonging to the interracial Kansas Emancipation League, opposed large numbers of former slaves settling among them. Although Kansans created a mythical self-identity based on their rejection of slavery, this rejection was based on the economic interests of yeoman farmers and the racial antipathies of white Kansans who envisioned a white Republic. Had Alexis de Tocqueville toured Territorial Kansas as he did post-Revolutionary New England, his observation that whites rejected slavery "for the sake not of the Negroes but of the white men" would have been equally prescient. As in Iowa, early residents of Kansas were more likely to share the racial prejudices of the regions they came from than shed these beliefs upon crossing the Mississippi River. These various attitudes were manifest throughout the early years of the region, making the race question a contentious issue long after the question of slavery was resolved.²⁷

²⁷ *Herald of Freedom* (Wakarusa, Kansas), September 12, 1857; *Fort Scott Democrat*, February 9, 1860; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 301-317; Eugene Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 98; Robert R. Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*; Richard B. Sheridan, "From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas: The Influx of Black Fugitives and Contrabands into Kansas, 1854-1865," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 12 (Spring, 1989): 41-43; James Leiker, "Race Relations in the Sunflower State," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 25

Early measures seeking to outlaw slavery in Nebraska Territory met fierce opposition from Democrats, not because they sought to make Nebraska a slave territory, but rather because party leaders felt such measures were politically motivated and only served to inflame the sectional crisis. Despite the enumeration of a handful of slaves in the territorial censuses of 1854 and 1860, very few political leaders considered the issue a matter of tangible importance. Because slavery was practically non-existent in Nebraska, Democrats argued that there was no need to “disgrace the fair pages” of Nebraska’s laws with any mention of the word itself. Although some Democrats acknowledged that there were a few men and women held in bondage near Kearney and Nebraska City, they argued that these individuals were better off than most white servants throughout the territory. A handful of Democrats even attempted to veil their fight against abolition as a crusade on behalf of these fortunate chattel. To free these few black men and women, *Nebraska City News* editor Milton Reynolds argued, would be to condemn them back to the cotton fields of the South or force them to flee to the “cold, cheerless and already crowded *charcoal* district in Canada.” Public sentiment in the wake of secession led to a considerable change of heart among Nebraska Democrats in 1861, however, with virtually every Democratic member of the Seventh Territorial Legislature joining Republican lawmakers in passing a bill prohibiting slavery in Nebraska.²⁸

(Autumn, 2002): 214-236; Paul E. Wilson, *A Time to Lose: Representing Kansas in Brown v. Board of Education* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 30; Bill Cecil-Fronsman, “Advocate the Freedom of White Men,” 105; Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 344, in Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants*, 50.

²⁸ Edson P. Rich, “Slavery in Nebraska,” in *Transactions and Reports of the Nebraska State Historical Society*, vol. 2, (Lincoln: State Journal Company, 1887), 92-113; *Nebraska Republican*, December 28,

As in Kansas and Nebraska, the Nebraska Territorial legislature also approved a measure prohibiting blacks from entering the state. As had previously occurred in Kansas, a combination of local political oddities and national events served to prevent the state's exclusionary preferences from becoming law. For example, in 1857 an exclusionary law requiring the immediate imprisonment of blacks who attempted to settle in the territory won the overwhelming approval of Nebraska's Free Soilers. Otoe County Democrats even flirted with Free Soil ideas as a means of creating white unity, stating their hope that Nebraska would be "kept sacred as a home for white men," rather than "an elysium for vagabond niggers." Perhaps owing to the tendency of their opponents to tar them as "negro worshippers," opponents of exclusionary laws often trumped the racial rhetoric of their adversaries in describing what "a great evil [it would be] to have negroes or mulattoes among us." They believed it was immoral, however, to pass laws subjecting blacks to fines and imprisonment because of their "misfortune" for being born black. Rather than pass exclusionary laws, the more liberal members of the territorial legislature thought it best to avoid formal declarations. While privately supporting informal measures aimed at preventing black emigration, most opponents of Iowa's exclusionary laws publicly supported the era's colonization schemes because they promised to remove people of African descent

1858; *Nebraska City News*, November 24, 1860; J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *Illustrated History of Nebraska*, vol. 2, (Lincoln: Jacob North and Company, 1906), 39-57, 62-71; House Journal, Territory of Nebraska, 1859, 199; House Journal, Territory of Nebraska, 1861, 180; Omaha Urban League, *The Negroes of Nebraska* (Lincoln: Woodruff Printing Company, 1940), 25; Bertha W. Calloway and Alonzo N. Smith, *Visions of Freedom on the Great Plains: An Illustrated History of African Americans in Nebraska* (Virginia Beach: Donning Company Publishers, 1998), 24; Addison Erwin Sheldon, *History and Stories of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University Publishing Company, 1913), 100-102

from the United States without the negative stigma associated with the enactment of legal barriers.²⁹

A third attempt to pass an exclusionary law for Nebraska Territory occurred in 1860, when Indiana native Houston Nuckolls proposed a law similar to that of his home state. Nuckolls's proposal subjected free blacks and mulattoes who resided in Nebraska beyond sixty days to misdemeanor charges and fines that compounded until they voluntarily chose to leave the territory. Republicans characterized the bill as "political buncombe" more calculated to win public approval than prevent black emigration. Perhaps validating the arguments of their opponents, Democrats framed Republican opposition to the measure as proof that the new faction was "founded upon the great element nigger." Beyond the ashen façade of Republican leadership, Democrats claimed, were Republican souls "of ebony [that] masticate charcoal."³⁰

Few labels were as reviled in Middle America than that of "abolitionist." Even Free Soilers utilized the label to tar their opponents rather than as an expression of their views about slavery. Free Soilers and Republicans alike were careful to qualify their position on slavery, opposing the extension of the institution for economic reasons while avoiding any intimation that they supported immediate abolition. The small coterie of self-proclaimed abolitionists in Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska faced insults questioning the integrity of their own racial identity. Others suffered violent attacks beyond the well-documented stories of Bleeding Kansas, with pro-slavery

²⁹ Council Journal, Territory of Nebraska, 1857, 127; J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *Illustrated History of Nebraska*, vol. 2 (Lincoln: Jacob North and Company, 1906), 39-41, 62-71.

³⁰ Edson P. Rich, "Slavery in Nebraska," 102-4; Alfred Sorensen, *The Story of Omaha* (Omaha: Omaha Bee Publishing, 1876), 166-7.

men reportedly chasing at least one minister from Omaha for his radical beliefs. Democratic editors in Dubuque labeled Harriet Beecher Stowe a “weak and fanatical female,” whose hatred for her own race and desire for personal glory led to her willingness to encourage civil war through her fabrications. Whites even occasionally chastised African Americans for their support of abolition and abolitionists. For example, the local press severely denigrated black leaders in rural Iowa who passed resolutions honoring the sacrifice of John Brown.³¹

Whites who publicly supported the most basic rights of local blacks, such as freedom of movement, often felt compelled to qualify their statements with a personal testimony against abolitionism and a denial that they loved African Americans more than their own race. “I am no more an abolitionist,” stated one Iowan immediately after urging public support for black education, “than gentlemen who came to Iowa to enjoy the privileges of our free institutions and to escape from the curse of slavery.” Those who defended the rights of black children to attend the same schools as white children, a position far in advance of public opinion in Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska prior to the end of the Civil War, were especially susceptible to negative monikers. Although a handful of Midwesterners attempted to use logic to illustrate that humanitarian support for free blacks was not an implicit call for immediate abolition or social equality, most found safety in joining their would-be accusers in attacking self-identified abolitionists. Few followed the example of Free Soiler William Penn Clarke in eschewing all forms of equivocation. “I for one am willing to take the

³¹ *Daily Democrat and News* (Davenport, Iowa), December 3, 6, 10, 1859, January 7, 1860; Alfred Sorensen, *The Story of Omaha*, 164-5; *Dubuque Herald*, February 8, 1863.

consequence,” Clarke stated after declaring his support for a color-blind Constitution in 1857 regardless of public opinion. “I do not sit here to give votes which will procure me popularity among the people,” Clarke continued, “but to vote according to the dictates of my judgment. If the people complain, I will take the consequences.”³²

Even abolitionists drew the color line at the marriage altar in antebellum Middle America. Nebraska’s earliest school laws included a lengthy list of fines whose proceeds were to be utilized towards public education. One of the costliest crimes was interracial marriage, its \$500 penalty being five times greater than that reserved for duelists and equal to that of an arsonist. The legislatures of Iowa and Kansas likewise banned interracial marriage. On this issue, Republicans bested their political rivals in derision and allegation, citing miscegenation as a Democratic practice en vogue in South. Republican editors responded to reports of interracial marriage in Appanoose County, Iowa as “a commonly Democratic thing.” Republicans throughout the region took great pleasure in painting Democrats as the true “nigger-lovers,” pointing to the hypocritical irony of Southern mania for segregation as a family affair in which leaders of the White Man’s Party lived in constant fear of incestuous relations between their own white and black offspring.³³

The Civil War

Historians of the African American experience in the Civil War typically fill their narratives with tales of the eagerness with which black men volunteered their

³² Journal of the 1857 Iowa Constitutional Convention, Vol. 2, 825-30; *Daily Democrat and News*, December 2, 1859.

³³ School Laws of the Territory of Nebraska, 1860, 91-94; *Iowa State Register*, April 18, 1868; Berwanger, 36, Robert R. Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 26.

services. Armed with the knowledge that the Civil War ended chattel slavery, historians have equated black enlistment with racial uplift. Historical interpretations of the black regiments raised in Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska are no exception to this rule. Stories of the courage and sacrifice exhibited by these units currently occupy a place of such mythological elevation that one is loathe to suggest that a critical re-examination is due. However, contemporary accounts of the recruitment of these hallowed regiments reveal an important feature of the African American experience that Civil War historians have obscured in their quest to produce inspirational fiction—many of the men who served in both Southern *and* Northern black regiments did not volunteer their services to the Union, but rather were kidnapped by Union officials who forced them into service.³⁴

³⁴ The first history of the black experience in the Civil War, written in 1887 by black veteran Joseph T. Wilson, emphasized that both free blacks and former slaves were eager to fight for the freedom of their race and viewed enlistment as the best means to do so. Although Wilson and later historians have acknowledged that some “recruits” were obtained by heavy-handed tactics that often were little more than kidnapping, these episodes have been minimized in favor of the more inspiring tales of voluntary enlistment inspired by an abiding faith that their sacrifice would ensure the freedom of the race. James McPherson’s 1965 book, *The Negro’s Civil War*, utilized a wealth of letters written by black soldiers during the conflict, but as he admits, these sources naturally limited his study to Northern, well-educated blacks who volunteered their services. The problem with this approach is not that it is untrue—many if not most black soldiers did welcome the opportunity to fight against slavery, but rather that they minimize the complex story of men who often had few alternatives to military service. For example, see Joseph T. Wilson, *The Black Phalanx: African American Soldiers in the War of Independence, The War of 1812, and the Civil War* 1st De Capo Press ed., (New York: De Capo Press, 1994); Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1953); James McPherson, *The Negro’s Civil War: How American Blacks Felt and Acted During the War For the Union*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965); Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); John David Smith, ed., *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Noah Andre Trudeau, *Like Men of War: Black Troops in the Civil War 1862-1865* (Edison, New Jersey: Castle Books, 1998); Keith P. Wilson, *Campfires of Freedom: The Camp Life of Black Soldiers During the Civil War* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2002).

Iowa Governor Samuel Kirkwood denied the request of Alexander Clark, a leading black resident of Muscatine, who requested permission to raise a company of black troops in 1862. Despite the governor's rejection, black communities continued to meet throughout the year and formed their own quasi-military organizations much to the amusement of many white Iowans. By early 1863, enlistment quotas compelled a different attitude and the governor authorized the creation of the First Iowa Colored Volunteers. Although many black men in the area were still willing to volunteer their services, discrimination in pay and promotion led many potential recruits to doubt the sincerity of white recruiters. Whites further discouraged voluntary enlistment by creating ad-hoc recruitment parties that looted Iowa towns and Missouri plantations, capturing slaves and free blacks and compelling their "voluntary" enlistment. Iowans who employed blacks prior to the 1863 had been harassed by whites who feared that such practices would encourage black migration to the area. After 1863, the scarcity of black laborers led a group of white employers to assault black recruiters in Iowa. Despite these obstacles, 521 men joined the First Iowa Colored Volunteers and the regiment mustered into federal service in October of 1863. Over a thousand recruits ultimately joined the regiment through both choice and coercion, with over half the regiment consisting of former slaves from Missouri. After several assignments performing garrison duty and manual labor, the regiment returned to Iowa in 1865. Unlike reports of other black regiments who were reportedly cheered by appreciative whites; the men of the First Iowa Colored marched through the empty streets of Davenport, the only music provided being that of their own regimental band. Men

and women of the Loyal League, a group of black civilians organized to support the regiment, cited the war as a struggle fought for the freedom of the race. Most white Iowans who espoused this same view during the conflict did so out of protest, once again predicting that a wave of black migration would descend upon their state.³⁵

The First Kansas Colored is the most famous Midwestern regiment in the Civil War due to its distinction as the first black regiment to engage the enemy. The simple narrative of the Civil War as an epic struggle of freedom against slavery becomes clouded, however, when one includes the important fact that the Battle of Island Mound took place on October 28, 1862, five months prior to the unit's acceptance into federal service. Eight "volunteers" serving in the First Kansas Colored died during this skirmish in October of 1862, yet the federal government refused to acknowledge the regiment while the state failed to pay the soldiers. National narratives of the Civil War frequently credit the First Kansas Colored as an inspirational tale of interracial cooperation and black courage, minimizing not only the government's refusal to accept their service but also the dishonorable early record of white officers within the regiment. While the First Kansas Colored's valor and sacrifice eventually made an important contribution to the Union effort and worked to

³⁵ Sewell S. Farwell Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City; "Colored Troops in the Civil War," WPA File, Keokuk Public Library; *Dubuque Democratic Herald*, July 1, 1863; *Iowa State Register*, February 11, 1863; Robert R. Dykstra, *Black Radical Star*, 196-8; "Report of the Adjutant General," Iowa Adjutant General's Office, (Des Moines, 1864), 198; Marilyn Jackson, "Alexander Clark: A Rediscovered Black Leader," *Iowan* 23 (Spring, 1975): 45; Stephen J. Frese, "From Emancipation to Equality: Alexander Clark's Stand for Civil Rights in Iowa," State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines; *Dubuque Herald*, March 28, 1863; *Waterloo Courier*, January 13, 1864; *Cedar Valley Times*, November 19, December 10, 1863; *Cedar Falls Gazette*, August 21, September 4, October 23, December 25, 1863; *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, May 30, 1863, April 2, 1864, January 7, 1865; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, September 14, October 30, 1865; "The Iowa State Bystander, 1894-1994: 100 Years of Black Achievement," *Iowa State Bystander*, 1994, 34.

challenge the racial assumptions of Northerners, historians have minimized the fact that the abolitionists and Free Soilers who raised this regiment shared the same basic racial assumptions as their Southern adversaries. These white leaders only recognized black freedom when it did not conflict with their preconceived ideas of racial hierarchy and when that “freedom” served their own interests. Despite the existence of a wealth of scholarship devoted exclusively to the First Kansas Colored and black soldiers in general, historians have all but expunged the contradiction of forcing men to fight for their freedom from the record. This sanitized version of events may appeal to the book-buying public, but it greatly distorts the racial attitudes that the men of the First Kansas Colored worked to overcome.³⁶

Black educator and political leader Charles Henry Langston had just arrived in Kansas when he accepted a position as recruitment officer in the late summer of 1862, after receiving the promise of demagogue James Lane that Langston would lead the men he recruited. Despite this and many other alluring promises guaranteeing payment and other soldierly benefits to all recruits, Langston experienced difficulties recruiting working husbands and fathers. “Many colored men whom I have asked to enlist,” Langston explained, “told me that they would enter service at once, but that

³⁶ “Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865,” vol. 1, (Topeka: Kansas State Printers): 246-261; “Official Military History of the Kansas Regiments during the War for the Suppression of the Great Rebellion,” (Leavenworth: W. S. Burke, 1870), 412; Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (New York: W. Norton & Company, 1966); William Frank Zornow, *Kansas: A History of the Jayhawk State*, 107-108; Dudley Taylor Cornish, “Kansas Negro Regiments in the Civil War,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 20 (May, 1953): 417-429; Albert Castel, *Civil War Kansas*, 93; Michael Fisher, “The First Kansas Colored: Massacre at Poison Springs,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 2 (Summer, 1979): 121-128; Sean McLachlan, “They Faltered Not,” *Missouri Life* 32 (February, 2005): 34-37; Glenn L. Carle, “The First Kansas Colored,” *American Heritage* 43 (1992): 78-91; Brian K. Robertson, “First Kansas Colored Volunteers: Contributions of Black Union Soldiers in the Trans-Mississippi West,” (M. A. thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2004).

their daily labor provided their wives and children with daily bread.” Other recruiters dealt with the reluctance of black men to abandon their families not by providing enlistment bonuses, as were provided to white recruits, but by kidnapping black men and impressing them into the regiment. This practice became so common that white journalists throughout the region began to take notice. By November of 1862, the practice of forcing black “recruits” to abandon both their families and employers received the censure of both Republican and Democratic observers. In Leavenworth, for example, white recruiters were censored for forcing black men “to leave places where they can support their families, to join a regiment which the Government does not recognize and does not pay.”³⁷

James Lane’s decision to raise a regiment of black troops against the expressed orders of the War Department and Lincoln administration has led many to assume he possessed humanitarian motives for his actions. Lane’s own statements both prior to and after his decision to raise the regiment demonstrate otherwise. Lane advocated selective manumission in 1862 as a matter of practicality, but he specifically disavowed universal emancipation. “We desire this war to be waged vigorously, earnestly, without reference to slavery,” Lane stated just days before announcing the formation of a black regiment. Lane followed this announcement with a series of public declarations aimed at reassuring both white and black residents that he possessed the authority to recruit black troops, although he very clearly did not. These proclamations revealed that Lane had little respect for African Americans and

³⁷ *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, September 4, 1862; *Freedom’s Champion* (Atchison), November 22, 1862.

believed that they possessed no rights which he was bound to respect regarding the formation of black regiments. “I would say to those persons of African descent that they are much mistaken in the commandant if they think he will let white men fight in their defense and let them stay at home,” Lane declared upon the establishment of a recruiting office. “If a white man can stop one bullet, you ought to stop two. You shall try it.” Lane’s rhetoric turned aggressive as indicated by the journalist’s change in font to convey the remainder of the speech. “*I don’t intend to threaten; but we have opened the pathway whereby you may prove that you can fight, and if you won’t avail yourselves of it voluntarily, we will compel you to fight.*” Not surprisingly, Lane ordered his black “recruits” to be guarded as prisoners, a tacit recognition that many of the men had been compelled to fight for a cause and a Union that defined their freedom in self-serving terms.³⁸

The “First Regiment Kansas Zouaves D’Afrique,” as it was originally dubbed by the *Leavenworth Times*, drilled its first recruits fifteen miles south of Leavenworth not only to minimize white hostility, but also to discourage the recruits from leaving the regiment. Early recruits were often described as being “brought over” from plantations to recruitment headquarters by Kansas military officials, but free blacks throughout the state were also captured and dragooned into service. For example,

³⁸ “General Order 9,” Issued by James Lane, August 18, 1862, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas; *Emporia News*, August 2, 1862; *Leavenworth Daily Times*, August 6, 7, 1862; *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, August 6, 1862; *Freedom’s Champion*, August 23, September 18, 1862; *Wyandotte Commercial Gazette*, August 9, 1862; *Kansas State Journal*, August 7, 1862, November 13, 1863. Most Kansans understood that Lane was acting beyond his authority, as area newspapers printed Lincoln’s orders that blacks were to be used for military labor and under no condition should be armed throughout August of 1862. For articles specifically calling attention to the fact that Lane was acting in violation of the orders of the President, see *Fort Scott Bulletin*, August 16, 1862; *Lawrence State Journal*, August 14, 1862; *Freedom’s Champion*, September 18, 1862.

soldiers marched through the streets of Leavenworth in January of 1863, ostensibly to round up deserters. “Every darkey caught in the streets that wore pantaloons,” the Leavenworth Bulletin reported, “whether ten or sixty years of age, was corralled.” Even those whites who supported black enlistment were outraged at the abuses perpetrated by some of the recruitment agents. A number of white residents labeled Lane’s plan as uncivilized because the unpaid service of the “unfortunate victims” of white recruitment agents resembled slavery. Recruits and recruiting sergeants guarded the recruits as prisoners, yet so many of these men eventually escaped and returned to their families and jobs that voluntary recruitment became the only long-term solution to filling the ranks. Although most volunteers were ideologically motivated, their motivation was limited by the fact that many of the men were not paid until the following summer. Even then, the government refused to compensate those soldiers who had served the longest by declining to pay for service rendered during the five months prior to the unit’s official muster on January 13, 1863. The media published a number of reports claiming that the officers entrusted to deposit this portion of the men’s rightful salaries occasionally held these funds back as a guarantee of obedience or simply stole their own soldier’s money. Although most officers kept their promises and safeguarded both the money and safety of their men, fraud became such a problem that authorities court-martialed a few of the unit’s white officers for fraud and embezzlement.³⁹

³⁹ B. F. Van Horn, “Capture of Fort Smith,” Van Horn Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka Kansas; *Freedom’s Champion*, January 20, 1863; *Leavenworth Daily Times*, August 1, 5, 1863; *Leavenworth Evening Bulletin*, January 10, 1863; *Wyandotte Commercial Gazette*, August 9, October

White officers were not the only members of the First Kansas Colored who faced legal proceedings. In fact, officials completed the January muster only after conducting mass arrests to recoup the number of recruits who had deserted the unit after months of unpaid service. Judges released a number of these men from their contracts, citing both the questionable recruitment tactics and the government's refusal to acknowledge or pay the unit during its first months as negating their contracts. Promises of pay and an end to the "irregularity" of recruitment methods encouraged men to join the unit or resume their service following the regiment's muster. Penitent recruiters promised that "colored men can enlist without fear of being misused," yet both white and black Kansans demanded more than verbal assurances. "The black men have been trifled with too long," white journalists declared, calling for recruiters to conduct future enlistments in a legal and honest manner. Black leaders took the initiative in establishing meetings with recruitment officers to ensure that they maintained their promises. Community members also held a number of mass meetings in various Kansas communities that were jointly chaired by black clergymen and white officers. Additionally, black communities established support networks to insure the protection of the soldier's families.⁴⁰

White officers at these meetings cautioned the audience against allowing "minor considerations" (namely, the litany of abuses endured by black volunteers and conscripts at the regiment's founding) to deter men from enlistment. African

11, November 1, 8, 15, 1862; *Kansas State Journal*, September 11, November 13, 1863; *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, June 7, September 13, 1863.

⁴⁰ *Kansas State Journal*, December 19, February 5, 1862; *Freedom's Champion*, January 24, June 20, 1863; *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, July 2, 10, 24, 1863.

American leader John H. Morris responded to the officers by attempting to bridge the gap between white and black perspectives. “I propose to explain somewhat the apparent demoralization complained of,” Morris began. “It is owing entirely to the circumstances surrounding the raising of the First Colored Regiment. That organization was raised by Senator Lane eleven months since. It was six months before it was mustered into service. And it has not yet been paid. It is said that paymasters have left here, to pay the regiment, but the same has been told before. The colored people are suspicious. They have reason to be. Centuries of bondage, under the severe rule of the white man, have made them cautious....” Morris’ continued by explaining the demoralizing story of William D. Matthews, tasked with organizing one company to be placed under his command. Matthews recruited three companies but officials denied the commission they had promised Matthews as General James Blunt assumed personal command of the recruits. Despite these and other abuses, Morris encouraged his audience to enlist, yet he also called upon the representatives of the government to honor their obligations. Several white officers responded to Morris, admitting the mistakes of their predecessors who had made promises based on speculation and predicting that military service would advance the race and expose the bankruptcy of racial intolerance. Although the white and black speakers at this meeting did not exactly engage or accept one another’s ideas, the meeting was indicative of a change in culture among the officers of the First Kansas Colored that led to the regiment’s later success as a military unit and agent of social change.⁴¹

⁴¹ *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, July 10, 1863.

Shortly after this meeting, nearly every white officer of the regiment addressed a letter of protest to James Lane opposing the decision to deny Matthews the commission he was promised. The petition suggested that without Matthews's service, the unit would have collapsed during its early months. These appeals were significant as an indicator of changing sentiment within the regiment; however they were of little practical significance, as Matthews's commission was but one of the many promises that Lane lacked the authority to fulfill. This unified sign of support for a black officer was illustrative of the revolution of opinion among the officers of the First Kansas Colored. The protest is particularly striking considering that at least one officer of a white Kansas regiment resigned his commission upon the news that black soldiers were to be mustered in as enlisted men. By the end of 1863, however, white soldiers and civilians throughout the state and region lauded the regiment as one of the finest in the field, albeit often expressed in paternalistic language.⁴²

The change in public opinion was the result of the courage and composure of the men of the First Kansas Colored during a series of engagements. Months prior to their official muster, the regiment earned the praise of their officers in routing a smaller force of rebel guerillas. Most important, the first major action at Honey Springs resulted in the defeat of a Texas regiment and the capture of rebel flags and soldiers. This battle, fought one day prior to the famous but disastrous assault on Fort Wagner by the 54th Massachusetts, won the praise of generals and line officers who

⁴² Ira Berlin, et al., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1865* Volume 2: The Black Military Experience (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 335; *Leavenworth Times*, June 3, 1863.

testified that these black soldiers from Kansas “displayed valor never surpassed by any soldiers.” National news reports lauded the courage of the First Kansas Colored but gave much of the credit to the white officers for pioneering a “unique brand” of discipline required to control black troops. Rebel soldiers intended to treat black soldiers with their own unique brand of discipline as the First Kansas Colored captured a thousand shackles their vanquished enemies had planned to use to return them to slavery. The Texas men were not the only whites to emerge from Honey Springs with a new perspective. “At the outset, I was very much opposed to fighting with negro troops,” explained a captain of a white Kansas regiment, “but I have now been in two fights with them, and they fight like demons; they were all that saved my company from being cut to pieces.” Before long, these officers refused to negotiate with rebel guerillas or other officers who refused to consider black captives as eligible for prisoner exchanges. In response to a Confederate guerilla leader who refused to consider the exchange of black soldiers, Kansas military officials withdrew from negotiations and threatened to hang rebel prisoners until the rebels reconsidered.⁴³

Although the recruitment of the Second Kansas Colored and subsequent artillery units proceeded in a more regulated manner than the First Kansas Colored, these regiments viewed the liberation of slaves in Missouri and Arkansas as natural sources of recruitment, often with little regard for the agency of the men they had just

⁴³ *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, May 31, June 23, August 6, 1863; *Cedar Valley Times*, September 3, 1863; *Wyandotte Commercial Gazette*, November 8, 1862; *Freedom’s Champion*, August 8, 1863; *Lawrence Republican*, November 6, 1862; *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, September 5, 1863; *New York Times*, August 18, 1863; *Fort Scott Union Monitor*, August 13, 1863.

liberated. Historians have documented the “wide latitude” granted by the War Department to army and naval officers directed to create black regiments in the Confederate heartland. Sources indicate that Union officials utilized similar tactics in Kansas and Union-controlled areas of the Midwest. In fact, recruitment raids became so common that profiteers began dressing as Union soldiers, capturing both slaves and free blacks in Missouri and selling them as slaves in the Border South for a handsome profit.⁴⁴

Despite the disrespect shown towards many of its members, the worst atrocity endured by the First Kansas Colored occurred at the Battle of Poison Springs, Arkansas in April of 1864 when a much larger force compelled the surrender of nearly an entire company of the regiment. Although these men were slaughtered after laying down their arms to surrender, the Arkansas press portrayed Northerners as the real savages for “seducing our slaves” into the army thereby “wheedling millions of harmless, happy, and innocent people to destruction.” Reporters in Washington, Arkansas, the default Confederate capital at the time of the battle, declared their victory a glorious and courageous stand against the savagery of an enemy that would consign millions of black men and women to extinction through emancipation. The only mention of any Southern atrocities against black troops was a sensationalized account of Native American troops who were reported as ceremoniously desecrating the bodies of black troops. Although it was not mentioned in the Confederate press,

⁴⁴ Michael Meier, “Lorenzo Thomas and the Recruitment of Blacks in the Mississippi Valley, 1863-1865,” in *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era*, ed. John David Smith (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 249-275; *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, September 5, October 3, 1863; *Freedom’s Champion*, April 4, May 23, July 4, 1863; *New York Times*, July 18, 1863.

Southern military officials used captured soldiers from the First Kansas Colored to pick and gin cotton in prison camps or sold them into slavery.⁴⁵

As had been the case in 1862, the courage and skill exhibited by these troops in the face of atrocities committed by friend and foe challenged the indifference of white Midwesterners towards African Americans. Rather than minimize the inconsistencies of white officers and political leaders who recruited and conscripted these regiments, the historical record should reflect the fact that the sympathy of white residents only occurred after tremendous hardships and sacrifices. As the war ended, the privation endured by black Midwesterners became less obvious, especially when contrasted with the continued violence and obvious denials of justice in the former Confederacy. As everyday forms of discrimination replaced kidnapping and cold-blooded murder in Middle America, white residents continued to consider the problem of the color line to be a regional phenomenon. While exhibiting considerable verbal sympathy for former slaves laboring below the Mason-Dixon Line, whites either closed their eyes to the inequalities that persisted in their own communities or assumed that the struggles of black Americans among them were the result of personal shortcomings.

Suffrage

Midwesterners recognized the tactical importance of black participation in the Civil War and often cited the bravery of black soldiers as evidence of their right to

⁴⁵ Brian K. Robertson, “‘Will They Fight? Ask the Enemy’: United States Colored Troops at Big Creek, Arkansas, July 26, 1864,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 66 (Autumn, 2007): 320-332; *New York Times*, March 27, April 24, May 14, 1864; *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, January 9, 1865; *Washington Telegraph* (Arkansas), April 30, March 30, May 10, 11, June 1, 30, 1864. The author would like to thank the Southwest Arkansas Regional Archives for her assistance in locating sources.

enjoy the blessings of liberty. Davenport's public celebration featured a parade in which members of the town's tiny black community led a coffin inscribed with the words C.S.A. through the city. While Midwesterners supported Congressional Reconstruction and hoped that the death of slavery would usher in a new era of freedom in the states of the former Confederacy, whites throughout the region were hesitant to extend the rights of citizenship to African Americans in their own communities. Despite several attempts to challenge the constitutional restrictions against black suffrage in antebellum Iowa, Kansas, and Territorial Nebraska, lawmakers maintained these restrictions until after black suffrage was recognized in the former C.S.A.⁴⁶

The first major challenge to this exclusion occurred in Iowa in 1857. Although the efforts of Iowa's tiny black communities and a handful of liberal state legislators were rewarded by placing the issue on the ballot, Iowa voters overwhelmingly rejected black suffrage in 1857. In the years that followed, black communities continued to challenge their disfranchisement as returning soldiers held conventions in Kansas and Iowa which demanded the right of suffrage. Despite the sacrifice and service of these men and the nearly two-hundred thousand other black Americans who served in the war, most Republicans were still hesitant to include black suffrage as part of their state platform in 1865. Abolitionists such as Josiah B. Grinnell opposed a formal statement in favor of black suffrage as a practical matter, fearing a measure so in advance of public opinion would defeat the entire Republican ticket.

⁴⁶ *Davenport Daily Gazette*, April 11, 1865.

Hiram Price agreed with Grinnell's concern but passionately argued that the sacrifice of black soldiers demanded a measure of courage among party leaders. "Let the Republican party have the courage to do justice," Price exclaimed at a critical juncture of the 1865 Iowa Republican convention. "I have no fear of the result in a contest of this kind. We shall carry the election and have the satisfaction of wiping out the last vestige of the black code that has long been a disgrace to our state." While many party leaders had hoped to avoid the volatile issue of black suffrage, Price's rhetoric inspired others to break their silence on the measure. This action forced the resolution to the floor for a vote where the measure passed by a significant margin. Although most party members had hoped to avoid any public statement on the subject, even fewer wished to go on record as opposing universal male suffrage. Iowa Democrats made their best attempt to validate Grinnell's concern, painting the Republicans in blackface to contrast with themselves as the "White Man's Party." The post-war political climate that associated the Democratic Party with disunion proved too much for Iowa Democrats to overcome, however, and the Republican party routed their opponents in the 1865 elections.⁴⁷

Despite the Republican Party's tremendous electoral advantages, the decision of party leaders to include the measure as part of their platform was no guarantee of the measure's success. African Americans met in conventions from 1865 to 1867, keeping the issue in front of lawmakers through petitions and personal lobbying

⁴⁷ Iowa Federal Writers' Project, "The Negro in Iowa" Collection, Works Progress Association, 1935-1942, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, hereafter cited as "Iowa WPA Manuscript Collection," 236-237.

efforts. Alexander Clark delivered one of these petitions along with an impassioned speech to state legislators in 1866. Clark addressed the lawmakers as “Fellow Countrymen,” asking his listeners to revise the laws so that he and the seven hundred veterans whose names appeared on his petition might be able to address them as fellow citizens. These efforts paid off two years later, when nearly two-thirds of voters approved a constitutional amendment to remove the word “white” from Iowa’s suffrage clause in 1868. Blacks in Iowa celebrated this victory as only the beginning of their fight for full equality, passing resolutions thanking their political allies while reminding them of the challenges ahead.⁴⁸

The electoral victory came as little surprise for many Iowans. Ben Matthews of Muscatine was one of many blacks who believed the Civil War had created a change in Iowa’s racial culture. As one of the speakers at Muscatine’s 1867 Emancipation Day celebration, Matthews predicted that white Iowans would approve the suffrage amendment as he read a piece of poetry he composed for the occasion:

In eighteen hundred and sixty-one
The traitors’ war had begun.
In eighteen hundred and sixty-three
Abraham Lincoln set the negroes free.
In eighteen hundred and sixty-four
The colored troops stood before
the rebels as a foe.
In eighteen hundred and sixty-five
The traitors found they couldn’t revive.
In eighteen hundred and sixty-six
Andrew Johnson cut up tricks.

⁴⁸ *Muscatine Journal*, November 6, 1865; *The Christian Recorder*, November 18, 1865, quoted in Stephen J. Frese, “From Emancipation to Equality”; Richard Acton and Patricia Nassif Acton, *To Go Free: A Treasury of Iowa’s Legal Heritage* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1995), 127-8; *Iowa State Register*, January 6, 1869; *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, March 14, 1866, January 30, 1868; *Appleton’s Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1869), 383-5; *Muscatine Daily Journal*, April 27, May 9, 12, 19, June 1, September 14, October 10, December 10, 14, 1868, January 2, 1869; *Cedar Rapid Times*, June 17, 1869.

In eighteen hundred and sixty-seven
Our noble Congress holds him even.
In eighteen hundred and sixty-eight
Colored men will walk up to the polls
And vote straight.⁴⁹

Despite this optimism, nearly a third of Iowans opposed the amendment even as national leaders were moving towards universal male suffrage. Perceiving this opposition, Iowa Democrats made black suffrage their top election issue. The 1868 Iowa Democratic platform directly opposed the amendment while party members sought to frame the removal of the word “white” as a referendum on racial purity. Democratic presses ran scores of incendiary articles predicting that suffrage would lead to amalgamation. Democrats cited the presence of white Republican leaders at black meetings as evidence of this process. For example, the manifestation of interracial cooperation at one such rally was censored by Democrats as a being the outcome of “motley crowd of black negroes and far more disreputable white negroes.” Reports claiming that black women “of masculine proportions” were bullying chaste white women were related to the changes in the state’s political culture, claiming that such insolence would not been tolerated only a few years prior. “We are ready for the fight,” claimed Democratic supporters, predicting that Republican victory would result in a “war of races” as racial distinctions and barriers would be the first casualties of Radical domination. Democrats also warned voters that a “swarm of negroes” would descend upon Iowa if the state allowed blacks to vote, apparently unaware that Southern blacks already enjoyed the franchise. Although betrayed by their incendiary rhetoric, the originators of such predictions

⁴⁹ *Muscatine Daily Journal*, August 2, 1867.

often denied their own racism, explaining their opposition to black migration as the result of economic self-interest. An influx of blacks, white opponents of suffrage explained, would increase the white man's tax burden as more almshouses and asylums would have to be built. At least one Democratic opponent of universal male suffrage reacted to the measure's passage by exclaiming that he would move to Kentucky. Although this lawmaker did not fulfill his oath, the fact that so few blacks had moved from the South to Iowa after the Civil War reduced the effectiveness of race baiting. Iowa's black population had grown from 1,069 to 5,762, but blacks still represented only a fraction of a percent of the state's residents.⁵⁰

Kansas's continued rejection of black suffrage was likewise connected to its demographics, as blacks constituted a significantly larger percentage of the population. The state constitution limited suffrage to white males and would continue to do so until 1884, although Kansas's acceptance of the 15th amendment in 1870 effectively ended the bar against black suffrage. African Americans in Kansas mobilized throughout the period to challenge their exclusion from the polls, participating in meetings and signing petitions prior to the Civil War. Black leaders intensified these efforts during the Civil War. For example, blacks held protest meetings throughout the state on the very day Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation that sought to remind their white neighbors that was a hollow word without the full rights of citizenship. Black leaders presented the

⁵⁰ James L. Hill, "Migration of Blacks to Iowa," 291-295; *Keokuk Constitution*, March 7, 1868; *Iowa State Register*, February 27, 1868; *Muscatine Courier*, September 5, December 19, 1867, April 30, March 18, October 1, 1868; *Muscatine Journal*, October 29, November 4, 5, December 5, 10, 1868; *Page County Democrat*, September 3, October 8, 1868; *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, January 8, 1869.

petitions from these meetings to members of the state legislature. Republican lawmakers politely received these delegates but refused to consider their demand for full political equality. Black leaders held a series of conferences in the following years, each producing similar petitions that were likewise disregarded as too far in advance of public opinion. Republican leaders likewise refused to accept the measure as part of the party's platform in 1866.⁵¹

The inclusion of black suffrage as one of two constitutional amendments the following year received the support of many of the measure's opponents who correctly predicted that pairing the measure with a constitutional amendment for women's suffrage would doom both measures. Although the state received a great deal of national attention for its apparently liberal stance on race and gender, the failure of both measures by a 2 to 1 ratio illustrated the conservative proclivities of the electorate who were determined to maintain both racial and gender barriers. "Long winded editorials on 'Woman's Sphere,'" remarked the *Dubuque Herald*, "are not half so reliable as election returns from Kansas where 'woman's sphere' has been emphatically defined."⁵²

The difference between Kansas and Iowa in regards to public opinion on black suffrage is due both to leadership and demographics. Republican leaders in Kansas typically avoided public support of black suffrage because the measure represented a

⁵¹ "Proceedings of a Convention of Colored Citizens: Held in the City of Lawrence, October 17, 1866," Spencer Research Library, Lawrence, Kansas; Eugene H. Berwanger, "Hardin and Langston: Western Black Spokesmen of the Reconstruction Era," *Journal of Negro History* 64 (Spring, 1979): 105-107; Richard B. Sheridan, "Charles Henry Langston and the African American Struggle in Kansas," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 22 (Winter, 1999): 268-283.

⁵² *Dubuque Daily Herald*, November 7, 10, 1867.

greater perceived threat to white voters in that state. In contrast to Iowa, whose black communities composed only a fraction of one percent of the state's total population, blacks represented 8% of all Kansans. As a result, Kansas was one of the last states to ratify the 15th Amendment before it became law. In addition, Kansans failed to remove the word "white" from their Constitution even after governor Thomas Osborn specifically called their attention to the matter in 1873.⁵³

The issue of black suffrage in Nebraska resembled aspects of Iowa's experience as well as those of Kansas, once again a reflection of both political leadership and demographics. Democratic state platforms in both 1865 and 1866 strongly opposed black suffrage and openly advocated white supremacy as party doctrine. Although Republicans responded by portraying their political rivals as tyrants, few made public statements that positively supported black suffrage. For example, Republicans attacked Democratic politician Joseph Early by claiming that he had participated in the Baltimore mob and "would yet assist in hanging Abraham Lincoln." Despite their rhetorical differences, both parties supported an 1866 state constitution that limited suffrage to white males. The intervention of the United States Congress, which refused to ratify this document and declared that the state would only be admitted into the Union with universal male suffrage, led to a special session of the territorial legislature. With the exception of a handful of Democratic legislators from Harvey and Otoe County, Nebraska lawmakers chose to accept Congress's

⁵³ *Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1869), 399; *Wyandotte Gazette*, May 25, June 1, 1867; "Annual Message of Governor Thomas A. Osborn to the Legislature of Kansas, 1873," Kansas State Library, Topeka Kansas.

demands rather than delay statehood. The Democratic *Nebraska City News* summed up the views of many Nebraskans with its gendered analysis of the state's limited options. Claiming that black suffrage was inevitable due to recent measures passed by the radical-dominated Congress, the *News* explained it would "be more manly to accept negro suffrage from Congress by legal enforcement than to humiliate ourselves by its voluntary adoption as the price of admission to the union." Ironically, Nebraska Democrats used a similar argument in favor of statehood. Rumors that Congress was considering a measure to enfranchise blacks in the territories led to warnings of "Nigger Inevitability" and calls for statehood with "a Constitution which will provide for WHITE voting alone." The actions of Congress, however, placed the state's Republicans in a position where they could support the national party's new position in favor of black suffrage without taking a personal stand on the issue.⁵⁴

Several blacks voted prior to the adoption of Nebraska's new constitution in March of 1867. One such voter in 1860 reportedly caused quite a disturbance by voting in an Omaha municipal election "despite the vigilance of the sentinels of both parties." Such disturbances continued in the first months after the new constitution took effect, with at least twenty African Americans in Omaha reporting that officials had denied their right to vote in city elections. Democrats ridiculed those who sought to uphold the state's highest law by supporting black suffrage in 1867, lampooning Republican insistence on removal of racial distinctions with claims that the party's lawmakers supported a motion to strike out the word "Brown" from Brownville and

⁵⁴ J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: Western Publishing, 1918), 344-54, 382-9; *Nebraska City News*, February 3, 1866.

replace it with the phrase “without distinction on account of race or color.” The *Omaha Herald* continued their opposition to universal male suffrage by denouncing the 15th Amendment and opposing black suffrage as well as the political enfranchisement of Native Americans and Asian Americans. The Democratic press portrayed Nebraska and the South as victims of black Republicans who were degrading the electorate with a “deluge of ignorance” that would soon be matched by another flood of Asian immigrants that would ultimately “De-Americanize [the] government” and destroy the Republic.⁵⁵

Republicans in Iowa and Nebraska supported the extension of suffrage in 1867 and 1868 because voters perceived the measure as a *fait accompli* that presented little threat to white supremacy in states where blacks would account for only a fraction of the electorate. Midwestern Republicans also accepted black suffrage due to a keen recognition that black voters would increase their constituencies. The actions and rhetoric of leading white Republican politicians are instructive in this regard. While these men typically avoided public statements about racial issues, Republican politicians lectured black audiences at Emancipation Day celebrations and black political rallies about their party’s intrepid campaign to pass black suffrage. Such a sacrifice, whites advised, demanded a display of loyalty among a grateful people who should demonstrate their gratitude by always voting for the Republican ticket. Although black voters recognized that many party leaders were genuine

⁵⁵ *Omaha Herald*, February 2, June 1, 1866, February 22, March 1, 22, 1867, July 28, August 18, September 1, 1869; Journal of the House of Representatives of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Nebraska, Twelfth Session, 1867, 95-7; Morton and Watkins, *History of Nebraska*, 382-389.

supporters of universal male suffrage, they likewise recognized that competition between the political parties was an essential factor in the health of the nation and would likewise be critical to insuring that Republicans did not take their votes for granted. The Republican press quickly revealed the limits of white support, as the first stories of blacks at the polls displayed a mixture of paternalism and the expectation that all blacks would vote as party leaders directed. Black Democrat Cyrus Bell recalled his first attempt to vote in Omaha in an atmosphere of partisan expectations: “Very naturally, every Negro was expected to vote the Republican ticket, if allowed to vote at all, and hence it was a reasonable expectation that every Democrat would do his best to prevent Negroes from voting.” Although Bell and other blacks were occasionally harassed by whites when they attempted to vote in the late 1860s, white Midwesterners recognized the right of black men to vote after 1870. As a result, Midwestern black communities remained politically empowered even as whites used economic power and violence to disenfranchise black voters in the South.⁵⁶

From Exclusion to Segregation in the Public Schools

Organized protest against discrimination in the public schools is at least as old as 1787, when a group of black citizens in Boston petitioned their state legislature to open a separate school for members of their race. African Americans responded by creating a private school in 1798 while supporting a second attempt for a separate school in 1800. These attempts were rewarded in 1820 and 1831 with the

⁵⁶ *Muscatine Daily Journal*, September 26, November 9, 1868, February 13, March 2, 1869; *Omaha Monitor*, August 4, 1921.

establishment of publicly supported separate schools. By 1844, black protest in Boston had progressed from exclusion to segregation as a handful of black businessmen led a petition drive calling on school officials to open their facilities to all of Boston's youth. In 1849, white abolitionists and black leaders formed the Negro School Abolition Society which increased the pressure on school officials by calling for integration through petitions and pickets. These efforts climaxed when a black printer named Benjamin Roberts enlisted the help of future Senator Charles Sumner who together launched a lawsuit to test the legality of the city's system of segregated schools. The court ruled that segregation was not only legal, but a positive good that was necessitated by the deep-seated prejudice that existed in the city. Although Sumner lost his case, many of the Boston schools voluntarily desegregated shortly afterwards. Writing in 1859, Frederick Douglass spoke for many who sought an end to segregated schools. "Integrated schools would not only afford Negro children a better education," Douglass explained, "they would strike a fatal blow at racial segregation and create an atmosphere in which Negroes could work more effectively for equal political and social rights."⁵⁷

African Americans in the nation's western frontier mirrored this spirit of agitation, yet historians have typically neglected black protest against segregation that

⁵⁷ James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 76-79; Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 75-6. Robert Leon Lane, "A Historical Study of the Development of School Desegregation in the Wichita Public Schools, 1966 to 1975," (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1976), 33.

occurred West of the Mississippi River and before *Brown v. Board*.⁵⁸ At least part of the neglect of this region is due to the disorganized nature of public schools in most frontier communities. Although public schools had been in operation in Iowa for several decades, these institutions provided only limited opportunities for both white and black children throughout the state until after the Civil War. Kansas and Nebraska followed a similar pattern, with most children being educated either in the home or within private schools until the late 1860s. White Quakers and other religiously oriented whites established a number of “contraband” or “freedman’s” schools in the region during the Civil War. Although these institutions were short-lived, they created a precedent in a few communities that was mirrored by the creation of separate schools.

Within smaller communities and rural schools, teachers and school officials simply excluded black children. Blacks confronted exclusion in each of these communities, leading white Midwesterners either to accept their demands for integration or create separate schools at considerable taxpayer expense. In the decades that followed, black communities challenged both the unequal facilities that were endemic throughout the region as well as the practice of segregation itself. Whites responded with a form of resistance that was unique to the region, rhetorically opposing discrimination while simultaneously clinging to white supremacy.

⁵⁸ Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery*, 113-114, 143. Litwack’s work is an example of the finest scholarship of the antebellum North as well as the exclusion of Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska from that scholarship. With the exception of half of a paragraph on page 116 and a pair of footnotes, these states and territories are completely neglected. Davison Douglas’s new work, *Jim Crow Moves North*, is an outstanding synthesis of historical work on separate schools in the North. Considering that so little has been written about school segregation in the Great Plains, Douglas was forced to limit the bulk of his study to those communities east of the Mississippi River.

Iowa's first territorial laws of 1839 declared that Iowa schools were open to "every class of white citizens" but did not explicitly bar African American students. The 1846 Constitution limited suffrage to whites but made no mention of race in its clauses that regulated schools. The omission of any educational exclusionary clauses was not the result of a movement for integration, however, as the new legislature immediately passed a school law declaring the schools "open and free alike to all white persons" between the ages of five and twenty-one. That delegates designed this wording to exclude blacks completely is demonstrated by the action of the 1850 legislature that modified the law to exempt blacks from school-related taxes. Although the school laws were important, the embryonic state of Iowa's public school system at this time resulted in a diffusion of power where teachers and local officials could make their own decisions regarding the admission of black pupils. For example, the 1850 census listed seventeen black children as scholars who were enrolled in the public schools of Iowa. Further consultation of the 1850 census reveals that about fifteen percent of black children were admitted to the public schools at a time when well under half of the state's white children were enrolled.⁵⁹

The legal exclusion of blacks from Iowa schools and school-related taxes were statutes whose power was limited to the willingness of local authorities to enforce them. For example, officials arrested a black woman in Iowa City when she refused to pay her share of the school despite her legal exemption from such taxes.

⁵⁹ Laws of Iowa 1851, Chapter 71, Section 1160, quoted in Bergmann, *Negro in Iowa*, 20; Senate Journal, 1856-1857, 229; Arnie Cooper, "A Stony Road: Black Education in Iowa, 1838-1860," *Annals of Iowa* 48 (Winter/Spring 1986): 113-134.

The first statewide “Colored Convention” of 1857 addressed the incongruity of these laws, issuing a protest against their continued taxation to build schools that excluded their children. Iowa legislators hired renowned educator Horace Mann to study their schools and recommend a new code of laws and local policies in 1857. Officials bungled this effort, however, and Mann never traveled to Iowa. As a result, his study made no mention of racial exclusion or segregation—an oversight that caused great unrest among some Iowa lawmakers. Democratic politicians sought to utilize the popular opposition to integrated schools by making it a campaign issue, alleging that their opponents sought “social equality” within the public schools. Republicans responded to these allegations not by defending the rights of African American children, but by reminding their readers that Democrats supported a policy of local control which might lead to integration, something most Iowa Republicans (or at least former Whigs who would later become Republicans) vehemently opposed. Rather than argue for integration, Whigs and other Democratic opponents presented the matter as a non-issue. “Does anyone suppose [the Iowa Legislature or Board of Education] will attempt to thrust colored children into white schools?” one Republican editor asked, adding that the wording of Iowa’s Constitutional provision was nearly identical to that of North Carolina.⁶⁰

Racial issues occupied nearly a fifth of the dialogue during Iowa’s 1857 Constitutional Convention, with the question of exclusion and segregation in the

⁶⁰ Richard, Lord Acton and Patricia Nassif Acton, 88-9; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, September 8, 1857; Robert R. Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 26, 109; Clarence Ray Aurner, *History of Education in Iowa*, vol. 2 (Des Moines: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1914), 121-122; Clarence Ray Aurner, *Leading Events in Johnson County, Iowa* (Cedar Rapids: Western Historical Press, 1912), 252.

public schools occupying a central part of that discourse. Delegates even considered a motion in favor of exploring the issue of black education to be controversial. The resulting discussion revealed a widespread consensus against the outright exclusion of black children, as well as a consensus against racial integration within the schools. Delegate George Gillaspay was the most outspoken against the possibility of integrated schools, condemning the racially neutral language of his colleagues who hoped to avoid the issue as a threat to racial purity. Gillaspay's fiery rhetoric smashed any possibility of avoiding the issue as he spoke vehemently against the possibility of interracial contacts as the first step towards amalgamation. "As an individual I am opposed to it," thundered the Ottumwa delegate, "and I trust in God, that I will never see the day... [when his state would encourage the] amalgamation of the black and white races of this country." "If the people of this state are disposed to appropriate money for the education of the blacks," Gillaspay stated, "let them do it in separate and distinct schools. I will not have [black children] made equal with my children, and the children of my constituents, who are white and I thank God that they are white."⁶¹

Gillaspay's peers did not agree that the clause in question—making the schools of Iowa "free of charge and open to all," would be interpreted as a mandate for integrated schools. Constitutional law specialist William Penn Clarke cited the example of Indiana's segregated schools despite the existence of the phrase requiring the schools to be "equally open to all" in the state constitution as evidence that

⁶¹ Journal of the 1857 Iowa Constitutional Convention, vol. 2, 62, 825-830; Iowa Constitution of 1857, Article 9; Robert R. Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 154.

Gillaspy was merely seeking political capital. Gillaspys “seems to see and hear ‘nigger’ in everything,” explained Clarke, while a Republican delegate from Burlington typified the tenuous position of his party in regretting that the delegates had broached the issue at all. A majority of his peers shared his desire for laws that would mirror the party’s ambiguity on race, with no “word including or excluding the negro race from the common schools” appearing in the document. Even the most outspoken delegates in favor of legal segregation denied their own prejudice, stating only the wisdom of “yield[ing] to the prejudices of the people.” Although delegates encouraged the removal of the phrase “open to all” as a compromise measure, its originator refused to comply and his supporters presented the issue as a litmus test of the delegates’ devotion to justice. “There is a sort of idle dream that somewhere in this great republic there is a feeling which would keep [blacks] out and deprive them of education,” explained Rufus L. B. Clarke. “One after another catches the idea, and every man thinks that somehow or other he is to be tainted, unless he joins in the hue and cry against anything like doing justice towards that portion of the human race. It is unmanly. It is ungenerous. It is unchristian.”⁶²

Despite the support of Clarke and a few others for school integration, the debate centered on how to frame the Constitution’s school laws to allow for segregated schools without explicitly mentioning the practice for fear of violating the lofty ideals of that document’s preamble. Gillaspys and Rufus Clarke represented the ideological boundaries of the delegates, the former attempting to mirror the state’s

⁶² Journal of the 1857 Iowa Constitutional Convention, vol. 2, 825-830.

antebellum exclusionary policies while the former sought to prevent the practice of segregation. Few Republicans supported Clarke, stating their desire that black children receive an education as “an intelligent negro [was] certainly preferable to an ignorant one” but explicitly opposing integration. After hours of debate, the delegates settled on language notable only for its ambiguity, declaring the schools open to “all youths of the state” while deleting the more explicit phrase “equally open to all.” Most delegates viewed the entire debate as superfluous, lampooning Gillaspie’s dark predictions of amalgamation in view of the state’s demographic reality. Had Gillaspie “not smelt a negro here,” explained one delegate, “I think this might have passed off smoothly.”⁶³

The Convention’s desire to avoid the issue of separate schools simply stalled the issue. Many of the same men met as legislators the following year and were once again assigned the task of drafting the state’s educational laws. The Iowa Senate quietly passed a school law that required officials to create racially segregated schools unless every white parent within a given district consented to the admission of black scholars. This bill led to a “spirited debate” in the lower chamber as legislators encouraged integration as a matter of economy while others called for a law mandating separate schools. The bulk of the participants favored a variety of popular sovereignty, once again hoping to place the issue in the hands of individual communities and their leaders. Efforts to amend the bill from unanimous consent to a referendum of the majority failed as legislators ironically claimed that such a

⁶³ Journal of the 1857 Iowa Constitutional Convention, vol. 2, 832-837, 1030; Arnie Cooper, “A Stony Road,” 126-128.

democratic approach would be unpopular in their districts where the majority of voters were opposed to integrated schools. Once again, even the most adamant proponents of segregation distanced their support from their personal opposition to blacks, speaking in vague terms of “the prejudices of the age” while claiming to be merely a conduit of public opinion.⁶⁴

Iowa’s 1858 school law mirrored most of Horace Mann’s recommendations but added a rather unique provision regulating separate schools. Officials were required to “provide for the education of the colored youth, in separate schools; except in cases where by the unanimous consent of the persons sending to the school in the sub-district, they may be permitted to attend with the white youth.” The following year, the same Iowa Republicans who drafted this law were outspoken opponents against the extension of slavery. Republican editors filled Iowa newspapers with melodramatic reports of the outrages against Free Soilers in Kansas and editorials against the fugitive slave law. The voice of the party sounded its shrillest pitch, however, in responding to Democratic allegations that they encouraged black migration to Iowa and sought to “force” black children into the white public schools of their communities. Despite the rhetoric of both parties, the Iowa Supreme Court declared the 1858 school law unconstitutional. The Court’s ruling had nothing to do with segregation or race, however, as the controversy dealt with the 1857

⁶⁴ Laws of Iowa, 1858, Chapter 52 Section 30; *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, March 2, 16, 1858.

Constitutional provision that the State Board of Education, rather than the legislature, be empowered to make regulations regarding schools.⁶⁵

The new law drafted by the State Board of Education was considerably shorter than that of the legislature and made no mention of race. The document's references to scholars used phrases such as the "instruction of youth" while declaring all "youth between the ages of five and twenty-one years" eligible to attend Iowa schools. The law also granted the right of children to attend the schools of any sub-district within the township they resided in, a measure that one might consider a clear statement against exclusions and the creation of separate schools. Existing records from the State Superintendent's office support a different conclusion, however, as correspondence indicates that state officials had not considered racial exclusion or segregation when forming the 1859 law. For example, a letter written from a Des Moines resident to State Secretary of Education Thomas Burton requested legal guidance regarding the new school law in regards to the "trouble" caused by a black student whose presence in the public schools was reportedly opposed by half of the white parents. The letter explained that Des Moines officials had consulted the new law and found no "plain" guidance on the matter, asking the State Board of Education to make a ruling on whether black students possessed the right to attend the public

⁶⁵ Laws of Iowa, 1858, Chapter 52, Section 30, Subsection 4; Arnie Cooper, "A Stony Road," 129; *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, April 6, 1858 *District Township of the City of Dubuque v. City of Dubuque*, 7 Iowa 262 (1858); *Iowa State Journal*, December 11, 18, 1858; *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye and Telegraph*, July 9, 1859. There is no indication that the Iowa Supreme Court considered the undemocratic provision regarding separate schools in its decision. The lengthy court decision contains no mention of the provision and local reports of the court's proceedings likewise make no mention of the issue of school segregation. Although at least one reporter claimed that the decision "contains too many words," yet none of these words related to the issue of school segregation.

schools. The Secretary of Education responded, explaining that there was no established policy on this issue but advised Des Moines officials that he had referred the matter to the judiciary committee. Although there is no record of the committee's deliberations or findings, this correspondence strongly supports the conclusion that the framers of the 1859 law used racially neutral language for reasons other than creating a mandate for segregation.⁶⁶

Although there is no further correspondence on the Des Moines issue, Burton responded to a similar inquiry from Corydon the following month. "The law is silent in regard to Negro children, but requires that a school shall be taught in each sub-district 'for the instruction of youth between the ages of five and twenty one residing therein' which of course includes all persons between those ages," the Secretary explained. Given the continued lack of a clear standard regarding race in the Iowa schools, Burton felt obliged to give his personal opinion on the matter. As black residents were required to support the schools through taxes, Burton stated, the state was legally obliged to provide their children with schools. Additionally, Burton explained that he believed that it was in the best interest of the state to educate all children. "I consider it the best policy," the State Superintendent added, "whenever it can be done to establish separate schools for colored children, especially where these admissions with the white children is likely to create disaffection." Burton expressed his understanding that separate schools were currently in operation throughout the

⁶⁶ Laws of Iowa, 1860 Chapter 88, Article 1, Section 2023, 2024, 2037; *Iowa State Journal*, January 1, 1859; Thomas H. Burton Jr. to G. Frain, December 14, 1859, Letterbooks of the Iowa Department of Public Instruction, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.

state wherever such a system could be operated economically. “There are a few isolated areas, however where they must either attend with the white children or be deprived of the advantages of an education. The law requires that provisions shall be made for their education, and hence they cannot be excluded on the grounds of color, unless special provision has otherwise been made for them by the Board of Directors.”⁶⁷

Even as the state legislature debated the merits of separate schools, local school officials continued to determine the issue locally without reference to school laws. The directors of the Iowa City schools voted in May of 1858 to establish a separate school for black children. Black children had presumably been excluded from the schools of Iowa City prior to this time, as school officials approved a separate measure permitting black attendance at an otherwise white school while the city built the new Jim Crow school. School officials predicated this decision on its acceptance by white parents and the board’s response the black petitioners explained

⁶⁷ Thomas H. Burton to William Miles, January 14, 1860; Iowa Department of Public Instruction, Letter Books, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines; *Iowa Citizen* (Des Moines), December 21, 1859, quoted in Clarence Aurner, *History of Education in Iowa*, 122; Iowa Department of Public Instruction, Letterbooks for Cases, 1861-1877, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines. There are only a handful of letters dealing with racial issues among the hundreds of letters of correspondence between the Iowa Department of Public Education and local school officials between 1859 and 1865. Although local officials were very concerned with the nuances of school laws and regulations regarding elections, administration, and finances, very few apparently sought guidance regarding the legal issue of excluding black pupils or creating separate schools. A search of school records and local newspapers reveals the existence of separate schools throughout the state. The scarcity of correspondence on this issue, in contrast with the abundance of correspondence on minor administrative details, demonstrates the indifference of school officials regarding the education of black children.

that they would rescind the measure if white parents raised objections about their children's presence.⁶⁸

Even communities renowned for abolitionist sentiment such as Grinnell, Iowa attempted to enforce the color line within the public schools. While a number of escaped slaves found sanctuary in this Iowa town, they were unwelcome in its schools. One former slave requested admission to the school so that he might return to the South and find his children, literacy being a means by which he could demonstrate his freedom to prevent his own re-enslavement. Although officials admitted a few black children in 1858, this decision was controversial and upset a number of Grinnell residents. In response, the school board held a public meeting and allowed its citizens to vote on the matter of expelling these children. Although only eight of the fifty participants voted for expulsion, oral histories indicate that public sentiment was still quite hostile. At least two white men were so upset at the continued presence of these children that they disrupted the school on the final day of the spring term with the intention of physically removing the children from the schools. The insistence of the teacher and superintendent that all children had a right to attend the school angered the men, yet the children were safeguarded by the action of a concerned neighbor who had advised them to stay away from the school on that particular day.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Minutes of the Iowa City Board of Education, May 7, June 2, 1858, July 29, 1859, April 4, 1860, September 11, 1867, May 16, 1868, May 31, 1869, June 12, 1870, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

⁶⁹ Iowa WPA Manuscript Collection, 257; *Iowa State Register*, June 17, 1904. Attempts to verify this report have been discouraged by the absence of newspapers and school records in Grinnell from this time.

Although local histories deny the existence of segregated schools in Davenport, the presence of black scholars in the schools of that city aroused considerable gossip within surrounding towns and serious opposition among the white residents of antebellum Davenport. The Democratic *Daily News* authored a lengthy editorial drawing attention to the “notorious fact” that a handful of black children were attending one of the city’s ward schools alongside white children. Responding to the *News*’ allegations that this integration was the result of a Republican scheme to promote intermarriage and amalgamation, the *Davenport Daily Gazette* responded with equal outrage. Rather than attack their political opponents for their assault upon the right of all children to an education, however, the *Gazette* was most concerned with assuring readers that they had no knowledge of or connection to this arrangement. The editors asked how the mixing of the races could occur in their schools, who was responsible, and whether parents had protested.⁷⁰

Although both parties sought to gain political capital from the event, Democrats and Republicans both supported the following petition signed by thirty-eight white parents opposed to the presence of black children in the Davenport schools:

Your petitioners feel aggrieved in consequence of Negro children being admitted in the district schools with white children. We are not opposed to the education of Negro children provided they are taught in a school house provided for the purpose of teaching them separate from white children. We pay taxes for the support of

⁷⁰ *History of Scott County, Iowa* (Chicago: Inter-State Publishing Company, 1882); Harry E. Downer, *History of Davenport and Scott County, Iowa*, vol. 1 (Chicago: S. J. Publishing Company, 1910); Davenport City Directory 1858-9, 1860, 1861-2; Minutes of the Davenport Board of Education, September 18, 1858; *Davenport Daily News* June 26, 1858; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, July 2, 1858. The author would like to thank Craig Klein of Scott Community College for sharing his research on the subject of school segregation in Davenport and the work of Davenport Public School Museum volunteer Robert McCue for his assistance in locating additional sources.

District schools, and should have the right to say whether Negro children should be taught with white children or not; there are some four or five Negroes taught at the stone school house in district No. 2. If they are to be continued in the school as stated above, we will be compelled to take our children from the school and protest against the payment of school taxes for the support of schools mixed with Negroes and white children. We consider that we have been greatly imposed upon and must seek redress if this course is to be continued in the school district; we know that you have it in your power to prevent this difficulty in the district schools, and hope that you will see that this matter will be settled directly...⁷¹

Petitioners presented their demands to the school board on September 18th.

Recognizing that the 1858 law required the unanimous consent of all white parents before black children could be admitted, the board ordered that the black children of Davenport be dismissed from the public schools and called a public meeting to discuss the matter. School officials at this meeting defended their actions in admitting the four or five black children who had applied to the school on the basis of economy, advising community members of the extra costs that would be incurred if a separate school were maintained for black children. Signers of the petition expressed regret for the fact that the black children had been dismissed from the school. One petitioner stated that his only reason for signing the petition was that he feared that racial integration would jeopardize public education in Davenport. At this public meeting, he and other signers sought to distance themselves from the movement. An impassioned but anonymous letter condemned the cruelty of the city's actions and laid bare the chattel mindset behind the exclusion of black children from the benefits of education. Some white community members, however, publicly spoke in favor of continuing the schools without any distinction of race. As a result, many at the meeting felt that if they individually counseled the signers of the petition, they might

⁷¹ *Davenport Daily Gazette*, September 22, 1858; *Daily Democrat and News* (Davenport IA), September 21, 1858; *Daily Iowa State Democrat*, September 21, 1858.

withdraw their names. However, the fact that the law required unanimous consent limited the practicality of such a canvass and allowed Davenport residents to hide their support of the movement behind empty statements of support for black residents and the education of their children. Even those who signed the original petition stated their belief that the dismissal of the black children was in line with the wishes of “sensible negro[es]” or due to the unfortunate state of prejudice of *other* parents. Other whites claimed that they were forced to “concede something to the opinions of these men for the safety” of the city’s nascent public school system.⁷²

Despite several attempts to create a separate school for black students in Davenport between 1858 and 1860, black parents, children, and community members prevented such schemes through boycotts and protests. School officials attempted to organize a separate school under the auspices of a white church on two separate occasions and made at least one attempt to create a separate room within an otherwise white school. In each instance, the result was the same; officials quickly discontinued the schools as a significant portion of black parents refused to send their children to these institutions while white residents complained of the added expenses. During these years, white Republican politicians and journalists offered little or no support of equal education rights, choosing instead to label their political opponents as racists while publicly distancing themselves from the issue of school integration. For example, Republican editors ridiculed the editor of the *Democratic News* for

⁷² Minutes of the Davenport Board of Education, September 18, October 4, 13, 1858; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, September 21, 25, 26; *Daily Democrat and News*, September 25, 27, 1858, December 2, 1859, January 31, 1904.

declaring that his children would never attend school with black children, not because of the inherent racial prejudice of the statement, but simply because of the fact that he was single and had no children. In certain instances, such as an editorial response asking whether their Democratic opponents felt it was “worse for a white child to sit by colored children than for a grown up white man to sit by greasy bucks and sable Dinahs,” Iowa Republicans sought to outdistance their opponents as the defenders of white supremacy on the Western frontier.⁷³

The precedent established by Davenport’s black community in preventing the creation of separate schools between 1858 and 1860 was maintained throughout the city’s history. School board records throughout the 1860s confirm that the schools of the city were never officially segregated again. The necessity of a child identified only as a “contraband” to make a special appeal to the school board prior to admission to the Davenport schools illustrates the continued presence of racial discrimination. School officials agreed to admit the child only if white parents voiced no objections. Although some board members boasted about the ethnic diversity of the Davenport schools, Superintendent W. O. Hiskey’s claim that the system was home to “the natives of almost every country under the sun” obscured the fact that the Davenport schools remained almost completely white throughout the 1860s. The schools practiced a variety of methods of informal discrimination calculated to

⁷³ Minutes of the Davenport Board of Education, November 8, 13, December 13, 1858, March 10, April 4, 16, 23, November 5, 14, 19, 25, December 10, 23, 1859, February 3, 1860; Meeting of the Citizens Committee and the Davenport City Board of Education, September 22, 1859; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, September 28, November 20, October 1, 1858, April 1, 11, 12, 13, 14, June 28, September 23, December 10, 1859, March 17, 1860; *Daily Democrat and News*, September 30, 1858; *Daily Democrat*, January 31, 1904; *Iowa State Bystander*, December 19, 1913; *Democrat and Leader*, May 13, 1919; WPA Manuscript Collection, 258.

discourage black patronage. The fact that only twenty-one black children attended the Davenport schools in 1870 while nearly that many children between the ages of six and sixteen were not enrolled illustrates that black enrollment was neither sought nor encouraged within the city's schools.⁷⁴

Racial segregation would have likely occurred in Davenport despite black protest if its demographics mirrored that of Southeastern Iowa communities such as Muscatine. Despite a relatively large black population in contrast to other Iowa towns, both contemporary accounts of early Muscatine and many of its historical accounts include no mention of separate schools in Muscatine despite the existence of an important court challenge that occurred in this city. Muscatine was one of Iowa's leading antebellum communities, with publicly supported schools established as early as 1848. The creation of a private school for black children in 1857 demonstrates that these schools drew the color line. The following year, the city reorganized its public schools and a separate school for black children was created. This school experienced rapid turnover throughout the early 1860s, as personnel records indicate that at the board employed at least three different white women to teach Muscatine's "African School" during the Civil War.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Minutes of the Davenport Board of Education, January 24, 1863, July 27, 1866; *Iowa State Register*, November 22, 1866; Ninth Census of the United States, 1870.

⁷⁵ Letter of G.B. Dennison, April 8, 1879, "History of the Muscatine Public Schools," Records of the Muscatine Public Schools; Muscatine City Directory, 1856, 1859, 1866; Muscatine File, Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa. Minutes of the Muscatine Board of Education recorded between April 12, 1858 and March 17, 1913 were destroyed in a fire that occurred on February 19, 1896. For information on that fire, see William D. Randall, "Little Known Stories of Muscatine," Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa, 1981.

Keokuk was home to a number of former slaves, such as Charlotta Pyles who was emancipated by the last will and testament of her former master. Pyles devoted her freedom to securing the emancipation of her family members, including the husbands of two of her daughters. Charlotta Pyles organized a six-month speaking tour in Pennsylvania with the assistance of a number of famous black leaders and abolitionists, raising enough funds to purchase the freedom of both of these men. These families settled in the Keokuk area in the mid-1850s and reportedly assisted others escape bondage through similar fundraising efforts and through the informal networks of the Underground Railroad. Charlotta continued her work as a traveling speaker, assisted by men and women such as Frederick Douglass, Lucretia Mott, and Susan B. Anthony. Charlotta Pyles passed both her first name and intrepid zeal to her daughter, whose 1875 legal challenge opened the High School of Keokuk to her own son, Gerard Smith.⁷⁶

Separate schools were in operation in Keokuk by at least 1859, when its “African School” reported an average daily attendance of thirty-three pupils. The following year, the city Superintendent was surprised to find that these children excelled in a number of subjects. The Superintendent’s diary lauded the white teacher of the “African School” and especially the musical inclinations of her students. While the antebellum public schools of Keokuk faced precarious finances—the board being compelled to close all schools in March of 1860 due to debt, the separate school was particularly underfunded. Records of the Superintendent indicate that the “African

⁷⁶ Iowa WPA Manuscript Collection, 260; Hallie Q. Brown, *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction* (Xenia, OH: Aldine Publishing Company, 1926), 34-45.

School” was the first public school to close and the last to re-open after the board received its summer allotment.⁷⁷

Although Iowa’s school laws were silent on the issue of segregation and there is no indication that state officials directed local boards to admit black children in antebellum Iowa, Democrats sought to earn political capital by labeling their opponents as integrationists. The 1859 Democratic platform specifically called for a new school law that required the exclusion of black children from “white” schools and mandated that school districts could not utilize the taxes of white citizens to build or maintain schools for black children. Such a law was not required for black exclusion in antebellum Iowa as whites expelled black children on account of race in several communities. Occasionally, local whites took an interest in the plight of these children and succeeded in getting the handful of black children in rural areas of the state reinstated after demonstrating that the children possessed exemplary character and intelligence. Even the sacrifice of black soldiers was no guarantee of admission, as two children were expelled from the rural schools of Taylor County while their fathers were still campaigning for the Union army.⁷⁸

Private citizens and religious groups established a number of separate schools for the use of “contraband” children during the Civil War. The support of such an institution in Keosauqua drew opposition when residents discovered that the school

⁷⁷ Keokuk Schools Superintendent’s Records, 1859-1860, Records Group 28, Box 2, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City; *Valley Whig* (Keokuk), February 7, 1859; *Daily Gate City* (Keokuk), September 20, 1860. The Superintendent maintained a detailed journal between 1859 and 1860. A search of SHSI records and the administrative offices of the Keokuk Public Schools reveals no other school records prior to the turn of the century.

⁷⁸ Iowa WPA Manuscript Collection, 261-262; *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, July 5, 1859; *Iowa State Register*, June 1, 1865.

was partially supported by public funds. Republicans tended to support these private schools, largely because they insured both black education and segregation. Party leaders often applied the label of “Copperheads” to whites who opposed the expenditure of public funds to partially subsidize these schools. Elements of class bias were apparent in these attacks, as Republicans portrayed their Democratic opponents to black schools as impoverished “scamps and ignoramuses” who were “anxious for the contrabands to remain as brutally ignorant as their persecutors.” There is little evidence to support the contention that more than a handful of the supporters of these “Freedman’s Schools” believed that the children of former slaves should be placed in the common schools of their communities. These institutions served as a basis for separate schools in cities throughout the state, often being supported by private donations and tuition payments of black parents prior to their absorption into public school districts. Black churches in communities such as Albia and Oskaloosa likewise supported schools during the war. School officials in Oskaloosa later incorporated one of these schools within the public school system, the initiative of the black community being interpreted by whites as support for Jim Crow. WPA researchers discovered similar experiences in Ottumwa and Mount Pleasant, as privately supported “contraband” schools became publicly supported Jim Crow schools after the Civil War.⁷⁹

Dubuque was an ethnic town from its earliest days, with significant German and Irish communities but very few African Americans. The city experienced rapid

⁷⁹ Iowa WPA Manuscript Collection, 260-262; *Iowa State Register*, October 6, 1863, February 10, 1866, October 8, 1867, *Oskaloosa Daily Herald*, July 3, 1950.

growth between 1850 and 1880, becoming one of the nation's leading urban centers by 1870. Dubuque's public schools struggled to keep pace with the city's expanding population and very few children of any race or ethnicity were able to take advantage of the public schools until after the Civil War. Given the ethnic and religious tensions between Protestants and Catholics from various parts of Europe, whiteness became a unifying concern as Dubuque's black population increased. Allegations that teachers required students to sing the praises of John Brown led to one of the first controversies in the public schools. A number of anonymous complaints in January of 1863 alleged that teachers were corrupting the white children of Dubuque by teaching the doctrine of abolitionism. Teachers were forcing this seductive dogma upon innocent minds each morning, these letters explained, through the seemingly innocuous daily ritual of opening class with music. While the schools had opened with song for many years, the recent selection of *John Brown's Body* troubled parents. School officials denied these charges and explained that the rules of the school board permitted students a few minutes each morning to lead one another in song. Officials maintained that the students chose what song they wished to sing with no coercion or even input on the part of faculty. Officials likewise added that students who did not wish to participate were allowed to sit quietly and study until the teacher began the morning recitation. One principal responded to personal allegations of abolitionism in connection to reports that he required the song's performance in his classroom by making an unequivocal denunciation of the song's message. The teacher added for good measure that he and his colleagues were far too busy in the

overcrowded and under-funded schools of Dubuque to add abolitionism to the curriculum.⁸⁰

Although Dubuque residents supported the Emancipation Proclamation as a wartime measure, most white residents also feared the possibility that the President's decree would lead to an increase in their city's black community, then representing less than one percent of the city's total population. As a result, the actions of black petitioners who confronted the racially exclusive public schools system only days after the Emancipation Proclamation took effect met opposition. Understanding these attitudes, these parents framed their request in a more conservative manner than was typical for other communities, asking the Dubuque Board of Education to create a school for their children rather than demanding integration. Although the board reportedly formed a committee to investigate this request, school leaders cited the under-funded nature of the city schools as justification for their refusal to support the petitioners' request. Black taxpayers responded by creating a private school for their children while expanding their campaign to include some of the city's leading white citizens.⁸¹

⁸⁰ *Dubuque Herald*, January 4, 11, 16, 1863; Mohammad A. Chaichian, *White Racism on the Western Urban Frontier: Dynamics of Race and Class in Dubuque, Iowa, 1800-2000* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2006). Chaichian's work is similar to that of other studies of individual communities in the Midwest in that it offers wonderful details about black churches, businesses, and local leaders yet ignores the creation of segregated schools and 19th century black protest.

⁸¹ Chandler C. Childs, Robert F. Klein, *Dubuque: Frontier River City* (Dubuque: Research Center for Dubuque Area History, 1984), 54-5; Annual Reports of County Superintendents, Microfilm Rolls 1-5, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City; *Dubuque Herald*, January 4, 11, 16, 21, February 17, 1863; Dubuque's earliest school records indicate that no minutes were kept between May of 1858 and November of 1863, as a result of "financial embarrassment." The author would like to thank Michael Gibson, Archivist of the Center for Dubuque History at Loras College for his assistance, despite my arrival minutes prior to the closing of the Loras College library.

Community leaders such as former mayor Julius K. Graves joined members of the black community were in their requests for school facilities the following. Graves personally presented the 1864 petition of thirty-four taxpayers requesting the creation of a public school for African American children. This school board again appointed a committee of its members to investigate the situation, but the existence of a private school averaging thirteen tuition-paying students convinced the board that a more economical plan might be arranged by subsidizing this school rather than building a separate school. The board voted to provide the teacher of this school ten dollars per month, a third of the salary teachers received in the white public schools of Dubuque. Detailed financial records of the Dubuque Schools do not indicate that the board ever made a single payment to support this school. There is also no evidence that the board considered the possibility of admitting the small number of black children into their respective ward schools at this time. As would occur throughout Iowa following the Civil War, Dubuque officials eventually incorporated the school created by the black community into the school district, citing the antebellum demands of the black community as support for segregation in later decades.⁸²

Given the notorious conflict regarding the extension of slavery and the popular support for laws banning black migration, one might expect violent confrontations regarding race in the public schools of Kansas. Although the political contest over the extension of slavery did not end at the schoolhouse door, overt

⁸² Minutes of the Dubuque Board of Education, May 27, June 3, November 11, 1864; "Dubuque's School Integration," unlabeled newspaper clipping, Dubuque School History File, Center for Dubuque History, Loras College, Dubuque Iowa; *Dubuque Herald*, June 5, 1864.

violence regarding the issue within the schools was rare. The exception may prove the rule, as Free State supporter J.B. McAfee was one of the few individuals threatened with physical harm for advocating abolition within the schools. Reverend McAfee established one of the first private schools in Kansas Territory near Leavenworth in 1855. Although there is no indication that black children were among the scholars, the Reverend's inability to censor his anti-slavery beliefs would soon lead to his and the school's demise.

...The Reverend's political views not harmonizing with the prevailing sentiment of a majority of the then citizens of the town, his days of usefulness as a successful school teacher became suddenly abridged, and as the vigilance committee gave him notice [with others] to quit, he thought prudence in this instance at least, was the better part of valor, so gracefully but with becoming agility retired from the school field.⁸³

Recent investigations of violence in Territorial Kansas reveal that racial issues such as the extension of slavery were often credited as the cause of bloodshed, even though most disturbances were actually based on property disputes or political rivalries that were only tangentially connected to the slavery question.⁸⁴ Controversies regarding the admission of black children in the handful of public schools in operation in antebellum Kansas may have resulted in violent rhetoric; there is little evidence that whites physically attacked black children or parents for their efforts to attend public or private schools. Although few Kansans committed atrocities against black settlers themselves, whites did commit violence against physical symbols of black migration and advancement such as privately supported schools attended by

⁸³ H. Miles Moore, *Early History of Leavenworth City and County* (Leavenworth: Sam'l Dodsworth Book Company, 1906), 199.

⁸⁴ Dale E. Watts, "How Bloody Was Bleeding Kansas?" *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 18 (Summer 1995): 116-129.

black children. However, the real cause of violence in Kansas schools mirrored the history of Bleeding Kansas; as these incidents had less to do with perceptions of race than with the economic implications of public schools. School taxes were an instant source of friction among early settlers, many of whom came from regions without publicly supported schools. A study conducted by the Kansas State Historical Society reveals that whites burned a number of schools as an economic or political statement while others looted schools for personal gain. Although some whites reportedly withdrew their children due to the presence of black scholars, there is only scattered evidence that black children attended both public and privately supported schools among white children.⁸⁵

Lawmakers in Kansas mirrored the actions of Iowa's territorial legislature in explicitly framing their first school laws to include only white children, only to avoid the question of exclusion and segregation upon statehood. Likewise, legal clauses regarding race in the public schools of Kansas were frequently revised and amended. Despite these changes, local officials operated their schools according to the dictates of popular opinion. While Iowa lawmakers deleted references to race by 1860, lawmakers amended Kansas statutes amended to allow separate schools but never required segregation. Although Kansas's legal history regarding school segregation was ambiguous, it is important remember that the laws of neighboring Missouri and Oklahoma required segregated schools.

⁸⁵ Lyman Child Wooster, *Columbian History of Education in Kansas* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1893), 229; Albert Castel, *Civil War Kansas: Reaping the Whirlwind* rev. ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 210.

The difference between Kansas and Missouri's school laws is instructive, considering that the territorial legislature mirrored the laws of its eastern neighbor in 1855 by providing for schools that were open to "every class of white citizens." The issue of race would lead to a heated debate in the Wyandotte Constitutional Convention four years later. Legislators voted to table a motion that would have inserted the word "white" into the criteria for determining the eligibility of students in the public schools by the vote of 26 to 25. Only two of the twenty-six men who voted against the exclusionary measure explained their position, and both of these delegates prefaced their remarks by stating that the government should only consider black education if they intended to maintain separate schools. The delegates debated a number of provisions intended to support the creation of separate schools, including one provision that required an equitable distribution of funds for white and black schools based on a district's demographics. The measure's sponsor defended himself from potential allegations of amalgamation by supporting stronger language that would prevent any misunderstanding of his intention that black and white children were not to share the same schools. Despite the clear intent of these measures to create and enforce the color line, supporters of each of these amendments repeatedly denied that they were motivated by racial prejudice. Their only intentions, they explained, was to make the schools of Kansas a success by accommodating community sentiment.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Laws of the Territory of Kansas, Chapter 144 Article 2 Section 1; "Debate Over Segregated Schools, Wyandotte Constitutional Convention, 1859," Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

Similar to the Iowa Constitutional Convention, most Wyandotte delegates tread delicately around issues of race and were satisfied with the Convention's decision to leave the issue of segregation to the state legislature or the dictates of local authorities. The Wyandotte Constitution provided for "equal educational advantages for white and colored" and "males and females alike," but offered no definition of terms. It is clear from the rhetoric of the convention and later actions of the delegates that the phrase "equal advantages" was not an endorsement of integration. In 1862, the legislature amended the school law and placed the operation of public schools in cities of the first class (incorporated communities with populations over 7,000) under the authority of each city. The law gave local authorities the power to separate the tax collected from black and mulatto citizens from those taxes collected from whites with the resulting proceeds earmarked for the maintenance of separate schools.⁸⁷

Daniel Neuenswander argued that because the tiny black population of Leavenworth, the only city containing over seven thousand residents in 1862, could not support the costs of a separate school system, the intent of the legislature appears to be to provide schools for white children without specifically excluding blacks. Although his analysis neglects the fact that the black community of Leavenworth maintained a private school at this time, his analysis regarding the racial attitudes of white legislators is likely correct. Although the law was ambiguous on this point, classifying all white children between the ages of six and twenty-one as eligible for

⁸⁷ Compiled Laws of 1862, Chapter 46, Section 18, Article 4, Chapter 46.

admission yet making no indication that black students were explicitly barred, white Midwesterners favored segregation. As a result, the ambiguity of this law mattered little. The dictates of local control ruled in most early Kansas communities, with white parents and teachers deciding independent of any statutory authority whether to accept or reject black pupils. This laissez faire attitude continued throughout the next century as local white opinion rather than state law determined the creation of the color line in Kansas schools.⁸⁸

The State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Isaac Goodnow boasted in December of 1863 about the progress of the public schools under his tenure despite the hardships of civil war. “If, with one-seventh of our population in the army,” Goodnow stated, “with the excitement and dangers from guerrilla raids, we can show continual progress in the work of education, no higher compliment can be paid to the virtue, intelligence and heroism of our citizens.” Although a few Kansas communities created public schools despite the hardships of territorial conflict and civil war, most of the progress made prior to 1865 was in the field of private education. As a result, educational opportunities were greatly limited for all children whose parents could not afford the cost of tuition. In addition to the financial obstacles of private education, there is only one documented example of a private school in antebellum Kansas that accepted black pupils. According to a letter written by Clarina Nichols to a family friend, Nichols’ daughter refused to exclude a handful of black children from the subscription school she operated in Quindaro. Despite the reputation of

⁸⁸ Daniel G. Neuenswander, “A Legal History of Segregation in the Kansas Public Schools From Statehood to 1970,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1973), 32.

antebellum Quindaro as a “stinking abolitionist hole,” the presence of three black children reportedly limited the school’s enrollment to a dozen pupils. Had she operated the school for white children only, Nichols estimated that thirty or forty children would have subscribed.⁸⁹

As historian Jeff Bremer has demonstrated, most residents of Quindaro did not identify themselves as abolitionists, many feeling compelled to defend themselves against such charges by assisting or at least acquiescing in the capture of fugitive slaves. Despite their hostility towards slavery and rhetorical support of fairness towards African Americans, the first public schools of this Free Soil port city were open to white children only. Although a women’s club debated the merits of admitting black children into both Sabbath and secular schools, the measure received little support beyond the abstract. In fact, residents of Quindaro refused to provide public support for black education until after the Free State faction had risen to ascendancy in the territory, allotting five hundred dollars for a “Colored School” in 1858. This school could not accommodate the large numbers of former slaves who came to the area during the Civil War, leading private citizens like Reverend Eben Blatchley and his wife to establish schools for children and adults in their home. The Blatchleys’ worked with area black churches that contributed funds to transform the school into Freedman’s University, a primary school for black children that was to evolve into “The Tuskegee of the West.” This transformation was the result of local A.M.E. church leaders who operated the school at the end of the Reconstruction

⁸⁹ Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, December 31, 1863; “Quindaro and Western University Historic District,” Special Collections, Kansas City, Kansas, Public Library.

period and renamed the school Western University, reflecting its transition to state-supported industrial school and teacher's college.⁹⁰

Leavenworth was the leading community of territorial Kansas and one of the first to offer public schools. The creation of a public school system in 1858 did little to advance the interests of black children, however, leading members of the town's small black community to form a privately supported school the following year. Leavenworth officials not only refused to consider financial support for this private school, but also denied requests of the German community to subsidize their school until 1863. These decisions were likely related to the financial difficulties encountered by the district, as only five to ten teachers were employed prior to this time to teach an average of over seven hundred children. Although the board excluded black children from these schools, the board's own rules stated that all children residing within the city limits "who are not otherwise disqualified" were entitled to admission. While subsequent records indicate that the board did not consider black admission, the board's rules included a lengthy list of conditions such as contagious disease that would result in a child's exclusion from school that did not include race.⁹¹

⁹⁰ *The Chindowan* (Quindaro), February 20, 1858; Orin McKinley Murray Sr., "The Rise and Fall of Western University," *Kansas State Historical Society*, 1960; William E. Connelley, *A Standard History of Kansas and Kansans* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1918), 1040; Jeff R. Bremer, "A Species of Town-Building Madness," *Quindaro and Kansas Territory, 1856-1862*, *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 26 (Autumn 2003): 156-171; Ed Shutt, "Freedman University," *The Historic Journal of Wyandotte County* 6 (2006): 273-275; *Wyandotte Commercial Gazette*, June 6, 1863.

⁹¹ Minutes of the Leavenworth Board of Education, August 31, 1860; *Kansas Express* (Manhattan), August 20, 1859, December 28, 1861.

The attitudes that led to the creation of segregated schools throughout the state of Kansas are evident within an article in the *Leavenworth Conservative* that was typical of the opinions of Kansans regarding the need to provide schools for black children. The author regarded the provision of schools for blacks as a way to provide public security rather than valuing the potential of black youth. The author wrote that if taxpayers did not build schools for black children, allowing them to “grow up in ignorance,” taxpayers would simply end up financing the construction of prisons. Despite these concerns, whites ignored a series of petitions from Leavenworth’s black community that began in January of 1862 and requested the establishment of a separate school for their children. Board members politely referred these petitions to committees but never formally considered any of these proposals until 1864. Given the board’s refusal to provide any sort of educational opportunities for their children, black citizens also protested against taxation to maintain schools that excluded their children. After the board likewise delegated and disregarded this protest, members of the black community created their own school. This privately supported black school opened with over a hundred children in daily attendance in 1862.⁹²

Board members granted the petitions of the black community in the fall of 1864 by creating a separate school. School officials appointed Charles Langston as the school’s first principal and two black women as teachers. The committee

⁹² Minutes of the Leavenworth Board of Education, January 23, May 12, 1862, September, 1863; Charles L. Gaulding, “Brief History of Leavenworth, Kansas, and the Development of its Early Educational System, 1855-88,” (M. A. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, 1955); Lloyd C. Smith, “A Historical Outline of the Territorial Common Schools in the State of Kansas,” (M. A. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, 1940); *Leavenworth Conservative*, July 8, 1862; *Leavenworth Times*, February 9, 1863, October 7, 1864; *Leavenworth Times*, December 6, 1863.

appointed by the board to study the needs of the black community recommended the creation of two schools because black children were scattered throughout the city, yet the city operated only one school for black children until after the Civil War.

Langston's acceptance of the position of agent for the Northwestern Freedmen's Aid Commission in 1865 promised to advance the interests of black education throughout the state. Langston attempted to survey the state of existing black schools, yet his study was not preserved. While Langston soon moved to Douglass County and operated a farm, school officials in Leavenworth employed only two black teachers following his departure. Conditions within this school were incredibly overcrowded as a result with each teacher being assigned over eighty children.⁹³

Residents of Lawrence wrote many of the early histories of Kansas and embellished the racial liberality of their community. Richard Cordley claimed that escaped slaves "made their way to Lawrence as if by instinct" owing to its citizens liberal reputation. "They knew how their masters hated [Lawrence]," explained Cordley, and "consequently they loved her. They all felt that they would be safe if they could only get to Lawrence. Lawrence became to them what the polar star had been to the fugitives of former years." Cordley may have been one of the leading abolitionists of the region, as his later biographical histories would claim, yet even he recognized that the egalitarianism of Lawrence faded in the wake of black migration. While Lawrence glorified in its self-proclaimed virtue, black migration to the Free State Citadel caused its residents "to feel that virtue was not always its own reward"

⁹³Kansas State Census of 1865; Minutes of the Leavenworth Board of Education, August 8, September 5, 21, October 3, 1864, August 21, 1865; *Leavenworth Conservative*, October 13, 1865.

as even self-proclaimed abolitionists “almost regretted the reputation their history had given them” according to Cordley. Whereas the city was home to only twenty-five African Americans in 1860, census recorders counted nearly a thousand black residents by the end of the war and 1400 by 1870.⁹⁴

The first settlers of Lawrence established free schools within months of the town’s founding in 1854. Additional schools opened almost every year, but most of these schools were privately supported and the only publicly supported schools operated in rented buildings until after the Civil War. Although it is possible that the color line was not drawn against the few black children who lived in antebellum Lawrence, no records of racially integrated public schools have been discovered. Considering the vitriolic remarks of pro-slavery forces aimed at Lawrence at this time, the silence of the city’s many enemies regarding the issue supports the conclusion that Lawrence’s first schools were for white children only. As Lawrence’s black community grew during the Civil War, its members formed and supported a separate school that was later subsidized by the city. Black and white volunteers also established a number of schools to teach adults basic skills such as reading and writing.⁹⁵

Many Kansans may have rejected a strict system of legally defined segregation at the time of statehood because they felt it was unnecessary and could be

⁹⁴ Richard Cordley, *A History of Lawrence* (Lawrence: E. F. Caldwell, 1895); Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Ninth Census of the United States, 1870; Kansas State Census of 1865.

⁹⁵ Kaethe Schick Papers, Watkins Community Museum and Archives, Lawrence Kansas; David Dary, *Lawrence, Douglas County, Kansas, An Informal History* (Lawrence: Allen Books, 1982), 273-4; Dick, 315; *Columbian History of Education in Kansas*, 128; Richard Cordley, *Pioneer Days in Kansas* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1903), 139-41.

construed as a requirement to provide schools for black children when it was simply easier to force their exclusion. After the Civil War, the growth of the public school system led to the belief that an education should be provided to all children of the state. School officials erected separate schools in nearly every Kansas town that had more than thirty African American children. The inefficiency of maintaining two school systems was financially burdensome in many of these districts, yet school officials maintained the color line in some of the smallest Kansas communities during the decades that followed the Civil War.⁹⁶

Nebraska's first territorial laws were passed in 1855 and mirrored those of Kansas and Iowa with their implied exclusion of black children. These laws directed officials to record the names of white children aged five to twenty-one who resided in their district as a basis for organizing schools. The school law was revised in 1858 and included lengthy provisions for the enumeration of scholars that included the word "white" in about half of its clauses while omitting the word at other times. The omission of the word white in some instances suggests that lawmakers did not feel they needed to make explicit what everyone already knew; the schools of antebellum Nebraska were intended for the exclusive use of white children. For example, the 1858 law proclaimed the Territorial School Fund as a source of financial support that was dedicated to the educational interests of "all the youth of this territory." Increased

⁹⁶ Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900; Albert Castel, *Civil War Kansas*, 210. By the turn of the century, such episodes were rare and Kansans supported the principle of education for all children, albeit on a segregated basis in those areas that had large African American or Mexican populations. The most comprehensive survey of this subject appears in James Carothers Carper's work, "The Published Opinions of Kansans Concerning Education, 1854-1900," (Ph.D. diss., Kansas State University, 1977).

concern about black migration among Nebraska legislators resulted in the amendment of this clause in 1860, as lawmakers inserted the word “white” wherever it they deemed it was missing and exempted African Americans from all taxes raised for school purposes. The change was mostly symbolic of Nebraska’s antebellum attitudes, as few public schools existed in Nebraska prior to the Civil War, and only a quarter of the state’s youth were enrolled in any school prior to 1860. As the war continued and Nebraska grew in both white and black population, state officials warned that the exclusion of children from the public schools represented a threat to the future welfare of the state.⁹⁷

Although the forms used to record school census reports in Nebraska prior to the Civil War reported the number of “white youth between the ages of 5 and 21” in a given location, it is likely that black children were not excluded from every school in the state. Printers did not remove the word “white” from these forms until 1867 when lawmakers removed the word “white” from the school laws, yet there is little indication that teachers and officials sought the guidance of the law when considering black enrollment. In fact, there is little reason to believe that local officials scrupulously adhered to the school law in general. The director of the Eight Mile Grove Township complained in 1860 that the “common clod-hopper” could not

⁹⁷ Laws of Nebraska Territory, 1855, 218; Laws of Nebraska Territory, 1856, 66; “An Act Providing for the Better Regulation of Schools in Nebraska,” Laws of Nebraska Territory, 1858, 278-300; School Laws of the Territory of Nebraska, 1860, 88-9; House Journal, Territory of Nebraska, 1856, 27-9; House Journal, Territory of Nebraska, 1857, 31; House Journal, Territory of Nebraska, 1859, 212; Second Annual Report of the Commissioner of Common Schools of the Territory of Nebraska to the Seventh Legislative Assembly, 1860-1861, 4-5; Auditors Report, Office of the Territorial Auditor and School Commissioner, Journal of the House of Representatives, Territory of Nebraska, 10th Session, 1864, 28; Nebraska Board of Education Annual Reports, vol. 7, 1864; Bertha W. Calloway and Alonzo N. Smith, *Visions of Freedom on the Great Plains*, 25.

comprehend these laws as even attorneys disagreed about their provisions. A county superintendent echoed these concerns, stating that few residents understood the law because teachers and parents had little inclination to track down the law or search its lengthy clauses. Regarding the specific issue of black exclusion, even the State Auditor admitted his uncertainty as to whether the law excluded blacks by including the word “white,” as no specific clause prohibiting black scholars or requiring separate facilities was included in its lengthy provisions. Confusion over the school law would continue throughout the Reconstruction period as both the Governor and the State Superintendent expressed the need for both simplified regulations and school officials who took the time to familiarize themselves with those directives.⁹⁸

The question of race was particularly contentious in Nebraska during this period, as legislators sought to avoid the issue of segregation and exclusion in the public schools. In all three states, communities and school officials would make these decisions locally, irrespective of law and often in violation of their imagined past. Despite these and other indications that Midwestern whites preferred exclusion and segregation in public schools and other areas of public life, the political power of Midwestern black communities expanded dramatically in the years that followed the Civil War. As a result, black communities throughout Middle America increased their efforts to confront the color line during Reconstruction in ways that anticipated the modern Civil Rights Movement.

⁹⁸ *Nebraska Commonwealth*, December 28, 1867, January 9, 1868; “The Negroes of Nebraska,” Omaha Urban League, 1940, 33; *Nebraska City News*, August 26, September 4, 1867; Report of Cass County, Dixon County, Second Annual Report of the Commissioner of Common Schools of the Territory of Nebraska to the Seventh Legislative Assembly 1860-1861; Tenth Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1878, 8-9.

Chapter 2: Reconstruction and the Color Line, 1865-1879

Although whites frequently sought political capital by predicting that Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska would be inundated with former slaves, only Kansas received sustained black migration between the Civil War and the end of Reconstruction. Of course, the most significant black migration to Kansas occurred between 1879 and 1880 when thousands of “Exodusters” abandoned the South in search of economic opportunity and greater political freedoms. Yet, Kansas saw steady and significant black migration prior to the Exodus. While the black populations of Iowa and Nebraska continued to grow after the Civil War, most of these black communities failed to keep pace with the influx of white residents. The demographic differences between these states led to the legal eradication of segregated schools in Iowa and Nebraska and the legal acceptance of separate schools in Kansas. As was the case in antebellum Middle America, however, race relations were formed and contested at the community level.

White Midwesterners, especially those in Iowa and Nebraska, often referred to their region’s lily-white demographics as an attractive feature of their communities. In addition, the racial attitudes of white Midwesterners were often tacitly displayed within their descriptions of other regions that were “less fortunate.” While white Midwesterners referred to New England in positive ways due to its lily-white racial demographics, whites utilized coded phrases to contrast the Great Plains and the Northeast with the “undesirable” residents of the South. Although whites seldom

cited racial demographics explicitly in these comparisons, even the most obtuse observer could comprehend why white Midwesterners did not consider the South as a desirable location to live. Occasionally these comparisons were explicit in their racial preference, such as a newspaper that referred to Maryland as an “oasis” during Reconstruction because it enjoyed the maintenance of “A White Man’s Government.” Democratic newspapers were especially outspoken on the matter of Reconstruction, with headlines such as “Don’t Kill the Niggers, But Slay the Whites” appearing on the front page of the *Omaha Herald*. As the headline indicated, the article aimed at shocking its readers into accepting the viewpoint of white Southerners who sought to portray themselves as the victims of racial violence. Although most Midwestern whites understood that whites routinely victimized African Americans in the South and often expressed sympathy with their plight, few Midwestern whites were willing to vote for black leaders in their own communities. Likewise, white Midwesterners typically believed that the re-establishment of all-white political leadership in the South was natural and beneficial for the region, even if they expressed occasional annoyance with the violent methods used by some Southern whites to re-establish white rule.⁹⁹

White editors filled Midwestern newspapers with outrage regarding the violent treatment of African Americans throughout the South during Reconstruction.

⁹⁹ *Davenport Daily Democrat*, April 5, 1865; *Nebraska City News*, November 30, 1867; *Nebraska Commonwealth*, December 7, 1867; *Omaha Weekly Herald*, November 17, 1865, December 23, 1868, January 13, August 13, September 29, 1869; J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *School History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: Western Publishing and Engraving Company, 1920), 110, 142; *Lincoln Evening News*, November 16, 1903; *Omaha Weekly Tribune and Republican*, August 14, 21, 28, September 4, 21, October 26, November 2, 1872; *Omaha Bee*, August 20, 1872.

Episodes of physical violence against black citizens were less characteristic of race relations in Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska than in the Deep South and Border States, yet the threat of violence was an ever-present reality for black Americans in Midwestern communities. Several black men accused of serious crimes were publicly shot, lynched, and burned each in these states nearly every year from 1865 to the end of Reconstruction. These public displays of violence often occurred in broad daylight, with hundreds and sometimes thousands of participants and witnesses. By the mid-1870s, public lynchings in these states were typically followed by a superficial attempt to catch the ringleaders of mobs and at least some sense of communal shame. A typical example of this charade of justice occurred in Wichita in 1874. Law enforcement publicly vowed that they would see that the leaders of a lynch mob stood trial for their actions, a statement that was likely meant as a warning for the perpetrators of the crime to leave town owing to the delay that followed the declaration. Public displays of physical violence against blacks accused of crimes continued after Reconstruction, but these actions were always followed by formal investigations and court proceedings, although equally few convictions were made. The most significant difference between Midwestern lynchings before and after Reconstruction was the sense of moral outrage that typically followed these events in the latter period. Prior to Reconstruction, Midwestern editors published editorials goading the men of rival communities to vindicate the honor of white womanhood in response to allegations of violent crimes perpetrated by black men. By the 1880s and

1890s, these same journals denigrated the violence that lynch mobs committed within neighboring towns as evidence of the depravity of those communities.¹⁰⁰

White men who were accused of raping black women received far more leniency for their alleged crimes. Midwestern courts dismissed a great number of these cases despite the testimony of the victims. For example, in 1876 African American John Price opened his Nebraska City home to a white acquaintance who claimed to be down on his luck. Price returned from his morning chores to find that his wife had locked herself in a room after their guest had attempted to rape her. Local whites intervened to prevent Price from avenging his wife's honor by the blade of his knife. Although the community empathized with Price's indignation, a crowd of white men intervened on behalf of the perpetrator, disarming Price and merely notifying the attempted rapist that he should leave the city. White reporters were occasionally quite callous towards black women who were the victims of rapes perpetrated by white men. For example, an 1873 article jokingly remarked that a young girl who had been serially raped by white men had enjoyed an "eventful day," intimating that the girl had likely invited the attack against her.¹⁰¹

Midwestern courts also discounted acts of violence perpetrated against black men. Reports of violence between white and black men indicate that blacks nearly

¹⁰⁰ Kaethe Schick Papers, Watkins Community Museum and Archives, Lawrence, Kansas; *Topeka Commonwealth*, June 7, 1873; *Atchison Free Press*, June 10, 1865; *Lawrence Tribune*, April 6, 1865; *Wyandotte Gazette*, June 22, 1867; *Topeka Commonwealth*, January 15, 1870; *Leavenworth Conservative*, January 6, 1870; *Wichita Eagle*, April 17, 1873, May 28, June 4, 1874; *Leavenworth Times*, October 18, 1877; Genevieve Yost, "History of Lynchings in Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, (May, 1933).

¹⁰¹ *Daily Nebraska Press* (Nebraska City), August 4, 1876; *Leavenworth Daily Commercial*, March 16, 1870, May 3, 1873.

always received the greater share of any legal sanctions. One such incident reportedly began as a fistfight but ended when a white man beat his black adversary unconscious with a crate. Although officials arrested both men, the local press amusedly reported that the judge convicted the black man while “the other fellow that wasn’t a negro was released.”¹⁰²

Black leaders in the Midwest protested against these injustices. They astutely perceived the historic implications of Reconstruction’s success or failure and believed that historians would remember the era for such obvious denials of justice and physical violence against African Americans. In a speech before the Iowa State Convention of Colored Citizens in 1876, Alexander Clark foresaw what three generations of white historians failed to comprehend—the tragedy of Reconstruction would not be the “blackout of honest government,” as was argued by white Southern historians until the 1950s, but rather the failure to achieve racial egalitarianism. “To the future historian,” Clark predicted, “no theme will be more prolific of comment, no subject the cause for more earnest thought and consideration, than the war and the nation’s retreat from the cause of freedom.”¹⁰³

Similar conferences of black leaders occurred annually in Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska throughout this period. Records of these meetings reflect a spirit of protest and agitation similar to that of the later Civil Rights Movement. These conferences, like the later movement, were limited by their focus only on the most blatant

¹⁰² *Page County Democrat*, July 17, 1869.

¹⁰³ Centennial Address of Alexander Clark Delivered to the Iowa State Convention of Colored Citizens Tuesday January 4, 1868, Alexander Clark Papers. Clark’s entire speech is also reproduced in the *Muscatine Journal*, January 22, 1876.

violations of black civil rights. While the Civil Rights Movement successfully confronted Jim Crow laws and Jim Crow practices, the culture Jim Crow created remained. Likewise, middle class black leaders and their liberal middle class white allies shrank from confronting issues such as economic equality and residential segregation. With some notable exceptions, civil rights agitation in the 19th century Midwest likewise acquiesced to the daily microaggressions and subtle forms of discrimination that occurred in the private sector in favor of a focused battle against legal inequality and de jure segregation in the public schools. Midwestern black leaders met in conferences and mass meetings to protest the episodic violence against African Americans throughout the region. While Southern lynchings and race riots filled the headlines of white newspapers, African American communities in Middle America understood that the denial of educational opportunity was a daily act of violence committed against their children.

The majority of whites in Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska during Reconstruction favored segregation when such a system could be reasonably maintained without adding an excessive financial burden on local school budgets. The increasing delicacy, with which the issue was discussed, however, suggests that the racial mores of these Americans were unique. Although the question of segregated schools was clearly a racial issue, even the most ardent supporters of the various campaigns to separate the schools explicitly denied their own prejudice. These men and women would emphasize the overcrowded conditions of the current schools, the belief that separation would create opportunities for black teachers and incentives for black

pupils, or the unfortunate racial attitudes of *other* whites, which they feared, made the separation necessary. While most whites attempted to disavow their own racial antipathies by insisting that separation would benefit students of both races, members of Midwestern black communities clearly understood the intent of these schemes and the consequences for their children. These men and women organized extraordinary resistance movements in every community as well as utilizing the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of their respective state governments.

Blacks represented less than one percent of Iowa's total population, yet they contested the issue of segregated schools in nearly every urban community. Most cities that contained enough black children to fill a single classroom moved from informal exclusion of these children to the creation of segregated facilities. Perhaps owing to the blatant inequalities between these schools and their white counterparts, reports and correspondence of local school officials seldom mention the creation of these schools or their eventual discontinuation. Racial issues led to a number of controversies in Iowa's rural schools, yet there is seldom any mention of these incidents in the official records of local and county school officials. For example, the appearance of two black children at a rural school in the central Iowa community of Adel caused a great deal of controversy yet no record of the incident or request for legal guidance was forwarded to county or state officials. The appearance of five black children at a school near Anamosa was considered newsworthy in journals

throughout the region, yet there is no report of any issues regarding race in county school records.¹⁰⁴

The expense of operating two school systems all but prevented the operation of Jim Crow schools in rural Iowa, but students were often informally discriminated against inside the classroom. Occasionally, prejudice proved stronger than prudence and separate schools were maintained at considerable expense for a handful of pupils. The village of Bonaparte, Iowa, even operated a separate school for one black child after the Civil War. School officials first refused to enroll the child because of race. Soon thereafter, they were advised that although the law was silent on the matter of segregation, it clearly required educational provisions for all the youths of their district. Urban Republican editors took particular pleasure reporting this story, contrasting the usual economy of such backwoods “Copperheads” who consumed only the cheapest whiskey and denied themselves the luxury of schools and churches, with the sudden extravagance of Bonaparte school officials in hiring a personal tutor and providing a separate classroom for one child. Ironically, the boy played with white children at recess and was reputedly quite popular among his would-be classmates.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, December 1, 1856, 655-713; Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, November 1, 1857, 141-176; Biannual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1859; Report of the Secretary of the Board of Education, 1859; Report of the Secretary of the Board of Education, December 2, 1861, 230-254; Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, December 1, 1865, 367-93; Abstracts from the Reports of County Superintendents for the School Year Ending October 4, 1865, 395-571; Biannual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1868; Biannual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1874; Biannual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1876.

¹⁰⁵ Iowa WPA Manuscript Collection, 257; *Iowa State Register*, February 12, 1868; *Davenport Daily Democrat*, January 23, 1867; Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Tenth Census of the United States, 1880; Bergmann, *Negro in Iowa*, 34.

Davenport's Republican press had a short memory in the mid-1860s, maligning the directors of the state's urban communities who continued to maintain separate schools despite that journal's support of Jim Crow locally. For example, Davenport's *Daily Democrat* diagnosed the residents of Muscatine with "Negrophobia," a unique "Copperhead" ailment whose only symptom was the separation of white and black children in the public schools. Such a condition, the Republican *Gazette* claimed, was foreign to Iowa and should be banished back to its Southern origins. Dual school systems were not confined to the eastern counties along the Mississippi River. The Southern Iowa town of Clarinda experienced a significant migration of blacks from neighboring Missouri following the Civil War and was home to a hundred black children of school age by 1870. Such demographics influenced school officials to exclude black children from the city's graded schools and construct a separate one-room school for black children in 1869. Rural schools nearby Clarinda no longer publicly excluded black children after the Civil War, but the fact that the existence of blacks in area rural schools drew comment in newspapers across the state illustrates the likelihood of informal discrimination within the classroom. School laws requiring the education of all youths empowered black families in confronting the practice of formal exclusion but did little to protect their children once admitted. In such cases, only the courage and persistence of black children and parents could address the culture of discrimination of rural Iowa. For example, within a rural district near Monticello one black child kept returning to the public school despite being repeatedly denied its privileges. The family kept the

pressure on until school officials gave in to the child's demands. Rather than accept him into the classroom, the teacher simply resigned his post and sought employment in a neighboring district. "We have before heard of rebels fleeing before colored soldiers," a Republican wag reported, "but this is the first instance we are advised of in which a colored child, unarmed, has put to flight a good strong Copperhead."¹⁰⁶

Despite the rhetoric of Republican political officials and editors, their political rivals were often more liberal in matters of local race relations. After purchasing his freedom, a former slave from Arkansas migrated to the rural Iowa community of Montezuma, hoping to begin a new life for his family in a land reputed to have stood for freedom in the late war. His children faced tremendous hostility in attending the local school, however, and the county superintendent refused to take a stand on the issue despite his legal mandate to provide for the education of all youths residing in his district. The superintendent decided to admit the children on a trial basis, explaining that he would expel them if the protests of white parents continued after their admission. According to WPA narratives, the Democratic Postmaster of the community chose to withhold the letters and petitions white parents sent to the superintendent to create the impression that the controversy had passed. This act of censorship became self-fulfilling, as white protest eventually subsided and all of the district's children were allowed to attend their school. A similar controversy occurred in the Southwestern Iowa community of Sidney in 1866. The following year, the

¹⁰⁶ *Davenport Daily Democrat*, November 20, 1866; *Iowa State Register*, December 25, 1866, August 13, 1869; Ninth Census of the United States, 1870. One hundred and sixteen black and mulatto residents under the age of twenty are listed in the 1870 census records of the townships of East River, Harlan, and Nodaway, Iowa. The only extant newspaper for the area, the *Page County Democrat*, makes no mention of any racial issues in the schools of Clarinda during 1868 and 1869.

admittance of a single black child inspired another disturbance in central Iowa. “A Copperhead in Marion county,” reported the *Davenport Daily Democrat*, “has taken his children out of school because a colored boy—a bright kind intelligent lad, formerly a slave—is allowed to attend it.” Two months later another black child was reportedly expelled from a public school adjacent to the Minnesota border because of his race. In each of these instances local reporting was highly political in nature, giving little details in the outcome of each case beyond the political affiliation of the school officials in question.¹⁰⁷

Perhaps the clearest example of this phenomenon occurred in February of 1865 when a young black child named Bessie Lemon attempted to transfer from Davenport to a rural school between Le Claire Township and Pleasant Valley in Southeastern Iowa. Although the teacher of this school allowed Lemon to attend with her white neighbors, Sub-director Jesse Henley ordered the teacher to expel Bessie Lemon and even threatened to remove the teacher from her position if she refused his order. Lemon’s father took the matter to county superintendent D. L. Gorton who was reportedly troubled by the matter and promised to intervene on his behalf. The issue was complicated, however, by a report from the teacher that claimed that Gorton himself stating his desire to exclude Bessie Lemon unless presented with a court order. Gorton apparently experienced a change of heart after talking with the girl’s father, as he letter advised the teacher to admit Lemon. Unfortunately, sub-director Henley defied the superintendent by claiming that he would expel the girl again the

¹⁰⁷ Iowa WPA Manuscripts Collection, 257-8; *Iowa State Register*, June 26, 1866; *Davenport Daily Democrat*, December 31, 1867; *Iowa State Register*, March 16, 1866; February 16, 1868.

minute she appeared at the school. The Superintendent replied, informing the sub-director that only the Board of Directors possessed the lawful authority to expel any child, stating forcibly that this kind of shameful action would no longer be countenanced in Scott County. Henley replied with a vicious personal attack against the Superintendent, predicting white flight and the destruction of the public school system. Although many parents and members of the Board of Directors sympathized with Henley's desire to keep the school all white, the threatening rhetoric of the sub-director exposed the racial connotations of exclusion. As a result, Henley became isolated in his campaign to exclude black students as parents and the board were forced to either accept Bessie Lemon or acknowledge that they shared Henley's racial assumptions. Despite his dire predictions, Henley's children were the only pupils to withdraw from the school when Lemon was accepted. Area newspapers focused on the fight between the two men, with both Republican and Democratic presses claiming Henley as a member of their rival's party. Lost in the partisan mudslinging was any report of what became of Bessie Lemon. While the various school officials made threatening remarks against one another, Bessie Lemon demonstrated a more genuine form of courage, attending school rather than follow the request of school officials that she stay home until the matter was settled for her. Despite all of the bluster displayed by officials and editors, the school was actually integrated by a young girl and her father who refused to be excluded or Jim-Crowed.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, May 20, 1865; *Davenport Daily Democrat* February 18, April 13, May 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 1865; *Cedar Valley Times*, May 25, 1865; *Iowa State Register*, May 13, 16, 18, 1865.

Elsewhere in Iowa, school officials sought to destroy this spirit of independence not by exclusion, but rather by a unique brand of education reserved for black children. Directors of Muscatine’s public schools instructed the teachers of its Jim Crow schools to teach black children their “place” in white society. Here and elsewhere in the state, black education was deliberately limited to only the most basic skills. Although white Republicans assumed black education should be directed towards the creation of laborers and domestics, they recoiled from the obvious forms of racial discrimination evidenced by the maintenance of separate and inferior schools. Republican politicians reportedly attacked the city’s dual system as barbarous in the 1867 school election; however their most public attack on Jim Crow was its added expense. Although the Republican press of Cedar Valley predicted that the victory of these candidates would spell an end to the city’s dual system, Muscatine’s Republican leadership refused to address the issue and even decided to fight against integration when black protest led to Iowa’s first legal challenge against Jim Crow.¹⁰⁹

Alexander Clark had established himself both as a national figure and as a leading citizen of Muscatine prior to challenging the city’s segregated school system in 1867. Clark was the son of former slaves, his father being emancipated “by his father and master” who sent young Alexander to learn the barbering trade in Ohio. Clark moved to the frontier town of Muscatine in 1842 and quickly amassed wealth through investing the profits of his barbershop in the port city’s booming real estate

¹⁰⁹ *Cedar Valley Times*, June 27, 1865; *Davenport Daily Democrat*, November 20, 1866.

market. Clark was reportedly a delegate to first National Colored Convention at Rochester New York in 1853, yet delegates west of Mississippi River are recorded in that meeting's official proceedings. Ten years later, Clark was promoted to the rank of Sergeant Major in the First Iowa Colored volunteers. Although not permitted to muster due to a physical defect in his left ankle, Clark continued to serve the regiment throughout the war as its leading recruiter. Clark's national reputation was evidenced by his selection as one of twelve delegates appointed to present the resolutions drafted by the 1869 National Convention of Colored Men to President Ulysses S. Grant. Clark's local reputation was such that his appointment was met with great praise and interest by white editors and he was chosen to introduce both the Governor of Iowa and James Harlan at this convention. Clark had also been a perennial delegate to Iowa Republican conventions, being elected vice-president of the Iowa State Republican convention and later touring alongside former Iowa Governor S. J. Kirkwood as the two men rallied audiences on behalf of the party. Clark was also later elected as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1872 and was an alternate at the 1876 national convention in his former home state of Ohio.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Alexander Clark Papers, Home of Kent Sissel, Muscatine Iowa, hereafter referred to as the "Alexander Clark Papers,"; Eulogy of the Honorable Alexander Clark, Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa; William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive, and Rising* rev. ed. (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 1097; "Proceedings of the Colored National Convention, held in Rochester, July 6th, 7th and 8th, 1853," 39, Kroch Library Rare and Manuscripts, Cornell University; Proceedings of the National Convention of the Colored Men of America held in Washington, D.C., January 13, 14, 15, and 16, 1869, Kroch Library Rare and Manuscripts, Cornell University; "Old Settler's File," Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa; Iowa State Census, 1856; *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, January 8, 22, 1869, January 27, 1888; *Muscatine Daily Journal*, January 2, 21, 1869, January 1, 1871, September 9, 14, October 5, 1872, June 20, 1878; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, December 2, 1869, September 13, 1872; *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, September 17, 1874; *Iowa State Register*, October 8, 15, November 12, 1875; Muscatine City Directory, 1856. Alexander Clark's home was preserved by a group of Muscatine citizens and is currently cared for by Kent Sissel, who was kind enough to open his

Despite his national prominence, Principal Joseph Eldridge denied Clark's 12-year old daughter the right to attend the school nearest her home in September of 1867. Eldridge referred Susan Clark to the "African School" which had been maintained for children of her race for several years, despite the fact that this school was almost a mile further from Clark's home. Alexander Clark immediately filed a lawsuit to compel school officials to admit his daughter into the school nearest their home. Attorney Dewitt Clinton Richman, who was named after the famous New York governor due to the friendship between the Richman and Clinton families, and Jerome Clarskaddan represented Clark. The attorneys served the Muscatine Board of Education with papers in October of 1867 that informed them that their clients sought a writ of mandamus to compel the board to admit Clark into the all-white school. The board responded by securing legal counsel of their own. The board also defended its practice of segregation by claiming that public sentiment demanded the separation of white and black children. The board explained that Iowa law required officials to provide schools for all children but gave those officials broad discretion regarding the assignment of pupils to individual schools. Although the board's argument was supported by most of the city's white residents, the *Muscatine Daily Journal* believed that this sentiment was symptomatic of slavery's legacy. In an impassioned editorial titled "MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN" the *Journal's* Republican editors linked the subtle violence of excluding a child from her school to the causes and

home and display his collection of Clark's personal artifacts, such as a collection of medals from the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial. The author would like to extend his sincere thanks to Kent Sissel for his hospitality as well as Muscatine resident Dan Clark. The author would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the late Betty Veerhussen who assembled the collection of documents comprising the Clark Papers and devoted much of her life to preserving this historic landmark.

consequences of all other forms of despotism throughout the world. The editorial utilized biblical imagery, presenting the community's action against a child for the crime of possessing the skin her Maker had created for her as an act of both blasphemy and bigotry. An act of such malevolence against a child, the authors predicted, warranted divine reckoning.¹¹¹

The Muscatine Courier had a much different interpretation of the issue, printing a racially charged and insulting attack against Alexander Clark and his daughter.

The head darkey of this city, Mr. Alex. Clark, certainly has one quality his admirers should be proud of, and that is his gift of hand-on-to-ativeness. For the last ten years the one sole object of his life has been to get his children into the white schools of this city. He has followed that object with all the devotion of an Eastern idolater, and has succeeded at last. Successive Boards, both Republican and Democratic, have sent his children home, but they have had to do it straight ahead on an average of twice a year at least. The same branches were taught by competent teachers in both, and the children of Mr. Clark have enjoyed just the same advantages at the public expense as anybody else's children. This, however, did not satisfy the vaulting ambition of the aristocratic barber. Until he could see his picaninnies seated on the same seat, and receiving the spankings from the same hand as Mr. Butler's children, Mr. Alex. Clark kept steadfastly at work. The District Court now decides that they have a right in the white schools, and to the white schools of course they will go. The Board of Directors offered to provide teachers for the colored school capable of teaching any school, but, no, Mr. Alex Clark wanted them in the white schools—on an equality with the white children. He is triumphant, and we now begin to see the practical workings of this nigger-worshipping policy of the party in power. They do not want social equality with the colored race! Never! It is coming faster and faster. Hurrah, for Sambo, the unterrified.¹¹²

Clark's letter of response was commended by several area newspapers, the editors of the *Davenport Daily Democrat* exclaiming that the editor of the Courier

¹¹¹ Original Notice of Mandamus Proceedings, October 10, 1867, Muscatine County Courthouse, Muscatine, Iowa; *Clark v. The Board of Directors* 24 Iowa 266 (1868); "Historic Maps of Muscatine," Muscatine County Court House Records, Alexander Clark Papers; Records of the Muscatine Schools, Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa; *History of Muscatine Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1879); Eighth Census of the United States, 1860; Ninth Census of the United States, 1870; *Muscatine Daily Journal*, September 14, October 31, 1867.

¹¹² *Muscatine Courier*, October 31, 1867.

had proven himself unworthy of the honor of removing Alexander Clark's shoes. Although Clark was the victim of two injustices—the discrimination against his children and the insults of lesser men—several editors predicted that Clark's masterful rhetoric and logical argument would demonstrate the merit of his case. Clark's reply began with an explanation of the public silence the Clark family had maintained in the case, stating that he hoped he might rely on the law for redress without suffering verbal attacks for the act. Clark dismantled the Courier's claims that the equal facilities were provided, listing the valuation of the various schools, the salaries of its teachers, and the equipment and supplies provided to each school. The requirement that all black children attend one school likewise resulted in discrimination, Clark maintained, as a third of Muscatine's black children lived so far away from the school as to prevent their regular attendance. For those fortunate to live within walking distance, the quality of education was also unequal as it was ungraded and had never prepared a single student to attend the higher grades. Clark confronted the language of the Courier's attack, explaining the violence of grown men calling black children names. Such actions were part of a calculated effort to spread racial prejudice to both white and black children, assuring that the racial caste system of America was passed on to the next generation. "It is the spirit that mobbed and murdered my people in the streets of New York, Memphis and New Orleans," Clark concluded, connecting the expansion of segregation to the nation's recent outbreaks of racial violence.¹¹³

¹¹³ *Muscatine Daily Journal*, October 31, 1867; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, November 4, 11, 1867.

The *Muscatine Courier* continued its barrage against Clark, increasing its readers' diet of sensationalized reports of black crime and conspiracy theories regarding black suffrage, miscegenation, and the Republican Party. The Democratic daily was largely composed of stories from white Southern newspapers about their late troubles with black men and women whose impudence had led them to reject their proper "place" in society. The editorial staff also provided their own interpretation of national and local events, drawing connections between the "Negro Problem" of both Iowa and the South. One such editorial, "A Taste of the African as a Ruler," presented a black leader's speech in favor of armed self-defense as a call to destroy white civilization by force. Although many of these articles made no specific mention of the Clark case, several used the local court challenge as a cautionary tale. News of Clark's victory at the district court level appeared with the headline "The Irrepressible Darkey Again."¹¹⁴

District Court judge J. Scott Richman understood as well as anyone that the laws of Iowa were intentionally vague on the question of school segregation, as he had been a delegate to the Iowa Constitutional Convention and clerk of the state legislature. Given the failure of Iowa legislators to pass legislation similar to neighboring states that explicitly authorized the creation of separate schools, the Clark case ironically resulted in the vindication of George Gillaspay and other segregationist legislators' arguments in favor of an explicit bar against interracial schools. Although the delegates to the 1857 Constitutional Convention and the

¹¹⁴ *Muscatine Courier*, September 5, October 31, December 19, 1867, March 5, 18, 1868; *Muscatine Journal*, November 5, 1868.

framers of the original school laws of 1858-1859 clearly supported segregation, the legality of the practice was now in the hands of a single Republican judge who was also the brother of the black plaintiff's lead counsel. Although no prior statement of Judge Richman's racial beliefs has been discovered, it is reasonable to expect that his views were more liberal than most Iowans as Richman had mentored African American barber A. H. Watkins and sponsored his application to the Iowa Bar Association in the early 1870s. Given the lack of explicit legal guidance on school segregation, Richman studied the issue in relation to other laws. His belief that the law applied equally to all determined his judgment that Clark's children had the same right as any child and could not be barred from a school because of color.¹¹⁵

Despite its recent support for segregation in Des Moines, the *Iowa State Register* reprinted the *Muscatine Journal's* proclamation declaring Richman's decision a "righteous judgment." The *Journal* editorialized that their school officials had been acting immorally in excluding "well-behaved colored children" in deeply religious terms. "Thus does this righteous judgment smash the act of man's inhumanity to man," the editorial observed "which caused innocent children to be laughed at and scorned, on account of the act of God in making them of a darker color than the blue-eyed Saxon." The *Journal* concluded by labeling segregation as a relic of a barbarous age that had now been "swept into the rubbish pile of the past."

Although school officials promised that they would appeal the case, the local

¹¹⁵ District Court Documents, Alexander Clark Papers; Court Documents, Alexander Clark Vertical File, Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa; Harry E. Downer, *History of Davenport and Scott County Iowa*, vol. 1 (Chicago: T. S. Clarke Publishing Company, 1910); *Davenport Daily Gazette*, April 24, 1874; *Muscatine Journal*, May 31, 1940; *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, May 18, 1908; *Iowa State Register*, September 7, 1864.

Republican press was confident that Richman's decision would be upheld. Although this article was reprinted in several area newspapers, the district court case aroused little comment in the Iowa press.¹¹⁶

George Gillaspay's nightmare scenario continued as the Muscatine Board of Education's appeal led to a trial before the Iowa Supreme Court presided by Chief Justice Chester C. Cole. Cole's sentiment on questions of race was well known, having been one of Iowa's first Democrats to defect to the Republican Party following the news of secession. Cole was active in promoting the interests of African Americans in Iowa, a position recognized by the black community of Des Moines when they selected Cole as a speaker at the dedication of Burns Chapel in 1867. Cole upheld Richman's opinion in July of 1868, the majority opinion of the Iowa Supreme Court declaring that racial segregation required "express sovereign authority." As the school laws of Iowa were silent on the matter, Cole declared that Muscatine officials must admit all children equally regardless of race. "If the board of directors are clothed with the discretion to exclude African children from our common schools, and require them to attend (if at all) a school composed wholly of children of that nationality," Cole explained, "they would have the same power and right to exclude German children... and so of Irish, French, English and other nationalities, which together constitute the American." Cole added his personal belief that segregation "would tend to perpetuate the national differences of our people and stimulate a constant strife, if not a war of races." Justice Wright's dissenting opinion likewise

¹¹⁶ *Iowa State Register*, November 1, 1867; *Muscatine Daily Journal*, December 6, 1867, May 1, September 9, 16, 1878, August 9, 1879; *Waterloo Courier*, November 21, 1867.

found that the laws of Iowa were silent on the issue. Rather than interpreting this silence as a ban on segregation, Wright believed that the schools were given broad discretionary powers.¹¹⁷

Despite its strong rhetoric about national cohesion, the Iowa Supreme Court's decision did not settle the issue of school segregation. In fact, its emphasis on the requirement of statutory authority might have been viewed as an invitation to amend Iowa's school laws. The decentralized nature of Iowa's Independent School Districts likely discouraged any such campaign, as school districts throughout the state continued to practice segregation after the Clark decision. In fact, separate schools continued to be operated in Muscatine until December of 1868. Interpreting the Clark case as a ban on involuntary segregation, Muscatine officials hoped that black children would "voluntarily" choose to continue their studies at the separate school. When only four children were reported in attendance of the Jim Crow school in October of 1868, board members determined that the continuation of the school was an unwarranted expense. The board's predictions that integration would ruin their public school system likewise proved to be out of touch with reality, as white parents did not withdraw their children while white children willingly participated with their new classmates during the 1868 school exhibition. The predictions of Clark and his plaintiffs about integration as a prerequisite to advanced education proved more accurate, as Susan Clark became first black graduate of Muscatine High School.

¹¹⁷*Clark v. The Board of Directors* 24 Iowa 266 (1868); *Western Jurist* 2 (1868): 372-373; Benjamin F. Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 3 (New York: Century History Company, 1903), 56; *Iowa State Register*, June 7, 1867.

Susan's matriculation was followed by her brother Alexander Clark Jr., who became the first African American to earn a law degree in Iowa.¹¹⁸

Alexander Clark Sr. continued his agitation for civil rights after his court victory, obtaining a law degree in 1883 and purchasing the *Chicago Conservator* in partnership with Ferdinand L. Barnett. Although his frequent travel between Muscatine and Chicago limited his time, his status as both an editor and an attorney led to numerous appointments and recognitions among national black leaders. Clark experienced the "double consciousness" described by W.E.B. Dubois as he attempted to press for the rights of African Americans while also maintaining his connections with whites as a civic leader, Republican orator, and member of the Muscatine Bar Association. Although Clark's white colleagues likely failed to perceive the challenges Clark faced, they viewed Clark as the epitome of racial progress. "I remember the time when the colored men had no rights which the white man was bound to respect;" stated one of his Muscatine colleagues upon welcoming Clark to the white legal fraternity, "but this has changed, and to-day we see Mr. Clark admitted to the Muscatine bar, and I extend to him the right hand of fellowship and wish him success in his profession." Clark was not only active in agitating for the rights of African Americans; he was also involved in nearly every local event of significance and was likewise a staunch supporter of women's suffrage. Muscatine journalist George Van Horne wrote a tribute of Clark entitled, "A Remarkable Career,

¹¹⁸ Muscatine City Directory, 1869-70; Muscatine File, Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa; *Muscatine Daily Journal*, May 16, 18, 19, June 1, 16, 17, 18, 19, August 7, 21, October 7, December 2, 1868, June 24, 1871; *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, September 12, 1898; "Alexander G. Clark's Children," Alexander Clark Papers.

A Great Example,” which summarized many of Clark’s accomplishments as a leader within several communities. Clark’s ability to build bridges among people of diverse perspectives was perhaps best exemplified, however, by his friendship with Henry Clay Dean. Dean was a fiery Methodist minister who vehemently opposed Union participation in the Civil War. In fact, Dean left Iowa after the Southern defeat and established the community of Rebel’s Cove in Putnam County, Missouri. The local press commented on the irony of Dean and Clark’s friendship, yet Clark and Dean forged a common bond based on their support for temperance as the two men traveled together during a lecture tour in 1875.¹¹⁹

Muscatine’s Republican press was supportive of Clark both before and after the Iowa Supreme Court’s decision. Given the party’s recent decision to support universal suffrage, Republican editors likely viewed the case as both a litmus test of their commitment to equality and a way to insure the support of Muscatine’s newly enfranchised black men. The reaction of both of the city’s Republican journals mirrored their previous statements regarding the district court decision, praising Cole for his “righteous decision” while denigrating their own party members who were yet to fully support the party’s new doctrine. “A proposition so just in itself and so plainly in accordance with law ought not to have been disputed,” explained the *Muscatine Journal*, “especially by a Republican School Board. We rejoice that the highest court in our State has set at rest this question and vindicated justice and law.”

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Veerhussen to Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, March 7, 1975, Elizabeth Veerhussen to W. D. Johnson, June 28, 1976, Alexander Clark Papers; Eulogy of the Honorable Alexander Clark, Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa; *Muscatine Daily Journal*, July 31, August 3, 1867, June 24, 1884; *Iowa State Register*, September 1, October 8, 1875; *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, January 27, 1888.

The *Iowa State Register* predicted the abolition of racial barriers in response to the case, proclaiming an end to “white and black walls between God’s people in Iowa.” Yet within a few months, the same Des Moines paper actively supported the creation of those walls in response to the city’s changing racial demographics.¹²⁰

Although state and local histories suggest either directly or by omission that Des Moines never maintained racially segregated schools, Jim Crow found a home in Iowa’s capital shortly after the Civil War. The *Iowa State Register* had spoken forcibly about the “Copperhead Intolerance” of school officials in Eastern Iowa that inspired their acts of discrimination against black children immediately following the Civil War. The following year, the same journal singled out the directors of the Muscatine schools for separating black and white students. The Des Moines editors mockingly suggested that whites in the Mississippi River town were reading a different translation of the Bible, as their doctrine apparently suggested that Jesus actually said, “suffer the little *white* children to come unto me.” As was endemic throughout the region, the Republican editors’ indignation for the intolerance of neighboring cities did not translate to support for integration within their own community. The black population of Des Moines had increased rapidly after the Civil War, nearly tripling from 91 in 1865 to 263 two years later. The question of whether the children of these emigrants would attend school alongside white children was soon a leading topic of discussion among Des Moines school officials.¹²¹

¹²⁰ *Muscatine Daily Journal*, April 15, 27, 1868; *Iowa State Register*, April 19, December 9, 1868.

¹²¹ Des Moines City Directory 1866-7, 1869, 1871, 1873, 1874-5, 1876-7, 1877-8; *The History of Polk County, Iowa* (Des Moines: Union Historical Company, 1880); Robert Denny, ed., *History of the Des*

The Democratic press of Des Moines was among the first to perceive the change in sentiment among their Republican rivals. “One who goes for universal equality of the races would hardly be expected to make an exception of the colored children,” explained the Iowa Statesman. “Many of us believe that white folks have rights which the ruling (colored) class are bound to respect,” the Democratic editor continued, “but we had not looked for an endorsement of this doctrine by so violent a miscegenation[ist] as brother Palmer.” After issuing their statement of support for Jim Crow as an act of racial self-defense by a besieged white community, the Statesman moderated its tone in its concluding remarks about the need to provide black children with a good school of their own. Although they believed that all children were entitled to an education, both the Republican and Democratic press of Des Moines agreed that separate schools were the only solution.¹²²

Two days later the *Register* reported its discovery of a private school for black children in East Des Moines. Black children in Des Moines had been apparently been excluded from the public schools of the city, as the paper reported that pupils on both sides of the river traveled great distances to attend this school not because of a preference for racial separation, but because “no other provisions” had been made for their education. Although the Register was not positive that all of the city’s black

Moines Public Schools: 1846-1966 (Des Moines: Des Moines Public Schools), 1967; “Bicentennial Reflections-History of the Des Moines Public Schools, 1846-1976,” Special Collections, Des Moines Public Library; *Iowa State Register*, September 5, 1865, November 22, 1866. Personnel at the Des Moines Public Schools office report that all minutes and other school records prior to 1878 were destroyed by a flood. Demographic statistics were taken from the 1869 Des Moines City Directory. The Iowa Census of 1867 indicates that there were only 215 African Americans in Des Moines, but this survey was conducted earlier in the year. The author would like to thank Hal Chase of Des Moines for his repeated assistance and hospitality.

¹²² *Daily Iowa Statesman*, January 16, 1866.

children had been excluded from the city schools, the editors believed that black children ought to be able to attend any school in the city. The editors also believed, however, that a separate school would be preferable due to the unfortunate racial attitudes of many of the city's white children and parents. The Register was soon notified that a plan to create a separate public school for black children was being considered by the East Des Moines School District. The Republican editors were among the staunchest supporters of this proposal, believing that the plan would be supported by both white and black parents. The plan soon stalled, however, as officials of the East and West Des Moines schools accused one another of negligence in the project that was supposed to be financed between the two cities. Despite the concerns of black parents who lived across the river, the Register believed that "justice demanded" the creation of the school. Whatever justice the school would have provided for the black parents presently paying tuition would have to wait, however, pending the resolution of the two board's disagreements regarding the percentage each board should contribute to the proposed school.¹²³

As white editors and school officials declared themselves experts on the needs of the black community, African Americans in Des Moines sponsored a lecture by Frederick Douglass and set aside the proceeds to help finance the private school both boards seemed so unwilling to support. The Republican press of Des Moines was reportedly moved by Douglass's speech, predicting that universal suffrage would be unanimously approved in Iowa if all the state's residents had been present somehow

¹²³ *Iowa State Register*, January 18, 21, March 21, 1866.

that evening. Republicans claimed that Democratic Party wags were jealous of Douglass' warm reception in Des Moines. The chosen response of the *Register*, which claimed that "the little finger of Fred. Douglass has more of the whiteness of manhood and dignity in it" than that of these "Butternut" reporters, may reveal more about the racial ideology of the Republican editors than their Democratic rivals. Douglass toured throughout Iowa in that spring, and a brief survey of Democratic newspapers reveals that their criticism was actually directed towards white politicians who introduced Douglass and white audience members who applauded their fawning remarks. Little criticism was raised towards Douglass' speech, while Democratic editors railed against the racially mixed crowd of "radical disunionists and niggers," whose treasonous applause was loudest when Douglass predicted that America would survive the presidency of Andrew Johnson just as they had survived the treachery of Benedict Arnold. The interracial crowds that greeted Douglass throughout Iowa and supported his calls for universal suffrage combined fears of emasculation and miscegenation in the Democratic world view, as the *Muscatine Courier* predicted that universal suffrage would place "delicate ladies" and "lusty niggers" together at the polls "while demure papas remain at home, rock the cradle, and administer 'lollypop and pap' to the infantile progeny."¹²⁴

In April of 1866, members of the black community petitioned both the East and West Des Moines school boards, demanding that the two boards provide for their children's education by at least partially subsidizing the private school in East Des

¹²⁴ *Iowa State Register*, April 25, 1866; *Cedar Valley Times*, April 26, 1866; *Davenport Daily Democrat*, April 28, 1866; *Muscatine Courier*, May 3, 1866; *Waterloo Courier*, May 10, 1866.

Moines which had recently closed owing to financial insolvency. Members of the two boards formed a joint committee the following month and discussed the issue while members of the black community pooled their funds to build a church with a basement large enough to serve as a schoolhouse. The community secured twelve hundred dollars by the end of the summer, launching a final drive in the fall wherein community members deposited their savings to create a school for their children while white parents complained bitterly about the price of textbooks. A number of white women sought to assist the black community by organizing an entertainment festival. Unfortunately, few whites attended the festival, the net receipt of \$83 being predominantly collected among the African American participants themselves. The poor showing of support of Des Moines whites was not the result of a lack of advertising, as the women issued circulars and print advertisements that appeared throughout the city calling upon their fellow white citizens to recognize their own self-interest in the endeavor. As blacks were “living among us,” the women explained, they “must necessarily be an element for good or evil.” Although the school boards appropriated a small amount of money to help furnish the basement school, nearly thirty-thousand dollars was spent to create a new school for white children adjacent this facility.¹²⁵

The black community of Des Moines needed little financial support outside of a few white donors, and they continued their agitation for civil rights after the dedication of Burns Chapel. The newly constructed church hosted Iowa’s annual

¹²⁵ *Iowa State Register*, April 25, May 18, 24, June 7, 12, 26, 27, 28, October 10, 30, November 1, 20, 22, 28, 29, 1866; Ninth Census of the United States, 1870; *History of Polk County*, 614.

convention of black leaders in 1868 wherein the meeting's thirty-one delegates framed petitions that called for the end of segregation throughout the state. Although these resolutions harshly criticized the continued denial of suffrage and discrimination, even Alexander Clark exhibited conservative sentiments on the most sensitive racial issue. The delegates disavowed any claim of "social equality," a codeword that was often used to connote interracial marriage. While later black leaders in Middle America would confront this ruse, even Alexander Clark avoided any chance that his remarks would be taken out of context in stating that "a law higher than human must forever govern social relations." Although many of the delegates' resolutions were framed in conservative language carefully selected for white audiences, the men overtly celebrated Alexander Clark's recent victory over school segregation and the proposed legislation that would guarantee universal male suffrage in Iowa. In response to a special resolution thanking the *Iowa State Register* for reporting its proceedings, the white daily exclaimed that Iowa's black leaders "have more manners than their more chalkish-colored brethren," adding that "conventions of the superior race" who likewise expect their resolutions to be publicized should take note of this simple courtesy.¹²⁶

Although the creation of Burns Chapel served as one of the institutional centers of Des Moines' black community, its secondary purpose as a meeting place for a publicly supported school for black children reduced the likelihood that black

¹²⁶ *Iowa State Register*, February 12, 13, 14, 16, 1868; *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, January 30, 1868; *Muscatine Daily Journal*, February 1, 13, 15, March 6, 1869; *Waterloo Courier*, March 19, 1868; *Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1869), 385; Ruth A. Gallagher, "A Colored Convention," *The Palimpsest* 2 (May, 1921): 178-81.

children throughout the area would be accepted as pupils within the schools of Des Moines. In February of 1868, reports that a trustee of the Des Moines public schools had expelled a child on account of his race drew indignation of the Republican press. Although the Register portrayed this incident as a betrayal of the noble history of “the free soil of Iowa,” the paper soon used the city’s new Jim Crow school as a punch line for racial humor. Democratic journals likewise portrayed this school as a source of entertainment for their white readers. After the black community of Des Moines protested the apathy of board members concerning the condition of their school, the Dubuque Herald joked that “no report of the progress of the aspiring (and perspiring) picanninnies” would be filed that year.¹²⁷

School officials seldom visited the “Colored School,” but reports of its attendance illustrate that the black community quickly determined that its maintenance was no longer favorable to their children. The number of children attending the school quickly dropped from forty-five to twenty-five in the fall of 1869. By the fall of 1872, only fourteen children were enrolled in the Jim Crow school and only four were present at the school board’s scheduled visit. Several protests were waged by black parents requesting an end to the board’s discriminatory policies, but these campaigns received considerable opposition by white parents and school officials. That the declining attendance at the “Colored School” represented the black community’s protest against Jim Crow was unperceivable to the city’s Republican press. “The fault of non-attendance lies entirely at the doors of our

¹²⁷ *Iowa State Register*, February 2, 1868; *Dubuque Herald*, June 30, 1869.

colored citizens,” the Register complained, denigrating the community as being more interested in jubilees, politics, and social clubs than the welfare of their children. The editors explained that there were over a hundred black children who should be in daily attendance, but was curiously silent on how a one-room school might accommodate that number.¹²⁸

Integration came to Des Moines largely as a result of black protest and limited school budgets. The schools of East Des Moines were forced to reduce their spending in the early 1870s as a political faction known as the “City Guards” increasingly came to dominate the city and demand reductions in public spending. A relative decrease in the size of the black population from 2.1% of the total population of Des Moines in 1867 to 1.7% four years later likewise led an end to school segregation. Ultimately, however, it was the protest of the black community that inspired not only integration, but also a change in perspective among many white residents about the practice of segregation.¹²⁹

The Republican press of Des Moines illustrated a sudden change of opinion regarding separate schools by 1874. In that year, the *Register* condemned Iowa’s Republican delegates for their support of an amendment to the proposed national Civil Rights Bill that removed schools from the list of places that would not be allowed to draw the color line. “It is of little comfort to the colored man to know that he may know stop at a hotel where white men do, or go to a theater where white men

¹²⁸ *Davenport Daily Democrat*, December 4, 1869; *Iowa State Register*, April 8, September 28, December 3, 1869, September 28, 1872, October 28, 1873.

¹²⁹ Robert Denny, “History of the Des Moines Public Schools”; Iowa State Census of 1867, Iowa State Census of 1873; *Waterloo Courier*, December 23, 1874; *Iowa State Register*, December 18, 1874; Des Moines City Directory, 1873, 1874-5.

do,” explained the *Register*. “He would much rather know that his children may be educated, as white children are educated, wherever they are.” The Des Moines editors disparaged the “poor sort of Republicanism” displayed by its own party delegates for sanctioning the color line if it were drawn against children. The editorial sarcastically added that the Iowa delegates might also remove the provision’s ban against separate cemeteries as school segregation ensured the eternal maintenance of the color line as it passed from generations of youth to generations of adults.¹³⁰

Although the Republican press of Des Moines often portrayed the eastern cities of Iowa in contrast to the egalitarianism of the rest of the state, the history of segregated schools in communities such as Burlington is similar to that of Des Moines. Historical narratives and annual reports to the State Superintendent omit Jim Crow’s presence in Burlington, yet separate schools were operated in this Mississippi River valley town until 1872. Black children were likely excluded from the few classrooms that operated prior to the end of the Civil War, as two-thirds of the city’s children were out of school owing to severe overcrowding during the conflict. In 1865, the board declared the public schools open to African American children and established a committee to determine if the number of black children who might attend the schools justified the expense of creating a separate school. Although the exact number that would “justify” this measure was never defined or explained, the committee apparently determined that this threshold would be exceeded. In March of 1865, the board ordered the creation of a separate school but then immediately

¹³⁰ *Iowa State Register*, February 7, 1875.

attempted to expunge this action from the record by replacing the order with a racially neutral statement about renting a room for school purposes.¹³¹

Although a teacher was hired for this separate school, the board reviewed its decision by appointing a second committee in May to re-examine the number of potential black scholars and determine if this number justified the expense of an extra school. The committee again determined that the expense was necessary voted to rent a room for the school. The board also selected a fifteen-year-old African American girl named Emma Lee to serve as the school's teacher. Lee was apparently hired at a significant discount as her attempt to negotiate her salary resulted in the acceptance of her threatened resignation. The board quickly replaced Lee with another young woman whose race cannot be determined through census records and the school was opened in the fall of 1865. Although area newspapers presented the creation of the separate school as a progressive measure that they hoped to see institutionalized throughout Iowa, the school experienced a precarious existence as the board was engaged in a perpetual search for qualified and willing teachers and suitable but inexpensive facilities to rent. The only advantage of the roving one-room school was that it averaged under thirty students, about half of the average number of white children assigned to teachers throughout the city. Although the school achieved some level of stability with the appointment of 17-year-old Rachel Brown as its teacher

¹³¹ Annual Reports of County Superintendents, Microfilm Rolls 1-5, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City; Minutes of the Burlington Board of Education, January 18, February 18, 21, March 4, 11, April 13, 1865; Burlington City Directory, 1869, 1862, 1866, 1868, 1869, 1870; *History of Des Moines County, Iowa*, 534-538; *Burlington Daily Hawk-Eye*, January 18, 20, 1865.

from 1867 to 1872, the school was both burdensome to maintain and a barrier to its pupils who sought to further their education beyond the school's limited facilities.¹³²

By 1872, members of the black community organized a protest and boycott of Burlington's "Colored School." School leaders and the local press conceded to the petitioners that their children were not given equal educational opportunities in the city's dual system but were hesitant to endorse integrated schools. The board attempted a compromise measure, notifying black parents that their children could enroll in their local public schools if they so desired while instructing the principals of these schools that black children were to be seated separately from whites. This method of informal segregation within the classroom was a common practice throughout the region, especially in smaller cities, and the new ruling quickly resulted in the transfer of most black children. Perhaps sensing these developments, Rachel Brown resigned her post prior to the ruling. The newly appointed teacher lashed out at her disappearing pupils, writing a letter in which she claimed that blacks were apathetic towards education despite her previous admission that her school was inconveniently located and inferiorly furnished. By December, the separate school appeared an extravagant expenditure to the board as only a handful of children were still in attendance. Its decision to close the school at the end of the term was presented as a cost-saving measure, perhaps accounting for the lack of protest among white

¹³² Minutes of the Burlington Board of Education, May 3, June 10, 14, August 23, 30, October 14, 1865, February 28, August 8, 1866, May 10, August 8, September 11, December 17, 1867, February 4, 8, 29, May 23, June 1, 1868, April 19, June 23, October 23, 1869, February 17, March 21, June 24, November 22, 1870, January 31, June 11, 1871, February 12, June 17, 1872; Burlington City Directory, 1870, 1871, 1872; *Cedar Valley Times*, June 27, 1865, April 4, 1867; *Davenport Daily Democrat*, July 18, 1865; *Iowa State Register*, March 23, 1866; Ninth Census of the United States, 1870.

residents. As in Davenport, the Republican press of Burlington had a short memory regarding its own experiences with Jim Crow. Only three years after they begrudgingly integrated their schools, Burlington editors suddenly saw through the poorly veiled racism of Dubuque officials whose defense of segregation was similar to their own recent remarks. Although the black community of Dubuque were protesting the continued maintenance of segregated schools, Dubuque officials insisted that the system benefited black children.¹³³

The attempted miseducation of black community regarding the benefits of Jim Crow failed in Dubuque. In the summer of 1870, representatives of the community presented a petition to the Board of Education that demanded Jim Crow's expulsion from Dubuque. The group's timing could not have been better as the board had been searching for ways to save money and nearly unanimously approved this request. The resolution to discontinue the "Colored school" and allow black children to attend the schools to which they "properly belonged" carried by the vote of 5-1 with surprisingly little discussion. The decision led to considerable discussion among white citizens both within and beyond Dubuque, however, as an editorial in neighboring Waverly, Iowa referred to the "damnable resolution" in a challenge to the racial pride of white Dubuquers. Dubuque's Democratic press likewise blasted the board's decision. The paper was especially angered that blacks might be presently looking forward to the opening of school as a day "when all distinctions of color shall

¹³³ Iowa WPA Manuscript Collection, 262-3; Minutes of the Burlington Board of Education, June 17, December 5, 18, 1872, January 15, 18, February 5, 1873; Burlington City Directory, 1873; *Burlington Daily Hawk-Eye*, December 11, 1872; *Dubuque Herald*, December 28, 1872; *Burlington Daily Gazette*, December 11, 1872, January 26, 1884; *Cedar Rapids Times*, December 26, 1872; *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, September 30, 1875.

cease by order of the majority of the board of education, and African and American shall shake hands together, compare notes, be of one mind-all intellectual inequalities notwithstanding- and chum together in the various ward schools of the city.”¹³⁴

Exaggerated reports of an interracial celebration especially riled integration’s opponents in 1870, yet the separate school was actually the result of interracial cooperation. Dubuque’s black community was still excluded from the public schools and supporting their own institution in February of 1866 when a group of citizens led by white businessman Marshall Kingman petitioned the board to create a public school for black children. Although this was at least the third request for such an action, the interracial nature of the petitioners caused board members to seriously consider the issue for the first time. The measure drew opposition among some white residents who opposed the measure for fear of encouraging black migration but the support of many leading whites negated such protest. Economic issues were the only barrier to the petitioners’ request, yet the offer to rent the basement of a white Methodist church for \$5 per month surmounted these concerns. Although white veteran teacher Elizabeth O’Laughlin was originally designated by the board to teach the course, Laughlin apparently desired to keep her position at her former school as seventeen-year-old Irene Belden was appointed soon thereafter. Belden’s position was made easier by the small number of children in her school, as the twenty pupils in regular attendance represented about a third of the average class size in the Dubuque schools at this time. Despite the low numbers of pupils, the board found that

¹³⁴ Minutes of the Dubuque Board of Education, July 25, 1870; *Dubuque Herald*, July 27, 31, 1870, September 14, 1875.

the school was difficult to manage, as Belden and others sought employment in the white schools of Dubuque. The school was also expensive to maintain, as the teachers received similar salaries despite having an average of only fourteen to twenty-one pupils in daily attendance between 1866 and 1870.¹³⁵

Although many white children in Dubuque were effectively denied a good education because of severe overcrowding, white parents had not protested the fact that the board maintained a separate school for such a small number of black children. In fact, the decision to integrate the schools proved unpopular despite its potential to reduce overcrowding. The *Dubuque Herald* denied that the savings would justify the end of the school, not because of their racial antipathies, but rather because of their concern for the welfare of black children. “It is not true economy,” the *Herald* explained, “and it most assuredly is not consulting the best interests of the colored children.” Although the board clearly indicated that the measure was the result of consultation with black parents, the *Herald*’s editors insisted that they knew what was best for the black community. Ironically, the only evidence in support of the *Herald*’s assertion that the present system met the approval of all residents was its claim that white parents had not complained about the economic burden of the dual system.¹³⁶

The *Herald* continued its insistence that integration was counter to the interests of the black community and reassured its white readers that their protests

¹³⁵ Minutes of the Dubuque Board of Education, February 1, 17, July 17, July 26, August 23, September 20, 28, 1866, May 23, July 18, August 23, September 19, 1867, September 10, 1868, August 27, September 23, 1869, February 10, 1870; *Dubuque Herald*, February 2, September 26, 1866, September 28, October 10, 1869; Franklin T. Oldt, *History of Dubuque County Iowa*, (Chicago: Godspeed Historical Association, 1911), 921; Minutes of Dubuque Teachers Association, 1866; Ninth Census of the United States, 1870.

¹³⁶ *Dubuque Herald*, July 27, 1870.

had been heard by the board that would correct its hasty mistake. “The welfare of the colored children alone would prompt this action,” explained the *Herald*, adding that public opinion demanded separation. Despite the report that the board planned to rescind their decision, a number of whites appeared with their own petitions calling for the continuation of the former system. New England-born board member Noah C. Amsden addressed the crowd as the board’s apologist, explaining that his original support was due his personal belief that integration was a moral imperative demanded by both local and national laws and represented the best interests of the community. “Subsequent developments have satisfied me,” Amsden continued “that many, probably a majority of our citizens are strongly opposed to the discontinuance of the colored school and the enrollment of the pupils taught, there, in the several ward schools.” Rather than admit that he was swayed by the pressure of public opinion to retreat from his lofty ideals about equality, Amsden justified the reversal of his vote by mirroring community sentiment which justified segregation on the basis of the unfortunate racial attitudes of other whites who would abuse black children, thereby effectively barring them from any chance at an education. “Without any change of my former opinions, except as to the feeling of the community upon this subject,” Amsden concluded, “I have moved reconsideration and hope the board will act with the same humanity in reconsidering that they did in adopting the resolution. Whatever our own opinions, the recognized doctrine of obedience to constituencies, would justify us in retracing our steps.” Each member of the board who had voted in favor of integration followed Amsden to the podium, mirroring his remarks and denying

that their retreat from integration was in accordance to their own professed beliefs in the equality of all men. Despite the transparent duplicity of the Republican-dominated board's rhetoric, the Democratic press was happy to report a return of both Jim Crow and "common sense" to Dubuque.¹³⁷

Although the issue of integration had aroused the interest of community members and school officials, the Dubuque board quickly returned to its customary ignorance regarding the operations of their Jim Crow school for the next few years. In fact, the school received its first visit from school officials in 1871 despite the board's regulations requiring annual examinations. These officials were reportedly surprised to find the teachers and students operating like a school ought to, remarking that rather than "while away her time merely for the sake of a few dimes," the teacher operated the school as an institution of learning. Given the frequent turnover of the school, it is likely that several of the teachers did not share the devotion of this particular instructor. Even the best teacher would face a number of insurmountable obstacles in Dubuque's separate school, as children between the ages of five and twenty-one were reportedly in attendance. The school's location also hindered regular attendance for many children, as the average attendance of the school regularly accounted for less than half of Dubuque's black school-aged population. Despite the small class sizes, the teachers of this school received the same pay as other female teachers, with the reported salary paid by the board being above the average salary of

¹³⁷ Minutes of the Dubuque Board of Education, August 25, 1870; *Dubuque Herald*, August 2, 26, 27, 1870; *Davenport Daily Democrat*, August 6, 1870.

the district's female teachers. As a result, the cost-per-pupil of maintaining the "Colored School" was well above the district average.¹³⁸

Two hundred miles downstream from Dubuque, the directors of Keokuk's schools experienced a different challenge in operating its separate schools: overcrowding. By 1866 there were over three hundred black children of school age in this booming river town. Keokuk was one of the few cities to construct a separate school for black children rather than simply renting rooms in church basements, opening the Concert Street School in 1868. A minor disturbance as a school function occurred in the same year, when a white child was whipped for disobeying his teacher who had instructed him to sit next to a black student. The incident served as a pretense to justify the city's dual system. Segregationists cited the episode as proof that "the effort to force the negro" among white children would strain race relations in Keokuk. The resulting conflict would only hurt black children, the local press predicted, thereby serving to "lower the negro in a worse condition than if left to occupy the position in society for which nature appears to have designed him."¹³⁹

The Concert Street School was also unique compared to other separate schools in that it hired black teachers exclusively. The board considered replacing the staff with whites in 1869 until members of the community organized a protest. The

¹³⁸ Minutes of the Dubuque Board of Education, September 22, 1870, June 15, 26, September 14, 1871, October 21, 1872, June 19, September 18, 1873, September 17, 1874, February 18, June 10, July 8, 1875; *Dubuque Herald*, January 29, June 27, July 2, December 16, 1871, December 28, 1872; *Dubuque Daily Herald*, June 20, July 1, 1873. The author would like to thank John Zeller of the State Historical Society of Iowa for providing demographic statistics from the 1870 Iowa Census.

¹³⁹ Essie M. Britton, "History of the Colored Race of People Residing in Keokuk and Vicinity," WPA File, Keokuk Public Library; *Keokuk Daily Constitution*, September 4, 1868; *Daily Gate City*, September 18, 30, December 23, 1866.

local press was sympathetic to this campaign in a paternalistic sense, praising white “generosity” for their liberal support in advancing the black race from ignorance by providing black children with their own public school. The limits of this generosity became evident three years later as system-wide cutbacks were particularly severe at the Concert Street School. While a number of teachers were laid off in 1872, the Concert Street School lost half of its teaching force. Now reduced to two teachers for several hundred students, members of the black community expanded Sunday School programs into full-fledged parochial schools that met throughout the week. Despite such obstacles, in 1874 a few black children passed the examinations given to all students who desired to enter the high school. Rather than admit these three or four pupils, school officials decided to establish a separate high school within the “Colored School” that was taught by the principal in addition to his administrative duties and full classroom of grammar school students. Records of the Keokuk schools indicate that school officials attempted to portray the effort as a measure to prevent overcrowding despite the obvious racial intent of the scheme.¹⁴⁰

Gerard Smith, the grandson of Charlotta Pyles, walked past his former school that now housed the “Colored High School” and entered the Central High School in defiance of the board’s intentions. His presence apparently caused little disturbance among his temporary classmates, as Smith reportedly completed morning recitations without incident. Smith’s presence concerned faculty members, however, as school

¹⁴⁰*Cedar Rapids Times*, November 25, 1869; *Keokuk Gate City*, March 7, July 23, 1869, November 10, 1870, May 5, 6, 1871, May 9, 1872, August 23, 1874; *Keokuk City Directory*, 1873; Minutes of the Keokuk Board of Education, June 20, July 17, August 22, 1874, cited in *Geroid Smith [sic] v. The Independent School District of Keokuk, Iowa*, 53 Iowa 128.

officials had previously circulated an order directing all teachers to refer black pupils to the newly created “Colored High School.” Although he had passed the same examination as all other pupils, faculty members politely informed Smith that he would not be able to continue his studies at this particular school without a letter signed by the board of directors. Days afterward, Smith was accompanied by attorneys who informed the board of the illegality of their actions and presented a petition requesting that Smith and other black children be admitted to the high school. Although one board member introduced a resolution to allow black students their choice of attending either the Central School or the “Colored High School,” the measure died for want of a second. Board members explained that their actions were only motivated by their concern for both white and black pupils, maintaining their insistence that black children were better served by the present arrangement while simultaneously denying those children to right to make their own determination. Board member John H. Craig defended the new scheme as a positive good for black youth, claiming that he had consulted black parents prior to the board’s decision and found all quite satisfied with the arrangement. Given the attendance at a mass meeting held the following day in which black parents drafted a resolution explicitly denying that any members of their community had ever expressed such sentiment, the board’s continual insistence that they were acting in the best interests of black children appears disingenuous.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Undated manuscript on “Geroid Smith,” Alexander Clark Papers; Frederic C. Smith, “One Hundred Ten Years of Public Education in Keokuk,” 101-102, Keokuk Public Library; *Geroid Smith* [sic] v. *The Independent School District of Keokuk, Iowa*, 53 Iowa 128. The author would like to thank John Zeller

The Smith family filed suit against the Keokuk board to compel its members to accept their son into the Central School. Attorneys D.F. Miller and John Valkenburg made quick work of the board's contention that the two schools offered equal educational opportunities. The plaintiffs demonstrated the patent differences between the one-room high school operated in the attic of a wood frame house and the beautiful brick building that housed the school for whites. Adding insult to injustice, the plain, two-story wood frame building that now housed grades 1-12 was located only a few yards from the Central School. The defense also claimed that Smith had been excluded due to overcrowding rather than race. The attorneys were well prepared for this argument, showing that 101 students were in attendance on the day that Smith was expelled while there were seats provided for 108 children. The Lee County District Court agreed that there was ample room at the Central School for Smith and that he was entitled to attend the same high school as other children "upon equal and the same terms of any other scholars." Although there was little ambiguity in the court's decision, the board continued to operate two high schools while it filed an appeal in the Iowa Supreme Court.¹⁴²

Smith's case was not heard until the following March. William Edward joined Miller and Valkenburg and continued their unrelenting attack of Jim Crow. The board denied that Smith's expulsion was racially motivated, again claiming that the school was overcrowded and engaging in a variety of lengthy explanations about how the

for volunteering his time to digitally photograph the fifty pages of court documents from the Smith case.

¹⁴² *Keokuk Gate City*, October 20, 1874; Photographs of the Keokuk Schools, Keokuk Public Library; *Dubuque Herald*, October 23, 1874; *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, October 22, 1874.

large number of open seats was deceptive due to seasonal needs to remove seats nearest the heater. Once again, the plaintiff's attorneys shattered this charade by detailing the acceptance of white scholars who enrolled in the overcrowded school without special permission *after* Smith was expelled. The only issue at stake, the attorneys stated plainly, was whether possessing black skin was a transgression, a sin that "said board of directors might impiously charge upon the common Father of all; but certainly not upon the plaintiff." The cross examination of school officials provided revealed a mixture of direct answers and subterfuge, as the Superintendent agreed that the two schools were not equal and that no white child had ever been excluded from the school for any reason, while also maintaining that Smith was merely referred to another school due to overcrowding. Officials often betrayed their own remarks about the racial neutrality of the action by their subsequent statements, which claimed that public opinion demanded segregation. In addition, administrators occasionally inserted statements claiming that they had no personal objections to the admission of black children while simultaneously denying that the case was about race. A few officials even went out of their way to make the case about race, presenting whites as the victims as their school was so crowded while a few black children enjoyed the benefits of small classes. Due to the crowded conditions in the white school, integration might result in some whites being excluded, one official testified, thereby making "an unjust discrimination against the white pupils on account of their color." Counsel for the defense were more measured in their response, yet their statements are equally revealing. "Defendants do not acknowledge

the right of plaintiff to inquire into their motives;” responded the board’s attorneys in response to questions about the exclusion of all black pupils, “but they have nothing to conceal in this matter”¹⁴³

The increasingly defensive posture of the officials reveals a great deal about the nature of white attitudes regarding race. White witnesses repeatedly made statements about the size of Keokuk’s black community in relation to other Iowa towns as evidence of the community’s need to continue segregation despite the actions of their neighbors. After all, whites maintained, blacks were better treated in Keokuk than other cities and were consulted before the school was created. The claim that blacks were consulted had some basis in fact. For example, the mother of Gerard Smith called upon the Superintendent at his home to personally request that her son be given a fair examination. The latter’s insistence that she did not specifically make an objection to the board’s plan ignores the wide discretionary authority possessed by the Superintendent. Both Charlotta Smith and Gerard Smith testified that they never consented to the creation of a separate High School, while school officials maintained that neither protested the arrangement until after the latter passed his exams.¹⁴⁴

Chief Justice Chester Cole agreed with the plaintiffs that the real issue was not overcrowding or disagreements about what might have been said by a few black residents who could not speak for the entire race, but rather a simple decision about whether Smith was turned away from the school because of his race. Cole needed only to cite his previous judgment in the Clark case to support his decision to sustain

¹⁴³ *Geroid Smith [sic] v. The Independent School District of Keokuk, Iowa*, 53 Iowa 128.

¹⁴⁴ *Geroid Smith [sic] v. The Independent School District of Keokuk*.

the lower court's judgment. Cole again revealed his own views on the subject by framing his judgment in historical context, citing the dialectic of Iowa history as advancing towards equality and assaulting caste distinctions. The statements of some whites during and after the trial revealed a defensive posture towards this perceived historic change, either presenting the "aristocratic" blacks as dangerous traitors to the tangible interests of their own race or perceiving whites as victims in the dialectic of history. Justice Cole offered a parting jab on behalf of the court, mocking the aggrandizing claims of self-sacrifice among white school officials. "And here we sympathize with dependents in their sorrow" Cole concluded, "We realize what tortures of mind they must have suffered in being compelled to withhold from colored scholars the same advantages of education accorded to the pure Caucasian race."¹⁴⁵

Keokuk officials faced a second legal challenge even as they filed the appeal in the Smith case in the fall of 1874. Reverend Charles Dove filed a writ of mandamus to compel the board to admit his son into the all-white Torrence School, which was adjacent to their home in October of 1874. The board utilized the same defense strategy that was employed in the Smith case, claiming that Dove was denied admission at the Torrence School due to overcrowding and denying that this case was about race. The circuit court quickly dispensed of the case, again ordering Keokuk officials to admit the plaintiff on an equal basis with other children. The board threatened to fire all black teachers in an attempt to have the case withdrawn, yet decided to renew their contracts upon the realization that their bluff might

¹⁴⁵ *Western Jurist*, 9 (1875): 417-418; *Geroid Smith [sic] v. The Independent School District of Keokuk*.

inadvertently lead to integration within the grammar schools. The case soon found its way back to Chief Justice Cole at the Iowa Supreme Court, who once again upheld the lower court's verdict that was based on his 1868 decision. Cole's opinion in this case stated even more plainly that school officials could not exclude any student on basis of race within the public school of Iowa. While both cases led to integration in Keokuk and reinforced the legal precedent established in the Clark case, the victory also led to an end to black employment in the public schools of Keokuk. The fate of the Dove children and Gerard Smith are unknown, although the latter did graduate from the Keokuk High School. Although a few histories suggest that he graduated in 1878, Gerard Smith's graduation was delayed because of the lawsuit and he did not receive his diploma until 1880. Ironically, the student historians have confused for Smith was one of the black children who attended the separate high school and consequently graduated two years prior to Smith.¹⁴⁶

Similar to the Clark case of 1868, the two lawsuits did not immediately end the practice of segregation in Keokuk. Area newspapers interpreted the decisions in a narrow sense, outlawing the exclusion of black children from otherwise white schools but not mandating an end to the "voluntary" schemes of segregation that were so "beneficial" for black children. At least one teacher demanded a permit from the Superintendent before accepting a black child, likely as an attempt to discourage the child from transferring to his classroom. After being forcefully reprimanded by the

¹⁴⁶ *Charles Dove v. The Board of Directors of the Independent School District of Keokuk*, 41 Iowa 689 (1875); Frederic C. Smith, "One Hundred Ten Years of Public Education in Keokuk," 102-105; "Keokuk Colored Schools," Keokuk Schools Vertical File, Keokuk Public Library; Keokuk City Directory, 1876, 1877-8; *Keokuk Gate City*, May 17, 1875; *Keokuk Daily Constitution*, June 1, 1883; *The Comment*, Keokuk High School, 1921.

child's mother, whose large stature reportedly matched her forceful argument about the legal history of the case, the teacher decided that dénouement was the better part of valor and eagerly received his new student. Most reports indicate that integration occurred slowly and quietly, with only sixty black students enrolling in the various ward schools while the rest continued to attend the Concert Street School. This school was maintained for the entire 1875-1876 school year on a "voluntary" basis, yet the number of children who volunteered to be Jim-Crowed declined quite rapidly. As always, economy proved the better part of equality as the Keokuk Board of Education voted an end to Jim Crow in June of 1876.¹⁴⁷

The Keokuk cases had little immediate impact on the only remaining segregated school in Iowa. Although only seventeen children were in daily attendance at Dubuque's Jim Crow school in 1874, the Dubuque board maintained its intransigence against black parents who sought an end to the color line. Dubuque's Democratic press praised Iowa Republican Senator William Allison for his support of the measure that removed school segregation from the list of forbidden practices within the 1874 Civil Rights Act as an action that prevented a "reversal of the order of nature" by elevating blacks above whites. The *Herald* cited Dubuque as an example that proved the utility and benefit of separate schools, again claiming that the black community was very pleased with their Jim Crow school.¹⁴⁸ Even as nearby cities integrated their schools as a result of black protest and lawsuits, the local press

¹⁴⁷ *Cedar Rapids Times*, July 1, 1875; *Keokuk Gate City*, September 7, 1875; *Iowa State Register*, September 9, 1875; Frederic C. Smith, "One Hundred Ten Years of Public Education in Keokuk," 105.

¹⁴⁸ *Dubuque Herald*, May 30, 1874.

of Dubuque portrayed their city as a model owing to the absence a racial discord due to the genius of Jim Crow:

Most every town has its troubles with the education of its little darkies, with the exception of Dubuque. Here our school board years ago adopted a policy which experience has proved to be not only successful, but eminently satisfactory. A separate school is provided for the colored children in the most central location in the city, a competent teacher is given them, and everything is provided that is given to other schools. This suits all sides, and especially the colored people who have no desire to have their children subjected to the sneers and insults of other children. Should one of these pupils finally get along to a point where he could enter the high school, he would be subjected to the same rigid examination the 'white trash' have to submit to, and if found qualified, would probably be recommended for admission. Then the board would have to decide his case. How that would be we cannot say, but we presume the board would not be frightened by one pickaninny.¹⁴⁹

Notwithstanding the *Herald's* insular beliefs, Dubuque's black community continued to agitate for their children by requesting better facilities in July of 1875. After a couple of months of negotiations, the school was moved from its present location in a church basement to the basement of a different church. The activism of the community was also evident in regards to the operation of the school, as the board recognized the need to work with black leaders in selecting faculty. Although the board's action in granting these two minor concessions was likely intended to discourage further dissent, the black community responded to their recent victory with a petition that demanded an end to segregation. School officials and the local press again reacted with indignation, retreating to their insular world-view wherein black parents were grateful for the charitable actions of whites and happy to be Jim-Crowed as they had in the past. Whites assured themselves that the "best colored citizens" were not a part of this ungrateful horde. The agitation, whites believed, was the inspired by recent court decisions and self-interested politicians who sought to

¹⁴⁹ *Dubuque Herald*, October 23, 1874.

destroy the present harmony of the races to satisfy a political hobby. An appeal from Robert Collins to the board which requested that the admission of his daughter into the High School was likewise seen as evidence of social disorder, although the board referred the matter to a committee for further discussion.¹⁵⁰

The board quickly determined that the teacher of the “Colored School” was qualified to teach Mary Collins any subject that was offered in Dubuque’s high school while somehow simultaneously instructing all of her other pupils. However, the board also decided that Collins should be allowed an opportunity to attend the white high school if she could pass an examination. As to the matter of integrating the primary and grammar schools, the board determined that “the comfort and advancement of the [black] children will be best served by continuing the school as it is.” The vote of the board demonstrated the occasional irrelevance of party lines as the motion passed with two Democrats and two Republicans in favor while one member of both parties dissented. While the local press continued to maintain that the welfare of the black students determined the vote, area Republican papers interpreted the decision as deeply partisan. “The Dubuque Board of Education has been wrestling with the colored school question,” explained the *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, “and as one might expect in that Democratic city, the decision is against admitting colored children to any of the ward schools except the one provided for their especial accommodation.” The editors were outraged that such a decision was made even after the Keokuk cases, and were likewise unimpressed by the board’s justification of their

¹⁵⁰ Minutes of the Dubuque Board of Education, July 22, August 5, 19, 30, September 16, 1875; *Dubuque Herald*, December 28, 1872, September 14, 1875.

actions. “The plea of the Dubuque Board that the decision is made solely in the interest of the colored children may deceive the Board itself, but can hardly be expected to be received by anybody else as anything but a very unsavory subterfuge.”¹⁵¹

The board continued its practice of segregation for the next two years despite considerable financial and logistical challenges. The board’s informal policy of only hiring white teachers likely influenced its frequent faculty turnover at the “Colored School” as a number of teachers quit after one semester or less, while several new appointees simply declined the position. The location of the school likewise proved controversial as the board’s goal of renting a room that was centrally located and accessible to all black children in the city proved impossible given Dubuque’s residential patterns. Although the board entertained several discussions about ending these challenges through integration, the “Colored School” was maintained at nearly triple the average cost per pupil. Members of the black community continued their protest of the school both because segregation was a violation of their legal rights as well as specific complaints about the apathy of teachers, inconvenient location, and sub-standard facilities. Official communications of the Dubuque board sought to minimize the issue of race. For example, the board’s report indicating that Mary Collins was not accepted into the high school made no mention of Collins or race. The board reported that all of the thirty-five applicants who were accepted into the

¹⁵¹ Minutes of the Dubuque Board of Education, September 20, 1875; *Dubuque Herald*, September 21, 1875; *Iowa State Register*, October 1, 1875; *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, September 30, 1875; Tenth Census of the United States, 1880.

school were graduates of the grammar schools, subtly indicating that the two students who were rejected were from the only non-graded school in the city.¹⁵²

Fifteen year-old Louise Howard continued the agitation against Jim Crow by presenting herself for enrollment at the First Ward School in January of 1877.

Although this school was closer to Howard's home, she was refused admission on the basis of race despite reports that other black children had been admitted to other schools that month. Joseph Howard filed for a writ of mandamus to compel school officials to admit his daughter. The board met to discuss the case as well as the rumors that black children were being admitted by teachers throughout the city regardless of race. The board was apparently troubled by these reports, passing a resolution aimed at ending such devolution by explicitly requiring all black children to attend the "Colored School." Although the measure passed by a 4-2 vote, the teachers were soon instructed to disobey this order by the Superintendent after he was advised on the recent court decisions of Lee County.¹⁵³

Jim Crow's final stand in Iowa elicited little comment or controversy, even within the Democratic press of Dubuque. The board members were reportedly briefed about the Keokuk cases prior to voting in favor of the resolution reaffirming segregation, citing the law's silence about race and segregation as grounds for a victory in the courts. Segregationists circulated a document that stated that since the oath sworn by board members only required them to abide by the school law rather

¹⁵² Minutes of the Dubuque Board of Education, November 24, 1875, January 6, 30, February 3, June 13, July 12, 20, August 17, 30, September 18, 1876.

¹⁵³ Minutes of the Dubuque Board of Education, February 8, 14, 1877; *Dubuque Herald*, February 11, 15, 1877; Tenth Census of the United States, 1880.

than a particular judges' interpretation of that law, board members were not bound by the decision of the Iowa Supreme Court. While this argument displayed little legal acumen, the creativity with which it was formed is comparable to the legal strategies of Southern segregationists at this time. The board hired attorney and fellow board member D. C. Cram to defend the case, yet the board soon rescinded this action and determined not to argue the case. Cram likely influenced this change in opinion about the legal merits of the board's case, having voted against the maintenance of segregation in both 1875 and 1877. The case of *Louisa J. Howard by her next Friend Joseph E. Howard v. John D. Jennings, Thomas Hardin, and the Independent School District of Dubuque* was heard on February 16th, and a brief but unequivocal opinion was offered three days later. The court ordered school officials to admit Louise Howard to the First Ward School. The judgment only affirmed what had already occurred a week prior, as the board had closed their "Colored School" and ordered integration due to the black community's month-long boycott of the Jim Crow school.¹⁵⁴

The rather quick change in attitudes in Iowa regarding separate schools was greatly influenced by the Civil War and Reconstruction. For example, the *Cedar Valley Times* portrayed separate schools as a progressive measure at end of war yet opposed them within a few years. This change should not be confused for a genuine belief in egalitarianism, however, as Iowa's black population failed to keep pace with

¹⁵⁴ Minutes of the Dubuque Board of Education, February 22, 1877; *Dubuque Herald*, February 11, 15, 16, 20, 1877; *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, February 22, 1877; Iowa State Reporter, February 21, 1877; *Waterloo Courier*, February 21, 1877; *History of Dubuque County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1880), 572.

the rest of the state. As a result, separate schools were costly and difficult to maintain. Despite the expense and inconvenience of operating dual school systems in Iowa, none of these communities integrated their schools until after repeated protests, boycotts, and court orders were brought to bear against Jim Crow.¹⁵⁵

Jim Crow Schools in Kansas, 1865-1879

These same methods of protest were utilized in neighboring Kansas, yet segregation would become firmly rooted in many of the state's leading communities during this same period. In his speech welcoming Kansas' new territorial governor, Samuel Clarke Pomeroy highlighted the importance of public schools to the first settlers of the state. "We come with the open bible, and the open spelling book," Pomeroy said. "Our Purpose is to place the one upon the pulpit of a free church, and the other upon the desk of a free school." By 1867 Kansans had built seven hundred and three schoolhouses throughout the state. Because most of these schools were constructed of sod, the total valuation of school property was just over a half million dollars. From these humble beginnings came rapid development, and in forty years the total valuation increased nearly forty times, reaching \$21 million in 1910.¹⁵⁶

What is difficult to discern, however, is how much this progress benefited all of the people of Kansas. Most white Kansans were opposed to the idea of social equality with blacks, a condition many feared might occur after years of social interaction through attending the same theaters, living in the same neighborhoods,

¹⁵⁵ *Cedar Valley Times*, June 27, 1865, April 4, 1867.

¹⁵⁶ Kansas State Historical Society, *Columbian History of Education in Kansas* (Topeka: Hamilton Printing Company, 1893), 130; *Topeka Capital*, June 18, 1911.

and sending their children to the same schools. Yet many white Kansans were equally uncomfortable with the outright denial of educational opportunities. For many whites, segregation offered an attractive compromise in its chimerical promises of separate but equal, yet demographic trends in the early years of the state were to make broad implementation of such a system nearly impossible.

As the black population continued to grow and more and more public schools were built, the question of segregation became a major issue in every district that could support a separate school. During the early 1860's, most urban blacks were educated by privately supported freedman's schools. These schools were operated in leading towns such as Lawrence, Leavenworth, Wyandotte, and Topeka until the end of the Civil War. The discontinuation of these institutions and the tradition of local control in operating public schools left the issue of exclusion, segregation, or integration to the dictates of individual communities. In every major city of the state and many rural districts, efforts to exclude black children or segregate them in inferior facilities met opposition from black parents and a handful of whites who opposed the separation on moral or economic grounds. Although the majority of Kansans accepted the need for some type of schooling for black children, it seems that with few exceptions, whites only rejected separate schools when it was deemed economically inefficient to create a dual system. Although many rural schools were open to black and white children alike, the limited integration that occurred within these institutions was not the result of liberal ideas about race, but rather a reflection of conservative school budgets and the scarcity of black pupils.

Despite the permissive nature of early state laws regarding segregated schools, Peter McVicar, Kansas Superintendent of Public Instruction from 1867-1871, was outspoken against Jim Crow in the state's educational system. For McVicar, providing educational opportunities without regard to race was "the only course worthy of a free people." Perhaps owing to his leadership, a resolution passed by the annual meeting of the Kansas State Teachers Association in 1866 spoke out strongly against the creation of segregated schools. The weight of this resolution should not be overstated, however, as this small, newly formed group of newly hired teachers likely recognized that separate schools might decrease the number of jobs for white teachers.¹⁵⁷

The neighboring state of Missouri displayed few scruples in expressing its opinion on the issue, as black children were legally excluded from the public schools both before and after Missourians adopted a new constitution in 1875 that mandated segregation. Kansas's legal history regarding segregation was more complicated for a variety of reasons that were often more related to economy than public support of integration. Kansas legislators favored segregation for the same reasons as their Missouri counterparts, yet they shared the rhetorical caution of their Iowa and Nebraska peers regarding explicit statutory endorsement of Jim Crow. The resulting rejection of authoritative guidance regarding the legality of the color line in the

¹⁵⁷ *Columbian History of Education in Kansas*, 9-10; *Kansas Educational Journal*, August 1866, 69; G. L. Wayne Britton, "A Brief Historical Study of the State Teachers Association of Kansas," (M. A. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, 1939), 26.

Kansas schools encouraged black protest against exclusion and Jim Crow during Reconstruction and led to a series of successful court challenges in later years.¹⁵⁸

These legal challenges were often aided and impeded by the ambiguous and complicated nature of Kansas school laws. School laws were amended several times during the Civil War, often adding or deleting clauses specifically authorizing separate schools with little indication that any of these revisions were a mandate for integration. Equally important, none of these laws mandated segregation. In fact, Kansas law was explicit in its requirement that the education of all children must be provided for. In 1867, the Kansas Legislature specifically authorized segregation in cities of the second class (those communities containing fewer than 7,000 residents) but also provided for heavy fines against any school district that denied any child admission to the city schools. A special school law pertaining only to cities of the first class (those communities with over 7,000 residents) was approved the same year and likewise explicitly granted the power to “maintain separate schools for the education of white and colored children.” A measure aimed at requiring separate schools for white and black children was introduced in the Kansas House of Representatives in 1870 never reached the floor for a vote. Two years later the state legislature reaffirmed their explicit authorization of separate schools in cities of the second class,

¹⁵⁸ Claude A. Phillips, *A History of Education in Missouri* (Jefferson City, Missouri: Hugh Stephens Printing Company, 1911), 26.

yet once again the law placed Jim Crow's fate in the hands of school officials rather than mandate the creation of separate schools.¹⁵⁹

Although segregation represented a progressive change over exclusion in both the laws of Kansas and local policies of individual school boards during the Civil War and in the years immediately following, African American communities soon mobilized for full integration. A conclave of African American leaders in Lawrence in 1872 called upon state legislators to retract all laws that distinguished citizens by race, nationality or color. Black leaders renewed these campaigns the following year and nearly succeeded in passing a civil rights law at the state level. Given these protests and the context of national Republican support for a federal civil rights law, as well as continued local hostility towards school integration, most Republicans in Kansas avoided public statements regarding segregation in the public schools. As a result, the statutory authorization of segregation in cities of the second class was quietly repealed in 1873. The staunchly Republican *Commonwealth* of Topeka was one of few journals that noticed the repeal. The *Commonwealth* chose to support this measure as "simple justice" and a litmus test of party loyalty despite the fact that the legislatures of the late 1860s that had authorized segregation likewise possessed large Republican majorities.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Woods, 186-187; Bernard D. Reams and Paul E. Wilson, "Segregation and the Fourteenth Amendment in the States: A Survey of State Segregation Laws 1865-1953," Prepared for the United States Supreme Court in re: *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*, 1975; *Laws of Kansas*, 1868, Chapter 18, Article 5, Section 73; *Journal of the Kansas House of Representatives* (1870), 660.

¹⁶⁰ *Kansas State Record*, March 27, 1872; *Topeka Commonwealth*, February 18, 19, 20, 1873; *Journal of the Kansas House of Representatives* (1873), 952-953; *Journal of the Kansas Senate* (1873), 436.

African Americans continued their agitation against Jim Crow in 1874, securing the passage of the state civil rights act that had eluded them the year before. Kansas's 1874 law prohibited "any distinction on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude" in schools and "licensed" places of public accommodation. Two years later, the legislature recodified the Kansas school laws and omitted all mention of separate schools, reaffirming their change in policy despite Democratic opposition. Despite the fact that the legislature had clearly outlawed Jim Crow in the schools of Kansas, state officials were content with the wholesale violations of these laws as school districts throughout the state tightened their embrace of Jim Crow despite the law and local black protest.¹⁶¹

National attitudes regarding race and Reconstruction were reflected in the retreat from school laws that were required integration in Kansas. Many of the same Republican lawmakers that had supported civil rights laws and legal barriers against segregated schools voted in favor of weakening these provisions in 1879. As had been the case in 1873, the school law was quietly amended six years later but now explicitly authorized separate schools. The 1879 law allowed but did not require Jim Crow schools within the cities of the first class (now communities with populations above 15,000 residents) but was silent regarding the legal authority of smaller cities and rural districts to operate dual systems. Subsequent court decisions beginning in 1881 interpreted the 1879 law as prohibitory, resulting in well over a dozen court

¹⁶¹ Journal of the Kansas Senate (1874), 313; Journal of the Kansas House of Representatives (1874), 58, 663; Laws of the State of Kansas, 1874, Chapter 49; Journal of the Kansas Senate (1876), 698-701; Journal of the Kansas House of Representatives, (1876), 1389; Laws of the State of Kansas, 1876, Chapter 122, Article 5, Section 2; *Topeka Commonwealth*, February 15, 17, 18, 19, 1876.

cases in which black plaintiffs successfully challenged school segregation in cities possessing fewer than 15,000 residents. In 1903, Topeka's William Reynolds challenged the legality of the 1879 law itself, arguing that the state legislature had effectively repealed the original law which allowed for separate schools when it recodified the law in 1876. Because the 1879 law was actually an amendment of older laws that had been effectively invalidated due to the recodification, the Kansas Supreme Court ruled that the power to maintain separate schools was implied given the legislative history of the school laws.¹⁶²

Leavenworth officials created a separate school for black children in 1864 in response to black protest against the exclusion of their children in the public schools. The temporary acceptance of segregation must be considered in historical context, especially in contrast to the continued exclusion of African American children in schools across the Kansas River in neighboring Missouri. In fact, prejudice against black education along the Kansas-Missouri border was so prevalent that informal schools organized by charitable Missourians were often conducted in secret even after the Civil War. Within a few years, members of the black community began a sustained protest against the lack of equal facilities. Black parents also launched several protests against segregation itself throughout the early 1870s, leading a number of white residents to predict that integration would destroy the public schools. Segregationists distanced themselves from the racial implications of their argument,

¹⁶² Laws of the State of Kansas, 1879, Chapter 81; Neuenswander, "A Legal History of Segregation," 55-60. The House and Senate Journals of 1879 reveal that the vote was nearly unanimous in favor authorizing the creation of separate schools in cities of the first class. Only Leavenworth and Atchison met this criteria in 1879, yet separate schools continued their proliferation throughout Kansas irrespective of the laws.

claiming to support Jim Crow as public-minded citizens in opposition to the “narrow prejudices and selfish purposes” of integrationists. A fire and overcrowding led to renewed calls for integration as a cost saving measure, leading to a controversial and short-lived decision of the board to admit some black children into the otherwise white schools.¹⁶³

By 1876, black parents launched a formal campaign requesting the admission of their children into the public schools regardless of race. Kansas’ first African American officer, Captain William D. Matthews, accompanied Matilda Robinson as she applied for admission to the all-white Morris School that March. Black leaders cited the recent recodification of the state’s school laws with its deletion of all provisions regarding segregation to support their case that the principal’s exclusion of Robinson was a violation of state law. The Board’s response lacked the legal acumen of the petitioners, claiming that laws only took affect when they were published and distributed throughout the state—a process the board suggested would take over a year. The board not only admitted their ignorance of the new school law but openly stated that if the law required integration as the petitioners claimed, the Board would delay integration owing to the logistical challenges of hiring new teachers (presumably white) and redistricting the schools. Integration received a measure of support from the *Leavenworth Commercial* for its advantages of economy, yet school officials did not attempt to determine if their actions violated the school law. Given

¹⁶³ *Leavenworth Conservative*, May 3, 1868; *Leavenworth Commercial*, February 1, November 2, 1870; *Leavenworth Times*, April 24, 1873, *Davenport Gazette*, December 7, 1875; Charles L. Gaulding. “A Brief History of Leavenworth, Kansas, and the Development of its Early Educational System, 1855-88,” (M. A. thesis, Kansas State Teacher’s College, Emporia, 1955).

the conflict between the dictates of white public opinion and an ambiguous law white officials chose to disregard, the board ordered the continuation of segregation. The board acknowledged the continued protests of the black community throughout the decade by agreeing to create two graded schools and hiring well-qualified black teachers.¹⁶⁴

The state legislature authorized the creation of an official Kansas City, Kansas School Board in 1867, one year after the cities of Wyandotte City, Kansas City, and Armourdale were consolidated. This board accepted the segregated system it had inherited from these and other surrounding communities as two of the ten school buildings controlled by the new board were reserved for black students. Neighboring communities that were later annexed into the city, such as Argentine and Rosedale, likewise maintained separate schools for black children. Even nearby suburbs such as Shawnee refused to consider the petition of black parents requesting the admission of their child. In fact, the apparent audacity of the father's demand reportedly inspired a violent attack against him. Area Republican papers filed their indignation against the attackers who mortally wounded the child's father, yet the schools of Shawnee remained segregated.¹⁶⁵

African American children were likely excluded from the schools of Atchison until the Iowa Yearly Meeting of Friends established a free school staffed by members who moved to Atchison during the Civil War. The first records of the

¹⁶⁴ Minutes of the Leavenworth Board of Education, April 3, September 5, August 21, 1876; *Leavenworth Commercial*, January 20, 1876; February 7, 1876; *Colored Radical* (Leavenworth), September 14, 28, November 18, 1876.

¹⁶⁵ *Wyandotte Gazette*, February 9, 1871, December 31, 1886.

Atchison schools demonstrate that the board of directors that was created in 1871 inherited a dual system of public education. A group of black citizens petitioned the new board requesting better facilities than what had been offered in previous years. Whatever facility had been operated in the past was reportedly so detestable that black petitioners informed the board that they would rather withhold their children from the old school than send them back to that location while their new school was being completed in the fall of 1871. The new building opened in November of that year, with one room being conducted for the primary grades while a second operated as the grammar school. Black children outside the city reportedly traveled great distances to attend this school, an occurrence that led to the additional burden of tuition payments for black students rather than integration of surrounding schools or the creation of additional facilities.¹⁶⁶

Members of Atchison's black community presented a petition calling for the end of segregated schools in June of 1873. The first reports of the town's Democratic press were hostile but at least tacitly conceded the legal validity of the petitioners in their sarcastic reports claiming that the black community was determined to integrate the schools "or make the board of education smell the civil rights bill." Democrats likewise acknowledged the power of the black community by explaining that their united votes had forced Republicans to consider the measure despite the nearly universal opposition to integration among whites of both political parties. The

¹⁶⁶ Louis Thomas Jones, *The Quakers of Iowa* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1914); Minutes of the Atchison Board of Education, August 15, 17, 29, September 4, November 6, 1871, August 12, 1872.

Democratic press of Atchison mirrored that of neighboring communities in their effort to both shame their political rivals as hypocrites while also playing to white hostility. These editorials leaned heavily toward the former strategy, however, as several columns emphasized the public silence of Republican leaders. This strategy was typical of the party, the Democratic daily asserted, as Republicans professed friendship towards black voters yet secretly met to discuss how best to prevent integration. This white Republican angst was unnecessary, the *Patriot* maintained, as they predicted that Atchison blacks were “as docile as a sick kitten” and would likely fail to perceive the duplicity of the party of Lincoln. The continued agitation of black leaders led to increasingly hostile rhetoric, as the *Patriot* began to portray whites as victims of the petitioners who were plotting to take over all of the public schools. “It remains to be seen whether the cracking of Sambo’s whip is to terrify the board of education,” the *Patriot* maintained, by bringing about the “positive destruction” of the public schools by favoring the votes of two hundred blacks over the welfare of the entire community.¹⁶⁷

Representatives of the Republican press visited the city’s Jim Crow school, complimenting both the faculty and the facility itself as equal to any of the schools throughout the city. Although the *Champion* shrank from the explicit accusations of black ingratitude that typified their rival, the message and intent was clear. While the Republican daily shrank from directly endorsing integration or segregation, its columns tacitly suggested that white residents had generously financed the

¹⁶⁷ Minutes of the Atchison Board of Education, June 16, 1873; *Atchison Patriot*, June 14, 16, 17, 1873.

construction of good schools as requested by the black community in years past. The paper's touching description of a black teacher who reportedly explained to her tearful class that her career would likely be ending soon was likewise calculated as a subtle defense of Jim Crow. The Democratic press noticed the duplicity of their rivals and exposed the gulf between the public and private conversations Republicans had between black leaders and white voters. Republican duplicity was especially pronounced in the published statements of the party's official organ. "The respective editors have tongues to speak their minds privately," the *Patriot* maintained, "but they have no pens to write publicly." Democrats were amused by the Republican-dominated board's denial of the black community's petition, yet intensified their attack following the board's attempt to disavow itself from its own actions. The board itself issued a lengthy report of their historic support for black education, yet concluded that integration was "premature and unwise." The board was particularly sensitive about the accusations of unequal facilities but acknowledged the inconvenience of the school's location and resolved to open a second building. As for the matter of allowing black children into the schools nearest them, the board claimed little sympathy with the feelings of prejudice they themselves had manifested in the last month, yet tacitly endorsed them by claiming that prejudice "constitutes a part of our nature." Anticipating Thomas Dixon's cultural defense of segregation, the report of the board regrettably declared that this feeling of prejudice could be discarded "no more than the leopard can change his spots."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Minutes of the Atchison Board of Education, July 7, 1873; *Atchison Champion*, June 18, 24, 1873.

Atchison's black community responded with an unrelenting attack on their school board members and the local politicians who had reportedly promised to support integration prior to their election. A lengthy resolution detailing the service of the race during the Civil War and the community's loyalty to the Republican Party both nationally and locally prefaced a statement warning that black voters would refuse to vote for Republican candidates in the future unless party officials honored their pledge to uphold the laws and desegregate the schools of Atchison. This resolution was adopted unanimously, perhaps influenced by the speeches of white Democratic leaders such as Ballie P. Waggener who shared the platform with black clergy and orators. The audience was quite skeptical of the friendship of any white politician, however, as they unanimously passed a second resolution wherein attendees promised that they would henceforth withdraw from any political meetings not composed entirely of African Americans. This action broke the Republican silence on the matter, as the *Champion* issued an editorial that endorsed the idea of segregated schools in Atchison a week later. The rhetoric of this column illustrates the tension among party leaders between honoring their professed ideals, maintaining the color line, retaining the black vote, and denying Democratic political capital. The bulk of the *Champion's* response accused the Democratic Party as deliberately waging a campaign to "stir up" blacks in Atchison to demand integration in order to shame the Republicans as hypocrites if they denied the request. If the Republican school officials decided to grant the petition, the Republican daily explained, their

opponents would be particularly fortunate as they could incite white backlash to electoral victory during the following term.¹⁶⁹

These allegations implicitly deny the independence and activism of the black community and characterize the shortcomings of even the most liberal whites in Atchison. Republicans responded to the petition by lecturing members of the black community about the benefits of school segregation and dismissed the petitioners' ideas as misinformed and wrong-headed. The resolution of the board to deny the petition went out of its way to explicitly deny the merits of the request by declaring that the grievances of the petitioners were "more imaginary than real." The board intimated that black parents should be grateful that whites in Atchison were willing to support black education at all considering the disparity in property value-based taxes. The continued agitation of the black community was relatively successful in securing improved facilities, yet even the slightest hint at integration resulted in dire predictions of what would later be labeled "white flight." Integration would drive the "better classes" of whites away from areas where black families lived, members of both parties predicted, thereby insuring that black children would be harassed by those who were left behind. The creation of separate schools itself facilitated the creation of separate neighborhoods, however, as black families moved within walking distance of the schools their children were allowed to attend. By the end of the decade, most black families were clustered near the separate schools in the northern

¹⁶⁹ *Atchison Champion*, August 1, 9, 1873.

and southern areas of the city, with a third school located across the river in East Atchison.¹⁷⁰

While this school in East Atchison was actually part of Missouri, whites in Lawrence acted as if the segregated schools in their community that were located north of the Kansas River were actually part of a different region. Blacks in North Lawrence organized as early as 1866 to protest segregated schools as well as their continued disenfranchisement, being joined by black residents who lived in Lawrence proper. Although their petitions were ignored by the state legislature, this was only the first of many protests against Jim Crow's infiltration of the legendary Free State Fortress. As in Leavenworth, black protest resulted in improvements in black education through the creation of graded schools in various locations. By the time of the Lawrence School Board's reorganization in 1867, two churches were rented and staffed with public funds and well-qualified black teachers such as Blanch Kelso Bruce, who later would become the first African American elected to serve a full term in the U. S. Senate. Although these two schools were overcrowded, they were actually less crowded than some of the classrooms reserved for white children. The rapid growth of Lawrence's black community soon led to extreme overcrowding in the rented basements of black churches, a condition that school officials candidly admitted. Black protest led to the creation of public school on both sides of the Kansas River, with the Vermont School being operated for black children in

¹⁷⁰ Minutes of the Atchison Board of Education, July 7, 1873, September 18, 1874, July 3, June 12, August 8, July 1, 1878, February 4, August 4, 1879, *Atchison Patriot*, April 25, 1874; *Atchison Globe*, September 13, 1879.

Lawrence while the North Lawrence school was reserved for African Americans in that township. The sensitivity of white residents regarding the disparity between their civic identity and the discrimination practiced in their public schools might have led to integration after the Civil War. Black protest certainly highlighted this inconsistency, yet even this most liberal of Kansas towns refused to integrate its schools given the size of its black population. Lawrence was unique compared to other Kansas towns, however, in its attempt to conceal Jim Crow by operating separate classrooms within various schools throughout the city while making no mention of race in its official records.¹⁷¹

The first public school built by the city of Topeka was a small, two-story frame building erected in the mid-1860s near the busy downtown intersection of present-day Sixth and Kansas. Although a handful of black children during the Civil War reportedly attended this school alongside white children, a wooden building about a block away from this school was reserved for black children in 1865. School officials transferred this school to the building at Sixth and Kansas the following year, separating white and black children by assigning the latter to the second floor. In 1867, the Topeka Board of Education nearly approved a measure to erect a separate

¹⁷¹ Kaethe Schick Papers, Watkins Community Museum and Archives, Lawrence Kansas; Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka*; First Annual Report of the Lawrence Board of Education for the Year Ending July 31st, 1868, Second Annual Report of the Board of Education For the Year Ending July 31st, 1869, Spencer Research Library, Lawrence, Kansas; "School History" Vertical File, Lawrence Public Library; Lawrence City Directory, 1868, 1873-1874, 1874-1875.

facility for black children, deciding instead to rent space in a black church in order to minimize expenses.¹⁷²

Shortly after the completion of several schools for white children, the board reserved the building at Sixth and Kansas for black children. The maintenance of separate schools was accepted by the residents of the rebel Free State government with little debate beyond the complaints of white taxpayers who labeled the dual system a “costly prejudice.” African American leaders responded by making the school a meeting place for the growing black community, with individuals such as E.H. White, the first black teacher of the city, volunteering his services to adults during the evening.¹⁷³

Despite superficial attempts by school officials to make schools appear equal, black parents knew that segregation discriminated against their children. Besides the negative stigma associated with being barred from one’s own neighborhood school and the substandard facilities that were all too familiar to those attending the Jim Crow schools, black children also experienced racial prejudice from white teachers and administrators. The black community of Topeka found themselves in a difficult position. While they fought each attempt of the board to expand segregation through the creation of additional Jim Crow schools as the city grew, they also sought to insure that these schools were well furnished and accessible to area children. Each new Jim Crow facility resulted in the transfer of black children from formerly

¹⁷² Minutes of the Topeka Board of Education, June 27, July 5, 20, December 14, 1867; Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka*, 27; A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1883), 268.

¹⁷³ A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, 1234; *Kansas State Record*, September 13, 1871; “The Preservation Effort,” *The Brown Quarterly* 3 (Spring 1999); Paul Wilson, *A Time To Lose*, 36.

integrated schools, but the expansion of segregation also resulted in the creation of graded schools. An editorial in the *Colored Citizen* exemplified the dilemma. Black children were being held back to prevent their advancement to the higher grades that were taught in white schools. Although the paper continued their assault on segregation, the creation of additional Jim Crow schools offered the promise of additional grammar schools for black children.¹⁷⁴

The development of Fort Scott's public school system was delayed until after the Civil War, despite the efforts of a number of women who filed petitions in favor of public schools during that conflict. A number of private schools were operated during this time, as well as a Freedman's Mission that offered instruction for area black children. At the end of the war, fifty black students received instruction in a publicly supported school for black children while nearly three hundred white children attended a public school staffed by only three teachers. In May of 1868, a public school board was organized and rapid progress was made by renting several buildings. The board maintained that the separation of white and black children that had occurred previously with no indication that any plan to consolidate the dual system was considered. One of the board's first actions was to appoint a white man to teach the "Colored School" for the fall term, intimating that this was the same school that had been operated by the city during the past few years. Personnel issues were particularly challenging for board members, as several white men declined their appointment as teachers when it was discovered what school they had been assigned

¹⁷⁴ *Topeka Colored Citizen*, June 21, September 13, 20, October 4, 1879.

to, with several teachers resigning the post after only one or two semesters. The board made no attempt to employ a janitor, instructing the teacher to designate janitorial duties to the students despite the fact that every school for white children had a paid janitor on staff. Although records indicate that the teacher of the “Colored School” received the same salary of other teachers, the economy of the school was also displayed by the receipt of rent from a black church that paid the board to utilize the building for its services.¹⁷⁵

By 1870, the board was recruiting teachers for its Jim Crow school as far away as Toledo Ohio. The physical location of the school was likewise transient, a school once used by white children now being moved across town to a location deemed accessible to black pupils. The first recorded protest against the dual system was recorded two years later, as the board received a petition from members of the black community asking that officials grant equal school privileges to black pupils in April 1872. The petition directly protested the inequality of the schools despite the identical rates of taxation and subtly called for an end to segregation, suggesting that there was “no need for [the] additional tax burden” of maintaining a dual system. The only action taken by the board in response was to repair the present facility

¹⁷⁵ Minutes of the Fort Scott Public Schools, May 4, June 8, August 3, September 8, 1868, April 5, 1869; *Davenport Daily Democrat*, September 8, 1865. A number of local histories detail the existence of separate schools in Fort Scott, such as a pamphlet entitled “Free to Learn” by the National Park Service at Fort Scott Historic National Site, and a 1977 unpublished manuscript entitled “Study of the U-234 School System” by the League of Women Voters. Unfortunately, these sources drew heavily from local histories written at the turn of the century that treated the subject of “Colored Schools” as an aside. As a result, many of the details of these histories are incorrect and the protest of black communities is non-existent. At least one scholarly investigation of the city fails to mention the city’s dual system at all despite dedicating an entire chapter to the history of Fort Scott’s public schools. See James D. Conkright, “A Social History of Fort Scott, Kansas, at the Turn of the Century,” (M. S. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Pittsburg, 1973).

maintained for black children and to solicit the opinion of white parents on the question of integration. At least one board member at this point considered the possibility of limited integration, presenting a motion to maintain separate schools for only the first two grades.¹⁷⁶

Members of the black community presented a petition to the board in early August that reiterated their demand that their children be admitted into all of the schools of the city. White residents responded with a counter-petition demanding the continued segregation of white and black children. This counter-petition was framed carefully, stating only that the petitioners were opposed to any measure that would result in the closure of the school for black children rather than explicitly acknowledging the desire to exclude black children from the schools designated for white children. A compromise effort that would provide integration beyond the first two grades failed after a 5-4 vote, followed by a second attempt to maintain the status quo by tabling discussion of the issue for a year. The board finally resolved in favor of forming a committee to investigate community sentiment. While the resulting committee report merely declared what the board already knew—that white residents of the city firmly opposed integration as evidenced by their petition—the survey provided members with a useful shield. Board members also sought to deflect potential criticism from black leaders by promising improved facilities, stating that the black community would be satisfied with this compromise. Although the board resolved to address the inequalities between the schools, including the overcrowding

¹⁷⁶ Minutes of the Fort Scott Public Schools, December 7, 1870, March 6, July 1, 17, August 15, 1871, June 3, July 1, 1872.

and the lack of graded classrooms, the board quickly tabled discussion of these measures. The only noticeable change for the 1872-1873 school year was that the board renamed the facility the “Plaza Colored School.” Members of the black community continued their quest to improve conditions at this school, securing black teachers later in the century after a second campaign later in the decade.¹⁷⁷

Most children in 19th century Kansas attended rural schools scattered throughout the state. These early rural school districts provided only limited opportunities to those students, white or black, who lived within walking distance of one-room schools. It is also important to note that many of these schools were as rugged as the frontier itself, with irregular lessons, irregular attendance, and regular discipline problems. Teachers were often little more than literate vagabonds, carrying certificates that were obtained from local officials rather than accredited institutions. Communities hired most rural teachers for school terms that often lasted no longer than a few months and in many cases they were paid by the day and boarded from one home to another. Older male students frequently bullied these teachers, while other students and community members often ran unpopular teachers off. In some areas discipline problems were so bad that community members were more concerned with the size of a teacher’s frame than they were with the size of their intellect. Some districts were too large to effectively govern, such as the Marion School District that covered almost 32,000 square miles when it was first outlined by government officials in 1865. Early residents attempted to offset these disadvantages

¹⁷⁷ Minutes of the Fort Scott Public Schools, August 5, 19, September 2, 16, October 7, November 1, December 1, 24, 1872, January 6, 1873.

by operating subscription schools that were often partially subsidized by the sale of public lands. The question of the color line was secondary to other forms of diversity in these schools, as ethnic distinctions and dialects were among the leading controversies in early rural districts.¹⁷⁸

Race was an issue in many rural communities adjacent to the Missouri border, however, and several separate schools were maintained in Northeastern Kansas prior to the Exodus of 1879-1880. Several Jim Crow schools were formed in Doniphan County during the 1870s, including the small townships of White Cloud and Highland. Legendary Free State/Republican editor Sol Miller believed that segregation was a progressive measure. Miller's editorials on the subject portrayed black integrationists as if they were hoodwinked by scheming political manipulators. Miller contrasted the "acceptance" of separate schools in White Cloud as evidence of their benefit and portrayed legal efforts to banish Jim Crow as contrary to their interests. Miller described an alleged case of black parents who protested against the admission of white children in "their" school as evidence of segregation's universal acceptance. Unfortunately, Miller failed to identify any background of this incident or details of the complaint that would allow for the exploration of this claim. Miller's belief that white politicians supported school integration as an electoral strategy to obtain black votes is somewhat disingenuous however, given his prediction that

¹⁷⁸ Dick, 313-24; Alex E. Case, "School District That Covered One-third of Kansas," *The Club Member* (February 1910), 7-9, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

mixed schools would prove so odious to both races that the public schools of the region would cease to operate.¹⁷⁹

Opposition to integrated schools was endemic beyond the Kansas-Missouri border, with letters opposing the practice appearing as far west as Council Grove during this period. The Civil War had barely concluded when the question of school segregation was raised, a local resident who identified himself as a former opponent of slavery stating his opposition of integrated schools. "I think I have seen enough of negroes to know that I cannot nor will treat them as my equal," the author explained, reiterating the belief that integration would destroy the usefulness of public schools and thereby victimize white children. A community meeting in nearby Junction City echoed these sentiments as white attendees passed resolutions that supported separate schools in threatening terms. In some rural areas, imaginative schemes were concocted to separate students without incurring additional expenses. In Burlingame, separate terms were designated for whites and blacks using the same building. Seneca residents convinced the school board to provide a separate room and teacher even though there were only two black students in the entire district.¹⁸⁰

Although Wichita was to become the largest city in Kansas by World War II, the city had modest beginnings and did not open its first public school until 1870. Wichita officials discussed segregation and considered operating racially separate schools, but the small number of black children who were spread throughout the city

¹⁷⁹ Patrick Leopoldo Gray, *Gray's Doniphan County History* (Bendena, Kansas: Roycroft Press, 1905); *White Cloud Kansas Chief*, February 3, 1870 quoted in *Atchison Daily Globe*, February 4, 1970.

¹⁸⁰ James Carper, "The Published Opinions of Kansas Concerning Education, 1854-1900," (Ph.D. diss., Kansas State University, 1977), 72-77.

all but prohibited such a practice. The schools faced a series of financial crises in their first decades, further diminishing any incentive for operating a dual system. White officials considered a proposal to segregate the schools in 1879, yet the twenty-two black children enrolled in the city’s public schools represented only two percent of the total enrollment. The school census of the previous year demonstrates the demographic factors that led to Jim Crow’s rejection on the grounds of economy:¹⁸¹

1878 Wichita School Census ¹⁸²			
	White Children	Black Children	Total
First Ward	3	415	418
Second Ward	13	176	189
Third Ward	5	284	289
Fourth Ward	20	313	333

School Segregation in Nebraska, 1865-1879

A number of studies have been written on the black experience in Nebraska as well as local histories of individual urban and rural communities. Without exception, each of these studies has concluded that Jim Crow never had a home in Nebraska.

General histories of local and state history likewise make no mention of racial segregation. With the exception of a handful of city directories of Nebraska City,

¹⁸¹ Minutes of the Wichita Board of Education, June 2, 1879; Sondra Van Meter, *Our Common School Heritage: A History of the Wichita Public Schools* (Wichita: Wichita Board of Education, 1977); William Finn, “The First Wichita School, 1869,” Special Collections, Wichita State University; Jessica Smith, “A History of Wichita High School, 1873-1935,” Special Collections, Wichita Public Library; *Wichita Eagle*, January 9, June 5, 12, 1879.

¹⁸² *Wichita Beacon*, April 24, May 15, June 5, 1878.

there are no printed records of Jim Crow's strange career in Nebraska. The mistaken assumption of a 1965 study commissioned by the Nebraska State Historical Society is typical of the omission of segregated schools. "The negroes attended the public schools," the study contended regarding postbellum race relations, "although some objected to attending with white children who had previously enjoyed more educational opportunities."¹⁸³

A detailed search of legislative records, newspapers, and school records reveals a far different story. A teachers' association meeting in Omaha after the Civil War illustrated the change in sentiment regarding exclusion, the teachers unanimously adopting a resolution in support of black education. The omission of any discussion of segregation was likely due to the controversial nature of the practice for reasons of economy. Lawmakers did not remove the word "white" from the list of qualifications to be admitted in the public schools of Nebraska until after a lengthy debate in 1867. Augustus F. Harvey of Otoe County introduced a bill in 1867 labeled "An act to remove the distinctions on account of race and color in the school laws of Nebraska." Despite the title, Harvey's bill was intended to open the schools of the state to black children only on the condition that these schools would be separate

¹⁸³ Bertha W. Calloway and Alonzo N. Smith, *Visions of Freedom on the Great Plains*, 25; Alfred Sorensen, *The Story of Omaha, From The Pioneer Days to the Present Time* (Omaha: National Printing Company, 1923); J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *School History of Nebraska*; Arvid E. Nelson, "A History of the Policies, Rules and Regulations of the Public Schools of Omaha, Nebraska From 1870 to 1964," (Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, 1969); William E. Broadfield, *Stories of Omaha: Historical Sketches of the Midland City* (Omaha: Nichols and Broadfield, 1898); Omaha City Directory, 1866, 1868, 1870, 1871, 1872-3; *Nebraska City News-Press*, November 29, 1965 clipping in "Black Community in Nebraska City and Surrounding Areas" Vertical File, Nebraska City Public Library; "The Early Educational Facilities in Nebraska City," in "Nebraska City Schools," MS 1237, Nebraska State Historical Society; James W. Savage, *History of the City of Omaha Nebraska* (New York: Munsell and Company, 1894), 308-17.

from those attended by white children. The committee recommended an amendment to the bill removing the requirement of separate schools despite the author's opposition.¹⁸⁴ Harvey and fellow committee member E. P. Child responded by voting against the bill in the committee and offering the following minority report recommending that the bill be passed in its original form:

The bill as referred to the committee provides for the education of colored youth. It gives them all the privileges and advantages of the common school system, the means of a free education, and lays the foundation of their usefulness to the extent of their ability as humble members of the body politic. To the proposition of the original bill, authorizing the Boards of education to provide separate schools for colored children, the undersigned agree, and will heartily concur in any action of the House which may adopt it.

But the amendment proposed by the majority of the committee contemplates the admission of colored children to our schools on an equal footing with white youth. This is reaching too far in advance of the age. The people of Nebraska are not yet ready to send white boys and white girls to school to sit on the same seats with negroes they are not yet ready to endorse in this tacit manner the dogma of miscegenation; especially are they yet far from ready to degrade their offspring to a level with so inferior a race.

The undersigned do not believe the intention of the majority of the committee can be carried out by the people; and we do not believe that the Legislative Assembly should force upon the people a measure so obnoxious to their wishes and habits and the established principles of political equality.¹⁸⁵

Despite Harvey and Child's continued objections, the House approved the committee's majority report and recommended amendment by a 19-13 vote. After some unrecorded debate on the measure, Harvey removed his opposition and voted with the 25-10 majority in favor of the bill. A leading Democratic newspaper responded with outrage, alerting its readers that the legislature had determined "that nigger children shall attend school with white children and upon the same benches..."

¹⁸⁴ J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *Illustrated History of Nebraska*, 57-60; *Omaha Weekly Republican*, January 18, 1867; Journal of the House of Representatives of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Nebraska, Twelfth Session, 1867, 71-95.

¹⁸⁵ Journal of the House of Representatives of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Nebraska, Twelfth Session, 1867, 95.

and angrily opposing the admission of black children into the public schools that had been built with white taxpayer money.¹⁸⁶

The measure was considered by the Legislative Council during the first week of February. An effort to indefinitely postpone the bill was defeated by an 8-4 vote, after which an attempt was made to insert the phrase “Provided nothing herein contained shall be construed to authorize the education of colored children in the same room with white children” into the bill. Even the harshest critics of the measure were explicit in their verbal support for African American education so long as the races were kept separate. Despite this conservative sentiment, Harvey’s amended bill removing the word “white” from the school laws with no mention of segregation ultimately passed the Council by a 10-3 vote. That lawmakers wished to avoid affiliation with the measure is evidenced by several efforts to purge any mention of race from the name of the bill. For example, an amendment to change the title of the bill from “An act to remove the distinctions on account of race and color in the school laws of Nebraska,” to “An act to amend sections 18 and 48, of chapter 48, part 1, of the Revised Statutes, entitled ‘school’,” failed by only one vote.¹⁸⁷

Although the bill only removed the word “white” from the current school laws and made no mention of segregation or integration, acting governor Algernon S. Paddock chose to veto the bill because he believed it opened the door to interracial schools. Paddock issued a lengthy statement in opposition to the bill for a variety of

¹⁸⁶ Journal of the House of Representatives of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Nebraska, Twelfth Session, 1867, 99-105; *Nebraska City News*, January 28, February 1, 1867.

¹⁸⁷ Journal of the Council of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Nebraska, Twelfth Session, 1867, 97, 147-54.

reasons, including the possibility that black children could be still be denied educational opportunities as the bill lacked an explicit guarantee of educational opportunities regardless of race. His main objection, however, was the bill's failure to provide for the separation of the races. "Much as we may regret it," Paddock explained, "we cannot close our eyes to the fact that a strong prejudice exists in the public mind against the intimate association of the youths of the two races in the same public schools, which no amount of legislation can eradicate." Paddock suggested that the bill be revised to include a statement granting the majority of citizens in any given district the power to decide if they would have separate schools or not.¹⁸⁸

Shortly after Nebraska's admission as a state, Governor David Butler called for a special session of the state legislature. Among the purposes of this session, Butler explained, was to revise the school law and provide educational opportunities that were "second to no other State in the facilities offered to all her children, irrespective of sex or condition." The governor later referred to the 14th amendment as "the essence of the lesson taught the American people during the terrible agony of civil war." The legislature continued to dodge the question of segregation, however, as the school laws made no mention of the practice and there is little indication that the matter was publicly discussed. Perhaps owing to the lily-white nature of most school districts in Nebraska, racial distinctions were not recorded in state mandated school reports until 1881. Ethnicity and foreign language was discussed regularly in

¹⁸⁸ Statutes of Nebraska, 1866, 354, 372; Journal of the House of Representatives of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Nebraska, Twelfth Session, 1867, 214, 253-4, 266. Paddock was acting governor due to the temporary absence of Territorial Governor Saunders.

county superintendent reports, yet even the two cities in Nebraska that maintained separate schools made no record of race in their reports. Despite local conflicts regarding ethnicity, school officials viewed assimilation as one of the missions of the public schools. “The safety and perpetuity of the State must be cared for,” the State Superintendent counseled, a goal that could best be met by “blend[ing] all nationalities into one.” Whether the small number of African Americans were included in this mixture was a matter left to local communities to determine.¹⁸⁹

The antebellum public schools of Omaha had a brief and precarious existence. A Board of School Directors was elected in 1857 but the first public schools did not open until two years later. The system was disrupted by the Civil War with private schools filling the gap until the end of the conflict. Between 1869 and 1872 the schools of Omaha were under the direction of two separate boards. Although there was some confusion regarding the authority of both groups, the chief complaint was related to overcrowding. A special act of the state legislature dissolved the two boards and created a Board of Education in Omaha that sought to resolve these hardships when it first met in 1872. The regulations of this board declared that the schools were “public and free to all children” living in Omaha. The issue of race was left unsettled, however, until a number of African American parents challenged the board’s policy of segregation. According to an 1888 letter, Omaha’s Jim Crow school was

¹⁸⁹ Senate Journal of the State Legislature of Nebraska, 1867 49-61; House Journal of the State Legislature of Nebraska, 1867, 111, 139-144, 153, 164, 176, 195, 199, 229-231, 239; Laws of the State of Nebraska 1867, 101-110; First Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1869; Fourth Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1872; Seventh Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1875; Tenth Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1878, 22; Twelfth Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1880.

discontinued only after these parents sought to compel the new board to enforce their own regulations by threatening to file a lawsuit.¹⁹⁰

School records indicate that Jim Crow was part of the existing system of public schools that the new board inherited. One of the first measures the board passed was a resolution naming the various schools with “The Colored School” appearing at the end of the list created during the summer of 1872. Black protest against segregation prior to this time led to editorial comments regarding the merits of Jim Crow. The Democratic *Omaha Herald* responded to accusations that it opposed all efforts to educate black children with an editorial calling for equal but separate accommodations in March of 1872. The Herald claimed that they had come to this conclusion, not as a result of racial hostility, but rather thoroughly investigating the issue alongside school officials whose bipartisan conclusion shared that of the Herald; Jim Crow offered the best advantages for both white and black children. Continued black protest led to the postponement of administrative decisions regarding the school in the summer of 1872, as board members prepared to discuss the issue once again.¹⁹¹

Jim Crow was not the leading topic of discussion that summer, however, as financial issues related to school bonds, new facilities, and textbooks took precedence. The board passed two resolutions authorizing the rental of a building to be used as the “colored school,” changing the location from the corner of Davenport

¹⁹⁰ Arvid E. Nelson, “A Brief History of the Methods Used to Elect Members to the Board of Education,” Omaha Board of Education Archives, Omaha, Nebraska; *Omaha Weekly Herald*, August 4, 1869; *Omaha Herald*, June 2, 1888; Arvid E. Nelson, A History of the Policies, Rules and Regulations of the Public Schools of Omaha,” Omaha Board of Education Archives, Omaha, Nebraska.

¹⁹¹ Minutes of the Omaha Board of Education, April 8, 1872, July 22, August 5, 19, 1872; *Omaha Daily Herald*, March 20, 1872; *Omaha Bee*, July 23, 1872.

and 15th streets to a room on 10th Street between Douglas and Dodge. The resolutions convey the impression that the board continued to debate the possibility of eliminating the school, adding the phrase “in case it shall be found necessary to do so” as a proviso. A communication from the Superintendent indicates that there was also confusion regarding whether white children residing near the school might be allowed to attend if they so desired. Future records indicate the board declared that they could not bar white children from admission at the school, but there is no indication that this ruling was related to the desire of white parents to send their children to this school. Had they chosen to do so, they would have enjoyed the lowest teacher-to-student ratio in Omaha. Compared to most of the classrooms throughout the city that contained 65-85 pupils, the “Colored School” possessed only twenty-five students. The most unique aspect of Jim Crow in early Omaha, however, was that black children throughout the city were admitted in schools throughout the city even while a separate school was in operation.¹⁹²

Enrollment of Omaha Public Schools, October 1872¹⁹³

School	Total Enrolled	African American
High School	52	1
Central	451	2
North	304	1
South	321	10
West	100	-

¹⁹² Minutes of the Omaha Board of Education, September 2, 7, October 7, 10, 1872; *Omaha Weekly Tribune and Republican*, October 12, 1872; *Omaha Bee*, November 5, 1872; *Omaha World-Herald*, September 4, 11, November 13, 20, 1872.

¹⁹³ Minutes of the Omaha Board of Education, October 10, 1872. The original chart that appears in the minutes has two columns, one entitled “white” and the other “colored.” One might reasonably conclude that the secretary meant “total enrolled” for this column, as to believe otherwise would result in the conclusion that there were 25 white and 25 black children in the “Colored” school.

Cass St	165	2
Jackson St	86	4
Colored	25	25
Hascalls	25	2

Shortly into the fall semester, the committee “recommend the discontinuance of the Colored school” along with other measures, each designed to relieve overcrowding. A resolution to discontinue the “Colored School” was passed by an 8-2 vote near the middle of the semester and its former students were referred to the schools nearest their homes. The measure appears to have aroused little controversy, perhaps owing to previous campaigns of black leaders and the integrated nature of the rest of the Omaha school district. The Omaha press reported positively regarding the decision of school directors in Patterson, New Jersey, which eliminated the city’s system of Jim Crow schools. However, little if anything appeared in the local press in the way of editorial comment regarding the same decision in Omaha. City newspapers were filled with editorials regarding the expense of textbooks, and other such controversies, yet the decision to expel Jim Crow from Omaha appears to have been handled quietly. At least one participant recalled that integration was not simply accepted by the Omaha Board of Education, recalling that members of the black community threatened to sue the board prior to the eventual decision to integrate the schools. Subsequent records indicate that black children attended nearly every school in the city at the end of Reconstruction.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Minutes of the Omaha Board of Education, October 14, November 4, 1872; *Omaha Weekly Tribune and Republican*, October 19, November 9, 1872, December 7, 1872; *Omaha Bee*, May 8, 1872; *Omaha Herald*, June 2, 1888.

Enrollment of Omaha Public Schools, 1877-1878¹⁹⁵

School	Total	Foreign Born	African American	% Foreign	% African American
High School	63	No Data	1	N/A	1.6
Central	839	71	19	8.5	2.3
North	643	72	13	11.2	2
East	604	73	37	12.1	5.8
South	329	71	3	21.6	.9
Cass St	120	7	1	5.8	.8
West	117	3	3	2.6	2.6
Hartman	106	29	0	27.4	0
Jackson St	79	8	1	1.0	1.3
Grammar School Total	2837	334	77	11.2	2.7

A search of Lincoln newspapers between 1865 and 1880 suggest that the schools of that city were never officially segregated. Educational opportunities were greatly limited in early Lincoln as only one public school was in operation in 1868. School board records date as early as the spring of 1871 and include no mention of separate schools. It is possible that black students were informally segregated in separate rooms due to the absence of demographic data, and the frequent practice of renting rooms throughout the city likewise increases the possibility that one of these facilities might have been maintained for black children. None of these rented facilities corresponded with the addresses of contemporary black churches, once again supporting the conclusion that Lincoln's early schools were racially integrated. The only mention of race in local newspapers was a complaint regarding some black tenants who lived above a room rented by the board. Rather than blame the

¹⁹⁵ Annual Report of the Omaha Board of Education, 1877-1878.

proprietor, the *Daily State Journal* expressed hostility towards the “careless” tenants who allowed water and other materials to seep into the holes in the floor onto the scholars below. “Rather than kill the colored people,” the *Journal* mused, school officials decided to simply rent a different room. This same newspaper referred to the school board of Lincoln, Illinois, as a “collective ass” for drawing the color line, once again supporting the conclusion that the schools of Lincoln were integrated. Finally, several requests from black churches and community groups were made to the board asking to utilize school facilities for civic and religious functions. The fact that these requests were made of several different buildings likewise supports the notion that these schools were open to black children. Even during height of Exoduster migration, there were no recorded comments for or against the creation a separate schools despite the fact that the board was in the midst of an ambitious campaign to create several new schools. Although the new arrivals were concentrated in one neighborhood of South Lincoln, there is no record of segregation. In fact, an editorial in the *Daily State Journal* placed the city in contrast to the South, as their public schools were open to all children.¹⁹⁶

Given the experiences of the state’s two largest cities, one might expect that the story of separate schools in Nebraska was settled by Omaha’s decision to integrate in 1872. A visitor to Nebraska City in that year would have likely

¹⁹⁶ Minutes of the Lincoln Board of Education, April 3, 1871, November 7, 1881, June 5, 1882, January 7, 1884; Carl Yost, “History of the Lincoln Schools” Archives of the Lincoln Public Schools; *Daily Nebraska State Journal*, July 2, 3, 23, September 23, 30, 1879; A.B. Hayes and Sam D. Cox, *History of the City of Lincoln* (Lincoln: State Journal Company, 1889), 226-233; A.T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1882), 1051-2; *Nebraska Commonwealth* (Lincoln), February 8, 1868; *Daily State Journal*, July 18, September 4, 16, 1879.

considered the residents of J. Sterling Morton's city to be liberal on questions of civil rights after witnessing the city's annual High School exhibition that openly challenged the era's ideas of gender. The exposition featured two girls and two boys engaged in a lively debate on the subject, "Should Women Vote," while other students presented a tableau on "Women's Rights" that featured women acting as lawyers, doctors, and other professionals while men wore aprons and performed domestic tasks. Although many aspects of the tableau were designed as entertainment, many of the men in the audience conceded that the young women bested their male counterparts in the debate. Despite the school's willingness to sponsor a discussion of gender in 1872, racial lines were strictly drawn in Nebraska City as evidenced by the recent creation of a separate school for African American children.¹⁹⁷

Although one of Nebraska City's first schools had been taught by abolitionist John H. Kagi, one of the men who died during the attack on Harper's Ferry, the first public schools were open only to white children. The board hired African American minister W. H. Wilson to teach a separate school for twenty-three black children in 1872. Later that year the Board of Education was abolished and the schools were placed in the hands of the city council, which operated the schools of Nebraska City for the next two years. The earliest surviving minutes of the Nebraska City Board of Education indicate that the new board continued to operate a separate school for black children until 1879, when the schools were integrated as a cost-saving measure.

¹⁹⁷ *Morning Chronicle* (Nebraska City), March 9, 1872.

Although the original school was generally taught by black ministers, the board hired at least one white woman, Mrs. V. M. Dennison, to teach at the school. Perhaps owing to her previous experience as a grammar school teacher in the city schools, Dennison received significantly higher pay than her black male counterparts. Black teachers were paid the same salary that new teachers below the high school received, yet the fact that most white men received two to three times the salary of female teachers did not transcend race as black men were paid the same rate as their female counterparts. Although the board limited their expenditures on staff and supplies at the school, the low numbers of black children in Nebraska City resulted in the cost-per-pupil being significantly higher than that of white children.¹⁹⁸

Overcrowding in the white schools and severe financial difficulties led to a combined effort of school officials and the city council to reduce expenses in 1878. In this atmosphere of crisis, David W. Hershey was elected as Secretary of Board of Education with bipartisan support. The board retained only nine of its sixteen teachers in the white schools the following summer, while other cost saving measures were

¹⁹⁸ A.T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, 1205; Report of Nebraska City Superintendent of Schools, Second Annual Report of the Commissioner of Common Schools of the Territory of Nebraska to the Seventh Legislative Assembly, 1860-1861; Fourth Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, December, 1872, 124-43; Minutes of the Nebraska City Board of Education, August 7, 1876, July 2, 1877, June 10, 11, July 9, 1878; "Early Schools" Vertical File, Nebraska City Public Library; *Morning Chronicle* (Nebraska City) March 28, 1872; *Nebraska City News*, February 16, 1878; Nebraska City Directory, 1870, 1881-1882; *Nebraska City Weekly News*, September 1, 1922; A search of extant Nebraska City newspapers published prior to 1879 has not revealed the precise origins of the separate school. Articles that describe the city schools rarely mention the existence of a "Colored School." For example, see the *Nebraska City News* of January 15, 1876. The *Democratic News* frequently omitted the existence of the school, including a detailed essay on every public and private school that appeared on September 10, 1877. The Republican *Nebraska City Press* offered more detail on school matters, however the few extant articles of this time period seem to deliberately obscure the fact that the city maintained a separate school. For example, the September 1, 1876 issue includes a list of teachers and schools but fails to mention the existence of the "Colored School."

likewise implemented. A plan to transfer the city's segregated school from a rented room to a vacant and abandoned church was enthusiastically received until it was discovered that the church had been condemned. Shortly after this discussion, the board considered the elimination of the school entirely. The leading paper of the city was outspoken against this plan, sarcastically predicting that the measure would result in tremendous savings for the city as nearly every white parent would place their children in private schools. The daily and weekly Democratic press claimed that their opposition to integration was based on the best interests of both white and black children, yet likewise maintained that whites had a unique right to frame school policy due to their larger average contributions to the school fund.¹⁹⁹

Board records are curiously silent regarding the decision to integrate the school in the late summer of 1879. Given the appearance of board minutes in the local press as well as the controversial nature of the measure, it is likely that board members sought a quiet end to segregation. The *Democratic News* prevented such an occurrence, printing a series of aggressive remarks regarding the planned integration. The *Democratic* daily proudly reported that black children did not appear for enrollment on the first day of the new semester, subtly endorsing whatever rumors had been circulated to intimidate parents and students. The appearance of one black child the following day likewise resulted in considerable discussion. Although the boy was enrolled, opponents of integration commented that there were better ways to cut costs than by "mixing up the colored children in the white schools." Further

¹⁹⁹ Minutes of the Nebraska City Board of Education, May 19, June 2, 21, July 7, August 4, 18, 1879; *Nebraska City Daily News*, June 2, July 17, 1879; *Nebraska City News*, May 10, July 12, 1879.

editorials claimed that the measure was an outrage and insult to white children and parents. Although the Republican newspaper was supportive of the move as a cost-saving measure, the board held a community meeting to discuss the matter. This gathering exposed a divided board, as some members defended their actions as consistent with the laws of the state while others simply considered the measure as economical, prompting the city's Democratic newspaper to lampoon the board's divided message as a "Double Mixture."²⁰⁰

Some members of the school board in trying to inform the people why it was they pushed colored children into the white schools are getting about as badly mixed up in the explanation as the school are [sic] in color. First they tell you it was for economy's sake the colored school was abolished. And then again if their argument doesn't seem to work all right, they will drop at once economy, and take up the legality of the act, and quote to you about the glorious bird of freedom, with one and twenty constitutional amendments, hanging from his tail, and tell you they are forced to push upon the people an act they know is repugnant to them. Weel, this latter ground they take may appear a little stronger to them, but we can't see where the strength comes in except in the color. We are anxious to have all the colored people in this city receive a good education, but we do think with the plenty of empty rooms we have, and at the cheap price a teacher can be got, the colored people should be placed in a class by themselves.²⁰¹

Although the city contained only thirty-nine African Americans of school age among nearly thirteen hundred whites; the enrollment of half of these black children among their white peers aroused considerable debate. The Republican *Press* was supportive of the measure, meeting the personal attacks of their Democratic rival with their own indictment of white parents who threatened to withdraw their children as ignorant and intolerant. Although the school board was not clearly divided along

²⁰⁰ Thompson to Dr. A. Brown, June 3, 1879, W. Jones to James Reed, October 9, 1879, W. Jones to James Reed, October 20, 1879, W. Jones to J. B. Parmalee, November 13, 1879, W. Jones to J. B. Parmalee, November 27, 1879 Nebraska Board of Education Records, Letterpress Books, RG 11 SG 1, Box 1 Volume 9, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska; *Nebraska City Daily News*, August 5, September 8, 9, 10, 15, 1879; *Nebraska City News*, September 13, 1879.

²⁰¹ *Nebraska City Daily News*, September 15, 1879.

partisan lines, the Democratic *News* sought to secure political capital by portraying the unpopular decision as a Republican measure. When one of the public schools was utilized to host a weekday political convention, the *News* capitalized on the issue. “The Republicans who are so zealous in having the niggers educated,” the *News* stated, “that they thrust them in the white schools, hesitate not in throwing one hundred white children out of one day’s schooling, in order that a political broil might be accommodated.” The paper went on to single out Hershey and the Republican members of the board, claiming that the closure of the all-white school for one day was further proof that these men were disposed to favor black children at the expense of whites. Ironically, the Democrats also held their convention at the same school the following month.²⁰²

J. Sterling Morton’s Democratic organ lampooned Hershey by printing a false story claiming that the Board Secretary had ordered teachers to segregate black children within their classrooms. “Let us have the whole hog or none,” the *Daily News* commented, “and for our part we will take the latter.” The *News* later sarcastically suggested that school integration be placed upon a voluntary basis. White parents who were “strong advocates of the forcing of the niggers into the schools,” The *News* explained, could choose to send their children to a special integrated school. This arrangement would please all parents, the Democratic daily explained, as the board would be allowed to “carry out their own hobby of mixing up

²⁰² Minutes of the Nebraska City Board of Education, April 5, 1880; *Nebraska City Daily News*, September 26, 27, 28, October, 2, 1879; *Nebraska City News*, August 16, 1879. Extant issues of the *Nebraska City Press* are limited. Although the rival *News* frequently reprinted the Republican journal’s columns, it is likely that the editors selected only the most “radical” columns for reproduction within their columns.

colors,” while also displaying “a commendable sanitary spirit,” by relieving the overcrowded conditions of the ward schools. Hershey was frequently the special target of the *News*’ racial humor. For example, when the Secretary spoke about the honor of being an educator who at least partially offset the low salaries required by the board’s economic retrenchment, the *News* sarcastically polled its readers if the prestige of teaching in Nebraska City had bucked the trend of wages since Hershey “forced the nigger” into the city’s schools.²⁰³

Despite all of the negative rhetoric, predictions among integration’s enemies about the new market for private schools were not fulfilled. One former teacher believed these reports and re-opened her academy in the meeting hall previously occupied by the city’s Mormon church. The new school merely competed for the same number of students who were already enrolled in private institutions, however, as private schools listed only minor gains while city directories and school records confirm that no “white flight” away from the city schools occurred. The issue soon faded from Morton’s Democratic journal with the exception of occasional jokes lampooning black pupils or denigrating Secretary Hershey. Morton displayed the limits of his journal’s comic creativity by publishing a fake letter to the editor from a young white student claiming that he patched his pants to mimic the style of his impoverished black classmates. The piece concluded by remarking that Dr. Hershey

²⁰³ *Nebraska City News*, September 13, 20, 1879.

liked the new style so much that he would dress his own boy in patches, intimating that the Secretary preferred racial amalgamation within his own home.²⁰⁴

Within a few weeks nearly all of the black students who had attended the “Colored School” were enrolled in the various ward schools of the city with no indication of any racial disturbances. Area schools likewise opened quietly the following semester. The failure of the neighboring community of Greggspport to offer a free public school, however, led to renewed Democratic editorials about the skewed priorities of the school board. The fact that white children in Greggspport who could not afford the subsidized tuition costs of the publicly supported school of that city while the black children of Nebraska City enjoyed free schools revived Morton’s indignation about the victimization of white children. “There has been such a hue and cry raised as regards educating the ‘poor colored children,’” the *News* exclaimed, “that we think it is pretty near time to look after the poor, neglected white children, provided the wise functionaries of education of Otoe County think that a poor white child is as good as the ‘poor colored child.’”²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Minutes of the Nebraska City Board of Education, April 10, 1883; *Nebraska City Daily News*, April 10, 17, 1880; *Nebraska City News*, August 16, 23, November 1, 1879, September 29, 1883. Hershey’s stand on the issue of school integration was apparently not a popular one. The former secretary polled only fifty votes (compared with 333 to 187 of the other candidates) during the 1880 election as an independent candidate despite his overwhelming electoral support in the previous election. In 1883, Hershey received only twenty-six votes for County Superintendent.

²⁰⁵ *Nebraska City Daily News*, October 14, December 6, 1879, January 5, 7, 1880; *Nebraska City News*, September 20, 1879.

Chapter 3: The Exodus in History and Memory: 1879-1880

In 2007, the Kansas Legislature passed Resolution 1853 declaring August 8th and 9th as “Kansas Exoduster Colonies Days.” The Legislature made two assertions that, although false, have dominated the historiography of the Exodus and prevented a critical examination of the migration. First, the legislature referred to all African Americans who migrated to Kansas during the 1870s and 1880s as “Exodusters.” Second, the resolution and the reports in area newspapers confidently asserted that the history of this migration has been well documented. The resolution itself passed unanimously with no discussion in the midst of a number of obligatory measures such as congratulating a local basketball team for its season.²⁰⁶

Area newspapers issued little if any comment in regards to the measure itself, but have been full of stories referring to any black resident of Kansas in the 19th century as an “Exoduster” while stereotyping all such individuals as impoverished “freedmen” who had recently been emancipated. Lesson plans and guides provided to

²⁰⁶ The author would like to acknowledge the fine work of the students of his *Peoples of Kansas* class in making much of this chapter possible. Each student selected and surveyed a Kansas newspaper, recording every source they could find on the Exodus and local race relations. The students sought to place these primary sources in historic context by utilizing information available in books and articles, each creating a short paper on the Exodus through the eyes of one Kansas journal. Although my primary intention was to illustrate something about critical thinking and the imperfect nature of historical inquiry, the students produced an unprecedented survey of the Exodus in Kansas that challenged my view of the Exodus. As a result, I devoted an additional six months to survey area newspapers and manuscripts and decided to include the story of the migration rather than merely assert its importance in changing the demographics of the region. While much of this essay is critical towards the work of other historians, I believe it is important to point out that prior to reading the work of my students, I was equally culpable in underestimating the significance of the Exodus.

teachers by the Kansas State Historical Society confirm the stereotype by their emphasis on the poverty of the Exodusters and the generosity of white Kansans.²⁰⁷

The first legislative and journalistic inquiries related to the Exodus of 1879-1880 displayed more partisan rancor, but also explored the migration in greater detail. Both Republican and Democratic leaders sought to use the Exodus to gain political capital, often ignoring the testimony of over a hundred informants in favor of their own preconceived conclusions about the meaning of the migration. The outcome of the hearings was apparent even before the first testimony was heard as both parties sponsored resolutions calling for redress based on their partisan views. To the surprise of none, the Republican members concluded that Southern Democrats had abused former slaves while the Democratic majority reported that the proceedings “established undeniably” that the entire movement was the result of Republicans’ exploitation of “ignorant freedmen” as part of a conspiracy to stir up dissent and transplant Republican voters into their districts.²⁰⁸

The basic premise of the majority report of the Voorhees Committee, the assumption that former slaves were ignorant and incapable of self-government, would soon become the dominant theme of Reconstruction historiography. With the exception of black historians such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Carter Woodson, Reconstruction historiography was dominated in the first half of the 20th century by a

²⁰⁷ Journal of the Kansas Senate (2007), 526; *Lawrence Journal-World*, December 16, 2001; *Topeka Capital Journal*, March 1, 2003; “African Americans Come to Kansas,” in *The African American Experience in Kansas*, Teacher’s Manual, Grades 4-6, Education and Outreach Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

²⁰⁸ *Report, and Testimony of the Select Committee of the United States Senate to Investigate the Causes of the Removal of the Negroes from the Southern States to the Northern States* (Washington 1880), I, iv-xxiv. (Hereinafter referred to as the *Voorhees Report*,.)

narrow interpretation founded upon the assumption of white supremacy. This assumption was exemplified by the work of Columbia historians John W. Burgess and William A. Dunning.

These professors and their students wrote a number of local studies of Reconstruction that were dominated by their own perspective. As a result, these historians confirmed popular beliefs that Reconstruction was a tragic era typified by misgovernment, as vindictive radicals manipulated “ignorant freedmen” in order to dominate Southern governments. The black men and women in these histories were pitiable creatures, easily deceived by ambitious and conspiring whites who preyed upon their childlike innocence. The economy of the South was likewise burdened by the presence of so many African Americans, who, according to Dunning and others, were wholly dependent upon white guidance and generosity.

The first historical interpretations of the Exodus reflect the dichotomy between African American historians and the Dunning School. The writings of contemporary black intellectuals, such as Alexander Clark’s “Vindication of the Colored Exodus,” have been lost to history, yet anyone familiar with Clark can likely infer the author’s thesis. The writings of Dunning advisee Walter Fleming have survived and his article on Benjamin ‘Pap’ Singleton still dominates the popular imagination of the Exodus. Fleming characterized Singleton as “an ignorant Negro who in himself seemed to embody the longings and strivings of the bewildered Negro race.” In fact, the only alteration to Fleming’s account is that “Ol’ Pap” is now

celebrated while those who supposedly followed him are made to fit Fleming's characterization.

Early Kansas historians, busy writing celebratory histories of Bleeding Kansas and John Brown, saw no inconsistencies in their portrayal of the beneficiaries of the state's noble history as ignorant, lazy, and helpless upon their arrival in Kansas. As with the history of Reconstruction, contemporary black leaders recorded another viewpoint. Topeka's *Colored Citizen* openly confronted the stereotype of the Exodusters, detailing both the success and the suffering the migrants experienced in Kansas and the South. Frederick Douglass recognized the movement as a grassroots protest of intelligent and independent men and women. Despite his personal reservations about the long-term consequences of a movement he viewed as escapist, Douglass presented the pioneering spirit of the Exodusters as a foil for those who considered the former slave "too indolent and stupid... to secure and defend his rights as a man." A number of articles written by black Midwestern journalists and leading black historians such as Carter Woodson likewise present an alternative perspective on the migration.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, January 21, 1880, January 27, 1888; *Parsons Blade*, July 31, 1897; Walter L. Fleming, "'Pap' Singleton, the Moses of the Colored Exodus," *American Journal of Sociology*, 15 (July, 1909): 61-82; John G. Van Deusen, "The Exodus of 1879," *Journal of Negro History*, 21 (April, 1936): 111-129; Roy Garvin, "Benjamin, or 'Pap' Singleton and his Followers," *Journal of Negro History*, 33 (January 1948): 7-23; Testimony of B. J. Waters, *Voorhees Report*, III, 2; *Colored Citizen*, June 3, 1879; Frederick Douglass, "The Negro Exodus from the Gulf States," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, 9 (January 1880): 39-48; Richard T. Greener, "The Emigration of *Colored Citizens* from the Southern States," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, 9 (January 1880): 22-35; Booker T. Washington, *A New Negro for a New Century*, 1900, 290; Carter G. Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration*, (Washington D.C.: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1918).

The 1960s and 1970s saw a renewed interest in the Exodus, with nearly a dozen articles and two books produced on the subject in those decades. Nell Irvin Painter's *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas* led researchers to a renewed interest in the movement by documenting the economic and political conditions the Exodusters fled. Robert Athearn's *In Search of Canaan* followed shortly thereafter, seeking to complete Painter's story by detailing the migration itself and the Exodusters' reception in Kansas. Although both authors surveyed a wealth of contemporary sources, neither fully challenged the perspective of the men and women who created those sources. The result was that these authors, like those before, did not really challenge the notion that the Exodusters were naïve and impoverished thereby making the migration a burden upon the state. Likewise, a series of articles by Glen Schwendemann, Arvah E. Strickland, and Suzanna Grenz each survey a handful of contemporary newspapers or manuscripts but fail to challenge that era's interpretation of the Exodus.

The negative image of the Exodusters is so pervasive that nearly every mention of the migration in any scholarly book or article in the past two decades continues to utilize phrases that project degrading stereotypes. Even some of the best and most recent studies of individual black communities perhaps unconsciously copy phrases such as "penniless, ragged blacks" into their narratives and adopt a turn-of-the-century tone when discussing the characteristics of the migrants. For example, Paul Franklin Harper's fine study of Independence, Kansas uncharacteristically drifts towards Dunning-like rhetoric, utilizing phrases such as "emotionally aroused

plantation Negroes” when discussing the Exodus. Recent books by accomplished historians continue to emphasize the credulity of Southern blacks in believing rumors about free land, listing “the gullibility of the freedpeople” as one of the major obstacles of the movement. More recent books and articles such as Thomas Cox’s *Blacks in Topeka* and Joseph Hickey’s study of Dunlap Colony provide some insight on a handful of people and communities, yet even within these studies the negative image of the Exodusters persists.²¹⁰

²¹⁰ Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976); Bryan M. Jack, “Bridging the Red Sea: The Saint Louis African-American Community and the Exodusters of 1879,” (Ph.D. diss., Saint Louis University, 2004); Nell Irvin Painter, “Millenarian Aspects of the Exodus to Kansas After Reconstruction,” *Journal of Social History* 9 (Spring, 1976): 331-338; Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas, 1879-80*, (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978); Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas: A Social History, 1865-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Glen Schwendemann, “Wyandotte and the First ‘Exodusters’ of 1879,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 26 (Autumn, 1960): 233-249; Arvah E. Strickland, “Toward the Promised Land: The Exodus to Kansas and Afterward,” *Missouri Historical Review* 69 (July, 1975): 376-412; Suzanna M. Grenz, “The Exodusters of 1879: St. Louis and Kansas City Responses,” *Missouri Historical Review* 73 (October 1978): 54-70; Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 143; Joseph V. Hickey, “‘Pap’ Singleton’s Dunlap Colony: Relief Agencies and the Failure of a Black Settlement in Eastern Kansas,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 11 (Winter 1991): 23-36; Billy D. Higgins, “Negro Thought and the Exodus of 1879,” *Phylon* 32 (Spring, 1971): 39-52; Paul F. Harper, *Surely it Floweth with Milk and Honey: A History of Montgomery County, Kansas to 1900* (Independence: Independence Community College Press, 1988), 123; Angela Bates, “The Western Migration of the African American and the Frontier Experience,” Nicodemus Historical Society, Spencer Research Library, Lawrence Kansas. Athearn does a fine job of mining sources yet uncritically accepts the contemporary perspective that the migration represented a “problem” for the white residents of Kansas. In fact, the word “problem” appears throughout Athearn’s narrative. As a result, a troublesome pattern of disparaging phrases labeling the Exodusters as being “dependent as children” creep from 19th century texts to the author’s own interpretive framework. While it is doubtful that Athearn truly believes that the subjects of his inquiry were “emotionally aroused plantation Negroes” who nursed “childish hopes” typical of “a restless, suspicious, and credulous people,” Athearn’s frequent use of such phrases detracts from the quality of his research and distorts his perspective. For example, Athearn’s conclusion that the Exodusters were bamboozled into making the trek and soon regretted their decision is based on newspapers written by white Southerners whose bias and motivation should have been apparent. For example, see Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, 70-88, 245. Likewise, Schwendemann frequently refers to the migration as a liability and labels successful attempts to prevent Exodusters from entering Kansas towns as “a rewarding accomplishment.” Schwendemann’s own belief that the migration represented a “problem” for Kansas is apparent in several of his phrases. For example, he writes that “it was a small wonder that the whistle of every boat filled the residents of Wyandotte with ‘anxious thoughts.’” For example, see Glen Schwendemann, “Wyandotte and the First ‘Exodusters’ of 1879,” 234.

Informal conversations with educators and formal discussions with students throughout Eastern Kansas reveal the dangerous consequences of leaving the story of the Exodus to the perspective of the Dunning School. Each February, Midwestern children are taught that black men and women, after generations of farming on Southern plantations, moved to Kansas believing that the feather of a duck planted in Kansas soil would yield a flock. These unprepared, impoverished, and ignorant freedmen, the story still goes, were aided by kindly local whites who saved the Exodusters from their improvident nature and taught them how to survive in their new home. Even the best and most recent Reconstruction scholarship available continues to emphasize the notion that the Exodusters “lack[ed] the funds or experience to take up plains farming” and immediately “settled for menial jobs in the state’s towns” despite clear demographic evidence that this cannot be true.

The story of the Exodus is among the finest examples of the intrepid and pioneering efforts of Southern blacks to confront the legacy of slavery in the years after the Civil War. Tragically, it remains mired in the racial assumptions of the past. In 1940, an article by Howard Beale in the *American Historical Review* initiated a challenge to the Dunning interpretation of Reconstruction by asking whether it was “not time that we studied the history of Reconstruction without first assuming, at least subconsciously, that carpetbaggers and Southern white Republicans were wicked, that Negroes were illiterate incompetents, and that the whole white South owes a debt of gratitude to the restorer’s of white supremacy?” As the Kansas Exodus is increasingly incorporated into historical texts and survey courses, is it not time historians study its

history without first assuming, at least subconsciously, that its principal actors were ignorant, unprepared, and incapable of providing for themselves?²¹¹

Despite the negative stereotypes that have persisted throughout a century of scholarship regarding the Exodus, contemporary sources reveal that many of the Exodusters were among the most organized of all the region's newcomers. Migration societies and clubs were formed throughout the South, electing officers and seeking information on Kansas and other Western lands. Contemporary sources also reveal that most Exodusters arrived in Kansas without white assistance, and a high percentage of the migrants was able to secure farms through both individual and collective efforts. A survey of available manuscript collections and eighty Midwestern newspapers further reveals that most of the Exodusters had more faith in their own abilities than in the many conflicting reports they had received about the region.

In fact, many of these rumors about the magical qualities of Kansas soil and the government assistance available to new settlers were not started by Southern blacks, but rather by Midwestern whites engaging in the common practice of boosterism. These stories were exaggerated in the years that followed by defensive advocates of white supremacy and entrepreneurial blackface artists. This turn of the century interpretation of the Exodus was an entertaining and useful fiction for white Midwesterners who sought to explain why Exodusters failed to achieve economic

²¹¹ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1865-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988): 600-1; Howard K. Beale, "On Rewriting Reconstruction History," *American Historical Review*, 45 (July, 1940): 808.

equality in their new homes, blaming the migrants rather than admitting their own prejudice. The patent bias of this minstrelized past was discreetly erased by the ennobling qualities of the historian's pen. As a result, a myth seeking to sanitize a century of inequality has been transferred from fiction to legend and from legend to history.

In perpetuating the myth that the Exodusters as a class were ignorant, impoverished, disorganized, and a burden to Midwestern whites, historians have neglected an opportunity to explore race relations at the end of Reconstruction. While the reaction of whites to the migration was often ambiguous, a number of patterns can be discerned. The first and most obvious pattern that emerges from an analysis of contemporary sources is the role political affiliation played in determining post-Civil War rhetoric about the migration and African Americans in general. The second pattern is the decline of that rhetoric over time as the migration continued and cities and political interests sought to use the migration to gain political capital. Third, white residents of the Great Plains denied that race was a factor in their actions and rhetoric, instead maintaining that their opposition to the Exodus was motivated by the character and resources of the migrants themselves. The fourth pattern is the tendency for white Midwesterners to view the Exodus as a test of their historic self-image as charitable men and women who had led their nation in abolishing slavery. Finally, despite the negative stereotypes perpetuated over the last century, sources indicate that the Exodus was a product of careful organization as many Exodusters needed little or no assistance upon their arrival in the Great Plains.

A bit more explanation is appropriate on the third and fourth patterns which may seem contradictory. Midwestern whites typically claimed that a large influx of Southern blacks would damage their city and state while simultaneously denying that their opposition had anything to do with race. Yet despite their negative interpretation of the Exodus, most Midwestern whites understood the reason Southern blacks wished to flee the South and displayed varying degrees of sympathy for their plight.

The idea of African Americans moving from the South was well-established long before the 1879 Exodus. Leading antebellum statesmen from Thomas Jefferson to Abraham Lincoln supported plans to create black colonies in Africa, through organizations such as the American Colonization Society. One of Kansas' own founding fathers, the paternalistic demagogue James Lane, proposed a black state in the Rio Grande region in 1864. Following the Civil War, however, discussions of black migration from the South focused primarily upon the attempts of African Americans who sought to create agricultural colonies in the Great Plains and the Mountain West. African Americans throughout the South held conventions and formed organizations in support of this idea during the 1870s.

Republican politicians such as Minnesota Senator William Windom underscored this sentiment. Windom sponsored a resolution in January of 1879 calling on Congress to investigate the possibility of black migration. Although Windom's resolution faltered, thousands of Southern blacks organized their own grassroots panels to investigate this same possibility. In addition, scores of black towns and agricultural colonies had been formed throughout the Midwest during the

1870s. While most of these settlements were merely small clusters of black family farms, others, such as Nicodemus, quickly became leading communities in their county. Large colonies had also been formed in Hodgeman, Morris, and Cherokee counties during the late 1870s, making Kansas a focal point of rural blacks throughout the nation.²¹²

Although its scope was unprecedented, the Exodus did not come as a complete surprise to many Kansans. The state's black population had risen steadily throughout the 1870s and represented the highest ratio of black to white settlement outside the South. While most of the state's African American population was centered in its larger northeastern cities, small clusters of black homesteaders could be found in nearly every organized county of the state.

Although race relations were occasionally tense in both urban and rural environments, sources indicate that these groups were generally invisible to area whites as they maintained their own social and religious institutions. As a result, reports published in January of 1879 claiming that the state should expect "a very large emigration of colored people from the South to Kansas" did not create a significant reaction among white residents. Even specific reports published during the following month, about large groups of African Americans from Kentucky and

²¹² Notes concerning the Nicodemus Colony as given by Rev. Daniel Hickman, 1913, Negro Exodus Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas; Work Projects Administration, "The Negroes of Nebraska," (Lincoln NB: Woodruff Printing Company, 1940), 6-10; Claire O'Brien, "With One Mighty Pull: Interracial Town Boosting in Nicodemus, Kansas," *Great Plains Quarterly*, 16 (Spring, 1996): 117-29; Advertisements for Nicodemus Town Company, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka Kansas; Testimony of Phillip Joseph, *Voorhees Report*, II, 393-400; Testimony of Henry Adams, *Voorhees Report*, II, 101-2; Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, 6, 76-8; *Hodgeman Agitator*, May 17, 1879.

Mississippi en route to black colonies in Hodgeman and Ellis counties, aroused little attention. The reaction was quite different when larger groups of Southern blacks, some of whom had expended all of their resources in making the trek to Kansas, began to arrive in the Eastern cities of the state a few months later.²¹³

Republicans v. Democrats

On its face, the rhetoric utilized by white residents of the Great Plains in interpreting the Exodus indicates a striking difference in the racial attitudes of Republican and Democratic leaders. Most Democratic journalists and politicians immediately interpreted the movement as an invasion. Democratic news and commentary regarding the arrival of the first Exodusters in any given area were almost universally negative, with the migrants being portrayed as a menace imported to the state by the Republican Party.

The reaction of Republican leaders and journalists was more complicated, largely owing to the self-identity of party members as liberators and protectors of the former slaves. Despite their personal misgivings about black migration which would soon surface, Republicans initially interpreted the movement as a test of their resolve and further proof of the need to confront Democratic bulldozing. Although most Republican politicians quickly distanced themselves from the movement as the migration increased, these men were forced to balance this retreat against their former

²¹³ Craig Miner, *Kansas: A History of the Sunflower State*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002): 155; Testimony of H. C. Park, *Voorhees Report*, III, 22; *Lawrence Home Journal* April 3, 1878; January 23, 1879, *Ford County Globe*, February 17, 1879; *Colored Citizen* (Topeka), February 8, 1879; *Blue Valley Telegram*, March 21, 1879.

statements, while attempting to satisfy both their genuine desires to be fair-minded and their need to retain the support of black voters.

Journalists and political leaders responded to the first groups of emigrants by interviewing the newcomers. Despite the general opposition to the movement displayed by Democrats, the stories of individual travels and tribulations softened the hostility that would characterize future reports. Democratic reporters who interviewed the Exodusters expressed admiration for the stoicism of those migrants who had ran out of provisions days ago and yet refused to ask for assistance.

Paternalism recognized no partisan boundaries, as expressions of sympathy revealed the racial assumptions common to members of both parties. “And to them Kansas is the promised land, flowing with milk and honey,” one Atchison Republican claimed. “It is a child-like, simple faith,” the reporter added, “but it is inexpressibly pathetic, and ought to touch all of the generous impulses of our people’s hearts.” Even those Democrats who believed that the Exodusters embellished their stories of Southern bulldozing likewise conceded that the migrants had legitimate grievances after spending an afternoon with the new arrivals. In fact, of all the Kansans who testified before the Voorhees Committee, only Parsons Democratic editor J. B. Lamb claimed that the Exodusters tales had no basis in truth.²¹⁴

Democrats were keenly aware of the limited welcome the Exodusters received from Republicans, and enjoyed exposing the duplicity of their political opponents.

²¹⁴ Testimony of Edward S. Mills, *Voorhees Report*, III, 31-33; Testimony of J. B. Lamb, *Voorhees Report*, III, 275; *Daily State Journal* (Lincoln), July 27, 1879; *Western Progress* (Olathe), March 27, 1897; *Lawrence Daily Tribune*, April 21, 1879; *Atchison Daily Champion*, May 3, 4, 1879; *Kansas Pilot*, April 15, 19, 1879; *Western Progress*, May 29, 1879; *Nebraska City News*, August 2, 1879; *Cedar Rapids Times*, August 21, 1879.

Democrats referred to the relatively minor migration of a tiny portion of Southern blacks as a “great practical joke on the North” as it exposed Northern Republican hypocrisy about racial issues. “Windy sympathy” was all the Exodusters received from Kansas whites, according to Democratic sources that portrayed the migrants as naïve in their faith that things might be different in the Midwest.

Civic rivalries often mixed with political hostilities as Democrats in Omaha blasted Republicans in Lincoln for their tacit efforts to prevent the migration from reaching their city. Republicans likewise entered the fracas, with partisan supporters in Missouri and Kansas castigating Democratic leaders in Atchison for their disgraceful reception of the migrants. Democratic leaders in Atchison were quick to respond, reminding observers that the city’s efforts to prevent new immigrants from entering the city were approved by Republican members of the city council.

Greenback newspapers also joined the cacophony of blame, claiming that their Republican opponents were guilty of “base hypocrisy” for courting black voters while secretly acting counter to the interests of the race.²¹⁵

As the Exodus continued through late spring and became increasingly unpopular among white residents of the Great Plains, Democrats attempted to portray the entire migration as part of a Republican conspiracy. New arrivals went from being interviewed about life in the South to being grilled by politically-motivated whites searching for evidence of a Republican program of resettlement. Such hopes were

²¹⁵ *Atchison Daily Champion*, May 6, 1879; *Lawrence Daily Tribune*, April 15, 1879; *Junction City Times*, May 1, 1879; *Atchison Daily Champion*, May 11, 1879; *Atchison Daily Patriot*, May 11, 1879; *Fort Scott Herald*, May 17, 1879; *Wyandot Herald*, May 29, 1879; *The Little Globe* (Atchison), July 9, 1879; *Independence Kansan*, July 16, 1879; *Olathe Leader*, July 31, 1879; *Russell County Record*, July 31, 1879; *Columbus Border Star*, August 8, 1879; *Omaha Weekly Herald*, August 8, 1879.

unfulfilled, as the newcomers typically expressed far more interest in purchasing a farm or securing a job than in their potential roles in a plot to alter the national political equilibrium. Democratic newspapers soon despaired of finding Exodusters to corroborate their conspiracy theories, and simply chose to reprint the denials of race friction penned by Southern planters “visiting” the state in hopes of retrieving their truant workforce.

Although Southern Planters privately agreed that the migrants had valid complaints, and publicly pledged at the Vicksburg Convention to improve their working conditions, Democratic papers in the Midwest selectively printed stories that hinted these grievances were mere Republican propaganda. By late April, such Republican propaganda became rather sparse. Although both Republican and Democratic newspapers throughout the region had frequently reported on Southern lynchings and other atrocities throughout the 1870s, amnesia appears to be a related symptom of “Kansas Fever,” as editors in contact with the infected new arrivals suddenly acted as though there were no race trouble in the South.²¹⁶

Midwestern Republicans were well aware that the migration would reduce the political power of the South, and had the potential to boost their party in local elections, yet Republicans throughout the region still sought to prevent the migration

²¹⁶ James B. Runnion, “The Negro Exodus,” *Journal of Negro History* 4 (January, 1919): 223; Testimony of B. J. Waters, *Voorhees Report*, III, 2-3; *Ford County Globe*, April 15, 29, 1879; *Wyandot Herald*, April 21, 1879; *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 27, 1879; *Leavenworth Appeal*, May 2, 1879; *Miami Republican* (Miami County, Kansas), May 16, October 24, 1879; *Colored Citizen*, May 31, 1879; *Independence Kansan*, July 21, 1879; *Lawrence Daily Reporter*, September 6, 1879; *Columbus Border Star*, October 3, 10, 17, 24, 31, November 7, December 5, 1879; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 17, 1879; *Nebraska City Daily News*, August 25, 27, 28, 1879; *Waterloo Courier*, August 6, 1879; *Cedar Rapids Times*, October 7, 1879.

of Southern blacks to their communities. In fact, many Midwestern Republicans declared that since they already enjoyed large majorities in their communities, these black Republicans could do the most good in the politically deadlocked states of the Old Northwest. Despite the fact that Midwestern Republicans sought to divert the migration to other states, many reported that it would still have the effect of reducing the electoral strength of the South “down to a point of harmless significance.”

The potential of the Exodusters to alter local elections, even in heavily Republican states such as Kansas, led white commentators to invent dehumanizing colloquiums for the migrants. “Carloads of the Fifteenth Amendment” was only one of many such euphemisms. Although few Republicans lived up to their avowed rhetoric, some county platforms in Kansas and Nebraska continued to boast of slavery’s defeat and the party’s protection of Southern freedmen, despite the movement’s unpopularity in the fall of 1879. While many Republicans’ rhetorical support of the migrants was limited to their desire to see the newcomers “deposit their ballots for the friends who freed them,” black voters recognized that Midwestern Democrats were even less concerned with their rights, and continued to support Republican candidates despite the hypocrisies of the party and the efforts of Democrats to divide their votes.²¹⁷

²¹⁷ Testimony of H. M. Case, *Voorhees Report*, III, 19; S. A. Hackworth to St. John, May 31, 1879, Records of Governor John St. John, Kansas State Historical Society (Hereinafter referred to as St. John Papers); *Saline County Journal*, April 17, 1879; *Osage City Free Press*, May 2, 1879; *Peabody Gazette*, June 6, 1879; *Russell County Record*, July 31, 1879; *Clarence Daily Journal*, October 29, 1879; *Daily State Journal* (Lincoln), July 27, October 3, 1879; *Hutchinson News*, May 8, 1879; *Saline County Journal*, April 17, August 28, 1879; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 17, 1879.

Debates over whether the Exodusters should receive aid also often contained a political tint. Many Democrats opposed the idea of providing the Exodusters with even the most basic forms of humanitarian aid, because they claimed that such actions would encourage the movement. Others sought to portray whites as victims by fabricating tales of government funds being allocated to Exodusters while poor whites faced unemployment and starvation.

Republicans occasionally challenged these images by perpetuating a different set of stereotypes. Foreigners invading American shores were receiving government aid, Republicans countered, while “black citizens bulldozed and driven from their homes by the democracy of the south” were left to starve. African Americans occasionally expressed a similar sentiment, writing letters to area editors that emphasized their citizenship in comparison to other migrants.²¹⁸

Republican and Democratic interpretations of the Exodus became increasingly similar as the migration continued. Campaigns to prevent Exodusters from arriving in various cities, under the guise of “anti-pauper” laws, enjoyed bi-partisan support in Atchison, Wyandotte, and Leavenworth. Republicans in Nebraska mirrored this pattern, defending the Exodusters when they first arrived in the late summer yet seeking to divert the migrants by fall. Although some Republican leaders continued to refer to the Exodus as part of an ongoing “struggle for freedom,” editorials encouraging these men to “go a little slow” on such rhetoric became more common.

²¹⁸ *Fort Scott Herald*, May 1, 1879; *Atchison Daily Champion*, May 3, 1879; *Hutchinson News*, May 8, 1879; *North Topeka Times*, May 16, 1879; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 17, 1879; *Daily State Journal* (Lincoln), July 27, 1879; *Topeka Commonwealth*, May 13, 1879.

Some Republican stalwarts even called for a discontinuation of relief organizations because the “systematic begging” of these groups were embarrassing to them.

Republican newspapers even joined their Democratic counterparts in selecting quotes from blacks claiming the South as “their natural home.” By the time of the Voorhees Committee hearings, nearly every Kansan testified that the movement was opposed by Republicans and Democrats alike. The Republican mayor of Topeka even expressed outright hostility toward the emigrants, claiming that only the “no account niggers” who failed to “mind their own business” had been attacked in the South.²¹⁹

As Republican political strategy shifted towards the kind of hostility that was once the exclusive domain of their Democratic rivals, black leaders increased their efforts to remind their nation of the reasons for the migration and the continued needs of some of the migrants. Richmond Lewis, a former Louisiana sheriff, was one of many black leaders who testified about the migration from personal experience. Both during the movement and as a witness at the Voorhees committee hearings, Lewis reminded whites that he and many other migrants were forced to leave their homes because their lives were personally endangered. Others such as John Waller wrote letters to Republican editors, reminding party membership of the outrages of the

²¹⁹ Minutes of the Board of Directors of the Kansas Freedmen’s Relief Association, Topeka, Kansas, May 3, 1880, Kansas State Historical Society (Hereinafter referred to as KFRA Minutes); Testimony of John Davis, *Voorhees Report*, III, 225; Testimony of H. M. Case, *Voorhees Report*, III, 18-20; Testimony of A. A. Harris, *Voorhees Report*, II, 420; Testimony of H. C. Park, *Voorhees Report*, III, 21-2; Testimony of H. C. Solomon, *Voorhees Report*, III, 24; Testimony of Edward S. Mills, *Voorhees Report*, III, 29; Testimony of Richard B. Morris, *Voorhees Report*, III, 35-6; *Wyandotte Gazette*, April 25, 1879; *Leavenworth Times*, April 25, 1879, *Kansas Pilot*, April 26, 1879; *Dodge City Times*, April 26, 1879; *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 27, May 8, June 6, 28, 1879; *Leavenworth Appeal*, May 9, 1879; *Western Progress*, June 26, 1879; *Wyandot Herald*, July 2, 1879; *Hutchison News*, August 21, 1879; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 17, 24, 1879; *Cedar Falls Gazette*, August 29, 1879.

South that they had once been so indignant about. As a result, many Republican journalists were exceedingly cautious in selecting their words about the migration. With the exception of a handful of journals such as the *Topeka Commonwealth*, many Republican journals simply avoided comment.²²⁰

Democrats made that goal difficult by escalating their allegations of Republican conspiracies related to the Exodus prior to the elections of 1879 and 1880. Paola's Democratic press claimed that Republicans in Miami County were importing over a thousand "Negro paupers," the first ripples of a "Negro tidal wave" intended to keep the Republican Party in power. Democrats of Cherokee County, Kansas included an anti-Exodus plank in their platform, claiming that their opponents were secretly working to bring blacks to the County. Other Democrats issued ominous statements claiming that such Republican schemes would continue "*unless some decisive action is taken by the people, and that very soon.*" Wyandotte Democrats were particularly creative, claiming that a group of sixty black migrants who arrived during the spring of 1880 had been treated to lavish food, wine, and hotel accommodations at public expense by prominent Republicans who expected "quid pro quo."

Republican governor John St. John devoted a large portion of his 1880 campaign responding to allegations that he had promoted the Exodus. Despite his overwhelming victory in the previous election and the popular support of his prohibitionist policies, St. John barely won reelection in 1880. Democrats predicted

²²⁰ Testimony of J. B. Lamb, *Voorhees Report*, III, 266-75; *Topeka Commonwealth*, May 13, 1879; *Olathe Leader*, June 5, 1879; *Colored Citizen*, July 19, 1879.

that St. John's "importation" of black voters would counter his support for the biggest issue on the ballot, the state's new prohibition law, as the measure passed despite the alleged tendency of black voters to "get drunk and swagger from one voting place to another."²²¹

Part of the Republican silence regarding the migration was due to the rhetoric attached to those who continued to defend the rights of the Exoduster. Democrats utilized the same malignant language their Southern party leaders applied to Radical Republicans, claiming that defenders of the Exodus "love the darkey better than they do their own wives and children." Republicans typically responded to such allegations defensively. Rather than directly challenge their opponents, many Republicans sought to surpass them in their rhetorical defense of white supremacy. Others complained that such allegations were unfair, as the remarks placed them "between two fires," meaning that if they supported relief efforts they were accused of "seducing the Negro," while if they did nothing they were portrayed as callous hypocrites. Even the strongest supporters of the Exodusters rights quickly discounted their involvement, countering the allegations by responding that their Southern-minded accusers were literal "nigger lovers" due to that region's proclivity towards miscegenation.²²²

²²¹ *Atchison Daily Patriot*, July 11, 1879; *Wyandot Herald*, July 17, 24, 1879, April 15, 1880; *Miami Republican*, October 17, 24, 1879; *Spirit of Kansas*, October 29, 1879; *Daily Tribune*, April 15, 1879; *Atchison Globe* Jan 28, 1880; *Columbus Border Star*, October 3, 10, 17, 24, 31, November 7, December 5, 1879.

²²² *Kansas Pilot*, April 19, 1879; *Atchison Daily Champion*, May 11, 1879; *Nebraska City Daily News*, September 27, 1879; *Omaha Weekly Herald*, August 15, 1879.

Governor St. John was the most common target of such attacks given his affiliation with the Kansas Freedman's Relief Association. The governor was repeatedly accused of instigating the migration by issuing circulars that promised free transportation, land, and supplies. Despite the offer of a cash reward for anyone who could secure even one of the fabled circulars, these allegations were never confirmed. St. John maintained that the migration was as much of a surprise to him as it was to other whites throughout the region. He and other KFRA members consistently denied that they had encouraged the movement, explaining that their efforts were only aimed at alleviating the suffering of those who arrived in the state without the means of their own support.

Although the governor was one of the most active white supporters of the migration, the majority of his efforts were limited to rhetorical support in private correspondence. St. John referred to the Exodus in religious terms in correspondence to John Brown's son, stating that the migration "will test our boasted love of liberty" more than any previous event in history. By the time St. John issued this statement, his lofty sentiments on the subject of the Exodus had become restricted to his private correspondence. Prophecies that St. John would be the Exodusters's Moses were likewise unfulfilled. Despite his continued correspondence with prospective migrants in which he welcomed men of all races and religions to come to the state, the combination of race and economic class formed a barrier St. John could not transcend.

The Governor privately counseled Southern blacks to remain in the South until they had several hundred dollars that might allow them to purchase farms in the interior of the state. That the uncompromising Sojourner Truth continued to refer to St. John as “God’s chosen instrument,” however, illustrates St. John’s relative liberality in an age when few whites would defend the right of African Americans to move to their state under any circumstances. Perhaps it was recognition of his relative support in an era of hostility that led African American leaders to dub their Topeka military unit the “St. John’s Guards” when it was mustered into service by the adjutant general in the summer of 1880.²²³

St. John was not alone in his desire to sever his ties with the Exodus. Some leading Topekans supported humanitarian measures but refused to maintain formal connections with the state’s leading relief association. The KFRA’s charter membership was composed primarily of leading state and civic officials, yet St. John and most of the other original officers resigned en masse prior to the 1879 elections. Many of the new officers openly stated their displeasure with the political motivations of those who had abandoned the movement, yet many shared the same reservations about affiliation with the increasingly unpopular organization. Politicians such as Preston Plumb of Emporia donated generously to relief efforts, yet publicly declared that Kansas was a poor choice for the migrants. By 1880, not a single white politician

²²³ John St. John to John Brown Jr., September 8, 1879, John Brown Jr. Papers, Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, Fremont, Ohio; Testimony of G. W. Carey, *Voorhees Report*, III, 393, 407-8; Testimony of J. B. Lamb, *Voorhees Report*, III, 271-3; Testimony of M. Bosworth, *Voorhees Report*, III, 288-9; Testimony of M. W. Reynolds, *Voorhees Report*, III, 299-300; St. John to J. Jackson, January 2, 1880, Horatio Rust to St. John, September 3, 1879, Lynch to St. John March 27, 1880, St. John Papers; *Junction City Union*, April 26, June 28, 1879; *Colored Citizen*, October 11, 1879; *Lawrence Home Journal*, April 8, 1880; *Spirit of Kansas*, September 22, 1880.

was an active member of the KFRA. The KFRA itself reflected public sentiment by becoming increasingly conservative, devoting its time and resources to preventing Southern blacks from coming to the region.²²⁴

Declining Acceptance

The retreat of the KFRA was reflected in the attitudes of Midwesterners regarding the Exodus. One Central Kansas editor described the state's reaction as "a sort of bravado of hospitality" that evaporated as spring turned to summer. Reports of the migration became increasingly impersonal as investigative interviews with the migrants themselves were replaced by metaphors that presented the newcomers as a dangerous and inhuman mass. These ignorant former slaves, white readers were told, "are often not unlike unreasoning animals." Both possessed a herd-like mentality causing them to follow "blindly on a given direction in which they have been started, like a flock of sheep jumping over a fence." The Exodusters were frequently compared to animals thereby justifying their reception and deportation "as so many cattle waiting to be shipped to market."

Exodusters who arrived as part of large groups perceived this trepid reception, recognizing that their numbers encouraged their new neighbors' xenophobic tendencies. An Exoduster who arrived in Leavenworth from Wyandotte with over a hundred others expressed his difficulty in finding a job as related to the tendency of whites to perceive the migrants as masses rather than individuals. Reports of

²²⁴ KFRA Minutes, September 12, 1879; Testimony of G. W. Carey, *Voorhees Report*, III, 406-8; Testimony of J. M. Brown, *Voorhees Report*, II, 365-67; Testimony of M. W. Reynolds, *Voorhees Report*, III, 296; Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, 60-1, 73; *Wyandot Herald*, April 21, 1879; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 17, 24, 1879.

Exodusters receiving aid created the potential for racial backlash. “Tramps, calaboose and the rock pile are the destitute white emigrant’s portion,” a Topeka man declared, “while the colored emigrant is sheltered, clothed, and fed.” A report originally printed in the *Kansas City Times* illustrates the sentiment of Northeastern Kansas as the migration continued into the summer months.²²⁵

If any State in the Union has acquired a right to ‘kick’ against the Negro exodus, it is the State of Kansas, and Kansas is kicking lustily. She doesn’t want any more Negro immigration at present. Leavenworth and Atchison have declared emphatically that the Negroes are welcome to every part of Kansas excepting those two cities. Topeka has all she can accommodate unless the citizens offer their private domiciles as barracks and St. John converts the executive mansion into a hospital quarters. Lawrence is as philanthropic as ever, but will pay a liberal per capita on several hundred refugees to anybody who will start a Negro exodus from the historic city. Wyandotte has organized a citizens’ committee to protect herself against any further invasion, and declares that no more refugees shall be landed at that point. The few hundred still remaining there have been dying at the rate of three or four per day, and thirty on the sick list as of yesterday are reported past recovery. The treasury is almost empty, and soon the citizens will be called upon for further donations in support of these infirm and helpless creatures who would otherwise die of hunger and privation.²²⁶

The “philanthropy” of Lawrence, as the preceding report indicates, repeatedly failed to measure up to the town’s liberal self-image. Although individuals such as Massachusetts-born Sidney Clarke verbally suggested his state would benefit from the emigration of a million or more of the world’s various oppressed populations, black or otherwise, many of Clarke’s neighbors expressed a very different tone when the first large group of Exodusters arrived in their city. Wyandotte residents reportedly “breathed a sigh of relief” as a hundred Exoduster families were sent west

²²⁵ Leslie A. Schwalm, “‘Overrun With Free Negroes’: Emancipation and Wartime Migration in the Upper Midwest,” *Civil War History* 50 (Spring, 2004): 160; *Cincinnati Commercial*, quoted in Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters*, 187; Testimony of John Davis, *Voorhees Report*, 224-33; *Kansas Pioneer* (Wyandotte) April 12, 1879; *Topeka Commonwealth*, April 19, October 31, 1879; *Wyandotte Gazette*, April 25, 1879; *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 27, 1879; *Leavenworth Times*, May 18, 1879; *Omaha Weekly Herald*, August 1, 1879.

²²⁶ *Omaha Weekly Herald*, July 11, 1879.

along the Kansas River, but the citizens of Lawrence were indignant. Republican mayor Isaac Newton Van Hoesen responded with an angry telegraph to his counterpart in Wyandotte, while veterans of Quantrill's raid perceived themselves as perennial victims.

Lawrence's black community assumed the initial responsibility of housing as many newcomers as it could accommodate, the balance remaining exposed on the depot platform or sheltered in boxcars. Black residents opened their homes and converted Lawrence's two black churches into barracks, yet a week after their arrival nearly two hundred Exodusters were still occupying makeshift camps near the depot or within the city's segregated schools.²²⁷

Perhaps the best indicator of how white Kansans viewed the Exodus was their reaction to reports that expected black migrants were not arriving in their city. The same Salina Republican journal that had called the migration "one of the wonderful things of this century" in April of 1879 printed the headline "Rejoice the Negroes Won't be Coming" three months later when the migrants made their way to other towns. Reports that news of the lynching of Bill Howard prevented a group of four hundred Exodusters from emigrating to Fort Scott led Democrats in that city to suggest the distribution of circulars detailing the lynching. Claiming that "Kansas has an ample supply of darkies," the *Herald* suggested that entire state should follow suit, publishing circulars detailing Howard's grisly fate for distribution throughout the

²²⁷ *Colored Citizen*, April 19, 1879; *Lawrence Daily Journal*, April 20, 1879; *Wyandot Herald*, April 21, 1879; *Leavenworth Times* April 22, 1879; *Lawrence Home Journal*, April 24, 1879; *Lawrence Daily Tribune*, April 21, 1879; Tenth Census of the United States, 1880; Charles S. Glead, ed., "Kansas Memorial, A Report of the Old Settlers' Meeting Held at Bismark Grove, Kansas, September 15th 1879," Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

South. Although residents of Fort Scott were relatively supportive of the large number of African Americans who passed through their town on their way to the colony near Baxter Springs, those who later sought homes and employment in the city were made to feel quite unwelcome. Although some whites called for a “shot-gun quarantine against further Sengambian invasion,” there is no evidence of armed resistance in Fort Scott.²²⁸

Despite this increasingly hostile reception, rumors that Wyandotte citizens armed with “drought rifles” sought to physically harm or simply intimidate the Exodusters were based on sentiment rather than actual lawlessness. Both Democratic and Republican sources claim that these reports were “sheer fabrications” invented by neighboring cities to denigrate the city of Wyandotte. Republican journalists claim that this “malicious Democratic lie” was invented by the *Atchison Patriot* in order to exaggerate prejudice against both the Exodusters and the citizens of Wyandotte, and “contain[ed] not the least shade or coloring of truth.” “While our people are inclined to do all they can to discourage these immigrants from coming here,” the *Wyandot Herald* explained, “they do not intend to place themselves in an attitude of hostility to the laws of the country, or in such a manner as to be charged with being destitute of humanity and charity.” On the contrary, editorials of self-congratulation were published in response to the city’s efforts to provide food and shelter for those

²²⁸ Testimony of B. J. Waters, *Voorhees Report*, III, 2-3; Testimony of M. H. Case, *Voorhees Report*, III, 15-6; *Saline County Journal*, July 17, 24, 1879; *Fort Scott Herald*, April 5, May 1, August 28, 1879; *Western Progress* (Olathe), April 24, 1879; *Atchison Daily Patriot*, July 26, 1879; *Lawrence Home Journal*, March 29, 1877; *Independence Kansan*, May 14, 1879; *Harper County Times*, April 1, 1880; *Wyandotte Gazette*, May 7, 1880. For an account of the lynching, see *Fort Scott Daily Monitor*, March 27, 1879.

migrants in need of temporary aid. The rumors likely stemmed from an April 24th community meeting where a self-appointed committee declared their intent to prevent future refugees migrating to Wyandotte. The committee originally included the phrase “peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must” in a resolution declaring their intentions regarding efforts to discourage future migrants. These words were soon replaced with the phrase “use all lawful means within our power,” yet the resolution itself was never officially adopted owing to questions of enforcement.²²⁹

The declining support the migration received from Midwestern whites followed a general pattern that closely shadowed the path of the migrants from the eastern cities of Kansas into the interior of that state and beyond. Even as river port cities began to oppose the movement, residents in rural Kansas and in other states waxed eloquent about how the migration was “one of the wonderful things of this century” as it personified a people moving from bondage to freedom. Western Kansans joined residents of neighboring states in lecturing Wyandotte, Atchison, and Leavenworth about the noble history of their state in the context of the migration. “The war for freedom commenced in Kansas,” a Salina editor commented.

Biblical analogies of the Exodus of the Israelites were particularly stylish on the East Coast, with letters and advice to Kansans being frequently reprinted throughout the region. A handful of Republican journals in the interior of Kansas and Nebraska continued to support the movement as the migrants entered their counties, yet the bulk of these comments evaporated that summer as the migration spread west

²²⁹ Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, 42-3; *Wyandot Herald*, April 21, 1879; *Wyandotte Gazette*, April 25, May 2, 1879.

and north. Despite the former lofty sentiment of Salina's Republicans, the arrival of a small group of Exodusters, who had been sent to Hays and then redirected to Salina, resulted in white protests and efforts to transport the Exodusters elsewhere. Observers commented that these self-proclaimed "friends of the Negro" shared the tendency of many who advocated aid for Native Americans—in both cases the most vocal advocates were those furthest removed.²³⁰

Tales of Exodusters who abandoned their journey and returned to the South were also heavily publicized by both Democratic and Republican journals, often reflecting the desire of Midwesterners to reverse the migration more than actual movements of the Exodusters. Promoting the idea that the Exodusters were manipulated by demagogues and naively unprepared for life on the Great Plains allowed Midwestern whites to oppose the migration under the pretense that their actions were only motivated by the best interests of the Exodusters themselves. Statements of disillusionment and disappointment with Kansas and Nebraska were common among all emigrants to both states, yet the newspapers were selective in only publishing the negative experiences of these black settlers. Offers of free return transportation and reports of individual Exodusters returning to the South were reprinted in journals across the area in the hopes of encouraging other migrants to do the same.

²³⁰ *Hutchinson Herald*, April 17, 1879; *Saline County Journal*, April 17, 24, 1879; *Ellis County Star*, April 24, 1879; *Junction City Union*, April 26, 1879; *Salina Herald*, July 5, August 2, 1879; *Hays City Sentinel*, Aug 1, 1879; *Hutchinson News*, August 21, 1879; *Osage City Free Press*, January 15, 1880; *Kansas City Times*, July 9, 1879.

Democratic newspapers seized upon a report that a dozen blacks were considering leaving Nebraska City to take up work on a Southern plantation as proof that the entire movement was a mistake. Editors who opposed the migration but lacked such good news to share with their readers simply fabricated their own tales. Letters allegedly written by “old uncles and aunties” now longing for their simple antebellum lives were printed throughout Kansas, yet seldom offered comment about the implications of life among Kansans being worse than slavery.²³¹

By the summer of 1879, correspondents as far away as London perceived the change of sentiment throughout the Great Plains. The same white Kansans who had previously reported the hardships African Americans faced in the South were soon printing stories that made that region appear as the land of Canaan. Kansans likewise resurrected the former image of their region as an arid wasteland. A handful of white Kansans candidly admitted the reason former boosters were suddenly so modest. “If Kansas is not a good state for every man willing ‘to labor and wait’ to come to,” one resident of central Kansas remarked, “some of us have been lying awfully for the past twenty-five years.” The recent trend of writing letters to Southern states denying the opportunities that Kansas provided, in order to “to keep out the Negro,” the author concluded, was “infamous and contemptible.”

²³¹ Testimony of J. B. Lamb, *Voorhees Report*, III, 271-3; Testimony of B. F. Watson, *Voorhees Report*, II, 339-43; Testimony of B. J. Waters, *Voorhees Report*, III, 2; Testimony of H. C. Park, *Voorhees Report*, III, 21; Testimony of J. M. Brown, *Voorhees Report*, II, 364; Testimony of M. W. Reynolds, *Voorhees Report*, III, 296-7; Testimony of M. Bosworth, *Voorhees Report*, III, 287-8; Testimony of Edward S. Mills, *Voorhees Report*, III, 29; *Fort Scott Herald*, April 12, 1879; *Republican Daily Journal* (Lawrence), April 24, 1879; *Wyandotte Herald*, May 8, June 19, 1879; *Independence Kansan*, May 14, 1879, April 7, 21, 1880; *Wyandotte Gazette*, May 15, 1879; *Western Progress*, August 29, 1879; *Omaha Weekly Herald*, September 5, 1879; *Omaha Weekly Bee*, Sept 8, 1880; *Nebraska City Daily News*, May 8, August 28, 1879; *Cedar Rapids Times*, February 5, 1880.

Another observer commented on the tendency of Midwestern Republican “organs [to] grind a different tune” once blacks began to arrive in the region. “The ‘man-and-brother’ theory will do very well,” another editorial claimed, “as long as the ‘man-and-brother’ is in the South.” Midwesterners deliberately minimized the well-known fact that Southern whites utilized a variety of methods to detain would-be migrants. Reports of trumped-up arrests, interference with steamboat traffic, and published threats of lynchings, in which captured migrants would “exodust” to their happy land via the “Hemp Line,” decreased as the migration continued. Republicans in the Great Plains generally avoided such clear evidence that the movement’s decline was not a natural phenomenon, choosing instead to believe the “encouraging” decline in traffic as evidence that conditions were improving in the South.²³²

There were important exceptions to the general trend of white Midwesterners who opposed the migration or sought to avoid the issue. In May, delegates at a meeting in Newton passed a resolution encouraging KFRA officers to place black homesteaders in their county “regardless of color, race, or previous condition of servitude.” A handful of intrepid reporters and editors likewise continued to support the movement long after it had become unfashionable. “The white man who is afraid of the Negro becoming his equal,” the new editor of the *Kansas Pilot* declared in August of 1879, “is already beneath the Negro.” Others appealed to the Christian

²³² Testimony of B. F. Watson, *Voorhees Report*, II, 338-47; Runnion, “The Negro Exodus,” 223; Billy D. Higgins, “Negro Thought and the Exodus of 1879,” 45; *Kansas Pilot*, April 15, 19, 1879; *Atchison Daily Patriot*, July 23, 1879; *Omaha Weekly Herald*, July 11, 1879; *Junction City Union* May 31, June 7, 1879; *Dodge City Times*, July 26, 1879; *The Little Globe*, July 24, 1879; *Lawrence Daily Journal*, June 28, 1879; *Junction City Union* June 7, 1879; *Lawrence Daily Journal*, December 30, 1879; *Davenport Daily Gazette* April 28, 1880.

charity of their neighbors, reminding them of the trials Southern blacks faced where nearly anyplace was better than their current environment. Unfortunately, the typical response of most Midwestern whites was the idea that anyplace other than their own community was better. Urban residents boasted of the opportunities available to migrants in the interior, while rural communities responded that the larger cities were more prosperous and offered more chance of employment. In fact, the only thing both rural and urban areas agreed upon was the idea that states beyond their borders offered the best opportunities for the Exodusters.²³³

This sentiment led to the desire to provide temporary shelter for the growing number of Exodusters who lacked employment in Topeka, while KFRA agents negotiated “voluntary” transfer agreements with area cities or matched migrants with employers. The location of these barracks proved troublesome for the KFRA, however, as several of their proposed locations were withdrawn due to the objections of nearby white residents. The association allegedly secured arrangements to build its barracks on land belonging to Charles Curtis. The future U. S. Vice President and Senate sponsor of anti-lynching bills later changed mind about the wisdom of this project being built upon his land after “more mature deliberation.”

A second location on the west side of town was abandoned after lumber and other building materials “found [their] way to the river,” while a third attempt was cancelled “owing to the advice of some of [the city’s] best citizens” who declared the

²³³ *Harper County Times*, May 15, 1879; *Kansas Pilot*, August 9, 1879; *Hays City Sentinel*, May 2, 1879; *Ellsworth Reporter*, May 8; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 24, 1879; Testimony of Edward S. Mills, *Voorhees Report*, III, 29; Testimony of M. W. Reynolds, *Voorhees Report*, III, 299.

idea to have the migrants quartered in their neighborhood “an insult to decency.” Residents near each proposed building site petitioned the city for relief, as they feared their gardens and hen houses would be raided. As a result, the barracks were constructed beyond the city limits.²³⁴

On July 14th, ten adults and four children left these facilities and traveled to Wichita in hopes of securing employment. Although it would later be found that these migrants planned on residing with family or friends in the area, the report that Topeka’s relief committee had simply “forwarded” the refugees was interpreted as an insult. Wichita officials had specifically replied to the committee’s request for voluntary acceptance of small groups of migrants in the negative. As a result, nine of the fourteen Exodusters were detained “in a gentlemanly manner” by police, and returned to Topeka along with a proclamation of quarantine “against the introduction of any more exodus.” Rather than express concern over the blatant disregard of the migrants’ right to move freely within their own nation, Wichita’s Republican newspaper chose to attack the KFRA for its actions. The Republican daily reported that the “John Brown spirit” of the KFRA was limited to the amount of Eastern aid in its coffers. Now that those funds were depleted, the paper claimed, Topeka was “dodging a responsibility of her own assuming.”²³⁵

Wichita’s action against the Exodusters drew both praise and indignation throughout the state. Republican papers condemned the city while the *McPherson*

²³⁴ KFRA Minutes, January 5, February 2, 1880; *Voorhees Report*, III, 98, 126, 290, 406; *North Topeka Times*, June 20, 27, 1879; *Fort Scott Herald*, July 5, 1879; *The Little Globe*, July 10, 1879; *Cedar Rapids Times*, October 7, 1880.

²³⁵ *Wichita City Eagle*, July 17, 24, 1879; *Lawrence Home Journal*, July 17, 1879; *Wichita Weekly Beacon*, July 23, 1879; *Wyandot Herald*, July 24, 1879.

Independent used the story as evidence that bulldozing was not an exclusively Southern or Democratic hobby. Democratic newspapers seized upon the rhetoric of the Republican press and the Republican-dominated city council about using public funds to turn away prospective settlers. Democrats especially enjoyed the opportunity to discredit Marsh Murdock, the Republican owner of the *Wichita Eagle*, given speculation that he would run for governor in the next election and would likely expect the support of African American voters. Murdock's paper issued a tepid apology, defending its previous "panic" as the result of misinformation that inflated the size of the group.

Despite the city's new-found contrition, newspapers such as the *Hutchinson Herald* considered Wichita's quarantine as a model for other cities to follow by "promptly and properly" returning all Exodusters to their last city of departure. Murdock's *Eagle* likewise resumed the offensive against his city's accusers, publishing an editorial broadside entitled "Beams in Your Own Eyes" that highlighted the hypocrisy of the entire state. Topeka residents destroyed Exoduster barracks, Wyandotte at least verbally favored armed intimidation, and Omaha judged Kansas towns while refusing requests to accept a number of migrants. The editorial went on to claim that *Eagle* and the city would have supported a dozen or even ten-dozen Exodusters if only they had been consulted in advance, a statement not

supported by the paper's failure to ever condemn the action of the city council or to seek a repeal of the mayor's quarantine.²³⁶

Just as the Northern public grew weary of Reconstruction, Midwesterners quickly lost interest in the needs of the Exodus. "A few hundred could perhaps be managed, while the novelty and enthusiasm lasts" a Topeka resident explained, "but charity requires variety, and in time we become so accustomed to these appeals for aid that but little heed is paid to them." Even Republican stalwarts claim perceived that by the end of the summer, Midwesterners had grown tired of hearing about the needs of the migrants or the conditions they had faced in the South.

Although the migration resumed following the fall harvests, the combination of apathy and the lower numbers of migrants in need of aid led to a drastic reduction in press coverage. The correspondence of relief-minded individuals and occasional news reports reminded area whites that some newcomers were still in need of temporary aid, yet even these reports reflected the fact that most Midwesterners had tired of such news.²³⁷

While the growing apathy of white Midwesterners paralleled Northern sentiment during Reconstruction, the tendency to view professional philanthropists such as Elizabeth Comstock as swindlers or outside agitators resembled Southern

²³⁶ *Wyandot Herald*, July 24, 1879; *Wichita City Eagle* July 24, 1879; *Hutchinson Herald*, July 26, 1879; *McPherson Independent*, July 31, 1879, *Wichita Weekly Beacon*, August 6, 1879; *Peabody Gazette*, August 1, 1879; *Wichita City Eagle*, July 24, 31, 1879.

²³⁷ Paul F. Harper, "Surely it Floweth With Milk and Honey," 133-6; *North Topeka Times*, June 27, 1879, January 16, 1880; *Atchison Daily Patriot*, July 23, 1879; *Colored Citizen*, July 19, 1879; *Atchison Daily Patriot*, August 3, 1879; *Lawrence Home Journal*, August 29, 1879; *Valley Falls New Era*, December 13, 1879; *Ellis County Star*, December 25, 1879; *North Topeka Times*, January 9, 1880; Testimony of A. A. Harris, *Voorhees Report*, 424-5, *Daily State Journal* (Lincoln), July 2, 1879-October 1, 1879; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 17, 24, 1879.

reactions to Yankee intervention. Local men and women who organized informal relief efforts were often portrayed as putting their own political or economic self-interest ahead of the migrants. KFRA officers were frequently accused of embezzling relief money, a charge that was difficult to prove or refute owing to the frequent resignations of officers and the wide scope of fundraising and relief operations. Allegations of fraud became so prevalent that KFRA meetings often devoted more time to defending officers from such charges than to planning relief efforts. Extant financial records indicate that the organization's leading donors were unshaken by such charges, as many wrote personal notes to Comstock asking only that she and the Association spend their money as they saw fit. KFRA records also indicate its membership represented a significant portion of local donors.²³⁸

Although white residents of the Great Plains rarely resorted to violence, their efforts nonetheless paralleled those of Southern "redeemers" during Reconstruction. While white Southerners sought to remove African Americans' citizenship, the strategies of Midwestern whites were aimed at the physical removal of African Americans from the region. Just as the path of Southern Redemption mirrored the removal of the Union Army, the history of the Exodus closely followed the forced removal of black migrants from Northeastern Kansas to Nebraska, Iowa, and Colorado.

²³⁸ Financial Records of the Kansas Freedman's Relief Association, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas; KFRA Minutes, September 12, October 6, November 3, 1879, March 1, 25, 1880; *Voorhees Report*, pt 3, p170; *Nebraska City Weekly News*, November 8, 1879.

As political leaders throughout Kansas became increasingly opposed to plans to relocate the migrants in their cities, officials in Eastern Kansas began sending the Exodusters outside the state regardless of the desires of the migrants and often without consulting area cities. As in Kansas, exaggerated rumors in other states produced considerable excitement. For example, rumors that 250 Exodusters had arrived in East Plattsmouth, Iowa in July of 1879 led to the refusal by railroad officials to allow these families to complete their journey across the Missouri river into Plattsmouth, Nebraska. “The long talked of Negro problem was at the door,” the Republican *Plattsmouth Herald* reported, as residents “talked a good deal of baby talk about what ought to be done with [the Exodusters], what the authorities ought to do and especially what *they* would do if they had the power.” Whites in neighboring Nebraska City even alleged that Plattsmouth residents threatened to drown the newcomers in the Missouri river, a claim that was likely based only on the desire of Nebraska City residents to mask their own tepid reception of the Exodusters. Plattsmouth’s Republican editor was thankful that violence existed only in the murmurings of the few and predicted that despite the inhumanity of the KFRA for exporting the migrants without consultation, Plattsmouth officials would find a way “to dispose of” these unfortunate men and women “quietly, honorably and satisfactorily.” He and other white residents of Plattsmouth later congratulated themselves for their generous actions in raising funds to send the newcomers on to Omaha, Lincoln, and Nebraska City, where labor was reportedly in high demand.²³⁹

²³⁹ *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 10, 17, 24, 1879; *Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln) July 24, 1879.

White residents of Omaha, Lincoln, and Nebraska City, however, had their own interpretation of Plattsmouth's generosity. As was the case throughout Kansas, residents of neighboring towns in Iowa and Nebraska castigated one another for their failure to accept the migrants while themselves seeking to divert the newcomers to other communities. "They did not throw stones at them," one reporter caustically remarked about the reception of the Exodusters by in Nebraska City, "but gave them bread at long range." As in Plattsmouth, residents of Fremont County, Iowa contributed liberally to raise funds to ferry the migrants across the Missouri river to Nebraska City. Once across the river, white Nebraskans lectured the newcomers on the blessings and opportunities of "Free Iowa."

Once it became apparent that only a fraction of the rumored four to five hundred migrants had arrived, opposition subsided and the residents of Nebraska City were relieved to find that even the oldest "old aunty" and the smallest "little pickaniny" were willing and able to secure work in the area. The chief complaint of white residents echoed antebellum sentiment, given the reluctance of Exoduster families to separate from one another in order to secure employment. The ability of each migrant to quickly find work moderated the tone of the city's Democratic press, yet those newcomers who sought to live among the white residents of the city were quickly notified that their residence would only be tolerated outside the city limits. A rather different reception awaited a second group of Exodusters who arrived in the area and immediately purchased farms and supplies from local merchants. The *Nebraska City News* was one of most outspoken Democratic newspapers against the

Exodus, yet the wealth of these Exodusters led to a glowing report in J. Sterling Morton's daily that welcomed this particular group of migrants.²⁴⁰

Several local histories claim that the Exodusters who arrived in Lincoln were quickly run out of the town by angry whites. The scarcity of footnotes makes it impossible to determine exactly where this myth arose, but a detailed search of Lincoln newspapers reveals a different and more complex story. A number of black and white residents initially worked together to coordinate aid and employment through Lincoln's Freedman's Aid Association. The city's Republican press continually lobbied for support and employment opportunities while verbally defending the migrants. Although the city's Democratic press was somewhat less welcoming, their sharpest criticisms were made in relation to the number of white "tramps" and "gypsies" that were reportedly more numerous. Over time, the rhetoric of both newspapers moderated and the Exodusters were soon forgotten.

Although the city's Republican press continued to castigate the South for its bulldozing, Lincoln residents were assured that all was well in Lincoln, as one of the final mentions of the migrants claimed that "'Watermillions' are becoming cheap and the Exodusters are becoming contented." Typical of this growing apathy towards the small numbers of Exodusters in the state, Nebraska's Republican Party platform explicitly called for fair elections in the South but made no mention of the challenges African Americans continued to face within their state. Likewise, area residents

²⁴⁰ *Nebraska City Weekly News*, May 3, 7, July 26, 1879; *Nebraska City Daily News*, May 1, 8, July 17, 19, 23, 24, August 5, 11, September 25, 1879; *Daily State Journal*, July 24; *Omaha Weekly Herald*, July 25, 1879.

attended sold-out performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in December of 1879, yet no indication is given that these men and women made any connection to the new forms of slavery that the Exodusters had sought relief from.²⁴¹

The Democratic *Omaha Weekly Herald* observed the growing tendency of Kansas officials to send the Exodusters to other river towns and called for the entire movement to be rerouted away from the Great Plains just prior to the first arrival of Exodusters in Omaha. The city's Republican press supported the migration while it was confined to Kansas, yet once large groups began to arrive in Plattsmouth these journalists began to consider methods to prevent their arrival in Omaha. Democratic rivals capitalized on this change of sentiment, mocking the duplicity of Nebraska's own "Kansas 'freedom shrieker[s]," whose rhetoric faded as the migrants approached. As was the case throughout Nebraska, the few hundred Exodusters who arrived in Omaha during the fall of 1879 paled in comparison to the number of impoverished white migrants. Most of these men and women found work quickly as area farmers frequently solicited Exodus labor in Omaha. Despite these conditions, a letter from an Omaha citizen in early 1880 typified the response of many white residents.²⁴²

²⁴¹ Bertha W. Calloway and Alonzo N. Smith. *Visions of Freedom on the Great Plains: An Illustrated History of African Americans in Nebraska*, (Donning Company Publishers, Virginia Beach, 1998): 71; Mary C. Gilliland, "The Negro in Nebraska History: A Resource Teaching Unit," (M. A. thesis, University of Nebraska, 1970), 47; Lee E. Williams, II, *Post-War Riots in America 1919 and 1946: How the Pressures of War Exacerbated American Urban Tensions to the Breaking Point* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1991), 64; *Daily State Journal* (Lincoln), June 29, July 1, 2, 3, 11, 12, 15, 20, 21, 24, 27, 29, 31, August 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, 19, 20, September 16, 26, October 1, 3, 7, 1879; *Nebraska City Daily News*, July 19, December 6, 1879.

²⁴² *Omaha Daily Republican*, July 22, Aug 15, 1879; *Omaha Weekly Herald*, July 11, 18, 25, August 1, 8, September 5, 1879; *Daily State Journal*, (Lincoln), February 4, 1880.

We would be kind to these people. We would be generous to them. We would not throw stones at them. We would welcome them, and not refuse them, opportunity to live in Nebraska as is their right in the enjoyment of equal liberty with white men under equal laws in our country. But we would tell the truth about these people, and expose the devilry that gambles and makes political barter of their calamity. They are the helpless, and almost hopeless, victims of a race-destiny which no statesmanship can avert, as time will show.²⁴³

As historian Leslie Schwalm has documented, white citizens in Iowa strenuously opposed plans to relocate former slaves among them during the Civil War, often utilizing threats of violence and night riders to intimidate black leaders. Although white hostility was displayed with more restraint, Iowa towns observed the migration with anxiety for fear that their communities might once again become target destinations of former slaves. Sources indicate that only a few hundred Exodusters settled directly in Iowa from 1879 to 1880. Typical of the few newspaper reports of the arrival of Exodusters in Iowa is a notice in the “Mere Mention” column of the *Cedar Rapids Times* observing the temporary presence of a handful of Exodusters in search of work. Although Kansas political leaders and KFRA officials suggested that St. Louis officials divert the migrants further north up the Mississippi, Kansas remained the destination of choice. As a result, those few hundred Exodusters who arrived in the Hawkeye state did so as individuals after being sent up the Missouri river by KFRA officials or as part of the group that was diverted to Cairo, Illinois.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ *Omaha Weekly Herald*, July 25, 1879.

²⁴⁴ Leslie A. Schwalm, “Overrun With Free Negroes,” 145-174; St. John to Horatio Rust, February 14, 1880, St. John Papers; *Voorhees Report*, III, 368-9; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 17, 24, 1879; *Iowa State Reporter* (Waterloo), May 14, 1879; *Cedar Rapids Times*, April 3, May 8, July 31, 1879, February 5, October 7, 1880; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, April 3, 18, 22, May 1, 12, 14, October 7, 1879; *Cedar Falls Gazette*, April 18, May 16, August 29, 1879; *Waterloo Courier* May 5, 7, December 10, 1879, February 25, April 28, 1880; *Dubuque Daily Herald*, May 3, 1879, January 20, 24, 1880.

The black community of Denver, as was the case throughout northern and western cities, held a series of mass meetings to raise funds to assist the Exodusters in Kansas. These efforts were supported by a handful of political leaders that included both current and former governors such as John Evans. Evans addressed the meeting and compared the Exodusters to the original pilgrims of Massachusetts “who in the face of apparently certain failure and starvation” made a new home for themselves where their rights were protected. These meetings culminated in the creation of an interracial organization known as the Central Executive Committee led by Governor F. W. Pitkin

The group resolved not only to send money to aid the needy in Kansas, but also to arrange for “a moderate immigration” of the “better classes” of Exodusters to Colorado. The response to this movement mirrored partisan sentiment, with Democrats opposing any black migration while the city’s Republican press supported this token effort. The ongoing debate about how many migrants the city and state could tolerate was likely premature, as there is little evidence to demonstrate that more than a few hundred Exodusters moved directly to Colorado at this time. Still, relief efforts among the black communities of Colorado Springs and Pueblo resulted in monetary relief for Kansas. The efforts of KFRA agent Wilmer Walton, who traveled throughout the mining regions of the state in hopes of coordinating employment, however, were met with hostility.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ Frederick Pitkin to St. John May 14, 1879; *Denver Daily Tribune*, May 3, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 22, 1879; *Colorado Transcript*, May 14, August 27, 1879; *Boulder News and Courier*, May 2, 1879;

The final stage of the migration was a “Second Exodus” that consisted of black farmers in Texas and Louisiana who moved into Southeastern Kansas during the winter and spring of 1879-1880. The movement was highlighted by a pair of conventions attended by black farmers in Houston in July of 1879 and in Dallas in February of 1880. These meetings were part of a larger effort to explore social and agricultural opportunities in Kansas and the Southern Great Plains. Both within the auspices of these conventions and within rural communities throughout Texas and Louisiana a number of emigration societies were organized. Although a number of migrants who left Texas and Louisiana in the fall of 1879 and the spring of 1880 possessed little money beyond what was needed to complete their journey, a high percentage of these migrants arrived at their destinations with significant resources.

These “Texodusters” were even more likely to have organized migration committees than those migrants who arrived in Northeastern Kansas via the Missouri River. These committees conducted research and often selected and purchased land prior to leaving their homes. A number of these groups, such as the Texas Farmers’ Association, selected land in the Texas panhandle. Several thousand, however, determined to migrate to Kansas via wagon trains or railroads. While those Texodusters who lacked the resources to be immediately self-supporting reportedly received the “cold shoulder” from even the most liberal residents of Southeastern Kansas, those who immediately boosted the local economies by purchasing farms and homes were given a much different reception. Even those journals that had circulated

Colorado Weekly Chieftain (Pueblo), May 15, 22, 1879; *Georgetown Courier*, August 28, 1879; *Colorado Miner* (Georgetown), August 30, 1879; *Fort Collins Courier*, September 4, 1879.

the sharpest criticisms of the migrants, reprinting gossip suggesting that the Governor mobilize soldiers to patrol the Southern border of the state, seemed to welcome groups of Exodusters who arrived with signs of wealth such as wagons and teams of horses. Reports that a number of the migrants were planting cotton along the banks of the Neosho and Verdigris Rivers excited a number of white Kansans who optimistically predicted that cotton exporting would become a major contributor to the local economy. “If our new neighbors can get land to till,” predicted one area editor, “they will find our Kansas air is GOD’S FREE AIR, given to all alike.” Of course, such sentiment was limited to those who arrived with money or at least quickly found work that did not displace white labor.²⁴⁶

A small number of Exodusters arrived in Independence during the spring and summer of 1879. The city’s Republican press was supportive of the migration during this stage, calling on their readers to send supplies to the Eastern cities of the state and describing the conditions in the South that had led to the Exodus. One such article told of a conversation between a white merchant and a former slave in Mississippi. The former’s claims that Kansas was too cold for blacks was reportedly countered by a brief history lesson reminding the merchant how Missouri slave-owners had so

²⁴⁶ Joe Louis Caldwell, “Any Place But Here: Kansas Fever in Northeast Louisiana,” *Journal of the North Louisiana Historical Association* 21 (1990): 57; Testimony of J. W. Cromwell, *Voorhees Report*, I 7-9; *Voorhees Report*, III, 292; Testimony of B. J. Waters, *Voorhees Report*, III, 3; Testimony of M. W. Reynolds, *Voorhees Report*, III, 295-307; T. R. Alexander to St. John, July 27, 1879; St. John to L. S. Childs, January 9, 1880, St. John Papers; *Nebraska City Daily News*, September 25, 1879; *Spirit of Kansas*, October 29, 1879; *Valley Falls New Era*, December 20, 1879; *Emporia Ledger*, December 11, 1879; *Saline County Journal*, January 15, 1880; *Parsons Sun*, Dec 6, 13, 27, 1879; *Osage City Free Press*, January 15, 1880; *Coffeyville Journal*, November 29, 1879, January 24, 1880; *South Kansas Tribune*, March 31, April 7, July 21, 1880; *Harper County Times*, April 1, July 1, 1880.

eagerly sought to expand their peculiar institution. “I recon ‘taint no colder for us now dan we was property,” the former slave explained “you was mighty particular about yo’ property, in dem days.” By October of 1879, the growing number of Exodusters arriving in Montgomery County in need of temporary aid likewise created an unfriendly climate. The efforts of the black community and the interracial cooperation of Independence’s branch of the KFRA who assisted these migrants was crucial. Nearly all of these migrants became entirely self-supporting within a few months. Several agricultural colonies throughout the county needed assistance as they awaited their first crops.

Daniel Votaw, resident of a small Quaker settlement near Independence took it upon himself to aid these men and women for the next few years. His letters attest to the varied experiences of the migrants, many of whom become relatively independent farmers, while others were never able to acquire the livestock and supplies needed to build successful farms. Even more disheartening, many of those farmers who arrived with small teams lost their livestock after a severe winter and a tornado. As the KFRA disbanded and local residents turned their backs upon the newcomers, Votaw continued to aid the newcomers at great personal expense, selling his personal belongings and mortgaging his own home in order to finance his humanitarian vision.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ KFRA Minutes, December 15, 1879; Paul F. Harper, “Surely It Floweth With Milk and Honey,” 122-35; Tille Kerns Newman, “History of Coffeyville, Kansas,” Coffeyville Kansas Centennial, 1969 *South Kansas Tribune*, May 21, 28, June 4, 1879, March 31, April 7, July 21, 1880; January 15, 1886; *Colored Citizen*, May 31, 1879; *Miami Republican*, October 24, 1879.

The Parsons KFRA branch was established in the fall of 1879 and was led by white and black officers. Elizabeth Comstock secured a significant portion of this branch's resources, yet the KFRA's general scarcity of funds led to a formal grading system to determine eligibility. Exodusters seeking temporary assistance were ranked in terms of industry and cleanliness on a scale of 1-3 with those migrants receiving a grade of two or three being officially designated "loafers" and declared ineligible for relief. As was the case throughout the region, most of the six to eight hundred migrants who settled in and around Parsons purchased farms or secured employment independent of white charity. Exodusters such as Reverend James Griffin and future County Coroner and Parsons Blade editor Edward W. Dorsey became leaders of the black community while Felix Porter became one of the county's leading farmers. Other Texas migrants such as Oswego blacksmith Washington Landis, and Chetopa grocer T. J. Finney likewise become leaders in their communities, the later being elected Labette County Coroner. The second generation was especially successful, many graduating from area universities and securing teaching positions throughout the segregated schools of Southeastern Kansas.²⁴⁸

Historic Image

Republicans retreated from their identity as the party that freed and protected the former slaves as Reconstruction became a political liability in the late 1870s.

However, the identity of all Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas residents was deeply rooted

²⁴⁸ KFRA Minutes, November 3, December 15, 1879, March 1, 1880; Testimony of M. W. Reynolds, *Voorhees Report*, III, 306-7; Wilmer Walton to St. John, April 27, November 22, 1880, St. John Papers; *Parsons Blade*, July 31, 1897.

in the belief that they had taken a leading role in the struggle against slavery. Charitable organizations, individual philanthropists, and individuals throughout the region emphasized their shared historic identity in efforts to defend the rights of the Exodusters. Whites throughout the Great Plains reminded their neighbors of the aid provided by Southern blacks to Northern soldiers during the Civil War, both as soldiers and as civilians who aided lost and captured Yankee soldiers. Kansans were especially likely to place the Exodus in historic perspective by utilizing the state's imagined tradition of racial acceptance dating back to the crucible of their Territorial history. Although many white residents became increasingly concerned as the migration intensified, the historic image of Kansas moderated their rhetoric.

“It is still a matter of pride to all who have chosen to abide here,” a Hutchinson editor explained, “to know that instinct leads the oppressed to the land where slavery first met rebuke.” Given the tension between this imagined past and the actual tradition of seeking to exclude blacks from Kansas, the Exodus presented “one of the most difficult and troublesome problems” for local political leaders. There was frequently a disparity between rhetoric and reality. For example, Manhattan residents approved a resolution exclaiming that a hostile reception of the migrants “would be untrue to our former history and the dictates of humanity,” yet community members simultaneously sought to divert two hundred Exodusters.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ Testimony of B. F. Watson, *Voorhees Report*, II, 343; *Emporia Daily News*, April 18, 1879; *Topeka Commonwealth*, April 19, 1879; *Saline County Journal*, April 17, 1879; *Lawrence Home Journal*, April 17, May 11, 1879; *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 21, 1879; *Saline County Journal*, April 24, 1879; *Leavenworth Times*, April 26, 1879; *South Kansas Tribune*, April 31, 1879; *Ellis County Star*, May 15, 1879; *Russell County Record*, September 11, 1879.

The gulf between the lofty sentiment of historic memory and the actions of community members widened as the numbers of migrants increased. Wyandotte citizens referred to their state as “the birthplace of freedom” shortly after a committee of citizens recommended the use of force to prevent future Exodusters from entering the town. It was not that Wyandotte was untrue to its history or sought to prevent former slaves from traveling freely in pursuit of economic and political freedom, residents explained, but rather a simple matter of self-defense. Even Kansas Republicans occasionally admitted that the Exodus has exposed the hollowness of their historic image, publishing sharp editorials likening the action of many Kansas towns to the attitudes and behavior that Southern blacks were fleeing from. “Kansas is *free soil* open to all,” a rural Republican exclaimed, “and God knows, if these poor persecuted people are not permitted to find a home with us—we as a state and a people have been living and acting a *lie* for years in the face of all the world.” Residents of neighboring states particularly enjoyed the distance between the lofty rhetoric first expressed by Kansas and the virtual quarantine its citizens imposed a few months later. Governor John St. John had formerly sung the praises of free Kansas, the *Nebraska State Journal* declared. Given the change in public sentiment, the Governor was “now singing out the other corner of his mouth,” the editors explained, and was joined by a chorus of his fellow agitators who determined that Kansas had received more than its fair share of “the plantation elephant of the African variety.”²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ *Ellis County Star*, April 24, 1879; *Wyandotte Gazette*, April 25, 1879; *Junction City Union*, May

The Governor's change in tune was echoed by the melancholy hymns of the disappointed thousands for whom freedom had once again proven chimerical. A handful of Exodusters wore the mask of plantation singers when they could find no other way to earn a living, seeking the pennies of white Kansans whose hallowed sacrifice for freedom had proven hollow. Seventy years of unrewarded faith had a way of shattering such façades, as the jovial performances of those who had never known the lash were tempered by the soulful expression of one aged Exoduster on the streets of Winfield whose song entitled *The Refugee* was preserved and remembered by the next generation.

Dis ole grey head, dese crippled joints are lookin' for a grave
Sum whar on dis earth's bosom dat has never nursed a slave;
But 'fore I cross dese hands and feet my story I'll impart;
For, if you wont protect dis head, you did once trust dis heart.

Chorus:- I'll wait a little longer still-
De clouds are sure to rise-
De Lord is boun' to "show his hand"
To dis chile 'fore he dies.

De southern sun for seventy years has shone upon dis head,
For fifty of dose years dis brow did sweat for massah's bread.
One day a flag was shown to me all filled with stripes and stars,
Dey said it was my country's flag and dat dis land was ours.

Chorus
I understood de "stripes," for I had seen and felt the scars,
But never heard the story of the "union of the stars."
I tho't my prayer was answered that for forty years had gone
From in dis heart across des lips up to de Maker's throne.

Chorus
Thinks I were boun' for Canaan's land across a deep red sea-
De stripes by day, de stars by night I'll watch-dey'll make me free
And den 'twill be my country, and none can make me 'fraid,
And with dis vow down in my breast, I hoped and worked and prayed.

Chorus

31, 1879; *Valley Falls New Era*, August 2, 1879; *Miami Republican*, October 24, 1879; *Daily State Journal* (Lincoln), July 19, August 7, 1879; *Omaha Weekly Herald*, August 1, 1879.

I kept good watch at day time and carried the news at night-
De picket guards could trust me, 'cause dey knew this heart was right.
In all the days of conflict when foes and friends were nigh,
Dat flag ne'er saw dis color on de face of rebel spy.

Chorus

Dose days and hopes must have been a dream-dat flag is not in sight,
And all its colors blotted out except one star, tonight;
I'm traveling towards dat little star (dey call it Kansas star,)
It shines just as it used to shine and sparkle in the war.

Chorus

'Tis all dat's left where once I saw dat constellation shine,
But den my eyes are gittin' dim- perhaps de fault is mine.
Infirmities are left to me- land, home or flag I have none
And dey who made dose promises, I 'spose are dead and gone.

Chorus

Ole massa's now called "general" and in Congress makes de laws,
And I'm de "refugee" and mine "the lost and ruined cause."
I'll lean upon my 'simmon cane and close my eyes and ears
An' trust God a little longer, since I've trusted Him seventy years.

Chorus²⁵¹

The image of John Brown was frequently used to remind Kansans of the noble sacrifice of the preceding generation of Midwestern whites against slavery. Yet given the gulf between history and memory, the image of John Brown was most frequently cited as evidence of the duplicity of these Kansans as displayed by their retreat from liberalism in the face of black migration. "If Brown's soul gets no more cordial welcome in Kansas than the blacks it was supposed to lead," mocked one Democratic journal, "that 'fiery particle' will retire to Hades in disgust." While Kansans continued to sing *John Brown's Body*, area Democrats commented that "the soul of John Brown might as well right about face." News that John Brown, Jr. planned to travel to Kansas to personally lead the Exodusters in their quest for freedom drew considerable comment in Democratic papers as proof that the migration was part of a

²⁵¹ Fifth Anniversary Edition of the *Parsons Blade*, July 31, 1897.

Republican conspiracy. The bulk of the correspondence between John Brown Jr. and Kansas officials reveals that Brown raised funds to aid the migrants among the residents of his new home of Ohio. Brown's efforts resulted in a few modest contributions to the KFRA but there is no evidence to support the conclusion that Brown Jr. returned to Kansas. The Secretary of the Kansas State Historical Society spoke of the migration in lofty terms in May of 1879, predicting that the migration would "prove to be the great movement which is finally to give the colored people that entire freedom and equality" that had alluded them in the South. Brown's later correspondence with Governor St. John reveals that KFRA officials believed this freedom and equality might best be secured outside of the state of Kansas; St. John hoped that Brown would lead the KFRA's efforts to divert the Exodusters from Kansas to Ohio and other parts of the Old Northwest.²⁵²

Although the legacy of Bleeding Kansas and the image of John Brown were the most common historic concepts used to justify support for the migration, a Greenback editor utilized a more tangible image from the state's recent past to admonish his fellow statesmen about the hypocrisy and short-sightedness of their xenophobia. Kansans had displayed a general hesitancy to accept foreign settlers and were typically resentful towards those foreign emigrants who required financial assistance upon their arrival in the state. By 1879, however, most Kansans agreed that

²⁵² KFRA Minutes, September 12, 1879, June 14, 1880; *Atchison Daily Patriot*, April 18, 1879; *Republican Daily Journal* (Lawrence), April 24, 1879; *Ottawa Republican*, May 8, 1879; *Lawrence Standard*, May 22, 1879; *Colored Citizen*, May 31, 1879; *Topeka Commonwealth*, March 27, 1880; *Cedar Rapids Times* August 7, 1879; *Emporia Daily News*, May 1, 1879; F. G. Adams to John Brown Jr., April 24, 1877, John St. John to John Brown Jr., September 8, 1879, John St. John to John Brown Jr., November 21, 1879, F. G. Adams to John Brown Jr., May 7, 1879, John Brown Jr. Papers, Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, Fremont, Ohio.

the majority of these settlers had become good neighbors as they found employment in cities or formed self-supporting agricultural colonies. As the same could be said for Nicodemus, the editor predicted that temporary aid for the Exodusters would also be a good investment in the future of the state. The need for temporary financial support, the editor reminded his readers, was not limited by race or ethnicity but was a daily reality for nearly all residents of the state. “Let Kansas and Kansas citizens be true to themselves,” the editor concluded, reminding his readers how most residents of the state had required temporary aid during the drought of 1860. Few whites perceived the irony that the poverty of some Exodusters was contrasted to the manly independence of white migrants, even as public funds were allocated in 1880 to aid white drought victims in Western Kansas. Although journalists throughout Kansas and Nebraska occasionally reminded their readers that the amount of aid expended on the Exodusters was far less than the regular expenditures given to poor white settlers, paternalism merged with xenophobia to perpetuate the myth of the Exodusters as the personification of the white man’s burden.²⁵³

A handful of Kansans also placed the Exodus in a social history context, reminding Kansans that many sharing their own ethnic heritage faced opposition when they moved west. An anecdotal example of this sentiment was circulated throughout Eastern Kansas about a “red-headed Swede” in Lawrence. The emigrant reportedly cursed the Exodus and declared that the migrants should be turned away

²⁵³ *Lawrence Daily Tribune*, April 22, 1879; *Atchison Daily Champion*, May 4, 1879; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 17, 1879; *Lincoln Daily State Journal* (Lincoln), July 31, 1879; *Emporia Ledger*, June 10, 17, July 15, August 12, 1880.

by force of arms until interrupted by an elderly gentleman who likewise spoke with a deep accent. The old man reminded the fiery-tempered foreigner that similar statements had been made against immigrants such as themselves. The xenophobic attitudes of some Kansans can be seen in similar articles that singled out foreigners as being the sharpest opponents of black migration. Such articles appreciated the irony of the nation's newest citizens presenting African Americans as outsiders. Yet occasionally these articles were thinly-veiled attacks on foreign immigration, such as an article that blamed immigrants as being the instigators of a recent lynching in Fort Scott.²⁵⁴

The Exodus demonstrated the unique regional self-identity of Midwesterners as well as the limits of that ideology when tested. Midwesterners viewed both the South and the East with contempt; the migration was the result of a sectional conflict neither section was willing to accept responsibility for. The South was viewed with hostility because its oppression of blacks led to the migration, while the East was castigated for its hollow support of black rights, as evidenced by that section's unwillingness to work with KFRA leadership in diverting the Exodusters throughout the Northeast. Many Kansans also saw the migration as a means of mending the sectional conflict in ways that matched their own preconceived ideas. Democratic editors believed that influx of blacks would expose the insincerity of Northern Republicans who criticized Southern race relations from the comfortable distance of their Yankee abodes. Leading Republicans viewed the migration as a means to force

²⁵⁴ *Lawrence Standard*, May 1, 1879; *Lawrence Home Journal* ; April 31, 1879; *Kansas Pilot*, August 9, 1879.

white Southerners to accept their vision of Reconstruction due to the potential labor shortage. “Kansas was the rock on which the union split,” one resident claimed, “possibly it is here where it reunification will be permanently cemented.” African Americans echoed this sentiment, as a South Carolina platform warned “A free and fair election, or Kansas.” Fort Scott’s *Colored Citizen* likewise viewed the migration as an effective form of collective bargaining, yet was cognizant of the limits of freedom in the quintessential Free State. The black weekly looked towards political developments in Oklahoma with interest, advocating migration to that territory as an alternative. There were many African and Native Americans “who will hail our coming with delight,” exclaimed the editor, anticipating the sentiments of many Midwestern black leaders of the following generation. “We will marry the squaws,” the *Colored Citizen* farcically suggested, “and produce a race that will puzzle the ethnologists.”²⁵⁵

Despite their criticisms of St. Louis, cities along the Kansas and Missouri rivers would soon adopt the same strategy of raising funds, ostensibly to aid the Exodusters but primarily for the purpose of sending the migrants to other cities or states. Although most officials maintained that their intent was to help these men and women find work, several candidly admitted that the real intent of these schemes was

²⁵⁵ KFRA Minutes, May 3, June 14, 1880; *The Kansas Pilot* (Kansas City, Kansas) April 26, 1879; *Wyandotte Gazette*, May 9, 1879; *Saline County Journal*, April 17, 1879; *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 22, 1879; *South Kansas Tribune*, April 30, 1879; *Omaha Weekly Herald*, July 25, 1879; *Emporia Daily News*, April 18, 1879; *Hutchinson Herald*, April 17, 1879; *Saline County Journal*, April 17, 1879; *Iola Register*, April 18, 1879; *Topeka Daily Capital*, *Emporia Daily News*, April 18, 1879; April 23, 1879; *Junction City Union*, April 26, 1879; *Osage City Free Press*, May 2, 1879; *Wyandotte Gazette*, June 20, 1879; *Republican Citizen* (Paola), October 4, 1879; *Fort Scott Colored Citizen*, December 27, 1879.

simply “to get rid of” the perceived problem the Exodusters represented. For example, the city of Wyandotte spent \$200 to send a group of 163 Exodusters to Plattsmouth, which in turn sent the migrants on to Nebraska City at taxpayer expense. Although the KFRA devoted a significant portion of their resources to providing temporary food and shelter, a majority of its efforts were likewise aimed at preventing large numbers of African Americans from settling in their towns. The KFRA frequently sent large groups of Exodusters without first assuring for their well-being, yet the preferred method of compelling the migrants to leave the Topeka barracks was to match them with employers prior to their departure. KFRA agents solicited “orders” for laborers from as far away as Iowa to Wyoming. Once an order came in, KFRA agents would notify a migrant or group of migrants who they felt best matched the employers’ specifications and provide them a one-way ticket. The migrants were free to refuse these offers of employment, however those who did so were deemed ineligible for any future assistance, thereby forcing a number of families who were receiving food or shelter to reconsider the generous terms of employment the association had offered.²⁵⁶

Biblical imagery of the Exodus of Israelites occasionally gave way to racial comparisons of black mass migration to one’s community in terms similar to Old

²⁵⁶ T. C. Henry to St. John, May 14, 1879, St. John Papers; Testimony of Edward S. Mills, *Voorhees Report*, III, 29; Testimony of M. Bosworth, *Voorhees Report*, III, 288-9; *Lawrence Daily Tribune*, May 12, 1879; *Emporia Ledger*, July 24, 1879; *Saline County Journal*, May 25, 1879; *Columbus Border Star*, September 26, October 10, 17, 24, 1879; *Russell County Record*, November 11, 1879; *Valley Falls New Era*, December 13, 1879; *South Kansas Tribune* (Independence), June 4, 1879; *Wyandot Herald*, August 27, 1879; *Topeka Blade*, July 21, 1879; *Harper County Times*, March 11, 1880; *Spirit of Kansas*, April 21, 1880; *Iola Register*, April 23, 1880; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 17, 24, 1879.

Testament plagues. KFRA agents rejected such openly racist appeals, yet devoted the bulk of their efforts to stopping the migration and redistributing the migrants. KFRA agents and city officials attempted to spin the redistribution of the Exodusters from Kansas to other Great Plains states as a natural process. This records of the KFRA indicate otherwise, however, as the organization forcibly diverted the Exodusters to these areas through the recruiting efforts of their paid field agents.

Relief workers and others throughout the region justified their desire to redistribute the migrants by creating the belief that their actions were calculated to best serve the migrants. “If a township or even a precinct was settled by them exclusively,” one proponent of redistribution explained, the Exodusters would likely retain their bad habits. “But scattered among a thrifty white population,” the rationalization continued, “there is every probability that they would improve.” White residents of Kansas and Nebraska claimed that other states were “more capable of employing and managing the class of people in question,” a thinly veiled attempt to sanitize their attempts to expel the migrants from among them.²⁵⁷

The arrival of a small number of Exodusters in Indiana was cited as evidence of a Republican conspiracy and was the impetus for the later Congressional investigation. Although Voorhees’ allegations appeared comical given the arrival of

²⁵⁷ Testimony of John Davis, *Voorhees Report*, III, 232-3; KFRA Minutes, October 31, November 3, 1879, February 2, March 1, 25, April 8, May 3, June 14, 1880; Comstock to St. John, June 9, 1880, St. John Papers; Testimony of M. Bosworth, *Voorhees Report*, III, 288; Testimony of John Davis, *Voorhees Report*, III, 228; Testimony of B. F. Watson, *Voorhees Report*, II, 342-338; *Atchison Daily Patriot*, August 6, 1879; *Nebraska City Daily News*, May 8, July 17, 19, 1879; *Omaha Weekly Herald*, May 30, July 11, August 1, 1879; *Republican Daily Journal* (Lawrence), April 23, 1879; *Western Progress*, May 8, 1879; *Lawrence Home Journal*, May 11, 1879; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 24, 1879; *Saline County Journal*, April 17, 1879; *Leavenworth Times*, April 26, 1879; *Daily State Journal* (Lincoln) Feb 4, 1880.

only a few hundred Exodusters, political leaders in the Great Plains made several efforts to stem the migration to the Hoosier State. These efforts were supported by both Republican and Democratic constituents, many openly stating their hope that future migrations would follow the North Star to Indiana instead of coming to Kansas. Even more surprising, KFRA records indicate that Pap Singleton, the self-proclaimed “Father of the Exodus,” supported this plan and personally worked to see that the migration was diverted from Kansas to Indiana. Additionally, KFRA agents either did nothing to counter rumors of racial violence in Kansas or deliberately circulated these rumors themselves during their journeys to that region in efforts to stop the Exodus. In every instance, political leaders and KFRA officials explicitly denied any sympathy with racism, justifying their actions by stating that blacks would be better off to migrate to other states or remain in the South.²⁵⁸

Intersections of Race and Class

This universal denial of racial intolerance was one of the most striking characteristics of the Midwestern white response to the Exodus. Whites throughout the region who opposed the migration universally denied that their hostility towards the Exodusters had anything to do with race, despite the clear racial nature of many of their comments that typified the migrants as inherently ignorant and shiftless. A significant number of whites claimed to oppose the migration simply because of the current state of poverty of many of the emigrants. City officials in towns such as

²⁵⁸ Emma Lou Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1957); *Wyandot Herald*, May 13, 1880; *Nebraska City News*, September 6, 1879; KFRA Minutes, October 31, 1879.

Atchison and Leavenworth resurrected seldom-enforced anti-pauper laws and applied them broadly to all black emigrants, even while agreeing that the term “pauper” was an unfair and even inaccurate label. The term pauper was often used as a racially-neutral code for black migrants, as Republican editors spoke against the “influx of indigent persons” in response to black migrants. Similar statements of self-proclaimed liberal whites throughout the region supported quarantine measures against “paupers” and sanctions against those responsible for “importing destitute persons” were thinly-veiled attacks on the Exodusters.²⁵⁹

Topeka’s Republican mayor H. M. Case repeatedly sought to prevent the Exodusters from entering his city and openly stated his desire see the migration halted. Rather than admit the obvious racial aspects of this desire, Case claimed he only sought the interest of the migrants themselves. Although he admitted that he had little contact with the migrants, he continuously maintained that “a great many” of these men and women had personally informed him that they were better off in the South. Even those white residents of the Great Plains who were active in charitable efforts to aid the migrants chose to mask their racial hostility as humanitarian concern. For example, a late September convention of various “refugee committees” held in Kansas City, Missouri phrased an anti-Exodus resolution as a measure to “prevent want and suffering” by “direct[ing] the tide of emigration into other and

²⁵⁹ Testimony of Edward Mills, *Voorhees Report*, III, 31; *Republican Citizen*, April 24, 1879; *Valley Falls New Era*, April 26, 1879; *Atchison Daily Patriot*, April 30, 1879; *Junction City Union*, June 14, 1879; *The Little Globe*, July 9, 1879; *Hutchinson Herald*, July 26, 1879; *Daily State Journal* (Lincoln), July 27, 1879; *Republican Daily Journal* (Lawrence), April 24, 1879; *Fort Scott Herald*, April 26, 1879; *Leavenworth Appeal*, May 2, 1879; *Wyandot Herald*, August 27, 1879; *Atchison Daily Champion*, May 6, 7, 1879.

older states, where accumulated wealth and population afford better facilities for their successful settlement.” Although rural Kansans likewise emphasized the lack of capital investment, agricultural prospects, and employment opportunities of their cities, they devoted considerable resources to recruit prospective white migrants with inviting visions of Edenic prosperity. So great were the fortunes of Neosho Falls, county boosters claimed, that the speakers stand at the Woodson county fair was surrounded by canopies of grain and columns of corn stalks. President Rutherford B. Hayes provided the keynote for the occasion. Next to the President stood a banner that read: “Kansas, 1856 Bleeding, 1860 Drouthy [sic], 1879 Booming.” Yet residents of Kansas continued to justify their efforts to expel black farmers on the grounds of the state’s poor agricultural outlook.²⁶⁰

White assumptions that all Exodusters were destitute and would become an economic burden had clear racial connotations, yet the rhetoric typically utilized to express this opinion was class-based and emphasized economic preparedness without any mention of race. Despite the clear racial implications, this message was consistent with Kansans’ advice to all would-be settlers. In its first year as a territory, Lawrence’s *Herald of Freedom* boosted the opportunities of the state but cautioned those without any funds from coming to Kansas. Social class was the criterion most often used to judge new settlers both prior to and during the Exodus.

Although Kansans disagreed about the minimum amount of money one would need to start a successful farm, most emphasized that their state provided

²⁶⁰ Testimony of H. M. Case, *Voorhees Report*, III, 14-9; *Voorhees Report*, III, 170; *Miami Republican*, September 26, 1879; *Wyandot Herald*, October 2, 1879.

opportunities for all who had significant resources and were willing to work. Both black and white settlers were judged by their wealth, those with healthy teams and deep pockets being considered the most desirable types of neighbors. Although members of ethnic or religious minorities received closer scrutiny, those who fit this criterion were usually welcomed into the state, especially if they settled among themselves and established their own social institutions.²⁶¹

The same was true of the Exodus. Those who defended the Exodusters typically included stories of economically successful black settlers and settlements. Middle-class blacks in leading cities such as Omaha were cited as evidence of the potential of urban blacks as model citizens. The relatively supportive tone that Midwestern whites frequently used to describe the residents of Nicodemus and other autonomous colonies likewise illustrates the primacy of economic class in determining white attitudes. Perhaps as a result, most reports of black settlers en route to black colonies offered either positive editorial comments or simply reporting the movements of these families as a matter of fact. Even reports claiming that tens of thousands of black migrants were selling off their Southern assets in preparation for migration to the Great Plains were moderated by assurances that these assets would result in the purchase of farms.

These reports were not without paternalistic overtones, however, as many of the Exodusters who joined or pioneered black communities were presented as

²⁶¹ *Russell County Record*, February 27, 1879; *Herald of Freedom* (Lawrence), October 21, 1854; *Lawrence Home Journal*, March 20, April 31, 1879; *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 1, 1879; *Peabody Gazette*, July 4, 1879.

imitators of white settlers. Furthermore, the “honest and self-respecting independence” of these newcomers was often presented in contrast to the undesirable African American immigrants who needed assistance. Governor St. John reminded his constituents that black settlers received only a fraction of such aid. “I have often thought it strange that those who seem so timid and easily frightened at the approach of a few blacks, and who are so anxious to fasten the responsibility upon some of their coming here,” the Governor stated in 1880, “have not put forth an effort to ascertain who it was that brought so many ‘poor whites’ to Kansas.”²⁶²

Indications that Kansans were relatively accepting of those Exodusters who possessed significant sums of money and quickly obtained employment and/or property are abundant. As many as half of the heads of families who migrated to Southeastern Kansas from Texas and Louisiana in the winter and early spring of 1879-80 arrived with enough money to establish small farms. Black journalists repeatedly counseled prospective migrants that their reception would be largely based upon their degree of financial preparedness and claiming that those who arrived with money to purchase farms and homes received “just about the same help and encouragement” as whites.

Frequent reports within white newspapers throughout the state that detailed the arrival of self-sufficient groups of Exodusters were generally quite positive, even

²⁶² John Dawson to George W. Martin, December 6, 1906, Negro Exodus Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas; *Lawrence Daily Tribune*, March 28, 1879, *Lawrence Home Journal*, March 29, 1879, April 8, 1880; *Emporia Daily News*, April 29, 1879; *Republican Daily Journal*, May, 7, 1879; *Valley Falls New Era*, June 28, December 20, 1879; *Spirit of Kansas*, July 23, 1879, May 19, 1880; *Graham County Lever*, March 26, 1880; *Topeka Daily Blade*, May 9, 1879; *Holton Recorder*, June 5, 1879; *Olathe Leader*, 5, 1879; *Valley Falls New Era*, June 28, 1879; *Western Progress*, August 16, 1879.

within those journals that were most critical of the Exodus. For example, the Democratic *Atchison Patriot* opposed the Exodus in no uncertain terms throughout 1879, yet printed a special note of welcome to a small group of Exodusters who possessed significant sums of money and had called on the paper for advice about where to settle. Other Kansas papers reiterated this sentiment, referring to migrants with significant resources as a different “kind of an ‘Exoduster’” that would benefit the state. When neighboring Wyandotte raised money to send the migrants up the river, officials allowed those families that possessed enough money to purchase or rent homes to remain in the city. In fact, the evidence strongly suggests that the leading cause of friction between Kansas towns regarding the transfer of Exodusters was exemplified by the relationship between race and class. Many city officials filtered prospective black migrants by their financial resources, attempting to send those without money down the river.²⁶³

What many white Midwesterners failed to perceive is that all of the Exodusters, regardless of their current economic state, had come to the Great Plains in hopes of achieving the financial independence whites respected. Although residents and journalists throughout the region repeatedly claimed that all migrants who secured jobs would be welcomed, the defensiveness with which these statements were often issued tacitly conveyed the reality of racial discrimination in employment.

Several Midwesterners candidly admitted that black laborers were the last to be hired,

²⁶³ Testimony of M. H. Case, *Voorhees Report*, III, 16; *Waterloo Courier*, December 10, 1879; Fort Scott *Colored Citizen*, October 4, 1879; *Wyandotte Gazette*, April 25, 1879; *Leavenworth Times*, April 27, 1879; *McPherson Independent*, June 26, 1879; *The Little Globe*, July 1, 1879; *Atchison Daily Patriot*, August 16, 1879; *Holton Recorder*, August 21, 1879; *Russell County Record*, November 11, 1879; *Graham County Lever*, March 26, 1880.

especially throughout the region's farms where workers lived in close proximity to the owners. A typical Exoduster family in the Junction City area of Kansas was able to secure employment only by agreeing to live in the owners' granary.

Labor shortages in Nebraska may have moderated this sentiment. At least one farmer in the central part of the state wrote to St. John requesting black workers, his letter stating that he would consider sharing his dining room with those who "keep themselves in a tidy condition." Black women also faced difficulties in obtaining employment as many white families likewise discriminated against them when hiring domestic servants. Advertisements for female laborers such as a Lincoln notice for a "white or colored" woman were exceedingly rare, and Midwestern whites were especially reluctant to hire black women who would be accompanied by children.

Laura Haviland and others who sought to match the Exodusters with rural families repeatedly expressed frustration with the difficulty of finding white employers who would accommodate entire families. "In the cursed bondage of the past," Haviland admonished, "the breaking up of families was the most bitter trial." Letters and diaries of those Midwestern farm families who did employ Exoduster families often resemble the paternalistic rhetoric of antebellum slave masters, amusing one another with tales of the musical inclinations of a people suited only for manual labor while conferring a sense of moral superiority for the protection and direction they provided to their laborers.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ Anne Bingham, "Sixteen Years on a Kansas Farm" in *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1912-1922*, vol. 15, 520; Circular of KFRA Employment Bureau, 1879, "Negroes Clippings," Kansas State Historical Society; Testimony of A. A. Harris, *Voorhees Report*, II, 419-25; Testimony of

Midwesterners repeatedly used class and gender-based arguments to deny that race was a factor in their opposition to the Exodus, yet they often expressed these sentiments in racial terms. The economic success of black migrants was expressed in paternalistic and gendered terms, exclaiming that those who had obtained employment had now achieved “a faint glimmer of light on the subject of their own manhood.” The rhetoric of Midwestern whites even mirrored that of antebellum planters as they sought to classify those Exodusters that would become the best laborers based on the physical appearance and gender of the migrants. White residents boasted of their liberality in providing jobs for black women while simultaneously perpetuating the image of the antebellum Southern Mammy who “had a natural talent for cooking.” Midwestern whites bragged about their ability to select “a good lot” while defenders of certain groups of migrants sought to enumerate qualities that differentiated them from “the worthless ones” merely by appearance. In each instance, racial slurs such as “wharf rats” and “African Aristocracy” were used to present both wealthy and poor blacks in the most negative light.

Migrants were also assigned certain characteristics based on the part of the South they had come from, with whites eliciting a preference for blacks from the

Edward S. Mills, *Voorhees Report*, III, 30-1; Testimony of H. C. Solomon, *Voorhees Report*, III, 23; Testimony of A. B. Bradish, *Voorhees Report*, III, 223; Testimony of H. C. Park, *Voorhees Report*, III, 21-2; J. M. Snyder to St. John, March 14, 1882, St. John Papers; Patrick Kennedy, “Nemaha County’s African American Community,” *Nebraska History* 82 (Winter 2001): 11-21; Nella Aldridge to “Grandmother,” July 13, 1880, Benton Aldrich Papers, Nebraska State Historical Society; Leslie A. Schwalm, “Overrun With Free Negroes,” 165-7; *Olathe Leader*, April 24, 1879; *Fort Scott Colored Citizen*, October 4, 1879; *Lawrence Home Journal*, May 8, 29, 1879; *Atchison Daily Champion*, May 8, 1879; *North Topeka Times*, June 27, 1879; *McPherson Independent*, June 26, October 16, 1879; *Daily State Journal* (Lincoln), July 18, 27, 1879; *Leavenworth Times*, April 30, 1879; *Junction City Tribune*, May 1, 1879; *Spirit of Kansas* (Lawrence), May 7, 1879, May 19, 1880; *Peabody Gazette*, July 4, 1879.

Border States rather than the Deep South. Even those Exodusters who established their own homes faced the criticisms of some whites who felt they would be more productive if they had the kind of white supervision they once enjoyed in their previous home. Such classifications were even utilized to create a Midwestern conspiracy theory that claimed the white South was enjoying the Exodus as the “best specimens” of black laborers remained in the South where they were well treated while the lower classes were run out, making the Midwest “a sort of Botany Bay for the town Negroes and pauper classes.”²⁶⁵

Although white Midwesterners were generally accepting of African American migrants who possessed money, the relatively low concentration of wealthy black men and women in most communities prevented a genuine test to their rhetorical acceptance of wealthy blacks. Nicodemus was perhaps the only community where a large number of African Americans competed with white politicians, merchants, and farmers in ways that presented a significant economic threat to the interests and status of leading white men. Although race relations within Nicodemus have been portrayed as nearly utopian, even the small number of white men who chose to settle or do business near the township made frequent complaint about blacks who sought to compete economically and politically with whites. Relations with white farmers and businessmen in Graham County were often strained, as normal economic and political

²⁶⁵ Testimony of John Davis, *Voorhees Report*, 228-30; *Wyandot Herald*, April 21, 1879; *South Kansas Tribune*, April 30, 1879; *Junction City Tribune*, May 1, 1879; *Wyandotte Herald*, May 1, 1879; *Columbus Border Star*, October 3, 1879; *Topeka Daily Capital*, June 28, 1879; *Atchison Daily Champion*, May 8, 1879; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 17, 24, 1879; *Western Progress*, August 17, 1879.

rivalries between towns competing for railroad lines and county offices would quickly become framed in racial terms.

On an individual level, successful black farmers often found that personal wealth attracted white hostility rather than esteem. Nicodemus' H. R. Cayton experienced this phenomenon in neighboring Stockton when a white rival tried to prevent area farmers from selling their livestock to him. Allegations that Cayton was a "smart aleck" were related to white Kansans notions about the proper place of blacks. Cayton understood the nature this insult and responded that he would have been considered "a good nigger" had he "appeared on the streets of Stockton as a hotel porter, a bootblack, or a monkey for the amusement of the general public."²⁶⁶

Despite the insistence of white residents that race was not a factor in determining their reaction to the Exodus, most whites in the region tacitly expressed the belief that any job was good enough for an Exoduster. Black men and women were considered both naively misled by wild rumors of free land as well as "impudent and fresh" when they sought to negotiate for better wages and positions. Although officials and relief workers who were involved with trying to find jobs for the Exodusters universally declared the desire of the Exodusters to find work, examples of offers of employment being turned down were often utilized by the opponents of the movement to create negative feelings about migrants.

²⁶⁶ Glen Schwendemann, "Nicodemus: Negro Haven on the Solomon," Glen Schwendemann, *Nicodemus: Negro Haven on the Solomon* (Topeka: State of Kansas Commission on Civil Rights, 1971); Leslie A. Schwalm, "Overrun With Free Negroes"; John Dawson to George W. Martin, December 6, 1906, Negro Exodus Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas; Claire O'Brien, "With One Mighty Pull," 117-8.

These stories were readily interpreted in racial terms because they fit the preconceived notions of many whites throughout the region. Even the most casual observations of black men and women in any setting in which they were not working led to the assumption of unemployment due to the prevalence of racial stereotypes. Even the most liberal whites would often revert to these stereotypes when poor communication led to misunderstandings. For example, whites who had no need for hired labor often sought to assist the newcomers by offering “catch jobs” but were offended when Exodusters had the audacity to expect regular wages for such work. Kansans were especially enraged when an offer of fifty positions at a Missouri mine was casually dismissed by a group of new arrivals.²⁶⁷

A recent article about the Exodus perpetuated the myth that the migrants refused this Missouri offer of employment because they believed they would receive free land if only they remained in Kansas. Contemporary sources reveal, however, that even migrants such as these who arrived in the early spring of 1879 understood the requirements of land ownership and refused this offer because of its low wages and poor location. As might be expected, mining eventually became a common occupation late in the movement as migrants found the more desirable jobs closed to them. In the meantime, even those Exodusters who received aid typically paid for this assistance through employment in building roads or other public works projects. The nearly universal tendency for the migrants to obtain both temporary and permanent

²⁶⁷ Testimony of John Davis, *Voorhees Report*, III, 228-9; Testimony of B. J. Waters, *Voorhees Report*, III, 2; Testimony of M. W. Reynolds, *Voorhees Report*, III, 297-8; *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 22, 1879; *Atchison Daily Champion*, May 6, 1879; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 17, 24, 1879.

positions as farm laborers, railroad workers, meatpackers, carpenters, and other positions relieved even the most ardent foe of the Exodus of their avenue of opposition. The temporary nature of many of these positions, however, led to renewed hostility by as many of the migrants eventually “drifted back” when these jobs ended.²⁶⁸

A meeting sponsored by North Topeka minister Joshua Barrett illustrates the tendency of Midwestern whites to mask their racial opposition to the movement in economic terms. Although the meeting was advertised as a “debate,” its intentions were thinly disguised by the notice that only white men would be allowed to speak in response to the disingenuously-phrased question of whether participants should “either directly or indirectly encourage the filling up of Kansas with paupers.” John M. Brown’s request to present an alternative point of view quickly revealed the white minister’s bias as the minister angrily replied that no black man would ever be allowed to speak from his pulpit so long as he was affiliated with the church.

Barrat’s uncontested monologue repeatedly emphasized his status as “a friend of the race,” mirroring the sentiments of others who claimed to oppose the migration due to its contrary nature to the economic interests of both the migrants and the Midwest as a region. Although the minister was reportedly applauded by many in the

²⁶⁸ Suzanna M. Grenz, “The Exodusters of 1879,” 68; Testimony of H. C. Park, *Voorhees Report*, III 21; Testimony of Green Smith, *Voorhees Report*, III, 223; Testimony of B. F. Watson, *Voorhees Report*, II, 345; Testimony of Edward S. Mills, *Voorhees Report*, III, 29; Leland George Smith, “The Early Negroes in Kansas,” (M. A. thesis, University of Wichita, 1932), 27; *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 22, 1879; *Republican Daily Journal* (Lawrence), April 23, 1879; *Wyandotte Gazette*, April 25, 1879; *Spirit of Kansas* (Lawrence), April 16, 1879; *Republican Daily Journal* (Lawrence), April 23, 1879; *Leavenworth Times*, May 11, 1879; *Wyandot Herald*, May 29, 1879; *Junction City Union*, June 28, 1879; *Western Progress*, August 17, 1879; *Lawrence Home Journal*, August 29, 1879; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 24, 1879; *Daily State Journal* (Lincoln), July 20, 21, 27, September 26, 1879.

audience, the cold reception of many of his allegations against relief workers illustrated that even those who opposed the migration empathized with the plight of the migrants and those who sought to assist them. Barratt's arguments seemed to resonate with the opinions of many in the audience despite their incongruous nature, both alleging that the KFRA was a fraud as little aid was actually distributed to the migrants while also claiming that many Exodusters had little incentive to find work due to the lavish aid now received.²⁶⁹

Despite the often absurd allegations of Barratt, his belief that the Exodusters represented a major economic drain was shared by many throughout the region. The most commonly expressed concern was the ability to attract wealthy white settlers and the consequences for area property values if large numbers of Southern blacks moved to Kansas. "White men, not even the most radical of the old abolitionists," a Parsons dispatch read, "will never buy farms with the prospect of having Negroes for neighbors." The melodramatic language that was often used to express these concerns, however, illustrated that more than property values were at stake. The Democratic *Columbus Border Star* not only referred to the movement as "a curse... which will be felt for many years," it claimed that the migration was an inglorious conclusion to local attempts to boosting the county. "Now we must make the humiliating confession," the *Border Star* continued, "that the only way we can get our county settled up is to bring thousands of plantation Negroes from Texas.

²⁶⁹ Testimony of Joshua Barratt, *Voorhees Report*, 208-13; *North Topeka Times*, May 9, 16, 1879; *Topeka Commonwealth*, May 11, 13, 14, 15, 1879; *Colored Citizen*, May 17, 1879; March 27, 1880.

Republican journals echoed this sentiment but were careful to avoid any mention of race. For example, the *Kansas Pilot* stated that introduction of paupers would discourage “the better classes” from coming to the city” Although the *Pilot* maintained that their opposition was based upon the present state of unpreparedness of Southern blacks, its rhetoric is revealing. “Let anyone who doubts this try the effect of settling a half dozen of Negro families on a block of residence property in the city,” the *Pilot* cautioned its readers, “and wait for the remainder to be taken up by desirable occupants.”²⁷⁰

The issue of public health was also used by white Midwesterners as a means of opposing the Exodus while masking racial antipathies. Like any good charade, those who advocated quarantine against the Exodus for medical reasons were able to cite a variety of factual events that gave their campaign the impression of legitimacy. In addition to sporadic accounts of Yellow Fever being reported throughout the South, many of the Exodusters arrived in poor health due to the gauntlet of starvation, exposure, and overcrowding they faced on the journey to Kansas.

Despite these factors, there is no indication that a single outbreak of Yellow Fever occurred in the Midwest in connection to the Exodus. Public health was a believable charade, however, and many Midwesterners continued to oppose the Exodus along these lines even after local doctors examined the migrants and declared them free of contagion. White residents likely believed the rumors that were spread

²⁷⁰ Testimony of John Davis, *Voorhees Report*, III, 225-6; Testimony of A. A. Harris, *Voorhees Report*, II, 420; Thomas Nickerson to St. John, September 10, 1879, St. John Papers; *Columbus Border Star*, October 3, 10, 17, 24, 31, November 7, December 5, 1879; *Kansas Pilot*, April 15, 19, 1879.

about the “filthy Exodusters” because they fit preconceived notions of Southern blacks and offered a racially-neutral way to oppose the migration. Even some of the more absurd rumors, such as the belief that refugees were given bedding that had been used by yellow fever patients at Southern hospitals, received considerable mileage within Kansas newspapers. At least one thoughtful Midwesterner appreciated the implausibility of this rumor and understood that its intent was to create prejudice among the “weaker portions of the population.” This genus of anti-Exodus propaganda was endemic even within towns that had relatively low numbers of Exodusters, with local outbreaks of measles being labeled “niggereasles” in central Kansas and rumors of malaria spread throughout the Southern portions of the state. Several years after the Exodus, however, these rumors were curiously reversed to explain how black farmers were able to cultivate the river bottoms of Southeastern Kansas that white farmers had eschewed, allegedly due to their inherent resistance to malaria.²⁷¹

Perhaps one of the most surprising aspects of the migration is the scarcity of whites who claimed to oppose the migration based on the belief that the newcomers were members of a criminal class. The few contemporary news articles that identified black suspects typically went out of their way to inform readers that the individuals in question were not Exodusters. The only editorial regarding the Exodusters and the potential for crime that appeared in the eighty newspapers surveyed openly denied

²⁷¹ Testimony of John Davis, *Voorhees Report*, III, 227-8; Testimony of M. Bosworth, *Voorhees Report*, III, 290; *Nebraska City Daily News*; May 8, July 17, 19, 21, 22, 1879; *Atchison Daily Patriot*, April 30, 1879; *Iola Register*, May 2, 1879; *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 11, 1879; *Topeka Blade*, July 21, 1879; *Omaha Weekly Herald*, July 25, 1879; *Emporia Ledger*, February 5, 26, 1880; *Coffeyville Journal*, October 6, 1883.

that African Americans were more likely to commit crimes than members of any other ethnic group. The prevalence of white crime upon black settlers, however, was recorded by a Doniphan County editorial that complained of the inequality of the county's justice system that shared the basic assumptions which had led to failure to bring justice to the perpetrators of the recent outrages in Yazoo County.²⁷²

Although Republican newspapers verbally opposed the strategy of quarantine employed by Leavenworth and Wichita, they shared their political opponents' desire to have the Exodusters return to the South or move on to the "vacant" lands occupied by Native Americans. City census figures often deliberately omitted the Exodusters because of the desire and expectation that they would not become permanent citizens. Positive comments about a particular group of migrants were likewise often linked to expectations that these men and women were merely passing through. The comments of whites throughout the region that these migrants represented a good source of temporary labor likewise conveyed the expectations that the Exodusters would not attempt to settle permanently in Midwestern cities.

Calls for aid for those migrants in need likewise emphasized the utility of such assistance in helping the migrants move onwards to their final destinations beyond the city. The most favorable reports were reserved for those groups who possessed significant sources of wealth and planned on settling elsewhere. No amount of wealth or assurances of temporary residence could completely erase the prejudice of color,

²⁷² Testimony of J. M. Brown, *Voorhees Report*, II, 360; *Columbus Border Star*, October 31, November 21, 1879; *Spirit of Kansas*, December 17, 1879; *Wyandot Herald*, December 18, 1879; *South Kansas Tribune*, June 2, 1880.

however, as area newspapers continued to apply headlines such as “Coons from Kansas” to describe even the wealthiest of prospective black settlers.²⁷³

The Exodus and the White Man’s Burden

The tendency of contemporary whites to view all African Americans who migrated to Kansas and the Great Plains during the late 1870s and early 1880s as “Exodusters” has led to a wide discrepancy in estimating the size of the Exodus. For example, local histories and contemporary newspapers often use the term to describe the residents of places like Nicodemus and other black colonies, despite the fact that they possessed a distinct self-identity that was formed in contrast to the latter Exodusters. White observers during the Exodus produced estimates ranging from 5,000 to 80,000, but unfortunately none of these contemporaries gave any explanation of how they arrived at a particular number. Historians have done little more than choose whichever of these estimates best supports their own perspective, once again failing to define their terms or specify their methodology.

A survey of newspapers throughout Kansas and Nebraska indicate that there were only a few thousand African Americans who arrived without any means of self-support throughout 1879-1880. Contemporaries likely perceived all Exodusters as impoverished due to the fact that about a dozen large groups of migrants were shipped from town to town as so much unwanted refuse. While smaller groups of migrants arrived throughout the state and found housing and employment without

²⁷³ *Wyandot Herald*, April 13, 1879; *Spirit of Kansas* (Lawrence), April 16, 1879; *Junction City Union*, April 26, 1879; *Saline County Journal*, May 1, 1879; *Western Progress* (Olathe), May 1, 1879; *Valley Falls New Era*, August 16, 1879; *Holton Recorder*, August 21, 1879; *Emporia Ledger*, March 18, 1880; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 24, 1879; *Nebraska City Daily News*, August 14, 1879.

white assistance, the arrival and departures of these larger groups of “refugees” dominated headlines and the white imagination. “Some of the [Exodusters] have teams,” explained Wyandotte’s Corvine Patterson, seeking to assure whites that these newcomers had money and would soon purchase farms. A handful of observant whites echoed Patterson’s statement, their tone indicating that these type of migrants were invisible to whites focused on those camped by the waterfront. Area journalists echoed this sentiment, the *Plattsmouth Herald* commenting on the migrants’ ability to fend for themselves and how quickly they seemed to disappear throughout central and southern Nebraska.²⁷⁴

Historical accounts of the Exodus often focus heavily on relief efforts, creating the impression that Southern blacks were perpetually dependent on the charity of whites. Both the financial records and the written accounts of the men and women who organized these relief efforts illustrate the limits of white charity. The

²⁷⁴ Testimony of J. M. Brown, *Voorhees Report*, II, 351-67; *Atchison Daily Champion*, May 3, 1879; *Olathe Leader*, August 31, 1879; *Iola Register*, August 1, September 26, 1879; Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, 33; Billy D. Higgins, “Negro Thought and the Exodus of 1879,” 25, 39; Angela Bates, “The Western Migration of the African American and the Frontier Experience,” 20; Arvah E. Strickland, “Toward the Promised Land,” 378; James B. Runnion, “The Negro Exodus,” 223; Norma Tolson, “An Account of Afro-Americans in Weir, Kansas,” 1997, Special Collections, Pittsburg State University; Nelson Case, *History of Labette County, Kansas* (Topeka: Crane and Company, 1893), 57-8; Lisa M. Frehill-Rowe, “Postbellum Race Relations and Rural Land Tenure: Migration of Blacks and Whites to Kansas and Nebraska, 1870-1890,” *Social Forces* 72 (September, 1993): 77-93; St. John to H. C. Weeden, Sept 12, 1879; Testimony of B. J. Waters, *Voorhees Report*, III, 2; Testimony of John Davis, *Voorhees Report*, III, 224-9; Testimony of A. A. Harris, *Voorhees Report*, II, 419; Testimony of B. F. Watson, *Voorhees Report*, II, 338; Testimony of H. C. Park, *Voorhees Report*, III, 21; Testimony of H. C. Solomon, *Voorhees Report*, III, 23; Testimony of J. W. Cromwell, *Voorhees Report*, I, 7-9; Testimony of G. W. Carey *Voorhees Report*, III, 391-3; Testimony of John Milton Brown, *Voorhees Report*, II, 358-61; Letter of Comstock submitted in *Voorhees Report*, III, 292; *Fort Scott Colored Citizen*, October 4, 1879; *Wyandotte Gazette*, April 25, 1879; *Lawrence Home Journal*, May 15, 1879; *Osage City Free Press*, May 30, 1879; *The Little Globe* (Atchison), June 13, 1879; *Lawrence Daily Reporter*, June 26, 1879; *Topeka Daily Capital*, June 28, 1879; *Wyandot Herald*, August 27, 1879; *Ellis County Star*, January 15, 1880; *North Topeka Times*, January 16, 1880; *Valley Falls New Era*, January 31, 1880; *Harper County Times*, March 11, 1880; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 24, 1879; *Emporia Ledger*, April 17, 1879.

only resources available to aid the Exodusters were private funds, as attempts to organize state and federal aid were abortive. City and county coffers were closed as well, with the occasional exception of a few dollars for burial costs or to cover the expenses of forcibly transferring the Exodusters to other cities.

Although there were many local and individual relief efforts that doubtlessly contributed to the well-being of the new arrivals, the only significant source of aid was organized through the Topeka-based Kansas Freedman's Relief Association and its auxiliary chapters throughout the state. Slightly over \$70,000 was raised by the KFRA between 1879 and 1881, yet the vast majority of these funds came from Eastern donors rather than Kansas residents. Financial records of KFRA reveal that nearly a third of their budget was devoted to transporting the Exodusters from one city to another as well as sending agents throughout the region and to Southern cities in hopes of either diverting the movement to other states or ending it altogether, expenditures certainly did not aid the plight of Exodusters. Black communities throughout the nation and the Great Plains contributed funds as well, with donations coming from large eastern cities as well as black military units stationed in the American West.

Even if one assumes that these relief efforts matched the amount the KFRA raised with its nation-wide network of wealthy philanthropists, it would appear that less than a hundred thousand dollars was actually spent on aiding the Exodusters from 1879 to 1881. Using even the lowest estimates of the Exodus and the most generous estimate of financial aid, it is apparent that the average Exoduster received fewer than

ten dollars of total assistance. Although the interracial effort to raise and distribute this aid were unique to the Exodus, the total value of relief dispensed to these migrants pales in comparison to the aid many white Midwesterners received on an annual basis, or to the average aid package white Kansans received from Eastern charities during the drought of 1860.²⁷⁵

As the migration slowed, a number of Kansans placed the Exodus in the context of the state's recent history and concluded that an "equal number of white men" moving under the same conditions "would have attracted no attention whatever." Demographic records support this claim, as few contemporaries commented about the 73,000 white Southerners who arrived in Kansas between 1870 and 1880. Another contemporary remarked that Kansas charities had fed ten "white tramps" for every one meal that was given to the Exodusters. Senator Windom likewise challenged the view of the Exodusters as dependent by placing relief efforts in comparison to those operated on behalf of Irish refugees or Southern whites exposed to Yellow Fever. Lincoln's *Daily State Journal* commented that their city gladly received white immigrants who spent all of their savings, yet the arrival of a few hundred blacks under the same conditions inspired a defensive hyperbole and

²⁷⁵ Financial Records of the Kansas Freedman's Relief Association, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas; KFRA Minutes, June 14, 1880; Frank W. Blackmar, *Kansas: A Cyclopedic of State History* (Chicago, Standard Publishing Company, 1912), 547-550; Margaret Whittemore, *One-Way Ticket to Kansas: the Autobiography of Frank W. Stahl* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1959), 48; William E. Connelly, *A Standard History of Kansas and Kansans*, 970-972; Cox, *Blacks in Topeka*, 69-71; Testimony of B. F. Watson, *Voorhees Report*, II, 338; St. John to Charles Dodge, June, 9, 1879; *Wyandot Herald*, April 21, 1879; *Lawrence Daily Tribune*, April 22, 1879; May 2, 12, 1879; *McPherson Independent*, June 26, 1879; *Junction City Union*, June 28, 1879; *Topeka Blade*, July 21, 1879; *Lawrence Home Journal*, August 29, 1879; *Saline County Journal*, April 8, 1880; *Wichita Eagle*, September 30, 1880; Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, 109-130; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 17, 24, 1879.

dichotomous thinking. Midwestern communities generously contributed to relief efforts of white neighbors throughout the period, yet resolved to provide only enough aid to ameliorate those blacks among them who were in danger of starvation or exposure. While ten thousand homesteaders in Western Kansas received governmental aid in 1880, it was the private donations that aided black migrants that received the greatest scrutiny and continue to dominate the historiography of early relief efforts in Kansas.²⁷⁶

Contemporary newspapers, manuscripts, and city directories in Kansas and Nebraska likewise illustrate that the majority of Exodusters quickly found employment and required little or no public assistance. Some observers, however, chose to overestimate the poverty of migrants for a variety of reasons. The majority of historical sources regarding the Exodus were written by relief workers, journalists, politicians, and Southern planters. Each of these groups shared a vested interest in exaggerating the destitute condition of the migrants. KFRA dispatches wrote of the graphic suffering of Exodusters while likewise exaggerating the amount of aid given. Southern planters circulated a variety of stories about the credulity of the migrants in an effort to encourage government intervention on their behalf. Midwestern journalists frequently censured their peers for their “extravagant statements” on the

²⁷⁶ Lisa M. Frehill-Rowe, “Postbellum Race Relations and Rural Land Tenure: Migration of Blacks and Whites to Kansas and Nebraska, 1870-1890,” *Social Forces* 72 (September, 1993): 77; Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, 179; Testimony of M. Bosworth, *Voorhees Report*, 290; Testimony of H. M. Case, *Voorhees Report*, III, 19; *Wyandot Herald*, April 10, 1879; *Russell County Record*, August 3, 1879; *Osage City Free Press*, January 15, 1879; *Olathe Leader*, April 15, 1880; *Daily State Journal* (Lincoln), July 27, August 2, 8, 9, October 7, 1879 *Cedar Rapids Times*, September 11, 1879; *Dodge City Times*, September 13, 20, 1879; *Arkansas City Traveler*, November 30, 1879; *Daily State Journal* (Lincoln), October 1, 1879; *Valley Falls New Era*, January 24, 1880.

subject, yet alarmist dispatches from Southern cities were reprinted throughout the region without any investigation of their validity.

Journalists in the Great Plains were not immune to this hyperbole. For example, Nebraska newspapers deliberately exaggerated the arrival of a few hundred black migrants as the harbinger of a “black wave” of ten to twenty thousand destitute blacks that would soon take over the region. Further complicating the issues is the fact that many of those who issued statements about the Exodusters, such as Topeka Mayor H. M. Case, admittedly had no contact with the Exodusters and knew very little of the migration. Editorial embellishment, political motivation, and the tendency of whites to view all African Americans as Exodusters all combined to produce exaggerated reports. Finally, many Exodusters themselves likely contributed to the perception of the migrants as dependent upon whites by exaggerating their own condition given the hesitancy of whites to provide aid to all but the most destitute migrants.²⁷⁷

The first migrants to arrive in a given Midwestern community were aided by black churches and families. Even the smallest black communities typically formed relief organizations. For example, a group of seventeen black men and women in Emporia, consisting mostly of laborers and domestics, each contributed between one and five dollars per person. Families opened their homes to the newcomers while

²⁷⁷ KFRA Minutes, May 3, 1880; Testimony of M. H. Case, *Voorhees Report*, III, 14-6; *Iowa State Reporter*, July 30, 1879; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, October 7, 1879; *Omaha Weekly Herald*, August 1, 1879; *Nebraska City Daily News*, July 28, 1879; *Emporia Ledger*, December 11, 25, 1879. Most city directories in Kansas and Nebraska identified African American residents in some manner. These directories only listed residents of the town that had established a permanent residence. Given the rapid rise of listed black residents from 1879-1881 in towns throughout Eastern Kansas, it is clear that many if not most of the Exodusters quickly became established residents.

black congregations converted their churches into barracks. Area black leaders canvassed their towns while agricultural workers surveyed surrounding farms to help the newcomers find work. Rural black colonies that had only recently been established likewise created both formal and informal relief agencies and employment referral services. Finally, a significant number of Exodusters were employed by black farm families and urban artisans throughout the region.²⁷⁸

The resources of local black communities were soon overwhelmed by the large numbers of Exodusters arriving in late spring. Charitable-minded whites throughout the region joined and contributed to local relief efforts. While many of these organizations genuinely desired to aid the Exodusters, the basic premise of most of these groups was based on the desire to alleviate the suffering of the most destitute migrants while discouraging others from making the trek. Cautionary statements about providing too much aid were circulated throughout the state, blaming the continued migration on the excesses of previous charity. Southern clichés were adapted to Midwestern circumstances, educating whites who knew little about Negro peculiarities that “if you give a Negro a finger, he will take a whole hand.” White residents fancied themselves in quite a predicament, wishing to fulfill the dictates of humanity yet fearing that the migrants might tell others about the kind treatment. Others viewed the migrants as one might a stray animal, warning their neighbors that the migrants would return to their doorstep each night and beg for food if once

²⁷⁸ Hickey, “‘Pap’ Singleton’s Dunlap Colony,” 23-33; *Lawrence Daily Journal*, April 20, 1879; *Leavenworth Times*, April 22, 1879; *Lawrence Home Journal*, April 24, May 8, 1879; *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 22, 1879; *Republican Daily Journal* (Lawrence), April 23, 24, 1879; *Leavenworth Times*, April 26, May 11, 1879; *Atchison Daily Champion*, May 3, 1879; *Harper County Times*, April 1, 1880; *Nebraska City Daily News*, July 22, 1879; *Emporia Ledger*, May 8, 1879.

provided for. As a result, monetary contributions were often specifically earmarked for transportation to other cities. Just as had occurred in St. Louis, funds were most forthcoming to send the Exodusters elsewhere, with little regard for what might become of them.²⁷⁹

It would be presumptuous to dismiss all charitable efforts, yet even the most genuine and well-organized relief efforts sought to aid the Exodusters while ending the Exodus. A number of prominent whites in Kansas formed the Freedman's State Central Organization, which appealed for donations under the signature of Governor John St. John. This organization soon evolved into the Kansas Freedman's Relief Association, whose constituent chapters offered shelter and aid as well as referring the migrants to potential employers throughout the state. Most of the prominent men who headed this organization removed themselves from it by the fall of 1879 as affiliation with relief efforts became a political liability. Liberal whites and African Americans such as John M. Brown and white women such as Laura Haviland replaced these politicians and assumed leadership of the organization for the next two years.

Brown understood well the pressures that led to the Exodus as a former Mississippi sheriff and schoolteacher who fled to Kansas several years prior to the Exodus after his life was threatened by Southern Redeemers. The goals of the KFRA

²⁷⁹ Testimony of George Irwin, *Voorhees Report*, III, 329; *North Topeka Times*, May 23, 1879, January 16, 1880; *The Little Globe*, July 10, 1879; *Emporia Daily News*, June 10, December 2, 1879; London Times April 23, 1879, quoted in Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, 73; *Voorhees Report*, III, 24-9; Bryan M. Jack, "Bridging the Red Sea"; Lorenzo J. Greene, et al. *Missouri's Black Heritage*, (Saint Louis: Forum Press, 1980), 92-3; Bryan M. Jack, *The St. Louis African American Community and the Exodusters*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008).

reflect the tension between aiding the migrants through direct aid, the operation of an employment bureau, and subsidizing a few agricultural colonies, and the organization's later focus aimed at stopping the migration. While the organization originally intended to help the migrants purchase and operate their own farms, it soon retreated from this goal in ways that paralleled the Freedman's Bureau in the postbellum South. While the original organizers optimistically declared "Let it never be said that Kansas closes her doors against or withholds aid from any law-abiding human being who is willing to work for an honest living," the resignation of many of the KFRA's founders symbolized the retreat of Kansans towards this lofty sentiment.²⁸⁰

These resignations led to a number of African Americans filling positions of leadership within the KFRA. These appointments were merely formal acknowledgement of the measure of interracial cooperation that typified relief efforts throughout the region. John M. Brown's service as an officer of the KFRA as well as its General Superintendent has been well-documented. Yet even the first relief campaigns waged by black churches and black relief societies entailed a high degree of interracial cooperation and usually led to the organization of deliberately interracial relief efforts. In Lincoln, Nebraska, for example, white political leaders

²⁸⁰ KFRA Minutes, September 12, October 6, 10, 31, November 3, December 15, 1879, January 5, February 2, February 7, March 1, 6, 25, April 8, May 3, 10, 13, June 7, 14, July 5, August 4, October 11, November 3, December 6, 1880, February 7, April 4, April 15, 1881; Testimony of J. M. Brown, *Voorhees Report*, II, 351-9; Testimony of M. W. Reynolds, *Voorhees Report*, III, 295; *Cedar Rapids Times*, May 7, *Colored Citizen*, June 3, 1879; *Wyandot Gazette*, April 25, 1879; *South Kansas Tribune*, April 30, 1879; *Saline County Journal*, May 1, 1879; *Western Progress* (Olathe), May 1, 1879; *Iola Register*, May 2, 1879; *Olathe Leader*, May 1 1879; *Osage City Free Press*, May 2, 1879; *Dodge City Times*, May 1, 1879; *Ellis County Star*, May 1, 1879; *Blue Valley Telegram* (Waterville), May 9, 1879; *Russell County Record*, September 11, 1879; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 24, 1879.

coordinated their efforts with a black relief organization formed and led by a number of barbers. While the organization soon evolved into the interracial Freedman's Aid Society, these men retained their positions of leadership. White KFRA representatives worked alongside black relief societies such as the Topeka Relief Board, while black leaders also served on a number of predominantly white relief boards. Black leaders such as Reverend T. W. Henderson shared the podium with national figures such as Susan B. Anthony after white and black relief organizations in Leavenworth held a mass meeting specifically calling for an interracial meeting. Sojourner Truth likewise toured Kansas in interest of the migrants, drawing large interracial audiences wherever she spoke.²⁸¹

The appearance of Anthony and Truth were typical of the leading role women played in the relief effort. Prominent women of both races were leading members of the KFRA and other organizations, and continued to offer aid after many of the male political leaders turned their backs on the migrants. These women relief efforts, conducted lectures, and were among the leading donors to relief efforts. Elizabeth Comstock was the most active of any KFRA fundraiser, personally raising a third of the organization's revenues during a series of lectures and meetings with black leaders and white philanthropists. 71-year-old Laura Haviland served as secretary of

²⁸¹Claire O'Brien, "With One Mighty Pull," 117-29; Laura French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County* (Emporia, KS: Emporia Gazette Press, 1929), 45; Handbill for "Concert For the Benefit of Kansas Refugees" Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library, Lawrence Kansas; Fifth Anniversary Edition of the *Parsons Blade*, July 31, 1897; Testimony of B. F. Watson, *Voorhees Report*, II, 343; Testimony of J. M. Brown, *Voorhees Report*, II, 358-60; *Daily State Journal* (Lincoln), June 29, July 1, 2, 11, 12, 16, 26, 1879; *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 21, 1879; *Republican Daily Journal* (Lawrence) April 24, 1879; *North Topeka Times*, April 25, 1879; *Atchison Daily Champion*, May 6, 1879; *Saline County Journal*, August 21, 1879; *Emporia Ledger*, October 30, 1879; *Colored Citizen*, October 11, 1879; Tenth Census of the United States, 1880.

KFRA after the men abandoned the organization, and managed the employment bureau. Scores of women throughout Kansas volunteered services as teachers within schools sponsored by KFRA and throughout the community. A small army of women volunteers taught classes for adults through KFRA auxiliary chapters in Parson, Lawrence, Topeka, Fort Scott, Independence, and rural areas throughout the state. Relief efforts in neighboring states were also typically dominated by both white and black women, a fact recognized by Colorado Governor Frederick Pitkin in sending a woman referred to only as “Aunt Clara” to Kansas to investigate how best to assist the migrants.²⁸²

Although many of the Exodusters were destitute by the time they reached Kansas, they were not the only travelers in 1879 who were dependent on the assistance of others. White immigrants throughout the region and nation were assisted by railroad companies, charitable organizations, and even local and state governments as they migrated West. While some private organizations and individuals sought to aid the Exodusters, the general lack of compassion displayed towards black migrants was unique. One wealthy black land developer related the discrimination he and his neighbors faced during their journey, many being forced to spend the majority of the two to three hundred dollars each had hoped to use to purchase farms.

²⁸² KFRA Minutes, October 31, November 3, December 15, 1879, March 1, 25, April 8, June 7, July 5, December 6, 1880; James Lindsay Smith, *Autobiography of James L. Smith*, Norwich, Press of the Bulletin Company, 1881: 147-8; Hickey, “‘Pap’ Singleton’s Dunlap Colony,” 27-8; Ann F Jameson of Maine to St. John, July 29, 1881; Frederick Pitkin to St. John, Aug 16, 1879; St. John to Mrs. Henry Cheever, January 16, 1880; Elizabeth Comstock to John St. John, January 20, 1880; Letter of Caroline DeGreene January 26, 1880, in *Voorhees Report*, III, 292-3; Dispatch of E. L. Comstock dated February 1, 1880, in *Voorhees Report*, III, 292; Testimony of B. F. Watson, *Voorhees Report*, III, 338; Testimony of M. Bosworth, *Voorhees Report*, III, 290-1; Testimony of M. W. Reynolds, *Voorhees Report*, III, 306; *McPherson Independent*, June 26, 1879.

Those who started with less money fared significantly worse. Reports of fatalities among the Exodusters were often reported with callous disregard. Although the trip from St. Louis to the Kansas City area was short, one Wyandotte official estimated that two percent of the newcomers perished during this leg of their journey. The migrants' health usually improved shortly after their arrival, yet the tendency to house all of the Exodusters within a handful of black churches or temporary shelters led to frequent fatalities among children and the elderly. Several white doctors volunteered their services or contracted with relief agencies to ameliorate their condition, yet the cavalier attitudes of city officials, ignoring these men's recommendations for improved facilities and rations, further illustrates the failure of many Kansans to view the Exodusters as individuals rather than temporary burdens or statistical abstractions. Perhaps the most chilling aspect of the apathy displayed by white residents is the political infighting that occurred between city and county officials regarding the few dollars required to properly dispose of Exoduster remains.²⁸³

The white reception of the Exodusters in the Great Plains reflected the Voorhees Committee hearings in that political intrigue superseded the interests of the migrants. Rival newspapers in cities from Wichita to Omaha debated the causes and consequences of the migration as a means of discrediting one another and promoting

²⁸³ Norman E. Saul, "The Migration of the Russian Germans to Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 40 (Spring, 1974): 38-62; Testimony of M. H. Case, *Voorhees Report*, III, 15-6; *Wyandot Herald*, April 13, May 22, 1879; *Republican Daily Journal*, April 23, 1879; *Fort Scott Herald*, May 10, 1879; *Republican Citizen* (Paola), April 24, 1879; *Lawrence Home Journal*, April 24, 1879; *Peabody Gazette*, May 2, 1879; *Junction City Union*, June 28, 1879; *Spirit of Kansas* (Lawrence), July 16, 1879; Lee Ella Blake, "The Great Exodus of 1879 and 1880 to Kansas," (M. A. thesis, Kansas State University, 1942), 25; *Emporia Ledger*, May 8, 1879.

their political parties, but offered little assistance to the migrants themselves. Towns throughout Kansas and Nebraska also framed black migration in political terms, using the issue to flame civic rivalries in ways that only added to the hardships of the Exodusters. Cities situated along the Kansas and Missouri Rivers criticized their neighbors for their reluctance to share the “burden” of the Exodus.

Within weeks, river towns abandoned plans of voluntary redistribution, offering financial incentives to boat captains to continue downstream with their unwanted human cargo despite the hostile reception they might receive upstream. Journalists in these towns joined the charade, printing bogus stories about the high demand for “colored help” in other towns and other states in hopes of diverting the Exodus. Smaller towns throughout the region watched the panicked reactions of their cosmopolitan counterparts with amusement, satirizing the often circular voyages of the Exodusters as they were sent from one municipality to another. Residents of these towns were less amused, however, when the cities commissioned railroads to transfer large numbers of migrants into the interior of Kansas and Nebraska.

By the summer of 1879, migrants were often forced to disembark under the cover of darkness. Despite the hostility they encountered at their eventual port-of-call, boat captains enjoyed the hefty bonuses they received from towns such as Wyandotte, Leavenworth, and Atchison to bypass their docks. River crews also enjoyed playing pranks on rival shipping lines, assuring the next boat received a hostile reception by

starting rumors that the next boat carried hundreds of Exodusters rather than Eastern manufactured goods.²⁸⁴

While some individual Kansans genuinely sought to aid the migrants, the primary concern of local governments was to find a way to quietly and inexpensively remove the Exodusters while discouraging other cities from sending the migrants to them. As a result, towns competed with one another in describing their city as inundated with unemployed and unemployable Exodusters. The insistence that the migration was foolhardy also protected Kansans from feelings of guilt for genuine suffering. January says it is criminal to allow this migration to continue as they must “endure hardships to which the lash of slavery would hardly compare.” Again, race was part of the issue as many were concerned that the labor market in small towns would be glutted and incoming settlers (white) would be without jobs. Although Eastern Kansans often complained because most of the immigration went to the frontier, the goal of every city that received a large group was to remove the Exodusters from their midst with haste and economy. “The only solution of the problem, therefore, is to provide for their temporary necessities, and send them away as soon as possible.”²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ Testimony of Edward S. Mills, *Voorhees Report*, III, 29; Testimony of B. F. Watson, *Voorhees Report*, II, 339; Testimony of H. C. Solomon, *Voorhees Report*, III, 23; *Fort Scott Herald*, April 19, 1879; *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 22, 1879; *Wyandotte Gazette*, April 25, 1879; *Wyandotte Herald*, April 17, May 1, 1879; *Harper County Times*, May 1, 1879; *Leavenworth Appeal*, May 2, 1879; *Fort Scott Herald*, May 10, 1879; *Nebraska City Daily News*, May 8, July 19, 21, 1879.

²⁸⁵ T. C. Henry to St. John, May 14, 1879; *Lawrence Home Journal*, April 24, 1879, February 2, April 1, 1880; *Junction City Union*, April 26, 1879; *Wyandotte Gazette*, May 3, 1879; *Topeka Daily Capital*, May 8, 1879; *Leavenworth Times*, May 18, 1879; *North Topeka Times*, January 9, 1880; *Wyandotte Herald*, May 1, 1879; *Harper County Times*, May 1, 1879; *Leavenworth Appeal*, May 2, 1879; *Fort Scott Herald*, May 10, 1879; *Omaha Weekly Herald*, July 25, 1879.

Although a number of Kansas newspapers defended the migrants against hostility by relating the horrors of Southern bulldozing, these reports declined in direct relation to the demographic influx of black migrants in the late spring and early summer of 1879. As the Exodus began to assume the character of a mass migration, several Midwestern residents blamed black migration on one of the South's smallest ethnic groups. Although native whites continued to abuse the former slaves, a number of Kansans blamed the recent mass movement as the result of the extortionist practices of "Israelite" merchants throughout the South.²⁸⁶

Ironically, the Biblical migration of the Israelites was the frame of reference for both participants and observers of the 1879-1880 migration. Exodusters presented their journey as a pilgrimage from the land of bondage to the sacred soil of free Kansas. Although the medium of expression these Southerners used to express the meaning of their journey—songs, poems, and prose—conveyed the passion that inspired the migration and the faith these pilgrims shared, the Exodus was a rational movement characterized by planning and preparation. African Americans held secret meetings, organized migration societies, and held public meetings and conventions throughout the South in preparation for the migration. Contemporary sources reveal that Southern blacks discussed all aspects of the migration during these meetings and had an advanced understanding of Kansas' own history both in both legend and fact due to frequent correspondence with African Americans throughout the Great Plains.

²⁸⁶ James B. Runnion, "The Negro Exodus," *Atlantic Monthly*, 44 (August, 1879): 225; *Blue Valley Telegram*, March 21, 1879, *Junction City Union*, March 22, 1897; *Miami Republican*, April 18, 1879; *Western Progress*, April 10, 1879; *Saline County Journal*, April 24, 1879.

Although Midwesterners cautioned their Southern contemporaries about the limitations of their region and the continued presence of white hostility, they also boasted of the region's opportunities and their own success.²⁸⁷

Inevitably, some of these stories were likely repeated in ways that exaggerated the conditions that awaited new settlers in Kansas. Yet it was white residents who opposed the movement who created and perpetuated the myth that the Exodusters believed that "forty acres and a mule" now awaited them in the land of John Brown. While Southern blacks certainly used a measure of poetic license to encourage their neighbors and friends to join them on their journey from Babylon, these myths paled in comparison to the mendacity of Southern and Midwestern whites who fabricated a species of malevolent lies to disparage the migrants and discourage the movement.

Jefferson Davis, a man far removed from the migration, typified the Southern response by presenting the Exodusters as easily deceived by implausible stories of Kansas as an Edenic paradise. "Those who have gone to Kansas will probably return," Davis callously suggested, "otherwise they will remain only to die in that cold country." Implausible stories of naïve and "deluded Negroes" who were victimized by unscrupulous men into selling all of their possessions for false land

²⁸⁷ Billy D. Higgins, "Negro Thought and the Exodus of 1879," 45; *Lawrence Home Journal*, March 27, April 31, 1879; *Osage City Free Press*, May 2, 1879; *Wyandotte Gazette*, May 2, 1879; *New York Times*, April 20, 1879; *Holton Recorder*, May 22, 1879; *Junction City Union*, May 24, 1879. Although previous historians have characterized the movement as mindless, spontaneous, and lacking in leadership, a critical evaluation of primary sources on the Exodus does not support this conclusion. Athearn's characterization of the migration as an "unreasoned, almost mindless exodus from the South toward some vague ideal, some western paradise, where all cares would vanish once the beckoning gates were reached" betrays the author's fine job of uncovering primary sources. These sources do not, however, support Athearn's insistence that the Exodusters continued to believe that they would get government land even after they get all the way to Topeka. For example see Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, 7.

claims and transportation vouchers became increasingly popular among white Midwesterners as the migration continued. One such myth that has been perpetuated by historians claims that a large number of Exodusters sold all of their worldly possessions in exchange for a flag, after someone they never met informed them that any land they desired would be theirs if only they placed that marker in the ground.

It is no coincidence that these myths first appeared in Southern newspapers. That they were soon circulated throughout the Midwest as factual reveals the similarity of the racial assumptions of whites in Kansas and their Southern neighbors. The retelling of these fables entertained Midwestern whites and reassured them that the suffering of the Exodusters was due to the innate weaknesses of black migrants, thereby justifying decades of social stratification as natural rather than the result of racial discrimination. These myths also provided tangible evidence that these newcomers would “settle upon Kansas a pall of ignorance” unless the migration was reversed.²⁸⁸

Whites circulated numerous stories of the “child-like” faith the Exodusters placed in circulars that claimed free land awaited all migrants in Kansas. White journalists throughout the Great Plains demonstrated their own credulity, however, in reprinting Southern dispatches about the efforts of mythical Exodus promoter Lycurgus P. Jones. Reports of Jones’ efforts as president of the “Colored Colonization Society of Topeka” spread throughout the region. According to these

²⁸⁸ *Colorado Weekly Chieftain*, May 29, 1879; *Emporia Daily News*, April 9, 1879; *Ford County Globe*, April 15, 1879; *Atchison Daily Patriot*, July 11, 1879; *Columbus Border Star*, October 3, 10, 24, 31, November 7, 1879; *Miami Republican*, October 17, 1879.

stories, Jones distributed circulars among Southern blacks explaining that 160 acres of good farmland near Topeka was available simply for the asking. Whites who harbored conspiratorial notions about the Exodus provided supplementary details to the story, claiming that these mysterious circulars instructed readers not to share their contents with whites.

Although some newspapers later admitted that Jones was a fictional character, Lycurgus soon assumed the qualities of a malevolent “tempter” of innocent blacks. As a result, earlier reports of the Exodus as a Biblical migration of the righteous from bondage were twisted into a story resembling the original sin of Eve. Despite the efforts of the Voorhees Committee and whites throughout the South and the Midwest to prove the devil’s existence, no evidence of Lycurgus himself was ever discovered. Not only did this malevolent spirit escape detection, no other circular promising free land specifically to black migrants was ever discovered. What was revealed, however, was a wealth of such materials that were aimed towards Southerners in general with no mention of race.²⁸⁹

The tendency of Midwestern whites to portray the Exodusters as ignorant for accepting rumors of free land, transportation, and supplies is ironic, considering that they themselves created and perpetuated these rumors as a means of diverting the migrants to *other* cities and states. For example, white residents in Plattsmouth falsely informed newly arriving Exodusters that free land was awaiting them in Nebraska City as a means of diverting them to that location. Sources indicate that the

²⁸⁹ Testimony of John Davis, *Voorhees Report*, III, 225-6; *Emporia Daily News*, April 9, 1879.

Exodusters, many of whom had been redirected by at least two cities prior, were more likely to perceive the transparency of this fable than some of the white residents of Plattsmouth. Even after the migrants had been diverted, whites continued to reassure one another that they had acted charitably, as better opportunities awaited these men and women down the river.

The efforts of relief workers aimed at diverting the Exodus to other states also had the affect of fueling rumors. Discussions of free and discounted rail transportation were freely discussed among KFRA agents and railroad executives as a means of diverting the Exodusters throughout the region. It is important to add that many of the perquisites that black migrants were lampooned for allegedly expecting, including free transportation to land available at low prices and on easy credit terms, were readily available to groups of white settlers who were recruited by railroad companies at this time.²⁹⁰

A handful of white and black leaders worked together in an attempt to negotiate for the Exodusters the same incentives frequently offered by railroad companies to white settlers. Others openly called for government aid, as white newspaper editors themselves predicted that “forty acres and a mule” would be provided at government expense. KFRA officials attempted to establish a few agricultural colonies by subsidizing land and supplies for the Exoduster. Unfortunately, the inexpensive lands selected by the KFRA were a poor investment, as they offered limited agricultural value and were divided into impractically small

²⁹⁰ *Nebraska City Daily News*; May 8, July 17, 19, 21, 22, 1879; *Lawrence Standard*, March 27, 1879; Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, 259-60.

tracts in an effort to transfer as many migrants to the new lands as possible. The KFRA intended to offer teams and implements as well as temporary housing, but the placement of so many migrants onto such poor land limited the potential these plans might have allowed.

Smaller colonies formed by the Exodusters themselves were often successful, but the tendency of KFRA officials to sacrifice the long-term welfare of its own black colonies in favor of simply removing black settlers from the cities led to the failure of its colonies. These policies were mirrored by the efforts of the white reformers to relocate Native Americans on small plots of infertile land. While government aid at least alleviated some of the suffering of native tribes, the KFRA simply abandoned black settlers on plots that were often as small as five acres and offered no access to water. Black settlers survived through supplementing their small operations with work on area farms and ranches, yet droughts and other economic catastrophes affected black settlers the hardest. As a result, a number of observers accused the KFRA of “dumping” the Exodusters into colonies merely as a means of eliminating them from urban communities. In any case, it is clear that these charitable efforts offered only limited assistance to black settlers.²⁹¹

Although reports of these activities likely influenced some migrants to move to Kansas, the migration was sustained by sophisticated colonization plans, mass

²⁹¹ Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 137-41; Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, 79; Hickey, “‘Pap’ Singleton’s Dunlap Colony,” 28-33; Paul F. Harper, “Surely it Floweth With Milk and Honey,” 134-5; KFRA Minutes, September 12, 1879, July 5, 1880; Testimony of John Milton Brown, *Voorhees Report*, 360; Blake, *The Great Exodus of 1879*; *Lawrence Home Journal*, May 15, 1879; *Junction City Union*, July 12, 1879; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 24, 1879; *Holton Recorder*, July 24, 1879; *Topeka Colored Citizen*, June 3, 1879.

meetings, and migration clubs that pooled their resources to obtain information about Kansas. These groups sought personal reconnaissance and correspondence with Midwestern blacks and white government officials rather than accept whatever rumors were inspired by KFRA colonization schemes. Both the official testimony of Exodusters during the Voorhees hearings and the informal interviews of migrants by Kansas and Nebraska journalists revealed that few who arrived in the Great Plains believed the rumors of free land and supplies. Those who arrived without the means to purchase farms consistently explained that they expected to find work until they saved enough money to purchase land or file a homestead claim.

Whites who worked closely with the Exodusters, such as Parsons KFRA president M. W. Reynolds, understood that the occasional references they made to “forty acres and a mule” were metaphorical in nature. Reynolds emphatically maintained that he never found a single Exoduster who arrived in his section of Kansas believing that they would receive land or any other form of property, equine, mule, or otherwise. Likewise, correspondence with Kansas government officials confirms that Southern blacks generally understood that no government aid would be provided and that private charity could not be depended upon.²⁹²

²⁹² Joe Louis Caldwell, “Any Place But Here”; Henry Smith to St. John May 17, 1879; Testimony of J. W. Cromwell, *Voorhees Report*, I, 5-6; Testimony of Henry Adams, *Voorhees Report*, II, 110; Testimony of B. F. Watson, *Voorhees Report*, II, 339-41; Testimony of M. W. Reynolds, *Voorhees Report*, III, 301-2; Testimony of George T. Ruby, *Voorhees Report*, II, 64-5; *Atchison Daily Patriot*, April 28, 1879; *North Topeka Times*, May 16, 1879; *Wyandotte Herald*, June 26, 1879; *The Little Globe*, July 29, 1879; *Holton Record*, August 21, 1879; *Lawrence Daily Reporter*, September 5, 1879; *Republican Citizen* (Paola), October 4, 1879; *Miami Republican*, October 17, 1879; *Saline County Journal*, December 25, 1879; *Plattsmouth Herald*, July 17, 1879; *Daily State Journal* (Lincoln), July 27, 1879.

Assertions that the Exodus was a spontaneous and disordered migration convey the earnestness with which some of its participants fled the South but underestimate the complexity of the movement. Interviews of journalists and relief workers revealed that many of the migrants were members of larger groups who pooled resources, planned their journey, and elected leaders. For example, a group of thirty-eight families from Tennessee arrived on farms near Fort Scott that had been secured previously by their elected representatives. Another group organized in Texas elected leaders and migrated to Southeastern Kansas in 1880, forming a small colony near Coffeyville that successfully raised cotton and other crops for a number of years.

Contemporary sources suggest that, Like these groups, a significant portion of the Exodusters arrived in Kansas and Nebraska in small groups and purchased small farms with little or no white assistance. Many of these Exodusters resented their affiliation with their poorer counterparts and sought to correct white notions that all Southern blacks were in a state of perpetual destitution. Topeka's *Colored Citizen* also battled the stereotype of the Exodusters as paupers, and reminded Kansans that African Americans had organized small groups of migrants and homesteaders in Kansas since the end of the Civil War. The journal recognized that many migrants were impoverished despite their best efforts, and organized the Kansas Colored State Emigration Board with its headquarters in the *Colored Citizen's* office.²⁹³

²⁹³ Paul F. Harper, "Surely it Floweth With Milk and Honey," 128; KFRA Minutes, March 1, 1880; Testimony of B. J. Waters, *Voorhees Report*, III, 2; *Western Progress* (Olathe), April 3, 1879; *Colored Citizen* (Topeka), April 19, March 30, 1879; *Atchison Daily Patriot*, August 6, 1879; *Coffeyville Journal*, March 13, 1879; *Waterloo Courier*, December 10, 1879; *Cedar Rapids Times*, October 7, 1880.

Black leaders in Kansas typically supported the Exodus in their published statements, yet many African American residents perceived the potential of the movement to increase racial tensions in their communities. One observant white resident in Atchison noticed that some of the wealthier black residents felt they had little in common with the newcomers, referring to themselves as part of a “better class” of the race. Both rural and urban blacks throughout the state feared that a sudden increase in the state’s black population would increase white hostility. Since white residents already viewed all African Americans as part of one class, they explained, and even established black residents would be classed as impoverished newcomers.

Many of the Exodusters themselves represented this class-based tension, attempting to differentiate themselves in terms of class and region. One migrant sought to assure his new black and white neighbors that the members of his party were a class apart from the rest of the Exodusters, explaining that those who preceded him had “been confined to the worthless Negroes of the river counties.” National black leaders reflected these tensions, as Southern black political leaders sensed the potential of the migration to reduce their constituencies.

B.F. Watson, of Kansas City, Missouri, personified this tension. Watson was among the first to coordinate relief efforts and greatly sympathized with the conditions many faced in the South; however, Watson also told white political leaders that he opposed the migration and worked to redirect the migrants despite their intentions. Yet while white leaders simply sent the migrants to other cities, Watson

escorted the migrants to their new destination and lobbied on their behalf. The balance between aiding the migrants and maintaining one's own status was difficult, and many leading blacks in Kansas such as B. K. Bruce utilized ambiguous phrases in hopes of maintaining this balance – a practice typical of all community leaders.²⁹⁴

National black leaders mirrored this double-consciousness of class. Whites frequently mis-represented the statements of black leaders as an attempt to justify their own positions. John M. Langston was a victim of such distortion in as whites selectively quoted a speech delivered in September of 1879 offering his unqualified support to the Exodus as one of the greatest signs of hope for racial advancement. The comments of Frederick Douglass were also frequently misrepresented in the white press. Douglass was wary that the Exodus established a dangerous precedent of retreat in the face of white hostility. “The business of this nation is to protect its citizens where they are,” Douglass explained, “not to transport them where they will not need protection.” Douglass responded to the Topeka *Colored Citizen's* concern that he had caved to white pressure by explaining his empathy with the movement. Douglass recognized the migration as a display of black agency, yet he believed that the conditions that led to the migration must be confronted.

²⁹⁴ August Meier, *Negro Thought in America*; James T. Haley, *Afro-American Encyclopedia: Thoughts, Doings, and Sayings of the Race*, (Nashville: Haley and Florida, 1895), 344; Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, 78; Billy D. Higgins, “Negro Thought and the Exodus of 1879,” 45-52; Joe Louis Caldwell, “Any Place But Here,” 61-62; Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters*, 243; Testimony of James O’Hara, *Voorhees Report*, I, 52-69; Testimony of John Milton Brown, *Voorhees Report*, II, 261; Testimony of B. F. Watson, *Voorhees Report*, II, 338-44; Testimony of H. C. Solomon, *Voorhees Report*, III, 23; *Topeka Commonwealth*, May 9, 1879; *Kansas City Daily Journal*, April 15, 1879; *Atchison Daily Patriot*, August 16, 1879; *Nebraska Herald* (Plattsmouth), July 10, 17, 1879; *Omaha Weekly Herald*, May 30, 1879.

When black leaders could not be found to oppose the migration outright, comments of black leaders were simply taken out of context to assure whites that the migration was a mistake. Newspapers cited the alleged testimony of a Southern black man selected by white planters to travel to Kansas and observe the Exodus as proof that there was no race friction either in Kansas or in the South. Occasionally, sources were deliberately fabricated to entertain white readers while assuring them that blacks were well-treated in the South but had been misled to believe otherwise by demagogues.²⁹⁵

Despite the open admission of many Midwestern whites that they offered significantly lower wages to Exodusters than they did white laborers, few of the migrants returned to the South. Within a few years, both Republican and Democratic presses throughout the Great Plains detailed the success of these migrants as urban craftsmen, laborers, and owners of prosperous farms. Many reports explicitly stated that the migrants had benefited the region, yet most important was the absence of articles to the contrary.

A variety of Exoduster communities published their own weekly and monthly journals as Independence's *Living Age* and the *Refugee Lone Star* in cooperation with local newspapers. Junius Groves of Edwardsville is the most famous example of the

²⁹⁵ John Mercer Langston "The Exodus" in *Freedom and Citizenship: Selected Lectures and Addresses* (Washington, 1883), 232-58; Frederick Douglass, "The Negro Exodus from the Gulf States," reprinted in Carter G. Woodson, *Negro Orators and Their Orations* (Washington: Associated Publishers, 1925), 466; *Wyandot Herald* April 21, May 15, 1879; *Wyandotte Gazette*, April 25, 1879; *The Kansas Pilot*, May 5, 1879; *Lawrence Standard*, May 8, 1879; *Atchison Daily Patriot*, April 25, May 17, 1879; *Colored Citizen*, April 21, May 24, 31, September 6, October 18, 1879; *Daily State Journal* (Lincoln), September 19, 1879; *Cedar Falls Gazette*, April 18, 1879; *Coffeyville Journal*, September 27, 1879; *Omaha Weekly Herald*, September 19, 1879; *Leavenworth Times*, April 27, 1879.

success of the migrants, becoming one of the wealthiest men in the region, yet hundreds of black farmers purchased and cultivated large farms throughout the state.

Others, such as Alexander DePriest, escaped Southern violence by migrating to Kansas during the Exodus. The DePriest family lived in Saline for a decade before moving to Chicago where DePriest's son became the first U.S. Congressman from a Northern state. The Exodus likewise provided a legacy of black leaders in Kansas, such as teachers Mattie and Maytie Bradshaw and civil rights attorney William Bradshaw, whose grandparents migrated to a black agricultural colony in Hodgeman County. Other black leaders such as attorney John Lewis Waller frequently communicated with Governor John St. John regarding the migration and likewise moved to the region in the wake of the Exodus. Waller joined a host of black leaders who came to the state in the years before and after the Exodus in various campaigns against segregated schools and for the enforcement of the state's civil rights bill. The nation's most famous legal case was likewise related to the Exodus. Elisha Scott was youngest of thirteen children born to an Exoduster family who migrated from Memphis to Topeka. Scott attended the Jim Crow schools of that city before dismantling them as the lead attorney of Oliver Brown's case against the Topeka Board of Education.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ Testimony of B. F. Watson, *Voorhees Report*, III, 343; Testimony of M. W. Reynolds, *Voorhees Report*, III, 298-9; Testimony of Green Smith, *Voorhees Report*, III, 223-4; Testimony of A. A. Harris, *Voorhees Report*, II, 420-1; William Sherman Savage, *Blacks in the West* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), 104-5; Harold F. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), 164-5; Jacob Gordon, *Narratives of African Americans in Kansas, 1870-1992: Beyond the Exoduster Movement* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1993); Samuel Dicks, ed., "Eliza Bradshaw, an Exoduster Grandmother," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 26 (Summer 2003): 108-13; Randall B. Woods, "After the Exodus: John

Conclusion

Exodus was consistent with black religion, a combination of faith and works. The focus for studying the Exodus has been on continued bondage (Painter) and the Middle Passage (Jack and Athearn) from the South to Eastern Kansas cities. Arrival within Kansas communities illustrates the Black Freedom Struggle.²⁹⁷

As a result of this limited focus, historians have perpetuated the contemporary myth that the Exodusters all arrived penniless and congregated in large cities where they relied heavily upon the generosity of whites. The consequence of this limited inquiry has led even the finest and most recent histories of the Reconstruction to assert that these “naïve and impoverished freedmen” were a burden upon local residents. After being deceived by rumors that claimed free transportation, land, and supplies awaited them in the “happy land of Canaan,” the story still goes, these men and women would have starved to death without the aid of white charity and government assistance. A survey of over eighty newspapers throughout the Great Plains and a wealth of other primary sources, however, revealed that many Exodusters arrived directly in rural communities throughout the region and started

Lewis Waller and the Black Elite, 1878-1900,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 43 (Spring 1977): 172-192; Paul F. Harper, “Surely it Floweth With Milk and Honey,” 126-33; KFRA Minutes, March 1, 1880; Notes concerning the Nicodemus Colony as given by Rev. Daniel Hickman, 1913, Negro Exodus Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas; Waller to St. John, September 3, 1880; *South Kansas Tribune*, January 15, 1886; *Coffeyville Journal*, October 6, 1883; *Cedar Rapids Times*, October 7, 1880; Richard Kluger *Simple Justice* (New York: Random House, 1977), 384.

²⁹⁷ Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2001), 4-5; Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

their own farming communities without white assistance while the remainder were self-supporting upon arrival in Kansas and Nebraska or shortly thereafter.

Chapter 4: Demographics and the Color Line in the 1880s

Nearly one thousand Exodusters arrived in Nebraska between 1879 and 1880, but records of the Nebraska schools do not indicate that the migration led to any campaigns to re-introduce Jim Crow to the schools of that state. In fact, Nebraska City chose to abandon racial segregation in the summer of 1879 even as black families were entering the area. Although Jim Crow returned to Nebraska City a few years later, the demographic peak of Nebraska City's black community occurred at the precise moment that the schools were desegregated. The legacy of the Exodus in Kansas, however, was quite different in regards to segregated schools. The demographic changes wrought by the Exodus endured and led to numerous campaigns to create the color line in schools throughout the state. Wichita's public schools first considered the creation of a Jim Crow school in June of 1879. The impetus for this campaign was the fear among some whites that a large number of Exodusters would soon move to Wichita despite the efforts of city officials to "discourage" black migration. By 1880, Wichita's would-be segregationists abandoned this campaign as only a dozen black families with children resided in the city—a situation that reduced the perceived demand for separation as well as the economy of such a scheme. White residents in communities throughout eastern Kansas likewise discussed the merits of creating separate schools as a result of the Exodus. As was the case in Wichita, school officials throughout the region rejected separate schools when the black population represented both a small percentage of the

total number of students and a small number of pupils. Where separation might be achieved with greater efficiency, school officials embraced Jim Crow and sought to justify its creation as a progressive measure.²⁹⁸

While the Exodus led to the expansion of segregation, most Kansas schools did not immediately draw the color line for a variety of reasons. In addition to the added expense of creating separate schools, many white Kansans believed that the Exodusters would not long remain among them. Although most Exodusters remained in Kansas and enrolled their children in the local public schools, very few white parents actually withdrew their children in response. Segregationists, however, attempted to twist these few cases of voluntary withdrawal to create the image that white children had been forced from their own schools. “The little ‘Exodusters’ are victors in possession of the primary departments in some of the towns,” segregationists explained, clearly intimating that white children were the victims of racial oppression. Although segregationists likewise attempted to portray the creation of separate schools as a liberal measure, the nature of their rhetoric was revealing. An observer in Manhattan explained that segregationists spoke in threatening terms. “The school question here is looming up as a running sore,” the visitor reported to a

²⁹⁸ Nebraska State Board of Education Correspondence Files, RG 11 SG 1 Box 1 Letterpress books 1871-1880, vol. 9-10, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska; Wichita Board of Education Minutes, September 6, 1880; Paul E. Wilson, *A Time to Lose*, 39; *Wichita Eagle*, June 5, 12, 1879, September 9, 1880; *Wichita Weekly Beacon*, September 15, 1880; *Daily State Journal*, August 10, 1879; *Nebraska City Daily News*, September 8, 9, 10, 15, 1879.

Southern acquaintance, and “when the Negroes are in any numbers,” the man explained, “separate schools must be had.”²⁹⁹

The black population of Manhattan increased dramatically as a result of the Exodus, its 315 black residents representing fifteen percent of the city’s total population in 1880. Within a few years, the majority of this community occupied homes in the southwest part of the town by a combination of choice and coercion. Although the newcomers naturally sought the comfort of being a part of a community that accepted them, those who attempted to move elsewhere were effectively “dissuaded” by whites in Manhattan. The existence of a large black population in one section of the city led to the creation of segregated classes in 1884. Nine years later the school board approved the construction of a separate schoolhouse despite opposition from the black community.³⁰⁰

The migration also led to the expansion of segregation in the state’s largest cities. Topeka had established separate schools prior to the Exodus, but segregation was not complete in the capital city until after the turn of the century. Even after the Exodus dramatically increased its black population to 26% of the city’s total population, officials deemed that black children who did not live adjacent to the city’s two Jim Crow schools should continue to attend their local schools with white children. Topeka might have abandoned its irregular system of segregation had it not

²⁹⁹ *Cedar Rapids Times*, October 13, 1881; Jackson J. Austin, “A Short Educational History of Labette County, Kansas,” (M. A. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, 1937); Kansas State Census, 1885; Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, 193-4.

³⁰⁰ Nupur Chaudhuri, “‘We All Seem Like Brothers and Sisters:’ The African-American Community in Manhattan, Kansas, 1865-1940,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 14 (Winter, 1991): 270-288.

been for the Exodus, as school records indicate that officials were considering a variety of cost-saving measures throughout the late 1870s. The Exodus reduced the likelihood of limiting or even eliminating Jim Crow from the Topeka schools, as demographic changes enhanced the economy of segregation when black enclaves emerged in several Topeka neighborhoods. As a result, school officials created three additional Jim Crow Schools within two years of the migration. White Topekans defended the expansion of segregation by presenting it as a liberal measure, explaining that blacks should accept the creation of separate schools “with thankful hearts.” After all, whites maintained, any provision for black education from public funds was indicative of a charitable people. Even the best and most recent histories of the African American experience in Kansas tacitly endorse this sentiment by minimizing black protest to segregation. Nell Painter claims that the black community of Topeka considered desegregation as “a lost cause.” Although black leaders in Topeka and throughout Kansas had once nursed dreams of integrated schools, Painter claims, following the Exodus these men and women “bowed to reality.” Utilizing one article from a white newspaper, Painter concludes that black community members “met and passed resolutions to the effect that since they had no alternative to segregated schools, they would insist on Black teachers for the good of the students and the good of the community.” This conclusion suggests an accommodation to segregation that never existed in Topeka or any other community in Middle America. Not only did the black community of Topeka continue their agitation by confronting

inequalities between the white and black schools, they also directly challenged Jim Crow through resolutions, boycotts, and at least two court cases during the 1880s.³⁰¹

Topeka's black community met in mass meetings throughout 1879 and 1880 to protest both the unequal conditions their children faced as well as the very practice of segregation itself. These efforts culminated in the fall of 1880 when the community supported a lawsuit against the Topeka Board of Education that sought to integrate the schools of that city. Eveline and Lillie Phillips had attended the integrated Clay Street School until the expansion of segregation resulted in the board's decision to transfer the children to the recently created Sumner School. James Phillips protested against the exclusion of his children, accompanied his girls to the school in the fall of 1880, and demanded their admittance. The black community utilized the board's refusal to admit the girls as a test case, pooling financial resources to secure the services of two sympathetic white attorneys. Topeka officials twice delayed the hearing because the city was in the process of becoming a city of the first class and therefore empowered to operate separate schools by state statute.³⁰²

Although Phillips withdrew his lawsuit following the city's reclassification, area newspapers demonstrated the kinds of challenges black plaintiffs would face in the court of public opinion. Whites marginalized Phillips and his supporters as non-representative of the black community, as the vast majority were reportedly content with separate schools. Unlike these "good" black citizens, the agitators were traitors

³⁰¹ Minutes of the Topeka Board of Education, 1879-1882; Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters*, 49-51.

³⁰² *Colored Citizen*, June 21, September 20, 1879; *Emporia Ledger*, March 18, 1880; *Topeka Commonwealth*, November 2, 9, 1880; *Kansas State Journal*, October 25, 1880.

to their race, area newspapers explained, as they wished to associate exclusively and presumably intimately with whites. Although Phillips was employed as a clerk, the local press mockingly referred to him as a “whitewasher” who was also a traitor to the best interests of the city, his selfish ambition leading to his desire to separate himself and his children from those of his race even if it meant the destruction of the public school system itself. The *Atchison Globe* suggested that Phillips and his supporters should defer to whites in all matters regarding the operation of the public schools given the disparity in taxable property. Ironically, this same newspaper six months prior had attacked the “thin” argument of wealthy parents who claimed that the poor should defer to the wealthy in school affairs for the exact same reason.³⁰³

The white press of Atchison was particularly upset to find that the black community in their city were engaged in similar protest movements. Although nearly two decades had passed since the Emancipation Proclamation, Atchison whites continued to refer to their black neighbors as “newly-freed.” While this label was historically inaccurate, the assertion that members of the black community were recently released from bondage helped to sanitize the separation of their children. After all, whites explained, one would not expect the children of slaves to progress as quickly as the children of free parents. As a result, segregation was justified as the children of “newly-freed” men and women would need special accommodations. Once again, the rhetoric of white segregationists betrayed their claims of racial

³⁰³ *Atchison Globe*, April 5, October 29, 1880.

neutrality, lampooning the naiveté of black protesters who believed that freedom meant equality.

Although Phillips failed to defeat Jim Crow, protests against segregation continued in the state capital as the black community held mass meetings and conventions throughout the early 1880s. One of the largest meetings of this kind occurred in 1882, as over 2,000 black residents of Topeka attended a mass meeting held in conjunction with a statewide meeting of black leaders. The convention passed several resolutions, including a declaration against discrimination in public schools. Although Governor St. John addressed this group, he avoided any mention of segregation. Like so many other white politicians who addressed black audiences in Middle America, St. John praised the educational achievements of blacks and called for the advancement of the race through education. However, St. John deliberately omitted any indication of whether that advancement would or should occur within Jim Crow schools. Area newspapers observed the political maneuverings of St. John and other leading Republicans, explaining that the importance of the black vote led such men to maneuver delicately around the issue of school segregation.³⁰⁴

Atchison considered promoting Jim Crow to the high school in 1880 after a black student attempted to enroll into Atchison High School. Because the costs of a separate high school would be great, whites were willing to stretch their definition of separate but equal to comply with economy. Local media suggested that the great majority of Atchison residents were opposed to “promiscuously mixing” white and

³⁰⁴ *Atchison Globe*, October 29, 1880, October 10, 1881; *Topeka Daily Capital*, August 5, 1882.

black high school students in language that hinted at miscegenation. The press also issued a veiled threat to school officials, predicting that any board candidate who supported integration of the high school would ultimately suffer both defeat and public shame. The idea that segregation represented an injustice was also minimized, as local papers assumed that the only reason a white candidate would support integration was as part of a scheme aimed at capturing the black vote. Atchison's segregationists also attempted to play the role of victims, countering the black community's petitions calling for equal protection with the assertion that that they too had rights that blacks must respect. Even after making such statements, whites vigorously maintained that they possessed no racial prejudice. Their financial support of black public schools, segregationists maintained, clearly illustrated that they were liberal on questions of race. "The colored people ought to be satisfied that they have fine schools for their children without paying a nickel of the expense," one editorial claimed. Because of such generosity, segregationists explained, blacks should be both grateful and content to send their children to a Jim Crow high school rather than attempting to "destroy" the white high school by insisting on their children's admittance. Such an act, whites asserted, would lead to the withdrawal of white children, yet white parents placed the potential act of destruction at the feet of those parents who sought to enroll their children.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁵ *Atchison Globe*, March 5, 27, 30, 31, April 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 1880; Kansas State Historical Society, *Columbian History of Education in Kansas* (Topeka: Hamilton Printing Company, 1893), 98-99.

Even while claiming that their preference for segregation was not due to racism, whites in Atchison candidly admitted that they did not wish to “mix” with black adults. The insistence upon integration among a handful of whites, segregationists explained, was the height of hypocrisy. White advocates of admitting black children into the high school would never agree to forced association with black adults in their professional and social endeavors, segregationists explained. Integrationists also labeled their opponents as hypocritical. For example, a white editor published a poem that mocked school officials for considering the creation of a second high school while failing to provide electives such as German in the white school. A number of whites agreed that a separate high school was foolhardy but also opposed integration. W. S. Cain was among the most outspoken residents of Atchison on the subject. Cain defended the right of black students to receive a high school education but, like the majority of whites, preferred for them to do so within “their own schools.” As a candidate for the school board, Cain claimed to understand the special needs of blacks given his experience as an officer within a black Civil War regiment. Cain’s own autobiography omits his support for segregation yet draws heavily on the abolitionist leanings of his father, whom Cain claims was a supporter of John Brown. The “tenderness” that Cain reportedly felt for the black children of Atchison seems disingenuous, however, considering Cain’s opposition to black suffrage after the Civil War and his continued belief that Congressional Reconstruction represented Yankee interference.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁶ *Atchison Globe*, March 5, 27, 30, 31, April 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 1880; *Columbian History of*

Although the board ultimately decided against the creation of a separate high school, it is clear that the board based its decision in favor of limited integration on their own financial interests and the inefficiency of operating a separate high school for a few children. Integration was more symbolic than substantive, however, as students and administrators drew the color line against the two black children who integrated the high school in 1881. Whites excluded these children from school activities and denied their request to march among their classmates in a city parade.³⁰⁷

Members of the black community continued to press for meaningful integration, protesting the exclusion of black children from extracurricular activities while launching a formal campaign against the school's policy of segregated seating in 1887. The staff of the *Atchison Globe* typified the white response to the campaign, declaring themselves as friends of the race yet claiming that they could not understand the why blacks were upset. After all, whites explained, it was whites who had "given" black children the right to attend the school. Separate seating was not a violation of the students' rights, the paper claimed, and blacks should know better than to demand inclusion where they were not wanted. The daily was particularly troubled by reports that even the "good" members of the race who had never forced themselves where they were not wanted were among the leaders of this protest movement, and predicted that the school would soon be taken over by the black students the same way that black adults were allegedly taking over the city of

Education in Kansas, 98-99; William S. Cain, *Autobiography of Captain W. S. Cain With Sketches of Relatives, Memories of 1861-1865* (Topeka: Crane and Company, 1908).

³⁰⁷ *Atchison Globe*, September 27, 1881.

Atchison. Although the previous generation of African Americans had been tempered by the lash, the *Globe* explained, members of this generation were more likely to be impudent. “The whip is in their hands, and they propose to exercise it in securing perfect social equality.” The *Globe* was perhaps more astute in its predictions that the black community would eventually succeed in getting school segregation outlawed. Although whites would respond to such laws by creating private schools, the *Globe* sarcastically remarked that even this strategy would be trumped by black insolence as legal barriers against Jim Crow would ultimately spread to private institutions. In the near term, however, Jim Crow operated both formally and informally in Atchison. Black children were officially segregated in the lower grades and excluded by custom and rule from extracurricular activities in the high school. In 1888, black graduates were even excluded from their own graduation ceremony.³⁰⁸

African Americans in Atchison continued their protest against both the practice of segregation and the inconvenience and unequal facilities which resulted. Although black parents demonstrated that over 100 children of various grades were crowded into one room, the local white press responded by denigrating the protest as evidence of the ingratitude of the black community. Because blacks always believed that they were being discriminated against, the *Globe* explained, the best way to convince black citizens to accept their segregated school would be to ban them from the building. Such an action would not only remind black parents how fortunate they were to have schools provided for their children, the paper concluded, it would result

³⁰⁸ *Atchison Globe*, September 24, 29, 30, 1887; William H. Chafe, “The Negro and Populism: A Kansas Case Study,” *Journal of Southern History*, 34 (August 1968): 406.

in black parents sending their children to the school in protest. Of course, this argument overlooked the fact that black parents in this case were actually protesting against the overcrowded condition of the Lincoln School, a condition caused by attendance rather than a boycott. The city's segregated schools were placed on a half-day system in the early 1880s, with children attending either morning or afternoon sessions. Black protest against overcrowding, as well as schools that were in total disrepair, ultimately led to the expansion of facilities throughout the city by the end of the decade.³⁰⁹

Blacks in Kansas City, Kansas likewise protested both the creation of the color line and the unequal conditions that existed within segregated schools. In addition to generating petitions and boycotts, African Americans raised money to create a private school for black children in 1880. The effort likely received a boost when black parents withdrew their children from one of the city's Jim Crow schools the following year after that school's white teacher abused his students. A number of children testified that the teacher "whipped them unmercifully" after knocking them down and kicking them, as well as displaying lewd pictures and subjecting them to bawdy stories of his sexual conquests. School officials demonstrated their disregard for the management of the city's separate schools by dismissing this protest and retaining the teacher for the following semester, even after every parent withdrew their children from the school. The white press in neighboring Atchison found this

³⁰⁹ *Atchison Globe*, March 5, 31, April 5, October 12, November 29, 1880, April 6, 1881, December 16, 1882, April 11, September 17, 24, 1883, October 18, 1884, November 5, 1889; *Atchison Daily Champion*, June 15, 1886.

entire episode amusing. The teacher was likely at fault, the *Atchison Globe* remarked, as any white man who would degrade himself by teaching in a black school was already guilty of worse crimes than that for which he was accused.³¹⁰

School segregation emerged in Kansas City as various communities with separate schools became part of the city's school district throughout the late 19th century. As early as 1884, however, a few neighborhoods in the northeastern part of Kansas City proper were all but exclusively black. For example, 681 of 782 school-aged children living in the second and third wards of Kansas City in 1884 were black. Given the presence of black families throughout the city, a number of black children attended primarily white schools until at least 1890 due to the expense of maintaining separate schools in primarily white neighborhoods. For example, black and white children were classmates at the Lincoln school located at Sixth and State Avenue throughout the 1880s. The closing of this school in 1890 led to the creation of the color line as the board determined that the black children of this neighborhood would be transferred to the overcrowded Third Ward Colored School. Black protest led to improvements and additional classrooms at this school, being a fully-graded and modern facility by 1904 when it was renamed the Douglass School in honor of the famous black leader.³¹¹

Attucks Elementary School was but one of many black schools in Kansas City, but in many ways its story is representative. Attucks began as a one-room

³¹⁰ *Emporia Ledger*, July 15, 1880; *Atchison Globe*, January 27, 1881.

³¹¹ William W. Boone, *A History of Black Education in Kansas City, Kansas* (Kansas City: Kansas City Kansas Community College, 1986); Annual Report of the Wyandotte Board of Education for the Year Ending July 31, 1884; Annual Report of the Wyandotte Board of Education for the Year Ending July 31, 1887; Annual Report of the Wyandotte Board of Education for the Year Ending July 31, 1889.

school for black children in 1880, originally housing grades one through eight within one room. Although board members refused to devote the resources needed to modernize Attucks until 1939, the Board's official policy was one of separate but equal. Enforcement of the policy often required black protest, as conditions within the city's Jim Crow schools became a priority only when members of the black community appeared before the board. Although school records indicate that all students received the same educational training and were held to the same academic standards, surveys of the city's segregated schools clearly indicated that these institutions were a lower priority.³¹²

By the early 1880s, only Topeka, Leavenworth, and Atchison met the population criteria required for cities of the first class and therefore explicitly allowed to operate segregated schools. Jim Crow was by no means limited to these cities, however, and no laws explicitly banned segregation in cities of the second and third class. A number of these smaller cities had created separate schools prior to 1880 and many more would do so in the next three decades irrespective of the law. One of these communities was Ottawa, which responded to a number of complaints by their white constituents protesting against the presence of black students. The creation of a separate school in that year was met by black protest as members of the community passed a resolution opposed to the practice of placing all black children into a single classroom. This resolution exclaimed that the black community would "not submit to

³¹² William W. Boone, *A History of Black Education in Kansas City, Kansas*, 5-6; Public Schools of Kansas City, Kansas, *Teacher's Hand Book, Together With Rules and Regulations of the School Board 1886-1887* (Kansas City Kansas: V.J. Lane & Company, 1886). A survey of future handbooks and annual reports of the Kansas City Kansas Board of Education reveal that the committee system changed in 1889 and eliminated its "Committee on Colored Schools."

any such action” and affirmed their desire to fight the board as well as any other entity that sought to impose the color line in Ottawa. Elijah Tinnon led the protest and sued the Ottawa Board of Education in 1880, seeking a writ of mandamus to compel school officials to admit his children into their neighborhood schools.³¹³

Although the records of the Franklin County courts do not include any documentation regarding the Tinnon case, both of the city’s local newspapers explicitly state that this court agreed with the plaintiff and ruled that segregated schools violated the 14th Amendment. Both papers also indicate that the plaintiff’s argument was based solely upon the practice of segregation itself and did not contend that the school was a violation of the 14th Amendment because of inferior facilities. The Ottawa Board of Education based its defense on the argument that the school laws of Kansas gave local officials broad discretionary powers, something District Court Judge Nelson Stephens agreed was true. Despite these powers, Stephens declared that the practice of separating children on the basis of race could not be authorized by the legislature regardless of a city’s population. Legal segregation within cities of the first class was “a rule plainly discriminating” against black children and “a violation of the rights conferred by the 14th amendment,” Stephens concluded, explicitly declaring Kansas’ only legal sanction of Jim Crow “inoperative and void.”³¹⁴

³¹³ Minutes of the Ottawa Board of Education, May 19, June 7, 1880, presented as evidence in *The Board of Education of the City of Ottawa et. al. v. Leslie Tinnon*, 26 Kan. 1 (1881); *Ottawa Daily Republican*, September 19, 1880.

³¹⁴ *Ottawa Journal*, January 27, 1881; *Ottawa Daily Republican*, January 27, 1881. These two articles misspell the plaintiff’s surname as “Tinnore” and “Tinnan” respectively.

The Ottawa Board of Education refused to accept this judgment and appealed the case to the Kansas Supreme Court. Here the board claimed that the practice of segregation equally discriminated against whites as they were separated from black children. The board also sought to sanitize the negative effects of segregation. Although the board denied that the practice created and reinforced notions of racial inferiority, they ironically did so in terms that expressed their own belief in white superiority. “We claim that whatever the subtle and indeterminable influence may be which is exercised by the company of the white children with the colored,” the board declared, “it is not one which the latter are entitled to demand as of right. It can only be claimed on the ground that the Caucasian youth is brighter and quicker than his dark-skinned brother, and that the contact would tend to sharpen and inspirit the latter.”³¹⁵

The Kansas Supreme Court ruled in Tinnon’s favor but ironically diminished the weight of the District Court’s decision by refusing to confront the fundamental legal question of segregation as a violation of the 14th Amendment. The justices of the high court explained that they “assumed” that the legislature had the authority to legally authorize segregation and deliberately avoided the question by making only tacit references to the lower court’s opinion. “The question whether, the legislatures of states have the power to pass laws making distinctions between white and colored citizens, and the extent of such power, if it exists, is a question which can finally be determined only by the Supreme Court of the United States; and hence we pass this

³¹⁵ *The Board of Education of the City of Ottawa et. al. v. Leslie Tinnon*, 26 Kan. 1 (1881).

question, and proceed to the next, over which we have more complete jurisdiction.” This “next question” involved the matter of whether cities of the second class could legally operate separate schools despite the fact that only cities of the first class were explicitly authorized to do so by Kansas law. The Kansas Supreme Court’s decision cited the Iowa Supreme Court’s decisions regarding segregation in Muscatine and Keokuk by declaring that Jim Crow required explicit statutory authority and was therefore illegal in Ottawa and other Kansas communities of the second class. The court’s opinion also matched the rhetoric of Justice Cole’s declaration against Jim Crow as a precedent for expanding prejudice to other classes. “If the board has the power, because of race, to establish separate schools for children of African descent, then the board has the power to establish separate schools for persons of Irish descent or German descent; and if it has the power, because of color, to establish separate schools for black children, then it has the power to establish separate schools for red-headed children and blondes. We do not think that the board has any such power.”³¹⁶

The ruling likewise matched the rhetoric of the Iowa cases by declaring segregation as contrary to the interests of the community. “Is it not better for the grand aggregate of human society, as well as for individuals,” the majority opinion declared, “that all children should mingle together and learn to know each other?” The Tinnon court also drew heavily upon the Progressive dialectic of history, painting segregation as a relic of a previous age. “The tendency of the times is, and has been for several years to abolish all distinctions on account of race, or color, or previous

³¹⁶ *The Board of Education of the City of Ottawa et. al. v. Leslie Tinnon*, 26 Kan. 1 (1881).

condition of servitude, and to make all persons absolutely equal before the law.”

“Therefore,” the opinion continued, “unless it appears clear beyond all question that the legislature intended to authorize such distinctions to be made, we should not hold that any such authority has been given. And we certainly should not expect to find that the legislature had given any such authority during the centennial year of 1876, when the minds of all men were inclined to adopt the most cosmopolitan views of human rights, and not to adopt any narrow or contracted views founded merely upon race, or color, or clan, or kinship.”³¹⁷

The case also demonstrated the connection between race and gender. In its attempt to portray racial segregation as consistent with the broad discretionary powers granted to school officials, the Ottawa Board of Education claimed that schools ought to be authorized to divide children by race just as they might separate boys and girls. The argument was somewhat disingenuous as gender segregation was only informally practiced in the public schools of Kansas and was not explicitly authorized by Kansas law. Rather than simply dismiss this argument as a non sequitor, however, the Court demonstrated the era’s ideas about both race and gender by confronting this argument. Gender segregation was defensible, the court explained, because gender differences were inherent and men and women needed to be educated differently to prepare them for their proper roles as providers and caretakers. Race was another matter altogether, however, as racial differences were less inherent than the result of

³¹⁷ *The Board of Education of the City of Ottawa et. al. v. Leslie Tinnon*, 26 Kan. 1 (1881); Daniel G. Neuenswander, “A Legal History of Segregation in the Kansas Public Schools From Statehood to 1970,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1973), 48-52.

historical experience. The court stopped short of declaring race as a social construct yet implicitly argued that ending segregation in the schools would lead to the obliteration of racial differences. Gender was another matter altogether, however, as neither integration nor segregation would change the natural differences between men and women.³¹⁸

Future U.S. Supreme Court Justice David Brewer dissented against this majority opinion in declaring that local control should be inviolate. “I think free schools mean equal school advantages to every child,” Brewer explained, “leaving questions of classification by territory, sex, or color, to be determined by the wisdom of the local authorities.” Just as the majority opinion attacked segregation through somewhat disingenuous examples of how Jim Crow might be expanded on the basis of hair color if allowed to operate on basis of race, Brewer sought to defend his belief in local control through counterfactual argument. “For instance,” Brewer hypothesized, “I do not think a child in North Lawrence can insist upon going to a school in South Lawrence simply because it dislikes the teacher in North Lawrence.” Brewer’s examples descended into absurdities, asking whether his peers would strip school boards of all their authority in the face of parental protest. While the issue obviously aroused the anger of the future Supreme Court justice, Brewer attempted to present his views in racially-neutral terminology. Brewer explained that it was not up

³¹⁸ *The Board of Education of the City of Ottawa et. al. v. Leslie Tinnon*, 26 Kan. 1 (1881).

to the courts to decide whether segregation was desirable but merely to determine the limits of local authority.³¹⁹

While local control was a paramount issue in all aspects of school governance, the issue of local control was repeatedly used throughout Middle America to defend segregation in ways that paralleled the defense of slavery through abstract references to “state’s rights.” In both cases, proponents of the color line cited historic truths in abstract and deceptive ways. Just as the United States was formed with an eye to protecting the powers of its constituent parts, segregationists argued, the founding fathers of Kansas sought to empower local boards to operate their schools according to their best judgment. Of course, neither of these arguments addressed the essential question of whether slavery or segregation ought to continue.

Despite the stated opinion of segregationists who claimed that school officials were empowered to operate separate schools under their broad discretionary powers, the *Tinnon* decision and subsequent cases inspired segregationists to seek legal protection for Jim Crow. Segregationists waged dozens of attempts over the few decades that sought to expand statutory authority for separate schools. With only two exceptions, however, this authority was denied due to the activism of black communities and the reluctance of Kansas officials to endorse Jim Crow. African Americans also attempted to challenge the existing laws on the subject, organizing scores of local and statewide meetings which failed to eliminate statutory authority for separate schools in cities of the first class. Considering the hesitancy of the state

³¹⁹ *The Board of Education of the City of Ottawa et. al. v. Leslie Tinnon*, 26 Kan. 1 (1881).

legislature to deny individual districts the power to maintain segregated schools and the tolerance displayed towards those districts which did so illegally, it is clear that the legislature wished to avoid the question.³²⁰

Local control occasionally meant the rejection of segregation despite the existence of large black populations. The tiny black community of Emporia Kansas grew rapidly in the winter of 1879-1880 as approximately six-hundred Exodusters migrated to Lyon County. Although white backlash against the migrants is evident by the change in rhetoric of the local press as the migrants “descended” upon Emporia, school officials rejected Jim Crow even after white residents petitioned the board. Emporia’s first public schools operated prior to the Civil War and were attended by both white and black students. School overcrowding was always a concern in Emporia but became particularly acute prior to the Exodus. School children were enlisted in the board’s campaign to secure additional funds to build new schools, with the children singing for “more room, dear voters, more room” during an 1879 performance. Unlike a number of later campaigns to create or expand the color line in the public schools of other cities, the children of Emporia were not enlisted in support of Jim Crow. The existence of 72 black children enrolled among 663 white children in January of 1880 certainly exceeded the size and proportion of a number of communities that operated separate schools. The lack of residential

³²⁰ For more on the importance of local control in Kansas’ school history, see Paul E. Wilson, *A Time to Lose*.

segregation likely frustrated any attempt to create the color line, however, as every classroom throughout the city had a large white majority.³²¹

This white majority was narrowest in the city's Third Ward, leading to a petition by white residents of that part of the city calling for the creation of a separate public school reserved exclusively for white children in May of 1880. This request was quietly derailed by members of the Emporia Board of Education who referred the matter to a special committee that tabled the matter. Once again, local leadership and black protest were essential in preventing segregation as members of the black community mobilized in opposition to the measure. Equally important was the fact that many of the leaders of the board were outspoken against segregation. Board member Lyman B. Kellogg had argued against segregation as early as 1870 when he referred to the practice as "the last relic of the senseless prejudice against color which has disgraced the American people." Richard Cordley was also a member of the Emporia school board whose position on race was demonstrated by his commitment to abolitionism during the Bleeding Kansas. Finally, abolitionist Preston Plumb remained a central figure in the community.³²²

The issue of school segregation was revived by whites in Emporia five years later following the resignation of Kellogg and Cordley. School census records indicate that the city's increasing black population was still scattered throughout the

³²¹ *Emporia Ledger*, May 8, December 4, 11, 18, 1879; *Emporia Daily News*, April 9, May 13, June 3, 4, December 1, 2, 22, 1879, February 12, 1880; *Emporia Ledger*, October 16, December 4, 18, 25, 1879, January 22, February 19, 26, March 4, 11, 18, 25, April 22, 29, 1880.

³²² Minutes of the Emporia Board of Education, May 3, 10, 24, 31, June 7, August 2, 1880; *Emporia Daily News*, May 6, 13, 27, June 3, 4, September 16, 1880; *Junction City Union*, May 1, 1880; *Kansas Educational Journal*, September 1870.

city yet nearly 70% of the city's black residents lived in the Second and Third Ward. White residents framed their petition calling for the creation of a separate school for these children as a progressive measure aimed at relieving the overcrowded condition. Likewise, the ninety-four petitioners who signed the appeal explained that they were motivated by "the best interests of both white and colored children" Although segregationists claimed that blacks supported their campaign and had signed the petition calling for the creation of a separate school; census records indicate only white participation. While whites fabricated claims of black support for segregation, Emporia's black community met and passed resolutions declaring their unqualified opposition to the measure as a violation of state law and their children's best interests. Despite the continued protest of the black community, both of the city's Republican newspapers continued to support segregation as a progressive measure demanded by white and black residents. Even the *Republican*, which had reprinted the petition of the black community, maintained that the measure was originated by black parents. The lily-white nature of the campaign was deliberately obscured by the city's Republican press, claiming that the measure was "seconded by a large number of white citizens" after members of the black community requested interracial support for Jim Crow.³²³

The 1885 movement for segregation culminated in a meeting of the Emporia Board of Education wherein the leaders of the campaign defended their plan as consistent with the interests of black children as well as the practices of the state's

³²³ Minutes of the Emporia Board of Education, August 7, 1882, August 3, 1885; *Emporia Daily Republican*, September 22, 23, 1885; *Emporia Weekly News*, September 24, 1885.

most progressive school systems. Existing sources do not indicate whether members of the black community were present at this meeting. However, given the fact that the committee appointed by the board to investigate the issue returned that same evening with a report citing the Tinnon case as evidence that such a plan would be illegal, one might logically conclude that members of Emporia's black community had investigated the issue themselves and informed the board of the Tinnon case. As has been demonstrated in earlier chapters, local school boards were typically unaware of the nuances of the state school laws and were likewise uninformed about recent legal decisions related to the schools. As a result, it is unlikely that this ad hoc committee would return the same evening armed with the knowledge of the Tinnon decision unless opponents of segregation had already investigated the issue in advance. The committee itself sought to distance itself from the issue, concluding that they lacked the power to grant the popular request due to the court's decision and the legislature's failure to explicitly authorize segregation rather than confronting the issue themselves.³²⁴

White residents of Emporia were especially dissatisfied with the decision of their elected school officials against segregation given the willingness of other cities of the second and third class to create the color line regardless of statutory authority. Angry letters appeared in both of the city's Republican newspapers that attacked both the court's decision as "contrary to common sense" as well as their own board's refusal to test this decision. Segregationists agreed that Jim Crow should be limited to

³²⁴ Minutes of the Emporia Board of Education, September 21, 1885; *Emporia Weekly News*, September 24, 1885; *Emporia Daily Republican*, September 23, 1885.

where it was most cost-effective but felt that there was no logical reason to base that line upon the total population of a given city. Instead, segregationists argue, school boards should be empowered to make separation based on local conditions such as existed in Emporia given its large percentage of black residents. At least one advocate of segregation plainly admitted that prejudice necessitated local autonomy regarding Jim Crow. “For though Kansas is the paradise of the colored race,” the author explained, “even Kansas has a serpent in it that will not be reconciled with the mixing of the races in our schools.” Of course, such candid admissions were never taken to the point of admitting malicious intent. The author concluded that the act of forced integration would harm race relations while good racial neighbors built good racial fences. “Not that the people of Kansas are the enemies of the colored people,” the letter concluded, “we are their friends; but it is simply inconvenient for whites to be forced into the same apartment with as many blacks.” Other whites presented those few blacks, if any, who approved their scheme as possessing both manliness and independence. Although white Emporians called upon the legislature to amend the school laws to explicitly allow Jim Crow in the cities of the second class, no such law was passed during the 1880s.³²⁵

As a result, the schools of Emporia remained integrated as the city’s growth stagnated and Emporia remained a city of the second class until after 1930. The fact that Emporia’s relative percentage of black residents declined after 1885 is also significant, although it is important to remember that many smaller cities with much

³²⁵ *Emporia Daily Republican*, September 23, 1885; *Emporia Weekly News*, September 24, 1885.

smaller black populations created the color line irrespective of law and economy. The liberal legacy of Preston Plumb, Lyman Kellogg, and Richard Cordley was continued with the leadership of outspoken Klan critic William Allen White who likewise spoke against segregation. However, the emergence of residential segregation led to a situation where two-thirds of the city's black students attended the same school by 1936 and represented over half of that school's enrollment. A survey taken in that year of the city's educators resulted in only four teachers who explicitly opposed racial segregation. Only one of these teachers spoke against Jim Crow in terms that made no reference to the cost of such a scheme, presenting segregation as fundamentally un-American. To "encourage compulsory segregation on the basis of race," this teacher explained, was "to defeat one of the fundamental purposes of the public school in a democracy." Regardless of the victory represented by Emporia's integrated schools, these attitudes limited the opportunities of black students attending the teacher's college in Emporia. Although black students in other Kansas colleges were able to secure student-teaching positions as part of their curriculum within local segregated schools, the Emporia schools did not allow black students to teach white children until just prior to the board's decision to hire the city's first black teacher in 1962.³²⁶

³²⁶ Kansas State Census, 1885, 1895, 1905; Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900; Maurice Sidney Stokes, "A Study of Negro Children Living in Emporia," (M. A. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, 1936), 9, 64; *Kansas Educational Journal*, September 1870; *Kansas News*, June 6, 1857; *Emporia Weekly Gazette*, June 14, 1956; *Emporia Gazette*, April 4, 5, 1957; *Topeka Plaindealer*, August 20, 1909, November 29, 1915; Jacob Stotler, *Annals of Emporia and Lyon County, 1857-1882* (Emporia KS: unknown binding, 1882); Ted F. McDaniel, ed., *Our Land: A History of Lyon County Kansas* (Emporia: Lyon County Bicentennial Commission, 1976), 157-60; "Emporia Kansas Centennial Celebration Historical Booklet," Emporia Centennial Commission, 1957.

Although Topeka's black population experienced the greatest net increase due to the Exodus, communities in Southeastern Kansas experienced the largest demographic increases in terms of relative percentage. For example, the black population of Chetopa increased from a handful of families in the late 1870s to approximately one-fifth of the city's 1500 residents. As a result, this demographic change aroused considerable white hostility and led to a campaign to separate the children of migrants into separate classrooms during the Exodus. In 1882, the Chetopa Board of Education built a new school for white children and reserved the old building for black students. Members of the black community protested against the creation of the color line, modifying their strategy to secure local control over this school after this protest failed. As a result, well-qualified black teachers replaced the former white instructors while African American leaders such as Henry C. Richardson won election to the school board. The neighboring farming community of Oswego likewise segregated its schools following the Exodus. Black protest took a similar shape in Oswego, as members of the community recruited and secured black graduates of the state's Normal Schools in nearby Pittsburg and Emporia while black leaders were regularly elected to both the school board and city council. The creation of five black churches between these two small towns likewise served the educational needs of the community. Despite the benefits of local control, extant photographs of school facilities in both of these towns illustrate the inequality of school facilities in the small towns of Southeastern Kansas.³²⁷

³²⁷ Kansas State Census, 1885; Fifth Anniversary Edition of the *Parsons Blade*, July 31, 1897; John St.

African Americans sensed these pressures and often choose to avoid them by settling their own rural communities throughout Southeastern and Central Kansas. Although many histories contend that the schools of Nicodemus were open to all races, there is little evidence to support the contention that white and black children attended school together during the peak of that town's existence. Rural schoolhouses were typically built every two to four miles, resulting in residentially-segregated farming communities such as Nicodemus and Dunlap being home to de facto school segregation. Although limited school integration occurred at Dunlap prior to the Exodus, in 1880 school officials voted to separate white and black children with the later attending a subscription school at their parent's expense. Black colonies such as Nicodemus and Dunlap were unique, however, in their ability to establish their own academies which taught a wide range of subjects including literature and business. The Dunlap school prepared many students for successful careers in teaching and many of its graduates went on to study at the University of Kansas.³²⁸

The toleration of whites for African Americans who lived in black colonies should not be confused for acceptance or interracial cooperation, although there were

John to L. S. Childs, January 9, 1880, Records of Governor St. John, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas; Photographs of Labette County Schools, Ira Clemens Collection, Special Collections, Pittsburg State University. Local histories fail to mention the existence of separate schools and typically ignore the very existence of black communities in Labette County. For example, see "Oswego Centennial, 1867-1967," Oswego Public Library; Nelson Case, "History of Labette County, Kansas," (Topeka: Crane and Company, 1893), 57-58, 187; Jackson J. Austin, "A Short Educational History of Labette County, Kansas," (M. A. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, 1937).³²⁸ *Emporia Ledger*, May 29, 1879, August 26, 1880; Tenth Census of the United States, 1880; Adel F. Throckmorton, *Kansas Educational Progress 1858-1967* (Topeka: Kansas Department of Public Instruction, 1967); *Topeka Commonwealth*, February 7, 1882; *Topeka Plaindealer*, February 25, 1910; Glen Schwendemann, *Nicodemus: Negro Haven on the Solomon*; Everett Newfon Dick, *The Sod-House Frontier, 1854-1890: A Social History of the Northern Plains From the Creation of Kansas & Nebraska to the Admission of the Dakotas* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); 198; William Sherman Savage, *Blacks in the West*, 178.

elements of interracial cooperation within each colony. A black colony established in Nebraska in 1880 built its own churches and schools that were occasionally patronized by white residents. Despite the likelihood of integrated schools in small black colonies, leaders of the Kansas Freedman Relief Association actively encouraged the creation of separate schools in the handful of colonies they subsidized. Agricultural communities such as the Dunlap Colony in East-Central Kansas were thoroughly segregated. Black children in Dunlap attended separate schools while black families went to separate churches. Black adults belonged to separate clubs and attended separate socials, and black corpses were interned in a separate cemetery. Even charitable events such as a barbeques and dances organized to provide relief for the county's growing Exoduster population revealed the existence of an impermeable color line as black and white participants observed the color line at these events.³²⁹

The Exodus also led to a dramatic increase in the black population of Southeastern Kansas' leading cities such as Independence. Only thirty black residents appeared in the 1875 census of Independence compared with 260 black residents only five years later. The city experienced continued migration throughout the decade, as a number of the four hundred rural blacks of Montgomery County moved into the city. The Republican press of Independence mirrored that of other cities in response to this increase, supporting the Exodus so long as their city received only a small number of

³²⁹ "A History of the Negro Settlement in Cherry County, Near Brownlee," undated manuscript, Oliver J. Burckhardt Papers, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska; Joeseeph Hickey, "'Pap' Singleton's Dunlap Colony," 28-9; KFRA Minutes, September 29, October 6, 10, 1879.

migrants. Once Southeastern Kansas began to receive a large number of the migrants, these journals called for the migration to be diverted to “older states” that possessed more employment opportunities. Although local histories of Independence have expunged Jim Crow from the historical record or suggest that black parents “voluntarily” sent their children to separate schools, the Exodus led to a campaign was launched in 1880 to create a racially segregated school. Although whites later claimed that the black community initiated this campaign themselves, there is no historical evidence to support this claim. In fact, the black community mobilized in opposition to this campaign, attending a mass meeting led by laborer John A. Holt that passed resolutions denouncing segregation. At least one of the city’s two Republican newspapers strongly opposed the measure as well, claiming that segregation would increase racial prejudice and increase the cost of operating the city schools. The measure’s support by area Democrats provided Republicans with ammunition in the ongoing partisan debate regarding school funding. Given the Democratic opposition to a recent plan to expand the schools of Independence, Republicans lampooned their opponents desire to build a separate school for the purpose of separating black and white children.³³⁰

³³⁰ *South Kansas Tribune*, July 21, August 18, September 15, December 15, 1880, September 14, 1881; Paul F. Harper, “Surely it Floweth With Milk and Honey,” 121; Tenth Census of the United States, 1880; Ken R. Brown, “Independence: The Way We Were,” Independence Arts Council, 1980; Warren A. Culp, “Montgomery County Grade Schools Scrapbooks,” Special Collections, Independence Public Library; Chautauqua County Heritage Association, “History of Chautauqua County,” 107; Bennie Mosley and Charlene Mosley, “A Preview of Independence, Kansas African History,” Special Collections, Independence Public Library. The author would like to thank the staff at the Independence Public Library and the Independence Public Schools for their assistance. A special thank you is due to Chuck Schmidt of the Independence Public Schools for his gracious hospitality.

African Americans in Independence refused to attend this Jim Crow school and wrote letters appealing to the Governor and other officials to intervene on their behalf. No intervention was forthcoming and attempts by black parents to send their children to the graded schools of the city were refused. Black parents and community leaders held a mass meeting which resolved to pursue legal action against the board. A number of whites likewise voiced their opposition of the board's action. "If there exists a good reason for fostering the prejudice of race, of maintaining a caste school at heavy expense, and of changing the present well being of our school interests," the *South Kansas Tribune* argued, "the people who pay for it should be enlightened." This emphasis on the financial cost of maintaining separate schools typified the Republican press' continued opposition to segregation as an "expensive prejudice." Meanwhile, the county's Democratic journal printed vicious attacks against those blacks who were fighting against segregation in an attempt to create divisions among the black community. "A portion of colored children are now attending school," the *Independence Star* reported, claiming that "it is only the upper crust that are sticking up their noses because they are asked to associate with those of their own color." While a number of black parents chose to send their children to the school while they fought the case, segregationist's self-serving claims these parents accepted segregation neglect the fact that the black community maintained a 100% boycott against the Jim Crow school upon its opening in September of 1880.³³¹

³³¹ *South Kansas Tribune*, July 21, September 22, 29, November 24, 1880; *Independence Star*, October 14, 21, December 16, 23, 1881; Paul F. Harper, "Surely it Floweth With Milk and Honey"; Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan* 194; *Independence Reporter-Sun* of September 13, 1981 maintains that

The Republican press only tentatively supported the black community's efforts, opposing the boycott while also opposing segregation as a poor use of scarce funds. The *South Kansas Tribune* was the more outspoken of the city's two Republican papers, yet it devoted the bulk of its coverage to attacking its political rivals rather than advocating integration as a positive good. For example, the *Tribune* published a lengthy letter allegedly written by one of the board's Democratic members which expressed his frustration with the "ornery niggers" of Independence to a Southern relative. The letter was clearly designed by the editorial staff to stigmatize the Democratic Party, misspelling nearly every word and connecting the Party's traditional opposition to integration and abolition. The second-class city of Independence should be legally empowered to segregate its schools under Kansas law, the letter claimed, as the city had "as many saloons accordin to our popelashun as a sitty of the 1st class." The letter likewise expressed its fear of an educated black electorate. "A numbskell republikan legislatoor went and passed a skool law, givin the niggers the same chance of the whites," the fake letter continued, "and the blamed wool heds hev found it out, and is now claimin their rites." The postscript again emphasized the expense of the scheme, as the mathematically-challenged Democrat believed the creation of a school attended by only a few children was money well

the black community requested a separate school in 1880, a claim that can be traced back to a journalistic essay written in the late 1930s in possession of the Independence Public Schools. School records are no longer extant and a thorough search of newspaper records can find no verification of this claim. Records of the Kansas Supreme Court in the 1891 case *Bertha Knox v. The Board of Education of the City of Independence* support the conclusion that this petition was not representative of the entire black community and was likely inspired by the exclusion of the children of the Exodusters.

spent even if white children were crammed in classes with sixty or seventy other pupils.³³²

The boycott lasted only one month before the Republican press began to attack the black community for its continued refusal to send their children to the school. These editorials continued to express a level of sympathy towards the black community, yet it was clear that the boycott made even the most liberal whites of Independence uncomfortable. Ironically however, it was this boycott that provided the Republican press with a conservative argument by which to oppose segregation. Given the fact that only a dozen black children were in daily attendance in the fall of 1880, Republican editors queried the “tax payers” (a coded reference to whites) if they would continue to finance a such a school while their own children were so overcrowded. As the boycott continued these editorials became increasingly concerned about the number of black children out of school, calling on the board to enforce its truancy regulations in order to prevent future black crime. The boycott eventually succumbed to the pressure of school officials and the desire of black parents to have their children in school, even if that school was a one-room facility. The community maintained its pressure, securing an additional classroom and the appointment of an additional African American teacher in 1887.³³³

The black community of neighboring Fort Scott continued their protest against Jim Crow and the unequal conditions their children endured within their segregated

³³² *South Kansas Tribune*, November 3, 1880.

³³³ *South Kansas Tribune*, November 24, 1880, September 6, 1882, September 12, 18, 1888; *Independence Star*, October 16, December 16, 23, 1881.

school by petitioning the school board and demanding competent black teachers. A careful reading of board records indicates that the Plaza School was not one of the administration's leading priorities as conditions within the school was rarely ever discussed unless members of the black community were present. Because of this activism, additional black teachers were hired throughout the decade to relieve overcrowding and secure graded classes. Although several of these grades were combined, the teacher-to-student ratios were similar to that of the white schools of Fort Scott. Although black and white teachers received the same pay, the handful of black male teachers were paid significantly less than the few white male teachers who were given positions as principals and high school instructors. The biggest concern of the black community beyond the larger issue of segregation was the practical matter of securing additional locations throughout the city. Although the board frequently investigated the question of creating a second location that would be more accessible for black families throughout the city, school records indicate that officials were insincere in these efforts. Several different committees were appointed at various times throughout the period to investigate and recommend a second and even third location, yet none of these committees ever returned with a full report and no vote was ever recorded on any proposed site until the board was threatened with a lawsuit in 1888.³³⁴

³³⁴ Minutes of the Fort Scott Board of Education, January 5, February 2, March 21, 1874, May 7, 1877, June 7, 1880, May 30, 1881, July 2, November 5, 1883, March 3, 17, April 7, May 5, July 2, 24, 1884; October 3, 1887; *Fort Scott Tribune*, May 30, 1942.

In February of 1888 a group of citizens presented a lengthy report exposing the injustice of nearly forty black children who were held back from advancing to the next grade in order to keep them in the segregated Plaza School. Although board member S. B. McLemon labeled the action of his peers as “degrading” and barbaric, his colleagues refused to alter their policy. After this protest failed, the father of Georgiana Reeves filed for a writ of mandamus to compel the board to admit his daughter into the grammar school nearest their home. McLemon once again strongly denounced the continued intransigency of his peers, labeling the board’s decision to hire an attorney to defend their backhanded actions as a fraud against public funds. School officials likewise decided to create a segregated classroom within the white grammar school nearest the Reeves’ home in hopes of deflecting the legal challenge. Although the creation of this classroom drew the protest of white parents, it satisfied the district court. Robert Crawford filed a second lawsuit the following year, likewise seeking the admission of his child into the school nearest their home. The district court ruled in favor of Crawford, yet by the time the case reached the Kansas Supreme Court Fort Scott had become a city of the first class and therefore legally entitled to operate a dual system under Kansas law. Although black protest resulted in the creation of additional and better facilities, the schools of Fort Scott remained segregated until after *Brown v. Board*.³³⁵

³³⁵ Minutes of the Fort Scott Board of Education, October 3, 1887, January 2, March 5, May 7, 16, June 3, 5, 1888; *Buford Crawford v. The Board of Education of Fort Scott*, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas; Fifth Anniversary Edition of the *Parsons Blade*, July 31, 1897, *Atchison Globe*, September 27, 1887. A conversation between the author and local historian Arnold Schofield reveals the latter’s belief that city officials intentionally fabricated its population statistics to qualify as a city of the first class because of the Crawford case.

George Washington Carver was one of the children who walked to the Plaza School each day until the lynching of Bill Howard in the spring of 1879 inspired him to move to Olathe, Kansas. Carver soon moved in with a black family in nearby Paola and followed them to Minneapolis, Kansas shortly thereafter. Carver attended and graduated from the high school in Minneapolis and operated a laundry until 1884, continuing his education informally by borrowing books from a local white doctor. Carver lived briefly in Kansas City, Missouri after securing a position as a clerk for the Union Depot. Carver's attempt to continue his formal education was stalled however, after he arrived at Highland College, a Presbyterian-sponsored university in the northeastern corner of Kansas. Although the administrators had accepted Carver's application, they reversed this decision once they discovered that Carver was black. The next few years of Carver's life were spent finding temporary work and filing a homestead claim in nearby Ness County. Despite initial hostilities of some of his white neighbors, Carver soon won the respect of these men and women. Unfortunately, the environment was less friendly and Carver was forced to find odd jobs when drought limited his farms productive capacities. Carver continued both his formal and informal educational endeavors, being admitted to Iowa's Simpson College where he was treated with kindness and acceptance by the all-white students and faculty. Although Carver's youth was anything but kind, both Carver and his biographers recorded that racial lines were less-tightly defined and maintained in the region's rural farming communities.³³⁶

³³⁶ Gary R. Kremer, ed., *George Washington Carver in his own Words* (Columbia: University of

Had Carver lived within one of Kansas' rural communities that experienced a large black influx during his tenure, he would have likely sustained a much more negative impression of rural race relations. Although racial violence did not typify the daily interaction of white and black Kansans, several lynchings occurred in rural Kansas during the 1880s. More common was the subtle kind of violence whites waged daily against black ambition. Whites in Columbus, Kansas attempted to portray their 1880 attempt to create the color line in their tiny school district as an accommodation to the wishes of the black community. Black leaders in the area exposed this farce by examining the petition and records of the Columbus Board of Education revealing the fact that only whites had supported the measure. Despite this fact and continued protest against Jim Crow, the schools of tiny Columbus were segregated shortly after the Exodus. Nearby Baxter Springs likewise chose to segregate its tiny school system shortly after the Exodus, although local histories have expunged both Jim Crow and the creation of the color line from the historical record. Yet Jim Crow enjoyed a long stay in Baxter Springs as the board operated a one-room school for black children until the 1950s. Even rural areas of Southeastern Kansas experimented with the color line, as twenty-eight farmers northwest of Baxter Springs held a meeting to protest the arrival of a black farmer in the 1880s for the purpose of keeping their district school lily-white while black families were likewise warned

Missouri Press, 1987); Mark D. Hersey, "My Work is that of Conservation': The Environmental Vision of George Washington Carver," (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 2006), 30-49.

against moving into previously lily-white neighborhoods by threatening letters attached to their doors.³³⁷

Carver would have also been surprised to find that a few of Southeastern Kansas' leading cities did not create separate schools immediately following the Exodus. Pittsburg officials did not even consider the matter until 1886. Leading merchant and school board member A. C. Campbell proposed the creation of a separate school in that year, leading to the school board's creation of a special committee to investigate the issue. Both Campbell and his fellow board members ultimately decided against Jim Crow, however, explaining that there were simply too few black pupils to justify the added expense of a dual system. Although board records indicate that there were only nineteen black students enrolled in the Pittsburg schools during the following academic year, demographic changes in the next two decades led to the creation of a Jim Crow school a quarter-century later.³³⁸

Coffeyville likewise did not create separate public schools until after the turn of the century, although informal exclusion led to the creation of private schools for black children both after the Civil War and after the Exodus. Although the schools were not explicitly segregated, efforts were made during the 19th century to separate

³³⁷ Randall B. Woods, "After the Exodus," 192; Genevieve Yost, "History of Lynchings in Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* (May, 1933): 192; Miscellaneous Correspondence, J. E. Weir Papers, Special Collections, Wichita State University; Ruth Rodman St. Clair, "Historical Background and Settlement of Baxter Springs, Kansas," (M. S. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Pittsburg, 1940); Baxter Springs Centennial Committee, "The Baxter Springs Story: 100 Years 1858-1958," 1958; Pictorial History of Baxter Springs, Kansas, Baxter Springs Historical Society, 1994, Special Collections, Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg, Kansas; Photograph of the Baxter Springs Colored School, Ira Clemens Collection, Special Collections, Pittsburg State University; *American Citizen*, February 18, 1889.

³³⁸ Minutes of the Pittsburg Board of Education, June 7, July 5, August 2, 1886, June 6, 1887.

white and black children during recess. Even the city directory was segregated with black residents appearing in a back section of the directory rather than the typical Midwestern designation of “colored” or one of its derivatives after the name of a city’s black residents.³³⁹

As was the case in business and religion, segregation limited opportunities for the race as a whole but likewise ensured the creation of a handful of jobs for black professionals. The existence of separate schools and the activism of black communities who demanded well-qualified black teachers within these institutions led to the creation of Hobson Normal Institute in Parsons. Founded by a group of Iowa Quakers in 1882, Hobson quickly grew and enrolled as many as seventy-five students at its peak. Several dozen of Hobson’s graduates become teachers within Kansas’ segregated schools. Many other Hobson alumni formed the core of black leadership in Southeastern Kansas, becoming business owners, journalists, and ministers. Given the limited funding available to the school and the fact that Kansas’ Normal Schools did not draw the color line, Hobson faced lower enrollments as black students gained admission to Kansas State Normal in Emporia and State Manual Training Normal School in Pittsburg. This competition paired with the limited

³³⁹ “Historical Scrapbook” compiled by Eunice Harvey, Coffeyville Public Schools; *Coffeyville Journal*, May 12, 1883; Coffeyville City Directory, 1900-1901. Both local and academic studies of Coffeyville and its schools make little or no mention of Jim Crow. For example, see Larry L. Thomas, “A Descriptive Study of Coffeyville, Kansas, from 1972-1992 with Implications for School Planning,” (Ph.D. diss., Kansas State University, 1992); “A History of Coffeyville,” Coffeyville Centennial Committee, 1969; “Schools File,” Coffeyville Public Library, Coffeyville Kansas; Tille Kerns Newman, “History of Coffeyville, Kansas,” 1969; John L Lechlitter, *Coffeyville Chronicle: 125 Years in the Life of Coffeyville, Kansas* (Coffeyville: Coffeyville Historical Commission, 1994).

opportunities available to its graduates ultimately led to the school's closure between 1896 and 1898.³⁴⁰

The South Central community of Wichita, Kansas did not open its first public school until 1870. Although the Board of Education discussed segregation and considered building separate schools in its early years, the city's small black population was spread throughout the city making such a scheme economically impractical. Wichita officials launched a formal investigation of the question in June of 1879; one month after the city expelled its small group of Exodusters. Board of Education officials requested money to build two new brick schools in the First and Fourth wards, with the old frame school of the Fourth Ward being moved and converted to a school for black pupils. The effort never received serious consideration as only twenty-two of the city's 895 pupils were African American and most were enrolled in various schools throughout the city. The measure received renewed interest the following year, with plans being made to move the old Second Ward School closer to the center of the growing black community and convert it to a school for black children. Logistical concerns would once again doom these plans as nearly half of these children lived outside the city's Second Ward. Even after the Exodus, less than two hundred and fifty African Americans resided in the city in 1885. Although the black community would represent less than five per cent of all Wichita

³⁴⁰ Nelson Case, *History of Labette County Kansas and its Representative Citizens* (Chicago: Biographical Publishing Company, Chicago 1901), 198; Quinzetta Brown, "Our Douglass," in the archives of the Parsons Board of Education; Louis Thomas Jones, *The Quakers of Iowa*; Fifth Anniversary Edition of the *Parsons Blade*, July 31, 1897.

residents until after World War II, Wichita still pursued a strategy of segregation and exclusion in its early years.³⁴¹

As segregation intensified throughout Kansas, members of the black community of Wichita united in 1889 and defeated a measure intended to separate the schools. Although the measure was presented as being “in the interest of both races,” seventy-five black men met and protested against the pending measure sponsored by Orsemus Hills Bentley. The black community ultimately persuaded Bentley to sponsor a state law specifically prohibiting school segregation in Wichita when he was elected to represent Sedgwick County in the Kansas Senate. Members of the Wichita Board of Education were divided about the wisdom of Bentley’s bill; however they seemed pleased by the possibility of such a divisive issue being determined by the state legislature rather than placed before them. Board members reportedly believed that segregation was “a wise move, and in the interest of both races,” yet likewise “[did] not desire to appear in the light of begrudging the colored children any of the rights to which they may be entitled.” As was the case throughout the region, white opposition to segregation in Wichita typically took the form of an economic argument although a handful of whites believed the matter to be inherently discriminatory. Wichita’s Republican school officials likewise followed the tradition of utilizing coded language when discussing the issue. In September of 1889, for example, the Wichita Board of Education recommended that double desks be

³⁴¹ Minutes of the Wichita Board of Education, June 2, 1879, September 2, 1880; *Wichita Eagle*, June 5, 12, 1879, September 9, 1880; *Wichita Weekly Beacon*, September 15, 1880; Craig Miner, *Wichita, The Magic City* (Wichita: Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum Association, 1988); Gretchen Cassel Eick, *Dissent in Wichita*, 17.

replaced with single ones in schools which were attended by black and white children, although no explicit mention of race was recorded.³⁴²

The presence of black children in rural communities beyond Southeastern Kansas likewise led to the creation of segregated schools. An influx of black miners into Mahaska County, Iowa led to the creation of two separate one-room schools in Carver. Despite the logistical challenges of building separate schools in the rural districts of Kansas, the arrival of the Exodusters led to the decision to create the color line by operating a separate school for black children in rural Morris County. Black farming colonies typically operated their own schools, yet the majority of Kansas' rural black population was scattered on individual plots of small groups of independent farm families who settled adjacent to one another. The presence of one such cluster created a controversy in Caldwell, Kansas when a white teacher threatened to resign his post rather than teach black children. "Upon being informed that his resignation would be accepted," the local press reported, "he cooled somewhat and now teaches whatever pupils are sent to him."³⁴³

In some rural areas, imaginative schemes were concocted to separate students without incurring significant additional expenses. In Burlingame, separate terms were designated for whites and blacks using the same building. Whites in Seneca requested and received a separate room and teacher for black children even though there were

³⁴² Frank W. Blackmar, *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History*, vol. 3, 1139-40; *Wichita Evening News-Beacon*, February, 1, 5, September 18, 1889; *Wichita Daily Eagle*, February 5, September 18, 1889; Sondra Van Meeter, "Black Resistance to Segregation in the Wichita Public Schools, 1870-1912," *The Midwest Quarterly*, 64-71.

³⁴³ Iowa WPA Manuscript Collection, 275; *Wichita Eagle*, December 15, 1881; *Morris County Times*, July 22, 1881.

only two black students in the entire district. Elsewhere, black and white children were physically separated within the classroom. Rural schools with black and white children even maintained separate water buckets for their pupils. While separate primary and grammar schools might be provided for the relatively large number of white and black children, the logistics of segregation in the advanced grades required even more creative measures. For example, the superintendent of Jefferson County required black applicants to the high school to take a special examination that no student had ever passed as of 1898. Others tacitly instructed teachers in the “colored schools” to neglect their charges and hold them back to prevent their advancement.³⁴⁴

Race is explicitly designated in the reports of the city and county schools of Nebraska following 1881, providing researchers with the demographic data necessary to determine both school and residential segregation patterns. These reports almost certainly under-report minority enrollment, however, as 1881 reports indicates that only 201 black pupils were enrolled in the public schools of Nebraska despite the fact that nearly three times that many black children of school age are listed in the 1880 census. Despite this under-reporting, the reports are likely correct in indicating that three quarters of the state’s black students were enrolled in the schools of Lincoln, Omaha, and Nebraska City. By 1890, 586 of 743 of the black children reported by city school districts were enrolled in these three cities. Although Aurora, Brownville, Beatrice, Falls City, Humboldt, and Seward occasionally reported between ten and

³⁴⁴ James Carothers Carper, “The Published Opinions of Kansans Concerning Education,” 75; Randall B. Woods, “After the Exodus,” 189; *Colored Citizen* (Topeka), October 12, 1898.

twenty black students prior to 1890, city and county reports give no indication that separate schools were ever maintained in these cities.³⁴⁵

The lack of school segregation in Lincoln and Omaha eliminated the most common avenue to black employment within Midwestern public schools. In 1886 members of Lincoln's black community presented a petition to the school board requesting that the board hire black teachers. Although the matter was referred to the committee on personnel, board members did not discuss the measure in subsequent meetings and there is no evidence that any black teachers were hired in Lincoln for nearly six decades.³⁴⁶

Although similar black protest in Omaha led to the hiring of a black teacher during the 1890s, the most significant accomplishment of Omaha's black community was preventing Jim Crow's return. Omaha, like Chicago, desegregated their schools in 1872 and 1874 respectively. Within both cities, black migration led to de facto segregation as residential segregation emerged and the general trend of race relations progressed from indifference to hostility. As the following charts indicate, however, the schools of Omaha were more racially integrated at the turn of the century than at any other time in the school's history. Although significant black migration to Omaha occurred much later than in Omaha, the possibility of de jure segregation's return to

³⁴⁵ Fourteenth Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1882, Sixteenth Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1884, Eighteenth Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1886, Twentieth Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1888, Twenty-Second Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1890. Many schools do not report regularly and further research is needed to explore race relations in the schools throughout the entire state.

³⁴⁶ Minutes of the Lincoln Public Schools, July 5, 1886.

Omaha is evidenced by several campaigns to re-create the color line in the following decades as well as the re-segregation of the schools of neighboring Nebraska City.³⁴⁷

Enrollment of Omaha Public Schools, 1885-1886³⁴⁸

School	Total	African American	% African American
High School	256	5	2.0
Central	871	19	2.2
Cass	522	43	8.2
Castellar	122	2	1.6
Center	261	3	1.1
Dodge	367	46	12.5
Farnan	438	8	1.8
Hartman	597	8	1.3
Izard	845	27	3.2
Jackson	93	3	3.2
Lake	160	11	6.9
Leavenworth	659	13	2.0
Long	715	34	4.8
Pacific	681	9	1.3
Pleasant	28	0	0
Grammar School Total	6612	220	3.3

Enrollment of Omaha Public Schools, 1890-1891³⁴⁹

School	Total	African American	% African American
High School	616	10	1.6
Ambler	55	0	0
Bancroft	312	7	2.2
Cass	446	37	8.3
Castellar	640	20	3.1
Center	371	0	0
Central	408	12	2.9

³⁴⁷ Alan Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); St. Clair Drake and Horace Clayton, *The Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1945).

³⁴⁸ Annual Report of the Omaha Board of Education, 1885-1886.

³⁴⁹ Annual Report of the Omaha Public Schools, 1890-1891.

Central Park	257	1	.4
Davenport	150	0	0
Dodge	382	72	18.9
Dupont	350	6	1.7
Eckerman	32	0	0
Farmum	538	23	4.3
Forest	212	0	0
Fort Omaha	37	0	0
Franklin	212	10	4.7
Gibson	41	0	0
Hartman	686	26	3.8
Hickory	293	0	0
Izard	758	55	6.9
Jackson	112	9	8.0
Lake	990	26	2.6
Leavenworth	509	36	7.1
Long	892	42	4.7
Lothrop	311	1	.3
Mason	562	6	.1
Omaha View	502	9	1.8
Pacific	591	12	2.0
Park	576	12	2.1
Paul	185	0	0
Pleasant	82	3	3.7
Saratoga	288	2	.7
Sherman	89	2	2.2
Vinton	135	0	0
Walnut Hill	580	8	1.3
Webster	595	17	2.9
West Omaha	191	1	.5
West Side	79	0	0
Grammar School Total	13477	455	3.38

Jim Crow Returns to Nebraska City

The decision of the Nebraska City Schools to discontinue their practice of racial segregation as a cost-saving measure did not end the informal methods of

discrimination black children faced in the school. In response to these conditions, a handful of black parents requested a return in the status quo in the summer of 1880. The *Daily News* reported that the petition was “signed by nearly all our colored people,” a claim that is suspect given that journal’s editorial support of segregation. The fact that the petition was presented to the board by one of the city’s leading white residents, Episcopalian clergyman Robert W. Oliver, rather than members of the black community is likewise instructive. The board referred the matter to a committee but took no action, perhaps indicative of their recognition that the measure was not universally demanded. The only certainty is that the board was deeply concerned about the added expense of maintaining separate schools. These concerns were removed in 1883 when Oliver returned to the board and offered to finance the entire scheme himself if the board would allocate twenty-five dollars per month to partially subsidize the teacher’s salary. Both Oliver and the board referred to the 1880 petition as evidence that this action would meet with the approval of the African American community, but it is doubtful that community members were consulted given their nearly unanimous opposition to the scheme when it became known. Black opposition was discounted and the only source of opposition continued to be based on the cost of the scheme. When Oliver lowered his request to five dollars per month, the board unanimously voted to re-segregate the schools.³⁵⁰

³⁵⁰ Minutes of the Nebraska City Board of Education, October 8, November 7, 1883; 12th Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Report of the Superintendent of the Nebraska City Schools, 57-8; *Nebraska City Daily News*, July 24, 1880; *Nebraska City News*, October 13, November 17. There is no indication that city or county officials consulted the Nebraska Board of Education for guidance in this matter as all extant correspondence deals with matters of finance and

Given his support for segregation, one might be surprised to find that Robert Oliver was an abolitionist minister who moved to Lawrence in 1863 to assist rebuilding efforts in the wake of Quantrill's raid. Oliver organized an Episcopalian college in Lawrence that evolved into the University of Kansas, serving as that institution's first chancellor due to his connections with the New England Emigrant Aid Society. Oliver continued his career of educational and religious service when he moved to Nebraska City in 1867, serving as the rector of St. Mary's Episcopal Church and presiding over Nebraska College, a short-lived divinity school. Oliver dedicated a significant amount of his time to founding a select school for women known as Shoenberger Hall. He was especially active in efforts to create a separate church for members of his African American congregation named St. Augustine. Although his efforts may be considered paternalistic by some perspectives, Oliver worked alongside St. Augustine's lay minister W. H. Wilson by personally raising funds for the church and assisting Wilson in his ordination. Shortly after the church's completion, Oliver served as an intermediary between the school board and St. Augustine, as the board rented the church and operated a separate school for black children. The apparent contradiction between Wilson's abolitionist background and his support of Jim Crow is explained by a family letter written by his grandson. "You know, grandfather was an abolitionist, but also a segregationist," Fred Oliver wrote.

district boundaries. For example, see Nebraska Board of Education Records, Letterpress Books, Volume 16-18, RG 11 SG 1, Box 2, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln Nebraska.

“He wanted the negro to have every advantage freedom affords, but he believed he could do better on his own.”³⁵¹

Oliver’s efforts to re-create the color line in the schools of Nebraska City illustrates the leading issues in the ongoing debate about the role of white abolitionists within the black freedom struggle of the 19th century. August Meier argued that abolitionists quickly abandoned black rights during Reconstruction. “Most Northerners had never been racial egalitarians,” Meier explained, “and they had to be pushed and shoved to accord equal constitutional rights to Negroes.” C. Vann Woodward also described what he viewed as the “acquiescence” of Northern liberals to the demands of Southern redeemers. “Northern opinion shifted to the right,” Woodward argued, “keeping pace with the South, conceding point after point, so that at no time were the sections very far apart on race policy.” In his introduction to *The Abolitionist Legacy*, James McPherson objected to the idea of an abolitionist retreat and argued that these men (women are conspicuously absent from his narrative) consistently sought to advance the interests of African Americans after the war. While McPherson viewed his conclusion as dichotomous with that of Meier, the example of Robert Oliver demonstrates the compatibility of compulsory segregation and racial uplift in the postbellum white imagination.³⁵²

³⁵¹ *Morning Chronicle* (Nebraska City) March 28, 1872; Nebraska City Directory, 1881; *Nebraska City News*, January 22, 1876; *Nebraska City Daily News*, July 24, 1880; Frank W. Blackmar, *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History*, vol. 2, 387-8; “Early Schools,” “Early Churches,” Vertical Files, Nebraska City Public Library; Raymond Dale, “Otoe County Pioneers,” Nebraska City Public Library.

³⁵² James McPherson, *The Abolitionist Legacy*, 3; August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *From Plantation to Ghetto*, 192; C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd rev. ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 69-70.

Oliver and his white neighbors in Nebraska City also personified both the liberal and conservative whites described by Joel Williamson in his study of Southern race relations following Reconstruction. While Oliver's liberalism was apparent in his work for and with the African American community, his support of segregation displays his fundamental conservatism. Although much of their rhetoric was likely insincere, it is still clear that the majority of Oliver's white peers viewed segregation as a benefit for both white and black children, thereby demonstrating the full range of racial ideas Williamson describes. Southern white conservatives like the majority of whites in Nebraska City, advocated humanity and justice for blacks and were supportive of basic educational services for black children. Because these whites also believed that blacks were innately inferior, they could justify the creation of segregated schools as a benefit to both races, just as creating graded schools was a benefit to children in each classroom. Williamson describes Southern white radicals, according to Williamson, believed that segregation was required to protect whites in the absence of slavery. Although few Midwesterners openly espoused such views, the belief that the re-establishment of the color line was necessary to protect white children from the natural state of debauchery of their black peers was occasionally voiced in coded terms in Nebraska City.³⁵³

Although many members of Nebraska City's black community appreciated Oliver's liberal intent, very few supported his proposal. African American laborer Charles Hurd led the community in a well-attended meeting called to discuss Oliver's

³⁵³ Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*.

plan and the board's rapid adoption of the measure. Although some members felt that their children were discriminated against by white teachers and students, these participants did not believe that segregation was the answer. Parents spoke forcefully about the discriminatory conditions within the former one-room school that the board had provided and the impossibility of their children to receive a complete education in any one-room school. The parents also feared that the measure would effectively bar their children from the High School, both by its failure to provide advanced educational opportunities and the possibility that white officials might covertly draw the color line by requiring a graded school certificate as a condition of admission. The attendees passed a series of resolutions that expressed their "most solemn, earnest, persistent and determined protest against separate schools." The black community also called upon white residents of the city to join them in fighting this injustice and assuring that the rights of their children were not abridged. Had Robert Oliver not moved from Nebraska City prior to this meeting, it is possible that he and others might have responded to this request.³⁵⁴

Although the city's Democratic press reported the proceedings of this mass meeting, they continued to maintain that the board's action met the approval of both white and black residents. "Now that the strife between the races over the schools in ended," the *News* reported, "peace will reign once more in that quarter." The Democratic daily made only one reference to the continued protest of the black community, discounting it as "a change of heart" that was typical of a population so

³⁵⁴ Tenth Census of the United States, 1880; *Nebraska City News*, November 17, 1883.

easily swayed by demagogues. The rank and file of the black community confronted this attitude, explaining that only a few blacks had ever signed the 1880 petition. Records indicate that the 1880 petition included a statement that clearly indicated that their support was directly related to the “resentments” of white parents and students rather than a desire for separation itself. In fact, when the board responded to the petitioners and explained that their request would likely be granted only upon the condition that the school would be placed in a separate room within one of the ward schools, supporters of the petition indicated that this plan failed to provide the desired relief “from the evils complained of.” Extant sources fail to include a full description of these complaints, including only a rather conciliatory remark about the petitioners desire to stop “intruding ourselves against the wishes and instincts of the white children and parents,” it is clear that the petitioners favored separation as a last resort against the discriminatory treatment that had occurred during the first year of the Nebraska City School District’s integration. Despite all of these conditions and the continued protest of the black community, whites continued to portray the segregation plan as a progressive remedy demanded by the black community.³⁵⁵

Perhaps as a result of the protest, segregationists began to claim that the separation was voluntary. In response to an editorial from the *Lincoln Journal* that was critical of Nebraska City’s continued exclusion of black children, whites in Nebraska City defensively maintained that they were only accommodating the wishes of the black community. “Our citizens are not ‘protesting against the admission of

³⁵⁵ *Nebraska City Daily News*, July 24, 1880; *Nebraska City News*, November 17, 1883.

colored children into the public schools,” the *Nebraska City News* explained. “The colored people petitioned for a separate school, which was granted, and now they are ‘kicking’ because they got it.” Despite their history of supporting segregation as a means of separating all white and black students, once the black community organized a protest and surrounding cities denounced the board’s action the segregationists of Nebraska City suddenly claimed that the scheme was voluntary. The *News* claimed that those black students who desired to attend the graded schools would be welcome to do so, yet records of the school board indicate otherwise. Even the headlines of the newspaper clearly indicated the editor’s understanding that the separation was racial in nature. “THE COLORED CHILDREN: The Board Orders a Separate School for Them,” read the headlines following the board’s acceptance of Oliver’s plan, its columns giving no indication that the scheme was voluntary or that black children might still attend their former schools.³⁵⁶

School records reveal that the school was voluntarily operated only in the sense that black children could either attend the Jim Crow school or stay home. Only eighteen students volunteered to be Jim Crowed in the school’s opening months, although the Superintendent reported that school is “getting along finely” and made no mention of the continued protest against segregation. Although school records list the “Colored School” among the city’s schools, the Superintendent’s flippant comments are representative of the board’s attitude to the school as the only mention of the school’s management is the recording of the number of students in regular

³⁵⁶ *Nebraska City News*, November 17, 24, 1883.

attendance and a \$5 ledger entry each month. When Robert Oliver moved to Kearney at end of the year the board determined to accept the burden of the school's finances rather than submit to another integration controversy. By that time, most of the twenty-five black children who had been in attendance in the city's schools prior to the re-segregation had apparently "volunteered" to attend the school given its enrollment records. Perhaps as part of this attempt to sanitize Jim Crow, the school board and local press began to refer to the school as the St. Augustine School in 1886. While the name change also reflected a relationship with one of Nebraska City's three black churches and was likely initiated by members of the black community, the board's alternating use of the term "Colored School" when creating administrative records while referencing the school as "St. Augustine" whenever the topic of segregation was discussed is instructive. The term "St. Augustine" is used almost exclusively by the school board in the latter half of the decade as black protest against Jim Crow became increasingly confrontational.³⁵⁷

These protests reached a climax at a mass meeting in January of 1889, when over thirty African American residents signed a petition demanding an end to all forms of restriction against their children. The impetus of this meeting was the Superintendent's order the previous month transferring Alfred Richards, Cain Martin, and Rebecca Richards from Greggspport to St. Augustine. Despite the fact that

³⁵⁷ Minutes of the Nebraska City Board of Education, November 7, 1883, January 7, February 4, March 3, April 7, May 5, June 11, 12, October 15, December 1, 1884, December 7, 1885, June 8, 1886; January 17, March 2, April 9, May 4, June 1, 15, September 15, November 3, December 7, 1885; *Nebraska City News*, January 12, 1884; 14th Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1882, 96-109; 16th Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1884, 114-5.

Greggsport was outside of the city limits, the board denied that race was a factor in this decision. Race was cited by the board as a source of friction, however, as the Superintendent cited the complaints of white parents who claimed that the scores of white children were being “abused” by the Martin and Richards children, leaving the board no choice but to send them to St. Augustine. Although the petition itself refrained from exposing the obvious inconsistencies of the board’s actions, asking only that admission to the city’s schools “be as free and unrestricted to colored children as to white” the Board voted to return the petition to its originators, with a message that the petitioners were acting in bad faith by making false accusations. Although the *Nebraska City News* chose to defend the board’s actions, it neglected to address why the board refused to support a petition advocating racial egalitarianism if its actions were not racially motivated.³⁵⁸

Isaac Martin continued his protest by presenting additional petitions asking for the board to allow his children to attend the public schools. The board agreed that the Martin children should be allowed to attend the city’s schools, once again determining that the only school they should be allowed to attend was the St. Augustine school. Ironically, the board now declared that this determination was based on geography rather than race as this school was declared to be nearest the Martin home. Although Martin’s exact address cannot be determined, he and other members of the black community testified that this was not true and further debunked the board’s claims of racial neutrality by reminding school officials that the St.

³⁵⁸ Minutes of the Nebraska City Schools, December 3, 1888, January 7, 1889; *Nebraska City News*, January 11, 1889.

Augustine school was attended only by black children. Martin escalated his campaign in January of 1889 by filing a writ of mandamus seeking to compel the Nebraska City Board of Education to admit his two children into their former school. While Martin searched outside the city for legal counsel, the board simply retained the services of two of its own members, Edwin F. Warren and Frank P. Ireland. Both men supported segregation despite their Yankee roots, as Warren was raised in Massachusetts and obtained his law degree from Yale while Ireland hailed from New York and graduated from Boston University.³⁵⁹

The city's Democratic press continued to support the board's policy of racial segregation while simultaneously denying that Jim Crow existed in Nebraska City. Even while claiming that each of the city schools were open to all children equally, the local press made continual reference to the race of the excluded children while both the newspapers and the records of the school board claimed that the children were transferred to the "Colored School." Furthermore, the local press and the board defended the legality of the separation by claiming that Nebraska law neither required integration nor prohibited segregation. Despite these references to race and tacit admissions that the schools of Nebraska City were racially segregated, both the board and the local press maintained that discipline rather than race was the cause of the Martin's transfer. Cain Martin was removed from the Greggspport School because he was "a boy of vicious, mischievous disposition," the *Nebraska City News* explained, leaving the question of why the children of St. Augustine deserved such a menace

³⁵⁹ Minutes of the Nebraska City Schools, January 23, February 4, August 5, 1889, February 10, 1893; *Omaha World-Herald*, May 8, 1899.

thrust upon them. Although the *News* printed editorials against a recent outrage committed by Whitecaps against a black family in Missouri, the paper failed to recognize the outrages it was simultaneously advocating against black children. In fact, the *News* presented the Martin's as the perpetrators of racial bigotry for their objections against attending the same schools as other black children.³⁶⁰

Although school records indicate that the case was scheduled before the Nebraska Supreme Court on January 28, 1889, there is no record of the case being heard in the Otoe County court prior to this time. Local newspaper coverage indicates that the case was twice postponed at the request the plaintiff's white attorneys. The *Nebraska City News* gleefully reported in February that Martin's white attorneys had convinced Martin to drop the case, although the tone of these reports indicate that intimidation was brought to bear against the plaintiff and his children.³⁶¹

Nebraska City attorney Frank T. Ransom took a particular interest in the case, using his position as a Republican state senator to introduce a bill that would establish the legality of Jim Crow in Nebraska regardless of the pending lawsuit. Ransom introduced Senate File 146, titled "An act to provide for the classification of pupils in the public schools, and to provide for the establishment of separate schools for the different sexes and colored children" in January of 1889. That this measure was supported by the Nebraska City Board of Education is evidenced by the fact that the

³⁶⁰ *Nebraska City News*, January 25, 29, 1889.

³⁶¹ Minutes of the Nebraska City Schools, January 23, February 4, 1889; *Nebraska City News*, February 1, 1889. A search of the records of the Otoe County Court and the Nebraska Supreme Court does not reveal that the case was ever placed on the docket of either court. Although Lincoln's *Daily State Journal* contains frequent reports from the Nebraska Supreme Court there is no reference to the case between January and March of 1889.

original copy of the bill was printed on the stationary of board member Edwin Warren. The measure itself followed the precedent established by Kansas in limiting Jim Crow to where it was most cost-effective, empowering districts containing more than twenty black children of school age to create racially segregated schools. The bill also anticipated the doctrine of separate but equal by explicitly requiring that black schools provide “the same advantages and privileges of a common school education that are by law afforded to white children.” The measure’s proviso allowing districts to also create separate schools based on gender in any district containing more than one hundred and fifty children of school age might account for the bill’s lack of support. Sources indicate that the measure never received serious consideration, being recommended for indefinite postponement by the Education Committee without comment in legislative records or within Nebraska City and Lincoln newspapers.³⁶²

Discrimination within the “Integrated” Schools of Middle America

Although the majority of Kansas schools were never segregated, the presence of black and white children within the same building rarely constituted integration in any real sense of the word. Black and white children were typically segregated formally by assigned seating patterns while older children drew the color line themselves in social and extracurricular activities. Black communities rarely protested against these forms of discrimination, focusing their attention on only the most

³⁶² Senate File 146, Nebraska State Legislative File, 1889; *Nebraska City News*, February 1, 1889; Senate Journal, 1889, 308, 322, 400-1; *Daily State Journal*, January 30, February 1, 7, 8, 1889; *Omaha World-Herald*, May 8, 1899.

blatant episodes of discrimination beyond Jim Crow such as the expulsion of black children for drinking from a “white” water bucket or openly racist methods of corporal punishment. Yet because the color line was typically established in more subtle ways, it was often considered as natural by both white and black residents. It took many years for children to be trained in the attitudes and prejudices of their parents, a fact that often elicited feelings of frustration among school teachers who labored to keep white and black children separate in the schoolhouse, only to see their efforts thwarted by the children playing together in the schoolyard and after classes. That black students usually faced discrimination incrementally as they aged likewise obscured the reality of racial bigotry within the public schools.³⁶³

The subtlety of the color line was reinforced by the fact that school policies and teacher’s handbooks in Middle America made no reference to race. On paper, black and white students received the same curriculum and were held to the same academic standards. There is also no distinction of race in the personnel records of the Kansas City schools, a fact that makes it difficult to determine if black teachers suffered wage discrimination. Although many of the first teachers in the black schools were white, by 1890 there were eighty-five black teachers in Kansas, many of whom taught in the black schools of the Kansas City area³⁶⁴

*Salaries of Teachers in Kansas City, Kansas in 1893*³⁶⁵

³⁶³ *American Citizen*, January 25, 1888, March 15, 1889.

³⁶⁴ Public Schools of Kansas City, Kansas, *Teacher’s Hand Book, Together With Rules and Regulations of the School Board 1886-1887*; Leland George Smith, “Early Negroes in Kansas,” 83-85.

³⁶⁵ Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City of Kansas City, Kansas, for the Year Ending June 30, 1904; Minutes of the Kansas City, Kansas Board of Education, July 3, 1893.

School	Cumulative Salary	Number of Teachers	Average Salary
Lincoln (Black)	\$4298	8	\$536
Douglass (Black)	\$3222	6	\$537
Long	\$6763	13	\$520
Everett	\$3904	7	\$557
Wood	\$3266	7	\$467
Riverview	\$3942	8	\$493
Armstrong	\$534	1	\$534
Central	\$6668	13	\$512
Reynolds	\$1474	3	\$491
Barnett	\$1574	3	\$525
McAlpine	\$963	2	\$482
Phillips (Black)	\$563	1	\$563
Armourdale	\$6462	13	\$497
Morse	\$4182	8	\$523

As the chart above demonstrates, salaries for teachers at the segregated schools of Lincoln, Douglass, and Phillips were the same, if not higher, than those received by teachers at the schools reserved for white students. Board policy required that teachers were paid on the basis of tenure and the number of classes they taught, with no reference given to any other factor such as race or the classification of the

school at which they taught. The minutes of the Kansas City, Kansas Board of Education reinforce this conclusion, listing the salaries of individual teachers with no indication that teachers at black schools received any less compensation than their white counterparts.³⁶⁶

A review of the annual reports of the Kansas City Board of Education reveal that teachers at the black schools were more likely to teach several grades, which may account for the fact that their average salary is slightly higher than that of the district average. Black principals typically earned significantly less than their white counterparts but it is important to note that black schools were generally much smaller. By comparing the salaries of black principals with those of white principals at schools of the same size, it is apparent that principals' salaries were also based on tenure and the total number of students under their supervision. The fact that black teachers were paid the same amount as their white counterparts is especially significant when comparing the segregated schools of Kansas with those of the South, where black teachers typically received half the pay of their white counterparts.³⁶⁷

Black teachers in Kansas were clearly discriminated against when being considered for teaching positions outside of the city's Jim Crow schools. A survey of Kansas personnel records indicated that only one black teacher was ever hired at predominantly white schools prior to 1910. As a result, black teachers were discriminated against in the amount of pay they might have received had they been

³⁶⁶ Minutes of the Kansas City, Kansas Board of Education, July 3, 1893.

³⁶⁷ Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City of Kansas City, Kansas, for the Year Ending June 30, 1904; Kansas City, Kansas Board of Education Financial Report, June 14, 1892; Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice*, 214.

allowed to teach within the higher grades or considered for leadership positions throughout the school district. Furthermore, black teachers were often underemployed as evidenced by the fact that they held a much higher percentage of advanced degrees than their white counterparts in the primary and grammar schools of Kansas. Black educators in Kansas were not only limited in their ability to earn the higher salaries which were paid to high school teachers, they also suffered from a lack of mobility as they were limited to careers in cities with Jim Crow schools.³⁶⁸

There is a clear record of discrimination against black students and parents in Kansas City in terms of unequal facilities, distances traveled by black pupils, corporal punishment, the percentage of students admitted to the high school in its first years of existence. Kansas City had no public high school until 1879 when the building of the Palmer Academy was purchased by the city. Although state law forbid segregation at the high school level, there was no law against selective admissions and no black children were admitted until 1889.³⁶⁹

Although many instances of corporal punishment went unreported, teacher's guides required that this type of discipline was to be used sparingly and was to be promptly reported to the county superintendent. A report from 1887—a year in which many white teachers and principals still presided over black students—reveals a clear pattern of racial discrimination. In a single school year there were over one hundred reported cases of black children receiving corporal punishment compared with 194

³⁶⁸ Carl J. Haney, "A Study of the Status of the Negro Teacher in Kansas," (M. S. thesis, Kansas State Teacher's College, Emporia, 1954); Annual Report of First Class Cities to the State Superintendent of Education, 1887, 1888...1910.

³⁶⁹ Third Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City of Kansas City, Kansas, 1889.

incidents involving whites. Considering that there were over six times as many white students enrolled that year, it is clear that whites were at least three times more likely to be “spared the rod.” A teacher in a predominantly white school in neighboring Lawrence reportedly had two separate whips, one for white children and another for blacks.³⁷⁰

Although the problem of overcrowding tended to be much worse in the schools reserved for black students, the rapid expansion of the schools and the number of students enrolled created major shortages throughout the system. Records clearly indicate that black schools were given last priority, yet there are occasional instances when conditions were actually worse in the white schools, albeit temporarily. For example, the school that was most overcrowded in 1884 was Central which was reserved for white children.

*Indications of Overcrowding in the Public Schools of Kansas City, 1884.*³⁷¹

<i>School</i>	<i>Number of Rooms</i>	<i>Seating Capacity</i>	<i>Total Enrollment</i>
Everett Street	6	300	405
Sixth Street (Black)	6	300	473
Central	9	450	850
Fifth Ward	2	120	70
Sixth Ward	2	120	152

³⁷⁰ Public Schools of Wyandotte County, Kansas, “Course of Study, Rules, Regulations, and Suggestions, Designated for the use of Teachers and School District Officers, 1889,” 6; First Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City of Kansas City, Kansas, 1887; *American Citizen*, March 15, 1889.

³⁷¹ Fifteenth Annual Report of the Board of Education of Kansas City, Kansas, 1884.

Charts and graphs fail to convey the types of informal discrimination captured by photographs and preserved in oral histories. Every photograph of black students in the scrapbooks of the racially-integrated schools of Independence, Kansas demonstrates that black children were required to sit amongst themselves in the back of the classroom. Although black and white children continued to play together, school officials in neighboring Coffeyville deliberately set about to enforce Jim Crow on the playground. By the time these students reached the high school no such prodding was necessary. Student yearbooks depict the maintenance of the color line in social and extracurricular activities while student yearbook staffs typically Jim Crowed the photos of their former recess playmates on a separate page at the back of the book. While black communities vigorously guarded against de jure segregation and other obvious forms of discrimination, the daily episodes of discrimination were seldom confronted or even mentioned as grievances within the most radical of black journals. The daily occurrence of these microaggressions were understandably minimized by black students who came to regard such discrimination as almost natural. James L. Dameron's memory of his experiences at a predominantly white high school in Oskaloosa, Iowa is instructive. "The students were friendly," Dameron recalled. "There was no discrimination... I never forced myself where discrimination might occur."³⁷²

³⁷² Scrapbooks of the Independence Schools, Independence Board of Education Office, Independence Kansas; Scrapbook compiled by Eunice Harvey, Coffeyville Board of Education Office, Coffeyville, Kansas; *Des Moines Tribune*, November 12, 1953, in "African-Americans" Clippings File, State

The Creation of Civil Rights Laws

A similar pattern of selective black resistance is evident in regards to segregation in public accommodations throughout Middle America. Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska each passed strong Civil Rights laws during the 1870s, yet the effectiveness of these laws was reduced by the refusal of the courts to enforce these laws and the reluctance of members of the black communities to confront violators. Ironically, one of the few cases in which Midwestern black plaintiffs sued under the provisions of the national Civil Rights Act led to the United States Supreme Court's declaration that this law was unconstitutional. Like *Brown v. Board*, the Kansas-based *United States v. Stanley* became the lead case of the 1883 *Civil Rights Cases*, although its outcome was a different kind of civil rights milestone. The Stanley case originated when Highland's Bird Gee sued Murray Stanley of the City Hotel of Hiawatha for his refusal to serve him breakfast alongside other guests shortly after the law was passed. Although Stanley was indicted on April 14, 1876, the case was delayed for the next seven years as Stanley's appeal ultimately led to the case's referral to the United States Supreme Court. Kansas newspapers provided little coverage on the case but did reveal local opinions favorable to the Supreme Court's decision. Although the Hiawatha press was reportedly surprised to find that Stanley had been acquitted, its support of the decision as consistent "with the prejudices of

Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines. A review of the yearbooks of Coffeyville, Independence, Parsons, Des Moines, Wichita, Omaha, Lincoln, and Topeka reveal a nearly universal pattern of placing the photos of black students at the end of the class or on separate pages rather than in alphabetical order among their white classmates.

almost every white man, woman and child in the United States” typified the response of white Kansans.³⁷³

Newspapers throughout the Great Plains welcomed the decision of the Supreme Court as a reiteration of local power. The Republican *Nebraska State Journal* stated that the decision was “in accordance with the spirit and letter of the constitution” and called upon Southern blacks to “hoe their own row” in protecting their rights without any indication that civil rights issues were national in scope. While this sentiment clearly demonstrates a retreat from the ideas of Reconstruction, the *Journal’s* editorial openly advocated the use of physical force by Southern blacks to defend their rights when necessary. Republican politicians such as John Ingalls demonstrated the obtuseness of even the most liberal whites in openly questioning why the Supreme Court’s decision angered his black constituents, identifying the tendency to overreact as one of the peculiarities of African Americans. Republican editors typically minimized the importance of the decision, assuring their readers that the court’s decision would foster color-blind justice. After all, Republicans reminded their black constituents, there were no special laws protecting the rights of whites.³⁷⁴

The decision is in exact accord with common usage, and the negroes have no cause for complaint. In all the best hotels of the country a ragged white man is refused entertainment, and for business reasons the proprietors prefer not to entertain negroes, as their guests would object. A decent negro would not stop at a hotel, or occupy a seat at an entertainment, where he was not wanted, and the impudent negroes who are anxious to thus render themselves conspicuous and annoying on the

³⁷³ *Hiawatha World*, October 25, 1883 in “Negroes Clippings,” vol. 6, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas; *Atchison Globe*, October 25, 1883; *Civil Rights Cases*, 108 U.S. 3 (1883).

³⁷⁴ *Nebraska State Journal*, October 17, 21, November 2, 22, December 15, 1883; *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 15, 1883; *Atchison Globe*, October 19, 1883. Kevin Gaines details the persistence of a culture that asserts that legal “color-blindness” is tantamount to the end of racial discrimination. Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

same principle that white men occasionally insist upon drinking large quantities of prohibited whisky, deserve to be thrown out. Polite and decent negroes never have any difficulty, so far as we know, in securing their rights, and the decision is a good thing in its application to those who are insolent and troublesome.³⁷⁵

“Stalwart Republican” editor Sol Miller likewise agreed with the court’s decision. “The ones to suffer,” Miller explained, “will be chiefly the upstarts, who persisted in forcing themselves among people who could not appreciate them, simply because they thought the law would uphold them.” Echoing the belief of other white Republicans that the measure would encourage a manly spirit of independence among blacks, Miller concluded by stating that African Americans “who were content to keep with their own class, [would] never feel the difference.”³⁷⁶

While most Republicans minimized the decision, a handful of Republican journals viewed the court’s decision as a retreat from the nation’s commitment to equality. The *Davenport Daily Gazette* even called for a Constitutional amendment guaranteeing black civil rights. Despite a certain degree of shock and indignation, Midwestern whites explicitly presented the decision as a Southern issue. Was not the purpose of this legislation, Midwestern Republicans asked, “to secure to the colored man his full recognition as a man and a citizen at the south as in the north?” The regional orientation of the local press demonstrated the insincerity of rank and file Republicans on matters of civil rights as Republican editors in Middle America directed their sharpest barbs at Southern Democrats while only a few Republican

³⁷⁵ *Atchison Globe*, October 17, 1883.

³⁷⁶ *Atchison Globe*, October 18, 1883.

editors even addressed the question of how best to secure the civil rights of African Americans in the wake of the Supreme Court's retreat.³⁷⁷

African Americans throughout the region understood the limits of their tenuous political alliance and held a series of protest meetings presided by black leaders rather than Republican politicians. The participants of one such rally vowed resistance "by all lawful means" to violations of their civil rights, as African Americans in Middle America clearly drew connections to the Supreme Court's decision and local issues. A number of short-lived local civil rights associations were formed out of these protest meetings, such as the Kansas City-based Civil Rights Agitation club which resolved to press for the enforcement of state's Civil Rights Law. The regional conference of the A. M. E. church in Denver likewise denounced the Supreme Court's action in the strongest terms possible, calling for a counter-revolution to assure the rights of their members. Black leaders from the Great Plains also attended national meetings as delegates alongside Frederick Douglass and other national figures. Area newspapers received scores of personal visits by black leaders and letters written by local African American residents appeared throughout the region. Although only one of the scores of protest meetings held in the region was recorded as having interracial participation, the fiery rhetoric of the black community

³⁷⁷ *Davenport Daily Gazette*, October 20, 24, 1883; *Davenport Weekly Gazette*, October 24, 1883; *Burlington Weekly Hawkeye*, October 25, November 1, 19, 1883; *Waterloo Courier*, October 3, 1883, January 23, 1884.

caused whites to take notice, albeit typically only for as long as it took to print an article lampooning the emotional sensitivities of the race.³⁷⁸

A handful of white political leaders were the exception to this rule and led the fight to create state laws that protected the civil rights of African Americans. In December, Senator Preston Plumb of Emporia presented a petition of African Americans to the U. S. Senate following the *Civil Rights Cases* which detailed the conditions they faced and called for legislation to protect their civil rights. A select group of influential Republican leaders in Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska responded to these conditions by making their states were among the first to pass civil rights laws following the decision of the Supreme Court.³⁷⁹

Historians have demonstrated that the existence of civil rights laws in Northern states did little to curtail the creation and enforcement of the color line in the restaurants, inns, theaters, and other places of public accommodation. Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska were no exception to this trend. Wealth and status typically moderated the symptoms of racial segregation, yet black delegates to state and county Republican conventions were routinely barred from accommodation at area hotels and restaurants. A troupe of traveling actors performing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were likewise refused service in Cedar Rapids in 1883. Even the eminent Frederick Douglass was reportedly barred from a Leavenworth hotel in 1888 because of his

³⁷⁸ *Atchison Globe*, October 24, 1883; *Nebraska State Journal*, October 20, 23, 31, November 1, 2, 3, 4, 1883; *Atchison Globe*, October 24, November 1, 1883; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, April 30, 1884; *Waterloo Courier*, October 24, November 7, 1883; *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, January 17, 1888.

³⁷⁹ *Davenport Weekly Gazette*, December 12, 1883; *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, December 13, 1883; 1931 *Negro Year Book of Tuskegee*; Bernard D. Reams and Paul E. Wilson, "Segregation and the Fourteenth Amendment."

race. Although black Midwesterners frequently threatened to sue proprietors under the terms of state civil rights laws, it was difficult to gather evidence that would secure convictions. For example, a Des Moines ice cream parlor claimed its refusal to serve black customers was due a shortage of product, while other establishments simply denied that they had refused service at all.³⁸⁰

Despite these obstacles and the understandable reluctance of blacks to sue white proprietors given the culture of segregation that existed in Middle America, more civil rights cases were filed in the Great Plains during the immediate aftermath of the *Civil Rights Cases* than perhaps any other period prior to the Modern Civil Rights Movement. A father and son in Eureka, Kansas sued a traveling theatrical troupe who discriminated against them in seating arrangements only months after the National Civil Rights Act was declared void. A similar case was brought forward in Carbondale, Kansas in 1888. Several skating rinks in Kansas were likewise sued, but the courts ruled that these places of public accommodation were actually private and therefore immune from the law. A particularly creative judgment occurred in Iowa when a judge ruled that the police had no jurisdiction over a rink because it was unlicensed and therefore immune from the state Civil Rights law. Similar occurrences were recorded in other states. Black plaintiffs in Ohio won a series of cases against roller rinks in 1885 but were awarded only nominal sums as Ohio's law prescribed no

³⁸⁰ Randall B. Woods, "After the Exodus," 189; *Topeka Capital*, June 19, 1886, November 20, 188; *South Kansas Tribune*, August 4, 1880; *Jackson Sentinel* (Maquoketa, Iowa), November 8, 1883; *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, July 22, 1884; *Palo Alto Reporter*, August 8, 1884. For details of Civil Rights laws in other Northern states, see Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); David Vassar Taylor, *African Americans in Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2002); David M. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (University of Illinois Press, 1975).

specific penalties. Blacks sued at least a dozen restaurants in Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska during the late 1880s but met similar intransigence from white judges. Although most of these cases were dismissed, two successful lawsuits involving the refusal of service at a barber shop did occur. A black barber in Oskaloosa, Iowa and a white barber in Lincoln, Nebraska were both sued for their refusal to shave black patrons, former being overturned by the Iowa Supreme Court in 1887 while the latter was upheld by the Nebraska Supreme Court in 1889.³⁸¹

³⁸¹ Valeria Weaver, "The Failure of Civil Rights and its Repercussions," *Journal of Negro History* 54 (October, 1969): 376; *Topeka Commonwealth*, September 6, 1883; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, November 16, 1886; *Carbondale Record*, August 18, September 1, 1888; *Topeka Daily Capital*, August 24, 1888 in "Negroes Clippings," vol. 5, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka Kansas; *Bowlin v. Lyon* 67 Iowa 536 (1885); *Atchison Globe*, October 4, 1883; February 4, 1889; *Iowa State Register*, November 19, 1885; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, November 16, 1886; *Iowa State Register*, November 19, 1885; *State v. Hall* 72 Iowa 525 (1887).

Chapter 5: Confronting the Color Line in the “Age of Jim Crow”

Historical surveys of the United States in the 1890s typically emphasize the corrupt alliance of businessmen and politicians, the era’s Victorian culture, and the dissent of Populists and Socialists. Middle America is prominently featured in each of these areas as World Fairs in Chicago, Omaha, and St. Louis displayed a Victorian façade while Midwestern railroad speculation and agrarian dissent dominated the national dialogue. The African American experience in Middle America, however, was hidden from that dialogue and has been expunged from the historical record. Even the best local histories such as Craig Miner’s survey of Kansas details the experiences of African Americans in the state’s formative years through the Exodus but abandons this narrative until the late 1920s when the Klan became a political factor in the state. Articles in local and state historical journals follow this pattern, focusing on African American history during the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement with little exploration of the decades in between.³⁸²

National surveys of U. S. history likewise neglect the African American experience beyond the assertion that the period represented a “nadir” that was typified by racial violence and lynching. Even surveys of the turn of the century address African American history only in the context of the Deep South or urban North. Especially disturbing is the tendency to address the African American experience from the perspective of white reformers. For example, Michael McGerr’s recent book

³⁸² Craig Miner, *Kansas: A History of the Sunflower State*.

on the turn of the century addresses the inconsistencies of segregation with the liberal goals of the Progressive Era without addressing black newspapers and other primary sources. As a result, segregation is presented as the creation of flawed yet charitably-minded whites. “True to their sense of compassion,” McGerr asserts, “the progressives turned to segregation as a way to preserve weaker groups.” Although McGerr is attempting to illustrate that segregation was not the worst case scenario given the racial attitudes of the time period, his and other works on this time period illustrate the assumption that segregation was “just the way it was.” Even worse, these surveys perpetuate the myth that blacks “accommodate[d] segregation, much as earlier generations had accommodated slavery.” By focusing nearly exclusively on the worst aspects of racial violence, historians have sanitized the violence of barring children from schools and perpetuating a culture that accepted racial intolerance as the norm. Equally disturbing is the fact that the creation of the color line in thousands of Midwestern communities has been either expunged from the historical record or dismissed as a natural occurrence that was accepted by African Americans.³⁸³

A small but growing number of historians have recently challenged this notion, however, by focusing on the efforts of individual black communities. Although national leaders such as Booker T. Washington may have at least superficially adopted a strategy of conciliation, historians are now turning the lens of micro-history to challenge the notion that the other eight million African Americans

³⁸³ Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 182-202.

who lived during the “nadir” wore the same mask. This change in perspective from national to local is challenging historic interpretations and revealing the complexity of an era that saw a dramatic rise in black education and entrepreneurial ventures that coincided with an increase in racial violence. This focus on individual communities transforms black communities from anonymous masses who presumably followed the lead of Washington’s coterie to autonomous communities that used a variety of methods to confront the color line.³⁸⁴

The self-determination of the black community of Nebraska City is representative of this autonomy. The failure of the Martin case only intensified black protest against Jim Crow, as at least five black parents presented handwritten petitions calling for the admission of their children in the graded schools nearest their homes. What these petitions lack in style and syntax they make up for in abundance in both logic and emotion, as each parent urgently appealed for the educational opportunities that they themselves were denied. Despite the simple justice that these petitions sought, these appeals were universally denied through postponement and delay while the requests of white parents asking that their children be transferred from one school to another with little or no explanation were immediately granted without delay or even inquiry. African American parents continued to send their

³⁸⁴ The work of Louis Harlan illustrates the complexity of Booker T. Washington. In many ways, the disparity between Washington’s accommodationist public persona and his private efforts to confront the color line characterizes the complexity of race relations in this era. For example, see Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Robert J. Norrell’s detailed exploration of Washington’s Tuskegee during the 1940s likewise illustrates the complexity of Washington’s legacy as he locates the origins of the Modern Civil Rights Movement in the institution that Washington built. For example, see Robert J. Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

children considerable distance to a school that lapsed into disrepair as board members postponed recommended repairs and frequently neglected their annual inspections of the St. Augustine school. Black children did enjoy one advantage over their white counterparts, however, as the teacher-to-student ratio at St. Augustine remained incredibly low as the city's black population slowly declined in the late 1880s. The white schools of Nebraska City, however, were so overcrowded that the board divided the primary grades into morning and afternoon sessions in 1890. Besieged by a second budget crisis and three years of continued black protest, the board consented the following year and allowed black children in Greggsport to transfer from St. Augustine to their local schools. Although this was merely a return to the status quo, this decision began a second and final process of desegregation in the Nebraska City Schools.³⁸⁵

Demonstrating the complexities of Jim Crow as both an architect of intolerance and as a rock upon which many black communities were built, black parents presented three separate petitions calling for the continuation of the St. Augustine school following the withdrawal of the Greggsport children. The wording of these petitions is instructive, however, as each petition calls for the maintenance of the school for the reason that "they could not do better themselves," indicating that the parents believed that the elimination of St. Augustine would only place the burden of education upon the black community. Given the choice between a segregated

³⁸⁵ Minutes of the Nebraska City Board of Education, June 15, December 7, 1885, June 8, 1886, June 18, 1887, April 8, March 3, August 4, 1890, June 1, October 8, 1891; *Nebraska City News* June 24, September 23, 1887, September 14, 1888; *Nebraska City Weekly News*, October 16, 1891; 20th Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1888; 22nd Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1890; Nebraska City Directory, 1881, 1888.

public school or no public school at all, five couples and three women claiming to represent the majority of the parents whose children were still enrolled at St.

Augustine expressed their desire that the school be continued in May of 1892. Four months later, a similar petition contained only six signatures while a counter-petition called for the abolition of the school. By November, petitions requesting that black parents be allowed to send their children to the graded schools nearest their home received nearly universal support among black parents. The board's decision to grant this petition, however, did not result in the immediate abolition of St. Augustine as a handful of black parents protested against the school's closure and continued to send their children to the school. In an effort to protect her position, the teacher at St.

Augustine exaggerated the amount of scholars in attendance in an attempt to justify the continued maintenance of the school following desegregation. Upon the discovery of the fraudulent reports, the board demanded the teacher's resignation and closed St. Augustine. Full integration occurred slowly, however, as some black parents were hesitant to send their children to the white schools of the city. By the Spring of 1893, almost all of the former students of St. Augustine were in regular attendance throughout the graded schools of Nebraska City. Photographs taken during the early 20th century confirm that integration was maintained, although the continued out-migration of Nebraska City's black residents would have made a third attempt at Jim Crow economically impracticable.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁶ Minutes of the Nebraska City Board of Education, April 4, June 6, October 3, 11, November 10, December 5, 9, 29, 1892, February 10, March 22, 1893; *Nebraska City News*, October 14, December 9,

The black community of Independence, Kansas likewise defeated segregation by a combination of direct protest, legal action, and interest convergence. Renewed protest against Independence's Jim Crow school culminated with a second boycott against the school in the fall of 1890. Black parents again petitioned the Independence Board of Education and demanded that their children be admitted to the local graded schools. Although the local press reported that the "Colored Department" of the public schools opened "with as little friction as could be reasonably expected" given the ongoing protest, it was clear that the boycott was a source of embarrassment for white residents who publicly claimed that the separation was actually demanded by black parents. The city's Republican press claimed that a small number of demagogues were behind the boycott, discrediting the popular support of the movement while portraying its leaders as traitors to their race who kept their own children in ignorance in order to gain notoriety. White Republican leaders in Independence responded to black protest by calling for new leadership in the black community. Anticipating the white Southern embrace of Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Compromise, whites in Independence called for their own compromise wherein the black community would be guaranteed equal facilities if only it would accept segregation. While whites searched for a member of the Independence black community who might accept such a compromise, that community escalated its agitation through legal channels. Following the refusal by school officials to admit his two daughters at a graded school that was less than a block away from their home,

1892; Nebraska City Directory, 1891-1892, 1893-1894; "Early Schools" Vertical File, Nebraska City Public Library.

Jordan Knox sued the Independence Board of Education. The lawsuit and continued boycott of the separate school placed the Republican press in an awkward position as it attempted to retain black support without supporting the leading issue of the black community. As a result, the Republican press printed numerous stories of Southern Democratic outrages yet maintained a peculiar silence regarding the local boycott and lawsuit. The Democratic press was more candid in its view of the case. “The question of why Cuffee can not be allowed to run the public schools of this city to his liking,” the *Star and Kansan* opined “and throw spit balls in any room he sees fit, instead of being kept with the rest of his sable brethren, is to come up before Judge Perkins in the district court to-day, on a writ of mandamus.” Given popular sentiment against the case, the Democratic press’ strategy of race-baiting drew no response by its Republican rival. Although Jim Crow was a human invention, the statement “Whom God hath separated let not man put together” sanitized and even sanctified the creation of the color line in Southeastern Kansas.³⁸⁷

African American attorneys Abraham Thomas and William A. Price, former Exodusters from Louisiana and Alabama, represented the Knox family. Both men had been active in local politics, with William Price nearly securing a Republican nomination for the state legislature prior to his withdrawal from the race and support of Alfred Fairfax’s successful campaign. Given the well-established legal precedent of Jim Crow’s illegality in cities of the second class, the legal strategy of the

³⁸⁷ *Bertha Knox v. The Board of Education of the City of Independence* 45 Kan 152 (1891); *South Kansas Tribune*, September 24, October 15, 29, December 17, 1890; *Independence Star and Kansan*, January 16, 1891.

Independence Board mirrored those of other cities in its attempt to portray racial segregation as an administrative matter that was not racially-motivated. Independence officials stressed the overcrowded condition of their schools and portrayed the creation of a separate school as consistent with the best interests of all children. The board responded to the plaintiff's argument about the distance his children might be forced to travel by fabricating a story about how white children were also forced to travel such distances due to overcrowding. Although the plaintiffs were able to prove this argument to be false, the opinion of the court was based on the legal precedent established by the Tinnon case. Once again, the district court and the Kansas Supreme Court upheld their previous decisions and referred to the history of legal judgments against Jim Crow dating back to the Clark case of 1868.³⁸⁸

Independence's Democratic press was vocal in its denunciation of the decision, predicting that a return to integrated schools would result in racial friction despite decades of evidence to the contrary. The journal even drew a connection to Southern Reconstruction, claiming that the "failure" of these efforts proved the bankruptcy of racial equality and need for racial separation. School officials attempted to delay integration despite the Kansas Supreme Court's decision in January of 1891, stalling until black protest led to the acceptance of black children in neighborhood schools. A large and well-preserved collection of photographs from the Independence schools reveals the limits of racial integration, as black and white children were separated within individual classrooms. Scores of photographs

³⁸⁸ *Bertha Knox v. The Board of Education of the City of Independence* 45 Kan 152 (1891); *South Kansas Tribune*, September 12, 1888; December 17, 1890; Kansas State Census, 1885.

demonstrate that black children were required to sit in the back row or rows of the classrooms, either by themselves or as a group. Even the records of black children were segregated, being recorded on pink sheets of paper instead of the white paper used for all others. Photographs of young children at recess demonstrate how difficult Jim Crow was to enforce outside of the classroom, and black and white children played together despite the efforts of teachers to maintain the segregation. Photographs of junior and senior high school activities reveal that such efforts were no longer required beyond the grammar school as both white and black children were well-educated in the Jim Crow culture of Middle America.³⁸⁹

A similar case occurred at the end of the decade in Olathe. The local press reported that “several of the good friends of the race” led a handful of black leaders to accept the idea of separate schools by making lavish promises about black employment, community control, and equal accommodations. When Jim Crow came to Olathe these promises were not honored as a hundred black children were placed into a single room administered by one black teacher who attempted to teach all eight grades simultaneously. By the summer of 1889 this school had expanded into a two-room facility but was still far from offering equal educational opportunities to its occupants. The construction of two new brick schools for white children at this time led to renewed pressure for integration. The board’s refusal to grant black petitioners’ request for integrated schools led to a lawsuit using the rejected application of nine-

³⁸⁹ *South Kansas Tribune*, January 14, 1891, *Independence Star and Kansan*, January 16, 1891; School Census Reports, Scrapbooks, Annual High School Yearbooks of the Independence Board of Education, Independence, Kansas; Scrapbooks of the Independence Public Schools, Special Collections, Independence Public Library, Independence, Kansas.

year-old Luella Johnson as a test case. Once again, school officials denied that any racial discrimination had occurred while simultaneously maintaining that racial segregation was in the best interest of all children. The board also claimed that Luella Johnson had been denied admission because she had applied for wrong grade. The district court sarcastically responded to this farce by pressing school officials how it could possibly make this determination without an examination, as they had denied this child admission to a graded school for her entire young life. Despite a variety of arguments concocted by school officials, the district court cited the Tinnon case in its judgment for the plaintiff in April of 1890. Although many whites apparently called for an appeal to the Kansas Supreme Court, the city's Democratic press agreed that the case has been settled according to established legal precedents and any additional legal proceedings would only cost the taxpayers more money. "The School Board is beaten," the *Johnson County Democrat* counseled, "now let them conform to the law and give the colored children their rights."³⁹⁰

Black leaders throughout the state not only confronted segregation in cities of the second class, they also petitioned their legislators and called for an end to the law which authorized the practice in cities of the first class. A letter to the *Wyandotte Herald* in 1891 expressed the sentiment of many Kansans in denigrating the black community for this effort. "It is a very foolish effort on their part," the letter claimed, explaining that segregation benefited black children. That the author's concern for the black community was disingenuous was evidenced by the very next line,

³⁹⁰ *Olathe Mirror*, April 10, 1890; *Johnson County Democrat*, April 17, 1890; *Leavenworth Advocate*, April 26, May 3, 1890.

however, as the letter explained that integration “would practically ruin” the white schools of Kansas City. Area black newspapers confronted this sentiment, reminding readers that black and white children had attended the same schools prior to segregation without negative results. In fact, integration offered positive benefits beyond economy. “Separate schools make prejudice greater and cause the Negro to feel his inferiority,” explained a letter to the *Iowa State Bystander*. Yet at the same time that black leaders and community members confronted the color line, they occasionally internalized the racist views of the dominant culture. For example, the author of the *Bystander* letter lamented the failure of black parents to instill the value of education in their children as white parents did. As a result, the author believed that mixed schools allowed black students to “unconsciously catch the spirit of enthusiasm” for learning that were inherent in white children.³⁹¹

The rhetoric of some African American leaders who sought to confront these attitudes by espousing racial pride and independence reveals a paradox of sorts. Omaha’s *Afro-American Sentinel* actively confronted segregation through direct confrontation of white proprietors, yet its comments aimed at improving conditions for black children occasionally appear to support self-segregation. The fact that Omaha employed only one black teacher while neighboring cities with separate schools hired scores of African Americans was particularly troubling. Cyrus Bell sarcastically remarked that the exclusion of black teachers was a feature of Omaha’s

³⁹¹Reginald T. Buckner, “A History of Music Education in the Black Community of Kansas City, Kansas 1905-1954,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1974), 5; *Iowa State Bystander*, June 24, 1894.

“beautiful mixed school system.” Bell recognized the value of community schools and directly confronted the notion that black children benefitted from attending classes with white children where they were informally excluded from the social, athletic, and extracurricular activities of the school. “And yet there are hosts of Negroes who are so simple as to believe that the gain is greater to the race by the mere concession of the privilege of ‘mixin wid de white folkes,’” Bell remarked, adding that black teachers and schools would provide Omaha’s black community with an institutional core beyond the churches.³⁹²

Such remarks should not be confused as support for Jim Crow, however, as a review of Cyrus Bell’s comments throughout his editorial career attest. Furthermore, the continued agitation to improve conditions within the segregated schools of Middle America were part of the general protest against Jim Crow. For example, while campaigns to equalize conditions between the black and white schools might seem accommodationist, the success of these campaigns ultimately led to the decision to integrate the schools due to the financial implications of operating two equal school systems. While the maintenance of separate schools actually lowered the overall costs of public schooling in many Southern communities given the atrocious conditions of Jim Crow schools, the continued demand for equal facilities led many Midwestern communities towards integration as a cost-saving measure.

The protest of Midwestern communities in demanding black teachers for black schools likewise demonstrates the complicated dichotomy between protest and

³⁹² *Afro-American Sentinel*, February 12, 1898.

accommodation. Blacks in Topeka led several campaigns in the 1809s that called for an end to the discriminatory hiring practices of the Topeka Board of Education. School officials responded by denying any racial preference for whites and maintained that the continued employment of white teachers in black schools was the result of a scarcity of qualified black teachers. After black leaders demonstrated that only eleven of the twenty-two black residents of Topeka holding teaching certificates were employed by the board in 1894, the Topeka board agreed to hire only black teachers in black schools. A similar campaign was waged in Atchison three years later, with black protest leading to a comparable merger between Jim Crow and affirmative action within the hiring policies of the Atchison Board of Education. While whites in both cities viewed these campaigns as evidence that the black community accepted segregation, African Americans in both communities continued to agitate against segregation even as they worked to improve conditions within segregated schools.³⁹³

One must also consider the daily realities of racial discrimination that occurred within the integrated schools of the region before labeling campaigns to equalize separate schools as accommodationist. African American student William Ford was reportedly well-liked by his white classmates at Omaha's Manual Training School, yet Ford's appointment as the speaker for his classes' graduating ceremony led to a protest by white students. Ford's classmates were so upset at his selection that the students voted against holding their own commencement ceremony unless he

³⁹³ Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka*, 113-114; *Kansas State Ledger*, June 8, 1894; *Iowa State Bystander*, November 19, 1897.

withdrew. As was the case with similar student protests, the actions of the administration was key to determining the outcome of the controversy. In this case, the white students were persuaded to remove their protest by the “determined tone” of administrators who assured the students that the commencement ceremony would be held as planned. Ford was only one of many African American students selected to speak at area commencement ceremonies. Chester Franklin and John Dickinson of neighboring Omaha High School were also among the orators of their class in 1896 with no indication of white protest. Black graduates in Southeastern Iowa such as Harriett J. Taylor and Fred D. McCracken likewise delivered graduation lectures, their speeches directly espousing the progress of black communities both locally and nationally.³⁹⁴

The activism of these students and their Midwestern communities is too often neglected by historians given the current preoccupation with the racial violence of the South. Although such episodes were relatively rare in Middle America compared to the nation as a whole, the dozen lynchings that occurred in Kansas in the last two decades of the 20th century is roughly equivalent to the relative percentage of black Southerners who were lynched during these decades. Yet the story of racial violence in Kansas is unique. An interracial mob in Hiawatha lynched a black man in 1892 who had allegedly killed a black clergyman. Reports of the incident claimed that local whites and blacks worked together in capturing the prisoner from law enforcement officials. Once the prisoner was in the hands of the mob, white participants reportedly

³⁹⁴ *Omaha Enterprise*, May 23, June 27, 1896; *Iowa State Bystander*, June 3, 1898.

withdrew from active participation and watched approvingly as their black co-conspirators carried out the mob's intentions. The following year, a black man in Salina accused of assaulting a white man with intent to kill was lynched *after* standing trial and receiving a seven-year sentence. The next year, a mob in Cherokee lynched a black man on the basis of his reputation as a violent criminal.³⁹⁵

The vast majority of lynching victims in Kansas were white, with most of these men being killed by mobs following the accusation of murder. Although allegations of rape were a leading cause of mob violence against both black and white men, white Kansans demonstrated the same tendencies of their Southern counterparts in extracting a particularly brutal penalty from black men accused of raping white women. Shawn Alexander's descriptive account of a brutal lynching that occurred in Leavenworth in 1901 makes evident the similarities between the ritualistic violence of both regions. Although only circumstantial evidence was brought to bear against Fred Alexander, a mob of two thousand whites brutally mutilated his body and fought over his remains as evidence of their own personal contribution to the protection of white women. The difference between racial violence in Middle America and the South was displayed following the public murder of Alexander as whites throughout the region denigrated the citizens of Leavenworth while black communities launched a sophisticated campaign for justice. That this campaign failed to achieve its desired ends, however, demonstrates the tendency of white

³⁹⁵ Monroe N. Work, *Negro Year Book 1931-32* (Tuskegee: Negro Yearbook Publishing Company, 1933), 293; 1882 Lynching File," Watkins Community Museum and Archives, Lawrence Kansas; *Emporia Gazette*, September 15, November 30, December 1, 1892, April 21, 27, August 22, 1893, April 24, 1894, April 26, 1899; *Pittsburg Plaindealer*, November 4, 11, 1898.

Midwesterners to recoil from the most patent manifestations of racial violence while remaining hesitant to fully support efforts to obtain racial justice.³⁹⁶

The tendency of Midwestern whites to decry racial violence while impeding attempts to assure racial justice permeated all aspects of black life. Because racial injustice was more subtle in terms of education and employment than in the occasional sensational reports of racial violence, whites in Middle America who were typically outspoken against physical violence were oblivious to daily forms of discrimination that surrounded them. A letter printed in the *Kansas State Ledger* echoed the attitudes of many frustrated blacks who were struggling with the harsh realities of a society that permitted such obvious distinctions based on race. “Why do we send our children to high schools and academies,” the writer asked, only “to earn \$1.50/day cleaning the sewers?” While the occasional lynching in Middle America received censure throughout the region, the daily execution of black ambition received little attention.³⁹⁷

Although lynchings did not typify race relations in Kansas, the omnipresent threat of violence is part of the context of those relations that must not be minimized. The connection between informal segregation and the possibility of physical violence is demonstrated by an incident that occurred in Ottumwa. A group of white residents and a group of black residents were “sharing” a public pavilion in the city park during the summer of 1897. Peace was maintained as the two groups alternated the use of the

³⁹⁶ Shawn Leigh Alexander, “Vengeance without Justice, Justice without Retribution: The Afro-American Council’s Struggle against Racial Violence,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 27 (Spring 2007): 117-133; Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*.

³⁹⁷ *Kansas State Ledger*, May 25, 1894.

facility for their dances while the other group retired to their respective side of the park and enjoyed their picnics. This informal practice of segregation received the tacit approval of the city, as the park's white manager reportedly determined when each group could use the pavilion. The refusal of an African American man to yield the floor disrupted this peace as one of the whites presented his revolver in a successful effort to regain possession of the pavilion. After the official refused to enforce the park's regulations against the possession of weapons, black park-goers informed a police officer of the event. The entire episode culminated in a number of the white participants assaulting their black neighbors with bricks and chairs. The white man possessing the revolver was fined ten dollars for threatening the life of a black man while the recipient of that threat was sentenced to twenty days in jail. None of the whites who assaulted the black park-goers were arrested were made.³⁹⁸

Similar episodes of discrimination in law enforcement continued to typify Middle America during the 1890s. Modern research has revealed that the acquittal rate of white homicide suspects in Douglas County at the turn of the century was over three times greater than that of African Americans. In addition to the racial bias of the judicial system, white reporters rarely mentioned the race of criminal suspects unless they were African American. The black press organized formal protests against this yellow journalism, such as a protest against an article by the *Omaha Evening Leader* in response to the killing of a police officer by an unidentified suspect the paper erroneously claimed was black. The *Leader's* article portrayed the entire black

³⁹⁸ *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, August 24, 1897.

community as prone to violent crime, admonishing black men to abandon their arms “because, as a rule, he has less discretion than the white man.” Black women were also discriminated against by Midwestern law enforcement officials who routinely arrested even the most elderly black women on suspicion of prostitution if they appeared in public after dark. Black men who appeared on the streets of Midwestern towns were routinely arrested for intoxication while even the most inebriated whites were tolerated. Black men were also routinely discriminated against in the enforcement of anti-loitering laws. For example, a group of black men were arrested to test Emporia’s new law against loitering on the same day that scores of white men on the same street were simply asked to return to their homes.³⁹⁹

White criminals who committed crimes against African Americans faced a much more lenient system of justice. Midwestern law enforcement officials and public opinion clearly favored white testimony when it conflicted with the statements of African American residents, especially concerning crimes in racially-mixed neighborhoods. Although only a few racially-motivated murders took place in such neighborhoods, racial violence was always a constant threat. Although Muchakinock, Iowa was occasionally referred to as “the colored Athens of Iowa” by the black press, Muchakinock had its own share of violence and vice that typified other mining communities. The racial demographics of this community where approximately one thousand out of fifteen hundred residents were black, however, had a tendency to

³⁹⁹ Clare V. McKenna, Jr., “A Tale of Three Counties: Homicide, Race and Justice in the American West, 1880-1920,”(Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska at Lincoln, 1993), 54; *Afro-American Sentinel*, April 30, 1898; *Atchison Daily Globe*, January 4, 1890, November 1, 4, 11, 1897; *Emporia Gazette*, January 10, 1896.

discourage whites from committing racially-motivated crimes against their black neighbors.⁴⁰⁰

The demographics of mining communities in Southeastern Kansas were quite different, with white residents vastly outnumbering blacks. That a few mining companies actively recruited Southern blacks as laborers led white miners throughout the region to stereotype all African Americans as strikebreakers. Most black miners came to Southeastern Kansas without the aid of the mining companies, however, as the black press of Pittsburg, Kansas urged black migration to the region. In Kansas, the *Plaindealer* assured their readers, “we are all Kansans regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” Although the Pittsburg *Plaindealer*’s essay entitled “Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death” was meant to inspire black migration as a means of protest against Southern tyranny, the violent rhetoric of white miners illustrated that such tyranny was not confined by the Mason Dixon line. While the black press predicted that this second Exodus of miners to Kansas would solve the Southern race problem, economic competition intersected with racism to create a volatile racial climate in the mining communities of Southeastern Kansas.⁴⁰¹

The intersection of race and class in Middle America is represented by the negative attitudes displayed by whites towards Southern blacks who were recruited to come to the region by mining companies in comparison to the indifference these same white residents displayed towards blacks who continued to migrate to black colonies.

⁴⁰⁰ *Iowa State Bystander*, July 6, September 28, 1894, September 9, 1898.

⁴⁰¹ *Pittsburg Plaindealer*, August 5, 12, 19, November 11, 1898; *Emporia Gazette*, July 25, 27, 1893, June 22, July 6, 1899.

While whites in Wathena, Kansas threatened violence against blacks who came to the region in response to advertised jobs that were sought by whites, the arrival of several hundred black migrants in Dunlap aroused little excitement. The situation was particularly acute in Weir City in 1893, when black workers recruited by mining companies required the protection of the state militia. Management of the Kansas and Texas Coal Company repeatedly denied their intentions to permanently replace their primarily-white workforce, explaining their deliberate preference for white workers. A second strike in 1899, however, led to efforts to recruit black workers. Railroad management circulated handbills throughout the South that advertised Weir City as “the paradise for colored people.” While these circulars urged Southern blacks “to join your friends in the land of plenty,” the reception these men received in Kansas was anything but friendly. The 1200 black men who arrived in Southeastern Kansas on special trains that summer likely perceived that their reception might be slightly less friendly than promised, as their convoys stopped to pick up armed guards prior to arrival in Kansas. Management also instructed the riders against looking out of their windows once they crossed into Kansas. Fort Scott Sheriff O.W. Sparks mirrored the race baiting tendencies of Southern lawmen, threatening to prevent blacks from entering his city “if it takes deputizing every man in Cherokee County.” As a result, the miners were housed in stockades guarded by state troops and Pinkertons. If Southeastern Kansas was paradise for black men and women, one newly arrival reported exclaimed, Kansas was “as near as [he] ever wanted to get to heaven.”⁴⁰²

⁴⁰² *Emporia Gazette*, February 4, 1895, January 11, 1896, October 2, 1893; John M. Robb, *The Black*

The majority of Weir City's new residents were adult males, yet the rapid increase in the city's black population led to the creation of a separate school in 1899 for the forty-four black children who now resided in the area. Despite the fact that Weir's black residents accounted for nearly a quarter of the town's population during the peak of mining operations, local histories barely mention the existence of a black community beyond paternalistic statements. For example, one local history claims that the black residents who stayed in the area after the "harsh and vicious Negroes" engaged in mining operations departed "were not really bad." Statements such as "they could be trusted," and "they could not help it if they were black," typify such accounts. Although local histories have expunged segregation and discrimination from the record, these practices were endemic throughout the city. Yet even those who sought to draw the color line in educational and social activities were loathe to lose blacks as voters or customers. When the minister of Weir City's black Baptist church opened a grocery store, for example, competing white merchants attempted to ruin his business by pressuring wholesalers against delivery to "the 'nigger' store." The threat of a retaliatory boycott by the entire black community quickly ended such schemes and the minister's store received all of the goods he ordered from the wholesalers. The economic power of Weir's black community soon declined, however, as the racial preferences of mine management led to the termination of

Coal Miner of Southeast Kansas (Topeka: State of Kansas, Commission on Civil Rights, 1969); Norma Tolson, "An Account of Afro-Americans in Weir, Kansas," Special Collections, Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg, Kansas; *Kearney Daily Hub* (Nebraska), July 27, 1893; *Parsons Blade*, September 16, 1893; *Atchison Globe*, August 23, 25, October 2, 1893; *Pittsburg Plaindealer*, November 4, 11, 1898.

black workers. As a result, the economic power of black mining communities was ultimately limited by the dictates of white interests.⁴⁰³

Although whites in Weir City portrayed the black community's celebrations of Emancipation Day as evidence of indiscretion and intemperance, the observance of such occasions in Middle America became increasingly connected with a new militancy regarding civil rights and racial pride as the turn of the century approached. Celebrations of Emancipation Day in the region at this time were not typified by fawning praise of the "Great Emancipator," but rather were an opportunity to reflect on the legacy of slavery and the black freedom struggle throughout the Diaspora. "Some deluded white men say they fought to free us," Omaha's Charles E. Burke explained to a white editor in regards to one such celebration. Burke recounted the military history of the Civil War, presenting the abolition of slavery as the result of military necessity in ways that parallel modern historiography. Midwestern celebrations were also typified by orations by white and black speakers, resolutions calling for an end to lynching, and even interracial baseball games. Black orators offered an alternative to the dominant narrative of slavery and Reconstruction at these events, acknowledging that the slaves freed themselves from bondage while correcting erroneous views that Reconstruction had proven that blacks were unfit for full citizenship.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³ "Weir, Kansas," Weir Bicentennial Committee, 1989, Special Collections, Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg, Kansas; John M. Robb, *The Black Coal Miner of Southeast Kansas*, 14; *Pittsburg Plaindealer*, December 20, 1898, September 23, 1899, January 20, May 12, 1900.

⁴⁰⁴ *Lincoln Republican*, July 30, August 6, 1891; *Dubuque Daily Herald*, August 2, 1899; *Daily Iowa Capitol*, June 11, 1896; *Omaha Bee*, August 13, September 23, 1896; *Iowa State Bystander*, August 4,

Only occasionally, however, did these celebrations address local race relations with such candor. While most speakers addressed race relations as a Southern phenomenon, Iowa's George Taylor implored his audience to confront local racism. By doing so, Taylor explained at a Keokuk festival, Middle America might become an example for the rest of the nation. "I have an original idea, the only one I ever had," Taylor exclaimed. "Don't go down to Alabama to solve the Negro problem. Begin right here on this platform. Begin here and then show Illinois and Missouri the record of Iowa and spread it all over the union." Taylor concluded by adapting the message of Booker T. Washington, advising his listeners to "'Put down thy bucket here'" not through accommodation to local conditions, but rather as a reference to challenging those conditions as a means of confronting racism throughout the nation.⁴⁰⁵

George Taylor exemplified this strategy as both a local and a national leader of the Afro-American League. Keokuk organized one of the first local branches of the League in 1890, the branch being also affiliated with Iowa's Afro-American Protective Association that was formed three years later. Iowa's League branches met annually in statewide conferences throughout the decade, such as an 1893 convention in Ottumwa that drew over a hundred delegates from throughout the state. By 1894, there were local chapters of the League in nineteen Iowa communities. The majority of the Iowa Afro-American League's resolutions confronted only the most egregious and blatant violations of civil rights in the South, yet these chapters occasionally

1898; *Pittsburg Plaindealer*, August 5, 1898, September 23, 1899; *Afro-American Sentinel*, August 13, 1898; *Davenport Weekly Leader*, September 9, 1893.

⁴⁰⁵ *Iowa State Bystander*, August 4, 1898.

confronted local violations of state's Civil Rights law by hosting mass meetings or contributing funds for legal challenges. While national issues might temporarily excite members of local League chapters, the strength of Iowa's chapters increased or declined in direct relation to their activism in local affairs. For example, the Des Moines chapter experienced a renaissance of sorts in 1896 when it supported a court challenge to segregation in a local restaurant. The tendency of these chapters to focus on racial violence and national issues ultimately led the organization towards conservatism and a false sense of regional exceptionalism. "While the Afro-Americans of Iowa have all the protection asked for," the League resolved in response to an episode of racial violence in South Carolina, "there of those of the race that are being outraged."⁴⁰⁶

A local chapter of the Afro-American League formed in Omaha in 1890 was specifically dedicated to challenging the color line within the state. "It has been manifestly shown that the colored citizens of Nebraska do not enjoy the full benefits, advantages and facilities," the organizers explained, "which should accrue to them under the rights and privileges accorded to them as citizens of this state." The organization also mirrored the later strategies of the Urban League, establishing a bureau of information to aid African Americans in finding employment and with the purchase of homes and farms. The League also reflected the growing controversy regarding interracial membership as the founders debated whether whites should be

⁴⁰⁶ *The New Era* (Humeston, IA), February 5, 1890; *Iowa State Bystander*, July 6, 1894, December 9, 16, 30, 1898; *Daily Iowa Capital*, June 21, 1895, June 23, July 2, 6, 1896, August 18, 21, 22, 1897; *Waterloo Daily Reporter*, December 28, 1898; *Des Moines Daily News*, December 26, 1898.

recruited or even allowed to join the Omaha chapter. Although its constitution stated that membership was open to all regardless of race, each of the initial one hundred members were African American and there is no indication of later interracial membership. Several of these members were also leaders within the National Afro-American League, however, as Barnett and Ricketts were elected to executive offices at the 1890 Chicago convention while E. R. Overall was selected as the chairman of the credentials committee.⁴⁰⁷

Nebraska's Afro-American League also met annually in state-wide conventions that were attended by delegates from its chapters in Omaha, Lincoln, Nebraska City, and Beatrice, as well as individual delegates from as far away as Chadron. As was the case in Iowa, the Nebraska League's focus on the South diminished its effectiveness although it was successful in securing the appointment of a black teacher in Omaha. The League also sponsored the legal defense of George Davies, a black railroad switchman who was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1896 following a train wreck which occurred on the Rock Island railroad. The League contended that Davies was denied a fair trial as part of a conspiracy by railroad management to escape liability for the accident. Davies was selected by the company to take the fall, the League's attorneys claimed, simply because he "happened to be in that vicinity." After the League provided numerous sworn affidavits attesting to Davies' innocence, the white press of Omaha soon joined the League in demanding a second trial. The *World Herald* argued that Davies' sentence of life imprisonment

⁴⁰⁷ *Omaha Progress*, March 22, November 29, 1890; *Omaha Bee*, January 7, 10, 1890.

was must be reviewed in light of these testimonies. “The fact that he did not [receive the death penalty] is evidence that there was an element of doubt in the minds of the jury,” the *Herald* explained. “You cannot send a man to the penitentiary for twenty years on suspicion, and call it justice.” The League’s involvement with a local issue revived its flagging membership, as Ella Mahammitt led the League’s special committee appointed to raise funds for Davies’ defense. “It has been said that the Afro-American League of Nebraska was dead,” the black press explained, as League membership had declined after years of passing the same resolutions against episodes of Southern violence. As in Des Moines, the League’s action in confronting a local issue led to a Renaissance in League activism. A year of fundraising, petitions, and correspondence by League members led to Davies’ case being placed before the Nebraska Supreme Court in February of 1897. The failure to repeal his conviction and the absence of other local campaigns soon led to a second decline in League membership. A variety of competing local civil rights organizations were temporarily organized throughout Nebraska, yet like the League they lacked the successful campaigns needed to inspire and maintain a popular movement.⁴⁰⁸

Local and state-wide chapters of the Afro-American League were also formed in Kansas, whose annual conventions drew delegates from as many as a dozen local chapters. As in Iowa and Nebraska, a host of similar organizations such as the Colored Men’s Council in Southeastern Kansas competed with the League for

⁴⁰⁸ *Omaha Bee*, March 15, 25, 26, 1890; *Kearney Daily Hub*, September 8, 1892; *Lincoln Evening News*, June 29, 1894, January 14, 1896; *Iowa City Daily Citizen*, April 30, 1892; *Omaha Enterprise*, August 24, November 30, December 28, 1895, January 11, 18, February 1, August 8, 15, September 26, 1896, February 27, May 1, 1897.

membership. Leaders of previous local organizations, such as the Topeka-based Colored League often assumed leadership within Kansas chapters of the Afro-American League. These organizations and the Kansas chapters of the Afro-American League campaigned for better facilities in the state's Jim Crow schools and openly confronted the practice of segregation in a few localities, yet these chapters typically did little more than pass resolutions denouncing lynching and other forms of physical violence. As a result, the local chapters of the League lacked the kinds of successful campaigns needed to maintain popular support. Despite its essential conservatism, one of the unique aspects of the Kansas League is the intersection of race and class related to the issue of temperance. Responding to T. Thomas Fortune's 1891 victory in a New York civil rights suit involving the service of alcohol, Kansas prohibitionists claimed that no purveyor of alcoholic beverages would ever draw the color line in their state. The greed and unchecked avarice of Kansas saloon keepers, the prohibitionists claimed, led to interracial consumption of alcohol among the lowest classes. Even prior to the Kansas' prohibition laws, temperance advocates claimed that "even the most aristocratic disburser of tarantula juice" never drew the color line.⁴⁰⁹

These claims of non-discrimination were clearly based on prohibitionist's attempts to denigrate purveyors of alcohol as members of an underclass rather than an actual survey of Kansas establishments. African Americans were regularly

⁴⁰⁹ *Topeka Commonwealth*, August 31, 1887 in *Negroes Clippings*, vol. 5, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas; *Emporia Gazette*, September 7, 1896; *Pittsburg Plaindealer*, December 30, 1898, January 27, 1900; *Atchison Champion*, December 1, 1891; Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka*, 187. Thomas Cox indicates that the city did not have a chapter of the Afro-American League until 1898.

discriminated against and even refused service altogether within restaurants and hotels throughout the state despite the existence of a strong Civil Rights law that clearly forbade such practices. That this law was a dead letter in Kansas is evidenced by one of the first attempts to enforce the statute. J. L. Leonard sued the St. Nicholas Hotel in Topeka after being refused service in August of 1892. The statute's provision outlawing "any distinction" of race within hotels and all other places of public amusement or accommodation was clearly violated by the Nicholas Hotel's refusal to serve Leonard in the dining room, yet the Kansas Supreme Court effectively nullified the entire law on an absurd technicality. The court ruled that the law was unconstitutional because its title called for the protection of "all citizens" while its provisions called for the protection of African Americans. Despite the court's decision, African Americans continued to seek legal redress for discrimination in Kansas restaurants and inns. Edward Stevens attempted to sue Topeka's Copeland Hotel in 1896 for their refusal to allow him to use their elevator. Stevens suit was dismissed, as were several other court challenges. Due to the court's refusal to enforce the now discredited law, black leaders in Kansas adapted their strategies. Mass meetings, petitions, and boycotts against businesses that drew the color line replaced legal challenges. Lawrence's *Historic Times* was one of several black papers in Kansas that addressed local cases of segregation, calling for an end to Jim Crow at the Bowersock Opera House while leading a boycott of a downtown confectioner for his insulting treatment of black customers.⁴¹⁰

⁴¹⁰ William M. Tuttle, Jr., "Separate but Not Equal: African Americans and the 100-year Struggle for

An Iowa district court likewise issued a ruling in 1892 that diminished the importance of Iowa's Civil Rights law, declaring that the statute did not apply to restaurants. Long-observed customs gave these establishments the right to refuse service to any potential customer for any reason, the court asserted, granting *carte blanche* to other establishments to draw the color line without fear of reprisal. In response, a handful of Republican legislators pushed for an amendment to Iowa's Civil Rights bill, specifically adding the phrase "restaurants, chop houses, eating houses, lunch counters and all other places where refreshments are served" to the list of establishments that could not discriminate against potential patrons. The bill easily passed both the House and Senate, with only a handful of Democrats from the state's Eastern cities opposing the measure. Despite this revision of the law, Iowa restaurants continued to draw the color line with impunity. Black plaintiffs sued at least half a dozen Iowa restaurants and hotels between the 1892 and the turn of the century, including the proprietor of the restaurant inside the state house. These cases were typically dismissed on lack of evidence. For example, a black attorney's case against an Iowa restaurant which "deliberately and openly" overcharged him in 1900 was denied on grounds of insufficient evidence.⁴¹¹

Equality in Lawrence and at the University of Kansas, 1850s-1960," in Dennis Domer and Barbara Watkins, *Embattled Lawrence: Conflict and Community* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Continuing Education, 2001), 181; *Lincoln Evening News*, January 27, 1896; *Kansas State Ledger*, September 30, October 7, 1892; *Emporia Gazette*, September 21, 1892; *Atchison Globe*, September 21, 1892.

⁴¹¹ Iowa House Journal of 1892, 172, 492; Iowa Senate Journal of 1892, 493; Laws of Iowa, Twenty-Fourth General Assembly, 1892, Chapter 24; Henry G. La Brie III, "James B. Morris Sr. and the *Iowa Bystander*," *Annals of Iowa* 42 (Spring, 1974): 320-321; *Oxford Mirror* (Iowa), March 24, 1892; *Waterloo Courier*, February 24, 1892; *Des Moines Daily News*, March 13, May 17, 1900; February 25, 1892; *Iowa State Register*, February 25, 1892; *Davenport Weekly Leader*, September 9, 1893; *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, February 19, 1894; *Afro-American Sentinel*, August 25, 1897.

At least one incident of alleged racial discrimination by an Iowa restaurant was likely based more on rumor than fact. An article in a rural Iowa Republican newspaper reported that George Washington Carver was refused service at Penn College in Oskaloosa. The *Oskaloosa Daily Herald* was quick to deny that such an incident occurred, claiming that the Penn College YMCA met Carver and invited him to lead their regular Tuesday evening prayer meeting. Following the meeting, the YMCA treated their guest to dinner at the finest restaurant in town, the *Herald* explained, when one guest of the restaurant expressed his displeasure at Carver's presence by making a scene in exiting the room. The paper further explained that this guest was a recent arrival from South who was not representative of the city and especially not representative of a Quaker college.⁴¹²

African Americans in Nebraska made several attempts to enforce their state's Civil Rights law, yet they were ironically limited in this regard by the statute's hefty minimum fines and the provision requiring the payment of the plaintiff's legal expenses. Because local police courts could not levy such penalties, legal redress could only be secured by securing a hearing before a circuit court. As a result, only one case had ever been tried prior to 1893 according to Matthew Ricketts, Nebraska's first African American state legislator and the sponsor of an 1893 act which amended the law to allow cases to be tried in police courts. This case involved the forced removal of William Gamble from a concert because of his race. One example of a case that had been dismissed without trial occurred in 1891 when a lawsuit involving

⁴¹² *Oskaloosa Daily Herald*, July 11, 1896, in George Woodson Scrapbook, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.

the refusal of a hotel to accommodate a black customer who had ironically sold the building to the present proprietor was dismissed on a technicality. Owing to several such dismissals, Ricketts' amendment changed wording of the statute to apply to “persons” rather than “citizens” as area judges had dismissed several cases regarding black citizens of other states.⁴¹³

The first test of the amended statute occurred in 1896, yet the outcome was no different than the previous law. The Omaha police court quickly dismissed the lawsuit of N.B. Washington against a local restaurateur, claiming that the plaintiff “failed to show that [the proprietor] applied any rule to Mr. Washington which was not alike applicable by law to any other man.” Although Washington had clearly been asked to change seats because of his race, the defendants’ claim that the plaintiff would have been served elsewhere in the restaurant satisfied the court that the statute had not been violated.” Ricketts responded to the nearly decade-long failure to secure a conviction under the state’s Civil Rights law by becoming a plaintiff himself. Ricketts’ lawsuit against a D. E. Burnett, a restaurant owner who refused to serve the legislator in the dining room of his establishment resulted in the state’s first conviction. However, Burnett successfully appealed his fine of \$25, the minimum allowable by statute, and overturned the decision of the police court by maintaining

⁴¹³Donna Mays Polk, *Black Men and Women of Nebraska*, (Lincoln: Nebraska Black History Preservation Society, 1981), 41; *Lincoln Evening News*, January 14, February 4, 1891; Laws of Nebraska, 1885, Chapter 104.

that he was only an employee of the restaurant. As his wife was the owner of the restaurant, the court explained, the defendant was immune from prosecution.⁴¹⁴

In response to the frequency with which Nebraska courts dismissed civil rights lawsuits, the *Afro-American Sentinel* devised a rather ingenious method of collecting evidence. Editor Cyrus Bell conducted a survey of restaurants and hotels as a method of confronting the informal methods of discrimination that had escaped prosecution under narrow interpretations of the state's civil rights law. The *Sentinel's* survey began as a circular mailed to area proprietors, asking a series of probing questions regarding their attitudes towards prospective African American customers. The intent, Bell explained, was to produce a guide for black visitors to Omaha during the 1898 Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition who would not be familiar with the town's racial mores. Realizing that many whites would either recognize the sensitive nature of his questionnaire or simply disregard it altogether, Bell determined that a personal canvass would be needed when only one unsigned circular was returned.⁴¹⁵

Despite his personal history of civil rights activism, Bell admitted that he feared a hostile reception by Omaha proprietors. "All our questions were hard ones to ask," Bell explained, "because in a community where the curse of color prejudice is so prevalent as in this, one must instinctively anticipate harsh and humiliating answers..." Bell quickly found that he was not alone in his discomfiture. One such

⁴¹⁴ *Afro-American Sentinel*, April 25, May 2, October 3, December 12, 1896; *Nebraska State Journal*, October 10, 1896.

⁴¹⁵ *Omaha Enterprise*, September 26, 1896; *Afro-American Sentinel*, December 12, 1896, May 22, October 23, 1897.

exchange between a *Sentinel* reporter and the clerk of the Merchants Hotel is worth reproduction in full.⁴¹⁶

Sentinel: Do you admit colored persons as patrons in your house, or do you exclude them as such?

Clerk: I can't answer your question authoritatively. The proprietor is out just now.

Sentinel: Should a colored person of proper appearance and respectable behavior present himself here and asked to be accommodated in your best style, would you be willing to receive him and treat him in the same way you would others under the same circumstances?

Clerk: Speaking for myself, I should say yes if he could pay the price.

Sentinel: You mean to say, then, that you should charge him the same rates for a (sic) even grade of service that you ordinarily charge any other class of customers for similar service? Or am I wrong in thus constructing your meaning?

Clerk: I should charge him higher rates.

Sentinel: Your object for charging him higher rates, I presume, would be to prohibit or discourage such people from seeking accommodation from you?

Clerk: Yes.⁴¹⁷

At this point the proprietor, whom the clerk reported was absent, made a rather sudden appearance and addressed the editor's questions himself. The *Sentinel* reported that the owner displayed a much higher degree of verbal dexterity than his clerk, utilizing ambiguous responses in an attempt to make it clear that black patrons were not welcome at his establishment without admitting that his establishment was in violation of the law. Bell's partisanship was equally transparent; the Democratic editor judging his subject as the prototypical "Republican of the latter day stamp" whose charitable exterior was betrayed by his duplicitous attitude and slippery language. For example, when Bell asked direct questions about whether black guests would receive equal accommodations, the owner dodged the question by simply stating that the hotel had served members of all races. When forced to give specific examples, however, the owner could recall only the example of Claus Hubbard, an

⁴¹⁶ *Afro-American Sentinel*, October 23, 30, 1897, May 7, 1898.

⁴¹⁷ *Afro-American Sentinel*, May 7, 1898.

African American man whom had once been served at a luncheon. Bell investigated the proprietor's claim, discovering that Hubbard was only begrudgingly served after some controversy despite his membership on a jury that had contracted with the hotel for meals.⁴¹⁸

The manager of the Klondike Hotel was the only respondent who unequivocally maintained that all patrons would be equally received, a policy he expressed as a temporary measure aimed at avoiding the negative publicity experienced by neighboring St. Louis during the 1896 Republican convention. The manager of the Dellone Hotel was credited with one of the most liberal sentiments expressed during the survey as he explicitly conveyed his view of discrimination as uncivilized and unwelcome at his establishment. Nevertheless, a critical examination of his response revealed the existence of negative stereotypes against African Americans. The manager qualified his response with the statement that no "well-dressed man of good breeding" would be denied accommodations at the Dellone. Similar statements indicating that blacks who were "well dressed, good-looking, and of good character" would be acceptable patrons were recorded by other proprietors, a strong indication that prospective black guests would be heavily scrutinized.⁴¹⁹

The Millard Hotel echoed this sentiment and denied that it discriminated against any prospective guests. One might assume that the Millard's standards were rather selective as Ohio state senator John Patterson Green was refused accommodation at that establishment during a political rally in October of 1896.

⁴¹⁸ *Afro-American Sentinel*, October 30, 1897, May 7, 1898.

⁴¹⁹ *Afro-American Sentinel*, October 23, 30, 1897.

Another typical and duplicitous response was recorded at the Drexel Hotel. After the customary equivocations by hotel employees, one clerk admitted the existence of the color line while denying personal culpability. “So far as I am personally concerned,” the clerk volunteered, “I would have no objection to receiving proper colored persons as guests.” “But you know how we are situated,” the clerk explained, “there are some people who do object to having them served at the same tables or in the same room with them, and we have to look out for ourselves.”⁴²⁰

The *Sentinel* evaluated the results of their canvass, concluding that the responses “were more remarkable for their ambiguity than for anything else.” Yet there were occasions during most of the interviews where the evasive rhetoric faltered, such as a statement by a white barber expressing his distaste for blacks who expected the same level of service as white patrons. Although one confectioner who was renowned for serving African Americans shocked the *Sentinel* with his candid statement of resentment towards his black patrons, in only one instance did the manager or proprietor of an Omaha establishment openly admit that black customers would be refused service. The manager of Joseph Hardin’s barbershop explained that his establishment drew the color line as a means of preserving their white clientele. Although the proprietor, manager, and employees of the shop were African

⁴²⁰ Minutes of November 11, 1898, Report of the Nebraska State Board of Directors, Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition, RG 42, Box 8 Folder 3, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska; *Afro-American Sentinel*, October 31, 1896, October 23, 30, 1897.

Americans, the interview revealed that these men thought it good business to refer members of their race “to places that are kept expressly for their accommodation.”⁴²¹

The *Sentinel's* canvass was unique because it simultaneously challenged and recorded white attitudes about race. It was also unique for the boldness in which it was conducted. For example, members of New York's African American community recognized that black visitors would not be welcome in Buffalo's hotels and restaurants during the Pan-American Exposition of 1901. Rather than confront the proprietors of these establishments as Bell had done, black leaders such as Mary Talbert established a Committee of Comfort to arrange accommodations within private homes. Similar efforts were recorded in every exposition city, including Omaha, yet Cyrus Bell's candid exploration of the color line was unique to the Omaha Exposition. Despite the taboo nature of his topic, Bell was pleasantly surprised to find that most of the proprietors were respectful and civil, although a small number expressed concern about the editor's intent to publish their responses.⁴²²

Although the *Sentinel* expressed a sense of amusement at the way many white proprietors and managers dodged the question of segregation, they were deeply disturbed to find that at least one of the businesses that had a reputation for serving all customers equally did so only grudgingly. Despite the fact that his business received almost all of the business of the African American community, the Pennsylvania-born

⁴²¹ *Afro-American Sentinel*, October 30, 1897, May 7, 1898.

⁴²² Barbara A. Seals Nevergold, “‘Doing the Pan’: The African-American Experience at the Pan-American Exposition, 1901,” *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 28 (January, 2004): 23-42; *Afro-American Sentinel*, October 23, 1897.

proprietor James Dalzell expressed resentment towards his dark-complexioned customers as a liability rather than valued customers.⁴²³

I propose to speak frankly and freely about the matter to you. It is true that I have served colored people at the same tables and in the same way that I serve white people, but I have said to them at different times that I would rather not have their patronage than to have it, for the loss on account of it is greater than the gain. You see, it is this way: If I accommodate colored people and cater to their trade, I will drive away the white trade. Being white myself, of course I prefer white patronage to that of colored people.⁴²⁴

The *Sentinel* devoted several articles throughout the exposition year to discussing the question of whether black patronage would hurt white businesses of Omaha, as Dalzell and others suggested. In each instance the paper concluded that very few white Omahans would actually take their business elsewhere and likewise believed that the added revenue of black customers would more than compensate for any such losses.⁴²⁵

Although white Nebraskans continued to violate the state's Civil Rights law with impunity, Matthew Ricketts succeeded in repealing the state's miscegenation statute in 1895. Although the governor vetoed the act, citing his opinion that many members of the legislature did not understand the intent of the bill, members of the black community continued the fight and secured the support of a white Democratic legislator. Although the campaign ultimately proved unsuccessful, the campaign illustrates the possibility of interracial cooperation in Omaha within even the most controversial areas of civil rights legislation. While Southern lawmakers competed for votes by concocting inflammatory rhetoric regarding miscegenation, Nebraska

⁴²³ *Afro-American Sentinel*, November 6, 1897; Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920.

⁴²⁴ *Afro-American Sentinel*, November 6, 1897.

⁴²⁵ *Afro-American Sentinel*, November 6, 27, 1897, May 7, 1898.

politicians preferred a strategy of postponement and avoidance. Omaha's black community complicated this strategy, however, as black leaders and journalists openly confronted Nebraska's political elite in meetings that often made white legislators "evidently ill at ease." So uncomfortable were many Nebraska's legislators when confronted with black constituents that they openly lied to their visitors by falsely reporting that they had worked behind the scenes to support the bill.⁴²⁶

During one of many debates regarding interracial marriage and the Nebraska statute that prohibited the union of whites and persons of a quarter or more African American heritage, a white legislator attempted to subtly paint Ricketts and other blacks who opposed the law as lacking in racial pride. If he himself were black, the legislator explained, he "would want [his] children to be just as black as they could be, and to have the kinkiest sort of hair." The impromptu response of Matthew Ricketts illustrates the sentiment of the community he represented.

It is fair to presume that when the white man's avarice tore my people from their native shores to enslave them in this land they were black; and there is no reason to doubt that they were blessed with a wealth of just such hair as that for which the gentleman now expresses such strong partiality. I can assure you, Mr. Chairman, that it is quite an agreeable discovery to me to find in this gentlemen one of his race who is so enthusiastic in his appreciation of black complexions and kinky hair, and I

⁴²⁶ *Omaha Enterprise*, February 22, April 4, 1896, January 23, 1897; *Afro-American Sentinel*, January 23, 30, March 13, 20, 27, April 10, May 1, 1897; Donna Mays Polk, *Black Men and Women of Nebraska* (Lincoln: Nebraska Committee for the Humanities, 1981), 41; Papers of Governor Holcomb, Records Group 1, Sub-group 17, Series 4, Box 1116, Folder 4, Nebraska State Historical Society.

almost feel like expressing regret, for his own sake, that nature failed to provide him at birth with those personal features.

But inasmuch as the gentleman's race has grown but little darker, if any, while mine has grown much lighter since the establishment of Negro slavery in America, the conclusion is inevitable, that during that dark period of its continuance, while the womanhood of my race was powerless to protect itself against the licentiousness of his, began a process of skin-bleaching and hair straightening which we have the right to ask shall be allowed to proceed, under legitimate conditions, to its natural termination. The gentleman has repeatedly and forcibly expressed his hatred for all forms of protection. The law which my bill seeks to repeal is an outgrowth of slavery, and had its conception in the desire to protect young white men of the South from marrying their near relatives on the father's side.⁴²⁷

African American Editor Cyrus Bell repeatedly published editorials whose argument and rhetoric anticipated that of the Modern Civil Rights Movement. Ricketts and other blacks in Middle America displayed a keen sense of historical understanding, recognizing the Abraham Lincoln acted out of political expediency and military necessity which tempered their optimism and faith in the better angels of the Republican Party. Calls for interracial dialogue alternated with explosions of indignation that anticipated even the most leaders of the modern Black Power movement. For example, Bell praised the actions of Jack Trice, a Southerner who fought back when whites broke into his home. "Shoot down the lynchers as Jack Trice has done," Cyrus Bell's *Sentinel* counseled, welcoming any repercussions that may arise after such a stand. Two decades later a Midwestern African American by the same name would exhibit another form of courage, reportedly leading his Iowa State College teammates on the gridiron despite sustaining lethal injuries by a racially-motivated member of the opposing team. While the exact events surrounding

⁴²⁷ *Afro-American Sentinel*, May 1, 1897.

Jack Trice's death remain shrouded in mystery and legend, Iowa State honored Trice in 1984 by naming their stadium in his honor.⁴²⁸

Two years after the noble yet suicidal efforts of the Southern Jack Trice were eulogized by Cyrus Bell, the *Afro-American Sentinel* again called for violent retaliation and even blamed Southern blacks for allowing white violence to go unanswered. The paper expressed disgust with "expressions of sympathy and pity" as a remedy and called for a "manly spirit" to take hold of black men in that region. In a spirit of righteous indignation, the *Sentinel* exclaimed that if only "one Negro possessing even ordinary courage and a good repeating rifle" would take a stand, the entire "generation of those low-strung, drunken scoundrels" of the white South would perish thereby redeeming the region. If lynch mobs would be "met by colored men armed and prepared to kill as many of them as possible," the paper continued, the "horrible atrocities that are now everyday occurrences all over the South will be few and far between."⁴²⁹

Black women throughout the region also anticipated many of the tendencies of the "radical" women's movement of the 1970s. Not only did a number of black women's organizations demand equal suffrage throughout the decade, black women also demanded inclusion within African American political clubs. Although most of this activity occurred within separate women's auxiliaries, women were often the leaders of the black community's leading social and political organizations. Black

⁴²⁸ *The Afro-American Sentinel*, May 30, August, 29, 1896; Jack Trice Papers, Special Collections Department, Iowa State University.

⁴²⁹ *Afro-American Sentinel*, July 16, 1898.

men and women likewise belonged to literary and debating clubs that typically supported universal suffrage long before the Nineteenth Amendment was passed.⁴³⁰

Midwestern blacks also confronted a host of issues that continue to dominate modern discussions of American race relations. Black literary societies debated the meaning of minstrel shows as a source of entertainment for both white and African American audiences. The black press likewise reflected modern tensions regarding support of black entertainers and criticism for the ways these men and women knowingly perpetuated stereotypes. The consequences of these performances were evident by the incredible popularity of minstrelsy among white audiences who portrayed blackface as an accurate depiction of black life. While the black press repeatedly printed sharp editorials criticizing members of the black community for their patronage of minstrel shows over more cerebral pursuits, even educated whites saw little if anything wrong with the racial assumptions of minstrelsy. A generation after Des Moines' Jim Crow school was discontinued, for example, black children from various schools were assigned to a "picaninny chorus" sent to entertain the Iowa State Teachers' Association's annual meeting in 1897.⁴³¹

While the application of such labels to children drew universal condemnation among African Americans, black literary societies also confronted the issue of whether members of the race were overly sensitive to racial epithets. "Colored people

⁴³⁰ *Perry Chief* (Iowa) December 20, 1889; *Waterloo Daily Courier*, April 20, 1898; *Cedar Rapids Republican*, October 22, 1899; *Lincoln Evening News*, February 1, August 15, 31, September 13, 1900; *Omaha Bee*, August 14, 1896; *Daily Iowa Capitol* (Des Moines), July 30, September 5, 21, 22, 1897; *Waterloo Daily Courier*, April 20, 1898.

⁴³¹ *Daily Iowa Capital*, December 29, 1897; *Waterloo Daily Courier*, March 31, 1898, April 10, 1899; *Omaha Bee*, February 13, 14, 18, 1890; *Kearney Daily Hub*, January 24, 1894; *Daily Iowa Capitol*, July 14, 1896; *Iowa State Bystander*, January 28, 1898.

often speak of each other as ‘niggers,’ ‘coons,’ etc.,” Epworth League President J. C. Parker explained in his tacit introduction of the topic, “and yet they flash fire whenever whites speak of them in such vulgar terms.” A series of male and female speakers addressed the issue from a variety of viewpoints, yet each agreed that historical context and tone determined the meaning of such messages. Whereas blacks used such phrases in jest or as sport with one another, the Epworth League concluded that whites typically utilized such phrases in a spirit of meanness.⁴³²

The 1890s were also host to a number of successful campaigns aimed at breaking the color line in municipal employment in police and fire departments. While a handful of black police officers were hired in the 1880s, black communities successfully lobbied for the employment of significant numbers of black patrolmen in Topeka, Des Moines, Omaha, and Kansas City. Smaller cities such as Emporia, Kansas employed one or two black firefighters, while larger cities responded to community activists by creating black fire companies. Omaha officials hired five black firefighters in January of 1895, while Kansas City followed suit three years later. Often these promises were followed by inexplicably long delays on the part of city managers, yet the continued agitation of black communities assured that these promises were delivered. For example, after over a year of delays black leaders in Omaha were told that they would have to wait even longer as nothing so controversial could be created prior to the municipal elections. “If it is expected that we shall bow and cringe like slaves to obtain so just a boon,” one leader reportedly exclaimed in his

⁴³² *Afro-American Sentinel*, July 23, 1898.

response to civic officials that they could keep their fire department and forget the support of the black community, “we prefer being men at all times.” Omaha’s black fire company was organized a few weeks later. These companies constituted one of the core elements of black communities, hosting both social and community events in addition to providing emergency services to black residents who had previously suffered delayed response times. The segregated nature of these departments, however, limited the opportunities of advancement for black firefighters. Omaha’s separate “colored fire department,” for example, was maintained until 1957 and effectively barred promotion beyond the rank of captain.⁴³³

The creation of these black fire departments illustrates the tremendous political power that the region’s largest black communities wielded. Middle America figures prominently in historic surveys of the national political scene at the turn of the century. Class and gender issues have also been well-documented as Midwestern women were among the first to achieve full political equality and Midwestern farmers were at the vanguard of the Populist movement. The struggles of African Americans in Middle America is all but ignored, however, as African American history is typically regionally and thematically segregated. While the story of Southern lynchings and Northeastern black leaders have recently been included in the national narrative, the complete omission of African Americans as historical actors in the Midwest creates the false impression that racial injustice itself might have been

⁴³³ Omaha Fire Department Collection, Folder E, “Summary of Miscellaneous Information on the Omaha Fire Department,” Douglas County Historical Society, Omaha, Nebraska; *Pittsburg Plaindealer*, March 31, 1900; *The American Citizen*, January 21, 28, February 24, March 31, April 22, May 20, September 30, 1898; *Iowa State Bystander*, August 19, 1898; Ted F. McDaniel, ed., *Our Land*.

segregated to other regions. The omission of African American suffragettes and African American Populists in Middle America likewise sustains and expands this falsehood by asserting by implication that blacks were not part of the era's leading social movements.⁴³⁴

Whites in Middle America attempted to discredit black political action by presenting black communities as both divided on major issues or as an unthinking monolithic block. While the later strategy was typified by presenting black voters as pawns of the Republican Party, black participation in the Democratic and Populist Parties was also used to denigrate the race as lacking unity. African Americans countered these racist caricatures meant to discourage black political action, asking why even the most liberal whites believed that black aspirants for office should be first paired off against each other with the winner representing the entire community. "Colored men are possessed of the same diversity of opinion as white men," Midwestern blacks pointed out, explaining their differences in opinion as characteristic of all citizens in a democracy rather than a peculiar tendency of a caviling race. "When a political vacancy occurs it is not the custom of our white citizens to assemble in mass meeting and agree upon one particular man for the vacancy," one black editor explained, adding that differences of opinion among black voters should be as expected as those between whites. Cyrus Bell of Omaha took this analysis further, claiming that white politicians also used these "divisions" as an

⁴³⁴ Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 182-202.

excuse to forsake their promised support for civil rights initiatives and black patronage.⁴³⁵

In order that the white man may violate his obligations he selects and dictates to the race what in his judgment, it should have, and if it does not accept it without investigation the Anglo-Saxon provokes inquiry and then for the purpose of violating sacred obligations declares that the colored race is always divided. This dogma of no union in the Afro-American race is a myth. There exists in the Anglo-Saxon two elements of opposite characters; there exists in every party and combination of that race, the same elements of strife and disunion, as it charges the Afro-American with. We term it the spirit of free speech which is guaranteed to all, the right to investigate what is best the same as any other race. But when applied to the colored by those who desire to deprive the race of its rights, that it is devoid of union. In all great questions that relate to the prosperity and the stability of this government, the Anglo-Saxon is not a unit. Take the Monroe Doctrine, the tariff, the currency, there is no union according to the definition of the term, as to the principles involved and which is alleged as an evil in the Afro-American. The great trouble is the Anglo-Saxon claims the right to dictate to the Afro-American and he must accept that dictation without investigation.⁴³⁶

Despite the tendency of whites to distort divisions in black political opinion, attempts to mobilize unanimous support within black communities for black political candidates were heavily criticized by blacks if those efforts were perceived as bypassing the democratic process. While the act of voting in a monolithic block for a particular black candidate was often presented as evidence of racial loyalty, black leaders were likewise critical of this strategy as a means by which the sovereignty of individual black voters might be removed. For example, an attempt to promote W. B. Townsend of Leavenworth for the office of state auditor under the banner of racial unity was severely criticized as undemocratic. Claiming that the meeting's organizers "dictated a candidate" and presented him as the choice of the state's African American voters, the *American Citizen* compared Townsend's campaign to that of a political machine. The issue of unified black support of black candidates was

⁴³⁵ *Omaha Enterprise*, October 3, 1897.

⁴³⁶ *Omaha Enterprise*, January 18, 1896.

complicated, however, as the appearance of two black candidates for the same office nearly always doomed the campaigns of both candidates. Republican party leadership accepted the candidacy of a number of black politicians only because they believed that the appearance of a black candidate would result in the entire black community voting the straight ticket. Although a number of black voters disagreed with the selection of these candidates, failure to support these men would have eliminated the most effectual method of securing black political leadership.⁴³⁷

The self-interest of Republican party leaders in maintaining the black vote in Middle America led to a gradual increase in the number of black men who were endorsed by the party. Although Democratic and Populist leaders occasionally nominated black men for office, such as Iowa's George E. Taylor and Nebraska's Edwin Overall, the Republican party continued to offer the best prospects for black leaders seeking political office. The 1890s saw black men elected to their respective state legislatures for the first time, as Alfred Fairfax and Matthew Ricketts secured Republican nominations as part of an effort to maintain the support of black voters who were being courted by the Populists. The significance of their election in predominantly-white districts is evidenced by the fact that most of the African Americans elected to the legislatures of Kansas, Iowa, or Nebraska in the following century were from urban districts with black majorities. Local black leaders such as Alexander Clark and John Waller of Iowa and Kansas were likewise appointed to

⁴³⁷ *American Citizen*, January 6, 1898; *Emporia Gazette*, June 15, July 6, 7, August 4, 1892; *Omaha Enterprise*, September 26, 1897; *Iowa State Bystander*, April 1, 1898.

diplomatic posts in Liberia and Madagascar as part of an attempt to secure
Midwestern black support in national campaigns.⁴³⁸

White self-interest was more commonly manifest in the selection of a token number of black men as delegates in county and state political conventions, as well as dispensing patronage and nominating black leaders as candidates for minor civic offices. While an increasing number of black men were elected to these city offices, one of the most effective ways of wrecking these campaigns was to publicize the fact that the candidate was African American. While most voters followed their party's recommendations for these offices, the campaign of Frank Blackburn for the office of Market Master in Des Moines is instructive. Although Blackburn became the first African American elected to a civic office in Des Moines, his opponent's strategy of drawing attention to Blackburn's race was effective. While Republican candidates for city offices swept their opponents by several thousand votes, enough Republican voters "scratched" Blackburn from their ticket that he nearly lost the election. While the black press of Des Moines lamented the racial prejudice that nearly doomed Blackburn's campaign, their claim that opposition was strongest with those districts "where the ignorant foreign element lived" illustrates the intersections of class and ethnicity that fueled intolerance even among the African American intelligentsia.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ *Omaha Enterprise*, July 13, 1897; *Daily Iowa Capitol*, September 21, 1897; *Omaha World-Herald*, September 30, 1893; *Iowa State Bystander*, May 6, 28, June 10, 24, July 22, September 28, 1898, May 19, 1899; Benjamin Harrison to Alexander Clark, September 2, 1890, Muscatine Art Center, Muscatine, Iowa; Milton O. Gustafson, Chief, Diplomatic Branch of Civil Archives Division to Elizabeth Veerhusen, April 25, 1975, Alexander Clark Papers; August 14, 18, 25, September 22, 1890; *Cedar Rapids Times*, May 29, 1873; *Iowa State Reporter*, July 2, 1891; *Iowa Citizen* (Iowa City), July 3, 1891; *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, June 30, 1891.

⁴³⁹ *Iowa State Bystander*, April 1, 1898.

Despite the primacy of racial issues among the intellectual leaders of the black community, Midwestern black journals devoted about half of their editorial columns to discussion of the era's leading national issues such as the gold standard. While a certain tension is evident within these journals regarding the balance between national political questions and those issues that specifically centered on race, black journalists bridged this gap by interpreting the era's monetary issues in terms of racial advancement. Black leaders such as George E. Taylor, the founder of the Iowa-based Colored Peoples National Protective Association, likewise presented the free coinage of silver as a matter of importance for African Americans. Explaining his belief that the gold standard was led to the oppression of working class families, Taylor issued a number of pamphlets directed towards black voters. Because the gold standard was "a threat to the laborer, farmer, and especially, the Negro" while the Republican Party failed to fulfill its promises to the black voter, Taylor called on members of the race to turn their support "silverwards," where their votes would be rewarded both through economy and patronage. The Afro-American Bimetallic League of Omaha echoed Taylor's economic and political advice, explaining that workers enjoyed a larger share of the economic rewards for their labor prior to the introduction of the gold standard.⁴⁴⁰

The Equality Political League epitomized the merging of racial and economic issues among black leaders, its founding convention in Topeka drawing over a

⁴⁴⁰ *Afro-American Sentinel*, May 23, August 29, 1896, December 11, 1897, May 12, 1898, January 28, 1899; Ronald N. Langston, "The African-American Legacy in Iowa Politics," in Bill Silag, Susan Koch-Bidgford and Hall Chase, *Outside In: African American History in Iowa, 1838-2000* (Des Moines: State Historical Society of Des Moines, 2001), 343-345.

hundred delegates from across the region. This short-lived organization endorsed the Omaha platform of People's Party and passed a number of resolutions that merged the issue of justice for the working class with that of racial justice. The League also endorsed Eugene Debs as an agent of both of these goals, viewing the future Socialist leader as a man that could unite the working class and heal the racial divisions that perpetuated economic inequalities among white and black Americans. While African Americans had secured emancipation from physical bondage, the Equality Political League maintained that the nation still awaited its "emancipation from organized greed." A similar organizations was formed in Des Moines while individual black Populists likewise merged themes of economic and racial oppression by warning that poverty was the nation's greatest threat as it perpetuated slavery among all races.⁴⁴¹

Kansas' socialist organ, the *Appeal to Reason*, likewise connected the economic power of the wealthy to the oppression of the plantation master. "The slave owner made a profit off of the chattel slave; the employer makes a profit off of the wage slave." The difference, the *Appeal* maintained, was that "the black man never had to tramp, half-starved, seeking someone to hire him." Although the chattel slave enjoyed some measure of security, the radical publication from Girard explained that "the white man is as much a slave to the rich as was the black man years ago." That white socialists discounted the suffering endured by generations of slaves was evident by the *Appeal to Reason's* conclusion that "many thousands of white men" would

⁴⁴¹ *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 5, 1894, in "Negroes Clippings," vol. 6, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas; *Iowa State Bystander*, October 28, 1898; *Omaha World-Herald*, September 21, 1898.

happily exchange their present occupations “for an assurance of themselves and families against starvation, on the terms of the chattel slave.”⁴⁴²

Black third-party movements likewise pressured their white allies and the Republican Party to take a stand against segregation. In 1896 the Afro-American Bimetallic League issued a formal protest regarding the refusal of Omaha’s Millard Hotel, the Republican Party’s headquarters, to accommodate Ohio’s first black state senator while he was in the city. The League’s complaint illustrates the intersection between the issue of segregation among black voters and the attempt of the black Populists to use this issue to create disaffection among the ranks of their Republican colleagues. The Afro-American Bimetallic League maintained that Senator John Patterson Green was treated “with all the courtesies becoming a distinguished citizen” when he transferred to the Dellone Hotel, yet the League’s implication that this was due to the Populist Party’s influence is supported only by the fact that the Dellone was the headquarters of the Populist Party. Later interviews with both of the proprietors of these hotels reveals that Green’s experience was likely the result of hotel management rather than its guests. Responding to a survey conducted by the black press, the Millard Hotel intimated that it sought only white guests while the owner of the Dellone spoke candidly against racial discrimination. The League’s observation that the city’s black Republican leaders were “compelled to suppress their indignation until after the elections” was prescient, as black Republicans

⁴⁴² *Appeal to Reason*, August 28, 1898.

attempted to minimize their party's refusal to support Green's right to equal accommodations.⁴⁴³

Although black Republicans were defensive when members of other political parties criticized party of Lincoln, they were among the first to expose Republican hypocrisy. A similar tendency is observable among Midwestern black leaders regarding the drawing of the color line by hotels and restaurants during conventions and expositions. While the black press in Topeka, Omaha, Des Moines, and Kansas City rarely reported the fact that black visitors to their city were restricted from most hotels and restaurants, the refusal of hotels in St. Louis to accommodate black delegates to the 1896 Republican Convention drew condemnation throughout the region. Despite the failure of one's own city to abide by Civil Rights laws or the failure of one's political party to abide by its own precepts, black voters ultimately determined that their interests were best served by the Republican Party. "The people are restless and sometimes worship strange gods," The stalwart *Bystander* explained. "There are many good and substantial reasons why a man should be a Republican. There is a semblance of an excuse for an American citizen being a Democrat. But there is no reason or excuse why a man should become inoculated with the disease known as Populism."⁴⁴⁴

Given the frequency and ease with which school officials, local governments, and political leaders throughout Middle America disregarded local, state, and national

⁴⁴³ *Afro-American Sentinel*, October 31, 1896, October 23, 30, 1897.

⁴⁴⁴ *Afro-American Sentinel*, June 13, 20, 1896; *Omaha Enterprise*, October 31, 1897; *Iowa State Bystander*, October 19, 1894.

statutes guaranteeing the civil rights of African Americans throughout the 19th century, the absence of a single incident wherein a black resident claimed that he was denied the right to vote in Iowa, Kansas, or Nebraska following the first year of enfranchisement seems peculiar. While black children were illegally excluded and segregated from schools, black women were ridiculed and discriminated against in all manners of public accommodations, and black men were barred from state militias and excluded from juries, not a single complaint has been discovered wherein an African American voter was barred from the polls in any of these states after 1870. While theorists of Critical Race Studies seldom apply their analysis to the past, Derrick Bell's theory of interest convergence seems particularly applicable in this situation. Given the overwhelming tendency of African American men to deposit their votes for the Republican Party and the near-monopoly of power that the Republican Party enjoyed both locally and nationally, Bell's theory offers a likely explanation for fact that the only civil right that was guaranteed to black men in Middle America was the right to vote.⁴⁴⁵

Invisible Men in the White City: The Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition of 1898

Four years after Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Compromise" at the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition, African Americans in the Midwest utilized a similar venue to challenge Washington's message and the racial discrimination that led to his recognition as the official spokesman of black America.

⁴⁴⁵ Mary Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," in Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* 2nd ed., (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 107.

Building upon the methods of protest utilized at previous expositions, African Americans in Omaha petitioned exposition management for inclusion, confronted various forms of segregation, hosted national and regional conferences, and challenged white proprietors about their informal and illegal methods of discrimination. Even more importantly, black leaders throughout the Midwest used the exposition as the impetus for the creation of a bi-racial civil rights organization that preceded the founding of the NAACP by over a decade.

Visitors to the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition of 1898 frequently reported being overcome by “a blinding, dazzling mass of white.” Reporters claimed that the gleaming façade of the grounds and buildings had a tendency to overwhelm fairgoers, causing Omaha’s excursionists to “stand stupefied at the entrance of the Grand Court, blinded as they would have been by a flash of lightning.” As guests regained their senses and utilized them to explore the rest of the fair, the whitewashed image of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition was complete. Fairgoers listened to the opening address entitled “Destiny of the Anglo-Saxon” and savored the smells and tastes of minstrelized Midway vendors. Yet beneath the veneer of empire and the plastered façade of Omaha’s White City, Americans of a darker hue were organizing a response to their nation’s representation of democracy and culture that they felt was neither representative nor democratic. The methods of protest utilized by these men and women and the reactions they encountered illustrate

the possibilities and limitations of interracial cooperation during the period modern historians have labeled “the nadir of race relations.”⁴⁴⁶

Omaha deliberately modeled its exhibit halls and sparkling lagoons along the blueprint set by previous expositions, creating a White City whose pristine exterior veiled the ephemeral materials used in its construction. The image of a Grecian utopia was completed by the addition of a Midway that featured “exotic” concessions and attractions. Although promoters cited the Midway as legitimizing Omaha’s claims of an “international” exposition, this veneer was even thinner than that of the buildings of the Grand Court. The Midway’s imperialistic orientation was evidenced by its stereotypical displays of foreign and nonwhite peoples, presenting the rest of the world “as an amusing cabaret” that catered to white fantasies of benevolence and cultural superiority. In both contemporary and historical accounts of the Exposition, the only reference to African American participation was as performers in this cabaret. Even though African Americans purchased Exposition stock, constructed its buildings, submitted and guarded its exhibits, managed its receptions, hosted national conventions, used its auditorium to form a national and bi-racial civil rights organization, and utilized the Exposition itself as a forum to protest segregation, white Americans then and now have noticed only the black minstrels who performed in the Midway attraction known as the Old Plantation.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁶ *Omaha Bee*, June 2, 1898; W. A. Rodgers, “The Exposition at Omaha,” *Harpers Weekly*, October 8, 1898, 987; John A. Wakefield, *A History of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition* (Omaha, 1903), 377.

⁴⁴⁷ *Omaha Bee*, February 21, 1898, quoted in Robert Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 107; Wakefield, *A History of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition*, 113; James B. Haynes,

The Old Plantation was transferred directly from the 1897 Tennessee Centennial and International Exposition and featured twelve log cabins that were home to thirty to fifty “native darkies” who sang and danced as they processed cotton. Just as historians have demonstrated that Native Americans negotiated the terms in which they participated in the Exposition’s Indian Congress, the cast of the Old Plantation attempted to express their agency in framing certain aspects of the performance. Early reports of the Midway exhibition indicated that lectures and demonstrations were intermixed with traditional minstrel fare. Disappointing ticket sales and a fire caused the Old Plantation to close temporarily, allowing its manager Emmett McConnell time to better adapt the show to the audience. The exhibition reopened in mid-July with a new theater, lower admission prices, and an “improved” show that featured cake walks, “buck and wing dancing” and a new group of “jolly, rollicking ‘niggers.’”⁴⁴⁸

Exposition handbooks, advertisements, and newspaper articles assured fairgoers that the Old Plantation was the most educational attraction on the grounds. A children’s guide to the Exposition praised the historical accuracy of the show, claiming that it portrayed life as it really was during the days “just ‘befo the wah.”

History of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition of 1898, (Omaha, 1910), 262; Grace Virginia Gregory, “The Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition at Omaha, 1898,” (M. A. thesis, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1929), 59; Jack D. Angus, *Black and Catholic in Omaha: A Case of Double Jeopardy, The First Fifty Years of St. Benedict the Moor Parish* (Lincoln: iUniverse, Inc., 2004); Jess R. Peterson, *Omaha’s Trans-Mississippi Exposition* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 82; Robert W. Rydell, “The Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition: ‘To Work Out the Problem of Universal Civilization,’” *American Quarterly* 33 (Winter, 1981): 601.

⁴⁴⁸ Josh Clough, “‘Vanishing’ Indians?: Cultural Persistence on Display at the Omaha World’s Fair of 1898,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 25 (Spring 2005): 67-86; *Illinois Record* (Springfield), April 30, 1898; *Omaha Bee*, February 21, July 11, 19, 31, August 27, 1898; *Omaha World-Herald*, July 23, August 30, October 5, 1898; “Glimpses of the Midway” unsigned article in the Tran-Mississippi and International Exposition folder of the Douglas County Historical Society.

The guide assured its readers that “Dinah and Tom and the picanninnies will be there in their cabins,” while “everyday life will go on as if it had stepped out of the past.” The Old Plantation was an authentic representation of the Old South in at least two regards—its paternalistic attitude towards African Americans and its intolerance towards the principles of free labor. After a competing Midway attraction hired an African American to promote their show to passersby, the Old Plantation’s manager filed a complaint. Maintaining that he controlled the “exclusive right to employ colored talent,” McConnell claimed that the employment of African Americans throughout the Midway would reduce the novelty of his show. Exposition management concurred and the promoter was fired, thereby reducing one opportunity for black participation beyond the gates of the Old Plantation.⁴⁴⁹

The Old Plantation’s popularity was largely based on McConnell’s ability to market the exhibit as an authentic display of African American life and culture. McConnell exploited this illusion of authenticity by allowing excursionists to take photographs with the performers. New inventions such as the Pocket Kodak Camera allowed wealthy guests to picture themselves as benevolent masters, and photos of excursionists surrounded by “small pickanannies” became treasured souvenirs. Stereotyped images of African Americans were also utilized for commercial interests. Fairgoers enjoyed pancakes served by Aunt Jemimah at the Home Kitchen exhibit of the Manufacturing Building and collected advertising cards that often contained racist

⁴⁴⁹ *Nebraska State Journal*, September 13, 1898; *Lincoln Evening News*, September 5, 1898; *Omaha World-Herald*, June 1, 2, 1898; E. W. McConnell vs. Exposition,” “Legal Affairs of the Exposition,” Miscellaneous Documents, *The Hatchet: Published in the Interest of a Fund for the Erection and Maintenance of the Girls’ and Boys’ Building of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition*, Trans-Mississippi Collection, Omaha Public Library.

caricatures. For example, an advertising card for an Omaha real estate agent featured the caption “De Colored Race in Topeka, Kansas” with four caricatured blacks cakewalking across a twisted path. Other Omaha businesses followed suit, including a mill whose advertising card featured a black child holding a watermelon and exclaiming “Ise got da best in de field.”⁴⁵⁰

Black participation at the Trans-Mississippi Exposition was restricted beyond these minstrelized representations. All of the executive-level officers were white and calls from the black community to appoint at least one African American among the fifty-member Board of Directors were disregarded. Missouri was the only state to appoint an African American among its board of commissioners, a token appointment directly related to the fact that Missouri was the only state that maintained a separate African American exhibit within its building. The second-class status of the two black commissioners was made clear by the exclusion of their names from contemporary promotional materials and historical sketches about the Exposition.⁴⁵¹

Despite the complete omission of African American participation in both historical and contemporary sources, members of black communities throughout the region were actively involved in many aspects of the fair. Several African American organizations hosted conventions on the Exposition grounds that were attended by

⁴⁵⁰ *Perry Daily Chief*, June 3, 1898; *Lincoln Evening News*, July 1, 1898; *Nebraska State Journal*, September 12, 1898; *Omaha World-Herald*, May 31, 1898; Updike Milling Company advertising card, Douglas County Historical Society, Omaha; Wakefield Scrapbooks, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

⁴⁵¹ *Broad Axe* (Salt Lake City), March 5, 1898; *Omaha Enterprise*, September 26, 1896; *Omaha Bee*, June 2, 1898; “Official Catalogue of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition, Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition,” RG 42, Box 8, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska; John A. Wakefield, *A History of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition*, 12-14.

delegates from all across the United States. In contrast to previous American expositions, including the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial, African Americans were employed in the construction of the Trans-Mississippi. Omaha's distinction in this regard was a source of pride among black journalists who jokingly commented on the physical contrast of black workers among white buildings. A handful of African Americans were also employed as guards, a welcome reprieve from the openly discriminatory hiring policies of Chicago's 1893 Columbian Exposition. A few blacks were even hired to fill prestigious positions, including the organizer of the Smithsonian exhibit and Omaha's Ellsworth W. Pryor who supervised the inter-racial staff that prepared and served many of the Exposition's banquets. In this position, Pryor also personally met with and received compliments from visiting dignitaries including President William McKinley.⁴⁵²

These individuals, however, were the exception to the informal rule of African American exclusion. Cyrus Bell, editor of Omaha's *Afro-American Sentinel*, reported that few blacks sought positions of responsibility because "they were confident" their applications would be denied. Despite these fears, Omaha's three black newspapers reported on the planning and development of the Exposition with a sense of guarded optimism. The *Enterprise* was the first of these newspapers to encourage members of the black community to prepare exhibits, asserting that the Exposition represented a great opportunity to promote both race and region. The question of region would lead

⁴⁵² *Afro-American Sentinel*, April 2, July 30, 1898; Telegram of W. V. Cox, National Museum Secretary to J. H. Brigham, Chairman of the Department of Agriculture for the United States Government Exhibit, June 4, 1898, National Archives, Maryland, RG 33 ARC 821519; *Iowa State Bystander*, April 22, 1898; Interview of Ellsworth W. Pryor, Works Progress Administration Collection, University Archives, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

to controversy, however, as black leaders were divided on whether to follow the Southern model of separate exhibits exemplified by the recent World's Fairs in Atlanta and Tennessee. Although Omaha's black community supported the creation of separate "Negro Departments" at these Southern fairs, the suitability of this practice for a Midwestern community was a matter of deep concern for many of Omaha's black residents. The black community's Woman's Club organized the first formal debate regarding a separate exhibit, with members assigned to speak in support or opposition to the question of "Does the Woman's Club favor a Negro building or Department at the Trans-Mississippi Exposition?" Although the *Enterprise* had originally supported a separate department, the unanimous decision of these women against separation would soon characterize the opinion of the black community.⁴⁵³

Black women in Omaha also took the initiative in demanding equal representation in exhibits and employment by submitting a formal petition to the Exposition's Board of Directors. Omaha's Colored Woman's Club also called upon the Exposition's Woman's Board of Managers, an entity responsible for displays and employment within the "Girls' and Boys' Building." Ella L. Mahammitt, president of the Colored Woman's Club and associate editor of the *Enterprise*, made a second attempt at reconciliation by forwarding the names and credentials of dozens of well-qualified black women who were seeking employment. Although the Woman's Board

⁴⁵³ *Afro-American Sentinel*, January 30, March 6, April 3, December 4, 1897, March 12, 1898; *Omaha Enterprise*, February 22, July 18, 1896, January 23, February 7, 1897. Of Omaha's three black newspapers, only copies of the *Afro-American Sentinel* are extant for 1898.

twice agreed to include these women in employment and exhibits within the Girls' and Boys' Building, they failed to honor their commitment. As a result, the only recorded participation of African Americans within the building was the performance "by the pickaninnies of the old plantation" on Children's Day.⁴⁵⁴

The imposed limits upon black participation within the children's building were the ironic result of the relatively liberal policies of the Omaha Public Schools. De jure segregation had been abandoned within the Omaha schools over a quarter of a century prior to the Exposition, resulting in racially mixed schools taught by white faculty. The Woman's Board of Managers utilized the resources of the public schools to organize the activities and exhibits of the Girls' and Boys' building. Because African American families were scattered throughout the city and their children attended many different schools, Omaha's black community lacked the organizational core that typified many other Midwestern cities and might have made black participation within the children's exhibit more visible.⁴⁵⁵

Despite the clear statement of opposition by the Woman's Club, a handful of leading men such as *Enterprise* editor George F. Franklin expressed support for a

⁴⁵⁴ *Afro-American Sentinel*, December 4, 1897, March 12, 1898; *Lincoln Evening News*, July 15, 1898; *Omaha Bee*, March 11, 1898; *Broad Axe*, September 10, 1898.

⁴⁵⁵ Minutes of the Omaha Board of Education, October 4, 1897, March 21, 1898; Annual Report of the Omaha Board of Education for the Year Ending June 30, 1902; Handbook of the Omaha Board of Education, 1903; *Omaha Monitor*, May 16, 1924, June 24, 1927; *Omaha Enterprise*, May 23, 1896. Although some histories of the black community of Omaha report that Eula Overall taught in the Omaha Public Schools as early as 1898, her name does not appear in personnel records until after the Exposition. Lucinda Gamble, however, was employed as a teacher within a primarily white elementary school from 1895-1901, retiring upon her marriage to Reverend John Albert Williams. Although most sources indicate that Gamble and Overall were the only black teachers hired by the Omaha Public Schools prior to World War II, a third black teacher, "Miss Brooks" was reported by Gamble in her history of the Omaha Public Schools written for a special "Women's Edition" of the *Omaha Enterprise* published April 4, 1896.

separate department as a way to highlight the progress of the race. The world was coming to Omaha, Franklin reminded his readers, and as a result he suggested that the black community should utilize the fair as an opportunity to create a separate exhibit that highlighted the progress of the race since emancipation. While members of Omaha's black community appreciated this sentiment, they eventually rejected calls for a separate exhibit as submission to Jim Crow. The self-identity of black Omaha contained an element of regional exceptionalism. Residents often boasted about the absence of segregated institutions within their city and frequently responded to episodes of Southern racial violence with a mixture of compassion and contempt for the victims.⁴⁵⁶

This sense of regional exceptionalism became so strongly pronounced in the year prior to the Trans-Mississippi Exposition that members of Omaha's African American community rejected the mayor's plan to produce city and state exhibits for the Negro Department of the Tennessee Centennial. Arguing that the concept of separation was inconsistent with the methods of progressive Northern thought and expressing the fear that their involvement could be misinterpreted as supporting segregation at their own Exposition, the black representatives of the mayor's Tennessee Centennial Committee informed the city that Omaha would not participate in the Southern fair's Negro Department. Identical sentiments were expressed by the committee of black leaders originally appointed to investigate the feasibility of a

⁴⁵⁶ *Omaha Enterprise*, February 20, 1897; *Afro-American Sentinel*, June 16, 1896. The *Afro-American Sentinel* of July 16, 1898 provides an example of the "mixture of compassion and contempt" Omaha's black community displayed towards the repeated occurrences of racial violence in the South. This issue contains an editorial that argues that Southern blacks were partially to blame for recent episodes of violence by their repeated failure to defend themselves.

Negro Department at the Omaha Exposition. Utilizing the image of the South as a negative contrast to their own “Northern” and progressive city, these men drafted a lengthy resolution that emphasized the inconsistency of self-segregation with the sentiment of forward-thinking members of the race.⁴⁵⁷

The absence of a separate “Negro Department” at the Trans-Mississippi Exposition was a source of pride for the black community of Omaha, yet the rejection of a separate display also eliminated the most common and visible avenue of participation that had been utilized by African American communities at previous World’s Fairs. Despite repeated attempts by individuals and organizations to secure positions of influence, African Americans were excluded in nearly every aspect of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition. As a result, the Old Plantation was the most visible manifestation of black participation to white fairgoers. Although a separate exhibit would have allowed African Americans to respond to this image, Omaha’s black community preferred exclusion to self-segregation. Even George F. Franklin and others who originally supported plans for a separate department sustained the community’s decision, stating his belief that participation within a separate venue might be interpreted as an invitation to extend the “genius of southern institutions” beyond the Mason Dixon line. As a result, Franklin suggested that community members should demonstrate to Exposition visitors that the color line was foreign to the Trans-Mississippi region by contributing exhibits, “not as colored men and women but as American citizens.” Unfortunately, no evidence can be found to

⁴⁵⁷ *Omaha Enterprise*, January 23, February 7, 27, March 27, 1897; *Afro-American Sentinel*, March 6, April 3, 1897.

support Franklin's optimistic declaration, as there are no records of black exhibitors at the Exposition beyond the separate "Negro Exhibit" within the Missouri Building. Although members of Omaha's black community boasted the fair-mindedness of their state and region, the Nebraska Building hired only white employees and excluded black organizations among its exhibits of fraternal and social associations.⁴⁵⁸

The black experience within American World Fairs has been an subject of increasing interest among social scientists, yet the Trans-Mississippi Exposition has been all but completely disregarded due to the scarcity of readily identifiable sources. Of all the fairs, Chicago's Columbian Exposition has been of particular interest to historians given the wealth of documents available on the meeting of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs and the participation and protest of black leaders such as Ida Wells and Frederick Douglass. Among these activities was the collaboration of Wells and Douglass with Chicago newspaper editor Ferdinand L. Barnett and educator Irvine Garland Penn who together published and distributed a lengthy pamphlet entitled *Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition*.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁸ *Omaha Enterprise*, July 3, 1897; *Broad Axe*, October 8, 1898; *American Citizen* (Kansas City, Kansas), May 6, 1898; Letter book of J. N. Campbell, RG 42, Box 1, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska (The letter book includes employee records which were checked against the 1885 Nebraska State Census and the 1900 and 1910 federal censuses to determine race of employees); Proceedings of the Board of Directors For the State of Nebraska, Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition, RG 1 SG 17 Box 16, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

⁴⁵⁹ Christopher Reed, *All the World is Here: The Black Presence at "White City"* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Robert Rydell, ed., *The Reason Why the Colored American is not in the World's Columbian Exposition: The Afro-American's Contribution to Columbian Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Anna Paddon and Sally Turner, "African Americans and the World's Columbian Exposition," *Illinois Historical Journal*, 88 (Spring, 1995): 19-36; The only documentation of the African American experience at the Trans-Mississippi is a page-and-a-half,

Ironically, a different African American leader named Ferdinand L. Barnett was deeply involved in efforts to secure a meaningful place for African Americans within the Omaha Exposition. Omaha newspaper editor Ferdinand L. Barnett saw the merits of a separate exhibit that could highlight the achievements of African Americans and guarantee a space for their participation, yet, as has been explained, he and other black Omahans ultimately rejected this strategy for the same reasons cited by his Chicago namesake. In 1893, Chicago's Barnett and other well-known black leaders such as Frederick Douglass hoped to conduct a mass meeting of leading African Americans to coincide with the Columbian Exposition. Although the Chicago meeting did not materialize in the way Douglass anticipated, Omaha's Ferdinand Barnett was actively involved in promoting a convention at the Trans-Mississippi Exposition that brought two hundred men and women on both sides of the color line together to discuss race relations. Dubbed the "Mixed Congress," its delegates created a national and bi-racial civil rights organization at the Exposition.⁴⁶⁰

Members of the Bishop Worthington Lyceum of St. Philip's African Methodist Episcopal church held several meetings in the final months of 1897 to discuss the upcoming Exposition. Several committees were formed to promote the fair as well as accommodate visitors to the city through a Bureau of Information. Among the suggestions that were made at the meeting was a proposal to host a "National Congress of Afro-Americans" to coincide with the Exposition. This idea

unpublished report by local historian Kira Gale to the members of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition Historical Association during the exposition's centennial.

⁴⁶⁰ *Atchison Daily Globe*, January 9, 1895; Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900.

was circulated throughout Omaha's black community and delegates from leading fraternal, social, and religious organizations met at St. Philip's in December to discuss the initiative. The delegates enthusiastically supported the idea of hosting a meeting attended by representatives of the nation's leading African American organizations to discuss the leading topics of concern to members of the race. Edwin R. Overall was elected temporary chairman of a steering committee to plan the event. Before long, the idea to organize a convention of black leaders was broadened into an ambitious attempt to bring influential whites and blacks from around the nation together to discuss racial issues.⁴⁶¹

Edwin R. Overall's status as an African American leader was well established before settling in Omaha in 1869. Prior to the Civil War, Overall was actively engaged in efforts to assist escaped slaves through the Underground Railroad in the Chicago area. He also served as a recruiter for the famed 54th and 56th Regiments of Massachusetts during the War and was selected to lay the cornerstone for the rebuilt Wilberforce University. Upon his arrival in Omaha, Overall was hired as a postal clerk and immediately began a successful campaign to end the city's practice of segregated schools. In addition to his local efforts and his national status as a high-level Mason, Overall presided over several local and national civil rights conferences and served as a Populist candidate for city commission in 1893. Given his strong reputation between both black and white Omaha residents, it was fitting that Overall

⁴⁶¹ *Omaha Enterprise*, August 17, 1895; *Omaha Bee*, November 30, December 17, 1897; *Omaha World-Herald* December 17 1897; *Afro-American Sentinel*, November 27, December 4, 11, 18, 25, 1897, January 1, 1898.

originated the idea to expand the proposed “National Congress of Afro-Americans” to include both white and black representatives.⁴⁶²

Edwin Overall was careful to seek the opinions and assistance of the entire African American community in preparation for the proposed conference. Given the delicate nature of the city’s political climate and the divisions within the black community at the time, Overall resolutely maintained that the conference be non-partisan and non-denominational. He obtained the support of the community through a series of mass meetings as well as the skillful use of committee assignments and personal diplomacy that produced an armistice between the city’s feuding black editors and political leaders. After several months of careful preparation, the planning committee secured the use of the main auditorium of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition and issued the official call of the Congress of Representative White and Colored Americans.⁴⁶³

In as much as there exists in the United States two classes of citizens between whom there is much misunderstanding, frequent friction, unhappy antagonism, want of good-will, lack of sympathy and hearty co-operation detrimental to the truest fullest and highest development of our common country; and believing that this condition of affairs can not continue without serious and disastrous results to this nation and people, and that these conditions arise and are due mainly to the ignorance upon the part of each class of the sentiments and aspiration which inspire and move the other, which ignorance can only be removed by a frank free and full expression and exchange of views upon topics of vital importance to the whole American people by representatives of both classes from all sections, and especially those which have to do with a modus vivendi between the people designated and confident that all loyal Americans who have the best interests of the nation at heart will welcome and bend their hearty support to any movement which will tend to establish just and happy relations between all classes of American citizens and promote the prosperity and welfare of our country and make her a nation beloved at home and revered abroad,

⁴⁶² *Daily Nebraska Press* (Nebraska City), January 19, 1876; *Omaha Enterprise*, April 4, 1896; *Omaha Bee*, September 29, 30, November 9, 15, 1893, August 16, 1898; *Afro-American Sentinel*, January 1, 8, 1898; A. T. Andreas, *History of Nebraska*, 1882; *Omaha World-Herald*, September 30, November 3, 8, 1893.

⁴⁶³ *Afro-American Sentinel*, January 8, 15, 22, 29, February 5, 1898.

we, the undersigned, a committee selected for that purpose, hereby issue a call for a Congress of Representative White and Colored Americans to be held at Omaha, August 17, 1898.

The aims and object of said Congress shall be:

1. To bring together representatives of both classes of American citizens herein designated, for exchange of views on INDUSTRIAL, EDUCATIONAL, SOCIAL and MORAL questions of vital moment to the prosperity of our country; and
2. To crystallize such views into some organization which will put into practice such principles as the Congress may agree upon for the accomplishment of the end desired. This organization will not be POLITICAL, but ETHICAL.

The above Congress will meet in the Auditorium of the Exposition Building, August 17, 1898, at 10 A. M.

The Governor of each State and Territory is requested to appoint five white and five colored citizens, either men or women, who are in keeping with the spirit of the call, as delegates to said Congress, and to notify the Chairman of the Committee of said appointments.

The Committee reserves the right to invite other persons from the respective States and Territories in order to insure the success of the Congress.⁴⁶⁴

Very few white or black editors followed the example of the *Iowa State Bystander* by reprinting Overall's lengthy manifesto in its entirety, but many of the nation's leading race journals such as the *Indianapolis Freeman* and Washington D.C.'s *Colored American* endorsed the meeting. Unfortunately for the planners of the Omaha conference, most black newspapers did not print any notice of the meeting and would likewise not report on its proceedings. Although the scarcity of press coverage was partly related to inadequate publicity on the part of the organizers, black leaders in Omaha were deeply concerned at what they perceived as lack of support for their efforts. Frustrated by the supposed intransigence of his journalistic peers, Cyrus Bell blamed the Congress's promotional shortcomings on the tepid

⁴⁶⁴ *Afro-American Sentinel*, April 16, 23, 30, May 7, 1898.

response of the region's black newspapers. "There are lots of us who don't read much," Bell offered as an explanation for the low subscription rates of race journals, "some because of the misfortune of not being able to do so, others because they are too lazy, and some because they think that all Negro papers are 'Nigger' papers, because so many of them are."⁴⁶⁵

Despite the conference's lack of media publicity, the initial response of white and black leaders both within and beyond the Trans-Mississippi region was extremely positive. Terence Powderly, the famed labor leader turned U.S. Commissioner of Immigration, sent his support from Washington. Inman E. Page, president of Lincoln Institute in Jefferson City, Missouri, gave the proposal a hearty endorsement that was echoed by former Louisiana Senator P. B. S. Pinchback. Letters of support were also forthcoming from white religious leaders of various denominations including Catholic Archbishop John Ireland of St. Paul, Minnesota and the Episcopalian Bishop of New York, Henry Codman Potter. Leading men of Nebraska also wrote in support of the Congress, with Nebraska Chancellor George McLean and Trans-Mississippi Exposition General Manager Thaddeus S. Clarkson both agreeing to serve as delegates. Additional letters of support came from Nebraska Congressman David

⁴⁶⁵ *Colored American* (Washington D.C.), June 18, August 6, 13, 1898, *Iowa State Bystander*, April 22, 1898; *Indianapolis Freeman*, May 28, August 20, 27, 1898; *Afro-American Sentinel*, August 6, 1898; *American Citizen*, December 17, 1897 through October 6, 1898; *Minneapolis Appeal*, May 7, 1898 through September 3, 1898; *Richmond Planet*, May 7, 1898 through January 11, 1899; *Cleveland Gazette*, May 7, 1898 through September 3, 1898; *Illinois Record*, April 2, 1898 through September 10, 1898.

Mercer, Secretary of the Lincoln Board of Trade John E. Utt, and Nebraska Governor Silas A. Holcomb.⁴⁶⁶

Governor Silas Holcomb of Nebraska maintained correspondence with both local organizers and the National Colored Personal Liberty League in appointing a eleven delegates to the Mixed Congress in July. The governor appointed five white delegates including Nebraska University Chancellor George MacLean, D. Clem Deaver from the Nebraska School for the Deaf, Trans-Mississippi Exposition General Manager Thaddeus S. Clarkson, Reverend J. R. Woodcock of Tecumseh, and former state legislator James O. Cram of Fairbury. After corresponding with John Albert Williams who provided the names of potential African American delegates, the governor appointed Silas Robbins, Dr. Matthew O. Ricketts, Cyrus Bell, Rev J. C. C. Owens of St. John's AME, W.H. Vanderzee and Rev J. T. Knapper of Lincoln.⁴⁶⁷

The *Afro-American Sentinel* reported that Governor Alva Adams of Colorado appointed both white and black delegates, yet a thorough search of the Governor's archives reveals only the appointment of five African American men. On July 9th, Adams appointed a delegation consisting of Denver's Paul E Spratlin, Joseph H. Stuart, and Reverend W. E. DeClaybrook along with Lazarus Holland of Pueblo and Reverend W. E. Gladden of Colorado Springs. What the delegation lacked in racial diversity it made up its fusion of social and economic classes, being composed of a

⁴⁶⁶ T. S. Clarkson to Silas Holcomb, July 27, 1898, RG 1 SG 17, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska; *Afro-American Sentinel*, February 12, May 28, July 23, 30, 1898.

⁴⁶⁷ Silas Holcomb to Charles C. Curtis, Records of Governor Holcomb, Nebraska State Historical Society, RG 1 SG 17 Box 13, Letter book of Governor Silas Holcomb; Charles C. Curtis to Silas Holcomb, July 15, 1898, H. Clay Hawkins to Silas Holcomb, July 1898, John Albert Williams to Silas Holcomb, July 18, 1898, Records of Governor Holcomb, Nebraska State Historical Society, RG 1 SG 17; *Afro-American Sentinel*, July 23, 30, 1898; *Lincoln State Journal*, July 13, 1923.

doctor, janitor, attorney, and clergymen. The delegates even represented both genders, as Lazarus Holland was represented by his wife who served as a delegate in his stead. ⁴⁶⁸

A delegation from Iowa was appointed with the knowledge of the Governor's office, if not by an actual appointment of Governor Leslie M. Shaw. Shortly after Omaha's John Albert Williams wrote a follow-up letter to the governor requesting a list of delegates, Shaw's private secretary received an unsigned letter recommending five African American delegates; John L. Thompson of Des Moines, George E. Taylor of Oskaloosa, Joseph E. Brown of Ottumwa, Austin A. Bland of Keokuk, and Phil Brown of Sioux City. As this letter was dated only four days prior to the Congress, the state's delegation was likely organized at the local level. Although a number of both white and black newspapers referred to the Iowa delegation as being appointed by the governor, it is likely that such an appointment could have only been made after the delegates left for Omaha. Each of the five black men whose names appeared in the Governor's correspondence joined Bailey in representing Iowa at the Mixed Congress. These men were joined by John Frank Blagburn, an African

⁴⁶⁸ Letterpress book of Governor Alva Adams, Box 8921 vol. 18, 552, Colorado State Archives, Denver, Colorado; Record of Appointments of Delegates and Commissioners, Box 50418, vol. 12, 120, Colorado State Archives, Denver, Colorado; *Afro-American Sentinel*, July 23, 30, 1898; *Cleveland Gazette*, December 23, 1899; Denver City Directory, 1898, 1899; Colorado Springs City Directory, 1896; Pueblo City Directory, 1892, 1904; Vertical File on Paul Edward Spratlin, Colorado State Historical Society Archives, Denver; Clementine Washington Pigford, "Beautiful, Beautiful, Zion!: 138+ Years of Faith, Works, and Historical Significance," Zion Baptist Church, 2003," Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, Denver, Colorado.

American pharmacist who was also elected as Superintendent of Markets earlier that year.⁴⁶⁹

Official or not, Iowa's delegation consisted of at least one white representative. The name of Peter R. Bailey is scribbled at the bottom of the list sent to the Governor's personal secretary in red ink, a likely indication that he either sent the note or was added to the document after the Mixed Congress. Bailey was a white attorney who was wounded in action at the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain before settling in Primghar, Iowa. Bailey was very active during the conference, serving on several committees, taking the podium in support of interracial goodwill, and representing Iowa in the meeting to turn the congress into a permanent national and bi-racial civil rights organization.⁴⁷⁰

Despite endorsements and appointments of prominent men, the interracial aspect of the Congress was in jeopardy as white delegates such as Chancellor McLean regretfully informed the organizers that they could not attend the meeting. Manifestations of the era's gender barriers were also present during the conference's final organizational meetings as the leading men of Omaha's black community dominated the podium. Despite the masculine façade, female attendees outnumbered their male counterparts by nearly a two-to-one margin while women composed over a third conference's steering committee. Cyrus Bell challenged the manliness of his

⁴⁶⁹ John Albert Williams to Leslie M. Shaw, August 2, 1898, Unsigned memo to W. H. Fleming, August 13, 1898, Office of the Governor, Correspondence, State Archive, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines; George MacLean to Silas Holcomb, August 3, 1898, Records of Governor Holcomb, RG 1 SG 17, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska; *Iowa State Bystander*, August 19, 1898; *Omaha Evening Bee*, August 18, 1898.

⁴⁷⁰ George W. Schee and O. H. Montzheimer, *Old Soldiers Who Have Lived in Montgomery County, Iowa*, 1909; Twelfth Census of the United States 1900; *Omaha Evening Bee*, August 18, 19, 1898.

brethren in an effort to secure greater participation. “If our ladies are as much more interested than the men in measures designed for race improvement as their greater showing at this meeting would seem to suggest,” the editor proposed, “then the relationship of the two sexes, both in social and political arrangement, should be inverted.”⁴⁷¹

Although the group had received letters of support from around the country, sentiment alone would not fill the four thousand-seat auditorium. By mid-summer it was clear that both the Trans-Mississippi Exposition and the Mixed Congress had failed to garner the national attention their promoters had hoped for. Leaders of both sought to overcome this difficulty by drawing heavily upon the resources of the region. For the organizers of the Mixed Congress, this meant personal visits to adjacent towns and the acceptance of delegates with or without a gubernatorial appointment. The failed attempt to organize a mass excursion among the small black community of Atchison, Kansas, however, demonstrates the difficulty organizers faced throughout the region. The city’s religious leaders negotiated a discounted rail fare to attend the Exposition during the Congress, yet the twenty-five tickets sold were short of the required minimum and the trip was cancelled.⁴⁷²

The outbreak of the Spanish American War also damaged the effort to promote the Mixed Congress. Leading newspapers both within Nebraska and

⁴⁷¹ George McLean to Silas Holcomb, August 3, 1898, RG 1 SG 17, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska; *Iowa State Bystander*, April 22, 1898; *Afro-American Sentinel*, July 30, August 6, 13, 20, 1898; *Omaha Bee*, August 19, 1898.

⁴⁷² *Nebraska State Journal*, July 31, 1898; *Afro-American Sentinel*, July 30, August 6, 13, 20, 1898; *Sunday Chicago Times-Herald*, May 22, 1898; *Omaha Bee*, August 9, 1898; *Atchison Daily Globe*, August 25, 1898.

throughout the nation turned their attention from the city's preparations for the fair to the nation's preparations for war. The correspondence files of the governors of Colorado, Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska illustrate that black and white Americans in the Trans-Mississippi region volunteered their services in far greater numbers than was necessitated by the "splendid little war." These volunteers included delegates who had been appointed by governors as well as prominent African Americans who likely would have been called upon to represent their city or state at the Mixed Congress. The companies that were formed throughout the region, especially among the larger African American communities in Eastern Kansas that composed the 23rd Kansas Regiment, drastically reduced the number of men available to participate in the conference.⁴⁷³

In addition to the disruption of war, the organizers faced opposition from a number of sources. The *Kansas City Star* suggested there was no "race question" in the United States as racial conflict was the result of natural differences between whites and blacks. Furthermore, the editors belittled the efforts of the organizers and suggested that the delegates were misguided, as there was little chance that their efforts would effect change within the next five hundred years. Omaha's white Episcopalian clergyman John Williams was openly hostile to the movement, labeling the conference a "pathetic" attempt to force social equality. Although the rector of St. Barnabus presented himself as a friend of the race, Williams' rhetoric revealed his

⁴⁷³ Silas Robins to Silas Holcomb, May 19, 1898, RG 1 SG 17 Box 13 Folder 84, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska; Albert Ford to Silas Holcomb, July 23, 1898, RG 1 SG 17 Box 13 Folder 81, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska; *Omaha World-Herald*, May 31, 1898; *Omaha Bee*, June 8, 1898; Nebraska State Journal (Lincoln), August 19, 1898.

true feelings as his letter frequently denigrated into a tirade against African Americans who refused to accept a “recognized menial position.”⁴⁷⁴

He may cook or cater for us; he may preside, “in his own place,” with grace, in exquisite evening dress, at our social feasts without alarming our social instincts one smallest particle; he may go anywhere, be anything in service or friendship, and we feel no repugnance; he may storm the blood-stained heights of the battle-crested Morros of Santiago as bravely as the bravest, and we feel no sense of presumption on his part in the nearness of his approach to us white men. But if he presumes to wear, or to ask for shoulder straps of a lieutenant, or if he dares to sit at a lunch counter with us white men, or if he dares ask for a soda at the same fountain with us, then our proud blood is up, and the negro must be taught to keep his own place.⁴⁷⁵

Both white and black Omahans responded to Williams’ attack on the goals and method of the Mixed Congress. Reverend John Albert Williams of St. Phillip’s A.M.E. addressed the concerns of his colleague in an editorial response that explained the goals of the Mixed Congress and of African Americans in general. If the “clear-headed” white clergyman could miss the point, Williams began, then the need for better interracial communication should be unmistakable. “Social equality,” the Reverend explained, was a malicious phrase created by those who opposed civil rights and wished to sabotage open discussion. In his concluding remarks, Williams addressed the white rector’s effete depiction of black men who “moan over” their status rather than taking the masculine approach of self-segregation that typified Southern expositions. “It would be unmanly,” the Reverend concluded, “to slink shame-facedly away and let the contagion grow.” “It is not unmanly to seek redress,”

⁴⁷⁴ *Kansas City Star*, April 22, 1896, August 19, 21, 1898; *Omaha World-Herald*, July 24, 1898; *Afro-American Sentinel*, August 13, 1898.

⁴⁷⁵ *Omaha World-Herald*, July 24, 1898; *Afro-American Sentinel*, August 13, 1898.

Williams concluded, “unless the laws of the land are merely for ornament and not for use.”⁴⁷⁶

An even more uncompromising response was written by one of Omaha’s leading white citizens, as businessman John Rush unleashed a historically-based indictment of white society that denied the existence of any distinction between social or civil rights and defended the black community of Omaha for their efforts to improve race relations. Rush began his letter with an indictment of white Midwesterners as hypocritical and deluded on matters of race and progresses to a discussion of the treatment of peoples of color throughout the world. Unlike the A.M.E. Reverend’s letter, however, he makes no attempt to distinguish social or civil rights, passionately proclaiming the equality of mankind in language worth reproduction:

...I have often said to myself that the people of this country are the most perfect hypocrites in the world. As long as they can violate the statutes with impunity, no matter how grave the offense may be their conscience never upbraids them. Apparently their motto is “You may break the law but don’t be caught at it.” We supposed that the civil war and the adoption of the xiii, xiv, and xv amendments to the constitution had settled the question for all the time. Man is endowed with certain attributes as will [sic] as rights. These attributes are innate-- better developed perhaps in some races than in others on account of environments. Shall we ridicule those whose opportunities for improvement have been inferior to our own? It is pretty well demonstrated at that during the single generation in which our colored brother has been emancipated whenever he has had the chance he has proven himself a worthy competitor of his late taskmaster and that during these years he has made marvelous progress. But this is not all. The negro depends upon his Caucasian friend who has set him upon his career and has promised him protection and encouragement. Incidentally, I may say that the caucasian race has been great in many things. It has been the greatest robber, the greatest murderer, and the greatest sycophant the world ever saw. For instance, “our cousins” send tracts and bibles to Africa and India to Christianize the heathen and then they send cannon and dynamite so that the poor native wretches may be blown into eternity if they attempt to defend their homes.

⁴⁷⁶ *Omaha World-Herald*, July 24, 26, August 7, 1898; *Afro-American Sentinel*, August 13, 1898; *Broad Axe*, August 13, 1898.

...Let us be fair and truthful and obedient to the law. We cannot afford to act the hypocrite. We voluntarily placed the negro on a legal equality with ourselves. Why not recognize the social equality too? Are we better educated, more refined, wealthier than he? Then in God's name, let us help to raise him up rather than plunge him deeper into his misfortunes. There is not a more loyal citizen in the United States than the negro, and yet a few years ago here in the city of Omaha an unfortunate colored man was torn to pieces on our public streets and the remnants of his poor anatomy were hung up on a telegraph pole. We are ashamed to speak of this, because it brings eternal disgrace upon us. Omaha must do a great deal before she can atone for that horrible sin. We must accept things as they exist. Nearly ten per cent of our population are negroes. They have the same rights and privileges that we have. Notwithstanding color they and we are descended from the same common parents. They are God's children the same as we. Their souls are just as precious as ours-- no difference nor distinction on account of color. The five races of mankind are all the same in the eyes of God, although the white man has an awful account against him upon the ledger of the recording angel. We may think ourselves better than others but we are mighty poor judges. Let the United States be true to its tradition and principles. Let us live up to our constitution and laws and set an example for other nations which we claim are inferior to us. Let us be honest and truthful and when we promise to do a thing let us fulfill that promise no matter what it may cost. Let us not merit the charge preferred some time ago by one of our own magazine writers: That we are the greatest liars on earth. Above all, let us be fair and honorable to the negro. We kept him in slavery nearly two centuries. It will take nearly that time to make reparation for our scandalous conduct.⁴⁷⁷

Members of the planning committee actively promoted their meetings beyond these editorials. Both the *Omaha Bee* and *Omaha World-Herald* ran regular stories about the preparations for the Mixed Congress and other planned events in conjunction with Afro-American Day. Detailed itineraries for meetings and events were printed in Omaha's white and black newspapers, with both reporting positively on the organization and goals of the convention. Although the daily records and correspondence of the general managers of the Trans-Mississippi exposition have disappeared, the Omaha daily newspapers indicate that exposition management was deeply involved and interested in the success of the Mixed Congress. In addition to reserving the auditorium, the executive committee extended a personal invitation to keynote speaker D. Augustus Straker and instructed their agents throughout the

⁴⁷⁷ *Salt Lake City Broad Axe*, August 13, 1898.

region to promote Afro-American day among local black leaders. General Manager T. S. Clarkson was in regular contact with Henry Clay Hawkins of the National Colored Personal Liberty League. When members of this organization optimistically predicted that 20,000 African Americans would come to Omaha on occasion of the combined meeting of the League and the Mixed Congress, exposition management and the white press were delighted.⁴⁷⁸

Edwin Overall and other members of the African American community of Omaha were not alone in their belief that the exposition provided an opportunity to spotlight race relations in America. The National Colored Personal Liberty League, an African American organization headquartered in Washington D. C., planned to hold its own convention in Omaha. Although the group planned to hold their convention later in the year, exposition management suggested combining their meeting with the Mixed Congress, a move strongly supported by Edwin Overall. The group spuriously claimed to have 600,000 members nationwide by 1909. Given the wealth, status, and wide geographic distribution of the few members that can be verified, one may wonder why no historian has ever published a single line about the organization or its “ladies auxiliary.”⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁸ *Omaha World-Herald*, August 9, 11, 12, 14, 1898;

⁴⁷⁹ *Afro-American Sentinel*, July 30, 1898; *Washington Bee*, June 26, 1909. A search of the card catalogs, indexes, vertical files, and general holdings of Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University revealed no evidence of the National Colored Personal Liberty League nor any sources on its leadership. A similar search was conducted at the National Archives in Suitland, Maryland and the Historical Society of the District of Columbia Archives in Washington, D. C. A survey of extant literature on the black community of Washington D. C. and correspondence with the authors of these works likewise revealed no indication of the group or its leadership. Likewise, a survey of reference sources on African American life and leadership does not reveal a single mention of the NCPLL.

The National Colored Personal Liberty League was formed in Washington D. C. in 1895 with the goal of advancing the cause of “personal liberty” for its African American membership. Although it was only one of many civil rights organizations, it is the only one to appear in the District’s city directories between 1898-1901. The NCPLL had a broad agenda, both as a social and a civil rights organization that confronted segregation, disfranchisement, lynching, and other forms of racial discrimination. The League’s opposition to government intervention in matters of “personal liberty,” such as prohibition, makes the NCPLL somewhat of an enigma. For example, a 1908 platform asserted that “attempts by Legislatures to regulate the opinions of men... are either wrong in principle or cannot be successfully enforced by law.” The next few paragraphs, however, called for government intervention to prevent segregation and disfranchisement.⁴⁸⁰

Contemporary newspapers confirm that the NCPLL was active in the Washington D. C. area for at least fifteen years, but organization claimed to have members nationwide. Although a city-by-city survey of the entire nation is beyond the scope of this essay, a brief investigation has not revealed any conclusive evidence of chapters in Kansas, Colorado, Iowa, or Nebraska at the time of the exposition. A search of correspondence files of leading statesmen in the region between 1897-1916, however, reveal a wealth of correspondence between these men and NCPLL leadership. Further complicating the mystery is the fact that the header of NCPLL’s

⁴⁸⁰ Washington D.C. City Directory, 1898-1901; Hampton University Newspaper Clippings File, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, Denver, Colorado.

stationary contains a list of executive officers, most of whom were scattered throughout the United States.⁴⁸¹

One of the most reasonable explanations of this phenomenon is that the stationary of the NCPLL list their executive officers by their native state. For example, the name of Charles C. Curtis, National Organizer of the NCPLL, is followed by the word “Iowa” on a 1906 correspondence. Federal census returns confirm that Curtis lived in Washington D.C. between 1900 and 1910 but was originally from Iowa. Judging by the press releases the NCPLL sent out, it may be that the group was attempting to convey the impression of a national body. Given the political involvement of the men they sought to influence, one can easily understand why such a tactic was attempted. Governors and Congressmen at the turn of the century were certainly more likely to be more responsive to a group that appeared to have membership in their jurisdiction than a group of black men operating hundreds or thousands of miles beyond their borders.⁴⁸²

Headquarter of the National Personal Liberty League.

Washington D.C., May 10, 1898.

To the members of the colored National Personal Liberty League of the United States and to all the colored persons who believe in the fundamental principles of personal liberty.

You are hereby notified that the colored National Personal Liberty League will meet in Omaha, Neb., in natural delegated convention on August 17th to 19th, at 12 o'clock. Every colored man who believes in personal liberty is cordially invited to take part in this convention, either as a delegate or spectator. The great Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition will be in full blast at that time and all who attend the convention will be entertained by the exposition committee on public comfort. The chairman of each State will see that his convention is called in ample

⁴⁸¹ *Washington Post*, June 6, 10, 1905, February 13, 1907; *Colored American*, April 30, May 21, 1898, May 13, 1899; *Washington Bee*, April 21, 28, July 23, May 20, 27, 1898.

⁴⁸² Charles C. Curtis to J. P. Dolliver, Legislative and Political Correspondence of J. P. Dolliver, MS 98 Box 25, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City; Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900; Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910.

time. Where is no organization of the Personal Liberty League, any well known colored man that believes in personal liberty, may call a meeting to select delegates to said convention. The following States will be entitled to the following number of delegates.

Alabama 10, California 20, Arkansas 10, Connecticut 3, Delaware 5, District of Columbia, 10, Georgia 20, Illinois 29, Indiana 10, Iowa 20, Kansas 20, Kentucky 10, Missouri 20, Minnesota 10, Michigan 10, Nebraska 20, New York 20, Ohio 20, Colorado 5, Pennsylvania 20, Wisconsin 5, Massachusetts 10, W.Va. 10, Rhode Island 5, South Carolina 20, North Carolina 20, Texas 20, Virginia 20, North Carolina 20, Texas 20, Virginia 20, Vermont 5, Florida 10, New Mexico 0, Louisiana 20, Tennessee 20.

All the Southern States are cordially invited, each will be allowed 20 delegates. Send list to the Secretary of the colored National Personal Liberty League, 30 days before the day of the convention in order that arrangements may be made for their allotment.⁴⁸³

Edwin Overall and NCPLL President H. Clay Hawkins indicated a common willingness to work together and they believed that holding the two conventions simultaneously could have a synergetic effect. Unfortunately, effective communication between the NCPLL and black leaders within Omaha were often lacking. The NCPLL's original call for delegates erroneously stated that the convention would be held in the first week of September. Corrected information rarely appeared and the Exposition's own press releases utilized a variety of names for the Mixed Congress and its sponsors. Hawkins' final correspondence with Governor Holcomb revealed that the NCPLL lacked the resources to fulfill their commitment to the movement. Only weeks prior to the opening session of the Mixed Congress, the League's president revealed that his organization lacked the funds travel to Omaha and solicited the governor for financial assistance.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸³ *Afro-American Sentinel*, July 23, 1898.

⁴⁸⁴ H. Clay Hawkins to Silas Holcomb, July 1898, RG 1, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska; *Colored American*, August 6, 1898; *Indianapolis Freeman*, August 20, 1898; *Afro-American Sentinel*, July 23, 30, 1898; *Washington Bee*, May 28, 1898.

Although the daily records and correspondence files of Exposition management are not available, the reports of Omaha daily newspapers illustrate that officials saw the Congress as a means of promoting the fair to a new demographic. In addition to reserving its auditorium for the opening session of the Mixed Congress, the executive committee extended a personal invitation to Detroit attorney D. Augustus Straker requesting his appearance as the keynote speaker for “Colored American’s Day” on August 19th. Committee members also instructed their agents throughout the region to promote the event among local black leaders in hopes of increasing the fair’s attendance. General Manager Thaddeus S. Clarkson was in regular contact with Henry Clay Hawkins of the NCPLL and when members of this organization optimistically predicted that 20,000 African Americans would come to Omaha, Exposition management and the daily press were delighted.⁴⁸⁵

On the eve of the Mixed Congress, black Omaha was energized. Even white shopkeepers noticed the excitement and sought to profit by advertising special “exposition rates” on hats and eveningwear within the pages of the city’s black newspapers. Both white and black journalists reported positively about the organization and goals of the Mixed Congress, with each of Nebraska’s leading newspapers printing regular stories about the preparations for the Mixed Congress. In fact, given the scarcity of surviving issues of Omaha’s three black weekly

⁴⁸⁵ *Omaha World-Herald*, August 9, 11, 12, 14, 1898; *Omaha Bee*, August 13; *Afro-American Sentinel*, August 6, 13, 1898.

newspapers, many of the most informative sources about the Congress and the content of its deliberations are within the region's white daily newspapers.⁴⁸⁶

The Congress was delayed by a miscommunication between its organizers and the managers of the Exposition. Organizers had informed delegates and attendees that they would not have to pay admission, as the Congress would adjourn to Creighton Hall for the afternoon sessions immediately following the opening ceremony at the Exposition's auditorium. When delegates arrived, however, they were denied entry unless they purchased a full day's admission. This charge was prohibitively expensive for many would-be fairgoers as evidenced by scores of letters, editorials, and petitions by private citizens and Exposition concessionaires throughout the summer. While some of the delegates purchased tickets, most others refused on grounds of principle and economics. As a result, the meeting was delayed until an ad-hoc committee located and negotiated a settlement with management. Fortunately for the organizers, General Manager Clarkson was himself a delegate to the convention. Clarkson arranged to have the participants admitted free of charge, yet the indignity of locking the auditorium's doors and escorting delegates to and from the building was determined to be a necessary precaution.⁴⁸⁷

Although the Congress was delayed, its opening reflected the organizers' vision of a gathering of men and women of diverse regions, racial heritage, and

⁴⁸⁶ *Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln), August 17, 18, 20; *Omaha World-Herald*, August 9, 11, 12, 14, 1898; *Omaha Bee*, August 11, 12, 13, 14, 15; *Afro-American Sentinel*, August 6, 1898; Omaha City Directory, 1898, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910.

⁴⁸⁷ W. V. Cox to J. H. Brigham, August 15, 1898, National Archives RG 33 ARC 821519; *Omaha Bee*, August 13, 16, 18, 1898; *Omaha World Herald*, August 17, 18, 1898; *Nebraska State Journal*, August 18, 1898; *Afro-American Sentinel*, August 20, 1898; Letter of T. S. Clarkson to Silas Holcomb, July 27, 1898, RG 1 SG 17; Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

political persuasions united by the common desire to discuss and improve American race relations. The structure of the opening session followed a general pattern of speeches by white and black delegates interspersed between addresses of welcome by white political leaders and patriotic medleys performed by a select chorus. The meeting's itinerary originally called for an address by Silas Holcomb, but as the governor was in Florida visiting members of Nebraska's Third Regiment, Lieutenant Governor J. E. Harris took his place. Harris opened his remarks by affirming the historic nature of the Congress as an opportunity for white and black Americans to "meet on the common ground of manhood." Following this address of welcome, Dr. H. S. Howell of Kansas City gave a powerful speech acknowledging the prejudice and hatred that limited the opportunities of African Americans. Utilizing a rhetorical model that would become a staple of civil rights leaders, Howell transitioned from the challenges of the present to the confident prediction that "the time will soon come when the colored man, like all other men, will be rated according to his true merits." The method by which this dream would be achieved, Howell explained, would not be accommodation or patience but rather through agitation and persistence. The *Sentinel* editorialized that Howell did not approve of Booker T. Washington's message of accommodation as the Kansas City doctor counseled members of his race "to seek employment along any line where his manhood and ability would sustain him, whether in Congress or elsewhere."⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁸ *American Citizen*, January 6, 1898; *Omaha Bee*, August 17, 18, 1898; *Afro-American Sentinel*, August 20, 1898.

The music selected for the Congress was a medley of patriotic standard-bearers, a tacit message to would-be critics that the conference's goals of equality and brotherhood were among the highest ideals of the nation. Members of the chorus represented a broad spectrum of the black community, with the voices of skilled laborers, porters, homemakers, barbers, attorneys, janitors, businessmen, and domestics joining together in a harmony its members hoped would someday represent their nation.⁴⁸⁹

The activism of the morning session continued for the next three days as the Congress met at a white church and Creighton Hall. White and black speakers discussed topics such as "What Can Be Done to Bring about a Better and More Respectful Feeling between the White and Colored Americans?" The participants debated various strategies but overwhelmingly rejected the accommodationist model expressed by Washington at the Cotton States Exposition of 1895. Although many of the delegates expressed admiration for the accomplishments of the Wizard of Tuskegee, the message of this exposition was personified by the expression of one of its participants that "the colored man should not be contented to work out his destiny with a pick and shovel." Discussions were held about the ability of "a fearless black press" to mold public opinion as well as methods to confront segregation and prevent lynching. The delegates displayed courage beyond rhetoric, personally visiting the

⁴⁸⁹ *Omaha Enterprise*, June 19, 1898, Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900; Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910; Omaha City Directory, 1898.

governor of Texas who was visiting the Exposition and inviting him to address their meeting.⁴⁹⁰

The delegates hoped to transform their resolve into a permanent organization they named the Representative White and Colored American Association of the United States. Area newspapers recorded the proceedings of the Mixed Congress and were supportive of the new organization whose purpose was to promote candid discussion of racial issues through correspondence and annual meetings of gubernatorially-nominated delegates. Edwin Overall was elected president and advisory boards were established for each of the states that had significant representation at the Congress. These boards were primarily composed of African American men and women and only created for Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Missouri, and South Dakota; reflecting the regional and racial composition of the organization at its inception.⁴⁹¹

The final day of the Mixed Congress coincided with one of the many promotional days set aside by Exposition management to attract various groups to the fair. August 19th was referred to as “Afro-American Day,” “Colored American’s Day,” and a host of other names in various contemporary newspapers, but was officially recorded as “Colored People’s Day” in most guidebooks and official histories. In contrast with the experience of Chicago’s Columbian Exposition, only a small program in the auditorium commemorated Omaha’s Colored People’s Day.

⁴⁹⁰ *Omaha Bee*, August 16, 17, 18, 1898; *Kansas City Star*, August 18, 1898; *Afro-American Sentinel*, August 13, 20, 1898; *Nebraska State Journal*, August 17, 18, 1898.

⁴⁹¹ *Indianapolis Freeman*, August 27, 1898; *Omaha Bee*, August 19, 20, 1898.

Attendance was average for an August weekday and contemporary sources give no indication that white fairgoers were even aware of the day's designation other than a rather small turnout to hear Straker's address. For example, Omaha resident Louise Hosp Armstrong penned a detailed description of her visit to the fair during the Mixed Congress and "Colored People's Day," yet no mention was made of African American participation. Local newspapers, however, reported Straker's remarks at length, complimenting the speaker while revealing paternalistic attitudes with headlines such as "Colored People's Own Big Day at the Big White City." Despite these sentiments, Straker emphasized the historic significance of the Mixed Congress as the first significant interracial gathering to discuss civil rights in America. The judge admitted that the "seed may be small" but expressed the hope that the tree would thrive and someday bear fruit.⁴⁹²

The Western Negro Press Association (WNPA) met in Omaha three days following the adjournment of the Mixed Congress. Although the WNPA was in its third year, the organization languished in relative anonymity until its meeting at the Trans-Mississippi Exposition. With the support of Exposition management and the cooperation of black and white newspapers of Omaha, the WNPA held a successful convention that would mark its transition from temporary fraternity to journalistic institution. While delegates from only four newspapers beyond the host city attended the 1897 meeting of the WNPA in Kansas City, delegates from sixteen black newspapers from St. Louis to Seattle attended the Omaha convention. Robert W.

⁴⁹² Haynes, "History of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition of 1898," 245; *Omaha Bee*, August 20, 1898; *Omaha World-Herald*, August 20, 1898.

Richardson welcomed the delegates to the Exposition as the head of Omaha's press bureau. Richardson assured the delegates that they would not be discriminated against while visiting the Exposition grounds and referred to the attendees as "brothers and sisters" engaged together in a common profession before distributing press passes and engraved souvenir medals. The delegates toured the Exposition grounds, recording the marvelous sights and sounds of the exhibits and the Midway but conveying no indication of discrimination or inhospitality.⁴⁹³

Representative of the conference's proceedings was a paper entitled "Should Lynching be Made a Political Issue?" by Julius Taylor, editor of Salt Lake City's *Broad Axe*. Taylor's paper likened the response of Republicans to lynching with the reaction of the Pope to Halley's Comet in the 14th century. Just as His Holiness had issued a papal bull against future appearances of the comet, Republicans cursed lynchings when flames filled the night sky but failed to take effective measures to prevent their occurrence. The resulting cacophony of resolutions, Taylor concluded, was no more effective in curbing racial violence than the ringing of the church bells to scare away the comet. The impotence of political leaders to prevent the crime was deliberate, Taylor charged, because national Republican leaders had no intention of

⁴⁹³ *Nebraska State Journal*, June 24, 1896, August 24, 1898; *Lincoln Evening News*, July 15, 1898; *Iowa State Bystander*, September 10, 1897; *Afro-American Sentinel*, June 25, July 2, 9, 16, 27, 30, August 6, 27, September 10, 1898; *Broad Axe*, June 11, 25, July 9, 16, 23, 30, September 3, October 10, 1898; *Omaha World-Herald*, August 23, 1898; *Omaha Bee*, August 23, 24, 1898; *Omaha Enterprise*, July 30, 1909; Clementine Washington Pigford, "They Came to Colorado... With the Dust of Slavery on their Backs: Information About Zion Baptist Church, its Members, and Societal Affiliations," Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, Denver, Colorado; *Indianapolis Freeman*, August 20, 1898; *Colored American*, July 23, 1898; *Dubuque Daily Herald*, August 24, 1898; *Denver Evening Post*, August 14, 1898. The *Omaha World-Herald* of August 6, 1898, enthusiastically reported that at least a hundred black journalists would be in town for the annual meeting of "The National Colored Press Association."

taking the issue beyond the annual charade of electoral rhetoric to appease black voters. To combat lynching, a barbaric practice the editor associated with the comet-phobia of the Dark Ages, Taylor proposed that anti-lynching legislation be promoted at the state and local level.⁴⁹⁴

The WNPA spent a considerable amount of time passing resolutions that were anything but accommodationist. While the delegates approved non-controversial statements of congratulations commending the actions of white and black soldiers, they connected their patriotic sentiment to racial agitation by forming their resolutions as a reminder of the nation's solemn duty to uphold justice both abroad and at home.

...we appeal to the sentiment of humanity in the American people which prompts them to spend hundreds of millions of dollars in the prosecution of war for the liberation of outraged and bleeding humanity in foreign lands—we earnestly appeal to all of these that they raise their united influence and might to stay these constant scenes of conflagration and blood that have cast the shadow of darkest opprobrium upon the nation's name.⁴⁹⁵

The delegates followed the larger theme of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition in boosting the region, albeit within their own unique framework of race and gender. The delegates passed resolutions encouraging African Americans throughout the nation to follow Horace Greeley's advice and "Go West" where members of the race might become the manly and independent homesteaders and farmers they had long desired to be in the South. In contrast to the counsel of Booker T. Washington, however, the delegates called for an expansion of liberal education that would

⁴⁹⁴ *Broad Axe*, September 3, 10, October 8, 15, 1898; *Afro-American Sentinel*, August 20, 27, 1898; *Colored American*, September 3, 1893; *Nebraska State Journal*, August 24, 1898.

⁴⁹⁵ *Afro-American Sentinel*, August 27, 1898.

provide wider opportunities for African Americans and spoke openly about the evils of mob rule and lynch laws. The delegates also passed a strong resolution commending the governors of North Carolina, Illinois, Virginia, and Kansas for appointing black officers and calling for an end to the discriminatory practice of appointing white officers for black soldiers. Whether or not these resolutions reached their intended targets is impossible to determine, yet their efforts were praised in many black newspapers throughout the nation. While the value of these resolutions may seem minimal when viewed with the benefit of hindsight, it is important to note that both white and black Americans felt they were important enough to draft as the turn of the century was host to myriad conventions that followed the same tactic.⁴⁹⁶

The Mixed Congress paralleled the Trans-Mississippi Exposition in that both failed to garner the national attention they sought. Exposition promoters boosted the fair throughout the summer, yet frequently complained that their efforts had been ignored outside of the region. Colorado Governor Alva Adams wrote to a leading Omaha businessman, praising the Exposition as “a revelation to our eastern friends” that “refined civilization” goes beyond the Mississippi river. Unfortunately for the organizers of the Mixed Congress and Exposition management, few of these friends challenged their preconceptions by visiting the Exposition. The *World-Herald* ridiculed this “Eastern Misunderstanding,” lampooning those whose naïveté led to acceptance of dime-novel fantasy and still believed that “the savage red man” presented a formidable danger west of the Mississippi. The editors countered this

⁴⁹⁶ *The Broad Ax*, September 10, October 8, 1898; *Afro-American Sentinel*, August 27, 1898; *Colored American*, September 3, 1893.

image with a rather tongue-in-cheek tribute to the novelty of the occasional buffalo rambling down Main Street and the sweet melodies of coyotes lulling city-dwellers to sleep.⁴⁹⁷

Although Omaha's attempt to create a national organization was abortive, the effort must be considered in historical perspective. Nearly two hundred people attended the conference—a number that compares favorably with the initial meetings of the Afro-American Council in 1890 and Afro-American League in 1898. Similar to Albion Tourgée's short-lived National Citizens Rights Association, the Representative White and Colored American Association of the United States received interracial support and enlisted a great deal of sentiment, but it never developed the infrastructure required for permanence. Only a few dozen delegates were active in the effort to create a permanent organization that quickly unraveled with the health of its founder-president. Despite these shortcomings, the African-American experience at the Trans-Mississippi Exposition was perhaps the most extraordinary of all American World Fairs. Establishing a visible presence at international expositions was among the goals espoused by black leaders such as Frederick Douglass dating back to the first national convention of black leaders in 1853. Douglass himself believed that the Chicago Exposition was “just the opportunity” to organize “a grand convention or congress of colored men,” yet beyond the annual meeting of the ephemeral Colored Men's National Protective Association, no such congress was organized. Given the prestige of Douglass and the

⁴⁹⁷ Alva Adams to H. Hugo Brandeis, November 18, 1898, Letterpress books of Alva Adams, vol. 19, Colorado State Archives, Denver, Colorado; *Omaha World Herald*, July 12, 26, 1898.

magnitude of the Columbian Exposition, the success of Omaha in organizing an interracial conference is particularly striking. The nation's leading civil rights organizations of the 1890s, the Afro-American Council and the Afro-American League, scarcely considered the possibility of bi-racial membership. Interracial organizations such as Tourgee's NCRA were little more than mailing lists endorsed by Northern white politicians. Celebrated movements of the following decades such as the Niagara Movement and organization of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) were initially dominated by a select coterie of elite Easterners. That an economically diverse mixture of African American men and women in the Great Plains could organize an undertaking of this magnitude should alert scholars to the importance of expanding the study of race relations beyond previously-held assumptions of race, class, gender, and region.⁴⁹⁸

The possibility of interracial cooperation at the turn-of-the-century was evidenced by the participation of nearly twenty-five whites who attended the Mixed Congress as delegates or distinguished guests. Several of these men, such as Nebraska delegate J. R. Woodcock, took a leading role in the deliberations and organizational efforts. Woodcock reported the proceedings of the meeting to Silas Holcomb,

⁴⁹⁸ *Atchison Champion*, May 8, 1892; Anna R. Paddon and Sally Turner, "Douglass's Triumphant Days at the World's Columbian Exposition," *Proteus* 12 (Spring, 1995): 43-47; "Proceedings of the Colored National Convention, held in Rochester, July 6th, 7th and 8th, 1853," 39, Kroch Library Rare and Manuscripts, Cornell University; Shawn Leigh Alexander, "We Know Our Rights and Have the Courage to Defend Them: The Spirit of Agitation in the Age of Accommodation," (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 2004); Mark Elliot, "Race, Color Blindness and the Democratic Public: Albion W. Tourg e's Radical Principles in *Plessy v. Ferguson*," *Journal of Southern History* 67 (May 2001): 309-11; Mark Elliot, *Color-Blind Justice: Albion Tourg e and the Quest for Racial Equality from the Civil War to Plessy v. Ferguson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Reed, "All the World is Here," 129-35; Dennis Mihelich, "A Socioeconomic Portrait of Prince Hall Masonry in Nebraska," *Great Plains Quarterly* 17 (Winter 1997): 35-47.

praising the conference and thanking the governor for the honor of the appointment. Woodcock described the three-day conference in the most positive terms, emphasizing the bi-racial nature of the delegation and heavily endorsing the effort to create a permanent civil rights organization. Woodcock shared the disappointment of his fellow delegates regarding the lack of national participation and likely supported the suggestion that the next session of the Mixed Congress be held in Richmond, Virginia to attract more participants. Had the organization followed this suggestion, it might have achieved permanence, as the black community of Richmond was already involved in its own short-lived effort to host a “Negro National Exposition” in 1899.⁴⁹⁹

Despite the brevity of its existence, the legacy of the Mixed Congress continued long after the Exposition faded into memory. While Omaha’s dream of civic grandeur and regional hegemony languished in an era of political corruption and relative decline, Edwin Overall’s vision of interracial cooperation would continue as former delegates formed the core of local NAACP chapters. Delegates John Albert Williams, Joseph Brown, and Paul Spratlin each served as the first presidents of the Omaha, Des Moines, and Denver NAACP branches, respectively. Williams followed the example of Cyrus Bell by canvassing Omaha’s theaters, this time adding a boycott of those establishments that drew the color line and reversing Jim Crow policies at the city’s beach and auditorium. Des Moines ranked ninth in the nation among local

⁴⁹⁹ J. R. Woodcock to Silas A. Holcomb, August 23, 1898, RG 1 SG 17, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska; Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910; *Afro-American Sentinel*, August 20, 1898; *Richmond Planet*, July, 16, 23, 30, August 6, 13, 20, 27, September 3, 10, 17, 24, October 15, 1898, January 3, 11, 1899.

branches in terms of membership under the lead of Joseph Brown, who as president recruited influential whites such as the governor, mayor, three Iowa Supreme Court justices, and the editor of the *Des Moines Register and Leader*. Brown also founded the National Bar Association, the world's leading association of African American attorneys.⁵⁰⁰

Iowa delegate John Frank Blagburn left the Mixed Congress to serve as a member of the National Afro-American Council's delegation that met with President William McKinley following the Exposition. He and his wife continued their friendship with the Overalls as well as his connection with the NCPLL, delivering a speech at that organization's 1909 banquet in Washington. Activism was a family tradition in the Blagburn household, with John's daughter Dottie becoming the subject of the first successful lawsuit under Iowa's civil rights law. Dottie Blagburn filed suit and received monetary damages from an all-white jury after she was forcibly removed from her theater seat four decades prior to Rosa Parks' famous act of courage. Other Iowa delegates led similar careers, with John L. Thompson serving as an officer to the National Afro-American League while George E. Taylor went on

⁵⁰⁰David R. McMahon, "The Origins of the NAACP in Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska, 1913-1926," (M. A. thesis, Creighton University, 1993); *Omaha Monitor*, July 3, 10, 31, August 28, November 6, 13, 20, 27, December 4, 18, 1915, March 4, 25, July 8, 15, 22, November 11, December 16, 1916, January 6, 13, March 19, May 26, June 2, 1917; Polk, 53; *Washington Bee*, June 26, 1909; *Afro-American Sentinel*, January 28, 1899; *Iowa State Bystander*, September 23, 1898; Bill Silag, Susan Koch-Bridgeford, and Hal Chase, *Outside In: African-American History in Iowa, 1838-2000*; Jack Lufkin, "The Founding and Early Years of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Des Moines, 1915-1930," *Annals of Iowa*, 42 (Fall, 1980): 439-61.

to represent the National Liberty Party as the first African American Presidential candidate in 1904.⁵⁰¹

Delegate and Ella Mahammitt continued the tradition of protest she began at the Exposition by waging a successful campaign to prevent segregation at Creighton and exposing the University of Nebraska's accommodation to Missouri's exclusionary policies in intercollegiate athletics. Colorado delegate Paul Spratlin led Denver's black community for three decades while his son was a scholarly contributor to the Association for the Study of the Negro Life and History. Nebraska delegate Silas Robbins represented black clients seeking redress under the state's civil rights law while his son became secretary to the American legation of Monrovia, Liberia. Delegate William VanDerzee continued his service to the African American community of Lincoln, organizing a meeting that strengthened the University of Nebraska's refusal to draw the color line in athletics and leading organizational efforts to form a NAACP branch in Lincoln.⁵⁰²

Although the NCPLL's Charles Curtis reportedly attended the Exposition, there is no indication that anyone else from his organization participated in the Mixed Congress. The NCPLL did maintain an active interest in the Midwest following the

⁵⁰¹ *Washington Bee*, June 26, 1909; *Afro-American Sentinel*, January 28, 1899; *Iowa State Bystander*, September 23, 1898; William Taylor to James Weldon Johnson, December 15, 1923, Unlabeled newspaper clipping on Blagburn case, Records of the Iowa NAACP Branch Files, Records of the NAACP Series C Reel 10.

⁵⁰² *Omaha Enterprise*, August 24, 1895, October 2, 1908, February 12, 26, 1909; V. B. Spratlin, "The Negro in Spanish Literature," *Journal of Negro History* 19 (January 1934): 60; Guy Robbins to Charles Young, August 18, 1917, Charles Young Collection, National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center, Wilberforce, Ohio; *Omaha Monitor*, July 10, 1915, September 16, 1916, May 16, 1924; William H. VanDerzee to Chapin Brinsmade, December 19, 1913, Walter White to Trego Williams, May 21, 1918, Papers of the Nebraska NAACP, RG 1254, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska; *Omaha Monitor*, July 17, 1915; McMahon, "The Origins of the NAACP in Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska, 35-6.

Exposition, however, as it promoted a slate of political candidates in Iowa in 1902. The previous year, representatives of the League sent a letter to every Nebraska legislator detailing the injustices African Americans were subjected to and calling for their help to redress these grievances. Shortly after these letters were circulated, the Mixed Congress' organizer and president Edwin Overall collapsed from suffocation caused by a growing tumor. He was eulogized by members of both of the races he sought to unite, his status as a leading member of Omaha society being forever enshrined by the large memorial that marks his final resting place among Omaha's representative white and black Americans.⁵⁰³

The turn of the century is often portrayed as both the “nadir of race relations” and an “era of accommodation” to social and cultural manifestations of white supremacy. This generalization, however, was formed five decades ago and should be challenged by detailed explorations of individual black communities. Although national leaders such as Booker T. Washington may have at least superficially adopted a strategy of conciliation at one Southern exposition, scholars must not assume that Washington's eight million contemporaries wore the same mask. If the African American experience within a Midwestern fair once dismissed as a “White City” is any indication, historians should expect to find continuity between Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement by exploring local instances of protest and interracial cooperation.

⁵⁰³ *Afro-American Sentinel*, August 20, 1898; *Colored American*, August 13, 1898; *Lincoln Evening News*, January 4, 8, 1901; *Des Moines Leader*, March 4, 1902; *Nebraska State Journal*, August 1, 1901; *Omaha Daily News*, August 31, 1901; *Omaha World Herald*, August 1, 1901; *Omaha Sun*, August 1, 1901; Records of Prospect Hill Cemetery, Omaha, Nebraska.

The African American experience at the Trans-Mississippi Exposition was characteristic of race relations at the turn of the century in Middle America. The methods of community building and protest that were utilized by the region's black communities were invisible to most whites. Yet behind the gleaming façade of the Grand Court and the minstrelized Old Plantation, black men and women protested both segregation and exclusion. They sought inclusion within the city's institutions and service within its places of public accommodation. Upon being denied both, they held mass meetings and issued valiant declarations yet met with only limited success.

Conclusion

Although several attempts were made to re-segregate the schools of Iowa and Nebraska in the early twentieth century, the activism of black communities paired with the economy of the status quo to defeat each of these campaigns. As the 20th century progressed, however, residential segregation increased to the point that a few schools in the urban districts of Iowa and Nebraska mirrored the de jure segregated institutions of Kansas. Whites in communities throughout Kansas that had not yet created the color line did not wait for residential segregation to separate their children. Dozens of attempts were made throughout the next three decades, often successfully, to create separate schools in both large and small cities. At least a dozen of these campaigns were halted or at least stalled by organized black communities armed with the law that prohibited Jim Crow beyond the cities of the first class. As a result, several attempts were made to amend the law to allow for segregation in cities of the second class. Although each of these attempts to expand legal segregation were defeated by mass movements and legal action, separate schools were maintained in over a dozen Kansas communities in violation of the law.

Wichita was the only city of the first class at the turn-of-the-century that did not maintain separate schools for white and black children, a situation that was ended when the city adopted Jim Crow in 1906. While whites in Kansas' largest cities perceived legal segregation as a benefit of urbanization, African American communities exposed the faulty logic of using population to justify Jim Crow. For example, attorneys for a black plaintiff who sued the Topeka Board of Education in

1903 sarcastically addressed the Kansas Supreme Court if black children appeared darker in urban environments than within small towns. Despite numerous protests, illegal segregation continued in Kansas with Argentine, Baxter Springs, Chetopa, Columbus, Council Grove, Lawrence, Manhattan, Olathe, Oswego, Paola, Parsons, Rosedale, and Weir all maintaining separate schools despite being classed as cities of the second and third classes. Some school districts maintained a veneer of legality by insisting that black children were free to attend any school of the city, despite clear evidence that such statements were patently untrue. Financial considerations led to the elimination of Jim Crow in many rural areas prior to 1954, yet communities such as Columbus and Council Grove continued to maintain separate schools throughout the early 20th century even as the number of black scholars dropped from between thirty and forty to less than a dozen. By 1930, nearly twenty Kansas communities practiced de jure segregation. Of the nearly twenty cities of the second class where sixty or more black students were enrolled, only six of these towns (Arkansas City, Emporia, Coffeyville, Galena, Iola, Junction City, and Ottawa) chose to abide by the law forbidding segregation. Of these six, Ottawa, Coffeyville, and Galena were forced to abandon Jim Crow by order of the Kansas Supreme Court. Of the remaining three, there is clear evidence that Emporia and Iola considered the scheme, while the records of the Junction City schools are unavailable.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰⁴ *Reynolds v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 66 Kan. 672, (1903); Kansas Superintendent of Public Instruction, Annual Reports of Class Cities of the First Class, 1902-1903; Kansas Superintendent of Public Instruction, Annual Reports of Class Cities of the Second Class, 1902-1903, 1903-1904, 1904-1905, 1920-1921; United States Federal Census, 1900-1930. Superintendent's reports provide only demographic data, but by listing the race of teachers employed, a researcher can deduce the approximate year that separate schools were maintained. Corresponding school board minutes,

A Western location was no guarantee against Jim Crow, however, as Salina chose to create a separate school for its relatively small number of black scholars. As residents of the largest town in Western Kansas, whites in Hays “impressed” upon the black residents of neighboring communities that they were not welcome in that town. So strong was this “impression” that Hays remained 100% white from 1900-1930 neighboring communities such as Ellis was home to a significant number of black families. However, the central Kansas community of Hutchinson was the only city of the first class that declined its legal authority to create a separate school during the 1920s.⁵⁰⁵

The continued growth of Kansas cities between 1900 and 1930 led to the expansion of legal segregation as the number of cities of the first class doubled from five to ten. Legal segregation also expanded during this time period through the annexation of surrounding townships. For example, photographs of the Lowman Hill School indicate that white and black students were separated within classrooms during the 1890s. Following the annexation of this district in 1901 and a fire the

newspapers, census records, and other sources were then checked to determine the accuracy of these conclusions.

⁵⁰⁵ United States Federal Census, 1900-1930; Kansas Superintendent of Public Instruction, Annual Reports of Class Cities of the First Class, 1921-1922, 1922-1923, 1923-1924, 1926-1927; Sheridan Ploughe, *History of Reno County Kansas, its People, Industries and Institutions*, vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Bowen and Company, 1917), 352; Willard Welsch, *Hutchinson: A Prairie City in Kansas* (Hutchinson, 1946); United States Census, 1910-1930. While each of the nine other cities of the first class in the 1920s chose to separate students by race, Hutchinson school officials refused to collect or record data on their racial demographics despite the implied requirement to do so on state forms. Hutchinson school officials occasionally sought to emphasize this refusal by crossing out the phrase “colored” on state forms and writing phrases such as “no separate data kept for white and colored” rather than supply the demographic information solicited by the state superintendent’s office. This practice was continued even after 1911 when Hutchinson reached the required population to be a city of the first class. Although the black community of Hutchinson was never as large as that of Topeka or Kansas City, Kansas, census records indicate that Hutchinson had over two hundred residents of school age in 1910 and nearly double this amount in 1920.

following year, a new school was constructed especially for white students while officials moved an aging two-room building to the site of the former school for the exclusive use of black students. William Reynolds, a clerk at a tailor shop, attempted to enroll his son Raoul at the newly constructed school. Although this school was much closer to the Reynolds home, officials refused to enroll Raoul.⁵⁰⁶

The gross inequality between the new school in the Reynolds's neighborhood and its aging Jim Crow substitute was unmistakable, yet Reynolds's suit against the Topeka Board of Education sought relief beyond condition and convenience. Reynolds was represented by Gaspar C. Clemens, a white Topeka attorney who was widely recognized as one of the finest constitutional law scholars of the West. Clemens was more widely recognized, however, for his uncanny resemblance to Mark Twain in both name and physical appearance, as well as his 1900 candidacy for Governor of Kansas on the Socialist ticket. Clemens viewed segregation rather than Socialism as something foreign to his home state, declaring that only the South was "aristocratic enough" to separate black children while gerrymandering "the 'poor white trash'" away from the children of the wealthy.⁵⁰⁷

Reynolds and his attorneys detailed the inequalities between the two schools, presenting photographs and detailed descriptions of the two facilities. Although the bulk of the plaintiff's arguments were based on the blatant violation of separate but equal facilities, attorneys for the plaintiff also argued that separate schools were a

⁵⁰⁶ *Reynolds v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 66 Kan. 672 (1903); Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900.

⁵⁰⁷ *Reynolds v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 66 Kan. 672 (1903); Photographs of the Lowman Hill School, Spencer Research Library, Lawrence Kansas; Michael Broadhead and O. Gene Clanton, "G. C. Clemens: 'The Sociable Socialist,'" *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 40 (Winter, 1974): 475-502.

violation of the Fourteenth amendment. Reynolds's attorneys anticipated the rhetoric of NAACP counselors in *Brown v Board*, indicting Jim Crow for forcing upon child and parent "the badge of a servile race." The Kansas Supreme Court disregarded these arguments in 1903, however, and even retreated from the established legal doctrine of separate but equal by ruling that the outward appearances of a school gave no indication of the quality of education one might receive within its crumbling walls. The court argued that because there were more white students in Topeka, the schools provided for their benefit would naturally be larger and more modern. The court ruled that even though white children enjoyed superior facilities, this was merely "an incidental matter and necessarily unavoidable in the administration of any extended school system." The court's decision also reflected white attitudes about the color line in its attempt to place Reynolds' on the defensive by twisting his argument about the Fourteenth Amendment into an attempt to force "a comingling of the races upon terms unsatisfactory to either [race]." Rather than confront Reynolds's argument about the neutrality of the law, the justices put the plaintiff on trial by insinuating that blacks who opposed segregation desired intimate association with whites.⁵⁰⁸

The Topeka board defended its policy of segregation by claiming that blacks needed "a little different discipline from the white pupils (and) have somewhat different educational requirements." Reynolds described the school provided for black children in his neighborhood of Topeka as a "veritable cesspool." After white officials and journalists denied the legitimacy of these claims, Nick Chiles of the

⁵⁰⁸ *Reynolds v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 672-91; Paul Wilson, *A Time to Lose*, 40-41.

Topeka Plaindealer offered a personal tour of every school in the city wherein he might point out the differences between the facilities for white and black children. The response of the *Wichita Eagle* typified the reaction of whites to these campaigns in their assertion that racial segregation was natural. “Race prejudice is something which neither laws nor courts can control, or even modify,” the *Eagle* exclaimed, “and the colored man makes a mistake whenever he tries to enforce social recognition through legal channels.” These and other statements matched the rhetoric of Southern segregationists and anticipated the backlash of the Modern Civil Rights movement by claiming that black legal challenges served only to intensify the “natural prejudices” within society. Such prejudices were somehow less innate during times of war, however, as Raoul was among the first group of men drafted for military service in 1917.⁵⁰⁹

As the Reynolds case demonstrates, race relations within areas of Middle America that possessed large black communities were similar to those of the white South. Statutes and public statements by whites exhibited more neutrality, but neutrality sustained the color line in Middle America because the majority of residents favored segregation. That whites in Middle America rejected statutory requirements of Jim Crow accommodations did not make segregation any less real for black residents. The result was a state of affairs that was comparable to what English traveler William Dixon observed in postbellum Virginia. Blacks in Richmond, Dixon

⁵⁰⁹ *Reynolds v. Board of Education of Topeka*, Brief for Plaintiff, 18; *Topeka Plaindealer*, March 3, 10, 1905; Thomas Cox, *Blacks in Topeka*, 113; *Wichita Daily Eagle*, April 30, 1902; World War I Selective Service Draft Registration Cards, Los Angeles County, California, 1917-1918, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

explained, knew where they were and were not welcome and observed the color line as if it were law. Had Dixon traveled west of the Mississippi River, he would have observed a similar situation whether he was in Kansas, Iowa, or Nebraska.⁵¹⁰

My own examination of these states reveals that the story of race in Middle America is equally relevant of that of Virginia because of segregation's persistence beyond the boundaries of law and region. My original intention was to avoid this complexity by recording only inspirational tales of successful civil rights agitation that would surprise readers and sell books. Unfortunately, few of my stories can compete with the melodramatic civil rights narrative that I learned as a boy growing up in Emporia, Kansas. I cannot turn the segregationists of 19th century Middle America into villains because they speak about race in ways that are too similar to my 21st century audience. No Midwestern governor stood in the doorway of his state's university and no white police chief vowed publicly to violate federal laws. Even the most intrepid black protagonists in Middle America were not murdered for their actions. Character assassinations produce no corpses and public condemnation is hardly martyrdom. Black children who attempted to enroll in Middle America's white schools were not harassed by white mobs. Their victimization was no less real, yet the absence of physical intimidation somehow reduces our indignation. Black adults who attempted to vote were actually courted by political leaders of every persuasion. Disfranchisement that occurs after the polls close is already a symptom of modern democracy.

⁵¹⁰ William Hepworth Dixon, *New America* vol. 2 (London, 1867), 332-333 in Howard Rabinowitz, *From Exclusion to Segregation*, 349.

Without clearly identifiable heroes and villains, a story must at least demonstrate good triumphing over evil. Yet in the Midwest there is no sudden moment when school segregation is ended, no removal of “white only” signs, no enforcement of civil rights laws, and no change in the practices of lunch counters and buses. I cannot craft a dialogue that would stir indignation from the rhetoric utilized by 19th whites, because it is too familiar to the unspoken racial assumptions of most Americans today. Black and white residents of 19th century Middle America lived separate and often unequal lives, a story too familiar to modern audiences to sell within the present genre of Civil Rights.

And yet, the fact that so few episodes of Midwestern history can match the drama of the Freedom Rides or the Greensboro Sit-Ins is precisely why their story must be told. The extraordinary events of the Modern Civil Rights Movement are quite different from the more nuanced challenges that students and educators face today. Despite the desire of many whites to construct and maintain segregation, the preferred method of Middle America was not violence or obvious denials of civil rights, but rather the construction of barriers in subtle ways that mirror modern challenges. I have utilized these case studies in my own courses and can attest to their value in reaching a generation that is more likely to relate to the veiled racial attitudes of 19th century Lawrence than the violent demonstrations of 20th century Little Rock. As a result, I believe that Middle America fulfills Jacquelyn Dowd Hall’s call to “make Civil Rights harder” by challenging the myth of progress and demonstrating

that racial barriers were not magically dissolved with the passage of civil rights legislation.

As Derrick Bell argues in his recent book on *Brown v. Board*, the appearance of civil rights laws within a culture that approves of subtle forms of segregation can produce a false sense of apathy among even the most liberal whites. While Bell's work might be considered "divisive" due to his critical examination of the present, an exploration of the past may allow for greater objectivity. Liberal whites in Lincoln certainly felt that they had "solved" the racial problem within their own communities by the turn of the century and cited the existence of civil rights laws as evidence of this fact. Whites celebrated the selection of Booker T. Washington as the orator of the 1902 commencement ceremony of the University of Nebraska as further evidence that they lived in a post-racial era. White journalists expressed a degree of congratulation to residents of the city and surrounding area for their response to Washington, claiming that no other commencement speaker had ever been so eagerly anticipated.⁵¹¹

White politicians and civic leaders attended a lavish banquet held in Washington's honor while area businesses attempted to cash in on the popularity of the black celebrity without paying any royalties. "Booker T. Washington has solved the race problem," exclaimed an advertisement of the Lincoln Gas and Electric Light Company. "We've solved the fuel problem-It's Gas." Regardless of Washington's message, however, white editorials written in response to his speech were typified by

⁵¹¹ Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants*; Oliver J. Burckhardt Papers, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln Nebraska; *Lincoln Evening News*, June 6, 11, 12, 13, 1909.

their view of Washington as an exception to the typical black leader. Even as whites sought to embrace the image of Washington for their own purposes, most white columnists used his visit as an opportunity to make judgments about the race through vague references to vice, poverty, and ignorance, masking their own racial assumptions by embracing their new black friend.⁵¹²

⁵¹² *Lincoln Evening News*, June 11, 12, 13, 1909; *Lincoln State Journal*, June 13, 1902.

Bibliography

Books

Acton, Richard and Patricia Nassif Acton. *To Go Free: A Treasury of Iowa's Legal Heritage*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1995.

Anderson, Alan B. and George Pickering. *Confronting the Color Line: The Broken Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986.

Athearn, Robert G. *In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas, 1879-80*. Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978.

Ayers, Edward L. *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Bell, Derrick. *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Bergmann, Leola Nelson. *The Negro in Iowa* Des Moines: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1969.

Berlin, Ira. et al., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1865, Volume 2: The Black Military Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Berwanger, Eugene. *The Frontier Against Slavery, Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967.

Blassingame, John. *Black New Orleans: 1860-1880*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.

Boone, William. W. *A History of Black Education in Kansas City, Kansas*. Kansas City: Kansas City Kansas Community College, 1986.

Brown, Hallie Q. *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction*. Xenia, OH: Aldine Publishing Company, 1926.

Butler, Kathleen Mary. *The Economics of Emancipation: Jamaica and Barbados, 1823-1843*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

- Bolton, Charles C. *The Hardest Deal of All: The Battle over School Integration in Mississippi, 1870-1980*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.
- Calloway, Bertha W. and Alonzo N. Smith. *Visions of Freedom on the Great Plains: An Illustrated History of African Americans in Nebraska*. Virginia Beach: Donning Company Publishers, 1998.
- Castel, Albert. *Civil War Kansas: Reaping the Whirlwind*. rev. ed. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997.
- Chaichian, Mohammad A. *White Racism on the Western Urban Frontier: Dynamics of Race and Class in Dubuque, Iowa, 1800-2000*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2006.
- Cohen, William. *At Freedom's Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control 1861-1915*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991.
- Cox, LaWanda. *Lincoln and Black Freedom: A Study in Presidential Leadership*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1981.
- Cox, Thomas C. Kenneth S. Jolly. *Black Liberation in the Midwest: The Struggle in St. Louis, Missouri, 1946-1970*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Cox, Thomas C. *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas, 1865-1915*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.
- Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press, 2001.
- Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic. *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* 2nd ed., Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000.
- Domer, Dennis and Barbara Watkins. *Embattled Lawrence: Conflict and Community*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Continuing Education, 2001.
- Douglas, Davison M. *Jim Crow Moves North: The Battle over Northern School Desegregation, 1865-1954*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Drake, St. Clair and Horace Clayton. *The Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1945.
- Dudziak, Mary. *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

- Dykstra, Robert R. *Bright Radical Star: Black Freedom and White Supremacy on the Hawkeye Frontier*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Edwards, Rebecca. *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865-1915*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Elliot Mark. *Color-Blind Justice: Albion Tourgée and the Quest for Racial Equality from the Civil War to Plessy v. Ferguson*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Eick, Gretchen Cassel. *Dissent in Wichita: The Civil Rights Movement in the Midwest, 1954-1972*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001
- Etcheson, Nicole. *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006.
- Foner, Eric. *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Foner, Eric. *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1865-1877*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.
- Gaines, Kevin K. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Gilmore, Glenda Elizabeth. *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2008.
- Glatthaar, Joseph T. *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990.
- Gordon, Jacob. *Narratives of African Americans in Kansas, 1870-1992: Beyond the Exoduster Movement*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1993.
- Gosnell, Harold F. *Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935.
- Glaude, Eddie Jr. *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Greene, Lorenzo J. et al. *Missouri's Black Heritage*. Saint Louis: Forum Press, 1980.
- Hahn, Steven. *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.

- Harper, Paul F. *Surely it Floweth with Milk and Honey: A History of Montgomery County, Kansas to 1900*. Independence: Independence Community College Press, 1988.
- Harlan, Louis R. *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Horton, James Oliver and Lois E. Horton. *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North*. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1999.
- Hyde, Samuel C. ed., *Sunbelt Revolution: The Historical Progression of the Civil Rights Struggle in the Gulf South, 1866-2000*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003.
- Jack, Bryan M. *The St. Louis African American Community and the Exodusters*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008.
- Jelks, Randal Maurice. *African Americans in the Furniture City: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Grand Rapids*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006.
- Jordan, Winthrop D. *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1968.
- Jones, Louis Thomas. *The Quakers of Iowa*. Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1914.
- Katzman, David M. *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century*. University of Illinois Press, 1975.
- Klarman, Michael J. *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Klein, Robert F. *Dubuque: Frontier River City*. Dubuque: Research Center for Dubuque Area History, 1984.
- Kluger, Richard. *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976.
- Litwack, Leon. *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*. New York: Knopf, 1979.
- Litwack, Leon. *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1961.

- Litwack, Leon. *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*. New York: Knopf, 1988.
- Loewen, James. *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*. New York: New Press, 2005.
- Logan, Rayford. *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901*. New York: Dial Press, 1954.
- McGerr, Michael. *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- McPherson, James. *The Negro's Civil War: How American Blacks Felt and Acted During the War For the Union*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1965.
- Meier, August. *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964.
- Meier, August and Elliot Rudwick. *From Plantation to Ghetto*. 3rd ed., New York: Hill and Wang, 1976.
- Meier, August and Elliot Rudwick, eds. *Along the Color Line: Explorations in the Black Experience*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976.
- Melish, Joanne. *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and Race in New England, 1780-1860*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Miner, Craig. *Kansas: A History of the Sunflower State*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002.
- Miner, Craig. *Wichita, The Magic City*. Wichita: Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum Association, 1988.
- Morrison, Michael. *Slavery and the American West*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Mullis, Tony R. *Peacekeeping on the Plains: Army Operations in Bleeding Kansas*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004.
- Norell, Robert J. *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985.

- Ortiz, Paul. *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Painter, Nell Irvin. *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976.
- Payne, Charles M. and Adam Green, *Time Longer than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850-1950*. New York University Press, 2003.
- Quarles, Benjamin. *The Negro in the Civil War*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1953.
- Rabinowitz, Howard. *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Rabinowitz, Howard. *The First New South: 1865-1920*. Arlington Heights, Ill: Harlan Davidson, 1992.
- Raboteau, Albert J. *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Reed Christopher. *All the World is Here; The Black Presence at "White City."* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.
- Rydell, Robert, ed., *The Reason Why the Colored American is not in the World's Columbian Exposition: The Afro-American's Contribution to Columbian Literature*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999.
- Salama-Layton, Azza. *International Politics and Civil Rights Policies in the United States, 1941-1960*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Sanders, Elizabeth. *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Savage, William Sherman. *Blacks in the West*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976.
- Schirmer, Sherry Lamb. *A City Divided: The Racial Landscape of Kansas City, 1900-1960*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002.
- Schneider, Mark Robert. *"We Return Fighting:" The Civil Rights Movement in the Jazz Age*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002.

- Schneider, Mark R. *Boston Confronts Jim Crow: 1890-1920*. Boston: Northeast University Press, 1997.
- Schwieder, Dorothy. *Iowa: The Middle Ground*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996.
- Silag, Bill, Susan Koch-Bidgford and Hall Chase. *Outside In: African American History in Iowa, 1838-2000*. Des Moines: State Historical Society of Des Moines, 2001.
- Sitkoff, Harvard. *A New Deal For Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Smith, John David, ed., *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Spear, Allan H. *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.
- Taylor, David Vassar. *African Americans in Minnesota*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2002.
- Taylor, Quintard. *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1998.
- Thornbrough, Emma Lou. *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.
- Trudeau, Noah Andre. *Like Men of War: Black Troops in the Civil War 1862-1865*. Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 1998.
- Williamson, Joel. *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861-1877*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965.
- Williamson, Joel. *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Wilson, Joseph T. *The Black Phalanx: African American Soldiers in the War of Independence, The War of 1812, and the Civil War*. 1st De Capo Press ed., New York: De Capo Press, 1994.
- Wilson, Keith P. *Campfires of Freedom: The Camp Life of Black Soldiers During the Civil War*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2002.

Wilson, Paul E. *A Time to Lose: Representing Kansas in Brown v. Board of Education*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995.

Woodson, Carter G. *A Century of Negro Migration*. Washington D.C.: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1918.

Woodson, Carter G. *Negro Orators and Their Orations*. Washington: Associated Publishers, 1925.

Woodward, C. Vann. *The Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951.

Woodward, C. Vann. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1955.

Journal Articles

Alexander, Shawn Leigh. "Vengeance without Justice, Justice without Retribution: The Afro-American Council's Struggle against Racial Violence." *Great Plains Quarterly* 27 (Spring 2007): 117-133.

Beale, Howard K. "On Rewriting Reconstruction History." *American Historical Review* 45 (July, 1940): 807-827.

Bergmann, Leola Nelson. "The Negro in Iowa." *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 46 (January, 1948): 3-90.

Berwanger, Eugene H. "Hardin and Langston: Western Black Spokesmen of the Reconstruction Era." *Journal of Negro History* 64 (Spring, 1979): 101-115.

Bremer, Jeff R. "A Species of Town-Building Madness: Quindaro and Kansas Territory, 1856-1862." *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 26 (Autumn 2003): 156-171.

Caldwell, Joe Louis. "Any Place But Here: Kansas Fever in Northeast Louisiana." *Journal of the North Louisiana Historical Association* 21 (1990).

Carle, Glenn L. "The First Kansas Colored." *American Heritage* 43 (1992): 78-91.

Carper, James C. "The Popular Ideology of Segregated Schooling: Attitudes toward the Education of Blacks in Kansas, 1854-1900." *Kansas History* 1 (Winter 1978): 254-265.

Cecil-Fronsman, Bill. "'Advocate the Freedom of White Men, As Well As That of Negroes': The Kansas *Free State* and Antislavery Westerners in Territorial Kansas." *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 20 (Summer 1997).

Chafe, William H. "The Negro and Populism: A Kansas Case Study." *Journal of Southern History* 34 (August 1968): 402-419.

Chaudhuri, Nupur. "'We All Seem Like Brothers and Sisters': The African-American Community in Manhattan, Kansas, 1865-1940." *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 14 (Winter, 1991): 270-288.

Clough, Josh. "'Vanishing' Indians?: Cultural Persistence on Display at the Omaha World's Fair of 1898." *Great Plains Quarterly* 25 (Spring 2005): 67-86.

- Cooper, Arnie. "A Stony Road: Black Education in Iowa, 1838-1860." *Annals of Iowa* 48 (Winter/Spring 1986): 113-134.
- Cornish, Dudley Taylor. "Kansas Negro Regiments in the Civil War." *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 20 (May, 1953): 417-429.
- Douglass, Frederick. "The Negro Exodus from the Gulf States." *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* 9 (January 1880): 39-48.
- Dicks, Samuel, ed., "Eliza Bradshaw, an Exoduster Grandmother." *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 26 (Summer 2003): 108-113.
- Dudziak, Mary L. "The Limits of Good Faith: Desegregation in Topeka, Kansas, 1950-1956." *Law and History Review* 5 (Summer, 1987): 366-368.
- Dykstra, Robert R. "White Men, Black Laws: Territorial Iowans and Civil Rights, 1838-1843." *Annals of Iowa* 46 (1982).
- Dykstra, Robert R. "Dr. Emerson's Sam: Black Iowans Before the Civil War." *Palimpsest* 63 (1982).
- Dykstra, Robert R. "The Issue Squarely Met: Toward an Explanation of Iowans' Racial Attitudes, 1865-1868." *Annals of Iowa* 47 (Summer, 1984): 430-450.
- Elliot, Mark. "Race, Color Blindness and the Democratic Public: Albion W. Tourgée's Radical Principles in *Plessy v. Ferguson*." *Journal of Southern History* 67 (May 2001): 309-11.
- Fisher, Michael. "The First Kansas Colored: Massacre at Poison Springs." *Kansas History* 2 (Summer, 1979): 121-128.
- Fleming, Walter L. "'Pap' Singleton, the Moses of the Colored Exodus." *American Journal of Sociology* 15 (July, 1909): 61-82.
- Gallagher, Ruth A. "A Colored Convention." *The Palimpsest* 2 (May 1921): 178-81.
- Garvin, Roy. "Benjamin, or 'Pap' Singleton and his Followers." *Journal of Negro History*, 33 (January, 1948): 7-23.
- Gatewood, Willard, B. "Kansas Negroes and the Spanish-American War." *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 37 (January, 1971): 300-313.
- Grenz, Suzanna M. "The Exodusters of 1879: St. Louis and Kansas City Responses." *Missouri Historical Review* 73 (October 1978): 54-70.

Hall, Jacquelyn Doyd. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past." *Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005).

Hickey, Joseph V. "'Pap' Singleton's Dunlap Colony: Relief Agencies and the Failure of a Black Settlement in Eastern Kansas." *Great Plains Quarterly* 11 (Winter 1991): 23-36.

Higgins, Billy D. "Negro Thought and the Exodus of 1879." *Phylon* 32 (Spring, 1971): 39-52.

Hill, James. "Migration of Blacks to Iowa: 1820-1960." *Journal of Negro History* 66 (Winter, 1981): 289-303.

Jackson, Marilyn. "Alexander Clark: A Rediscovered Black Leader," *Iowan* 23 (Spring, 1975).

Kennedy, Patrick. "Nemaha County's African American Community." *Nebraska History* 82 (Winter 2001): 11-21.

La Brie, Henry III. "James B. Morris Sr. and the *Iowa Bystander*." *Annals of Iowa* 42 (Spring, 1974): 320-321.

Leiker, James. "Race Relations in the Sunflower State." *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 25 (Autumn, 2002): 214-236.

Lovett, Christopher. "'To Serve Faithfully': The Twenty-Third Kansas Volunteer Infantry and the Spanish American War." *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 21 (Winter, 1998): 256-275.

Lufkin, Jack. "The Founding and Early Years of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Des Moines, 1915-1930." *Annals of Iowa* 42 (Fall, 1980): 439-61.

Meier, August. "Negroes in the First and Second Reconstructions." *Civil War History* 13 (January, 1967): 114-130.

Meier, August and Elliot Rudwick. "Early Boycotts of Segregated Schools: The Alton, Illinois Case, 1897-1908." *Journal of Negro Education* 36 (Autumn, 1967).

Meier, August and Elliot Rudwick. "Negro Boycotts of Jim Crow Streetcars in Tennessee." *American Quarterly* 21 (Winter, 1969).

Meier, August and Elliot Rudwick. "The Boycott Movements Against Jim Crow Streetcars in the South, 1900-1906." *Journal of American History* 55 (March, 1969).

Mihelich, Dennis. "A Socioeconomic Portrait of Prince Hall Masonry in Nebraska." *Great Plains Quarterly* 17 (Winter 1997): 35-47.

Monhollon, Rusty and Kristen Tegtmeier Oertel. "From Brown to Brown: A Century of Struggle for Equality in Kansas." *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 27 (Spring-Summer, 2004): 116-133.

Nevergold, Barbara A. Seals. "'Doing the Pan': The African-American Experience at the Pan-American Exposition, 1901." *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 28 (January, 2004): 23-42.

O'Brien, Claire. "With One Mighty Pull: Interracial Town Boosting in Nicodemus, Kansas." *Great Plains Quarterly* 16 (Spring, 1996): 117-129.

Paddon, Anna R. and Sally Turner. "Douglass's Triumphant Days at the World's Columbian Exposition." *Proteus* 12 (Spring, 1995): 43-47.

Painter, Nell Irvin. "Millenarian Aspects of the Exodus to Kansas After Reconstruction." *Journal of Social History* 9 (Spring, 1976): 331-338.

Peavler, David J. "Drawing the Color Line in Kansas City: The Creation of Sumner High School." *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 27 (Autumn, 2005): 188-201.

Pelzer, Louis. "The Negro and Slavery in Early Iowa." *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 2 (October, 1904).

Rabinowitz, Howard. "From Exclusion to Segregation: Southern Race Relations, 1865-1890." *Journal of American History* 63 (September, 1976): 325-350.

Robertson, Brian K. "'Will They Fight? Ask the Enemy': United States Colored Troops at Big Creek, Arkansas, July 26, 1864." *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 66 (Autumn, 2007): 320-332.

Runnion, James B. "The Negro Exodus." *Journal of Negro History* 4 (January, 1919).

Rydell, Robert W. "The Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition: 'To Work Out the Problem of Universal Civilization.'" *American Quarterly* 33 (Winter, 1981): 587-607.

- Rye, Stephen. "Buxton: Black Metropolis of Iowa." *Annals of Iowa* 41 (Spring, 1972): 939-957.
- Saul, Norman E. "The Migration of the Russian Germans to Kansas." *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 40 (Spring, 1974): 38-62.
- Schwalm, Leslie A. "'Overrun With Free Negroes': Emancipation and Wartime Migration in the Upper Midwest." *Civil War History* 50 (Spring, 2004): 145-174.
- Schwendemann, Glen. "Wyandotte and the First 'Exodusters' of 1879." *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 26 (Autumn, 1960): 233-249.
- Sheridan, Richard B. "From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas: The Influx of Black Fugitives and Contrabands into Kansas, 1854-1865." *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 12 (Spring, 1989): 23-47.
- Sheridan, Richard B. "Charles Henry Langston and the African American Struggle in Kansas." *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 22 (Winter, 1999): 268-283.
- Shutt, Ed. "Freedman University." *The Historic Journal of Wyandotte County* 6 (2006): 273-275.
- Silbey, Joel. "Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa: 1838-1861." *Iowa Journal of History* 55 (October, 1957): 289-318.
- Strickland, Arvah E. "Toward the Promised Land: The Exodus to Kansas and Afterward." *Missouri Historical Review* 69 (July, 1975): 376-412.
- Watts, Dale E. "How Bloody Was Bleeding Kansas?: Political Killings in Kansas Territory, 1854-1861." *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 18 (Summer 1995): 116-129.
- Van Deusen, John G. "The Exodus of 1879." *Journal of Negro History*, 21 (April, 1936): 111-129.
- Woods, Randall B. "After the Exodus: John Lewis Waller and the Black Elite, 1878-1900." *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 43 (Spring 1977): 172-192.
- Van Meeter, Sondra. "Black Resistance to Segregation in the Wichita Public Schools, 1870-1912." *The Midwest Quarterly*, 64-71.
- Weaver, Valeria. "The Failure of Civil Rights and its Repercussions." *Journal of Negro History* 54 (October, 1969).

Woodward, C. Vann. "Strange Career Critics: Long May they Persevere." *Journal of American History* 75 (December 1988).

Woods, Randall B. "Integration, Exclusion, or Segregation?: The Color Line in Kansas, 1878-1900." *Western Historical Quarterly* 14 (April, 1983): 181-198.

Wubben, Hubert H. "The Uncertain Trumpet: Iowa Republicans and Black Suffrage, 1860-1868." *Annals of Iowa* 47 (Summer, 1974): 409-429.

Yost, Genevieve. "History of Lynchings in Kansas." *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 2 (May, 1933): 182-219.

Theses and Dissertations

Alexander, Shawn Leigh. "We Know Our Rights and Have the Courage to Defend Them: The Spirit of Agitation in the Age of Accommodation." Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 2004.

Austin, Jackson J. "A Short Educational History of Labette County, Kansas." M. A. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, 1937.

Blake, Lee Ella. "The Great Exodus of 1879 and 1880 to Kansas." M. A. thesis, Kansas State University, 1942.

Britton, G. L. Wayne. "A Brief Historical Study of the State Teachers Association of Kansas." M. A. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, 1939.

Buckner, Reginald T. "A History of Music Education in the Black Community of Kansas City, Kansas 1905-1954." Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1974.

Carper, James Carothers. "The Published Opinions of Kansans Concerning Education, 1854-1900." Ph.D. diss., Kansas State University, 1977.

Conkright, James D. "A Social History of Fort Scott, Kansas, at the Turn of the Century." M. S. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Pittsburg, 1973.

Erbe, Carl H. "The Bill of Rights in the Iowa Constitution." M. A. thesis, State University of Iowa, 1924.

Gaulding, Charles L. "Brief History of Leavenworth, Kansas, and the Development of its Early Educational System, 1855-88." M. A. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, 1955.

Gilliland, Mary C. "The Negro in Nebraska History: A Resource Teaching Unit." M. A. thesis, University of Nebraska, 1970.

Gregory, Grace Virginia. "The Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition at Omaha, 1898." M. A. thesis, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1929.

Haney, Carl J. "A Study of the Status of the Negro Teacher in Kansas." M. S. thesis, Kansas State Teacher's College, Emporia, 1954.

Hersey, Mark D. "'My Work is that of Conservation': The Environmental Vision of George Washington Carver." Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 2006.

- Jack, Bryan M. "Bridging the Red Sea: The Saint Louis African-American Community and the Exodusters of 1879." Ph.D. diss., Saint Louis University, 2004.
- Knapple, Francis Yoder. "The Negro High School Student: A Study in Omaha Central High School: 1935-1941. M. A. thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1942.
- Lane, Robert Leon. "A Historical Study of the Development of School Desegregation in the Wichita Public Schools, 1966 to 1975." Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1976.
- McKenna, Clare V. Jr., "A Tale of Three Counties: Homicide, Race and Justice in the American West, 1880-1920." Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska at Lincoln, 1993.
- McMahon, David R. "The Origins of the NAACP in Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska, 1913-1926." M. A. thesis, Creighton University, 1993.
- Nelson, Arvid E. "A History of the Policies, Rules and Regulations of the Public Schools of Omaha, Nebraska From 1870 to 1964." Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, 1969.
- Neuenswander, Daniel G. "A Legal History of Segregation in the Kansas Public Schools From Statehood to 1970." Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1973.
- Robertson, Brian K. "First Kansas Colored Volunteers: Contributions of Black Union Soldiers in the Trans-Mississippi West." M. A. thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2004.
- Smith, Leland George "The Early Negroes in Kansas." M. A. thesis, University of Wichita, 1932.
- Smith, Lloyd C. "A Historical Outline of the Territorial Common Schools in the State of Kansas." M. A. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, 1940.
- St. Clair, Ruth Rodman. "Historical Background and Settlement of Baxter Springs, Kansas." M. S. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Pittsburg, 1940.
- Stokes, Maurice Sidney. "A Study of Negro Children Living in Emporia." M. A. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, 1936.
- Thomas, Larry L. "A Descriptive Study of Coffeyville, Kansas, from 1972-1992 with Implications for School Planning." Ph.D. diss., Kansas State University, 1992.

Warren, Kim. "Education for Citizenship: African Americans and Native Americans in Kansas, 1865-1935." Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2003.

Manuscripts and other Archival Sources

Alexander Clark Home, Muscatine Iowa (Private Residence)

Alexander Clark Papers

Atchison Board of Education, Atchison, Kansas

Minutes of the Atchison Board of Education

Atchison Public Library, Atchison, Kansas

Atchison City Directory

Black Archives of Mid-America, Kansas City, Missouri

African American Newspaper Clippings Collection

Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, Denver, Colorado

Hampton University Newspaper Clippings File
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Burlington Board of Education, Burlington, Iowa

Minutes of the Burlington Board of Education

Burlington Public Library, Burlington, Iowa

Burlington City Directory
Burlington Public Schools Scrapbooks
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Center for Dubuque History, Loras College, Dubuque Iowa

Early Dubuque History Vertical Files
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Coffeyville Board of Education, Coffeyville, Kansas

Minutes of the Coffeyville Board of Education
Coffeyville Public Schools Scrapbooks

Coffeyville Public Library, Coffeyville, Kansas

Coffeyville City Directory
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Colorado

African American History Collection
Colorado Springs City Directory
Governor's Papers, Alva Adams
Denver City Directory
Pueblo City Directory
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Colorado State Archives, Denver, Colorado

Governor's Papers, Alva Adams
Record of Appointments of Delegates and Commissioners

Davenport Board of Education, Davenport, Iowa

Minutes of the Davenport Board of Education
Public Schools Scrapbooks
Unpublished Manuscript of Craig Klein, Scott County Community College

Davenport Public Library, Davenport, Iowa

Davenport City Directory

Des Moines Board of Education, Des Moines, Iowa

Minutes of the East Des Moines Board of Education
Minutes of the Des Moines Board of Education

Des Moines Public Library, Des Moines, Iowa

Des Moines City Directory
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Douglas County Historical Society, Omaha, Nebraska

African American Newspaper Clippings Collection
Diary of Louise Hosp Armstrong
Omaha Fire Department Records
Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Collection
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Dubuque Board of Education, Dubuque, Iowa

Dubuque Public Schools Scrapbooks
Minutes of the Dubuque Board of Education
Minutes of Dubuque Teachers Association

Dubuque Public Library, Dubuque, Iowa

Dubuque City Directory
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Emporia Board of Education, Emporia, Kansas

Minutes of the Emporia Board of Education

Emporia Public Library, Emporia, Kansas

Emporia City Directory
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Fort Scott Board of Education, Fort Scott, Kansas

Minutes of the Fort Scott Board of Education
Scrapbooks of the Fort Scott Public Schools

Fort Scott Public Library, Fort Scott, Kansas

Fort Scott City Directory
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Independence Board of Education, Independence Kansas

Minutes of the Independence Board of Education

Independence Public Library, Independence, Kansas

Chautauqua County Heritage Association Records
Independence City Directory
Montgomery County Grade Schools Scrapbooks
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Iowa State University, Special Collections

Jack Trice Papers

Kansas City Board of Education, Kansas City, Kansas

Argentine Board of Education Minutes
Kansas City, Kansas Board of Education Minutes
Rosedale Board of Education Minutes

Kansas City Public Library, Missouri Valley Room, Kansas City, Missouri

Quindaro and Western University Historic District Collection
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas

Annual Reports of First Class Cities to the State Superintendent of Education
Annual Reports of the Kansas City, Kansas Board of Education
Department of Education Records and Correspondence
Ray Watkins Papers
Journal of the Kansas House of Representatives
Journal of the Kansas Senate
Kansas Freedman's Relief Association Papers
Kansas City, Kansas City Council Minutes
Montgomery County Clippings
NAACP Records and Correspondence
"Negro Exodus" Papers
"Negroes" Clippings Files
Records of the Adjutant General
Records of the Wyandotte Constitutional Convention
Governor's Papers, Edward Hoch
Governor's Papers, John P. St. John
Governor's Papers, John Leedy
Governor's Papers, Lorenzo Lewelling
Governor's Papers, Arthur Capper
Supreme Court of Kansas, Records, Briefs, and Court Opinions
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Kansas State Library, Topeka, Kansas

Statutes of Kansas
Journal of the Kansas House of Representatives
Journal of the Kansas Senate

Keokuk Public Library, Keokuk, Iowa

Keokuk City Directory
Keokuk Public Schools Scrapbooks
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics
Works Progress Administration File

Lawrence Public Library, Lawrence, Kansas

Lawrence City Directory
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Leavenworth Board of Education, Leavenworth Kansas

Minutes of the Leavenworth Board of Education
Leavenworth Public Schools Scrapbooks

Leavenworth Public Library, Leavenworth, Kansas

Leavenworth City Directory

Lincoln Board of Education, Lincoln, Nebraska

Minutes of the Lincoln Board of Education
Scrapbooks of the Lincoln Public Schools

Lincoln Public Library, Lincoln, Nebraska

Lincoln City Directory
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis Missouri

Roy Wilkins Collection
Charles Turner Collection

Muscatine Art Center, Muscatine, Iowa

Letter of Benjamin Harrison to Alexander Clark

Muscatine Board of Education, Muscatine, Iowa

Alexander Clark Papers
Minutes of the Muscatine Board of Education

Muscatine County Courthouse, Muscatine, Iowa

Court Records, *Clark v. Board of Directors*
Historic Maps of Muscatine

Muscatine Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa

Eulogy of Alexander Clark
Muscatine City Directory
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center, Wilberforce, Ohio

Charles Young Collection

National Archives, College Park, Maryland

Letters Received Concerning the Trans-Mississippi Exposition, 1897-1899

Nebraska City Board of Education, Nebraska City, Nebraska

Minutes of the Nebraska City Board of Education

Nebraska City Public Library, Nebraska City, Nebraska

Nebraska City Directory
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln Nebraska

Benton Aldrich Papers
Governor's Papers, Silas A. Holcomb
Journal of the Nebraska Council
Oliver J. Burckhardt Papers
Nebraska State Board of Education, Records and Correspondence
Newspaper Clippings Index
NAACP Records and Correspondence
Laws of Nebraska

Senate Journal
Supreme Court of Nebraska, Records, Briefs, and Court Opinions
Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Collection
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics
Wakefield Scrapbooks

Omaha Board of Education, Omaha, Nebraska

Minutes of the Omaha Board of Education
Personnel Records
Scrapbooks of the Omaha Public Schools

Omaha Public Library, Omaha, Nebraska

Omaha City Directory
Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Collection
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Parsons Board of Education, Parsons, Kansas

Minutes of the Parsons Board of Education
Manuscript of Quinzetta Brown, *Our Douglass*

Parsons Public Library, Parsons, Kansas

Parsons City Directory
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Pittsburg Board of Education, Pittsburg, Kansas

Minutes of the Pittsburg Board of Education

Pittsburg Public Library, Pittsburg, Kansas

Manuscript of Norma Tolson, Afro-Americans in Weir, Kansas
Pittsburg City Directory
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Pittsburg State University, Axe Library, Special Collections

Ira Clemens Collection
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Prospect Hill Cemetery, Omaha, Nebraska

Records of the Prospect Hill Cemetery

Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, Fremont, Ohio

John Brown, Jr. Papers

Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas

African American Photographs Collection
Lawrence Board of Education Records
Lowman School Photographs
Manuscripts of the Nicodemus Historical Society
Records of the 1866 "Colored Convention"
Sumner High School Papers
T.Y. Baird Papers

State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines

African-Americans Clippings File
Annual Reports of County Superintendents
Chester C. Cole Papers
George Woodson Scrapbook
Governor's Papers, James Grimes
Governor's Papers, Samuel Kirkwood
Governor's Papers, Leslie M. Shaw
Iowa Department of Public Instruction, Letterbooks and Correspondence
Iowa Federal Writers' Project, "The Negro in Iowa" Collection
Journal of the 1844 Constitutional Convention
Journal of the Iowa House of Representatives
Journal of the Iowa Senate
Laws of Iowa
Laws of the Territory of Iowa

NAACP Records and Correspondence
Records of the Adjutant General
Supreme Court of Iowa, Records, Briefs, and Court Opinions
Territorial Petitions, Records of the Secretary of State
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts

State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City

Annual Reports of County Superintendents
J. P. Dolliver Papers
Keokuk Schools Superintendent's Records
Minutes of the Iowa City Board of Education
Sewell S. Farwell Papers
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Topeka Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas

Topeka Board of Education Minutes

University of Nebraska-Omaha, Special Collections and University Archives

Works Progress Administration Collection

Watkins Community Museum and Archives, Lawrence, Kansas

Kaethe Schick Papers
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

*Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri-Kansas City,
Kansas City, Missouri*

Arthur Benson Papers

*Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri-Rolla, Rolla,
Missouri*

Dutton Brookfield Papers
C. Jasper Bell Papers

Wichita Board of Education, Wichita, Kansas

Minutes of the Wichita Board of Education
Sondra Van Meeter Papers

Wichita Public Library, Wichita, Kansas

Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics
Wichita City Directory

Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas

J. E. Weir Papers
Vertical Files and Unpublished Manuscripts, Various Topics

Newspapers

Colorado

Boulder News and Courier
Colorado Miner (Georgetown)
Colorado Statesman
Colorado Weekly Chieftain (Pueblo)
Denver Daily Tribune
Fort Collins Courier
Georgetown Courier
Rocky Mountain News

Iowa

Burlington Gazette
Burlington Hawk-Eye
Cedar Falls Gazette
Cedar Rapids Times
Cedar Rapids Gazette
Cedar Valley Times
Davenport Gazette
Davenport Leader
Davenport Democrat
Davenport Democrat and News
Des Moines News
Des Moines Leader
Des Moines Tribune
Dubuque Herald
Gate City (Keokuk)
Iowa Capitol (Des Moines)
Iowa Citizen (Des Moines)
Iowa City Citizen
Iowa State Bystander (Des Moines)
Iowa State Democrat
Iowa State Register (Des Moines)
Iowa State Reporter (Waterloo)
Keokuk Constitution
Muscatine Courier
Muscatine Journal
Oskaloosa Daily Herald
Oxford Mirror
Page County Democrat
Waterloo Courier

Kansas

Afro-American Advocate (Coffeyville)
Arkansas City Traveler
American Citizen (Kansas City)
American Citizen (Topeka)
Atchison Blade
Atchison Champion
Atchison Free Press
Atchison Patriot
Atchison Globe
Blue Valley Telegram
Carbondale Record
Chanute Daily Tribune
Colored Citizen (Fort Scott)
Colored Citizen (Topeka)
Colored Citizen (Wichita)
Coffeyville Chronicle
Coffeyville Journal
Coffeyville Vindicator
Columbus Border Star
Dodge City Times
Ellis County Star
Emporia Gazette
Emporia Ledger
Emporia News
Emporia Republican
Ford County Globe
Fort Scott Bulletin
Fort Scott Democrat
Fort Scott Herald
Fort Scott Tribune
Freedom's Champion (Atchison)
Harper County Times
Herald of Freedom (Lawrence)
Herald of Freedom (Wakarusa)
Holton Recorder
Hutchinson Herald
Hutchinson News
Independence Kansan
Independence Reporter-Sun
Independence Star
Iola Register

Junction City Tribune
Junction City Union
Kansas Pilot
Kansas City Journal
Kansas City Kansan
Kansas City Star
Kansas City Times
Kansas Express (Manhattan)
Kansas Headlight (Wichita)
Kansas State Ledger
Kansas State Record
Kansas News (Emporia)
Lawrence Home Journal
Lawrence Journal
Lawrence Journal World
Lawrence Reporter
Lawrence Republican Journal
Lawrence Standard
Lawrence Tribune
Leavenworth Advocate
Leavenworth Appeal
Leavenworth Bulletin
Leavenworth Conservative
Leavenworth Herald
Leavenworth Times
Marysville Advocate
McPherson Independent
Miami Republican
Morris County Times
North Topeka Times
Negro Star (Wichita)
Olathe Leader
Osage City Free Press
Ottawa Journal
Ottawa Republican
Paola Republican Citizen
Pittsburg Plaindealer
Parsons Blade
Parsons Sun
Peabody Gazette
Pittsburg Plaindealer
Republican Citizen (Paola)
Russell County Record
Salina Union

Saline County Journal
South Kansas Tribune (Independence)
Spirit of Kansas (Lawrence)
Topeka Blade
Topeka Colored Citizen
Topeka Commonwealth
Topeka Capital
Topeka State Journal
Topeka Journal
Topeka Plaindealer
Valley Falls New Era
Valley Falls Vindicator
Vindicator (Wichita)
Western Christian Recorder (Kansas City)
Western Progress (Olathe)
Wichita Beacon
Wichita Eagle
Wichita Globe
Wichita Searchlight
Wyandotte Commercial Gazette
Wyandotte Gazette
Wyandotte Herald

Missouri

Kansas City Call
St. Louis Argus
St. Louis Palladium
St. Louis Post-Dispatch
St. Louis Globe-Democrat

Nebraska

Afro-American Sentinel (Omaha)
Enterprise (Omaha)
Kearney Daily Hub
Lincoln Evening News
Lincoln Republican
Lincoln State Journal
Morning Chronicle (Nebraska City)
Nebraska City News
Nebraska City Press

Nebraska Commonwealth (Lincoln)
Nebraska State Journal (Lincoln)
Omaha Bee
Omaha Herald
Omaha Monitor
Omaha News
Omaha Republican
Omaha Sun
Omaha Tribune and Republican
Omaha World-Herald
Perry Chief
Plattsmouth Herald

Other States

Broad Axe (Salt Lake City)
Chicago Defender
Cleveland Gazette
Colored American (Washington D.C.)
Illinois Record
Indianapolis Freeman
Minneapolis Appeal
New York Times
Richmond Planet
St. Louis Argus
Washington Bee
Washington Post