

Kansas Grows the Best Wheat and the Best Race Women:  
Black Women's Club Movement in Kansas 1900-30

BY

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Abstract  
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The rise of club women in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries challenged established definitions of true womanhood, redefined leadership roles in Black communities, and questioned the complexities of economic class status. According to Deborah Gray White's analysis, Black women "with full knowledge of the ravages being wrought, proclaimed the advent of the 'woman's era' and came forth with a plan that made Black women the primary leaders of the race, a plan based on the promise of equality between Black men and women."<sup>1</sup> Although club women's histories abound, most take concern with women in southern states, northern cities, and east coast urban centers who were battling urbanization, Jim Crow, and economic blight, all while ushering in a new middle class generation. Unlike the well represented areas of the nation, there is no book-length discussion examining club women in Kansas. Nevertheless, I argue that the women participating in the greater Kansas club movement tailored their programs to strengthen their communities. Out-migration became a constant problem for Black communities in Kansas, causing leaders to search for ways to attract and retain potential citizens. Neighborhoods struggled to bridge rural life and an emerging urban society. Finally, Blacks worked to bring about the reality of full citizenship within the state and the region. Monitoring the ebb and flow of unstable migration patterns, addressing the needs of rural women, and re-visioning the failed and unfulfilled promises of the state, Kansas women accomplished more than just incorporated art clubs; they strengthened a community in transition, setting in motion the construction of a Black middle class. The significance of my work lies in its exploration of the wide-ranging work of the little known women's club phenomenon in the

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 40.

Central Plains, but perhaps more importantly in the inclusion of resources that document this history in order to map a more complex picture of the intersections of race, class, gender, and region.

My research is a significant contribution to the study of the Great Migration, examining movement patterns of African Americans in and out of the Central Plains beyond the Exodusters saga or narratives of the western frontier. Often neglected for southern, northern or western studies, Black populations in the Central Plains in the early twentieth century tell of a people in search of full citizenship, land and opportunity. Analyzing African Americans in the Central Plains illustrates the agricultural roots of the region and how the process of urbanization influenced their communities, a transition repeated throughout the nation during a time of migration and industrialization. While many African Americans left Kansas for points farther west, Oklahoma or even northeast, studying those who remained in the region is important to the complexity of the larger narrative of African American history. Interdisciplinary in nature, my research engages historical scholarship, archival collections, Black feminist theory, literary studies and material culture to provide a rich source of information to better understand the role of “women’s work” in the development African American communities in Kansas.

## Acknowledgements

I am a woman of faith, so I first thank God for the strength and grace to complete my degree. I dedicate my dissertation to my mother, Ozella Y. Williams, who, even through her illness, encouraged me throughout this process. To my father, Lee E. Williams, Jr., I thank him for supporting my graduate school journey. I cannot repay my parents for all of the love, patience and encouragement they provided all of my life, but especially through my studies. Thank you, for teaching me the power of faith, hope and love.

I would like to thank all of my professors and mentors for their guidance and patience. David M. Katzman, thank you for directing me through the dissertation process. Thank you for, somehow, knowing when to let me find my own way and when to set me back on my path. I thank Maryemma Graham for being a terrific and constant mentor. What I learned working for The Project on the History of Black Writing (HBW) infused my graduate school tenure with a sense of balance, and broadened my career opportunities. Thank you, Deborah Dandridge, for your dedication to the Afro-American Club Women's Project, and your commitment to examining the lives of African Americans in Kansas and the Central Plains. Thank you for always reminding me where I come from: Topeka, Kansas! I thank Tanya Hart for her open door policy, and pressing me to see the book beyond the dissertation. Great thanks goes to Allison Dorsey, whose excitement about my project always uplifted my spirits and critical review of my work will help me form a strong foundation for a manuscript. I thank Randal Jelks for joining my committee as co-chair, and steering my research and writing in the productive direction.

Throughout my journey to the PhD, I was blessed to receive funding for my research pursuits. I would like to thank the Mellon Mays University Fellowship for financial and

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I pay homage to my women-ancestors who made their way to the Kansas. Ma Mary was not a club woman. Dora Estell, Winnie Perry and Aimee Woods may not have been club women either, so this dissertation is not about finding my foremother's names among the rosters of these racial uplift organizations.<sup>2</sup> All four women, my great-grandmothers, all found their way to Kansas. Dora Estell's parents came by cover wagon crossing the state of Missouri shortly after emancipation, and settled in Quindaro, Kansas. Winnie Perry and Aimee Woods were Exodusters who left Tennessee in the early 1880s. While Aimee Woods spent a few years in Oklahoma, where two of her children were born, Winnie Perry settled in Topeka. Ma Mary came by train in the 1930s after leaving her husband and the father of her thirteen children. Ma Mary lived in Kansas City, Kansas in a home my grandfather built for her with three of his

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<sup>2</sup> Ma Mary is Mary (Beaton) Williams, my paternal grandfather's mother. Dora Estell is my paternal grandmother's mother. Aimee Woods is my maternal grandfather's mother. Winnie Perry is my maternal grandmother's mother. This information comes from a combination of oral history and census records.

younger siblings. Only staying a few years, she later settled in Toledo, Ohio. All four women sought a new life in Kansas for whatever reason or length of time. They worked gardens, took in laundry, went to church, bore children, kept house and held it all together. Most importantly, they worked to build communities in Kansas.

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Preface : Are There Black People in Kansas?: Opening Thoughts of a Dissertating Scholar and Prodigal Daughter

On a hot and muggy night on The Grove, the entering class of Fisk University mingled, getting to know one another, sharing dreams and goals for their collegiate careers. Freshman Week allowed new students to enjoy the campus without the intimidation of upperclassmen or the expectation of forming social cliques. Throughout the first week, I introduced myself, stating I was born and raised in Topeka, Kansas. With raised eyebrows, several of my new classmates would ask, “are there Black people in Kansas?” Fisk, as with other Historically Black College/University (HBCU) such as Howard in Washington, DC, Spelman and Morehouse in Atlanta, Grambling University in Louisiana, attracted students from everywhere . . . except the Central Plains. Interesting question considering I was quite obviously of African descent, and I was indeed from Kansas. In actuality, the question examined a more complex issue about black identity. My young classmates were not questioning whether or not I miraculously generated from mutant Kansas soil to be the sole black human being from Kansas, but how did the meta-narrative of African American history allow for the construction of black identity in Kansas. In other words, what historical, political, economical, or agricultural event aided in the migration of African Americans to Kansas? During my freshman year, I was one of two students from Kansas; the other young woman, from Wichita, graduated the next year, leaving me to be the only member of the Kansas student club for the remainder of my years. I felt as if my own narrative did not hold as much credibility as my classmates’. Even though I knew of the history of the Exodusters, and the Brown vs. The Topeka Board of Education case, I remained a part of a lesser known narrative.

After classes started, a professor reminded me of Aaron Douglas, a Topekan who taught at Fisk in the art department and painted the heralded murals in the Administration Building. I also learned more about the Exodusters, and that many of them fled middle Tennessee in the spring and summer of 1879. I began to trace my own family's migration patterns, concentrating on the women in my family. My mother's maternal grandmother, Winnie Perry, and paternal grandmother, Aimee Woods, were Exodusters who left Tennessee in the early 1880s. Both married prior to leaving Tennessee, Aimee Woods spent a few years in Oklahoma, where two of her children were born, Winnie Perry settled in Topeka. My father's maternal grandmother, Dora Estell, migrated with her parents to Quindaro, Kansas from Franklin, Missouri around 1905. My father's paternal grandmother, Mary Williams, or Ma Mary, came by train in the 1930s after leaving her husband and the father of her thirteen children. Ma Mary lived in Kansas City, Kansas in a home my grandfather built for her with three of his younger siblings. Only staying a few years, she later settled in Toledo, Ohio. All five women migrated to the Central Plains at different stages of their sought a new life in Kansas for whatever reason or length of time. They worked gardens, took in laundry, went to church, bore children, kept house and held it all together. Most importantly, they worked to build communities in Kansas.

"Kansas Grows the Best Wheat and the Best Race Women: Black Women's Club Movement in Kansas, 1900-30," was originally an extension of my M.A. thesis titled "Drink Deep or Taste Not: The Women of the Pierian 1894-1920." The Pierian, which is still in existence, is a literary club founded in the late nineteenth-century in Kansas City, Kansas. With my dissertation, I widen my research to include all of the state of Kansas, including the State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, and the larger understanding of African Americans in the Central Plains. I wanted to know how migrating African Americans created communities in the

West or Central Plains. As a personal quest, I wanted to illustrate Black communities in my home state, a place known for the Exodusters and Brown V Board. I wanted to know what happened between searching for full citizenship and fighting segregation. I also did not want to find my answer through a male-dominated narrative like many other studies. So I searched through the lives of Black women who left an impressive collection of materials.

### **Dissertation Chapter Outline**

Chapter I Summary: To Promote Negro Womanhood: Scholarship, Theory, and Method

In this introduction, I will review relevant literature, offer a state of the field, and situate my work within the established scholarship. I begin with a summary of literature dedicated to Black women's history, focusing on the club movement. Key elements in Black women's club movement scholarly literature includes issues of class, respectability, and the cult of true womanhood. Throughout this dissertation, I will invoke Black feminist thought as a viable theory for my work. Methodologically, I will use archival and quantitative research.

Although club women's histories abound, most take concern with women in southern states, northern cities, and east coast urban centers who were battling urbanization, Jim Crow, and economic blight, all while ushering in a new middle-class generation. Unlike the well-represented areas of the nation, there is no book-length discussion examining club women in Kansas. Nevertheless, I argue that the women participating in the greater Kansas club movement tailored their programs to strengthen their communities. Out-migration became a constant problem for Black communities in Kansas, causing leaders to search for ways to attract and retain potential citizens. Neighborhoods struggled to bridge rural life and an emerging urban society. Finally, Blacks worked to bring about the reality of full citizenship within the state and the region. Monitoring the ebb and flow of unstable migration patterns, addressing the needs of

rural women, and re-visioning the failed and unfulfilled promises of the state, Kansas women accomplished more than just incorporated art clubs; they stabilized a community in transition, setting in motion the construction of a Black middle-class. Examining these women as a study underscores the notion that a national narrative cannot represent a local history.

## Chapter II Summary: Creating Community in the Central Plains: Politics, Economics, and Geography

The founding of the State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs in 1900 created a communal space for Kansas club women to assert their emerging middle-class status, organize their growing population, and further defines their purpose. Although not widely chronicled, Black Kansas women actively participated in clubs in their own communities. The State Federation supported the activities of Kansas club women, which included groups organized around the arts and humanities, and domestic science. However, these women also found themselves battling legislators, school boards and church authorities. At the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Session of the State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, members stood and denounced the outright illegal de jure Jim Crow laws in Parsons, pleading to the assistant county attorney for an explanation. Later that same summer, club women responded to Ida B. Wells's call for resolutions supporting an anti-lynching law. African Americans understood the importance of stimulating the economics of the state, often purchasing advertisements touting the benefits of buying from local businesses and farms. Kansas women experienced a sense of pride, noted by the establishment of the John Brown Club, an organization whose sole purpose was to remember its namesake's life and work. These women composed their state and regional songs with references to sunflowers, the Kansas River, wheat, and rolling plains. Women established organizations in the central and western counties and cities such as Salina, Great Bend, and Newton, to the southeast cities of Parsons, Pittsburgh and Coffeetown, to the northeastern

communities in Topeka, Kansas City, Lawrence, and Leavenworth. In this chapter, I examine how club women created and sustained their connections to the state of Kansas and the surrounding region. I determine what role African Americans played in the politics and economics of the time and how they influence these elements to help secure their place in the state. Examining these women as a study underscores the notion that a national narrative cannot represent a local history.

### Chapter III Summary: Laboring in a Righteous Cause: Maintaining the Home, Childrearing, and Nurturing Communities

The members of the State Federation believed childrearing and home maintenance to be the most important communal responsibility, and, through their programs, sought to successfully motivate an emerging generation and prepare for one yet to come. Many of the club women's daughters worked side by side with their mothers in junior clubs, organizations designed to teach young women moral purity and respectability. The Topeka Federation created the Junior League in 1915, an organization dedicated to educating and grooming young girls to be second generation moral leaders, while women in Lawrence established the Self-Culture Club as a weekly seminar for mothers. There were also programs for boys, often geared to rescuing wayward neighborhood boys from the vicious cycle of poor education, unemployment, loitering, and then imprisonment. Clubs such as the Self-Culture Club promoted Mothers' and Boys' programs geared to connect young boys with older mentors in the neighborhood. Second only to childrearing, was the ennobling the atmosphere of the home. Club women gave seminars and papers on the importance of home maintenance and the order of the women's sphere. More than just drudgery, club women sought to redefine homemaking as a domestic science, an important component of the middle-class respectability. While these two elements of clubdom were vital to the development of respectability, they also acted as community stabilizers. Raising children

and creating strong homes proved difficult in early-twentieth century Kansas with migration bringing Blacks in while moving more to northern and Midwestern urban enclaves. Educated children who remained in the state once they reached adulthood often married, settled in, and bought property, which contributed to the overall growth of the community. Owning a home and maintaining one's property added to the desirability of the community as well, thus undermining racist stereotypes about unkempt African Americans homes. So while good mothering and home improvement proved to be markers of middle-class respectability, these elements aided those who stayed in Kansas and relied on rooted communities to survive. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which club women evoked notions of middle-class respectability in order to stabilize their communities.

#### Chapter IV Summary: Moving Onward and Upward: Moral, Industrial, and Liberal Educational Institutions for Young Men and Women in Kansas

Education of all sorts was an important issue within the State Federation, and was a constant source of change. Church programs, specifically at local AME churches, served to educate both young boys and girls into their religion. In the majority, club women supported the teachings of Booker T. Washington, lauding the benefits of industrial education and economic stability. Women of the Kansas City League supported sewing and home keeping classes for incoming migrant women. Influential Black men promoted farming education to sustain the use of local land and make it profitable. At times, *The Topeka Plaindealer* preached that Black people needed more industrious workers and few politicians and lawyers to uplift the community. However, club women in Kansas often veered from Washington's theories of industrial education when they felt it necessary. In 1919, the Wichita Association of Colored Women's & Girls Club continued to press for higher education by presenting "deserving young women" with college scholarships to Friends University and Emporia State Teacher's College.

After the scholarship students finished their education, club women in Wichita assisted them in finding jobs in Kansas school districts. This project ensured that young women raised in middle-class homes not only received higher education, it promoted community growth. Educated and employed young women could attract and retain young men to the area, and it was hoped, add to the young Black families in the state. In chapter four, I examine Black club women and the role of moral, higher, liberal, and industrial education in their personal, familial, and communal work. Due to out-migration patterns and attractive opportunities for teachers in other areas, club women had to fight to retain Black teachers, potential young mothers, and most important, new workers for their club goals. Education became a way to ensure that their middle-class sensibilities would continue to mature and her in a new generation.

#### Chapter V Conclusion: Closure from a Rising Scholar and a Sunflower Child

I close my dissertation with a personal narrative, referencing my relationship with my grandparents and their migration story. I attempt to review the overall argument of my dissertation and pertinent aspects of my research. I conclude with a description of the end-goal of my writing and my plans for future research and publications.

#### Chapter I: “To Promote Negro Womanhood”<sup>3</sup>: Scholarship, Theory, and Method

In the year of 1898, a far seeing woman of our race felt the need of bringing the Negro women of Topeka together for the purpose of inculcating the spirit of good will and unity among them so that various human needs and problems could be met intellectually and harmoniously.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Club goal from the History of the Wichita District Association of Colored Women, 1923-1941. Afro-American Clubwomen Project, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

We have gone behind prison doors in Hospitals and administered to those in distress helped the needy, cheered the lowly ones. So you see our work has been along that line, and great good has been done by each one doing a little, and much of the work done by this club can never be tabulated.<sup>5</sup>

The last century opened with the Negro, a thing, and closed with him approximately a man and a citizen. The world has witnessed the remarkable phenomena of an enslaved race, in less than a generation, emerge from barbarism and climb to the highest pinnacle of American citizenship. The achievements of the Negro in the century just closed has clearly demonstrated that he possesses all the attributes of man and that he is capable of receiving the highest degree of intellectual, moral and physical development.<sup>6</sup>

Twenty years after the Kansas Fever of 1879 which sent Exodusters in search for shelter, employment, education and full citizenship, the women of the Kansas State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs founded an organization to corral the collection of local groups emphasizing domestic arts, industrial education, respectability, childrearing and community building. On the heels of the Kansas founding of the *Topeka Plaindealer* in 1899, the women who constituted the State Federation sought to establish stable African American communities. "Kansas Grows the Best Wheat," was an advertisement tagline for area flour mills, a phrase that Black women in Wichita adapted to brag that Kansas also "produced" the best Race women in the country.<sup>7</sup> "Growing," "producing," and "cultivating" were words used to describe African American communities throughout the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in the Central Plains. With out-migration surpassing in-migration, stubborn land and harsh climates, Blacks in Kansas sought to strengthen family and community roots. And while women's clubs in Kansas joined an emerging procession of women around the nation, they made sure to remain focused on their local, state, and regional neighborhoods and communities.

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<sup>4</sup> "History of the Ne Plus Ultra Art Club," 1949, Afro-American Clubwomen Project, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

<sup>5</sup> "History of the Booker T. Washington Club," 1913, Afro-American Clubwomen Project, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

<sup>6</sup> Nick Chiles, "The Twentieth Century," *The Topeka Plaindealer* January 4, 1901.

<sup>7</sup> History of the Wichita District Association of Colored Women, 1923-1941. Afro-American Clubwomen Project, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.



The rise of club women in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries challenged established definitions of true womanhood, redefined leadership roles in Black communities and questioned the complexities of class. The amalgamation of post-Reconstruction-era race relations, Jim Crow, the rising middle class, the pressures of racial uplift, and constructs of gender roles in Black communities created the conditions for the emergence of the Black club women's movement. Fueled by an abhorrent distasteful image of Black women created and perpetuated by the racist white male press, club women sought to use representations as member of the middle-class to elevate Black women as a group. In an article published in *Outlook* magazine in 1904, Eleanor Tayleur wrote that Black women were said to have "the brain of a child and the passions of a woman, steeped in centuries of ignorance and savagery and wrapped about the immemorial vices."<sup>8</sup> Others thought Black women were the "the chief instruments of the degradation of the men of their own race. When a man's mother, wife and daughter are all immoral women, there is no room in his fallen nature for the aspiration of honor and virtue."<sup>9</sup> A most common and objective slur came from John W. Jacks of the Missouri Press Association stating that Black women were immoral. President of the Missouri Press Association and editor of a local newspaper, Jacks attempted to shame Ida B. Wells by labeling all Black women "as immoral, liars and prostitutes."<sup>10</sup> The "negative image demonstrated a widening gap between the Victorian lady, to which most Black elite women aspired and the treatment that Black women received from the general public."<sup>11</sup> Responding to the violence, negative verbiage, and dismissal Black women, Josephine Ruffin, editor of the *Women's Era Newsletter*, which

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<sup>8</sup> Eleanor Tayleur, "The Negro Woman: Social and Moral Decadence," *Outlook*, 76 (January 1904), 270.

<sup>9</sup> "The Negro Problem By a Colored Woman and Two White Women," *The Independent*, 64 (March 17, 1904) 589.

<sup>10</sup> *A History of the Club Movement Among the Colored Women of the of America* (1902; Washington, DC:NACW, 1978): 11-29.

<sup>11</sup> Dorothy Salem, *To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890-1920*. (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1990), 8.

recorded the works of club women nation-wide, sounded the alarm inviting club women to Boston to coordinate the founding of a national organization of like-minded women.

According to Deborah Gray White's analysis, Black women "with full knowledge of the ravages being wrought, proclaimed the advent of the 'woman's era' and came forth with a plan that made Black women the primary leaders of the race, a plan based on the promise of equality between Black men and women."<sup>12</sup> Studying the Black club women's movement through an historical lens allows one to examine constructs of communities, patterns of migration, evolving gender relations, and class hierarchies, especially those of the Black middle-class. At the heart of their work was the challenge of eradicating the social and political systems confining Black women to second-class status. Whether implicit or explicit, race, class and gender were troubling issues in club women's lives. Club women sought to uplift all women in an attempt for recognition and respect from the larger American society; a goal which often placed the heavy burden of responsibility on the working class for their conditions and not the societal oppressions in which they lived. The restructuring of race and class by club women in turn offered a new definition of gender. By asserting themselves as Black, yet middle-class Race women, they also sought a sense of womanhood ordinarily reserved for their white counterparts. Black women interchanged and interweaved theories of racial uplift, education, Black Nationalism, feminism, and religion that reached across many different communities and always in conjunction with their position as women. Black women spoke of the private sphere in public venues, challenged patriarchy while working in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and Baptist churches, supported industrial schools while funding young women to attend liberal arts colleges, and managed middle-class respectability while pressing Race pride.

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<sup>12</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 40.

Although not widely chronicled, Black women in Kansas actively participated in clubs in their own communities as well as on the national level.<sup>13</sup> In general, the history of African Americans in Kansas and the Central Plains has been neglected. At the most, the narrative of Blacks in Kansas begins with the Exodusters movement in 1879 and ends with the Brown vs. The Topeka Board of Education case in 1954, including very little, if any, information between the two dates. While there was not much de jure discrimination in Kansas, although the threat was ever-present, de facto discrimination was deeply woven in the fabric of the state. School districts attempted to, and succeeded at times, to segregate schools, lynch mobs targeted African Americans; whites excluded Blacks from basic services and facilities, and launched offensive narratives in local newspapers. Black Kansans struck a balance between exercising full-citizenship rights and struggling against familiar tenets of racism. Blacks often migrated, labored and lived side by side with whites, yet continued to fight an encroaching racially-based system of segregation and exclusion at the turn-of-the-century. As Black Kansans pressed for equality under state and national law, those who benefitted from white supremacy fought to reinforce and increase exclusionary practices and violent intimidation.

Kansas and the Central Plains remained mostly rural compared to other Midwestern and northern states, which shaped economic and employment opportunities, and led to fluctuating patterns of migration. African Americans lived in urban enclaves in the state that were often situated on the edges of rural areas. While Kansas was a destination for some African Americans, it also was a source of migrant population for urban areas. This movement inevitably led to the development of small, close-knit, and locally-minded communities. However, Black people in Kansas were highly aware of the neighboring states and nation that

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<sup>13</sup> Marilyn Dell Brady published articles about Kansas club women including, "Kansas Federation of Colored Women's Clubs." *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*. vol. 5 New York: Carlson Publications, 1993." I will reference her work throughout my dissertation.

surrounded them and the threats facing African Americans as a whole. If there was a Free State tradition in the land of John Brown, there was also a history of Jim Crow, reinforced by the migration of whites from all regions of the nation, but particularly the former slave states.

Black club women were active participants in community formation, creating their own space, and were also members of an emerging middle-class. I argue that Kansas club women were part of a small, yet engaged group of African Americans that provided community leadership in issues specific to their region. In attempt to developed Black communities in the state, Kansas women sought ways to strengthen their neighborhoods and towns. Kansas women stabilized migration out of the region, redefined life in the Central Plains to a national audience, created educational opportunities for their children and sought to form a life of full citizenship in the state. While the women were concerned with their region, they were active in the national movement and, at times, voiced the opinions and philosophies of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). Kansas clubs responded to national campaigns such as the Frederick Douglas home restoration, and regularly participated in the many national meetings, including the initial call-to-action in Boston. Kansas women, and their counterparts in the club movement, were greatly concerned with their own moral and social status and were indeed conscious of class, Christian value systems, education and piety.

Kansas women navigated a complicated relationship with the NACW, which was geographically distant. Kansas women praised middle-class values, and the majority of Blacks lived in the urban enclaves of the state, but some members lived in rural areas where they tended family farms or worked in mills. Even those who lived in the urban communities in Kansas City and Topeka remained close to agrarian life because their “city” abutted farmland. Rather than seeing their rural sisters as those in need of “uplifting,” Kansas women understood them as

partners in the struggle to build stable communities. The Kansas State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs were involved in political matters of the state and lobbied legislators, and they grappled with maintaining membership and sustaining community, as shifting migration patterns ebbed and flowed. Additionally, Kansas women exhibited a sense of pride in their region, noted by the establishment of the John Brown Club, an organization whose sole purpose was to remember its namesake's as a symbol of freedom, equality and militancy. Their experience, creative work, and regional songs, for instance, referenced sunflowers, the Kansas River, wheat, and rolling plains. Black women established organizations in the central and western counties in Salina, Great Bend, and Newton, to the southeast cities of Parsons, Pittsburgh and Coffeerville, to the northeastern communities in Topeka, Kansas City, Lawrence, and Leavenworth. The women participating in the greater Kansas club movement understood their role as community builders and furthering a middle-class society. As they performed a delicate dance with the NACW, male-dominated public discourses, and the patriarchal AME and Baptist churches in the region, African American club women in Kansas create a public space for their activities.

Club women in Topeka organized the State Federation in 1900. Members of the Oak Leaf Art Club invited other area club to join "a movement to further advancement of [their] women."<sup>14</sup> Women from clubs located in the area including Topeka, Paola, Leavenworth, and Kansas City, attended at the first gathering. During the first year, the Kansas federation consisted of ten clubs, electing Mrs. Elizabeth Washington as its first president. By 1910, the women boasted of having thirty organizations within the federation. By the time of their 16<sup>th</sup> Annual session in June 1916, the Kansas federation included forty art, literary, civic and motherhood clubs. Kansas club women joined with their regional organization, the Northwestern

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<sup>14</sup> "The Sixteenth Annual Session of the State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs Proceedings Summer 1916," Afro-American Clubwomen's Project (KS), Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas. 17.

Association in Wichita, to approve a resolution urging the passage of a national anti-lynching law.<sup>15</sup> That same year, excluded from the public theater in Parsons, they protested by calling on state law that forbade the practice of Jim Crow in Kansas.<sup>16</sup> After years of grappling with the decision, the Kansas State Federation joined the NACW in 1922. Many independent clubs within the state had already affiliated with the national organization, but there were some who still did not support the application for membership. The leadership during the late teen years desired to be more involved in the collective movement, and found national recognition through their work with young girls. Always concerned about their daughters' development, the Kansas organization created its junior league in 1924, and was one the first state organizations to do so. The efforts of Kansas women did not go unnoticed by the national organization, and by the end of the decade they were holding key national offices and making policy for the entire body. In thirty years, the Kansas State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, which began as a local collection of art clubs, transformed into a nationally-recognized body of women involved in the growth of the African American communities in the state.

Many of the federated clubs of Kansas joined local city councils. Founded in 1901, the Topeka City Federation Colored Women's Clubs included the Ne Plus Ultra Art and Literary and Oak Leaf Art and Charity Clubs, The Stella Puella Art and Charity, and the Oriental Literary and Art, Elite Art and Craft Clubs. The Progressive Women's of Emporia and The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Literary and Arts Club of Manhattan were also members of the Topeka federation. The Wichita Association of Colored Women's and Girls Clubs was created in 1919 included the Booker T. Washington Club organized in 1901, the Alsbic Club founded in 1915, the Book Lover's Club created in 1923, and the Mary Bethune Club founded in 1938. The Wichita Association also

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 6.

welcomed the Literary and Art Club of Great Bend founded in 1911, the Jewel Art Club organized in 1912 in Parsons, and the Narcisuss Art Club of Newton. Additionally, Wichita hosted the Music Department of the Kansas Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. Many of the organizations did not join the city federation, yet belonged to the State Federation including the Carnation and Sunflower clubs of Atchison, the Imperial and Carnation Art Clubs of Hutchison, and the Fleur De Lis Art Club of Coffeyville. There were clubs that did not become members of state or regional organization, opting to affiliate directly with the NACW. Still, there were other clubs such as the Kansas City League, a bi-state organization, the Pierian of Kansas City, Kansas and the Self-Culture club (Lawrence) that did not affiliate with any governing body, yet were active in their local communities.

### **Literature Review & Historical Background**

At first glance, African American club women histories seem marginal, consisting of scholarship written about a small percentage of Black women who were engaged in middle-class imitative activities, self-absorbed and intentionally self-alienating from working-class women. Scholars who examine the histories of Black women in the United States uncovered a much more complex narrative than the one-dimensional analysis of club women. While constructs of gender and class are crucial issues to contend with, understanding Black women's intellectual traditions, cultural productions, migration patterns, and relationship with religious institutions are important challenges to address. And while there are limited resources, there *are* resources and what is available must be examined to the fullest of its potential and possibility. The study of Black women in the United States has found itself on the margins and their lives were not read as part of the greater narrative of American history, but the collection of scholarship written since the 1970s brought the plight of African American women to the forefront. Acknowledging the

role of Black women in the conversations about full citizenship and democracy allows historians to understand times of transition, times of institutional development, and times of increased oppression in American history.<sup>17</sup>

There are three main areas of Black women's history and scholarship I will examine in this dissertation. I will utilize the primary documents, speeches, essays, and articles, written and published by Black Kansas women. I will include primary archival sources collected and preserved that represent club women and their era in history, including club year books, activity programs, state, regional, and national convention proceedings, personal correspondence, photographs, financial records, and newspaper articles. I will select secondary scholarship by scholars who address all aspects of Black women's histories, theories and research methods. Historians who research club women answer questions that move their scholarship from marginal to significant to the constructs of race, gender, migration, and class in the United States. Were Black club women simply mimicking white middle-class women? Were club women mainly accommodationists, integrationist, Black Nationalist, or did they draw on all three philosophies? Did club women shun working-class women or were there cross-class lines relationships that developed and were nurtured by both groups, and how fluid were those boundaries? Beyond the usual questions, I will examine how Black club women affected migration patterns throughout the United States, transformed travel for Black women, injected a Womanist and Black feminist stance in the development of African American organizations and institutions such as the NAACP, Pan-Africanist Movement, and Negro Business Leagues, supported educational programs of all kinds, and negotiated a delicate relationship with Baptist and AME churches.

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<sup>17</sup> The collection of books written about club women is great, and I will footnote each selected text throughout the first chapter.



## Theorizing Black Feminist Thought and Womanist Thought

Although there are multiple theoretical approaches that address the history of Black women of the United States, I will use Black feminist thought, Womanism and Womanist theology throughout this dissertation. Black feminist tradition “is not a single unified body of thought, although there are common themes.”<sup>18</sup> Historians such as Patricia Hill Collins, Barbara Christian, Beverly Guy Sheftall and Cheryl T. Gilkes are at the forefront of the development of Black feminist thought. Black feminist thought examines the communal African American female experience in the United States and identifies the problematic societal position of Blackness and womanhood. Black feminists argue that there is a wealth of subjugated knowledge or systems of knowledge that are “routinely distorted within or excluded from what counts as knowledge.”<sup>19</sup> Black feminist theories emerge from women’s intellectual productions of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. During that time, Black feminism developed as a social, political, and economic space for African American women. Generally marginalized by Black and women’s studies programs, Black feminism/feminist studies offered a site for Black women to create a dialogue, defining themselves, their experiences, and place in American history. Incorporating an emerging Black feminist thought paradigm and embracing the archival practice, historians created a consensus of prominent and pertinent points of discussion defining club women scholarship. In general, these texts seek to argue that Black women were involved in the shaping of their communities, social and moral uplift, and (re)-defining Black womanhood. Black feminist thought offers a way to historicize this era, elevate it as a prominent event worthy of scholarly scrutiny, and place it in the larger history of gender and race in the

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<sup>18</sup> Kristin Waters and Carol B. Conaway, eds. *Black Women’s Intellectual Traditions: Speaking Their Minds* (Lebanon, NH: University of Vermont Press, 2007) 3.

<sup>19</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 251.

United States. In other words understanding the multiple challenges Black women encounter and the activism they initiated is the basis on which Black feminism is founded.

According to Collins, “Black Feminist Thought’s core themes of work, family, sexual politics, motherhood, and political activism rely on paradigms that emphasize the importance of intersecting oppressions in shaping the United States matrix of domination.”<sup>20</sup> Key to Black feminist thought is the reclamation of the history of women long-since passed on. “Knowing the minds and talents of our grandmothers, mothers, and sisters have been suppressed,” Collins suggests, “stimulates many contributions to the growing field of Black women’s studies.”<sup>21</sup> Patricia Bell Scott, Barbara Smith and Gloria Hull assert that the “politics of Black women’s studies are totally connected to the politics of Black women’s lives in this country.”<sup>22</sup> Smith’s “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism,” argues that the development of feminism did not include an autonomous Black women’s movement and therefore lacked a substantial collection of the writings and histories of Black women in the United States. Relating Black feminist theory to the everyday lives of Black women allows scholars to apply it to their collective experiences, past and present. Every action is inherently political as long as the final goal is to challenge racist and sexist normative ideas in U.S. society. Black club women infused Black feminist thought in their interactions with male-dominated organizations, and created multiple “affiliations with both Black nationalist and interracial organizations, made important contributions to Black feminist thought and through their use of multiple strategies shaped debates over the solution to the race problem.”<sup>23</sup> Black club women believed themselves to be “definers of nationalism and

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>22</sup> Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith, *But Some of Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies* (New York: Feminist Press, 1993), xviii.

<sup>23</sup> Kate Dossett, *Bridging the Race Divides: Black Nationalism, Feminism and Integration in the United States, 1896-1935* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2008), 1.

feminism,” and not “victims of the state or patriarchal nationalism,” and in their speeches, writings and activities they worked to place women acknowledging “feminist nationalism as a process of interaction developed between women and men, not solely by men.”<sup>24</sup>

A cornerstone of all theories and histories of African American woman and the differentiating aspect from a more white women’s perspective of feminism is the dismantling of the Cult of True Womanhood. Black women needed to overcome their historical positioning, define and express the multiple oppressions against them, and assert their voice and agency in and into the conversation of race, gender and rights. Hazel Carby’s work *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* outlines what Black women confronted in the “dominant domestic ideologies and literary conventions of womanhood which excluded them from the definition ‘woman’”<sup>25</sup> The four cardinal virtues outlined by Barbara Walters were piety, purity submissiveness and domesticity, which according to Carby were “dominant. . .describing the parameters within which women were measured and declared to be, not to be women.”<sup>26</sup> African American women confronted the sexual stereotypes cast upon them. Taking ownership of their sexual safety, redefining womanhood and voicing their histories are all components of Black feminist thought and Womanist theology.

While Black feminist thought invokes a sociological argument, Womanism and Womanist theology builds on the communal and spiritual contributions of Black women. For Womanist theorists self-naming and spiritual experiences are foundational components. By using the term “Womanist,” theologians distance themselves from the white-female-dominated feminist theory and recognize oppression by white men and women. Also Black Womanists

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 6.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 22.

include spiritual experiences as central to Womanism and theology. Katie Cannon and Emilie Townes pin point the gender clash in the Black church around 1890 as crucial point for Womanist theorist, arguing that club women fought on two fronts: “one was to expose the hypocrisy of white Christianity while the other was to exhort Blacks to exhibit moral purity and gain strength from spirituality.”<sup>27</sup> Club women’s role in grooming morality came “not nature, but by proximity” to childrearing, education and community nurturing.<sup>28</sup> The moral club woman was not formed in the image of Mammy, who was constructed a caregiver and domestic for white families, but a woman who is invested in her own family and community.

One of the notable early Black women who wrote about Black women and their spiritual positions was Anna Julia Cooper. In her book, *A Singing Something: Womanist Reflections on Anna Julia Cooper*, Karen Baker-Fletcher argues that including Black women’s religious thought is crucial to understanding their interaction with community and moral teachings. Cooper believed that “human beings were required to respect the sacredness of one another’s lives across racial, cultural, economic, national, religious and gender boundaries.”<sup>29</sup> While the two theories differ both are useful for examining club era movement. Club women desired to remove themselves and their work from the ever tightening constraints of patriarchy; they were tied to the tenants of Christian principles, morality, and temperance.

Black club women’s literary and intellectual traditions demanded that womanhood be re-examined and redefined in light of their existence. While “woman” was often defined in terms of white women in American society and community leadership was attributed to African American men, Black women sought to define themselves in their writings. Black women’s

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<sup>27</sup> Kristen Waters and Carol B. Conway, *Black Women’s Intellectual Traditions: Speaking Their Minds* (Burlington, VT: University of Vermont Press, 2007 ), 367.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 372

<sup>29</sup> Karen Baker-Fletcher *A Singing Something: Womanist Reflections on Anna Julia Cooper* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 16.

intellectual traditions emerged in their personal essays, speeches recited at public venues, organizational conventions, newsletters and periodicals, and novels. These scholars sought to discover what women such as Maria Stewart, Anna Julia Cooper, and Angelina Grimke, were contemplating, arguing, and working toward. Scholars began to re-visit the club movement that began in the nineteenth century. By utilizing Black women's theoretical discourse, the lives, culture, and activities of the clubwomen complicated the history of race and gender in the United States. Although Black women vocalized their concerns for decades prior to the club movement, it was during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries that club women found their collective boisterous voices. Shirley Wilson Logan's *We Are Coming: The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth Century Black Women* asserts that Black women's rhetoric maintained "common practices that were molded and constrained by prevailing conventions and traditions."<sup>30</sup>

### **Historiography of Black Club Women**

To accurately depict the efforts of Black Kansas club women it is necessary to theorize and historicize their activities rooted in the normative constraints of twentieth-century notion of respectability. At the heart of their quest were meta-physical claims about human dignity and equality for women and men living and dying on the Central Plains. It also allows me to explain contradictions in their lives and work without uncomfortable scholarly apology. The triad of race, class and gender is important to the discussion of club women and the general history of the emerging Black middle-class. Even though the majority of Black women in the United States were struggling to support themselves and their families, there were a growing number of women rising to the burgeoning Black middle-class. The elite upper class of African Americans

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<sup>30</sup> Shirley Wilson Logan *We Are Coming: The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth Century Black Women*, (Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999 ), xv.

in the late nineteenth century, although a small percentage of the larger population, represented those with privileged lineage. The elite classes were often in this “position by virtue of birth, wealth, education, occupation and status”, and were in the second or third generation”<sup>31</sup>

Interacting with whites and Blacks of their own class, elites African Americans sustain a position between the two.

As the century came to an end, migration patterns and economic opportunities gave way to the development of a middling class of African Americans. Though they did not have the multiple generations of free Blacks in their families, these emerging middle-class Blacks were more socially than economically upwardly mobile, often educated at historically Black colleges and universities or northern predominately white institutions. These were African Americans “who had forgotten neither their family’s enslavement nor their own struggles for an education.”<sup>32</sup> They mostly believed that their standings in their own communities would prove to white society that they were respectable, self- supporting Americans as well as their entire race would be. The nurturing children and young adults was not an individual task but a communal one, a process in which parents, grandparents, community leaders and others worked together to demonstrate “collective consciousness and social responsibility.”<sup>33</sup> More often scholars describe this group as Race Men and Women. They called themselves the “‘better’ classes and understood their adoption of Victorian values as an application of their own Christian principles”<sup>34</sup> The middling class “appeared to be unconsciously torn between a desire to emulate the assimilation of the elite of live within the Black world.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> David M. Katzman *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 83.

<sup>32</sup> Gilmore, xix.

<sup>33</sup> Stephanie Shaw *What Women Ought to Be and Do: Black Professional Women Workers During Jim Crow Era.* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996) , 2.

<sup>34</sup> Gilmore, xix.

<sup>35</sup> Katzman, 167.

In Cash's *African American Women and Social Action: The Clubwomen and Volunteerism from Jim Crow to the New Deal*, she asserts that although they promoted middle-class respectability they sought to "bring the masses in step with the values and attitudes of the middle-class."<sup>36</sup> Class distinctions have been a constant discussion for scholars who study club women specifically, and Black women in general. Some scholars such as Cash believe that there were clearly drawn class lines, and that club women did not actively engage working-class women. According to Cash, there was "great anxiety" about their position in the U.S. narrative, so club women emphasized "home life and epitomized middle-class morality and behavior."<sup>37</sup> Dossett and others see more fluid lines, where club women interacted with those of the lower classes, and that current discussions arose from modern interpretations of class. When Black feminist scholars argued against creating ahistorical "sisterhood connections" where there were none, in reaction to white feminism, there developed a "chasm" between middle- and working-class women.<sup>38</sup> Since working-class women far outnumbered middle-class women, the line of logic defines working class women as more important to historical study, while middle-class women are "less worthy of study and unlike their poorer sisters incapable of exhibiting race pride or nationalist sentiment."<sup>39</sup> In turn, this line of thinking leads to a narrative that working-class women did not value education or morality, or nurturing communities. Dossett concludes that "members of the Black middle-class shared a belief in racial uplift," but it was not simply "the prerogative of the middle-classes imposed on the poor."<sup>40</sup>

The overarching theme in the scholarship about Black women during post-Reconstruction is the examination of gender and destabilized social constructions of race. In her book *Gender*

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<sup>36</sup> Cash, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Cash 67.

<sup>38</sup> Dossett, 10.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Dossett, 11.

& *Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, author Glenda Gilmore muddies the water in the understanding of race and gender during post-Reconstruction. Gilmore releases Black women from the bind of gender and race in order to closely examine the role that they played in the refiguring of white supremacy. By placing Black women at the center of her discussion, Gilmore presses historians to “take into account the plethora of new sources on African American and women’s history, grapple with the theoretical insight that gender and race are socially constructed, and test new ideas about the junctures of public and private space in political culture.”<sup>41</sup> Other scholars such as Floris Barrett Cash and Wanda Hendricks also advance the idea of Black women working toward progressive reform in the Jim Crow era.

In the 1990s, scholars asserted that club women’s history embodied political activism as well as communal race relations. Both Glenda E. Gilmore and Wanda Hendricks set their case studies in the center of political debates that took place during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Gender, in their research, becomes just as complex as race, creating a space of power for Black women. Gilmore’s work illustrates how Black women altered southern politics by becoming representations for their communities in white society. Gilmore states that as Black men “were forced from the political, the political underwent a redefinition, opening a new space for Black women.”<sup>42</sup> The “whitewashing” of southern history led to a narrative that rendered “Blacks as passive recipients of white’s actions.”<sup>43</sup> Hendricks argues that women in Illinois took advantage of their rights to participate in local politics to eradicate social and political forces that oppressed Black communities. Using the democratic system in largely

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<sup>41</sup> Glenda Gilmore *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), xvi.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.



racially segregated wards, Black women pressured city council members to respond to them.<sup>44</sup>

Both historians situate Black women's clubs at the center of critical political development in African American communities. This era of scholarship asserts that Black club women were not only participated in volunteerism, but also were active members of policy-transforming bodies.

Scholars such as Deborah Gray White, Floris Barnett Cash, and Martha A. Jones connect the work of club women asserting that Black women in local and national movements “transformed the public standing” of Blacks in the United States. Black women worked throughout the struggle for equality and full citizenship for African Americans even as political and social movements shifted. Club women worked to “alter their environment and to destroy negative images that white America had constructed.”<sup>45</sup> In *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves*, White asserts that Black women have “been forced to handle issues of gender and race, too tightly woven together to separate, but through various eras, have often been asked to choose.”<sup>46</sup> Her work and others create a link from the organizing efforts of Black women to the national civil, social, and political rights movements within African American communities and the nation's history. These texts also recognize the multi-faceted efforts of club women, noting that these groups were neither homogenous in purpose nor procedure.

In efforts to understand that club women's lives have not been fully examined, more recent scholarship emerges challenging past narratives and asserting new. Kate Dossett's *Bridging the Race Divides: Black Nationalism, Feminism and Integration in the United States, 1896-1935*, reiterates the argument that club women were “smart, flexible and strategic in their

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<sup>44</sup> Wanda Hendricks *Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest: Black Club Women in Illinois* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

<sup>45</sup> Cash, 12.

<sup>46</sup> White,

thinking,” mixing and melding different methodologies and theories in to advance their cause.<sup>47</sup> They were mobile, “visiting each other in their homes and schools, and met each other at conventions, churches and community celebrations.”<sup>48</sup> Kathy Glass concurs in *Courting Communities: Black Female Nationalism and “Syncre-Nationalism” in the Nineteenth Century North*, stating that club women “found it necessary to develop eclectic resistance strategies and unique forms of political alliance.”<sup>49</sup> With their interactions being so diverse, it is impossible to view these women through one historical lens; club women “challenged the dichotomy between Black nationalism and integrationism and with the presumed triumph of an interracial America.”<sup>50</sup> Club women stood at the forefront in the development of Black Nationalist, the NAACP, and Pan-Africanist movements, all while promoting Black feminist agendas. Black women “courted communities,” and called “collectiveness into existence through diverse forms of subversive spiritual political and cultural work.”<sup>51</sup>

Black club women established service programs during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as they had a “continuous record of self-help, institution building and strong organizations.”<sup>52</sup> Maude Thomas Jenkins and Beverly Jones argued that Black women’s clubs were voluntary associations, acting as mediators between families and the dominant culture.<sup>53</sup> Jenkins asserts that Black clubs emerged “as a response to the nineteenth century era, a time of self-improvement, social purity, and social reform.”<sup>54</sup> Jones argues that “cast back upon

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<sup>47</sup> Kate Dossett, *Bridging the Race Divides: Black Nationalism, Feminism and Integration in the 1896-1935* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2008 ), 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Kathy Glass *Courting Communities: Black Female Nationalism and “Syncre-Nationalism” in the Nineteenth Century North* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>51</sup> Glass, 1.

<sup>52</sup> Cash, 1.

<sup>53</sup> Maude Thomas Jenkins “The History of the Black Woman’s Club Movement in America” (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1984), x.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 7

themselves, self-help became the shibboleth that applied to the whole spectrum of Black activity.”<sup>55</sup> These scholars insisted that the move to create clubs was well-organized, both nationally and locally, and was a reflection of the Progressive Era, the emergence of, and the advancement of Black communities. Because Blacks were excluded from most public services, club women “provided health care institutions, including hospitals, sanitariums, dispensaries, tuberculosis camps and other self-reliant medical assistance.”<sup>56</sup>

Understanding how club women operated within and outside of the Baptist and AME churches is crucial to correctly define how women supported the growth of churches and sustained their communities. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham’s *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church 1880-1920*, argues that “women crucial to broadening the public arm of the church and making it the most powerful institution of racial self-help in the African American community.”<sup>57</sup> Black women worked in religious institutions, but often felt marginalized out of places of authority on the heels of the end of Reconstruction. The church and organized religion served as both “a source of Black women’s oppression and a resource for their struggles for gender equality and social justice.”<sup>58</sup> In her work, *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture*, Martha S. Jones speaks the shift of power and dominance that occurs in the church around the turn of the century when Black men were removed from political and civic activities and relegated to church and Black communal organizations, “looking to regain the measure of public authority they had formerly

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<sup>55</sup> Beverly W. Jones “Mary Church Terrell and the National Association of Colored Women, 1896-1901” *The Journal of Negro History* 67 (1982): 21.

<sup>56</sup> Cash, 22.

<sup>57</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 2.

<sup>58</sup> Bettye Collier-Thomas *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice* (New York: Knopf, 2010), xvii.

exercised in the political realm.”<sup>59</sup> Prior to the 1890s, Black women served as leaders and ministers in the church, but as definitions of womanhood and manhood were constructed, Black men “revealed their new anxieties about the national of manhood in a world shaped by disenfranchisement, segregation and violence.”<sup>60</sup> She continues stating that “as the power and authority of Black women within public culture was increasingly constrained, it became more difficult for Black women to imagine their lives as unfettered by gendered boundaries.”<sup>61</sup> It is at this time that club women ventured out into their own clubs exercising the autonomy they desired, but retained their positions on Christianity and morality. While most club women were affiliated with a church, their work often took place outside of its walls.

The majority of histories about club women emphasize an eastern or southern narrative. Besides a few books about Chicago women, there are no published works examining what women were doing in the “West.” The “East” was the house of power for club women, often engaged in aggressive organizing programs to reel in state federations in rural areas. Geography and rationality problematizes the issue of class for club women since the power eastern women may have viewed their most western and rural sisters as recipients of their programs and not peers. The majority of the club women monographs focus on the eastern or southern region of the country, with a few concentrating on the Midwest and western areas. Wanda Hendricks challenges the regional bias in her work *Gender, Race and the Politics of the Midwest*, arguing that regional differences shaped how women worked in their communities and influenced the local political systems. Because Black women were able to vote in local elections in 1913 in

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<sup>59</sup> Martha S. Jones *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 174.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 176

Illinois, they were able to alter the city and “helped advance the chances for eradication of social and political forces oppressive to the Illinois African American community.”<sup>62</sup>

### **Western Studies Scholarship**

When refiguring Black migration to the West, one must understand how it was imagined in the eyes of the nation and the Black migrants who ventured to call it home. According to Monroe Lee Billington and Roger Hardaway, the West was defined as “states whose areas are totally or in part West of the one hundredth meridian. . . including those seventeen states that make up the Great Plains, Rocky Mountains and Pacific Slope regions.”<sup>63</sup> The West consisted of newly established states and territories that were often open to homesteaders. The West was considered the new frontier; both Black and white migrants were regarded as pioneers. The frontier was often depicted as “the greatest American story ever told an epic victory of the human spirit, the starting point historical proving ground, and the finest hour of our cherished values.”<sup>64</sup> Yet for many if not most settlers, reality was far different. African Americans have been conveniently omitted from most the discussions of western settlement, which is one reason why the history of Black migration to Kansas has been overlooked.

Migration scholarship and Western historical studies allow me to contrast the various African American migratory patterns and create a more diverse understanding of Black migration. There are two main groups of scholarship about African American migration to the Central Plains. The first focuses on a specific city or state in the Central Plains, examining the political, social, economic and cultural development in that particular area. Understanding the routes in which Blacks took to arrive at these Central Plains cities and states becomes the

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<sup>62</sup> Wanda Hendricks, *Gender, Race and the Politics of the Midwest* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1998), xi.

<sup>63</sup> Monroe Lee Billington and Roger D. Hardaway, Dillington, eds, *African Americans on the Frontier*, (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1998), 3.

<sup>64</sup> Williams Loren Katz, *The Black West: A Documentary and Pictorial History of the Role in the Westward Expansion of the U.S.* (New York: Harlem Moon, 2005), xii.

backdrop of these investigations. As Randal Jelks notes in *African Americans in the Furniture City: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Grand Rapids*, studies of smaller African American communities in the Central Plains and the Midwest tend to emphasize the regional distinctions that differentiate them from their more populous neighbors and northern and eastern counterparts, yet still “reflects industrialization, the pull and push of Southern migrants and European immigrants, the formation of ghettos, labor discord and racial/ethnic antagonisms.”<sup>65</sup> The majority of the studies begin with the fall of Reconstruction in 1877 and end in the early-to-mid twentieth century, either marking the death of Booker T. Washington, the end of World War I, or the beginning of the New Negro era. While understanding migration causes and patterns are important to city/state studies, community formation becomes the focal point.

The second form of scholarly inquiry is the settlement of the West and how African Americans contributed to the expansion and development of western states and territories. Western scholarship usually tracks Black migrants as early as the sixteenth century and following through well into the twentieth century during the Civil Rights era. Western studies work to give readers a more comprehensive view of the migration patterns of all Americans, and generally included more than one region or state. In addition to understanding the role of African Americans in the development of western sites, these studies analyze patterns of continual migration, tracing the movement of migrants from one region to another, and their interactions with Native peoples and Spanish explores. Both forms of migration scholarship speak to migrants’ search for full citizenship, racial justice, and educational and economic opportunities. Western studies and city/state specific scholarship inform my research and writing.

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<sup>65</sup> Randal M. Jelks *African Americans in the Furniture City: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Grand Rapids*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), xii.

Nell I. Painter's *Exodusters* concerns herself with freedmen and women who fled the lower Mississippi Valley for Kansas. In her study, she sees migration more as a rational response to freedom and Reconstruction as opposed to a more undefined view of it as a naïve leader-led movement. Painter writes from an African American history standpoint, treating migrants as subjects, arguing for their agency and seeing them as part of a larger Black Nationalist movement. Thomas Cox's *Blacks in Topeka, 1865-1915* and Randall Woods's *A Black Odyssey* go beyond explaining the reasons for the exodus and discuss the social development of Black communities in Kansas. Cox remarks how African Americans in Topeka worked to gain agency and refused to accept second-class citizenship. Woods's explores the thin line between full citizenship and Jim Crow. "Black encountered discrimination in public services," states Randall, while "during the same period there were integrated schools . . . and Blacks were protected in their right to vote."<sup>66</sup> Gretchen Cassel Eick's study *Dissent in Wichita*, which chronicled the civil rights movement in that city, sheds some light on its Black community in the nineteenth century. She speaks of the cow town as a place where a small population of African Americans who built communities, yet still fought the growing displeasure from white separatists jealous of Black successes. These texts resemble, in purpose, other works explaining the development of Black communities in other states evaluating the social stat of African American institutions and interactions with dominant culture. Hamilton's *Black Towns and Profit: Promotion and Development in the Trans-Appalachian West, 1877-1915* highlights five Black towns founded shortly after the end of Reconstruction to Booker T. Washington's death. Hamilton depicts them as seeking opportunities to be found western town-building enterprises.

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<sup>66</sup> Randall B. Woods *A Black Odyssey: John Lewis Waller and the Promise of American Life, 1878-1900*. (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1981.), xvi.

The western studies informing my work include scholarship by Quintard Taylor, Kenneth Marvin Hamilton and William Loren Katz. Taylor's *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* and Katz's *The Black West: A Documentary and Pictorial History of the African American Role in the Expansion of the United States* track African American migration from the sixteen century confronting the myth that Spanish explorations did not include those of African descent and that pioneers were all white American cowboys and homesteaders. Katz and Taylor question whether the western frontier provided the escape from the racism, violence and Jim Crow of the South that many migrants so desperately search for. Both Katz and Taylor name Nicodemus, Kansas, in their studies as part of the western migration destinations for African Americans. Robert G. Athearn's *In Search of Canaan* Athearn depicted these town settlers attracted to Kansas by frontier myths. Athearn sees the Exodusters as a people achieving freedom, while Painter argues that Blacks encountered a struggle and compromise. Athearn's work is similar in that he focuses on the Exodusters' search for new free soil where they "could work their land in the manner of other Americans and could thereby achieve that true freedom so far denied them."<sup>67</sup> In his understanding, Kansas stood as an answer to the "bound but unhealed wound"<sup>68</sup> of the South and the apathetic northerners.

Although their numbers cannot compare to the many that either migrated to the North, or even those who remained in the South, African Americans who created homes in the Central Plains are an essential part of the larger narrative of Black life and culture. Without the inclusion of African Americans in the Central Plains, there is an incomplete understanding of the reasons why Blacks migrated in the first place. Secondly, the expansion of the West is clearly and undoubtedly an American story, but without an examination of Black communities in the

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<sup>67</sup> Robert G. Athearn *In Search of Canaan* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), 7.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.



burgeoning regions, this monumental part of the history of the country is exclusively a white American story, “whiting” out the presence of Blacks in American history. The exclusion of African Americans in the West is tragic because the story of continental expansion is one of a search for democracy and full citizenship, two of the elements of Black desire throughout the history of Blacks in the country. The inclusion of Blacks in the Central Plains also includes African American’s desire for land and opportunity.

The scholarship about U.S. Black western migration has evolved in the last one hundred years. From the “race relations models” of the 1930s and 1940s to the development of Black urban historical construction in the 1960s and the emphasis of class-based analysis of the 1980s, migration scholarship has shifted dramatically.<sup>69</sup> Currently migration studies offers a complex view of the field, highlighting migration patterns in less studied regions such as the Southwest, Northern Plains, and the Pacific Northwest areas of the nation. Complex class and race analysis are also emerging as well as patterns of chain and seasonal migration, and Black suburbanization. Especially important recently is the challenge of incorporating issues of gender as well as class and race. Scholars such as Joe Trotter, Jr., Tera Hunter, and Allison Dorsey established theories of community formation, a natural result of African American migration. This approach considers the political, social, and economic structures that help fashion Black communities. In urban destinations they faced “the onslaught of de-industrialization, high unemployment, residential segregation, and new forms of community, institutional, cultural, and political conflict.”<sup>70</sup> Including the story of Black women in Kansas will contribute to a fuller and more complete understanding of African American migration. I will specifically examine Kansas

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<sup>69</sup> Joe Trotter, Jr. *The Great Migration in Historical Perspectives: New Dimensions of Race, Class and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

<sup>70</sup> Joe E. Trotter, Earl Lewis and Tera Hunter *The African American Urban Experience: Perspectives from the Colonial Period to the Present* (New York: Palgrave & Macmillian, 2004), 2.

women as they encountered the Central Plains, and interpreted their lives as Black people, as women, and as Kansans. In addition to understanding the role of club women in Kansas, I also will contribute new scholarship to Black migration studies, race and gender constructs, community formation and the understanding of class in the Black community.

I will analyze the causes of and the responses to Black migration to Kansas, going beyond Exodusters Movement in 1879, including subsequent movements during the Great Migration. Black migration patterns in Kansas differ from the literature which focuses nearly exclusively on urban cities. The first difference stems from migration patterns to and out of the state. For a few migrants, Kansas was a destination, but for the majority, it was not. In fact, Blacks in Kansas often moved in, out, and around the state, creating a place of constant movement. Chain migration, where families from southern cities often followed one another to new locations, was a source of Black in-migration in Kansas. One family member might reside in Kansas while the other left a southern city for Chicago or Detroit. Secondly, rural to urban migration in the state was important and was a major factor in the development of the state's urban Black communities such Wichita, Kansas City, or Topeka. But with Black out-migration also important, as Black communities were forming, they were likewise disappearing.

### **Cultural Production: Early Twentieth-Century Black Newspapers**

Black feminist theory, western migration studies and community studies provide my dissertation with an interpretive lens to understand the rich sources that Black club women left behind in the forms of newspapers, religious material, photographs and letters. I am especially indebted to the information found in Black newspapers. The first Black newspaper, *Freedom Journal* appeared in New York City in 1827, and published by John B. Russwurm and Samuel Cornish. Although it had a brief run, they published in their words, "to plead [their] cause,"

because other media outlets had not done so. Editors of this earlier publication were often concerned with the state of American civilization, noting their position in the equation. The “press’s content and its very form changed with evolving historical and cultural condition in America.”<sup>71</sup> The Black press served as a public venue for African Americans to “form and reform ideologies and creating and recreating a public sphere and staging and restaging race itself.”<sup>72</sup> African American journalists, editorial writers, and community members utilized Black newspapers as a vehicle to strike against the dominant discourse of exclusion.

The Black press of the Middle West and Central Plains often resembled most newspapers around the nation. Henry Lewis Suggs’s states that the Black newspapers in the Middle West “functioned as an instrument of social change, enterprise, artistic expression, self-esteem and racial solidarity.”<sup>73</sup> Most supported Republican Party, often reporting the injustices of segregation, exclusion and violence. In Kansas, papers were established state-wide, in both rural and urban areas, which allowed them to flourish and sustain publications. In her article, “The Black Press and the Search for Hope and Equality in Kansas, 1865-1985,” Dorothy V. Smith argues that Kansas a place of the mind and in their imagination was freer than the Redeemed South. Reverend T. W. Henderson of Leavenworth and Reverend A. T. Williams of Lawrence founded *The Colored Radical* in 1876. While it last only five months, *The Colored Radical* supported the Republican Party. As more newspapers cropped up in the state, editors and businessmen and women began negotiating over territory and coverage. The editors of *The Kansas Blackman* founded in 1894 and the *State Ledger*, both serving Republican party, struggled to monopolize readership across the state. The editor of the *Ledger* Jeltz argued that the *Blackman* was divisive and encouraged Black people in the state to accept second class

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<sup>71</sup> Todd Vogel *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 1

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>73</sup> Henry Lewis Suggs, *The Black Press in the Middle West, 1865-1985* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1996)

citizenship, while *Blackman* editors said that the *Ledger*, which listed an integrated staff, was not a Race paper and therefore not worth the read for African Americans in the fight for full citizenship.

In the uproar of the newspaper disputes, Nick Chiles, a Kansas businessman whose hotels and lunch counters were popular and prosperous in the state, sought out *The Call's* editors. Purchasing *The Call*, Chiles hired J.H. Childers and Willa Smith to help him charter *The Topeka Plaindealer* in 1899. Chiles's paper developed a devoted readership and maintained a national circulation. Taking over editorship in 1905, Chiles relentlessly reported about the treatment of African Americans, particularly in the South. Dedicated to the creation of Black communities in the West, Chiles boasted of the progress made by African Americans in the state of Kansas. Chiles also served as a member of the Western Negro Press Association, regularly traveling to Colorado, Iowa, Nebraska, Utah and Wyoming to support small Black towns. As the decade continued and Jim Crow persisted and African Americans resisted, other newspapers emerged. The *Uplift* and *Afro-American* papers did not visualize Kansas as "the land of great opportunity," but considered the state "the most murderous state in the Union."<sup>74</sup> Chiles and the editors of *The Topeka Plaindealer* agreed in articles detailing school segregation cases, mob violence, sexual violence against women and racist legislation practices.

After examining the scholarship that informs my work, I write to place my research in the historical narrative and contribute to the existing discussion. My work examines the history of African Americans in Kansas specifically, and the Central Plains regionally, therefore situating it within national migration patterns and community development is crucial. In my work, I define the Central Plains as the states situated in the middle of the country. Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Iowa and western sections of Missouri are considered Central Plains in this study. I

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<sup>74</sup> Suggs, 117.

intentionally do not use the term “the Midwest.” I will refer to the Midwest, as including to others states—the eastern half of Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. These states sustained patterns of Black migration and community development that the states in the Central Plains did and could not. The reasons for the Midwestern states maintaining Black populations are numerous, but mostly have to do with access, opportunity and mobility. Each of the Midwest states developed at least one industrial area attracting migrant workers. Railroads linked more directly to southern urban centers such as Memphis, Little Rock, and Atlanta as did river transportation.

African Americans migrating to the Central Plains depicted themselves as moving to the West, as frequently stated in the *Topeka Plaindealer*. Kansas was part of the West in their eyes. Dedicated to the agrarian way of life, Central Plains was less populous. Although areas such as Kansas City, Topeka and Wichita were urban in consideration, the surrounding areas places remained rural. African Americans in Kansas and the Central Plains sought to seek a better life for Blacks in the West, defining it in opposition to the South, East, and North. They also sought to expand further west, taking advantage of newly declassified reservation lands and homesteading acts in Oklahoma, Colorado and Wyoming. African American migration to the Central Plains was less than other areas, and many moved on again. Consequently narratives about African Americans in the Central Plains have been ignored.

Once it is established that there was a viable Black community of women involved in club work, I ask if these women promoted volunteerism within their communities. I then ask, as did Gilmore and Hendricks, if gender troubled constructions of race for club women in Kansas, creating a space for political action and reform. I will then examine how Black Kansas club women transformed their communities and impacted the social and political arenas throughout

the twentieth century. I then examine the relationship of the local activities to the national movement. What determined their involvement in clubs? Did their work reflect what was developing on the national level, and, in turn, did Kansas women in any way shape the national movement? In other words, do Black Kansas club women affirm the established theoretical framework of club women's studies? If not, how do we change the theoretical framework?

## Chapter II: Creating Community in the Central Plains: Politics, Economics, and Geography

Our homes and our hearths are the earthly shrines of our daily devotions; our women the patron goddesses of those altars. In a large measure we rate our valuation of the woman by the character and charm her very individuality

lends to the home over which she presides. Connected with this Kansas Federation are the BEST WOMEN OF OUR RACE in the state. They will succeed because they are laboring in a righteous cause.<sup>75</sup>

Many people have the mistaken idea that all Negroes live in the South. For the past two decades the tide of Negro immigration has been westward. At the present the Negro population of Topeka and Shawnee County is 8,000; in Kansas 54,000, and in the adjoining states and territories 100,000.<sup>76</sup>

On Thursday, June 21, 1900, the ladies of the Topeka Oak Leaf Club hosted a public gala, introducing their guests to the newly established State Federation of Women's Art Clubs. Women from Paola, Leavenworth, and Kansas City, Kansas, joined the Topeka organization in a fantastic display of creative artwork. The convention began midweek, with the women meeting to test the sustainability of a state federation. Kansas club women were quite aware of the emerging virtual communities of middle-class Blacks, and the flourishing of women's organizations in Boston, Washington, D.C., and Chicago, and wanted the same for their communities. The elegant affair was held at the Masonic Hall in Topeka where each club had "a booth displaying their paintings, drawings and different kinds of needlework, embroidery, Roman cut, and cross-stitching."<sup>77</sup> Ten clubs and 28 delegates represented women from northeastern Kansas. High style and elegance marked this event, which included male escorts, a banquet, and well-connected individuals from local and regional communities. With its art displays, state-wide guest list, and impressive spread, the State Federation gala introduced an emerging twentieth century African American middle-class community to the whole state, in an attempt to redefine the developing urban area with rural roots, attract like-minded citizens to the state, and announce its existence to an elite community.

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<sup>75</sup> Nick Chiles, "Among Kansas Women. The Recent Convention Held in Topeka Results in a Federation of Women's Clubs. Art Display and Social Features," *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 29, 1900. Capitalization printed in original article.

<sup>76</sup> Editorial, "The Pride of Topeka, Our Great School of Normal and Industrial Training," *The Topeka Plaindealer* December 19, 1902.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

News of the event spread beyond state borders thanks to the publication of an upstart newspaper in Topeka. Among the three hundred guests, was the editor of the year-old *Topeka Plaindealer*, who stated in a review article that “[c]onnected with this Kansas Federation are the BEST WOMEN OF OUR RACE in the state.”<sup>78</sup> Nick Chiles, along with J. H. Childers and Will Harris, created the *Topeka Plaindealer* to “use every honorable means to advance the moral, financial, and political interests of [their] people.”<sup>79</sup> Childers served as the newspaper’s editor until Chiles took that post in 1905. His ever more looming objectives were to; first, stimulate the migration of African Americans to the state provided they were upstanding farmers and business men who could contribute to the stability of the Black population, and to keep the atrocities of racism in the United States, specifically in the South, ever in the minds of his readers.

The *Topeka Plaindealer* covered club women, reviewing each annual summer session, noting individual club meetings and activities, and commenting on the link between club women’s work and the rise of middle-class Blacks in Kansas. The *Topeka Plaindealer* offered the State Federation women a public venue and a guide for laboring in the righteous cause of uplifting Black communities in the state. The newspaper worked to offer an outlet for African Americans in the Central Plains, and thus the nation. “If a voice crying out for equity and justice is here in Missouri,” stated the editors, “let Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, and Utah take it up till everybody hears the cry for the rights of race or individuals.”<sup>80</sup> Thus with the first issue appearing in 1899, and the founding of the State Federation in 1900, the *Topeka Plaindealer* and the Kansas club women accepted the challenge of grooming an emerging community. In this chapter, I provide background of how the State Federation came to be. I begin by highlighting

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> J. H. Childers, “Our Salutation,” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, January 6, 1899.

<sup>80</sup> Editorial, *Topeka Plaindealer* January 2, 1903.



state history and the Exoduster movement, and the economic, political, social, and geographic circumstances of the time. I continue with an exploration of the different cities and regions that made up the readership of the *Topeka Plaindealer*, the membership of the State Federation, and the motives behind the gala event. I speak to the uneasy and often divisive relationship that developed between the State Federation and the National Association of Colored Women. In this chapter, I argue that the State Federation and the influential members of the Black press were deliberate in their attempts to “grow” stable communities even while they committed to the collection of like-minded African Americans through the country. Maintaining a sizable Black population was one of the most important goals for the emerging middle-class African American community. Laboring in the “righteous cause” of forming a place of political, economic, and social opportunity of African Americans, Kansas women accomplished more than just founding art clubs. In conjunction with the *Topeka Plaindealer*, the State Federation created a route to increasing the African American population and set in motion the construction of a Black middle-class sensibility.

Black Kansans were part of a network of African Americans in search for full citizenship in the West, a narrative often reserved for native-born whites, European immigrants, outlaws, and pioneers. The mainstream narrative is overwhelming white and individualistic in nature. African Americans in early twentieth century Kansas purposely defined who they were and desired to be by actively encouraging migration to the state. Kansas club women, journalists, farmers, and even some politicians examined African Americans in other cities and regions of the country, decided what to emulate and what to avoid creating the best Black community in the Central Plains. Central Plains and western territories share similar narratives about early Black migration patterns before the Civil War. Prior to the war, most African Americans, both enslaved

and free, resided in the South and those who lived elsewhere made up a very small percentage of the larger population. The process by which Kansas became a state actually encouraged Black migration to the area, but the census only recorded around 630 African Americans in the state in 1860.<sup>81</sup> Most of the migrants who arrived in Kansas City after the Civil War, but prior to the Exoduster movement, were from neighboring Missouri they were well-accustomed to working in agriculture, and understood farming and the harsh weather that dominated the area.<sup>82</sup> Though African Americans were few in number, Black Kansas communities built on their foundations decades later. To be sure the numbers of African Americans were low, yet their presence still requires examination and explanation in order to construct a more developed narrative of Black migration and community building.

Although these states were considered free, many politicians and white settlers did not want large numbers of Blacks to move into their areas. True “Free States,” while rejecting slavery, nonetheless did not welcome free African Americans in their territories. White settlers who were familiar with the system of slavery and Jim Crow also flooded the Central Plains, bringing along with them experiences of Black exclusion and segregation. Geographically most Black communities in the Central Plains were built around river towns and often attracted seasonal labor as well as European immigrants. Both Blacks and European populations worked in mills, and in the fields.<sup>83</sup> Lastly, African Americans population remained low, often peaking in the late-nineteenth-century only to decline throughout the first half of the twentieth. At times,

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<sup>81</sup> Quintard Taylor *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company) 94.

<sup>82</sup> Greenbaum, *The Afro-American Community in Kansas City, Kansas*, 20.

<sup>83</sup> The majority of African Americans who arrived in the central plains set out to find work on the river fronts, including St. Louis, small towns in Iowa, Indiana, and Minnesota. In Indiana the “Black population was only 428, less than percent of the total population and a net increase of 166 persons in the preceding decade.” Due to its proximity to the slave state of Missouri, Iowa received a handful of Black into its borders prior to the War. There were “324 free colored residents in Iowa . . . in most cases Blacks worked in the mines of Dubuque, or as laborers in the river towns of Burlington, Davenport, and Keokuk, and lived in shacks close to the waterfront.”

Kansans experienced significant outmigration, enough that there needs to be a discussion about the depopulation of the state. The lives of those who stay in the Central Plains during periods of out-migration must be examined in order to understand why some remained while others moved on.

The early signs of the impending migration began in 1874-75 when rumors of free transportation to Kansas traveled quickly through Tennessee and Kentucky. Since relocation became one of the most expensive elements of the migration, travelers thought that if it were covered, the rest of their limited funds could go towards buying land, provisions, and supplies. Flyers boasting of discounted land plots also flooded the area. Free travel and cheap property excited the prospective migrants and some, set out for the west. Others such as N. A. Napier, a Tennessean, visited Kansas in 1875 to see if the speculations were true. Napier found that a family would need around \$1,000.00 to relocate. Benjamin “Pap” Singleton, also from Tennessee, traveled to the state earlier in 1873 but made few inquiries about the condition of the land or the sacrifice families needed to make to survive. Singleton and Columbus Johnson of Tennessee returned in 1877 and sent a migration advertisement praising the state.<sup>84</sup> Men like Napier, Singleton, George Brown, and W.J. Niles became “migration conductors.” In the South, communities congregated in order to design resettlement plans. Real estate companies developed to aid the potential migrants requiring land and homes in the new state.

Though Kansas did not actually welcome Black settlers, they came anyway. Following the end of Reconstruction in 1877, African Americans in the South and border states, sought to escape the mounting violence, emergence of Jim Crow, and loss of voting rights by Black men. With Redemption, whites reestablished supremacy over Blacks, confining many of the masses to sharecropping and domestic work. African Americans who had the financial means and cultural

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<sup>84</sup> Painter, 115.

capital remained in the South and often encouraged others to do the same. Other Blacks decided that American soil would never offer full citizenship, and left the country to begin colonies in West Africa. Still others made their way to southern urban centers hoping for release from the system of southern agricultural exploitation. Exodusters migrated west with the hopes of achieving full citizenship on U.S. soil. The Exoduster movement, as Nell Painter first stated, was a rational response to terror, loss of political rights and blocked economic opportunity. In July of 1877 a Black businessman named W.J. Niles and a white man, W.R. Hill, brought families from Kentucky to settle in the now well-known town of Nicodemus, Kansas. With men from Topeka, the Kentuckians chartered Nicodemus in 1877, crowning it the “Great Solomon Valley of Western Kansas.” Despite the lack of an adequate railroad system, Nicodemus briefly flourished and is the only surviving black settlement founded during this migration. Then in 1878, Singleton, A.D. Frantz, and Columbus Johnson founded Dunlap Colony in Morris County, Kansas with approximately 800 families. Most of the migrants were farmers, and purchased land for \$1.25 an acre. The Exodusters, who found refuge in Wyandotte coming off the steamer *Fannie Lewis* on the banks of the Kansas River on March 23, 1879.<sup>85</sup> Six thousand Exodusters, ex-slaves and their children came by way of the Mississippi river and railways during the summer of Kansas Fever. Several of the bordering counties were the first to welcome Exodusters to the state. Those abolitionists, who remained in the area after the turmoil of state war and the Civil War, and the small number of Kansas Blacks, accommodated the recently freedmen and women.

The majority of historians concur on the factors that propelled the first Kansas. The end of Reconstruction, homesteading, racial violence, agricultural problems and instability, and the Free State hope were all contributing factors. The success of the migration is another point of

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<sup>85</sup> Greenbaum, 24.

disagreement among scholars. While some see it as a complete failure due to harsh weather conditions, dashed expectations about agricultural ability, and sickness among the migrants, others view movement of the Exodusters as a success simply because it occurred. Scholars like Nell Irvin Painter and Robert G. Athearn assert that there was not a main community leader in the South promoting migration to Kansas. Athearn asserts that the way of migrants in 1879 “was sudden, unplanned, and therefore disorganized, and. . . leaderless.”<sup>86</sup> Many migrants were without adequate food and funding, and found themselves without any place to go or any one leader to follow. Community aid organizations cropped up wherever there were stranded groups of freedmen, women, and children bound for Kansas. Once the migrating groups arrived in Kansas, many were destitute and disillusioned about their new prospects.

To the dismay of most of the migrants the conditions in Kansas were not as good as they first believed. The influx of Black people into the state made white settlers uncomfortable. Most of the migrants did not have money or food and survived off limited state funds and the mercy of Blacks who arrived earlier and had established communities. Several counties forbade the homeless Southerners from camping at river docks and in the wooded plains. The newer citizens were encouraged by earlier migrants to scatter among the different towns so that their large numbers would not alarm white people and so that the scarce provisions would last.<sup>87</sup> White farmers often complained to city officials about black farmers buying and developing neighboring land. They feared that a small community of Blacks would attract new migrants to their “established” areas. But the racial tension in Kansas did not sway most of the African-

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<sup>86</sup> Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas, 1870-80*, (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), 5.

<sup>87</sup> Kansas State Historical Society. *In Search of the American Dream: The Experiences of Blacks in Kansas*. (Kansas State Historical Society Press, 1984) 4.

Americans from staying since what might await them in Tennessee, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Louisiana would prove to be worse.

White southerners were aware of the departure of Blacks from the area and many attempted to hinder the Exodus altogether. Because most of the ex-slaves continued to work as sharecroppers for white planters, finding enough laborers to work the land became a challenge. Without the African Americans people to work the land and create profit, southern states lost the economic benefits derived from the exploitation of sharecroppers, not to mention the ability to dominate the Black communities. Since most sharecroppers were indebted to the white planters, some southern whites simply forbade their workers to leave. Others punished their employees or physically intimidated prospective migrants. If Black families were successful in leaving the plantation, those objecting would meet them at the Mississippi River, and violently prevent their departure. Whites, and some Blacks, opposed to the Exodus also printed discouraging news articles to parallel positive advertisements about the conditions in Kansas.<sup>88</sup> While many might have succeeded in discouraging southern Blacks from abandoning the south, the majority of those with an unquenchable desire to be free from the extreme racial tension, unprovoked violence, and economic instability, moved despite the pressure to stay.

Although some Blacks who had established fledging communities in the early nineteenth-century thought that the high number of migrants would become a problem, the majority of the settled families welcomed the influx. While cities such as Topeka, Lawrence, and Wichita received hundreds of migrants, the bulk of the migration landed in the Wyandotte County and surrounding area, present-day Kansas City, Kansas. The Kansas City Black population boom increased the cities chances of prospering as a community. In fact, African-Americans made up 24% of the total population in Kansas City in the late nineteenth-century

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<sup>88</sup> Gordon, 3.

compared to blacks in Detroit, Philadelphia, and Chicago who only comprised 5%, 4%, and 1% respectively.<sup>89</sup> In contrast, many of the black families in Wyandotte County lived farther apart than in other cities, mostly because of the landscape and the abundant land for blacks.

Government reassigned Native American reservations were the most fertile and available land that Kansas could offer blacks. Most of the new settlers farmed for occupation and provisions but this time the ex-slaves worked and provided for their own families and not those of the white land owners in the south. They were now able to keep the profits of their labor and feed their children without owing the white farmer. Even when harvests were not plentiful or when winters were severe and deadly, the freedom of being in control of one's own destiny persuaded many families to remain in Kansas.

The last and most diverse groups of southern Blacks began to arrive in the early 1880s and the 1890s, and continued throughout the few years of the twentieth-century. This group came from a variety of states. While the majority came from the South, some migrants left northern areas such as Indiana, Ohio, Nebraska and Iowa. Earlier in the century, blacks relied on circulars, letters from families, and news articles to guide them to Kansas, but the latest migrants needed to know more about establishing businesses and educational opportunities. Noting that their economic and community standing, some African Americans remained in the South in spite of the racial tension surrounding them. Some whites commented that this was a "better class of rural blacks."<sup>90</sup> Those who came from northern or Midwestern states were mainly looking for pioneering opportunities in business or education and the freedom to pursue both in Kansas.

With the added opportunities in education and business, there developed class delineation within the black community: the laborers who worked the railroads and service industry for

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<sup>89</sup> Greenbuam, 27-29.

<sup>90</sup> Painter, 205.

livelihood, and the group of middle-class professionals with education, business experience, and the political and social power to shape the black Kansas image. During the last population increase of the 1880s and 1890s, the number of African Americans went from 4,576 to 6,935.<sup>91</sup> Because this final group of migrants was business-oriented, Black Kansas City neighborhoods flourished economically. Black businesses and professional services that developed in other states as a result of the new arrivals aided the overall creation of the black business district in Kansas. Black doctors, lawyers, and educated ministers relocated from parts of the South but mainly from surrounding states and more northern areas.

By 1900, African Americans in Kansas, those who arrived before and after the Exodusters, made strides to create stable communities. Initially agriculture was the main source of livelihood for African Americans in Kansas, and in the Central Plains in general. African Americans attempted to utilize generations of southern agrarian knowledge to sustain their families and communities once they arrived in the state. While their communities grew, they continued to remember those who migrated to the “Western counties and sought to develop the country along the old lines of raising corn, wheat and oats.”<sup>92</sup>

The result was a miserable failure and thousands of settlers left Kansas and sought homes elsewhere to live and die along old lines. But there were some who stayed; these together with many other Kansas farmers have established a new order of things.<sup>93</sup>

Citing the many opportunities in dairy, wheat, and produce production, Chiles continues stating that farming income and autonomy is better than any other occupation held by African Americans. As industry took root in southeastern and central Kansas, mill work and meatpacking plants attracted workers and supported communities. Railroads also employed

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<sup>91</sup>Greenbaum, 27.

<sup>92</sup> Editorial, “Another Good Chance; Or Opportunity is Open to the Kansas Negro, as Well as the Negro Elsewhere, to Make a Decent Living Outside of Politics,” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, July 14, 1899.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.



Black men in the area, including the Santa Fe railroad.<sup>94</sup> Lastly, as the beginning of the century progressed, small businesses cropped up across the state.

As the communities grew, African Americans found their identities in the West, desiring to stand out from other regions in the country, yet still connected to the growing Black middle-class. As evident in the *Topeka Plaindealer*, African Americans sought to define their communities by citing what they experienced in other regions of the United States. Often referring to Kansas as the West, African Americans in the state viewed their region to the East or the South. Of much concern to members of the press was the image of Kansas as a promoter of migration to the state. Noting the advances of Blacks in the state was a major aspect of the *Topeka Plaindealer*. Boasting of the earning potential in agriculture, Chiles wrote of successful farmers who migrated to the state with nothing but the desire to be successful farmers. Farmers such as I. G. Groves of Edwardsville in Wyandotte County, was known as the Potato King. Written about by Booker T. Washington and praised as may be the most profitable farmer in the United States during his time. Another farmer, Benjamin Vance of Shawnee County, came to Kansas with “a team of horses and fifty cents.”<sup>95</sup> These prosperous farmers operated in “Wyandotte, Shawnee, Douglas, Jefferson and Leavenworth counties,” and “own fine farms, live in handsome country homes, ride to town in good carriages, are respected by all their neighbors, and have all the advantages and comforts enjoyed by their white neighbors.”<sup>96</sup>

Although Blacks in Kansas may have envied the bustling cities in the East, and the culture of the South, they saw an inherent value in it as an “agricultural state, and it is in

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<sup>94</sup> Personal note: my father Lee E. Williams Jr., his father Williams Sr., and my maternal grandfather Oscar E. Woods, all worked for the Santa Fe. My paternal grandmother’s brothers, the Beatons, also worked for Santa Fe at some point during the early twentieth century.

<sup>95</sup> Nick Chiles, “Colored Men Who Are Growing Rich on Kansas Farms.” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, February 9, 1900.

<sup>96</sup> Chiles, “Colored Men Who Are Growing Rich on Kansas Farms.” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, February 9, 1900.

following this kind of labor that the human family has laid the foundation of its present greatness.”<sup>97</sup> While other regions of the country concocted discouraging narratives about their lives in the West, African Americans wanted others to know that there was more to the state than “corn, chinch bugs, cheap politicians, and hell . . .”<sup>98</sup> Black Kansans often rejected the congestion and destitution of the East, which included Philadelphia, New York, Washington, D.C., and other urban areas on the coast, noting that some advances for Blacks were more probable in Kansas or the West than the East. Acknowledging the promotion of a Black firefighter to an all-white department prompted Childers to comment, “[o]ut West where there are evidences of activities and ph, *colored* fire departments are so common that they are considered affairs of minor importance.”<sup>99</sup>

With the establishment of businesses, schools, newspapers, fraternal organizations, and ladies’ clubs, Black communities across the state dug deep, planting strong roots. Although most African Americans who migrated during the Exoduster movement received the worst land in either the harshest climates, or the most undesirable locations far from water supplies and nutrient rich soil, the migrants who managed to remain accomplished what they could. Black Kansans understood their role in the expansion of the West, opening the frontier to create a unique community that shunned the oppression and violence of the South, the overcrowded urban destitution of the East, and the false hopes of the North. While the majority of the state remained rural, there was a varied range of communities. Some Blacks resided in the growing urban-ish areas such as Kansas City and Topeka, while others settled in rural farm towns like Great Bend. Still others built homes and communities in railroad and mill towns such as Salina,

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<sup>97</sup> Editorial, “Another Good Chance; Or Opportunity is Open to the Kansas Negro, as Well as the Negro Elsewhere, to Make a Decent Living Outside of Politics,” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, July 14, 1899.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Editorial, “Strictly Confidential,” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, February 3, 1899.

Independence and Wichita. And finally, Blacks established their own towns including Nicodemus, Dunlap, and Tennesseetown in Topeka. Whatever and wherever they called home, African Americans who migrated to Kansas struck out on their own and refused to “resign themselves to the political or economic order of the Redeemed South.”<sup>100</sup> Migrants to Kansas did not follow one leader, but operated under their own agency weighing their options of staying put, emigrating to Liberia, or moving North, and decided to try the Free State. Although, hope was ever present, Black migrants understood the racial politics and organization of the United States, and knew their journey to full citizenship would not be resolved by becoming Kansans. While their options were limited, the African Americans who decided to stay for whatever reason lived in cities and towns that often bordered rural farmland, faced population decreases, and struggled to fulfill Free State promises.

While they worked to “grow” and stabilize their communities, Black Kansans knew their determination meant nothing to those who wished to blanket the country in white supremacy. The situation for African Americans in the Central Plains, worsened with the ever-tightening grip of Jim Crow segregation, racial violence, and limited rights. In the Central Plains, Jim Crow, racial tension and violence worsened because racist whites responded in fear to the rising numbers of Black citizens in the area, even though their population remained relatively low. On November 8, 1901, whites lynched a Black man, Fred Alexander from Leavenworth, Kansas. Accused of murdering Pearl Forbes, a young white woman, and assaulting another, Eva Roth, Alexander proclaimed his innocence until the end of his life. Governor W. E. Stanley sought protective custody of Alexander in the penitentiary in the city of Leavenworth. Stanley trusted the thuggish policing system of the city to protect Alexander even as mob terror seemed

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<sup>100</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration After Reconstruction* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1976), 260.

imminent. A white mob of violent men kidnapped Alexander, took him to the scene of the crime, tortured him, doused him with oil and set him on fire. Pearl Forbes's father, John, an active member of the mob, saturated Alexander's body and clothing with the oil and lit him on fire. At the time of his lynching, Alexander swore his innocence:

I have nothing to confess. I am innocent. I am a dying  
for what another man did. I see lots of my friends here,  
and they know I did not do it. If I had been guilty I would  
have said so at the penitentiary and could have staid [sic]  
there for life.

The *Topeka Plaindealer* editor Nick Chiles proclaimed that “the events of the past few days have served to convince us that the Kansas renegade white men are but a few degrees removed from their brothers of the South. The white man of the North will burn and mob a Negro just as quickly as the same act is done in the South.”<sup>101</sup> Chiles continues, stating that “Kansas had long been regarded as a state where intelligence and sober judgment prevailed over passion and prejudice,” this was not the case.<sup>102</sup> Jim Crow, white violence, and racism were just as present as in Kansas as in the South to African Americans across the state.

Throughout the early twentieth century, white mobs lynched Blacks in several cities and towns in the state of Kansas. A little more than a year after Alexander was murdered, whites lynched Mont Godley, a Black man from Pittsburg, Kansas, after a white police officer was shot and killed during an arrest scuffle. Rumors spread that Godley was the assailant; however some witnesses reported that, as the scuffle escalated, a second officer named Officer Galer pulled his weapon and began shooting randomly, wounding Godley's brother Joe and killing his fellow officer. Witnesses added that the guilty officer hid out in the town while Godley was murdered and later hanged from a light pole in the town square. These violent acts of terror against Black

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<sup>101</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer* January 18, 1901

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

people in the state prompted them to organize self-defense groups such as the Colored Protective Club in Great Bend, KS which boast of over forty members in the early twentieth century.

Elaborate on meetings with lawyers.

Facing Jim Crow, exclusion, poverty and lack of opportunity in Kansas and the Central Plains, many African Americans moved farther west actively sought more land west of the state. Whether due to extreme weather, Jim Crow, violence or lack of opportunities, African Americans left Kansas for places farther west. Because many of these migrants were prominent members of Kansas communities, the *Topeka Plaindealer* editors remained in contact with them, often asking them to serve as informants, relaying information about their new homes to the people of Kansas. In an early article, Chiles commented that although “many people have the mistaken idea that al Negroes live in the South. . . the tide of Negro immigration had been westward.”<sup>103</sup> In an article titled “Establish Negro Colonies,” *Topeka Plaindealer* editors outlined a plan to develop Black colonies in western Kansas, eastern Colorado, and Wyoming, all states within the circulation of Chiles’s newspaper. The Western Negro Press sought to promote migration with a “worthy class of Negroes,” the available farm lands, suggesting that all Black newspapers in the Central Plains advertise land prices, train travel, rental and housing possibilities, and the biographies of those already living in the areas.<sup>104</sup> An informational held in Topeka invited the likes of Booker T. Washington. Clearly the members of the Western Press Association planned to hand-pick families from various cities in the Central Plains in an attempt to “grow” the new communities through property acquisition, agriculture and hard work, agriculture, and property. The goal of the project was to

induce a strong tide out of the cities in the east, south and  
west to colony lands. The complicated life of the city draws

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<sup>103</sup> Chiles, “Establish Negro Colonies” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, August 9, 1907

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

down the Negro in its whirlpool, a helpless struggler against class as caste and tosses him aside as a bit of the wreckage. He occupies the undesirable residence portions of the cities in tenements tumbled down and unimproved. The Western Negro Press wants to Drive this face home so hard that the laboring class will desert the cities. . .”<sup>105</sup>

In addition to surveying new lands, western migrants opened their homes to other people who were either passing through to another western state or looking for work and permanent housing. A system of migrant hosting developed and further encouraged by newspaper editors, including Chiles. African Americans who left Kansas and Oklahoma for Utah and Wyoming often submitted columns describing their experiences and triumphs in their new states. Newspapers encouraged rail travel to the new “colonies” to support new economies.

Iowa and Nebraska, states in the Central Plains region, hosted a small numbers of African Americans. Omaha became home to a small African American communities, including migrants from Kansas in the twentieth century. While they moved the Nebraska, many Blacks remained connected to Kansas through family ties or business pursuits. African Americans in Des Moines, Iowa, worked to establish their own communities in the state. Iowan newsmen and women hosted the Western Negro Press Association in 1908 in order to solidify its presence among the Black communities in the region. The *Bystander* newspaper edited by John L. Thompson, hosted and sponsored the event.<sup>106</sup> In an article published in the *Topeka Plaindealer*, it was said that the state of Iowa was “a splendid state, very little racial prejudice there, and if a colored man is up to the standard, he can readily get the support of the white people.”<sup>107</sup> Joshua B. Bass editor

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Thompson is clearly a friend of Chiles, but I do not know at this time whether he was from Kansas. I can comfortably suggest that he must have spent some time in the state, but I do not know where and for how long.

<sup>107</sup> Chiles, “The Colored Editors Meet at Des Moines: Iowa Shows Western Negro Press Association a Royal Time—the Gathering was One of Both Pleasure and Profit.” *Topeka Plaindealer* June 19, 1908.

of the *Montana Plaindealer*, was also in attendance. Migration throughout the Central Plains strengthened the connections formed by African Americans in the region.

African Americans who left Kansas in the early-twentieth century found homes in states and regions that seem foreign to popular narratives of Black migration. The experiences of Blacks who left Kansas in the early twentieth-century were not part of the usual narratives of migration emphasizing south to north, or rural to urban patterns. In the fall of 1902, Charles Mayhew of Topeka traveled with his Elks lodge to a small community of Blacks living in Salt Lake City, Utah. Mayhew traveled with his lodge for a couple of weeks, visiting the small African American communities in Denver as well as Salt Lake City.<sup>108</sup> According to Mayhew's account the African Americans in the area were "prosperous and have good, well paying positions and are placing their hard-earned dollars in a manner that will prove profitable to them; in buying homes, and building up property and character."<sup>109</sup> In Utah, the transplants founded communities similarly to how they lived before, starting up a newspaper titled *The Utah Plaindealer*.<sup>110</sup> Butte, Montana, was another uncharted migration destination for African Americans. In the early years of the twentieth century, Colorado Springs, Colorado, became a destination for African Americans wanting to leave Kansas. Advertised in the *Topeka Plaindealer* as a summer vacation destination, Blacks began to relocate there in small numbers.

By far, the most popular migration destination for Black Kansans on the move was Oklahoma. For one, the proximity created the opportunity for Black Kansans, especially for those living in Wichita, Independence, Parsons, Liberal, and Coffeyville who made regular trips

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<sup>108</sup> Black organizations in the Central Plains often sent out representatives to visit newer communities throughout the region. The Elks lodges in Kansas were just a few of the groups who traveled to visit and assess burgeoning communities. The Western Negro Press Association also deployed representatives to Iowa, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Colorado.

<sup>109</sup> Editorial, "A Pleasant Trip," *The Topeka Plaindealer* September 5, 1902.

<sup>110</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer* September 19, 1902.

to the state prior to their relocation. Originally regulated “Indian Territory,” and closed to non-Indian settlement, it was opened up for non-Indians in 1893 as part of the Oklahoma land rush. In an article printed in the summer of 1905 titled “The Negro’s Paradise: The Indian Territory Has Many Prosperous Blacks and Room for More,” the towns of Chelsea and Vinita hosted a small Black community.<sup>111</sup> In 1905, only two Black people lived in Chelsea, a town of around 700 people. One of them, Mattie Martin, a widow, operated a “small rooming house and eating establishment,” and owned several acres of land.<sup>112</sup> The recruiting articles in the *Topeka Plaindealer* suggest that Blacks should move to Oklahoma, stating that “if some industrious colored family would go to this town and open up a hand laundry, they could make money.”<sup>113</sup>

Whites practiced Jim Crow in Kansas, it too dominated in the new territories. Speaking about Oklahoma, Chiles reminds migrating Blacks that most of the whites entering the state were Southerners, but could be “easily handled,” once the laws of the state were enforced. According to records, “a few poor crackers,” told African Americans that they were not allowed to live in the town, but were admonished by a U.S. judge in the town that “he would put any one in jail who attempted to resort to such methods to force or compel citizens or those seeking citizenship.”<sup>114</sup> After the racial altercation, Chiles declares that the “class of people had left the town a better element of whites have come in which makes it all the better.”<sup>115</sup> Black newspapers also spoke against the dreaded Sunset Towns throughout the Central Plains, where whites forced African Americans from land through the threat of violence and death.

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<sup>111</sup> Chiles, “The Negro’s Paradise: The Indian Territory Has Many Prospero Blacks and Room for More.” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 23, 1905.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*



While Chelsea hosted a small number of African Americans, Vinita, a town of four thousand, was home to seven to eight hundred Black people. Small businesses cropped up all over the town, including barbershops, “two grocery shops, one hotel, two restaurants, one physician and surgeon, a Blacksmith, six barbershops, one clothes cleaning and dye establishment, all owned and controlled by colored people.”<sup>116</sup> With all the development in the town Chiles invoked the spirit of Booker T. Washington, hoping that he would visit the town where so many pursued self-help and industrial education. As with Chelsea, Vinita was home to Jim Crow, and angry whites often targeted Black business as well as those working to build Black prominence in the town. Black citizens in the city reported to the *Topeka Plaindealer* that the “jailer [in Vinita] is a citizen of Arkansas and a dead enemy to the Negro.”<sup>117</sup> Chiles continues stating that the day of prejudice is over and Black men should hold office.

The patterns of migration for African Americans in the West also coincided with railroad routes. Many migrants to the Central Plains left families in the South, and back East, so it was important that they return, visit or care for aging relatives, friends or other individuals who remained home. Migrants from cities such as Nashville, Tennessee, kept in touch with their hometowns through the *Topeka Plaindealer* and other local newspapers.<sup>118</sup> Dr. J. S. Bass, a resident of Iola, Kansas, moved to the small town from Nashville, where he was a student at Meharry Medical College. Funded in part by the Freedmen’s Aid Society, and opened as the Meharry Medical Department of Central Tennessee College in 1876, Meharry served as the leading medical teaching college for African Americans during the early twentieth century.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Editorial, *Topeka Plaindealer* June 23, 1905

<sup>118</sup> Editorial, *Topeka Plaindealer* December 26, 1902

<sup>119</sup> Meharry Medical College produced 15% of all African American physicians since 1970. “Academic Tenure and Freedom: Meharry Medical College.” Lawrence S. Poston, Earl F. Bloch and Gerald Soslaw page 56 *Academe* vol. 90 number 6 nov-dec 2004 56-78

Now in Kansas, Bass enjoyed a “lucrative practice,” and “accumulated considerable property.”<sup>120</sup> He returned to Tennessee during a yellow fever epidemic to treat the people of Nashville and was “accorded a great ovation by the citizens of his hometown, Murfreesboro.”<sup>121</sup> By 1910, Blacks in Oklahoma had “stuck through the hard times and accumulated much wealth—the schools, colleges and business enterprises are a credit to their thrift and energy.”<sup>122</sup> Black migrants throughout the country, yet nurtured their family ties and business ventures they created “back home.” African Americans in the Central Plains continued the tradition of maintaining connections even as they supported the growth of new, promising communities in the West.

In the early years of the century, African Americans in Kansas did not take whatever freedoms they had for granted. In a 1907 article asking Blacks to support financially Washburn College, one of the few institutions of higher education that allowed African Americans, Chiles argued that the only reasonable thing to do is to support it. He suggested that the minds of whites in power had changed over the years since the Exoduster movement, and they no longer viewed Blacks as thrifty and smart, but held those “who commit crimes saying ‘the Negro don’t appreciate it , legislate him out of our schools.”<sup>123</sup> He continued stating that

Kansas is wild, and when a craze sweeps over her, it is always carried to the extreme. Jim Crow struck Kansas a little over two years ago in a wave of ‘reform’ now watch her out-Georgia Georgia!<sup>124</sup>

The establishment of Jim Crow railroad cars in the Central Plains developed into a growing humiliation and a sign of second-class citizen for African Americans. Missouri continued to practice separate railroad cars and Oklahoma, as a growing state with southern tendencies, developed a system of segregation transportation systems. For Black Kansans who

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<sup>120</sup> Editorial, *Topeka Plaindealer* May 12, 1904.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Editorial, “Blacks Making Good in Oklahoma,” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, May 10, 1910.

<sup>123</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer* June 14, 1907.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

had to take trains to those neighboring states it was disturbing. In 1908, three Coffeyville people were arrested near Tulsa after they refused to ride in the Jim Crow cars. The judge ordered the riders released since they were interstate passengers and not subject to Oklahoma Jim Crow laws. "Oklahoma had just as well understand once and for all," stated Chiles "that Negroes will not ride in front end of smoking car for white men, and the conductor who asks passengers to move or telegraphs ahead for officers to arrest them for insisting on riding in decent cars, oversteps his bounds."<sup>125</sup>

### **Kansas Club Women**

What is missing in the discussion of the development of the Central Plains is the role Black women played in the construction of the African American communities in the region. Women participated in the Exoduster movement as migrants as Kansas welcomers. The first women's organizations in Kansas were aid societies that served African American migrants adjusting to life in the West. In Kansas, aid societies, such as the Lawrence Aid Club founded by Black women in 1870, worked to help Exodusters arriving in the state. Lawrence, a town that straddled the dramatic northeastern curve of the Kansas River, was an important site in the battle for Free State soil. Situated just east of the territorial capitol Lecompton, the arguments, Lawrence was the site of debates and often violent. Even as the slave state war raged around them, communities continued to grow including small African American enclaves. With the founding of the Kansas State University in 1865, the city became the intellectual and artistic enclave that sat between the rural western part of the state and the growing commercial eastern region.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Chiles, "Oklahoma Judge Against Jim Crow," *The Topeka Plaindealer*, May 22, 1908.

<sup>126</sup> The University of Kansas was originally called Kansas State University.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Black women participated in the local and national club movement. From the beginning of the national movement, club women in Kansas were involved, even attending the first gathering in Boston 1895. The Sierra Leone club of also of Lawrence, led by president Mrs. J. H. Young, was present and accounted for when women from around the nation answered Ruffin's call to convention. Founded in the late-nineteenth-century, the Sierra Leone was the only Kansas club present; the women of the Sierra Leone associated themselves at the start of the movement.<sup>127</sup> The Self Culture club was founded in Lawrence in 1915 by Gertrude Clark, and derived its name from a set of books by the same name. *Self Culture: Physical Intellectual, Moral, and Spiritual* a course of lectures written by James Freeman Clarke in 1881, served as the women's reading material throughout the early years of the club's existence. With its motto, "United We Stand," the Self Culture club organized as a way to encourage mothers to study child care together.<sup>128</sup> As it continued to grow, members created a club constitution and as set of by-laws in order to maintain the integrity and agenda. In the constitution and by-laws of the organization the official objective of the group was to "promote the culture and entertainment of its member for social union among other clubs to further higher intellectual, social and moral conditions."<sup>129</sup> The women met on the first and third Tuesdays of each month at 3:00- 4:30 o'clock in the afternoon. Originally the club restricted membership to 12 married women, but amended the by-laws extending invitations to 24 members and unmarried women. The women of the Self Culture club did not join the State Federation, but elected to engage with another local the Sierra Leone club, which was active in

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<sup>127</sup> The Sierra Leone club was noted in the NACW proceedings. Other Kansas women may have attended, but the Sierra women registered as a club.

<sup>128</sup> Editorial, *Lawrence Journal World* February 24, 1985.

<sup>129</sup> "Constitution and By-Laws," Self Culture Club box 1 folder 26. Afro-American Clubwomen Project, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

the NACW. Located in Lawrence, halfway between Kansas City and Topeka, The Sierra Leone and Self-Culture clubs referred to Lawrence as the Athens of Kansas, noting its connection to the local university and the emergence of arts culture.

Two other organizations involved in the laying the foundation for the national movement were located in Kansas City, Kansas. What is distinct about the development of the Black community in greater Kansas City is that it is a bi-state city, straddling a border steeped in the history of the institution of slavery in the United States. This is important because since the greater Kansas City area is rooted in both “free” and slave state traditions. It is important to understand how the Black population in each city formed. If one city’s Black community grew because white Missouri slaveholders migrated to the developing urban center and the other swelled because of the migration of Blacks out of the south, then the two places would have border issues that historically restrict the flow of the population. In reality, the state line, a border that has deep-rooted meaning concerning emancipation, freedom, and race relations, did not hinder border-crossing for the emerging and middle-class Black women in the city.

The Pierian of Kansas City, Kansas, and the collaborative clubs affiliated with the Kansas City League of Kansas City, Missouri.<sup>130</sup> The club women in Kansas City were educated and immersed in the ideology of the time. Like their counterparts in Washington, D.C., Chicago, Illinois, and Nashville, Tennessee, the Kansas City women felt that there was a need for racial uplift in their neighborhoods. Locally, regionally, and nationally, these proactive women scrutinized their surroundings, analyzed the condition of Black people in their communities,

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<sup>130</sup> The archival materials come from two sources. The Kansas City League, also known as the Kansas City Colored Women’s League, materials come from microfilm copies of the *Woman’s Era* newsletter and various articles and pieces from the archives at the Kansas City Public Library (MO). In 1896, the *Woman’s Era* newsletter became the print-voice for the National Association of Colored Women. The larger collection of information on the Kansas City clubs is located in the Frederick Douglass papers. I plan to travel to Washington, D.C. and comb through the archives this summer. The Pierian archives, not featured in this paper, are housed at the Kenneth Spencer Research Library located at the University of Kansas.

proposed methods that fostered the quality of life for Black people, and challenged Black women and men to initiate social change.

The Pierian women concentrated on literary perfection and scholastic achievements for the women in the community. In November of 1894, fourteen women assembled in the home of Mrs. Silena Rivers commemorating the first meeting of the Pierian book club of Kansas City, Kansas. Subsequently, the Pierian women founded the first African American literary club in the city. Their organization was clearly literary in nature, choosing to highlight educated women in the community and the education of young Black children. The women of the Pierian were teachers and wives of elite men in the city, and had less involvement with the community activism, but were still prominent members of the community-building coalition. The members of the Pierian used literature and homebuilding as their avenues toward race and self-improvement.

Several of the women in the Pierian were wives of the prominent men in the Kansas City, Kansas area. Annette Gleed, wife of Fred Gleed, owned a livery stable with J.W. Jones located at 444 State Avenue. Built by the Black carpenters and masons in the area, the stable housed over sixty horses.<sup>131</sup> J.H. Johnson, spouse of Lulu Johnson, brought his family during the early Exoduster movement and settled at 852 Freeman. He was an avid entrepreneur who ran a grocery store and sold real estate while attempting to publish one of the black newspapers in the city.<sup>132</sup> B.S. Smith, husband of Laura Smith, received his law degree from the University of Michigan in 1886 and relocated to Kansas City, Kansas in 1887. Not only did he manage his law firm out of his home, Mr. Smith eventually “served as deputy city attorney and in 1892, was

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<sup>131</sup> Greenbaum, 81

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 84

elected councilman for the Third Ward.”<sup>133</sup> He also became a member of the Niagara Movement headed by W.E.B. DuBois.

The Pierian went through several transformations before settling on a name, purpose, and plan of activities for the group of black women. Under their first elected president, Mrs. Silena Rivers (1894-96), the group chose as their purpose to focus on classic works of literature as well as the Negro authors and speakers of their time. Thus they chose the name “The Pierian” from the Alexander Pope’s “Essay on Criticism” and used “ A little learning is a dangerous thing. Drink deep or taste not the Pierian Spring” as their motto. The women chose this literary allusion as a name for two reasons. Although they were the first black literary club in Kansas City, Kansas, there were numerous organizations springing up in Kansas, which among black women were devoted to the visual arts and crafts. By choosing The Pierian, the women in this club differentiated themselves from the others that emphasized the visual arts rather than literary arts and interpretation. By not adding the word “club” at the end of their name, the women separated themselves from the more trendy societies that were developing only to die out quickly in the state. Therefore, they crowned their group with a name that they believed conveyed scholarly, stable image.

For the first three to four years the society’s early history is a consistent pattern in the marital, employment and class status among clubwomen in Kansas. Meetings were held every first Saturday afternoon in order to accommodate the unmarried high school teachers and day laborers as well as the women who did not work or who labored earlier in the day. At this time the club represented a mix of both working and rising middle class women. There was also a combination of married and single women who were active members of the club. This is apparent in a surviving handwritten program from 1897 which includes a roll of the names of

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 87.

active members and a listing of program activities which referred to the members as both “Mrs.” and “Miss”. The “mix” of class and marital status correctly reflected the national and local movement of Black women’s clubs during this time as seen in the development of groups such as the NACW.

The Kansas City League used their energy to create a settlement house for supplying the working class and migrant folk with housing and an industrial education. The women participating in the greater Kansas City club movement also assumed the role of community builders and served to construct a middle-class society. In February 1893, Josephine Silone Yates called for the creation of the Kansas City League. Yates was a teacher at Lincoln Institute in Jefferson City, Missouri, and was well-known throughout Black communities in Kansas and Missouri. Born in Mattituck, New York, Yates took to reading and writing at an early age, attending the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.<sup>134</sup> Yates accepted a teaching position at Lincoln in 1881 at the age of twenty-three. She later declined an offer from Booker T. Washington to become “lady-principal” at his Tuskegee Institute, and married William W. Yates.<sup>135</sup> After taking a hiatus from teaching, Yates became the driving force for the founding of the Kansas City League.

The Kansas City League, comprised of Black women already having a profound impact on the community, developed the first settlement house managed by Black women in Kansas City, Missouri. Although the organization was incorporated under Missouri laws, given the unique relationship Missouri had with northeastern Kansas, the Kansas City League consisted of women’s groups from Topeka, Lawrence, and Kansas City, Kansas. This bi-state cooperation sheds light on how this emergent class of Black women understood the formation of their

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<sup>134</sup> Gary R. Kremer and Cindy M. Mackey, ““Yours for the Race”: The Life and Work of Josephine Silone Yates” *Missouri Historical Review* (January 1996), 200.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 204



community. In fact, Josephine Yates and Anna H. Jones traveled to the Kansas side in order to establish the first Black YWCA in the area.<sup>136</sup> Yates was greatly active with the NACW, serving as national president 1901-03, a fact that was not lost on the State Federation body. The Kansas City League, the Pierian and the Sierra Leone club created close ties with the national organization and in turn with Yates. The Kansas City League published in the *Women's Era* newsletter on a regular basis, putting the Central Plains in the national discussion of the role of club women and the emerging middle-class.

Club women sought to create a sense of economic stability by securing employment for the recently-arrived migrants. According to Yates's report in the first issue of *Woman's Era*, the women "intended to make [their] work largely industrial in character since in a young and rapidly growing city constantly receiving an influx of various nationalities, it is exceedingly necessary that the industrial avenues shall be open to our young people."<sup>137</sup> Her desire to assist the down-trodden and uneducated citizens of Kansas City, Missouri and northeast Kansas is a direct response to Booker T. Washington's call to equip Black people with the industry and skills to better themselves financially. Yates states that incorporating the organization helped to "inspire confidence, gain permanence and be ready for the transaction of business."<sup>138</sup> By cultivating an idea of economic independence, Yates and the other women resisted racial oppression based on the negative images perpetuated by white Americans who believed the Negro unfit for society.

As the women were constructing their ideal local and regional communities, they were also striving to collaborate at the national level. Many of the women who were active in the late nineteenth century wanted to collaborate with the emerging national organization. The July 1895

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<sup>136</sup>Charles Coulter, "Notable Women in Early Kansas City," *Kansas City Star*, February 16, 2004.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

issue highlights the clubwomen around the nation preparing for the national conference scheduled later that month. Josephine Ruffin, editor of *Woman's Era* newsletter, states that clubwomen were showing “interest in and sympathy with the movement [and will have] substantial recognition in the presence of its delegates.”<sup>139</sup> Among others like Margaret Murray Washington and Fannie Barrier Williams, Ruffin assured her audience that Ida B. Wells will be one of the major guest speakers attending the conference. During the conference, which was held July 29-31, Washington challenged the local organizations to “adopt resolutions endorsing Miss Wells’ [sic] work.”<sup>140</sup> The resolutions would be adopted by local groups throughout the year. Committees were formed at the meeting to challenge the “Georgia convict system, lynching, and the Florida state law making it a crime to teach white and colored children at the same time in the same schools, and other atrocities.”<sup>141</sup> Other state and city organizations followed suit, publishing their resolutions in subsequent issues of the newsletter. This national push for activism created a seemingly strong bond between the women who were separated by state and city borders.

In the May 1894 issue of *Women's Era* the Kansas City League celebrated its first anniversary and ensured that the event would be recognized locally, regionally and nationally. Similar to the programs that other clubs around the nation planned, this celebration included “exercise of a public nature and the annual reports were listened to with much interest.”<sup>142</sup> There were speeches delivered by prominent men and women of the local community while “cheering letters were read from the leagues of Washington [DC], Boston, and Lawrence [KS].”<sup>143</sup> This last example further validates how the women were involved with the more national scene of

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<sup>139</sup> *Woman's Era*, July 1895.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

clubdom as well as their concentration on the well-being of their own community. This observation also emphasizes how the communities, not defined by geographic boundaries, the women constructed transcended local and regional borders and captured the national club movement.

West of Kansas City, club women in Topeka began building a foundation for the State Federation. As a site for industrial educational institutions and the seat of government, Topeka became fertile soil for the emergence of middle-class minded African Americans, especially club women. In the late nineteenth century, two clubs in Topeka emerged as organizers of the State Federation. The city, crowned the capital shortly after the Kansas became a state in 1861, was located about 68 miles west of Kansas City. During the nineteenth and early-twentieth-century, the Black community in Topeka worked to develop prosperous communities. Developing communities was not an easy task. Many of those who migrated to western Kansas to Nicodemus, did not fare well and moved to Tennesseetown, a small Black enclave northwest of Topeka. Those African American Exodusters who managed to develop some sort of wealth and prestige in the community, “preempted most positions of authority and responsibility before the 1880s were over,” and those who had arrived after 1879 only received partial acknowledgement as “faithful servants of the church.”<sup>144</sup> Interactions between whites and Blacks were everyday occurrences, however because there was an inconsistent pattern of Jim Crow in the state, there were odd systems of discrimination that would vary from neighborhood to neighborhood. African Americans often had greater access to political office than in other parts of the country, and those in Topeka initiated dialogue with people in powerful political position.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Cox, 165

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

Black women created the charitable, social and reform organizations in the Topeka, developing programs to aid their communities, especially during times of hardship and despair. The earliest club recorded in Topeka was the Coterie Club organized in January 1889. With a purpose to “pursue some line of literary study,” the women of the Coterie gather at the home of Mrs. D. H. Watkins.<sup>146</sup> Limited to twelve women, the Coterie club sought the “social and intellectual improvement of its members.”<sup>147</sup> In addition to literature, the members of the club emphasized current events, “Home and Fireside,” and “U.S. History.” The Coterie Club reorganizes in 1894 with a new focus on domestic sciences and the arts. Club member D. H. Jones migrated from Tennessee shortly after the Exoduster movement in 1884.<sup>148</sup> Serving the Midwest and Central Plains, Jones attended the Women’s Western State and Territories conference in Chicago in 1896 and was elected corresponding secretary. During the conference, the women collected 184.00 for foreign missions.<sup>149</sup> She continued her support of African American communities in the region by regularly visiting churches for mission programs in the area, including a trip to Colorado in June 1899.

Two new clubs emerged in Topeka toward the end of the century. The Oak Leaf Club, the organization that initiated the founding of the State Federation, was founded in 1898. A year later, a second club formed in the Topeka. Located in the state’s capital, the women of the Oak Leaf Club. Although one of the earliest clubs founded in Topeka, there is little information about the Oak Leaf’s early years beyond newspaper articles. Black women in Topeka came together to form a second club, the Ne Plus Ultra club. In February 17, 1899, “a far seeing women of [her]

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<sup>146</sup> J. H. Childers, “The Ladies Coterie.” *The Topeka Plaindealer* November 30, 1899.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

race” arranged a meeting with area women to foster the “spirit of good will and unity.”<sup>150</sup> Ossie Fox called a group of Topeka women together at the home of Mrs. J. M. Johnson to form an organization that encouraged “unity and goodwill through domestic artwork and community service.”<sup>151</sup> The members of Ne Plus Ultra club worked to “stimulate the domestic interests of home life and make life in the home one of less drudgery but more beauty.”<sup>152</sup> As with other clubs in the area, the women chose to organize “for the purpose of studying needle work in its various forms” as a route to overcoming the “drudgery” of housekeeping.<sup>153</sup> After a few years in existence, the members voted to change their name to Ne Plus Ultra Art and Literary club to reflect their focus on the arts, literature, and education. This club consisted of both married and single women. In the early years, the women met at 2:30-5:00pm every first, second, third and fifth Fridays. The membership altered meeting times to the second Saturday of each month from 11:00am-2:30 pm. The women chose the national organizations motto, “Lifting as We Climb,” as their own. Operating under a closed intake process, members presented selected a potential candidate and three additional members needed to speak on her behalf. If two existing members of the club rejected the candidate, she would not be invited to join.

Wichita, located in south central Kansas, also attracted an impressive number of African Americans during the nineteenth and early-twentieth-centuries. Seasonal migration to Wichita from southeastern towns such as Coffeyville, Pittsburgh, and Independence was quite common. Due to its location in the state and the nature of the community, and the higher numbers of Blacks in the city, African Americans in Wichita sought to resist the advancing Jim Crow

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<sup>150</sup> Ne Plus Ultra Art and Literary Club Archives, (find year) box 1 folder 1, Afro-American Clubwomen’s Project (KS), Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ne Plus Ultra Art and Literary Club Archives, “Year Book, 1929-30,” box 1 folder 6. Afro-American Clubwomen’s Project (KS), Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

agitation in the area as well as from the developing Indian Territory/Oklahoma. Although there were organizations in operation before 1900, the Booker T. Washington club is the earliest documented in Wichita. Founded in 1901 by Parthenia Glover, the Booker T. Washington club chose its name because “of his deep interest and successful work in the education of [their] race both intellectually and in manual training.”<sup>154</sup> With the motto, “Uplift of Negro Women,” the Washington club members desired to educate communities of women throughout the Central Plains. The women of the Booker T. Washington club concentrated on educating young Black youth, donating supplies to local elementary schools. The Douglass school, a segregated elementary school in Wichita received major gifts from the Washington club, including a piano for music students and a large portrait of their patriarch Booker T. Washington. As one of the first women’s organizations to join the Interstate outside of the northeastern region of the state, the Washington club embraced the idea of creating and connecting with communities through the central plains.

In the early part of the twentieth century, other clubs formed in Wichita. In 1912 the Alsbic Club, an acronym for Art, Literature, Science, Biography, Industry, and Charity, worked for the “welfare of humanity [which] has always been a concern for this club.”<sup>155</sup> The Book Lover’s Club formed in 1923 by Janie L. Pope, wife of Reverend R. L. Pope Pastor of St. Paul AME Church. The Book Lover’s club served as a medium for enriching its members culturally, through assigned readings, lectures and open discussions. With a twin club in Salina, the Wichita women traveled at least twice a year to visit their sister-organization. Arts and

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<sup>154</sup> “Club History,” Booker T. Washington Club Archives (Wichita) box 3 folder 22. Afro-American Clubwomen’s Project (KS), Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

<sup>155</sup> History of Wichita District Association of Colored Women, 1923-1941, Afro-American Clubwomen’s Project (KS), Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, 15.

entertainment became a major part of their program, and the Book Lover's club invited local and nationally recognized artists, musicians, poets, and scholars to Wichita annually. Stating that their programs gives "Wichita that opportunity of hearing some of our won celebrities, promotes interracial good will, and is the means of providing a scholarship for the ranking girl in any of our high schools."<sup>156</sup> There were two collaborative service organizations that emerged from the club groups included the Wichita Phyllis Wheatley Children's Home and the Mary B. Talbert branch of the YWCA, 1920 and 1924 respectively. Both programs were part of a nationwide community of Black women and were initiatives supported by the NACW.

Wichita was an anchor for other clubs in the more rural areas. The women of Great Bend were an interesting addition to clubdom because they hailed from a generally rural area of the state. In 1911, twelve founders of the Literary and Art club, the women of Great Bend formed by "women who lived on farms in the vicinity of Great Bend, and women who had a desire for growth, knowledge, of literature and art."<sup>157</sup> Entrenched in farm life, the women of Great Bend gathered together on their farms to discussion literature and lend their talents to the arts and crafts project. Unlike club women in the East or South, rural women in Kansas often viewed themselves as members and not the recipients of club work aid. Women in Newton, Kansas, created the Narcissus Art Club in 1918. A well-known club throughout the state, the Narcissus club purchased "a nice piece of ground and made some very credible donations to all the churches of the city."<sup>158</sup> Arkansas City, a small town located four miles north of the Oklahoma border, also joined the Wichita women.

Although the women of Wichita did not organize a city federation until 1919, they were very active and received great success and recognition, locally, state-wide and nationally, rather

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 15.

quickly. Already embroiled in action against local school boards, and resisting local and national violence against Black people, the Wichita women created a program targeting racial equality, educational advancement and child welfare. The Wichita City Federation's motto was, "Moving Onward and Upward," shed light on their emphasis on child welfare and education. Originally, organized to "promote the civic, racial, religious, political and educational interests of Negro Womanhood," their first mission was to care for the neglected and underprivileged children in the city. Three clubs, the Alsbic, Booker T. Washington, and the Great Bend, gathered on October 20, 1919 at the St. Paul AME church at Elm and Water streets in order to create a Wichita city federation.<sup>159</sup> Seeing that women in Wichita found clubs to be popular and believing that they must meet the needs of their own community, the women in the represented clubs decided to develop a local governing body. Because of its proximity to the southeastern part of the state and the Oklahoma border, the Great Bend and Arkansas City clubs, belonged to the Wichita city federation. Other small cities and towns included Dodge City, El Dorado, Hoisington, Hugoton, Newton, and Winfield, Kansas, further empowered the Wichita association. In their own words, the Wichita women believed that "the district operating as it does is in the center of the richest factories, Wheatbelt, Oil, and Milling Industries, all of which have helped to add much to the progress of our Charity, Music, and Scholarship Departments of the District, state, and national associations."<sup>160</sup> In other words, their work served the growing number of African Americans in the city, which in turn supported their efforts.

### **Kansas State Federation Founding**

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<sup>159</sup> "History of Wichita District Association of Colored Women, 1923-1941," Wichita Clubs City Association of Colored Women Archives, box 1 folder, Afro-American Clubwomen's Project (KS), Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.



As the final decade of the nineteenth century drew to a close, women in Topeka, Kansas City, Wichita, Nicodemus, Great Bend, and Paola, were active in the club movement, some even participated in the founding conventions of the NACWC in Boston. The majority of organizations across the nation focused on racial uplift through the acceptance and practice of middle-class values. Church circles, literary groups, and aid programs continued to grow, including the organizing of Black sororities, but the clubs of the late nineteenth century were decidedly middle-class in nature.<sup>161</sup>

Editors of the *Topeka Plaindealer* noted the change in Black life nationally and in Kansas and began the newspaper with this shift in mind. The role of Black women changed significantly and Chiles noted how clubdom dominated the lives of middle-class Blacks across the state. Although Chiles, Childers, and Harris were pleased, they were slightly disappointed in the few organizations focusing on home, domestic science, and the advancement of womanhood.

There has never been a time when our people could boast so many and such a variety of clubs as we have at the present day. In fact, it seems to be the era of clubs, and since we find them such a benefit to in the sciences of literature, music, and art, why would not also be wise to organize Self Culture and Domestic Science clubs, for the benefit of our homes? [W]e believe that much good can be accomplished for ourselves and those with whom we come in contact if clubs of that kind were organized.<sup>162</sup>

Earlier in the year, Chiles describes the need for “arousing a more than passing interest in domestic science and fine needle work, these clubs have certainly attained the supreme object of their conception.”<sup>163</sup> In his eyes the purpose these art clubs was to support “the peculiar sphere

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<sup>161</sup> Black sororities refers to the female organizations of the Divine Nine. Founded between 1906-1922, and often in conjunction with Black male fraternities, Black sororities are community service organizations. The first founded in 1906, was Alpha Kappa Alpha, followed by Delta Sigma Theta in 1913. The last, Sigma Gamma Rho was founded in 1922.

<sup>162</sup> Nick Chiles, Home and Club, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, April 14, 1899.

<sup>163</sup> Chiles, Home and Club, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, January 20, 1899.

in our social life where the real refinement and culture of womanhood.”<sup>164</sup> African Americans needed “real lovely homes, presided over by mothers whose matronly genius enables the beautifying of their homes.”<sup>165</sup>

Black club women in Kansas also sought their own identities in the West. While they viewed women in Washington, D.C., and Boston as sisters in the same struggle, Kansas women remained dedicated to the cause of developing Black communities in the West. As the year progressed, the *Topeka Plaindealer* printed weekly articles titled “Home and Club,” where editors persuaded club women to support the development of a federation of arts and domestic science clubs. The women working toward federation began to solidify their purpose actually limiting the diversity of clubs in the state. The majority of the church clubs remained but were not members of the federation. Those more industrial groups such as sewing clubs joined the Kansas City League settlement house movement. And with the printing of an article revealing the reformation of women’s clubs in Washington, DC pressed the issue more. In one of his many visits, Chiles notes that the “noble women of our race are doing much to elevate and better the condition of their less fortunate sisters.”<sup>166</sup> With homes for the orphaned, aged, day nurseries, and industrial schools, the women of the nation’s capital, were providing services for those of their race, which excluded the many programs for whites. Printing in great detail what the women in the East accomplished served as one catalyst to create the State Federation. Since women in Kansas were already organized in the individual groups, organizing state-wide seemed the next step.

The women witnessed a burgeoning effort to organize at the dawn of the twentieth century. The *Topeka Plaindealer* and the women who would eventually make up the state

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid

<sup>166</sup> J. H. Childers, “Washington Women in Reform Work,” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, December 8, 1899.

organization began to work together to make the gala a successful event. In the months leading up to June 1900, editors of the *Topeka Plaindealer* closely monitored the women's progress often offering advice on how they should collaborate.

We are not prepared to say, just now, upon what lines our Ladies will federate, but we are constrained to believe that the state organization if consummated will be sufficiently liberal to allow clubs of all kinds to become members.

Chiles believed that the women should unite “and their work divided, classified, and intelligently guided” and to “discuss questions relative to domestic economy, self-culture, music, and literature best calculated to advance the interest of our people.”<sup>167</sup> Interestingly enough, he does not mention the work in the community that women in the East were doing.

A few weeks before the federation extravaganza women from all over the state wrote to the *Topeka Plaindealer* expressing their excitement and anticipation.

I would like to say, through the columns of your journal, that I heartily indorse [sic] the plan of organizing a state federation of the Afro-American women's clubs of Kansas, and shall urge my club to send a representative.<sup>168</sup>

Women from individual clubs submitted columns voicing their excitement about the federation's event, hoping like Chiles and other leaders in the region that developing such an organization would shed light on the community of respectable Blacks in the Central Plains. The women of the Oak Leaf Club mailed over five hundred invitations throughout Kansas, including Topeka, Kansas City, Wichita, Newton, Paola, Parsons, and Leavenworth.

On the first day of the conference, Wednesday, June 20, 1900, the women formed a temporary organization in order to conduct business in an official manner, forming committees and electing officers. Mrs. M. Drane of Topeka was selected as temporary chairperson with Mrs.

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<sup>167</sup> Chiles, “Our Women's Work,” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 8, 1900.

<sup>168</sup> Mossie Ellison, “Editorial,” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 15 1900. Mossie Ellison served as Secretary in the Phyllis Wheatley Club of Paola, Kansas.

A. C. Scott of Leavenworth serving as secretary. The following morning the group authorized the founding of the State Federation, with the aid a of constitution committee outlining the organization's bylaws. Mrs. Lizzie (Elizabeth) Washington of Topeka's Oak Leaf Club was elected president. Washington served as the first president of the State Federation, and held the position for two years. She and her husband owned farmland in southwest Topeka, and they raised one child.<sup>169</sup> Entrenched in farm life, the Washington's were first generation descendants of Exodusters. Her parents were from. . . His parents were from. . . Washington believed in "tender compassion," and the ideals of striving for middle-class respectability.<sup>170</sup> Washington was in attendance at the convention in 1896, and routinely traveled to the annual NACW summer conference.

The other officers included Mrs. Dyson of Alpha Club of Kansas City as first vice president, Mrs. B. K. Bruce of the Nineteen Hundred Club of Leavenworth as second vice president, Mrs. M. B. Jordan of Topeka's Golden Rod club as recording secretary. Miss Mossie Ellison of Paola's Phyllis Wheatley club was the only single woman elected to an office that first year. The women concluded by passing resolutions in memory of those who worked tirelessly to make the State Federation a success. Clubs in attendance included Ne Plus Ultra, Oak Leaf Club, Golden Rod Club, Dumas Art Club, Oriental Club, Saint Elma Club, Rose Bud Club, and Pansy Club, all of Topeka. The Phyllis Wheately Club of Paola and the 1900 Art Club of Leavenworth were also present.

Following their initial gathering, the women headed back to their home towns with the full support of the *Plaindealer's* editors, readers, and their fellow citizens who believed in the

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<sup>169</sup> The farm was located along 29<sup>th</sup> and Van Buren streets, where Skaggs shopping center and Osco drug stores used to be.

<sup>170</sup> Carrie McLaughlin "The Kansas Association of Colored Women and Girl's Club" Afro-American Clubwomen's Project (KS), Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, 1

inherent worthiness of and righteous cause of women's club work. In the minds of Black middle-class in Kansas, these women "took hold of a phase of the race problem in which all should have vital interest . . . we shall watch with more than usual intent the growth of this organization and we predict for it a career of usefulness and a life of activity commensurate with the magnitude and greatness of the undertaking."<sup>171</sup> In Chiles's mind, the women of the State Federation were to be "the patron goddesses of the [home] altars" rating their "valuation of the woman by the character and charm her very individuality lend to the home over which she presides."<sup>172</sup> At this early date, most of the Kansas women agreed with Chiles, but as the decade continued, they began to stray from the narrative of the women's sphere.

Interestingly enough, the State Federation did not immediately seek membership in the national organization. As with other State Federations in the Central Plains, the Kansas group voted not to join the National Association of Colored Women as well as the Northwestern Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. The reluctance to join the NACW early on in its history caused divisions among individual women and clubs across the state. The Self-Culture and Sierra Leone clubs of Lawrence, the Pierian, and the Kansas City League did not attend the gala and their membership chose not to join the State Federation; however, they were active the national organization and its founding in the late-nineteenth century. A few groups in Kansas City, Kansas and Lawrence operated somewhat autonomously from the State Federation, but were very involved with the national organization. Speculation by scholars and local historian suggest that a few clubs in the area did not view the women of the State Federation as reflecting middle-class values. Whether due to the inclusion of rural women, or the Federation's reluctance to join the national organization, or the agricultural background of most of its members and the

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<sup>171</sup> Chiles, "Among Kansas Women." *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 29, 1900.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

towns they came from, the clubs in the groups in Lawrence and a few in Kansas City shunned the notion of joining the Federation.

While the state organization was a great place to bring the women together, they realized that meeting once a year would not support their efforts on a day-to-day basis. The regions of the state were diverse in nature and required club women to develop area-specific programs. Since the state of Kansas consisted of urbanish enclaves with growing educational institutions, rural communities with southern tendencies and pioneering territories, the city federations were distinctive. Women in Wichita embraced their calling to aid young women to attend area teacher's colleges, while women in Kansas City, Kansas more frequently collaborated with organizations across the river in Missouri. Topeka women anchored the State Federation, while more rural groups concentrated on their local communities and towns. With different needs in the state, city federations became popular in Kansas. Topeka became the first organization to develop a city federated league. In 1901, the women of Topeka formed their own city-wide organization. The Topeka Federated Colored Women's Clubs consisted of the Ne Plus Ultra Art and Literary, the Oak Leaf Art and Charity, and Oriental Literary and Art clubs. With "Rowing Not Drifting," as their motto, the Topeka women worked to prove that Kansas would be the heart of the national club movement. The Progressive Women's club of Emporia and the Twentieth Century Literary and Art club of Manhattan joined the Topeka group. Without a large contingent of women in Manhattan or Emporia, women in these cities created ties with clubs in Topeka. The Black population in the Central Plains in general and Kansas specifically did not believe geographical distance as a hindrance to the formation of community. Because they were small in numbers, African Americans understood their community as being state and regionally inclusive. Also, the inclusion of Manhattan and Emporia in the Topeka organization linked the

three sizable colleges in the area—Washburn University in Topeka, Emporia State College in Emporia, and Kansas Agricultural and Mechanical Institute in Manhattan.

In 1901, the convention was held in Leavenworth at Chickering and G.A.R Hall. As noted by B. K Bruce in an editorial submitted to the *Plaindealer*, both African Americans and whites attended the exhibit hall functions. In an eager attempt to assert the moral value of Black women, Bruce remarked that whites “were as free in their praise as were the colored people,” and the women’s display were the finest in the West.<sup>173</sup> “All Doers are Welcome,” was the motto of the convention and the meetings were attended by all the women and the “betterment of our people was apparent always and was discussed by those who were doing something and who were trying to lay a foundation on which to build a race.”<sup>174</sup> In additional comments, Bruce discussed his view of the changing scene of race men and women in the state of Kansas.

If I read the signs aright a new era is about to dawn on Kansas, an era in which the talkers; those whose stock in trade is talk, talk will be relegated to the rear and those who are actually doers will be advanced to the front, and the ladies will be the pioneers in this movement.

The women, in Bruce’s estimation were engaging in real advancement and were “such an unusual thing” since the majority of “meetings held by men in Kansas, have been for the sole purpose of advancing some men into political favor.”<sup>175</sup> Middle-class minded Black men, which included Chiles, suggested that club women resign themselves to their own sphere, and to refrain from participating in the political and economic world of men.

The State Federation decided to forgo their third annual convention in June 1903 when massive floods devastated the region. Forgoing their annual convention, the State Federation

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<sup>173</sup> B. K. Bruce, “The State Federation of Art Clubs,” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, July 12, 1901.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

worked to heal the land and the people living in their state. Club women were “sewing and fitting for the sufferers,” and providing other forms of aid to victims.<sup>176</sup> With most of the African American neighborhoods in low-lying floodplains, their homes and communities received the brunt of the deluge. Many of those devastated by the natural disaster were the Exodusters, who “had served the better part of their days working for the slaveholders,” and now “in their declining years, they are left without home, money or friends.”<sup>177</sup> As reported “[f]rom Salina to Kansas City for 200 miles, the fertile valley of the Kaw is laid waste” with the loss of life numbering in the hundreds.<sup>178</sup>

In every village and hamlet through this rich stretch  
of territory, property has been destroyed, families  
made homeless, and in other portions of the state  
Great losses and suffering have occurred.<sup>179</sup>

Racist sentiment bubbled beneath the aid effort as “some white papers [were] making an effort to throw stigma upon the name of hard working Blacks.”<sup>180</sup> The mainstream media often used stereotypical images of Blacks as idle people, unwilling to work. Chiles remarked that Black laborers were as hardworking as any other class of people; however, they asked to receive equal payment, which irritated a few supervisors. Chiles concludes that “men have a perfect right to look to their welfare, and to the place where there is most benefit for themselves and families.”<sup>181</sup> The suffering was greatest for Blacks as they received the least amount of help. The needs of the community were met by the members of their own community. The members of the Kaw Valley Lodge No. 18, St. Luke’s Temple No. 5, and the Tabernacle and Tent of the

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<sup>176</sup> Chiles, “The Flood Sufferers,” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 12, 1903.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Chiles, “Kansas Appeals for Aid,” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 5, 1903.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Chiles, “The Flood Sufferers,” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 12, 1903.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.



International Order of Twelve, the True Eleven and the Benevolent Society sent its members to alleviate the flood devastation in Topeka and Kansas City.<sup>182</sup>

In the early part of the century the State Federation women continued to focus on married women, parenting, and the domestic sciences, however young and unmarried women were active in club life. In 1904, the State Federation convention met in Lawrence, in Everett Hall June 15-16 with “twenty-one well represented clubs united this year to promote the work to success.”<sup>183</sup> Many of the women attending the conference were young and unmarried, and contributed by presenting papers and offering solos. Black Greek letter organizations such as Alpha Kappa Alpha or Delta Sigma Theta had not yet formed; therefore many of the young college women who might have been active in camp Greek life chose membership in area clubs. Lawrence hosted the Progressive Club, an organization targeted to young college women. Active in both the Kansas City League and the State Federation, the young women participated in numerous community and state events. At the end of the session, Lulu Harris of Topeka, the only single woman to head the State Federation was elected president and the body voted to hold the next convention in her city. While newly-elected presidents often hosted conventions, it was not guaranteed that her city would become the site of the next year’s conference.

The fifth annual program was held in Topeka, June 15-16, 1905. The women reserved the Representative Hall at the State House. There were over 200 delegates in attendance with over 1500 enjoying the reception on Wednesday night. Women from Topeka, Lawrence, Leavenworth, Salina, Kansas City and Wichita traveled to the capital city to participate in the convention which was “one of the largest gathering of colored women ever held in Kansas and

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<sup>182</sup> “Selected Events from, the Early Years of the Kansas Association of Colored Women’s Clubs,” Kansas Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Archives, box 1 folder 31. Afro-American Clubwomen’s Project (KS), Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

<sup>183</sup> Chiles, “The State Federation! Colored Women’s Arts Clubs Meet in Lawrence. Interesting Programs!” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 24, 1904.

they have distinguished themselves as being equal of any women in the state.”<sup>184</sup> In the article published about the event Chiles recommended that the “brothers in white who have no soul or conscience of right when it comes to the Negro,” to pay close attention to the good the club women do in their communities. It was during the 1905 convention that the women began forming the junior program, introducing the State Federation’s kindergarten to the entire body. In addition to the kindergarten children, young women from Lane school, the segregated elementary school in the city, attended the convention, offering songs and entertainment for the women. The clubs in attendance included the Adelpia, Progressive and Alpha clubs of Kansas City, the Imperial Art and Carnation club of Lawrence, the Golden Link club of Wichita, the N.U.G and Dunbar clubs of Salina, the Clover Leaf and 1900 Art, and Progressive Study clubs of Leavenworth, the Golden Rod, Oak Leaf, Rosebud, Excelsior, Dumas, Ne Plus Ultra, Atheneum, Oriental, Sheldon League, and Orphan’s Home of Topeka.

By 1910, 30 clubs representing 10 cities and 600 women attended the state convention held in Atchison at the True Eleven Hall June 15 and 16. Chiles stated that “no organization is proving in such an effective manner the advancement of our women as our state federation.”<sup>185</sup> In 1911, some members began to move beyond the cultural and domestic aspects of the club movement to focus on race issues. Many of these more outspoken women were young and unmarried. Miss Nellie Ford of Kansas City offered read papers on “The Race Wonderful,” during the annual convention in Newton. The Carnation Club of Lawrence hosted the convention in 1913, welcoming 139 delegates from over 50 clubs to their city. Kansas City

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<sup>184</sup> Chiles, “The State Federation! Colored Women’s Clubs Make a Brilliant Showing in Topeka” *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 23, 1905.

<sup>185</sup> Chiles, “Negro Club Women Meet,” *The Topeka Plaindealer* June 3, 1910.

clubs lead “in the valuation of art work with displays valued at \$935.”<sup>186</sup> The charitable donations totaled \$1945.82, which would be used for the charitable organizations either managed by the federation or individual city leagues. The State Federation clubs donated monetary gifts to those in charge of charity, and portions of the art valuations were also submitted. The Carnation Club was the only organization located in Lawrence that participated in State Federation programs. The Sierra Leone, Self- Culture, and Double Twelve clubs were never federated members of the state organization, and only hosted the summer convention twice with the 1913 program being their final appearance.

The 1914 convention was held in Kansas City, Kansas, at Sumner High School with a program aimed at understanding the political climate of the time. Sumner high school, founded in 1905, was an all-Black school for Kansas City’s African American community. Created after a racially-charged incident between young white and Black men inspired its founding, educators in the region and nationally regarded the school as a stalwart in education. Sumner included both industrial and liberal educational programs. In fact, the printing students actually printed year book programs for the Pierian women in the early years of the decade. During the conference sessions, “papers on ‘civil Righteousness’ and ‘Women want the Ballot’ [were] much discussed.”<sup>187</sup> Black women discussed the suffrage movement and were vocal advocates for the vote for women. In Kansas women voted on school board elections as early as 1861, when it entered the Union. In 1912, women received the ballot for state elections. While middle-class minded Black men did not always support women’s voting rights, the issue was important to the

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<sup>186</sup> “Selected Events from, the Early Years of the Kansas Association of Colored Women’s Clubs,” Kansas Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Archives, box 1 folder 31. Afro-American Clubwomen’s Project (KS), Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

<sup>187</sup> Selected History. Kansas Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Archives, box 1 folder 24. Afro-American Clubwomen’s Project (KS), Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

Black community nonetheless. Chiles, for example, attempted to remain neutral in his paper, but in a few articles, he did not have a positive opinion of women voters.

A troubling violent act against Black women forced the women in the state to respond beyond their domestic science and artistic endeavors. Violence against women moved the club members into action. In November of 1915, attendants at the Kansas state hospital in Topeka reportedly kidnapped and raped several young Black women on the institutional grounds. The *Topeka Daily Capital*, identifying them as Alberta Hadley, 17, and Thelma Grant 14, described the incident as “orgies.”<sup>188</sup> Taken into custody in Topeka after supposedly, running away from home and hopping a Santa Fe train from Kansas City, the police turned the girls over the state hospital. As the *Topeka Plaindealer* recorded, the brutality occurred over at least one year while the superintendent watched without report. Chiles writes that “at last the white man has been shown up in his true light in this scandal of the state hospital.”<sup>189</sup> It was reported that several white men took “young girls 13 and 14 years old up into an institution and into a private room of the guards and there keep them for immoral purposes for days; and then let them down in sacks at night.”<sup>190</sup> Because the hospital was segregated, the attendants could reach and abuse Black female patients without detection. The hospital housed Black women in “cottages,” outside on the main building on the institutions grounds. The white nurses, who were to serve Black patients, did not wish to tend to the women, who were “left alone at night by the white nurses when they wished to attend dances.”<sup>191</sup>

The mother of Alberta Hadley contacted the assistant county attorney A. C. Bartel to tell of the crimes against her daughter. The doctor in charge of the hospital Dr. T. C. Biddle,

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<sup>188</sup> “Negro Girls Tell of Relations with 7 Men in Asylum” *Topeka Daily Capital* November 14, 1915.

<sup>189</sup> Editorial, *Topeka Plaindealer*, November 19, 1915.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

received warning from other patients and attendants, approached the accused and warned them to end the abuse. George Frost marshal of the court of Topeka “obtained the assistance of Harvey Parsons chief of police,” serving warrants and arresting the men involved.<sup>192</sup> The men named in the complaint fled the scene shortly after collecting their pay. One man, D. G. Turner, remained, but the others, Jack Cummings and Jack Berry, the ring leaders, and D. E. Deese and Joseph Elliott left before officers could reach the hospital. Robert Arnold, another attendant, served as the watchman making sure no one found about the assaults. The last man accused was Arthur Davenport who fled to Nebraska in October of 1915. Black citizens in the state approached the Governor Hodges about punishing the attackers through trial and conviction, as well as lobbied to have female attendants in the hospital so that Black female patients had some sort of protection.

The call to more political action was headed by women in Wichita. The racial tension arising in the southern tier of the state and in Oklahoma prompted club women to join the larger national call to resistance. In 1916, prior to the State Federation’s June convention, the Northwestern Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs and its members joined the Ida B. Wells campaign to lobby for anti-lynching legislation. Meeting in Wichita, one of the most proactive cities in the state, the women of the regional organization penned a resolution supporting national legislation to ban lynching. At that session, the women read letters of salutation from the governor of the eighteen states represented.<sup>193</sup> Henrietta Harper, president of the Kansas state federation, was a definite supporter of the Northwestern federation coming to the city. As part of the Northwestern Federation’s annual convention, the Wichita City Federation hosted the two-day meeting at the courthouse’s district court quarters. African American men and women

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<sup>192</sup> Editorial, *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 14, 1915.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

knew of Wichita, as well as other southern-tier cities, as a more politically active area of the state. The purpose of the meeting was to adopt a set of resolutions to support the anti-lynching campaign, which supported making lynching a federal crime. Lynching, an act of terror, was commonly used to intimidating Black people from exercising their civil rights. The Northwestern Federation sent a resolution to Chicago where the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs convention was being held. They included in their demands was the request for a federal anti-lynching law, suffrage, the end of Jim Crow railroad cars, reform of marriage and divorce laws, and support for federal child labor laws. The issues brought to the table by the women emphasized the triple bind of gender, race and class. At the heart of their political pressure was their position as women, wives and mothers who fought against unfair marriage and divorce laws, violent and unsettling Jim Crow mandates, and working children who did not have opportunities for education. The passing of laws that prevented exploitation of women and children would, in their words,

Forever put an end to the demoralizing influences  
which follow the present legislation which legalizes  
marriages in one state and places a blot upon the innocent  
offspring in another section of the same great commonwealth.

Finally the Northwestern Federation women sought full and national suffrage for women believing that

best interests of the whole country will be protected when  
the women who bear the children make the homes, tutor the  
youth and sustain the church by their strength and taxes,  
are empowered to cast their ballots for those who are placed  
in the guidance of the ship of state.

As they continued to remain focused on their position in the community, they found space to be political, forcing the private domestic sphere into a public legislative discussion. While they urge

obtaining middle-class respectability, club women sought to bring family and gender matters to the political arena.

Upon President Harper's arrival at the 16<sup>th</sup> annual summer session in Parsons, she presented to the Kansas Federation the work done by the Northwestern Federation and the several Kansas women and clubs present at the meeting. She then suggested that the State Federation seek membership in the Northwest Federation. The State Federation membership needed to cast votes in order to join the Northwestern Federation. The matter was brought to vote twice during the convention with only half voting to submit application papers to the Northwestern Federation, therefore the State Federation did not join the Northwestern Federation. While the vote meant that the organization would not join, individuals, local clubs, and city federations were welcome to seek membership. However, the imprint of the situation was not lost on the Kansas women. For the rest of the convention, they focused their energy working on issues they felt they could affect, beginning with the Jim Crow incident in Parsons. After they contacted the assistant county attorney by letter on June 14, by June 16, 1916, the final day of their convention, Kansas club women received a response from C. J. Taylor, assistant county attorney of Labette County. He states that the "matter of the violation of section No. 1 chapter No. 49 of the Laws of 1874, by the proprietors of certain places of amusement in the City of Parsons has just been called to our attention by your committee."<sup>194</sup> He continues promising that an investigation of the discriminatory practices will take place promptly.

For the first 16 years of its existence, the women of the State Federation had emphasized home maintenance and childrearing as ways of signifying middle-class respectability. During their summer conventions, usually held during the last week of June annually, the women raised money for charities; however they saw it to be futile in the face of Jim Crow and violence. Thus

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

they acted in unison to address these issues in the political arena with their own agendas that emphasized their mission. It was following the outrage at the state hospital spurred the State Federation of colored women's clubs, that the collective gathered to lobby for legislation for an anti-lynching law, the repeal of Jim Crow in Kansas and the nation, women suffrage and child labor laws. Following the mounting incidents against Black people in Kansas, the State Federation worked to become a more forceful political presence in the state. The Northwestern Federation's alliance with the national organization over the anti-lynching bill and the petition to the Parsons county attorney offered the best opportunity to "make themselves felt as a political factor [through their] activity seeing that they as a race get justice."<sup>195</sup>

Harper's presidency signaled a more close relationship with the national organization, which coincided with the NACW's effort to create a more powerful enterprise throughout the country. The national organizer Victoria Clay Haley of St. Louis visited the convention to encourage women in Kansas as well as the Central Plains to be active members in the NACW. With Harper at the helm, the State Federation also vowed to take a stance for the advancement of the race. At the State Federation annual convention in Hutchison, the delegates passed Kate Wichklint's resolution, stating that

Whereas the cup of iniquity is seemingly full running over in every nook and corner encircling the entire domain, thereby causing great unrest everywhere; be it Resolved that we as a race and members of the State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs do hereby pledge ourselves in the name of God and our country, to remain loyal [to the race] in the future as we have in the past.<sup>196</sup>

Harper and other Wichita women perceived a benefit from being involved with the club movement on a national level.

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<sup>195</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 23, 1916.

<sup>196</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 29, 1917



As the decade advanced, the conflict over whether to seek membership into the NACW was such an issue that it alerted the National Organizer. Throughout the early part of the century local Kansas clubs attended national meetings, often taking part in the business of the organization presenting papers, operating budgets, and chairing committees. It was the National Organizer who, between 1916-1918, took to the road to visit and evaluate the state federations in the rural parts of the South and the vast areas of the West. Because the 1918 national convention would be held in Denver, Colorado, the national officers believed they needed an understanding of what club women in rural areas and in the West were doing, “particularly the States of Kansas, Colorado, and the neighboring States.”<sup>197</sup> In addition to Kansas and Colorado, she visited Indiana, Missouri and Utah. In addition to reporting on the activities of these club women, the national organization also desired to know why some areas did not organize state federations and why some groups did not affiliate with the NACW. One problem as the National Organizer, noted was the in order to be a member of the NACW, clubs were required to join State Federations. In the case of some rural communities, local clubs were “too far off or some State requirement was not agreeable to the club.”<sup>198</sup> She included that her presence at some state meetings she was “forthwith accused of taking the State Organizer’s job and meddling with the State’s business.”<sup>199</sup> Women in the Central Plains remained leery of remitting power or control to the NACW. Geographically removed from their plight, some Kansas women and others in their region, rejected the added financial burden of joining the NACW and what relinquishing funds would do to their already limited resources and unsettled population.

In Kansas the conflict emerged for several reasons. The Sierra Leone Club of Lawrence attended the 1895 conference in Boston, bringing back with it an energy and enthusiasm for both

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<sup>197</sup> National Notes, 1918. NACW Records, Bethune Council House, Washington, DC., 45.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

local and national work. These early clubs heeded the call from Mary Church Terrell, Josephine Silone Yates, and Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin to become an active part of the national fever spreading across the nation. The majority of Kansas clubs organized around the turn of the century. The early clubs nurtured their relationship with the national organization and believed themselves to be cut from the same moral, social and class conscious mold. The later clubs as well as the state federation visualized a more local agenda, tending to their own communities, people and expectations. Although aware of the national movement, the Kansas federation was a collective of women more concerned with the immediacy of their local needs. In addition to their general emphasis on the local, the ever-detailed rules and regulations that governed the NACW deterred and even prohibited some state federations and local club women from joining. The Talbert law, enacted at the 1916 convention in Baltimore, Maryland, “blocked the progress of clubs to the NACW.”<sup>200</sup> The prickliest rule enacted stated that

All clubs desiring affiliation with the National Association of Colored Women be required to obtain membership through their State Federation. Where no State Federation exists, individual clubs will be admitted until such time as there shall be a State Federation organized.

In Kansas, this meant that the early clubs who believed themselves to be affiliated with the national organization were required to join the State Federation, a collective already leery of that distant power and more importantly their financial, and their local office positions. The Sierra Leone, Self-Culture clubs of Lawrence, and the Pierian of Kansas City, Kansas, and other earlier groups were called to join the State Federation in order to officially do business with NACW.

As the National Organizer commented in her report, she

Could go into the State and roe interest and enthusiasm but could not get clubs to join the NACW until they had joined the State. In

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 44. This interaction with what the NACW called, rural clubs was documented in the NACW’s national papers.

some instances the State meeting was far off or some State requirement was not agreeable to the club. In other cases I found that where I could get the clubs to join the State and NACW, I was forthwith accused of taking the State Organizer's job and meddling with State's business. I was not always sure that if the club was willing to pay State and NACW, that the club would be accepted by the State.<sup>201</sup>

The National Organizer concludes that the rules regulating entrance into the NACW were too restrictive and recommended that "if our work is to reach all women we must let down this bar."<sup>202</sup> Only clubs that joined their state federation could apply for membership in the NACW. The National Organizer's eye-opening travels through the Midwest and Central Plains were meant to advocate for the further development of the NACW. While visiting the State meeting in 1917, she noted that Kansas club women and those rural organizations "think in many cases to belong to the State is sufficient and that they belong to the national."<sup>203</sup> At the heart of matter was the need to retain management of local clubs and the resources, both monetary and human, in the state of Kansas and the Central Plains.

In 1922, after deliberating for years, the State Federation sought membership with the NACW. While this was the State Federation's first collective association with the national organization, individual clubs were already involved. Its entrance into the NACW organization coincided with the State Federation's national recognition for its local programming. The Kansas State Federation emphasized reaching rural women, engaging young women, and promoting the arts; areas that the NACW sought to strengthen in its program.

Just as club women in the Central Plains sought to be more politically engaged, they also worked to bridge the divide between rural women and the emerging urban communities in the region. Reaching rural women became a major objective of the State Federation, but not in a

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 45

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 47.

critical or disparaging manner. Unlike urban areas of the country, many rural women in Kansas and the Central Plains joined as members of the clubs and federations. Seeing that regions of the state remained mostly rural, connecting with ladies on farms and farming communities became an important task in stabilizing Black communities in the states. In 1922, Childs divided the State Federation into four districts in order to connect and organize rural women of the state. Prior to her dictations, the two major city leagues, Topeka and Wichita, attracted many of the rural club women. With Childs's restructuring of the federation came a change in how women understood their relationship with the NACW. Childs took the advice of the national organizer who had visited a few years earlier, and constructed an organization more acceptable to the national body and more willing to joining the NACW.

Engaging in local politics and bridging the rural and urban divide were two of the local objectives that the Kansas State Federation created. The middle part of the decade brought national prominence to the State Federation. In 1924 the Kansas Junior Federation officially organized after operating for close to fifteen years. Consisting of club women's daughters, this program provided club women with a place to introduce to their daughters to middle-class sensibilities. Kansas club women encouraged young women and girls to be active in the State Federation since its inception without hosting an official junior league. On the surface of the matter, managing a youth-oriented program was nothing new for club women, the women of the Central Plains sought to develop additional routes to a stable population. Creating sustainable Black communities in the Central Plains required the cultivation of new generations, and therefore, starting with the youngest and most impressionable members of the community. The first activity for the junior league was a Mother-Daughter radio show with speeches and songs

broadcast from the St. John A.M.E. church in Topeka.<sup>204</sup> A ceremony followed with the girls entering the sanctuary carrying lighted candles. There were 528 young women and 16 clubs represented at the convention in 1925. The junior league continued to grow, and eventually became a model for the NACW's girls' program.

Kansas women also led the national organization in the area of the arts. The Wichita Federation developed an outstanding music program, which produced the NACW's national song. Mollies Fines of the Wichita City Federation, who was the state music director, held nation-wide competitions on the district and state levels for adults and children for instrumental and vocal performers in both classical and traditional African American spiritual genre.<sup>205</sup> Through her efforts, Fines became a nationally recognized figure in the club movement becoming the national music chairperson, penning the "National Motto Song," which the NACW membership accepted in 1925. Whether it was collaborating with rural women, creating youth organizations, or excelling in the arts, Kansas women reached national recognition by understanding and supporting the development of their communities in the Central Plains.

The Kansas Federation met once a year from the beginning of their founding. In the first thirty years, Lawrence, Salina, Topeka, Kansas City, Atchison, Parson, Hutchison, Wichita, Great Bend, Junction City, and Newton, all hosted the state convention at least once. The movement throughout the state brings to mind the extensive railroad system and how African American women navigated the railway. While out-migration was a constant reality for Blacks in Kansas, African Americans, including club women, created and relied on a state-wide collection of communities to stabilize their region. Using an extensive rail system that transverse

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<sup>204</sup> There is no indication from the archives that this radio broadcast was an annual program, but the junior league continued to grow throughout the state. I figure that the population of young girls eventually outgrew the radio show. I do know that the lighted candle ceremony was an annual event during the junior conventions.

<sup>205</sup> Afro-American Clubwomen Project, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, 4.

the expansive rural areas and connected urban enclaves, African Americans in Kansas remained a part of their virtual community even if they seemed, on the surface, as isolated.

While Kansas club women created the State Federation to corral the growing numbers of art clubs, and in turn galvanize their efforts to promote middle-class respectability, they found themselves expanding their initial understanding of club work. By the end of the 1920s, organizations such as the local YWCAs, homes for girls, and mothers' clubs joined the State Federation. By 1930, the State Federation created a successful Junior League, established collegiate scholarship for young Kansas women, gained notoriety for their artistic talents, and lobbied to pass a national anti-lynching law challenging Jim Crow laws in the state. *The Topeka Plaindealer* achieved state-wide circulation, and was read by patrons nationwide. By 1930, the State Federation convention held in Wichita included over 150 delegates.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> "Selected History," Kansas Association of Colored Women's Clubs Archives, box 1 folder 24. Afro-American Clubwomen's Project (KS), Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

### Chapter III: Laboring in a Righteous Cause: Maintaining the Home, Childrearing, and Nurturing Communities

Why we, as a race of people are asked to raise better babies and build better homes when after we have striven to raise strong boys and girls, in body and minds, they are mobbed and burned at the stake?

Mrs. Beatrice Childs, President Wichita City Association, 1921

Negro women of America are the most abed and unprotected of any class on earth; but in the face of seemingly insurmountable barriers and difficulties, they have laid the foundation of a manhood and womanhood which will yet bring honor and renown to the country that made them “hewers of wood and drawers of water.” With a bravery and fidelity that have won respect from all honorable people they took the major portion of the Black man’s burden—the rearing of families –and oftentimes provided food, clothing and shelter, while many husbands and fathers wasted their substance in rioting and gambling. Negro mothers delved in the gold mine of the washtub and the kitchen that their sons and daughters might be able to obtain educations in all lines of work.

Nick Chiles, *The Topeka Plaindealer* April 21, 1899

In the shadows of the race riots in Greenwood-Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1921, Beatrice Childs proclaimed that the racist, violent, and deadly assault on Black people unequivocally threatened the progress of families and their households. African Americans faced an increasingly dangerous world, threatened by de facto and de jure racism, which challenged their survival as well as excluded them from social services and basic dignity. Although denied the respect they were entitled to, the members of the State Federation believed that childrearing and home maintenance were the backbone of a strong middle-class community. Club women were not alone in their thinking. *The Topeka Plaindealer* published several articles instructing its readers to comply with carefully detailed tenets of everything domestic. Articles such as “Home and Club,” “Clubwomen’s Work,” and “Businessmen and the Home,” were long-standing editorials. Many Black-male critics, including Nick Chiles, suggested that women remain in their domestic sphere concentrating on rearing children and maintaining the home. The line that determined what was acceptable for women to do outside the home was thin yet visible.

While *The Topeka Plaindealer* newspapers editors clearly desired to relegate Black women to domestic duties the reality was that Black women were fully engaged beyond that. Black women worked to oppose the system of Jim Crow, racially motivated violence, and economic discrimination. Not incidentally they saw how the restrictions of Jim Crow affected

their lives, homes and families. In this chapter, I examine the State Federation women and newspaper editors understanding of the struggle to build Kansas communities in spite of growing discrimination, racial violence, out migration, and limited resources. While urban areas grew, rural life remained important, widening the gap between the two and causing strife within the Black community. Kansas club women continued to navigate their relationship with the NACW, which at times was contentious, all the while toiling to maintain home and hearth in an increasingly traumatic time. The State Federation served as a state-wide stabilizer creating programs to support communities' middle-class respectability, yet under their own terms and conditions. At times, their desire to remain autonomous and refusal to join the NACW did not sit well with the national organization and often led to friction among clubs. Kansas club women framed their understanding of childrearing, community nurturing and home maintenance according to life in the Central Plains. Raising children to build stable communities and creating respectable homes always furthered regional values and middle-class respectability. I argue that African Americans in Kansas believed their "righteous cause" of home maintenance and childrearing stabilized Black communities in the state.

The Greenwood-Tulsa riots was a regional terror attack on what was referred to as Black Wall Street, a neighborhood of African American entrepreneurs that had gained economic independence. Many African Americans who had migrated to Kansas in the late-nineteenth century relocated to Oklahoma as land, once part of Indian Territory, was reclassified and opened to settlement. Black Kansans, whose dreams of finding prosperity in the Sunflower State were dashed by rough weather and unyielding land, left for the new lands opening up in Oklahoma Territory in the 1850s. Black Wall Street threatened the very root of white supremacy and white fear, and anger led to violence against Blacks who specifically flourished in that



district. According to accounts, “1,256 houses were burned in a thirty-six square block area of Greenwood, including churches, stores, hotels, businesses, two newspapers, a school, a hospital, and a library, in short all the institutions that perpetuated Black life in Tulsa.”<sup>207</sup> The Tulsa riot occurred too close to home for most Blacks in Kansas, especially in the southern tier of counties that shared a border with Oklahoma. African Americans living in cities such as Independence, Pittsburg, Parsons, Coffeyville, Arkansas City, and Liberal, Kansas, were vigilant and monitored encroaching racially motivated activities and violence across the state line. If a massacre could happen in a place a few hours away, then it could happen in Kansas. Child’s speech illuminated the problem facing Black families: race progress cannot be achieved if white supremacist power—Jim Crow and violence were to reign reigns in the United States. The “righteous cause” as Chiles described it was the struggle for Black women to create loving, beautiful homes in the midst of a violent, oppressive and sometimes life-threatening environment. Racial uplift is referred to as the response to and challenge of white supremacy and Jim Crow in the US. Refuting the images of African Americans as inferior, middle class Blacks believed that “the improvement of [their] material and moral condition through self-help would diminish white racism, they sought to rehabilitate the race’s image by embodying respectability enacted through an ethos of service to the masses.”<sup>208</sup> Thus shortly after its founding the State Federation worked to counter white supremacy. The fact that Blacks also left Kansas during the early twentieth-century proved detrimental to the establishment of stable communities. Institutions, business districts, schools, churches and cultural organizations, all markers of middle-class respectability

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<sup>207</sup> James S. Hirsch. *Riot and Remembrance: The Tulsa Race War and its Legacy*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), 2. For more information on the Greenwood-Tulsa 1921 riots, see Alfred L. Brophy’s *Reconstruction the Dreamland: The Tulsa Riot of 1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.), Tim Madigan’s *The Burning :Massacre, Destruction, and the Tulsa Race Riots of 1921* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books St. Martin’s Press, 2001).

<sup>208</sup> Kevin K. Gaines *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) xiv.

could not thrive on the constant churning of the labor and migration turnstile. To flourish and advance their communities, Black Kansans needed their world to be stabilized and that would not happen as long as life continued along the same systems.

At the time of Childs's speech, the State Federation was twenty years old and had adopted other causes beyond the art clubs. Two generations removed from the Exodusters, out-migration out-paced in migration, creating a flow of African Americans from the state. While home maintenance and communal nurturing were important to Blacks in Kansas, none was more crucial to the development of their communities than childrearing. For African Americans in Kansas a route to stable populations included raising children rooted in the neighborhoods and communities across the state. Raising children and creating strong homes proved difficult in early twentieth century Kansas with the national pattern of massive Black migration to northern and eastern urban enclaves. At the same time whites were imposing Jim Crow or exclusion, restricting Blacks opportunities and freedom. School districts in Topeka, Wichita, Kansas City, Parsons, brought segregation cases before circuit and supreme to exclude Black children from attending school with whites. Blacks were segregated in or denied admission to many hospitals; children were refused services in local orphanages, and denied access to other community institutions. By 1921, club women were working to advance Black life in Kansas in the face of increased restrictions. Kansas club women were not lost in a void of middle-class strivings unaware of their dire surroundings and ever-looming needs, thus, "laboring in the righteous cause," was not just a slogan, but the only way to construct some sort of order in a world determined to inflict chaos. Club women's role in the late-nineteenth century changed as they faced the reality of living in a world of white supremacy, African American Kansans, once

infused with the hope of the Exodusters now had to face the violence and turmoil in their own backyard.

Even during the beginnings of the club movement, Black women, nationally and regardless of class, sought to raise children and maintain homes free of the threat of violence, harassment or exclusion. Rearing children was top priority. In the summer of 1895, when Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin called the women together in Boston, she spoke of the necessity of their cause. Later that year, Mary Church Terrell called women together in Washington, D.C. and the Congress of Colored women met in Atlanta. All of the regional and national organizations came together in Washington, D.C. in 1896. In 1897, the NACW was formed there in Nashville. Of special interest was “the training of children, openings for our boys and girls, how they can be prepared for occupations and occupations may be found or opened to them.”<sup>209</sup> “Home training,” she continued, “is necessary to give our children in order to prepare them to meet the peculiar conditions in which they find themselves.”<sup>210</sup> In 1896, Rosetta Douglass-Sprague, daughter of Frederick Douglass, spoke at the convention in Washington, D.C., stating that all Black women regardless of status wanted “homes in which purity can be taught, not hovels that are police court feeders.”<sup>211</sup> Whether women lived in substantial dwellings or in one-room cabins, club women saw promise of race advancement in the domestic sciences. One of the resolutions reached on July 22, 1896 mandated that their “influence throughout the country to have mothers’ meetings; held where the mothers of [their] race be taught the necessity of pure homes, and lives, and privacy in home apartments.”<sup>212</sup> For women who cared for their families in one-room rural or urban apartments, creating a home out of little was difficult, but for club

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<sup>209</sup> “National Notes, 1896.” National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC. 32.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 37

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 47

women a necessity. As Dossett argues, constructing a line of delineation between middle-and working-class women creates an illusion that only a small percentage of women wished for better homes and environments to raise their children, stating that “respectability was not simply the prerogative of the middle-classes imposed on the poor.”<sup>213</sup> However, club women were surely quite aware of class lines, if only to define themselves against the lower class.

Black male leaders of the time often regulated club women to a gendered sphere. The men of the editorial staff of the *Topeka Plaindealer* lauded the development of the art club in Topeka and in the state as a whole. Nick Chiles and company did not look kindly on women who fussed with politics and the realm of men. African Americans who sought political advancement on the backs of local Blacks were frowned upon by Chiles and his editorial staff. Frustrated with the assortment of clubs that emphasized a “cursory study of Shakespeare and Milton . . . sandwiched in with whist parties and parlor dances,” clubs that we created “for the purpose of arousing a more than passing interest in domestic science and fine needlework,” pleased Chiles and those who believed that Black people needed more than ever homes of purity, love and warmth.<sup>214</sup> These homes, according to Chiles, needed “mothers whose matronly genius enables them to beautify their homes and make them such ‘bowers of innocence and ease that the child hungry for pleasure or rest will seek them there rather than elsewhere.’”<sup>215</sup>

While the male editors of *The Topeka Plaindealer* lauded good motherhood, club women educated themselves on the science of parenting, often turning to the newest research in motherhood, parenting and educating children. They not only acted in the smaller groups, Black women gathered every summer at their State Federation conventions to offer lectures to the group as a whole. Their exercises, reading materials and tutorials were more than mere nods to

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<sup>213</sup> Dossett, 11.

<sup>214</sup> Chiles, *The Topeka Plaindealer* January 20, 1899.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

respectability; club women used it as “a foundation of women’s survival strategies and self-definition irrespective of class.”<sup>216</sup> The material the women studied definitely incorporated the study of eugenics and modes of racial uplift. The extent to which club women embraced the often racist and sexist groundings of eugenics is not known, however, during the 1916 State Federation convention in Parsons, they recommended

The encouragement and organization of purity reading circles for the purpose Of making thorough and systematic study of various topics on purity and the principles of eugenics and at every opportunity afforded, foster the teachings of these principles as outline in the productions of Mr. Shannon of Delaware, Ohio.<sup>217</sup>

The women were not holed up in their own micro-vacuum, and were aware of the studies and sciences of the day. Eugenics became an interesting topic for club women and any community seeking to uplift a particular group of people. At the 1922 national convention a women’s only meeting on “Eugenics: The Saving of Boys and Girls,” was presented by Miss Mary A. Lynch followed by a discussion of the T. W. Shannon System.<sup>218</sup> Shannon was an author whose books authored *Nature’s Secrets Revealed: Scientific Knowledge of the Laws of Heredity or Eugenics*, a manual arguing that motherhood was the highest and most noble position a woman could hold.

Mothers studied to understanding the mental development of children. For women in the Central Plains, enhancing motherhood was more than just a middle-class notion; motherhood symbolized stability in a region struggling to maintain a progressive Black population. Strong responsible mothers would raise healthy, educated children who would remain in the region and promote a new generation of middle-class Blacks. In addition to working with mothers, the object “of the club [was] to promote culture and entertainment of its members for social women

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<sup>216</sup> Dossett, 11.

<sup>217</sup> “Kansas State Federation of Colored Women’s Club 1916 Proceedings” Afro-American Clubwomen Project, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

<sup>218</sup> “National Notes, 1922” National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC, 78.

among other clubs to further higher intellectual social and moral conditions.”<sup>219</sup> In the winter of 1915 the women of the Ne Plus Ultra club completed a three month-study of motherhood, beginning with essays concerning the mental development of children. In January and March of 1915 the women presented original essays, beginning with “How May High Ideals be Developed in a Child,” by Mrs. M.F. Clark. On March 12 and 19, two essays “What Has the Greatest Influence on the Life of a Child, Heredity or Environment,” and “Teaching a Child to Think,” were presented to the group. The reading material incorporated the theories of racial uplift, emphasizing the well-behaved, well-educated children would rehabilitate the race, or at least the middle class, in order to dismantle white supremacy. .

For generations, Black women served as caregivers to white children and domestics in white women’s homes, so emphasizing raising their own children and maintaining their own homes was a major goal for them. The Self Culture club embarked on a discussion of the impact of motherhood on a woman’s mind and her moral compass during a February 7, 1923 meeting. Encouraging women to take on the challenge of motherhood was an important. In 1921, Mrs. H. N. Stowe presented an essay “How to Understand and Sympathize with the Adolescent Boy and Girl” and in 1922, Mrs. Orville Copeland presented “Should the Same Care be used in the Training of Boys and Girls?” during meetings of the Self Culture Club. In 1926, Black women founded the Mother’s Club of Wichita, organized to “sponsor extensive courses in parental education with certificates from Opportunity school.”<sup>220</sup> Inviting guest speakers, the Mother’s Club of Wichita worked to assist in rearing the youth in the community. Club women believed that they could solve the community’s woes through “intensive social services focused on

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> “History of Wichita City Federation” Afro-American Clubwomen’s Project (KS), Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, 14.

improving home life and educating mothers.”<sup>221</sup> The women restricted membership to mothers, using pink and blue as their club colors to indicate their goal to promote motherhood and child rearing. The club also encouraged camaraderie and sisterhood within the group, organizing a mothers’ singing group. Kathryn Helms, a prominent member of the Wichita community and a nationally recognized club woman served as the club’s first president. Helms developed public forums to solve youth-related problems. This group organized the first parent-teacher organization at the segregated L’Overture School in Wichita, creating a channel for mothers to understand school curriculum and proper student during the school day.

Black women discussed the training of girls and boys, but the relationship between mother and son was of special concern of club women in Kansas. As young boys grew up mothers faced raising young men who were often terrorized in society. Whites saw young Black men as dangerous hoodlums, over-sexed, thus the women thought they required extra attention and instruction, mostly aimed at ensuring their fitness to lead the Black community, love their families and earn a living. At the State Federation convention in 1916, Mrs. Carter of Chicago visited and spoke of the women as “a race sticking together and raising boys who loved their parents.”<sup>222</sup> To this issue the women of the Self Culture Club organized the annual Mothers’ and Boys’ Day program in May. The event, held at the University of Kansas, would feature prominent Black men in the community. In May 1927, the program hosted by the club, listed two fraternity men of Lawrence, John Bell of Alpha Phi Alpha and T. Bowler of Kappa Alpha Psi speak to an audience of young men from the community. Club women sought the help of

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<sup>221</sup> White, 27.

<sup>222</sup>“Kansas State Federation 1916 Proceedings” Afro-American Clubwomen’s Project (KS), Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, 6.

prominent men in the community to mentor young men who might not have male leadership at home.

While raising boys was filled angst about their mere survival and role in society, rearing young girls required lessons in womanhood and guidance on which routes to take to get them there. Raising girls became a communal investment. The process included family, church and teachers working together to “consciously enhance individual development in a manner that regularly demonstrated, demanded and yielded individual postures of collective consciousness and social responsibility.”<sup>223</sup> Raising young women secured a new generation of club women to advance a movement of middle-class respectability. Club women researched different programs, many nationally recognized, to provide training for their young women. On November 7, 1922 the Self Culture club women asked in a discussion, “What Girls are Best Served b the Campfire Movement.”<sup>224</sup> In 1924, the State Federation assumed the lead in the development of young women by establishing the Kansas Junior Federation. Consisting mostly of club members’ daughters, the Kansas women were one of the first to build a state-wide junior program. Junior organizations in Kansas were more than mere finishing school clubs for young women; they were groups that focused on rooting young women in the community therefore socializing the next generation of club women who would marry and make their homes in the state. At the second annual meeting of the junior league, 16 new clubs, made 30 in all total with 528 young ladies in attendance. Part of the juniors’ work included placing a “series of books and pamphlets in Kansas public schools that [gave] fair and impartial treatment of the position and

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<sup>223</sup> Shaw, 2.

<sup>224</sup> “Self Culture Club History” Afro-American Clubwomen’s Project (KS), Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.



accomplishments of the American Negro in history, art, science and war.”<sup>225</sup> The growth of the Kansas Junior League was so successful and prominent that Beatrice Childs continued her work on the national level becoming the founder and chair of the National Junior Federation in 1926. Childs put forth “strenuous effort in introducing the junior organization to the national audience.”<sup>226</sup> Susie V. Bouldin also of Kansas, was later elected chair of the National Junior Arts and Crafts Department.<sup>227</sup>

Although they desired to see their young daughters embrace their emerging middle-class lifestyle, club women knew that there would be challenges these young women would encounter outside of their protective circle. The Kansas Junior League not only immersed young girls into the club’s uplift and respectability philosophies, but it also offered a safe haven to protect them from either the ills of society or the threat posed by urban men, both Black and white. Because Black women received little or no protection from local police, they were forced to create their own protective and safe spaces for themselves and their daughters. It was in this reality that Black women fought to assert their position in local, regional and national organizations and institutions headed by men. The Kansas Junior Federation was one of the first in the nation and touted as “the best in the United States, so says National Women’s Federation.”<sup>228</sup>

Club women attended to neighborhood, or “city children,” differently than their own. At the 1916 Baltimore, Maryland NACW convention the women dedicated a whole day to “Child Welfare” for their great concern was illustrated by a report given by Mrs. Sarah Jackson of Princeton, Indiana, and Mrs. Mimmies Croswait of Kansas City, Missouri, titled “What Parents Owe Their Children,” and “The City Child,” by Mrs. Joanna Snowden Porter of Chicago,

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<sup>225</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer* June, 1925.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> “National Notes, 1926.” National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC, 78.

<sup>228</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 1925.

Illinois. Club women worked to nurture the children of cities and towns in which they lived, especially those whose mothers worked outside the home or the orphaned. They founded the Ladies Colored Orphan's Home was founded on May 6, 1901, in Topeka, Kansas, shortly after the institution in Leavenworth opened. Organized and managed by Mrs. J. H. Odell and Mrs. J. B. Jones, both prominent members of local clubs, "the object of the Association is to care for and supervise orphan children that may be admitted under the rules and regulations."<sup>229</sup> Odell was said to be the "agitator," after visiting the St. Francis Academy in Baltimore, Maryland, which incorporated an orphanage within the school. She gathered other women in the community, all of whom were club members in the city, to organize the Topeka home. In order to maintain operations, the women held fundraising campaigns open the general public, arranging entertainment and dinners. Any member of the community in good standing could join the association for a membership fee, however, it was made clear in the newspaper that the "business of the association is transacted by a board of Trustees," who were the twelve founding members of the organization and all women.

Sarah Malone founded in 1908 the Florence Crittenden Home in Topeka to housed young Black women. The Crittenden home model was developed by Charles Crittenden in 1882 after he lost his young daughter to scarlet fever. Seeing a need to serve children and young mothers, Crittenden traveled the country helping communities create homes for those in need. The Crittenden home in Topeka served young Black women.

Black women in Wichita created and managed the Wichita Phyllis Wheatley housing facility. In 1920, the Wheatley home reorganized in order to serve the increasing numbers of children in need of full-time, temporary or daycare. Since its beginning, the Wheatley home temporarily housed school-aged children, often re-assigning them to other families through

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<sup>229</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, December 26, 1902.

foster-care-type programs or permanent adoption. Purchased for \$5,000.00 and located on East 13<sup>th</sup> street, the home housed twenty to thirty children; most remained in the facility through their teenage years.<sup>230</sup> The home which hosted only African American children, operated throughout the twentieth century, with the housing managers purchasing ground to rebuild on 9<sup>th</sup> Street and Mathewson in 1934 because the original house was condemned by the city's building inspector. The new facility, which opened in April 1935, housed 60 children and cost \$10,000.00 to build. Black women understood the need to provide housing for single mothers and their children since many landlords would not lease to Black women or single mothers. Civic-minded women also knew that available housing was often overcrowded and in poor condition. Helping young women, mothers and children avoid violence, poverty or living in the streets supported the development of middle class respectability among the women in the city.

Other clubs in the Central Plains were also active regionally when raising young women. Club women in the Central Plains fought for the safety of young women and girls in the rural and mill towns developing in the vast lands of the West. Seeing the trouble that young Black women could possibly face, the Women's Club of Omaha, Nebraska sent to legislation a petition "bearing the names of 150 colored women, praying the body to raise the 'age of consent' from 15 to 18 years."<sup>231</sup> Protecting young women from male predators, both white and Black, was not just a purity or moral act; protecting young female migrants from prostitution scams, early pregnancies, infant mortality, alcohol abuse, and illiteracy was pertinent for stabilizing populations in the Central Plains. The Iowa Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, realizing that young Black women attending the University of Iowa were not allowed to live in the dormitories until they were integrated in 1946, purchased a home in 1919 to house to house

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<sup>230</sup>Editorial, *Wichita Eagle*, Saturday, November 25, 1922.

<sup>231</sup> National Archive Document, 1896. National Association of Colored Women's Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC., 18.

“more than 1000 girls in this home during this period.”<sup>232</sup> After the end of Jim Crow housing system at the university, the house was sold in 1950. In segregated Oklahoma, as the population of towns increased, the Oklahoma State Federation of Colored Women presented state legislation to secure a “Negro Girls’ Training School. . .[and] the maintenance of a 5,000.00 scholarship loan for orphan girls.”<sup>233</sup> In Oklahoma, the women of the City Federation of Tulsa, founded in 1924, created a day nursery which was “very much needed as an aid to working mothers.”<sup>234</sup> To raise funds for the nursery, Molly Franklin brought the Fisk Jubilee Singers to Tulsa and ticket sales were used to support the operation of the facility. As part of an awareness program for young girls, the Self Culture club of Lawrence, Kansas J. C. Bryant presented a program titled “How may parents keep youth from going at too rapidly a pace in the social world,” in order to illuminate the dangers of the world outside of their insular community.<sup>235</sup> In another attempt to stem predatory advances against young girls and women, Mrs. Mitchell spoke about “Why young girls leave home,” in an attempt to understand why young women were in danger and how to prevent it. Jim Crow laws prevented young Black girls from receiving the protection afforded to white women, yet club women worked to counter the constraints of an every-growing violent and segregated Central Plains.

Protecting young women of the neighborhoods was an important task in nurturing communities. Nationally club women focused on working women. One of the resolutions at the 1908 convention in Brooklyn, demanded a “greater consideration of the Negro working girl, a

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<sup>232</sup> “Iowa Association of Colored Women Fiftieth Annual Convention program.” National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC., 1.

<sup>233</sup> Mildred P. Williams “Forty Years of Climbing,” *The Sooner Woman: Official Journal of the Oklahoma State Federation of Colored Women* 1, no. 2(Summer 1951): 5.

<sup>234</sup> *The Sooner Woman: Official Journal of the Oklahoma State Federation of Colored Women* 1, no. 2(Summer 1951): no page number.

<sup>235</sup>“ Self Culture Club Oct 3, 1922 Yearbook”. Afro-American Clubwomen’s Project (KS), Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

better appreciation of the difficulties and the dangers of her situation.”<sup>236</sup> Black women encouraged the work of the Society for the Protection of Colored Women, an organization founded by white women, which did invite Black women to participate in its programs. Nannie Helen Burroughs, who lived in Washington, D.C., and a stalwart for the working girl, chaired the Young Women’s Work committee in the NACW, presenting her work on the National Training School for Women and Girls at national conventions. The National Training School for Women and Girls included courses in liberal arts as well as industrial training so that domestic work would be viewed as a science. She stated that the “women who earn their living as cooks should take training and become professionals. Household engineers—if you please.”<sup>237</sup> Burroughs worked to support the working-class women who were relegated to domestic and laundry service. Ethelyn Collins and S. W. Layton, both of Philadelphia, presented a report on the national condition of “Unfortunate Women,” at the 1916 convention in Baltimore, Maryland. Again at the 1918 convention in Denver the women spoke to the issue of “Women and Children in Industry,” and how to support those who were trapped in the system of drudgery work.

African American children suffered the cruelty of Jim Crow, racism and violence at an alarming rate. Black children, especially teenagers were subject to juvenile justice systems, which mistreated them and offered poor representation if any. At the 1922 national convention in Richmond, Virginia, Mrs. Mary Jennings of Portsmouth, Virginia, presented a paper on the “Importance of Colored Probation Officers to Take Care of Colored Children,” as way to monitor and report the treatment of Black youth who were shuffled around in the system.<sup>238</sup>

Sallie W. Stewart, a probation officer herself, spoke to the world of crime that enveloped young

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>237</sup> Paula Giddings *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 102.

<sup>238</sup> “National Notes, 1922.” National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC., 76.

people who were trapped in the juvenile justice system.<sup>239</sup> At the Richmond, Virginia, convention, the Juvenile Court Department offered club women working in the field in their local communities an opportunity to learn more about the system. Sallie Black Hamilton, chaired the discussion of topics ranging from remedies for delinquent teenagers, the role of correctional institutions, convenient scientific studies to understanding how the environment affects delinquent children, and how volunteers can help parolees stay on the straight and narrow and not return to the system.<sup>240</sup> Black women emphasized the upbringing of children as a way for young people to avoid the pitfalls of urban life, but they also sought to eliminate the problem that created inequality in the justice system. Social work attracted Black women because they believed that infiltrating the departments and programs that doled out punishment to young Black youth would disrupt the generational destruction of Jim Crow.

Club women spoke to the need for social service work during the 1926 national convention in Oakland, California. As defined by the Social Service Department chairperson, social service was a group of “related efforts for the betterment of all sort of folks. . . Social service [had] reached down, [had] reached up and brought the lowest and the highest, into a range of mutual interest. It [had] brought the East and the West together in spite of the prophecy ‘never the twain shall meet.’”<sup>241</sup> The NACW called for greater service to the working class community, creating a Social Service Department early on in its existence. The Social Service Department was created for the “betterment of all sorts of folks,” it “reached down, reached up and brought the lowest and the highest in to a range of mutual interest,” bringing “East and the West together in spite of the prophecy ‘never the twain shall meet,’”<sup>242</sup> While the department

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid..

worked with other national organizations, committee members struggled to solicit logistical support from individual clubs and state federations they needed to be a success nationwide. The committee began a letter writing campaign targeting individual chapters and city federation, asking members to contact their local social work organizations. The NACW desired to have a program correspond with other national organizations such as the National Conference of Social Work (NCSW), which met in Cleveland, Ohio, in the summer of 1926. NACW representatives were present at the Cleveland meeting and received positive feedback from other organizations. The NCSW sought “justice for immigrants and blacks, advocated research aimed at determining the causes of poverty and crime, and supported woman suffrage.”<sup>243</sup> As much as the departmental committee members wanted to create a dynamic program, they believed it was not regarded as a popular profession for them and quite new to other organizations “to whom great movements require a special interpretation, but other groups are just as slow to accept this civic and religious responsibility.”<sup>244</sup> Clubs were slow to respond, often requesting more information and guidance as to what to do in their communities. The most productive project was a letter-mailing campaign to heads of NACW clubs and other national organizations asking them to discuss the social service at meetings, conventions, and various gatherings, with “many clubs [promising] to use these subjects as a basis of study and also have it noted on the yearly programs.”<sup>245</sup>

In the Central Plains, the issues concerning service came to light in Kansas at the 1916 Parson’s state convention. Mrs. Frazier, chairman of the charity department, submitted her report stating that the race, was not “considering the great amount of social reform work being

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<sup>243</sup> "National Conference of Social Work." *Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica Online.* Encyclopedia Britannica, 2011. Web. 28 Feb. 2011.

<sup>244</sup> “National Notes, 1926” National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC., 72.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

encouraged by other races of this country and the standard of purity is being greatly neglected,” and greater effort is needed to create programs to support it. Located in the southeastern part of the state and home to many seasonal migrants and those who worked in the local mills, charity work among Black people was, at times, the only services available to African Americans in the community. The organization of charity work was as important, if not more, than the actual charity itself. The women of the State Federation and the NACW made sure that they not only engaged in charity, but did so by professional standards. Club women savored their autonomy and power in their organizations and worked to ensure that they ran efficient programs and controlled the finances that flowed through each project.

In addition to regional influence, Kansans, both male and female, were anxious, and rightly so, over the out-migration of African Americans, thus although verbally chastising the lifestyle of the “lowly” populations in the area, the middle-class still needed their presence in the state. The *Topeka Plaindealer* editors noted a growing class of the “tough elements of our people,” gathering in the northern part of Topeka. Hoping that the emergence of the middle-class community put an end to the disturbances and see that “this class, which does nothing but loaf and loiter the year ‘round, is cleaned out of existence.”<sup>246</sup> Club women received the negatively implied narrative that they operated in their surrounding neighborhoods and communities at arm’s-length as not to have direct contact with women of the working class, but because the majority of the published histories cover the Black elite in eastern, northern and southern areas of the nation this theory has not been completely evaluated. Cash’s work maintains that Black club women were not bridging the gap between the classes and claimed to be the moral compass for the mass of Black women needing severe reform.<sup>247</sup> To Kansas

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<sup>246</sup>Editorial, *Topeka Plaindealer* January 27, 1899.

<sup>247</sup> Cash, 4.



women striving for personal respectability, it would be in vain if the rest of the Black community undermined them. Thus middle-class African Americans interacted with their working-class counterparts when encouraging them to joining the ranks of the middle-class. Realizing that they were small in numbers, Black women in the Central Plains needed each and every woman in the region to join the club movement. Bringing together rural and urban, working and middling classes of women was vital to the development of their communities.

Nationally and locally, club women collaborated with other service organizations, although their efforts were often co-opted or even restricted as they were relegated to second class priority. Club women worked with, and eventually developed partnership with the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Since the YWCA emphasized self-help and Christian principles, Black club women believed that it would serve their communities. The first segregated facility opened in Dayton, Ohio, in 1893, with many other branches operating throughout the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>248</sup> As the numbers of segregated branches developed and Black women joined, the leaders of the national system of YWCAs sought a way to manage the development of branches dedicated to Black women and those sites that did not allow them to join. There were no Black branches in the South once the YWCA nationalized in 1906.<sup>249</sup> In 1907, the YWCA officials met to discuss the role of "Negro work" within the organization.<sup>250</sup> African American women joined in increasing numbers making it difficult to maintain levels of segregation. While there were integrated branches of the YWCA around the nation, segregation was still the situation of the day for many sites, and all of the segregated ones were not located in the South. In order not to offend the segregated branches, the officers of the

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<sup>248</sup> Giddings, 155.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Dorothy Salem *To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890-1920* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1990), 47.

YWCA regulated predominately Black branches to serving under white branches. The YWCA justified segregation by allowing Black women to organize under their own group and club names, but remaining affiliated with the national organization. The Association followed contemporary American folkways for the separation of the races, stating that “there were natural groupings of people.”<sup>251</sup>

The growth of the YWCA throughout the eastern and southern parts areas of the country was palpable in Kansas. The Yates branch of the YWCA in Kansas City was founded in 1913 in the name of Josephine Silone Yates after her departure, the same year the first Colored Secretary, Eva Bowles, was appointed on an “experimental basis.”<sup>252</sup> In 1915, the YWCA held its first interracial conference in the South, but the national convention that same year featured only one Black female representative. By 1919 there were eighty-six Black branches up and running in the country with Black women leading the charge for more leadership opportunities in the organization’s national office. In 1924, the Mary B. Talbert Branch of the YWCA opened its doors in Wichita, serving a growing community of Black women and children. Touted as a place for “world-wide fellowship of women and girls which transcends all barriers of nationality and creed,”<sup>253</sup> the Talbert branch reflected the goals of the NACW’s series of branches, yet supported the rural and mill region of Sedgwick County. In the Central Plains, family stability served to retain African Americans in the region. Family stability included attending an industrial institution, buying a sizable plot of land, having children who could tend the farm and continue the cycle. African Americans encouraged college-aged young people to enroll in area higher educational institutions, attend law or medical school with intentions to serve the African Americans who were subject to the cruelty of Jim Crow laws restricting them from legal counsel

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Giddings, 155.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 18.

and hospital facilities. Howard University Medical College, Meharry Medical College, and the local Douglas Hospital medical programs regularly advertised in Black newspapers in the region.

Exclusion from service facilities required Black people in Kansas to act and create their own outreach to serve their communities; however, Black women often developed their own programs and institutions to shield young men and women from the pitfalls of urban life. Nationally, “their social settlement houses and schools provided mother meetings, night classes, home libraries, home economic classes, and other activities for improvement.”<sup>254</sup> The settlement house movement served to house recent migrants to new urban areas, both northern and southern, or conducted by emerging middle-classes everywhere. The settlement house movement developed out of the need to “ease social problems of Black community.”<sup>255</sup> Settlement houses were run by club women who have had “a continuous record of self-help, institution building and strong organizations.”<sup>256</sup> Club women believed that “progress and respectability to bring the masses in step with the values and attitudes of the middle-class.”<sup>257</sup> In these homes or renovated buildings, club women taught young migrant women or those who could not help themselves, “making settlement houses a catalyst for community development and social change.”<sup>258</sup> Club women believed that “moral women were the cornerstone of ‘good’ homes and it was only through the home that a people can become really good and great.”<sup>259</sup> Settlement houses were a “dual commitment to provide a vast array of social service, educational and recreational programs and to her in sweeping social change.”<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Cash, 65.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 1

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>259</sup> Giddings

<sup>260</sup> Lasch-Quinn *Black Neighbors: Race and the Limits of Reform in the American Settlement House Movement, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 1.

The Kansas City League, which straddled the Kansas-Missouri border, was one of the first organizations in the region to participate officially in the settlement house movement.<sup>261</sup> Just as the women desired to foster an ideological community, they wanted to create a physical community based on middle-class values. Both Silena Rivers and Josephine Silone Yates summoned the women together to create an agenda for the development of their new middle-class community. The first order of business for the Kansas City League was the betterment of young women and girls in the area. Believing that the success of the race was in the redemption of the Black women, the clubwomen instilled in the younger generation the ideals of respectability. In their eyes, molding young women at an early age assured a future community of women with middle-class Victorian-based values. According to Yates's article published in the first issue and volume of the *Woman's Era*, the women were "especially anxious to better the condition of women and girls."<sup>262</sup> In June 1893, "several girls who found themselves friendless and alone [in Kansas City] had been provided for in our rooms until they could obtain employment" while "an orphan [was] sent to a good home out of the city."<sup>263</sup> Later that summer, the League provided a blind woman's daughters with clothing and they "intended to see that they [were] properly clothed for school during the winter and as much longer as [was] necessary."<sup>264</sup> Since the woman determined the values and morals of the family, this type of uplift insured Kansas City that it would have the type of middle-class minded families it desired. With women

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<sup>261</sup> The Ladies Aid Society of Lawrence and the organizations associated with the Exodusters movement preceded the Kansas City League in helping migrants acclimate to the area, but the League adhered to the theories and methods of the movement itself.

<sup>262</sup> *Woman's Era*, March 24, 1894.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*

and families like their own, the women knew the images that John W. Jacks portrayed would be difficult to prove.<sup>265</sup>

While instructing women on how to be respectable was a tactic that aided the development of the middle-class community, Yates, Jones and the other clubwomen stressed that the same ideals be applied at home. The Kansas City League and the Pierian were involved with the national trend of racial uplift programs that targeted home development. Yates spoke of domestic betterment, which was a major component of women's club movement. Dedication to the image and productivity of true womanhood, Yates states in the second issue of the newsletter that a "course of lectures upon practical subjects is now in progress."<sup>266</sup> Yates used the word "practical" in the sense that the lectures were pertinent to the development of a woman's private sphere. The listing of lectures began with an essay offered by Jones titled "The Improvement of the Home." Yates is confident that "this will become one of the effective methods of executing a wholesome educational influence in the community."<sup>267</sup>

By May of 1893, the Kansas City League relocated the settlement house to a building that had "four rooms . . . in a very pleasant respectable quarter and tastily furnished through the cooperation of the league (KC) and the Attucks Club."<sup>268</sup> By establishing a receiving house away from the slums that were cropping up due to increased migration, the clubwomen were able to move the young migrant women from the moral and social pitfalls of the congested and often dangerous alleyways and tenement house. The Kansas City League was involved with the national trend of racial uplift programs that targeted home development. Yates speaks of the domestic betterment issue, which was a major component of women's club movement. In May

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<sup>265</sup> Reference in a section not included in this abridged paper, John W. Jacks, president of the Missouri Press Association published an article referring to Black women as immoral.

<sup>266</sup> *Woman's Era*, May 1, 1894.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> *Woman's Era*, March 24, 1894.

1893, young women from the community were taught how to sew aprons and then advised on how to market their wares for profit. Although this would not have sustained a family during this time period, the goal was to foster a sense of fulfillment and responsibility.

The Kansas State Protective Home for orphans and the aged in the Black community founded in late-nineteenth-century Leavenworth was successful because “it was the conception of women and that its present degree of success and efficiency is due entirely of their efforts and labor.”<sup>269</sup> The building, a “large, comfortable frame building of about fifteen rooms,” was located in South Leavenworth and operated on donations from area organizations, churches, and individuals. As Chiles notes, “it deserves more than a passing notice; it is further of especial interest when we think of it as the conception of our women and that its present degree of success and efficiency is due entirely to their effort and labor.”<sup>270</sup> He continues quoting without regard to the views of others that

the Negro women of America are the most abused and unprotected of any class on earth; but in the face of seemingly insurmountable barriers and difficulties, they have laid the foundation of a manhood and womanhood which will yet bring honor and renown to the country that made them ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water.’”<sup>271</sup>

Black women of Leavenworth managed the home with a capacity of about twenty residents. In 1899, around twenty women, both married and single, served as officers and operators of the home. M. J. Mitchell served as superintendent and general solicitor and A. E. Sanders was treasurer; both were single women. Two men worked at the facility, Dr. C. M. Moates, a graduate of Meharry Medical College and W. B. Townsend, a lawyer who graduated from the

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<sup>269</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer* April 21, 1899

<sup>270</sup> Chiles, “The Protective Home,” *The Topeka Plaindealer* April 21, 1899.

<sup>271</sup> Editorial, *Topeka Plaindealer* April 21, 1899.

state university in Lawrence, were both “gentlemen of ability in their chosen fields of labor.”<sup>272</sup> At the time of publication of the *Topeka Plaindealer* article, the women enrolled “six old ladies, five boys and fourteen girls,” with ages ranging from five to eighty-five.<sup>273</sup> Not only did the home host young parentless children, the all-women staff worked to place them in decent homes. In 1898, the women raised \$1098, with \$700 coming from the state of Kansas, and the remainder from cash donations. In addition to funding, the facility received around \$200 in in-kind donations.

Whites excluded African Americans from local health clinics and hospitals, which rallied community and national campaigns to provide health care in segregated institutions and education programs in neighborhoods. The Douglass hospital in Kansas City, Kansas, was a point of pride for most African Americans in the state. Named after Reverend Calvin Douglass of Western University, members of the medical community founded the hospital because Black surgeons could not perform surgeries, attend to patients, or train nurses at existing facilities.<sup>274</sup> The first hospital, located at 312 Washington Boulevard, was “outfitted for a capacity of ten patients, and two upstairs rooms were converted for use as nurses’ quarters.”<sup>275</sup> In 1899, First AME Church hosted an ornate opening ceremony, with the official charter signed at the end of the year. Shortly after its founding, fundraising became a pressuring need even though the hospital received \$300 per year from the state. The Douglass Relief Union was a ladies auxiliary headed by Mrs. Cynthia Henderson as donation collector. The auxiliary secured financial support, while the women also sought food, supply, produce, coal and other goods for the patients and staff. In August 1900, the ladies of the auxiliary hosted a three-day barbeque on the

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<sup>272</sup>Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> The area AME council sponsored and financed Western University. I will discuss Western University in detail in chapter five.

<sup>275</sup> Greenbaum, 92.

hospital grounds to raise funds. At the turn of the century, Douglass served over 300 patients. In 1915, the nursing program at the hospital became affiliated with Western University. At the national convention in 1922, Mrs. Williams Boone “stated that \$500 had been raised [that] year for charity and that they furnished one room in the city hospital.”<sup>276</sup>

Nurturing communities proved difficult in an area prone to such natural disasters such as tornados, floods and droughts. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, it seemed that developing neighborhoods and communities prospered just to be destroyed by some catastrophe of nature. African American communities were in a constant state of rebuilding and repopulating. Because many services were not open to Blacks in Kansas, they had to create and maintain their own mutual aid programs. In the summer of June 1903, The State Federation postponed their convention to aid the victims of the severe flooding in the region. African American leaders lobbied for the state elected officers to assist the many unfortunate citizens of the state, especially those who had little to nothing to begin with. The floods, which swept through “the valleys, which, but a few hours since were rich with promise and filled with happy and contented people,” resulted in “loss of life and destruction of property.”<sup>277</sup> In light of the terrible disaster, the club women of the State Federation worked with the sewing clubs of the state and the Pastor of St. John’s AME Church of Topeka, to help the “156 flood sufferers now housed in the spacious basement of the church.”<sup>278</sup> However the efforts initiated by the state did not approach the State Federation efforts to help collect and disperse aid, goods and food.

With the failure of Reconstruction, the end of local civic and government appointments and loss of voting rights, many African Americans reconsidered the dream of political power and

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<sup>276</sup> “National Notes” National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC., 35.

<sup>277</sup> Chiles, *The Topeka Plaindealer* June 5, 1903.

<sup>278</sup> Chiles, *The Topeka Plaindealer* June 12, 1903



equality in the United States and turned to self-help, business and land ownership. For the masses, “their chief interest lay in land ownership, education, and politics in approximate reverse order of importance to the preoccupations of,” political leaders.<sup>279</sup> In times of increasing discouragement, racially motivated violence and Jim Crow, African Americans turned inward, looking to Black leaders who stressed that community uplift more than immediate legislation, stating “a neatly kept home and yard will do more to solve the Negro problem than the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment to our Federal Constitution.”<sup>280</sup> Owning a home and maintaining one’s property added to the desirability of the community as well, thus contesting the stereotype that African Americans neglected their homes. Home owning pride was crucial because many neighborhoods in cities and towns in Kansas were integrated or were so small that even segregated places appeared mixed. So while good mothering and home improvement proved to be markers of middle-class respectability, these elements aided those who stayed in Kansas and relied on rooted communities to survive. Both the editors of the *Topeka Plaindealer* and the Kansas club women worked to promote home maintenance and childrearing because the very survival of their communities was at stake for Blacks in Kansas. The editors of the *Topeka Plaindealer* asked each man to “spend a few hours each day at his own home repairing the fences and sidewalks, cleaning up the yards, trimming the shade trees, moving the ash heap, and putting a little fresh paint on his outbuildings, he will have done something that not only beautifies but it also preserves them; it raises him in the estimation of his neighbors and compels a compliment from the passer-by”<sup>281</sup> “The home is the unit of society. If the home and its surroundings be pure, sweet and clean, the manhood and womanhood developed therein will go

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<sup>279</sup> August Meier *Negro Thought in America 1880-1915* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 11.

<sup>280</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer* February 3, 1899.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

out into the world with pure and lofty ambitions. Good homes, with intelligent parents are the keynote to the 'race problem.'”<sup>282</sup>

Club women in Kansas also tackled home maintenance and good housekeeping issues during their summer state and regional conventions. The initial State Federation gala in 1900 promoted the belief that an artistically decorated and clean home was the most important task Black women could complete. Often regarded as drudgery, club women managed to turn housework into a domestic science, requiring skill, and talent leisure. The first convention featured an exhibition of women’s artistic work. In 1901, the State Federation met in Leavenworth at Chickering Hall. As with the first event, the meeting hall housed the women’s crafts. Both whites and Blacks visited the exhibits. In an editorial, B. K. Bruce stated that the work Black men do was never “more agreeably surprised in their lives and certainly never prouder of their ladies.”<sup>283</sup> Chiles noted at the turn of the century that men have failed at understanding the profession of domestic science and that the woman should be “the mistress of the home and not the servant, she will need to give just such study to its peculiar problems as she gave her mathematics and her chemistry at school.”<sup>284</sup> In their eyes, women should know the finer more complex issues in home maintenance. She should understand the construction of the “lighting, heating, ventilation, drainage and plumbing, and the sanitary conditions in general.”<sup>285</sup> Creating “science” out of domestic life reflected the influence of the Progressive Era’s scientific emphasis. The white people who attended “were free in their praise as were the colored people.”<sup>286</sup>

One purpose then of the Federation as enunciated by

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, July 12, 1901.

<sup>284</sup> Editorial, *Topeka Plaindealer* April 7, 1899.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

the booths not by long winded speeches, nor longer resolutions, is to make our homes more beautiful, more enticing and places fit for the gods.

The editor remarked that a silent sermon was preached through their domesticity. Speaking of the programmatic part of the convention held at the G. A. R. Hall, Bruce admired their motto, “All Doers are Welcome,” and noted that the “betterment of our people was apparent always and was discussed by those who were doing something and who were trying to lay a foundation upon which to build a race.”<sup>287</sup>

The summer conventions throughout the early part of the century emphasized the domestic sciences and the maintenance of the home. While the women praised a clean home, a well-decorated and pleasant dwelling was the route to a respectable middle-class home. During the 1905 convention held in Topeka, the art display included everything from “a doily to a sofa pillow, hand-painted china, burnt woodwork, paintings and every conceivable thing that needle and hand can work.”<sup>288</sup> The display of home décor, stated the author, was that so “men should feel proud of their wives and the boys of their sweethearts for this magnificent display of culture and refinement and the progress that is being made by the Negro women of Kansas.”<sup>289</sup> The Salina convention in 1906 featured art work, which judges from the local area critiqued determining a winner by the end of the program. The Loving Cup was awarded to the winning artistic entry. By 1910, there were 28 clubs represented by 81 delegates at the convention in Atchison, with the editor of the newspaper exclaiming that “never before in the history of the federation was there such a grand exhibit of needle work, china painting and cooking put up for

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<sup>287</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, July 12, 1901.

<sup>288</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer* June 23, 1905

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

inspection.”<sup>290</sup> Each year, the artwork display became more and more elaborate, with clubs and city federations vying for the Loving Cup prize and the regional recognition.

Pierian women also furthered the preservation of the home through reading topics that the club adopted throughout the year. In the 1909-1910 yearbook, themes included “Domestic Science,” “Toilet Helps and Hints,” and “Hygiene.” During the 1911-1912 year, the women devoted each meeting to “Home Building.” On October 26, 1911, Mrs. Bell Thompson presented the group with her speech “Domestic Instinct,” while Mrs. Ida Ewing offered an essay on “Practical Sanitation,” on February 8, 1912. Other topics that year include “Mural Decoration and Color Harmony,” “Domestic Economy,” and “Labor Saving Devices.”<sup>291</sup> Included in the bibliography were magazine articles from *The House Beautiful*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *The Craftsman*. Homebuilding was also a major theme during the 1912-1913 year with members offering the group tips on creating and sustaining an acceptable home. Not only was this a way to build a respectable community, but also countered white assumptions and assertion about Black people and their lifestyles.<sup>292</sup>

Raising money for their club work and uplifting efforts was a major activity. The State Federation relied on dues from individual clubs and city federations, sales of their artistic work, fundraising concerts and dinners. While home care dominated the summer conventions, the material value of the artistic displays netted high dollars. While club women did not suit the definition of Black entrepreneurship, their goals to support financially their work were direct, definite and often publicized in local newspapers. The funds raised during these conventions

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<sup>290</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, July 8, 1910.

<sup>291</sup> Yearbook 1909-1910, Box 1, The Pierian Collection, Afro-American Clubwomen’s Project (KS), Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

<sup>292</sup> Yearbook 1912-1913, Box 1, The Pierian Collection, Afro-American Clubwomen’s Project (KS), Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

were donated to charities operated by member of the State Federation. In 1913, the State Federation raised nearly \$2,000.00 with clubs in Kansas City and Topeka leading the way, with \$953.00 and \$800, respectively. In 1914, the most well attended convention since its founding, the women raised \$6,361 worth of domestic art work the following year it brought in over 6,000.00 in 1915.<sup>293</sup> Ten years later the income from sales topped \$25, 000.00. Thus while home care was at the heart of their art exhibits the amount raised was just as important to the State Federation allowing it to finance their charitable organizations. Black women transcended gender boundaries participating in political activities with men, yet maintaining autonomy and control of their own programs.

Not all club women were married, though home maintenance and childrearing were key issues facing most married women in local Kansas clubs, single women focused their efforts on other issues as well. Without the responsibility of childrearing or the constraints of marriage, single women could hold offices. Single women also held positions in clubs such as Secretary, Historian, Treasurer and Current Event Coordinator, offices that were removed from direct concerns with home maintenance and childrearing. With married women and mothers preoccupied with child development and kitchen arrangement, single women brought worldly issues to clubdom. Single unmarried women were young, many college-aged looked to the world around them. Married women were just as moved by these issues, however, single women led in these areas. At the 1904 convention in Lawrence, Miss Laurie of Salina gave a paper titled “The Progressive Woman,” while Gertrude Solomon, Emma T. Brown, Olive Henderson, all single were elected to high offices. Miss Elnorah Smith served as Historian for the Ne Plus Ultra Club. On October 31, 1913, Miss I. Smith spoke about “Women as Inventors,” at the weekly Ne Plus Ultra meeting in Topeka. Miss Essie Wigley spoke about “What Part Will the

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<sup>293</sup> Selected Events from the early years of the Kansas Association of colored women’s clubs

Negro Take in Reconstruction?” and in 1915 presented her work on “Leading Women of the Race,” which no doubt mentioned the names of those women in the national movement. Single women made their mark across the state of Kansas, including Lulu B. Harris who served as State Federation president in 1905-06 and steered the organization in a progressive direction.

For sure there were interactions between married and single women in Kansas clubs. In an area of the country that depended on young, strong families to thrive, eligible unmarried women were a help and hindrance. The Pierian, Self-Culture, Ne Plus Ultra and others were founded by and open to only married women, but all three, within a short time, began accepting single women. The shifting in membership in Kansas is because of the low numbers of Black women in the region and the need for more club women to participate. Secondly married women believed that training single women in the ways of middle class respectability offered their clubs longevity. Located in a small college town, the Self Culture club entertained regular discussions about married life including an essay titled “why is it that so many beautiful and sound women go through life unmarried?” and “How much does a young wedded couple need with which to begin a life together.” The Progressive Era Club of Lawrence, a group of young men and women, was literary in nature, but also served as a forum for young women and men to gather and mingle under the guise intellectual discussion. The Utopian Club of Lawrence routinely hosted entertainment parties where each young single member of the group invited one male guest. Married club women often became matchmakers for the younger single women, ensuring that they were properly paired with the eligible bachelors in the community. Inviting a male guest also created a morally acceptable atmosphere, giving, at the least, the allusion of proper chaperoning. Married and single club women interacted in a fluid dance throughout the early twentieth century.

During their monthly gatherings and, regional and national conventions, club women presented research on Black women in business. In fact, what would eventually become the National Business Department was created by women in the Central Plains. Mrs. Guy of Topeka and Mrs. M. L. Crosthwaite of Kansas City, Missouri present “The Afro-American Women in Business,” during the 1906 convention in Detroit, Michigan.<sup>294</sup> The Central Plains contingent was followed by another group of women presenting “The Afro-American Women in the Professions,” a symposium, which closed with an address given by Mrs. Booker T. Washington.<sup>295</sup> It was at the Hampton, Virginia 1916 convention that the Business Department emerges and headed by Topekan Mrs. Jamison. At national conventions, Kansas women took the lead when discussing business opportunities for Black women.

Black women in the Central Plains were business women even though they claimed the domestic sphere. Black women in the Central Plains often had access to business opportunities due to the nature of the region. Rural towns that had small Black communities operated separate facilities and offered opportunities for business owners. The most popular businesses for women included dress shops, short-order diners, in-home teachers offering private lessons, and laundresses. Gertrude Fisher owned the Queen City Café at 2000 Belmont Street in Parsons, serving “regular meals and short orders at all hours and only the best is served.”<sup>296</sup> In addition to her café, Fisher also owned and managed a rooming house located at 2125 Grand avenue. Following the death of her husband, Fisher married a man by the name of Warner, and continues to operate the diner and manage her properties. Ada Barton Coulter, of Wichita, purchased and operated a room rental property on North Main Street. “She is a politician as well as a

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<sup>294</sup> National Notes, 1906. National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC., 6.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Editorial, *Topeka Plaindealer* June 16, 1916.

businesswoman,” stated the *Plaindealer*, “and can poll as many votes as the next one in Kansas.”<sup>297</sup> Coulter purchased the old Jackson home for two thousand dollars, five hundred in cash, renovated the boarding rooms and “contracted to room and board over a hundred railroad hands, money guaranteed at a fair price.”<sup>298</sup> After earning a considerable amount of money, between nine and twelve hundred dollars a month from the M. P. Railroad company for boarding their employees, a buyer approached her offering eighteen thousand dollars for the property and the contract. Coulter refused to sell, and instead began to acquire more property in Wichita, worth around 20,000, and Topeka, worth 4,000.<sup>299</sup> A music machine dealer attempted to sell Coulter an expensive piece of equipment, but she purchased a pianola which more than paid for itself. By 1911, Coulter owned “a barber shop, a café, two places of business, full all the time, horses, cows, chickens, besides fine residence property in Topeka and several hundred dollars in personal property.”<sup>300</sup> She was later named a representative to the Colored Business Men’s Conference in West Virginia by Governor Hodges.

Nationally, it was not rare for women working for newspapers or publishing their own printed circulars. Women often submitted articles to the *Topeka Plaindealer* to publicize the work they accomplished in their communities; however, it required them to take publication power into their own hands. One major goal for club women was to counter the negative images of Black women published and dissemination by white men and women. When Black women took the initiative to create their own perceptions of themselves, their sisters and their communities, they published their own words in area newspapers and journals. At the *Topeka Plaindealer* offices, two women Nannie Leah Stull and Cyrenia G. Smith served as apprentices

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<sup>297</sup> Editorial, *Topeka Plaindealer* May 19, 1911.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, July 11, 1913.

<sup>300</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, May 19, 1911.



to the newspaper staff. Both were young and married, but Chiles believed that they “adopted the right course in taking up newspaper work and [they] believe a bright future awaits [them] in newspaperdom.”<sup>301</sup> Willa L. Smith, one of the founding staff members of the *Topeka Plaindealer* and circulation manager, returned to the newspaper after a stint in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Discussing her return to Topeka, Smith, unmarried, stated she would “enter the newspaper game once more, [she liked] it and [felt] lost outside of the harness.”<sup>302</sup>

Interestingly enough, much of what club women accomplished in their public roles they could not achieve at home. According to Dossett, “Black women often pursued feminist goals in their public lives which they often unable to achieve in their own personal lives, particularly their marriages.”<sup>303</sup> Local gatherings, monthly meetings and summer conventions offered respite for club women who were working to enact personal and communal change, but often challenged at home. Club women “understood that their very ability to project a feminist agenda on race movements sometimes depended on their ability to perform different roles in private.”<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Chiles, “A Little Personal,” *The Topeka Plaindealer* December 19, 1902.

<sup>302</sup> Chiles, “Miss Smith May Enter Newspaperdom Again.” *The Topeka Plaindealer* November 19, 1915.

<sup>303</sup> Dossett, 12.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

#### Chapter IV: Moving Onward and Upward: Moral, Industrial, and Liberal Educational Institutions for Young Men and Women in Kansas

“Several names for the club were presented, but the one presented by Laura Ramles, Booker T. Washington, was accepted because of his deep interest and successful work in the education of our race both intellectually and in manual training his is regarded as the greatest educator of his time. We deem it an honor to be called the Booker T. Washington Club. [We] take him as an example we trust.”<sup>305</sup>

“Arise ye colored women/There is work for you to do./Oh how can you be so idle/When the race is calling you./Calling now for noble women/Who will ever dare and do/As time goes marching on.”<sup>306</sup>

“The ideal plan was conceived was to bring together these leading lights and profound thinkers of Kansas and the West, into organization where many other might be benefited as the result of mingling and intermingling their thoughts and ideas with the opinions and investigations of others.”<sup>307</sup>

In the 1920s, the Wichita Association of Colored Women’s and Girls’ Club initiated a scholarship fund which supported young Black women attending Friends University and Emporia State Teacher’s College. In return for the support, these college educated women agreed to remain in the state to teach in the Wichita public school district. While club women’s scholarship awards were not new to the national movement, Kansas women and others in the Central Plains sought, in part, to retain educated young women in the state as a route to sustainable Black communities. Rather than sending young women away to normal schools or universities in the South and East, Kansas club women worked to plant roots for the next generation of middle-class women. Encouraging young women to pursue higher education instead of an industrial one created a work force more suitable to Kansas and the Central Plains than the urban centers of the North and East. The act of supporting a women’s education and then requiring them to begin their careers in the state sets the stage for rooting them in area communities. Thinking progressively, club women believed that an educated woman would

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<sup>305</sup> History of the Booker T. Washington Club of Wichita. The BTW club was founded in 1902 by Parthenia Glover at the residence of Mrs. Lucy Anderson. The first history was written in 1913, from which this quote comes. Afro-American Clubwomen Project, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

<sup>306</sup> “Call to Women” Federation Song. Afro-American Clubwomen Project, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

<sup>307</sup> Chiles, *The Topeka Plaindealer* Jan. 26, 1900.

marry well, own a home, have children and further development Black communities. Also Black women felt morally obligated to rear, care for and educate the young women in the community. For young women, education added complexities because they were charged with two goals: to earn an education and build communities. Education in many forms proved to be the best route to stabilizing Kansas communities, and while attaining an education in the state was, legally, easier, Jim Crow often emerged as the law of the day. Self-education was one cornerstone of the club movement, with women choosing to broaden the membership. Moral and religious instructions were both interwoven with liberal and industrial education programs. While male leaders of the time might have clung to one form of education best suited for the community, club women believed that a multiple courses of instruction would serve the state's Black population as well as create a diverse community that would attract potential citizens and keep those reared in the state. Wichita women, along with the other clubs belonging to the State Federation, labored to create educational programs designed for their communities.

In this chapter, I examine the educational pursuits of African Americans in Kansas and the Central Plains. Education, in all forms, was of the utmost important for Black communities. Literacy was the one tool that white supremacist knew could dismantle Jim Crow. Fighting for the right to educate themselves throughout slavery and during the struggles of Jim Crow was a component of Black progress. In fact, migrating African Americans established educational institutions in their new locations almost as fast as they built churches and homes. Similarly to other areas east and north of the Central Plains, African Americans in this region supported agricultural and industrial institutions, and attended area liberal arts colleges and universities. Club women supported educational institutions by serving as teachers, creating scholarships and operating fundraising programs. In addition to opening educational facilities, club women started

literacy programs in their homes and churches. Club women in Kansas founded their own literary societies, whose reading transcended domestic concerns science. Often ignoring their gendered boundaries, club women in Kansas also educated themselves in the area of politics, science and religion. Constantly challenging boundaries in the region, many African Americans fought the encroaching Jim Crow laws of exclusion and segregation within area school districts. While they battled politicians and neighbors who wanted white supremacist mandates in the state, African Americans worked in their protective programs and with sympathetic representatives to overcome racist tactics and regulations. This chapter outlines the specific regional educational issues African Americans tackled.

Next to churches and mutual aid organizations, the literary society was one of the most popular and populated groups for Black women. Beginning as early as the eighteenth century, the literary society became for Black women a refuge for self-education. Many of the early organizations established roots in the tradition of the “reading rooms” in churches and in the homes of teachers and ministers. Reading rooms provided a place for African Americans to teach and subvert white supremacy. Slaveholders understood that literacy was a threat to the system, so they fought to “maintain the Black [person’s] ignorance and [her] illiteracy.”<sup>308</sup> After emancipation, African Americans clamored for educational and invested heavily in it. To African Americans, learning to read and write would lead to self-respect and full citizenship. They would be disadvantaged in protecting their rights, earning a living, and improving their lives and their communities if they remained illiterate, which is why African Americans fought to create and maintain their educational institutions and traditions.

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<sup>308</sup> Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) 1.

Black women excelled and were quite successful in the literary societies of the early-nineteenth century. Around the 1830s, several literary clubs in the northeast developed in Philadelphia and Boston, so many that the number of female organizations “outnumbered male mutual aid societies 27 to 16.”<sup>309</sup> The reading rooms were located in churches, small rooming buildings used as small public libraries, and in the homes of Black and white families. The mission of many of the early northern societies was to understand the lives of their southern brothers and sisters, to further the abolitionist movement, to prove their intellectual equality with whites and to educate them. Even the early societies struggled to balance the contradictions that this activity created within the Victorian women’s sphere. Women, who chose to be vocal leaders in literary societies, maintained highly sensitive relationships with collective groups of club women and Race men due to their often outspoken and confrontational, defined as masculine and not feminine, manner. The line between accepted participation in literary societies and operating outside of respectable normative was incredibly thin. To be sure, however, women often purposely ventured to and from, often blurring the distinction even more, if only to disturb the constructs of patriarchy in African American communities.

During the Age of Booker T. Washington, which started roughly around the time of Douglass’s death in 1895, and the passing of Washington in 1915, reading societies transformed into large associations, debating U.S. racial policies, challenging or supporting Black intellectual critics and theorist, and the role of African Americans in the United States. Many of these late-nineteenth century organizations accepted both male and female members, and heavily promoted in circulated Black newspapers around the nation. The large associations believed that literature secured a route to “a positive, learned identity far removed from the intellectual poverty

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 56.

associated with slavery.”<sup>310</sup> The members of these growing associations threw their hope behind the redemptive power of literature and knowledge, rejecting the leading critic’s support of industrial education. The demand of literary study would, in their eyes, lead to a “race better prepared for the demands of citizenship and the particular challenges of the twentieth century.”<sup>311</sup>

In addition to “bettering” the race, Blacks in Kansas gathered in literary societies to build their communities. Literary societies targeted potential teachers, journalists, businessmen and women, and brought single men and women together who make good husbands and wives. Meeting on a regular basis solidified these groups of men and women who would promote middle class respectability, while impressive numbers of African Americans created a sense that they were a presence to be reckoned with. The Progressive Club of Lawrence, Kansas founded in 1892, the Douglass Literary Society in Nicodemus, and the Columbian Literary Society in Kansas City, Kansas, were co-ed and literary in nature, encouraging the development of intellectual discussion.<sup>312</sup> One of the most active and prominent group was the Inter-State Literary Society (ISLA). Founded in December of 1891, the (ISLA) was a multi-state organization that convened on a regular basis to discuss the development of the African American community in the region and nationally. The beginning of the ISLA is important as it occurs prior to the death of Frederick Douglas and the rise of Booker T. Washington. Founded in Topeka by Nathaniel Langston, with George W. Gross serving as first president, the ISLA developed out of the desire to promote self-culture and self-education and consisted of Black intellectuals living in Kansas, Missouri, and eventually Iowa, Nebraska and Oklahoma.

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<sup>310</sup> McHenry, 141.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Chiles, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, January 27, 1899. Columbian Literary Society in Nicodemus met in the local school house.

Nathaniel Langston, originally a merchant who owned a store on Massachusetts Street in Lawrence, also founded the *Atchison Blade*. Discussion of the benefits of higher versus industrial education held during ISLA regional conventions and local meetings were often reprinted in local newspapers, including the *Plaindealer*. While industrial educational programs encouraged agrarian pursuits, members lauded the virtues of liberal education, not only in area schools but in their daily lives. With the death of Frederick Douglas, the spreading fame of Booker T. Washington and his access to white philanthropist, the ISLA and its counterparts elsewhere challenged Washington's message of industrial education. As with the Boston Literary organization, ISLA fought against the movement of industrial education as a route to empowerment in the Black community.

Due to its size and membership, the ISLA received heavy press coverage throughout the region with *Topeka Plaindealer* editors J. H. Childers and Nick Chiles, who were members on the roll and attended ISLA sessions, providing the most visibility with front-page articles on the organization.<sup>313</sup> The ISLA rotating annual meetings throughout the Central Plains region, both men and women members, the ISLA discussed topics from the role of the church in the lives of African Americans, to youth educational institutions and local political systems. Similar to such in Boston and Washington DC, ISLA's met in public facilities, often with hundreds in attendance.<sup>314</sup> Lively debates about African Americans as a national "problem," and race issues drew in large numbers of people from the region. The *Plaindealer* championed the ISLA because of its "confidence in the race's future, and the beneficial results that may accrue

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<sup>313</sup> Childers and Chiles were not members early on it the ISLA, but I do not know if they eventually joined in the early twentieth century. I can guess that they joined once the association invited Nebraska and Iowa to become regional members.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

therefrom,” and for “its galaxy of bright minds.”<sup>315</sup> The ISLA conventions rotated throughout the Central Plains as Black communities grew in the region. New, emerging Black communities often hosted ISLA conventions as a way to promote potential places for African Americans to live. Hosting an ISLA conference also brought business to local Black merchants, especially restaurants, lodging homes and newspapers. Lastly, ISLA conventions showcased middle –class African Americans to white as well as Black communities in the host city.

The *Topeka Plaindealer* chronicled the ISLA throughout its existence. In an 1899 article, the editors chronicled the first years of the ISLA in the region, defining its history as a collection of discussions, or “ages” using each segment of time to examine certain issues or topics. The first was the Age of Literature “replete with many sparkling essays and a variety of literary productions to satisfy the soul and suit the taste of all; this primitive age produced a foretaste of what we were to enjoy later.”<sup>316</sup> Literary societies in the last decade of the nineteenth century focused on literature, both fiction and non-fiction, of the classic canon and the African Americans critics of the time. In addition to literature, members of the ISLA read about religion, society and science. The second age was to discuss morality with essays presented such as “Moral and Manners,” “The Tyranny of Public Opinion.” During the conference in St. Joseph in 1892, essayists and panelists asked “Is There a Conflict Between Religion and Science,” and “Is There an Evolution in Religion,” “The Human Mind is God’s Masterpiece.” The discussions of science, religion, morality and the mind were topics of time period, given the western fascination in the late nineteenth century with the science of race.

As the Era of Booker T. Washington emerged, the topics of discussions shifted from the value of literature to the race to the identification of the “Negro Problem.” African Americans

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<sup>315</sup> J.H. Childers, *Topeka Plaindealer* January 6, 1899.

<sup>316</sup> Editorial, *Topeka Plaindealer* January 26, 1900.



found themselves in the worse conditions since the end of Reconstruction and in need of solutions for racial violence, Jim Crow and exclusion. In addition to the problems challenging African Americans everywhere, Blacks in Kansas faced dwindling populations in the Central Plains. At an ISLA convention held in Kansas City, Kansas, in December 1895 two attendees shocked the crowd by starting a yelling match. During the closing session of the convention, a “noted professor and prominent attorney almost took [their] breath by declaring. . . ‘There is no Negro problem.’”<sup>317</sup> Another member of the ISLA rebutted stating that there was, indeed, a Negro problem. The newspaper state that the men “fought long and hard in a bloodless battle and finally called upon the convention for re-enforcements, and it was left to the Negroes present to decide whether or not they constituted a problem.”<sup>318</sup> From that point forward, the ISLA debated the progressive power of literature for the race and the issues that challenged Black leadership.

Club women served in the ISLA throughout its existence. The first female director was Callie Edwards, a prominent club woman of Topeka who served the organization with “calm dignity, modesty, gentleness yet firmness,” and “clearly demonstrated what a woman can do at the head of the executive department of [their] organization.”<sup>319</sup> Women who were members of ISLA continued their conversation about education to the regional conferences. Mrs. Willa D. Wiggins, president of the ISLA, offered the keynote address during a symposium on education and African American communities was held in Denver, Colorado in 1918. Other women in the association debated about the role of liberal versus industrial education. Titled “The Negro Better Fitted for Citizenship by Industrial Training than by Higher Education,” included an affirmative argument by Mrs. L. V. Steward and a rebuttal by Mrs. Louis Williams, both of Los

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<sup>317</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer* January 26 1900.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

Angeles.<sup>320</sup> Miss Lucy Laney of Haines Normal School of Augusta, Georgia, presented an essay on “The Function of the Negro College in Race Education.”<sup>321</sup> The formal conference sessions suggested the emphasis on liberal education and the expectation of communal advancement through intellectual discussion.

The ISLA eventually included Nebraska, with Omaha hosting the December 1908 regional convention. Welcomed by the mayor, J. C. Dahlman, with the keys to the city, he stated that the “welcome arch represented their sincerity and their interest in the education of the race, and belief that delegates would do honor to these expressions of good will on the part of the city of Omaha.”<sup>322</sup> Continuing the challenge of African American leaders and critics, the paper “The Political Rights of the Negro,” presented by Professor Fred Roundtree of Topeka “created much lively discussion on the part of the followers of Dr. Booker T. Washington and Dr .Du Bois respectively.”<sup>323</sup> Another paper titled “The Negro in Politics,” was given on the next day. By 1917, the ISLA was teaming with “the most noted men and women of the race, including artists, doctors, lawyers, poets, professors, college presidents, teachers—in fact, men and women of thought in every walk of life.”<sup>324</sup>

Although women participated in the ISLA in, they continued to be active in their all-female organizations continued to function. They began to have limited role in ISLA and served more a marginal role in ISLA. Asked to mostly sing solos, performing instrumental numbers, and render papers about domestic sciences, women needed to break from the ranks of such a prestigious organization in order to create and follow their own agendas. When women did

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<sup>320</sup> “National Notes, 1918” National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC., 104.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Editorial, *Topeka Plaindealer* January 8, 1909.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid

<sup>324</sup> Editorial, *Topeka Plaindealer* January 5, 1917.

attempt to engage broader conversations, they were often chastised. During the 1908 ISLA conference in Omaha, women from the host city and from Kansas City, Kansas, received heavy criticism from *Topeka Plaindealer* editor Nick Chiles. Mrs. G. W. Wright of Omaha offered “The Thought of Age,” Miss Eula Overall read “Women From all Points of Activity,” and Miss Minnie Howell of Sumner High School of Kansas City led the discussion. After the session, the first one led by women during that particular convention, Chiles, during the convention “severely criticized the women for not being interested in slum charity work or doing anything along that line for the poor and destitute of the race,” which caused the women to “rise fast and furious.”<sup>325</sup> Chiles later recounted the incident in the newspaper. By the late nineteenth century, or the *Women’s Era*, Black female literary societies shifted focus from the role of Blacks in the United States and the critique of African American leaders to organizations emphasizing home maintenance, childrearing and industrial education.

While they were active in the co-ed organizations, Black women thrived in their own literary societies. The ideology and discourse that served as a framework for the clubwomen’s work were prominent ideals in the construction of the black middle class community. Clubwomen “conjoined the dominant ideologies of the cult of true womanhood, progressive materialism, Republican motherhood, and municipal housekeeping with culturally specific ones: African American Christianity, Booker T. Washington’s industrial education, and W.E.B. Du Bois’s model of Talented Tenth leadership.”<sup>326</sup> By merging the various thoughts, black clubwomen created a sturdy ideological foundation and tailored it to their needs. The politics of

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<sup>325</sup> Editorial, *TheTopeka Plaindealer* January 8, 1909.

<sup>326</sup> Anne M. Knupher, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood: African American Women’s Clubs in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 11

respectability “emphasized reform of individual behaviors and attitudes both as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform of the entire structural systems of American race relations.”<sup>327</sup>

One of the first all-female literary societies in the state started with members of the Pierian founded in 1893 in Kansas City. The Pierian women valued classic, liberal education along with industrial training. Although the women believed that industrial education was appropriate, there were members of the community who were considered the Talented Tenth and poised to lead the masses. Josephine Yates was a Professor of Science at Lincoln Institute in Kansas City. Born in Long Island, New York, Yates surrounded herself with other noteworthy women in the community. Anna H. Jones, a Kansas City League member also taught at Lincoln. Both Cora Watson-Griffin and Carrie Dearborn taught courses in music and cooking, respectively.<sup>328</sup> There were women in the Pierian who served as teachers in Kansas City, Kansas in the 1920s, at the famed Sumner School.<sup>329</sup> In fact, the works that they examined during their meetings were discussed in the classroom. By imparting the knowledge found in texts by Du Bois, Washington, and Douglass to the young pupils in their care, the Pierian women were preparing the next generation to join the developing middle-class community.

The Pierian was an organization dedicated to literary pursuits, but was also a group supporting the development of the middle-class. As McHenry states, “[a]ssociations with African American literary culture was considered fundamental of racial uplift and social reform and one potential avenue to the assertion of political agency.”<sup>330</sup> Thus, even if the women merely read, internalized and reported the knowledge that they gleaned from the various texts, they were still being politically active in racial uplift and linked to the construction of the

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<sup>327</sup> Higginbotham, 187.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> There is evidence that one of the Pierian women taught at Sumner because the 1920 yearbook was designed and printed by a high school student.

<sup>330</sup> McHenry, 188.

emerging community. The middle-class-Black women “believed that interaction with print—producing it, reading it, and allowing it to direct their social and political conversations was a potential vehicle for constructing identity and regulating social change that carried with it the power to elevate and enlighten the race.”<sup>331</sup> With this in mind, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin published the *Women’s Era* newsletter with the first issue appearing in March 1894. Ruffin called club women from around the country to submit reports about the work they did in their individual clubs, city leagues, and regional conventions. Along with Ruffin, club women sought to challenge the negative imagery presented by Jacks and other white racist journalists and cultural critics by presenting themselves as middle-class women who were concerned about their homes, children, and communities. Each newsletter was consisted of colorful reports for clubs in all regions. The newsletter was “representative of the ways that Black women created through their literary work, a collaborative space in which to represent themselves and expand their identities.”<sup>332</sup> Ruffin also wished to begin nationalizing the club women. Several of the clubs in the central region published local reports in the *Women’s Era* newsletter. Beginning with the first issue, the Kansas City League women published articles about their work in their community. The Kansas City League also participated in this use of literary engagement when they regularly submitted articles and reports to the *Woman’s Era* newsletter. The Sierra Leone and Progressive Era clubs of Lawrence, The Attucks men’s club and the Eureka club both of Kansas City, submitted reports to the *Women’s Era* newsletter.<sup>333</sup> Other Central Plains communities such as the Women’s Club of Jefferson City, Missouri, the Woman’s Club of Omaha, Nebraska, and an unnamed women’s group in Denver, Colorado.

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>333</sup> Other clubs and organizations submitted to the newsletter, however, not all reports were published.

As the women were concerned about the emerging middle-class in the greater Kansas City area, the women collectively were vested in the issue of racial equality. To promote racial pride and awareness in the community, Black women encouraged each other to read actively, embracing the works published and promoted by leading African American activist of the time. The August 1894 *Women's Era* highlighted how the Kansas City women were devoted to Ida B. Wells and her anti-lynching campaign. Yates states that "her work is leaving an impression upon the public mind . . . the more agitators and propagandists along the way, the better for our cause."<sup>334</sup> In the September 1894 issue Yates reported that the Kansas City women were reading articles published by Frederick Douglas, another hero supported by club women. Yates gives praise to his work stating that it should be "carefully read by anyone who is not able to bring to any discussion of the southern lynching, calm, unprejudiced and unbiased thought."<sup>335</sup>

Kansas City women were also invested in the progress of the middle-class, regionally. The women of the Sierra Leone Club, whose work debuted in the second issue of *Woman's Era*, was founded February 7, 1892 by twelve Black women who felt the "need of a closer union and broader development" chose to emphasize "the intellectual and social improvement of its members."<sup>336</sup> The women who joined the club were all wives and mothers thus their "attention was at first given to home training and domestic economy."<sup>337</sup> The Sierra Leone, under the guidance of the Kansas City League, offered to develop age, marital status and theme specific clubs. The Progressive Club, founded in Lawrence, Kansas consisted of high school graduates and university students. Lawrence hosted the state university and its student population and the growing numbers of educated young people in the area. Most of the Progressive Club's

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<sup>334</sup> *Woman's Era*, August 1894.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>336</sup> *Woman's Era*, May 1, 1894.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*

members were single and their pursuits were “entirely literary.”<sup>338</sup> The diversity of clubs and organizations in Kansas allowed clubwomen to reach a larger number of individuals, young and old, male and female. The Alsbic club of Wichita founded in 1912 focused not only on art, literature, science, and biography, but also paid attention to Industry and charity work in the city.

Toward the end of the century, club women rallied around Ida B. Wells and her challenge to make lynching a federal crime. The *Women’s Era* newsletter became the site to respond to Wells’s efforts. Yates understood that the national conscience of the Black community would have to be enlightened in order to successfully uplift the race. While championing a Washingtonian stance, club women believed in educating the public in race matters and political processes. By the end of 1896, the *Women’s Era* became this official publication of the NACW. The collection of columns from the different regions was lost to the need to nationalize the club movement.

Black women in the newly established women’s clubs saw limited engagement with the politics of the day, although they often found their own ways of subverting patriarchy. During last decade of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth, club women emerged in their organizations ready to “refashion the personal identity and reconstructing the public image of African Americans.”<sup>339</sup> Race literature becomes extremely important to the development of the Black middle-class and the growing. Noted in the 1909-1910 yearbook, the Pierian women focused on that reading and analyzing the cultural critics of the time was the key to developing race pride and constructing community. The yearbook of 1909-10 illustrated an important shift in the women’s reading list. The title of the booklet read “Negro Authors” and featured Kelly Miller’s *Race Adjustment*. Miller’s book, later re-titled *Radical and Conservatives*, had been

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<sup>338</sup> *Woman’s Era*, July 1894.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*,

published a year earlier as a collection of essays that examined issues such as the tumultuous relationship between Blacks and the American government. Miller was a Professor of Sociology at Howard University when his book was published and later became Dean of the College in 1919. His essays provoked readers to protest the standard of living of Black people in America through all avenues. Throughout the year the *Pierian* invited distinguished Kansas City professors to expound upon Miller's ideas and images of the Negro in America. In November 1909, Professor G.N. Grisham came to the meeting to talk about Miller's essay, "The Negro's Part in the Negro Problem." In February 3, 1910, the women welcomed Professor J. M. Marguess to address another Miller essay the "Rise of the Professional Class."<sup>340</sup> Club women also read the works of African American authors. In 1909-1910, the first year that the *Pierian's* yearbook included a bibliography, the bibliography included such works as Charles W. Chestnutt's *The Conjure Woman* and *The House Behind the Cedars*; W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Philadelphia Negro*, *Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, and *The Souls of Black Folk*. The women also read the work of Paul Lawrence Dunbar, a favorite of club women, and discussed aspects of his life. His collection of poetry, *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, was one of the works examined during the year. The collateral list cited works by Phyllis Wheatley and Booker T. Washington and other articles about race found in periodicals such as *Atlantic Monthly*, *World's Work* and *The Outlook*.<sup>341</sup> While the *Pierian* women were not collectively working with the Kansas City League in the community, their method of racial uplift served to build the emerging class through education and literature.

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<sup>340</sup> "Negro Authors," 1909-1910, box 1, The *Pierian* Collection, Afro-American Clubwomen Project, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*



In addition to studying motherhood, the Self-Culture Club worked to “promote the culture and entertainment of its members for social union among other clubs to further higher intellectual, social, and moral conditions.”<sup>342</sup> The women kept up with classic literature by assigning certain texts, selecting quotations to start each meeting. While they were immersed in classical British and American literature, the women of the Self-Culture club read, interpreted and debated the national and local Black critics and leaders of their time period, which they expressed in their monthly meetings. Memorization was an important aspect of education. At the October 8, 1915 meeting, women answered the roll by reciting a stanza or two of Paul Lawrence Dunbar’s work. Dunbar was a favorite poet of club women. On December 6 of the same year, they responded citing the writings of Booker T. Washington, yet another popular author and supporter of club women nation-wide. The following January, women used quotations from Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglas to announced their attendance, while in March 1916, they started their meeting reciting Du Bois’s work. James Weldon Johnson’s *Lifting Every Voice and Sing*, appeared in the inside cover of the 1915 yearbook. A report of Joel Chandler Harris’s life appeared in the 1923-24 yearbook. The Pierian women immersed themselves in the Black cultural production, including the importance of folklore, song and poetry in the African American tradition. Kansas club women were far from focusing solely on domestic science issues or the role of women in the home. Living in the Central Plains did not isolate African Americans; rather they sought ways to interact with their virtual community of emerging middle-class Blacks throughout the country.

This shift in reading materials can be attributed to the rise in race pride and consciousness among the women. Issues facing Black people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

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<sup>342</sup> Self Culture Archives, Afro-American Clubwomen Project, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

centuries were chronicled in magazines such as the *Women's Era* newsletter. Although the women still emphasized the reading and recitation of classical literature, they were very much concerned with the image of their race and how the leading critics planned to solve “Negro problems.” Although the Pierian women did not devote a large amount of time to social activity in the community, the reading and interpretation of literature and criticism served as a racial uplift tactic. Women in the Pierian worked in the school districts, often implementing what they learned in the club sessions in their classrooms. Segregated classrooms allowed for Black school teachers to design specific curriculum. In addition to educating their youth in the actual classroom, club women could further teach their neighbors through community and church programs.

Club women were aware of the political and social changes occurring in their country and, from the beginning of the movement, worked to prepare themselves and their surrounding communities for the relentlessness of white supremacy. Nationally, club women used their multiple affiliations—relationships with the NAACP, Pan Africanist movements, suffrage groups, writers and intellectuals, and labor unions—to keep abreast of their changing world. In order to navigate their world, club women “relied on integrationist and separatist strategies” becoming members of both the UNIA and the NAACP.”<sup>343</sup> At the annual state, regional and national conventions, women educated attendees about legislation, petitions, court cases, and labor movements through seminars and symposium. During the 1916 convention in Parsons, the State Federation women challenged racially based exclusion from the theatres by contacting the county attorney.<sup>344</sup> In order to confront the problem, the women needed to under the law of the day, which stated that they were allowed into the facility. The Plessy-vs-Ferguson case in 1892,

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<sup>343</sup> Dossett, 1.

<sup>344</sup> I have referenced this incident already, so I will only insert a brief summary.

which rule that separate rail cars was constitutional as long as the Jim Crow cars were equal to the white cars. Upheld by the Louisiana Supreme Court in 1896, a separate but equal accommodation was sanctioned. During the 1899 national convention in Chicago, Illinois, Mrs. Rosa Bowser Branche presented a talk on “Jim Crow Car Laws.”<sup>345</sup> Understanding their rights and risks while riding the rails was important for their survival. Kansas club women frequently traveled by rail throughout the year they attended church and association conventions as well as visited friends and relatives. The Book Lover’s clubs in Salina and Wichita were twin organizations, traveling at least once a year to the other city in order to discuss their readings and activities. The women in the clubs believed that “through book reviews, discussions and lectures,” their clubs were, “a medium for enriching its members culturally.”<sup>346</sup> Each year the Wichita branch would sponsor an African American artist or group performance for the city, giving the residents an “opportunity of hearing some of [their] own celebrities and promote[d] interracial good will.”<sup>347</sup> Rail travel was not as certain and safe for club women, so during the 1899 national convention in Chicago, Illinois, Mrs. Rosa Bowser Branche presented a talk on “Jim Crow Car Laws.”<sup>348</sup> Club women traveled from coast to coast in order to attend national conferences. In 1904, the national convention was held in St. Louis, Missouri, in Chicago in 1924, and in Oakland, California in 1926, two locations that would take multiple days to reach by rail, so the conference participants leaving the east coast needed to secure their safety for several days. In fact, in preparation for the Oakland convention, club women began negotiating rail costs and lodging information shortly after the Chicago convention.

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<sup>345</sup> National Notes, 1899, National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC., no page indicated from 1899 program.

<sup>346</sup> Book Lover’s Club of Wichita History. Afro-American Clubwomen Project, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, 9.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> National Notes, 1899. National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC.,

At the Detroit convention in 1906 attendees listen to a presentation “The Afro American Woman and Suffrage” by Mrs. Sarah A. J. Garnett of Brooklyn, New York. While historical narratives of the suffrage movement nearly remove Black women’s involvement, the truth is the Black women were as in tune to the issues facing the women vote as anyone. As a way to record and publish the work that Black women were doing on suffrage, a paper by Lillian T. Fox of Indianapolis “The Afro-American Women in Journalism,” argued for the inclusion Black women’s narrative in the nation’s media. Women in Kansas voted in civic and school board elections when the state entered the Union in 1861. As women inched closer to receiving voting rights, club women ensured that the women in their communities knew their rights. During the 1920 national convention at Tuskegee Institute, the women passed a resolution anticipating the right to vote by encouraging “colored women give their close attention to the study of civics to the laws of parliamentary age and to current political questions, both local and national, in order to fit themselves for the exercise of the franchise.”<sup>349</sup> Not wanting Black people to be caught off guard and unaware of their political world, club women informed their collective body asking members to return to their communities and teach others.

Liberal education thrived in areas closest to the colleges and universities in the state. Club women in these college towns were more likely to promote liberal arts rather than industrial education, and more likely to press young women and men to remain in state to pursue higher educations. Thus, women in Lawrence, Wichita and Emporia noted the highest numbers of educational programs within the club movement. In Lawrence, the Self- Culture club held regular programs for the young men and women of the Progressive Era club who attended the University of Kansas, then the Kansas State University. Watching intently the young people

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<sup>349</sup> National Notes, 1920. National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC., 55.

who graduated from the institution, club women asked during a 1923 session “Will the education of the Negro solve the race problem?”<sup>350</sup> Women in Wichita often entertained and supported young women attending Emporia State Teachers College. In the fall of 1916 two young women, Mattie Scott and Gertrude Owens began their collegiate study at Emporia State Normal, mostly likely joining the Teachers College after their initial studies.<sup>351</sup> While members of the Ne Plus Ultra club promoted classes at Washburn University. African Americans were asked to support Washburn University in hopes that the school would be open to them. Stating that “Washburn college has been a blessing to the Negro,” Blacks were asked to contribute 1,000.00 toward the 75,000.00 goal needed to support the operating budget.<sup>352</sup> An institution whose “doors have never been nor never will be closed against the Negro,” in the midst of the menacing hand of Jim Crow became a place of hope, and Black leaders in the region believed that they should work to support it.

African Americans in Lawrence, the Athens of the West, sought connections to the state university, often citing their proximity to the University as a route to middle-class respectability. The University of Kansas, known as the Kansas State University at the time, allowed African American students to enroll, with the first Salina Wilson being the first Black person to attend.<sup>353</sup> Recalling the lone Black student, who entered in 1870 among the “few links youths and bronzed-haired maidens who came from the prairies of Kansas to begin their college careers?”<sup>354</sup> Although many African American students attended, by 1909, the largest graduating class only claimed eight Black graduates. African American students were also involved in extra-curricular

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<sup>350</sup> Self Culture Club Yearbook, 1922-23. Afro-American Clubwomen Project, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

<sup>351</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 16, 1916. The Wichita Association of Club women sent young women through the Emporia State Normal School and then onto the Teacher’s College.

<sup>352</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 14, 1907.

<sup>353</sup> Amber Reagan Kendrick “Ninety Years of Struggle and Success: African American History at the University of Kansas, 1870-1960.” Dissertation, University of Kansas, 2004.

<sup>354</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 11, 1909

activities including the various universities literary societies, for the colored students have done quite credible things in the town literary societies, and have even represented the university in debates.”<sup>355</sup>

Assisting students financially to attend institutions of higher education was a priority for African American organizations not only to provide aid but also to root them in the community. While students who worked during their collegiate years, Blacks students were “handicapped” because of the type of employment they could actually gain. For Black students at Kansas State University, there “were no clerk stenographers, bookkeepers and the like,” who worked their way through their programs, but most worked as “table waiters, janitors, porters, farmers, maid, and laundresses.”<sup>356</sup> With its dedication to higher education and conviction of the uplifting power of literature and writing, the ISLA offered literary scholarships and awards to students attending industrial schools in the area. Through Western University in Quindaro, Kansas, the ISLA awarded Miss Mabel Harding, a 1907 graduate of the institution.

Educating their children to be the race leaders of the future became a crucial goal of Black Kansans. Many of the club women were in the teaching profession in some manner or another, so the anxiety about building sound educational facilities and institutions was immediate and daunting to Blacks in the Central Plains. As they watched as hundreds of Blacks exited the state, establishing institutions that would serve to stabilizing their communities was more than just adhering to middle-class notions. Without a generation build upon their respect hopes and dreams, their work would be deemed useless. In April of 1900, a problem brewing within the school district in Topeka erupted causing those in the Black community to take a stance. The Chairman of the Board of Education Edward Stephens, a Black man, stated that he had “traveled

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<sup>355</sup> Editorial, *Topeka Plaindealer* June 11, 1909.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*

in England, I have traveled on the continent of Europe, I have lived as a missionary on the West Coast of Africa, but the colored people of Topeka are the most corrupt people I ever saw.”<sup>357</sup>

Meeting at St. John’s AME church, the pastor, Reverend Dr. George H. Shaffer, brought together members of the community to address the situation. Believing that Stephens was a “Black man posing as a leader and educator of colored youth, has been guilty of attempting to defame and Blacken the reputation and good standing of colored people of Topeka by publically and falsely stating that they were low and corrupt in morals and manners, making no exceptions as to age, sex or class, seeking by such statement to place the colored people of this city in the most odious light possible before the white people of this community.”<sup>358</sup> He was on record calling people of his community “darkies,” and “niggers,” while he maintained authority at the Industrial Institute for Colored Youth in Topeka. The community resolved to “denounce the said Edward Stephens,” whose “aims are coldblooded and selfish, that as tax payers and citizens we protest against the appropriation of the people’s money for the maintenance of said institution while Stephens is a the head of it.”<sup>359</sup> They followed this meeting by asking the school board to discharge Stephens and “disconnect him from the same in every way.”<sup>360</sup>

Migration patterns among young people attending the different institutions in the state and region was regularly reported in the *Topeka Plaindealer* and other newspapers. This reporting not only allowed parents and community to boast of the numbers of young people receiving educations, it also served to track students in order to “harvest” they completed their studies. As recorded in the *Plaindealer*, many small communities of African Americans cropped up on a regular basis. Mound City, Larned, Horton, Elwood, and Eskridge were all small towns

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<sup>357</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, April 20, 1900.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, April 20, 1900.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

that sent young people to school in Topeka, Emporia, Lawrence, Kansas City and Wichita. Guy Lewis, a college student attending Kansas University, routinely returned home to Eskridge to visit friends and family.<sup>361</sup> The reporting of students' movement also constructed a safety-tracking program for young men and women who were out in an often unsafe and violent world.

While educational access was easier in the Central Plains than it was in the South and even other regions of the U.S., African Americans in the state still faced the advancing and aggressive action of small school boards to create Jim Crow school districts. Even though Kansas law of 1889 forbade segregated school districts in the second class cities, small towns such as Galena and Parsons, sought to segregate primary and secondary schools. After completing a new school in 1904, white school district members in Parsons fought to keep young Black children from attending, creating a segregated educational system in the city. In an attempt solicit support from the Black community, the *Parsons Daily Sun* asked two prominent men in the community, one teacher and one preacher, to support the segregated system. Eventually, the school system failed, with the district courts ordering that it would be against the law to have a Jim Crow school district. In 1906, the Wichita school district, also sought to segregate schools in that city. While Wichita was a city of the first class, through the laws passed in 1889, it was an exception to the rule and was not allowed to segregate schools. It was in 1907 more than a year later, Attorney General Coleman instructed the board of education in Wichita to cease the Jim Crow system. Galena faced similar problems in 1915, when its board of education established a segregated school. When African American students refused to attend the separate school they were threatened and punished as truants. In early 1916, the Kansas Supreme Court ruled that Galena must end segregation in the schools. In all three cases the Kansas Supreme Court ruled in favor of the 1889 law which only permitted segregation in first-class cities.

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<sup>361</sup> Chiles, *The Topeka Plaindealer* January 19, 1917.



However, the constant threat of segregated schools in smaller cities of the second-class continued, often resulting in cases going to the district and supreme courts. Galena was again subject to segregation laws in 1917, when the city's Commercial club submitted a set of resolutions to the Kansas State Legislature to persuade Governor Arthur Capper to support legislation to allow segregated schools in the city. The Commercial club knew that the bill would be defeated, so they asked the Governor to place the "weight of [his] active personal support in order that [his] political career. . . be not marred by the refusal to grant to such a large body of [their] citizens the simple justice offered them by this bill."<sup>362</sup> The whites of Galena argued that the segregated school system had "proven a grand success wherever it has been given a trial, as is shown by the fact that it is sued in every first class city in the state."<sup>363</sup> According to the organization, Blacks did not reject it, but if so, and by a "radical of their race," the law would be quickly abolished.<sup>364</sup> If the bill was defeated, the whites in Galena and every commercial body, mother's clubs, YWCA, and religious organization would call to elect those officials that "pledged themselves in favor of this measure and to vote against a known enemy of the bill if he be a candidate for any office within the gift of the people of [their] state."<sup>365</sup> The bill did not pass later that month. Segregated primary schools already existed in some second class cities and in cities of the first class such as Kansas City and Topeka.

Because of segregation and racial threats in the public school systems, Black communities were always searching for ways to make receiving an education a reality for their children. After successfully soliciting the aid of education advocates, the Board of Education in Topeka agreed to spend 24, 000.00 repairing two the all-Black elementary schools, Banner and

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<sup>362</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer* February 16, 1917

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer* February 16, 1917.

Clay, in the city. The instructors at the Banner school created an industrial unit for training of young students.<sup>366</sup> In January 1917, the *Topeka Plaindealer* reported Black leaders petitioning the Kansas legislature to offer a sizable allotment for both Western University and the Topeka Industrial and Educational Institute for the coming school year. In the minds Blacks in the area, both institutions were beneficial to their communities, and in Chiles' mind the least the state could do for African Americans in the state.

These schools are saving young men and women from the slums, and if there is one thing for which the white race is indebted to the colored people it is to give them the proper education and the opportunity to earn an honest living as their foreparents were slaves and kept in ignorance, humiliation, and degradation.<sup>367</sup>

Students attending industrial schools in the state often presented their work at the State House in order to prove their worthiness for additional state funding. In February of 1917, the State Industrial Department of Western University students displayed their “art work, drawing, printing, music, wood work, domestic arts and sciences.”<sup>368</sup>

The Booker T. Washington club, founded in 1901 in Wichita, was organized specifically to support area African American school children. The women named their club after Washington because of “his deep interest and successful work in the education of [their] race both intellectually and in manual training.”<sup>369</sup> With their motto, “Uplift of Negro Women,” they routinely donated funds, books and equipment to the Douglass and L’Overture schools, as well as Western University in Quindaro Kansas, and the National Baptist Training School. Although they embraced the ideals of Washington and his ilk, Wichita women sought to take advantage of

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<sup>366</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 30, 1899.

<sup>367</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer* January 19, 1917.

<sup>368</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer* Feb 9, 1917

<sup>369</sup> History of the Booker T. Washington Club of Wichita, 1913. Afro-American Clubwomen Project, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, 1.

the liberal arts institutions in the local area as well. Supporting both routes to a sort of agency, club women proved to be “race women whose ambitions and strategies changed over time but who always depended on their interactions with other race women.”<sup>370</sup>

Nationally, the NACW worked to raise the standards of education, targeting regions with specific challenges. At the 1926 national convention in Oakland, California, the women of the NACW resolved to challenge southern school districts that were inadequate and Black teachers not receiving salary increases and the “great discrepancies between the per capita amounts spent on children of the colored race in comparison with white schools in the South.”<sup>371</sup> They resolved to agitate government officials to “regulate the proportionment of educational funds and the schedule of salaries for Negro teachers in such a manner as to give the colored children equal advantages with those of other groups.”<sup>372</sup> At the 1924 convention in Chicago, Hallie Q. Brown urged club women to “raise \$50,000.00 for higher education [as a] challenge to the loyalty of our women to safeguard the future advancement of the race through education of [their] youth.”<sup>373</sup> State Federations came together with funds to aid the Educational Campaign, with Ohio leading the way with a donation of \$2,107.00 followed by Illinois with \$1,037.60, and Kansas rounding out third with \$568.00.

As Jim Crow action threatened educational institutions in the Central Plains, and as African Americans grew more and more dissatisfied with the tightening restrictions, Black teachers created their own organizations to confront the rising issues. The National Association of Teachers met in Oklahoma City in the summer of 1910 in order to encourage attendance of

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<sup>370</sup> Dossett, 1.

<sup>371</sup> National Notes, 1926. National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC, 50.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> National Notes, 1924. National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC, 32.

the National Education Association to “hear what the Negro educators have to say concerning the solving of the race problem in all the states of the Union.”<sup>374</sup> Chiles added that the teachers of Kansas should attend “for the West must show the east what she is and what she can do.”<sup>375</sup>

Blacks in the Central Plains, Blacks in this area were often subject to exclusion. Buildings, concert and banquet halls, and rooms were not always available to African Americans. At times the usage laws were not even consistent on a daily, monthly or yearly basis. Building, purchasing or renting their own place for educational gatherings were ways that club women promoted education in their communities. Many of the fundraising events presented or promoted by club women served to support financially their educational facilities. In 1895, the Women’s Club of Omaha, Nebraska, desired to have a facility of their own “where they may hold their regular meetings, lectures, etc., and conduct a library and reading room for club members and any other women who may desire to take advantage.”<sup>376</sup> Oklahomans, who faced major forces of Jim Crow in their communities, built libraries throughout the state. The Excelsior Library in Guthrie, a library in Muskogee, the Genevieve M. Weaver Library in Ponca City, were all organized and support by club women in the state. In Tennesseetown, just north of Topeka, citizens in the all-Black town opened a library to serve the people of the community. “The library was open eighty-five evenings with an average attendance of 11 and a total attendance of 44, 13 girls and 77 boys were enrolled. The highest record of attendance for any one of these was 49 evenings.”<sup>377</sup> In Nicodemus, the first established all-Black town in the state, African Americans formed the Douglass Literary Association created a library for the its residents. Touting owning “magazines, papers, histories, works of fiction, dictionaries, and a set

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<sup>374</sup> *Topeka Plaindealer* July 1, 1910

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>376</sup> National Notes, 1895, National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC, 18.

<sup>377</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer* April 14, 1899.

of Encyclopedia Britannica, [they] emphasized the preparation of the Negro so he can enter the social, political, and economical, life of the republic; and instead of asking for a chance take one as other races have and are doing.”<sup>378</sup>

Some of the most important aspects of racial uplift educational theories included the education of parents. If parents did not seek to educate their children then they will fail in society, allowing “the offensive ones to starve and those who would subsist by theft, robbery or murder, we consign to the jail, the penitentiary and the gallows.”<sup>379</sup> It is in minds of the editors that the parent’s role in his or her child’s education is to “furnish the child with the sufficient skill at maturity to fight the battle of existence.”<sup>380</sup> In an article published in the spring of 1899, the editor wrote regarding the low numbers of children in Topeka who actually attended school. As schools closed for the school year, the writer asked “what can be done for them, and what ought to do, becomes a very important question.”<sup>381</sup> Out of the nearly 2,500 Black children in Topeka only 710 students were enrolled. The editor questions why this issue exists and charges parents with the crime of child neglect. In a response to Nathaniel Sawyer’s “The Relation of Parent to Teacher,” J. H. Childers stated that “the duty of parent to child” is “of great importance when taken in connection with the great race problem.”<sup>382</sup> In his logic, the solution to the Negro problem had little to do with “the masses as it has with the individual.”<sup>383</sup> The idea that the person unit would influence the masses “as soon as the leaven begins to work in the individual,” was a theory of the Talented Tenth emerging in discussions of education and responsibility.

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<sup>378</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, February 9, 1900.

<sup>379</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer* June 23, 1899.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

Club women read, interpreted and applied the newest information regarding parenting and expected their constituencies to take heed. African American women “devised child-rearing strategies that included much attention to providing the mental and material preparation necessary to undertake tasks.”<sup>384</sup> The Self-Culture club presented to its membership a presentation about how to promote punctuality and regular attendance at school.<sup>385</sup> The politics of sexual health in schools was alive and well even in the early twentieth century club movement. In May of 1915, Ne Plus Ultra Women discussed whether sex hygiene should be taught in schools. In 1922, the women of the Self Culture Club asked in a discussion whether educating children of both sexes together or separately worked to further development of young people.

While coed industrial schools were open to Blacks in the area, club women establishment of educational programs facilities in order to teach working class women and recent migrants language skills and simple trades. In addition to teaching young women and men functional trades, the Kansas City League women taught English courses in the summer of 1893.<sup>386</sup> In fact, one of the first activities they conducted was to combat illiteracy among the working-class Blacks in the city. In the summer of 1893, the women assembled a group of women all over the age of fifty and taught them how to read and write. Youth-oriented English courses were added to the course listings later in the fall. The Kansas City League also offered young women the opportunity to learn a trade in order to support their families. In May 1893, young women from the community were taught how to sew aprons and then advised on how to market their wares for profit. The skill involved in seamstress work was respected compared to domestic work.

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<sup>384</sup> Shaw, 2.

<sup>385</sup> Self Culture Club Yearbooks, 1922-23. Afro-American Clubwomen Project, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

Also, seamstresses could work out of their own homes and have a sort of autonomy of the labor and profit. The safety factor with working out of one's home and not a white man's house was another attraction to the seamstress occupation. Although this would not have sustained a family during this time period, the goal was to foster a sense of fulfillment and responsibility. In her essay to the national convention in 1896, Mrs. M. F. Pitts stated that the addition to reading circles and lectures for the women served to bring "mental stimulant to every careworn, tired housewife who has nothing to look forward to but the monotonous routine of farm life and its lonesome cares; to such women a reading club or debating society . . . saves the intellect from stagnation as well as to awaken a lofty thought in a dormant mind, which is only secondary to saving the world."<sup>387</sup>

As Kansas was a rural state and most residents relied on agriculture-related careers for a living, industrial education was highly praised by African American leaders in the community. While community leaders supported agriculturally-based industrial education, they did not want young people to leave the state. The creation of industrial programs at the high school and normal school levels was a major goal of African Americans in the state of Kansas and the Central Plains. Known as the Tuskegee of the West because of its industrial education philosophy and the fact the Washington lauded the institution, sending instructors from Tuskegee to Topeka to teach, the Topeka Industrial Institute (TII) often employed teachers from the Alabama institute. Miss Theresa Adams, an instructor in dressmaking, relocated to Kansas to work at the TII. Arriving "highly recommended for the position by Mrs. Booker T. Washington, Adams

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<sup>387</sup> National Notes, 1896. National Association of Colored Women's Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC, 64.

Almost as soon as it was first printed, the editors of the *Topeka Plaindealer* created a weekly article dedicated to “Industrial Institute Notes.” Western University in Quindaro, Kansas, and Topeka Industrial School, were two of the most prominent industrial schools in the area and “managed by competent and honorable Negroes.”<sup>388</sup> At the end of the calendar year, the editors of the *Topeka Plaindealer* would profile each industrial institute in the state, and in later issues, those in the Central Plains. Each semester the *Topeka Plaindealer* would include a large spread touting the progress and accomplishments of teachers and students affiliated with the industrial schools in the area. Industrial educational institutes were advertised as training problem solvers. In addition to publishing articles at the end of the year, the *Topeka Plaindealer* editors published beginning-of-the-year advertisement to boost enrollment numbers and end of spring semester articles profiling outstanding students and prominent faculty members. In a Western University at Quindaro advertisement, the final remarks stated that the school attempted to “try and help solve [the] problem” of educating African Americans.<sup>389</sup> Advertisements ran throughout the year asking parents to “send your sons and daughters to Western University in Quindaro. Western was described as a school “for the moral, intellectual and industrial training of youth.”<sup>390</sup> In 1902, tuition for Western was \$1.00, with “board” costing \$5.50 per month and a \$1.00 per month room charge. As an institute of the Central Plains, Western touted it was the perfect place to “provide for the education of the ex-slave on the native soil, the child of the exodus in his adopted home and the pioneer Negro following the track of the forty-niner in the all the Mississippi Valley.”<sup>391</sup> Attending school in Kansas seemed most appropriate since “the

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<sup>388</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, January 6, 1899.

<sup>389</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer* September 19, 1902.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.



clanking of slavery's chain was never heard, that there should be established an institution of learning committed to the policy of giving a broad and comprehensive training to [the] <sup>392</sup>youth.” “There is abundant reason to be that those parents who fail to teach their children a trade make a big mistake.”<sup>393</sup>

Boarding students brought in more money to the schools, so administrators often recruited in the surrounding states in the central plains for applicants. Administrators of the Topeka Industrial Institute, nicknamed Tuskgegee of the West, often traveled throughout the Central Plains to recruit students. Professor W. R. Carter of the institute made an almost annual trip to Colorado to secure young applicants for the institution. In 1902, Carter visited Colorado for six weeks drumming up funding and recruiting students.<sup>394</sup> African Americans in Kansas were quite aware of the nationally recognized leaders of the race. Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery* was serialized in the *Topeka Plaindealer* and then advertised for purchase following. A constant theme running throughout the newspapers of the late nineteenth-an-early twentieth centuries was the need for African Americans to purchase land, plant bumper crops, and support their families and communities through their profits. “The Negro Must Get to the Farm,” stated C. A. Groves, Potato King in a speech at a forum in Edwardsville, Kansas. He continued, emphasizing his belief that “the Negro that his salvation lies in tilling the soil.”<sup>395</sup>

Educational institutions in Kansas, the Central Plains and that nation, employed single, educated women, and often the only alternative to domestic work. Some single women traveled from institute to institute in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Women educated at normal schools often returned to the classroom as teachers at industrial and higher educational

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<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

<sup>393</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, November 23, 1900.

<sup>394</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, August 22, 1902.

<sup>395</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, June 15, 1906.

institutions. The local newspapers, church records and women's club archives often chronicled the lives of these young women as they relocated from one school to another. Miss Theresa Adams, a Tuskegee instructor, joined the Topeka Industrial Institute in 1902 in dress making and millinery, who came "highly recommended for the position by Mrs. Booker T. Washington."<sup>396</sup> Women served as administrators, especially recruiters for the school. Miss Minnie Howell spent summers in the western regions of Kansas to help "applications for admission as students come pouring in by every mail and the present outlook does great success for the coming school year."<sup>397</sup>

While industrial education was the preferred system and promoted in the pages of the *Plaindealer*, editors of the newspapers referenced area and nationally recognized medical schools and often placed advertisements in their publications. The medical profession, as well as law and social work, were admired in Black communities because of the nature of Jim Crow. Without facilities to serve them, African Americans were at the mercy diseases and malnutrition. Church organizations and clubs could only do so much when serious medical was restricted to white populations. African American communities could not thrive without health and human services, therefore, educating a young generation in the medical fields stabilized not only the communities in the Central Plains, but nationwide. Chiles often boasted of Howard University Medical School in Washington, DC, as one of the "best equipped and most flourishing," school and was open "to both colored and white students (male and female)."<sup>398</sup> In 1902, he wrote an article celebrating the largest graduating class in its young history, with 51 "young men and young women prepared for their life work."<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, August 22, 1902.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Chiles, "A Great College," *Topeka Plaindealer*, August 8, 1902.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

The local club movement began as a space for Black women to develop their own education. Separate from mutual aid societies where they worked for others, church organizations where they often struggle under the patriarchal religious systems, federated women's clubs allowed them to set their own agendas. Subjected to an increasingly overbearing form of patriarchy in the church, club women, "emerged from the rancorous debates within churches into the club movement, creating new sites for autonomy and authority, and in turn reconfiguring African American public culture into a realm of deliberation and leadership shared by male and female activists."<sup>400</sup> Self-culture and self-education was the first goal club women assigned themselves. Women reserved monthly meeting gatherings for book discussions and debates, essay and research presentations, and visiting scholar seminars.

Although club women were members of their local churches and therefore regarded as religious individuals, their own organizations removed them from the patriarchal system of the institutions, specifically African Methodist Episcopal and Baptist churches. Being bound denominations, sects, and church territorialism, were issues that club women desired to rise above within their movement. While their early experiences in the church were less encumbered, Black women "found their expanding authority challenged even as they were asserting decisive influence through the independent club women's movement."<sup>401</sup> In addition to over-bearing, exclusionary and sexist mindset of Black male religious leaders, strict adherence to denominations and religious practices proved problematic for club women. When Ozzie Fox called together women of Topeka in 1898 to found Ne Plus Ultra, she believed that denominationalism was "one great obstacle," keeping women from reaching across the city to

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<sup>400</sup> Martha S. Jones *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 174.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

create a better community for their families.<sup>402</sup> Religious teaching within the club movement was a way to conquer what thought to be the dangers and temptations of the twenties. The NACW resolved in 1926 to “urge the return to the family altar and the cooperation of all parent-teachers associations in an effort to intensify the religious life of [their] younger generations.”<sup>403</sup>

Women’s clubs were not the only organizations challenging Black churches. At the close of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the church as an institution remained a staple in the Black community; however its role in the progression of the race was a major question in Kansas communities. In a provocative article titled “Responsibilities and Duties of the Negro Church,” Nathaniel Sawyer of the Interstate Literary Association sounded off on the power of the Black church and its effect on its communities. Believing that “church is the most powerful agency in the Negro life; that the preacher is the most puissant leader and the influence which the church exerts and the tendency of its power determine for weal or woe, for good or for ill, for salvation or damnation, the destiny of the Negro race.”<sup>404</sup> During the early years of the twentieth century, many preachers and parishioners were involved in building larger and larger churches, and supporting ministries while children were without homes and or educations. The mission of the church in Sawyers estimation was to “teach the Negro this his general manner of life should correspond to his actual situation,” which “cannot be done by rearing magnificent edifices of worship with Brussels-carpeted aisles, richly upholstered pews, exquisitely-carved choir stands . . . and gilt-edged Bibles when the parishioner lives in a back alley or a one-roomed cabin, when the table spread for his frugal fare is devoid of clothe, when

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<sup>402</sup> « Ne Plus Ultra History, 1949. » Afro-American Clubwomen Project, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

<sup>403</sup> National Notes, 1926. National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs Bethune Council House, National Park Service, Washington, DC, 50.

<sup>404</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer*, March 31, 1899.

the window of his lowly dwellings is destitute of panes when many times his miserable abode is the domicile of vermin and of dirt.”<sup>405</sup>

Sawyer continues “such periods in every race are those where in the masses are ignorant unacquainted with the phenomena of nature the conditions of existence with their relations to their fellows with the laws of life with the principles of economics. In such times as these to them the voice of the prophet is the voice of God and the directions of the priest are such as it is sacrilegious to disobey. It is such a period as this in the Negro’s life in which we now live.”<sup>406</sup>

“It is in great part that the teachings of the church represent the divine will and are the guide of life implicitly to be obeyed as they are the hope of everlasting life for those who follow them.

The responsibility of the church for its subjects therefore is all embracing its duty is to furnish them such a guide of life here below as is also adapted to their mode of living.”<sup>407</sup>

In order to understand the Black community the church must “study the Negro’s condition and his wants; by a study of his peculiar relation to his environment and the means to adapt him to it.”<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

<sup>406</sup> Editorial, *The Topeka Plaindealer* March 31, 1899.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter V: Closure from a Rising Scholar and a Sunflower Child

Age slows him down only a little. Though he is no longer the large-bodied black man who resembled James Earl Jones, Lee E. Williams, Sr., still had a powerful, crushing grip and a booming baritone voice I remembered. Williams, my grandfather was born and raised in Sunflower County, Mississippi in the early decades of the twentieth century. He fled the South in the 1930s, like hundreds of thousands of African Americans during the Great Migration 1915-1945. His wife, my grandmother, Vivian Williams, is a native Kansan. Her parents migrated to Kansas from Arkansas shortly after the Exodusters movement of the late nineteenth century. Together they settled in Kansas and raised a family of five boys and are now living out their elderly years in the city. Vivian had been tending to her flower beds and, with arthritic hands and a pain-filled grimace; she turned the heat-dried and stubborn Kansas soil, aerating the earth. He had been working the in the garden that morning attempting to salvage what produce he could. Thin and gangly now, he dropped his weary body in the straight back chair and stared out the window.

“Granddaughter, what do you want to know?” I slid the tape recorder across the table thumbed through my list of questions. What I wanted to know was how our family, at least part of it, had settled in Kansas. Their lives, our lives, were not unusual to me. African Americans living in Kansas were not a strange phenomenon in my eyes. I knew about our history as black Kansans; how we arrived in the state and how we formed strong roots here. But that is not how the meta-narrative of internal African American migration is presented in historically. I am a second generation integration baby. I entered kindergarten in 1981, twenty- seven years after the landmark *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* case. As a young girl growing up in Topeka, I was instructed to always hold the Brown family in high regard. After church on Sundays, we

ventured out into the sea of Black church goin' folk and often see Linda and Cheryl Brown at the whatever favorite dining spot developed during the week. My mom would point her out, after she turned away from us, of course, and say "that's Linda Brown, she's the little girl who desegregated the schools." I knew who she was on sight and was somewhat star-struck even though I did not quite understand the roots of Jim Crow segregation, the memories of violence and intimidation in Black life, and the inequalities in education and economics. I did know the names of those who fought for full citizenship and equality, and the importance of recognizing their sacrifice. I detected a sense of pride in my mother's voice; she and her generation recalled the narratives of African Americans in Kansas with such honor and dignity. Unfortunately, my generation did not always share the same admiration for the history of African Americans in Kansas, and in the larger scheme, Blacks in the Central Plains. Or maybe it was just me.

"Kansas Grows the Best Wheat and the Best Race Women: Black Women's Club Movement in Kansas, 1900-30," is my attempt to illustrate the sense of pride found in African American communities in the Central Plains in early-twentieth century. The narrative of the Exodusters, the struggle to sustain families in harsh weather on the worst land, the spiritual tenacity to build churches, and the wherewithal to support educational institutions served as the source of pride for African Americans in Kansas. By understanding the development of Black communities through the collective and individual lives of women, I ventured from a well-documented and male-dominated narrative of the era. Using the lives of Black women in Kansas emphasized how regionality troubles race, class and gender specifically during the early-twentieth century.

As I conclude this part of my academic journey, I now see what I wanted to convey in this dissertation. In chapter two I argued that African Americans sought the West as a place of

full citizenship. I sought to illustrate how Blacks in Kansas did differentiate themselves from their eastern, northern and southern counterparts, but were still connected in the national struggle for racial equality. African Americans in the Central Plains understood that their hopes and goals for their region shifted how they viewed gender and class. While there was a distinction between the emerging middle class and the working class, African Americans in Kansas realized that their small population meant that they had no time to divide their communities. Blacks in Kansas lived in both urban and rural areas, yet understood the virtues of both lifestyles. The West became a place to build Black communities, many leaders sought to initiate a large migration to the Central Plains and western states.

At the end of chapter two and throughout chapter three, I examined the development of the Kansas State Federation, the clubs that were not members of the federation, and the ongoing struggle to maintain authority in their region. My goal was to illustrate the pride club women took in establishing and sustaining their homes and communities. While working to achieve middle-class aspirations through home maintenance and childrearing was a major concern for club women in Kansas, club women understood that without creating stable communities, their uplift programs would not be successful. Beatrice Childs's speech referencing the Greenwood-Tulsa terror attack, illustrated the trials of raising a family in the midst of violence, segregation, and humiliation of Jim Crow. I argued the middle class respectability that was part of their programs was parallel to what women were doing national wide, but because they create their programs to attract and retain Blacks in the area.

In chapter four, I attempted to demonstrate how club women melded the ideologies of the time for their own programs. Industrial and liberal education co-existed in club women's



programs in order to accomplish their goals. In addition to their theoretical approaches, club women in Kansas sought ways to retain educated black women in the state.

As I continue to rework my manuscript for publication, I have several new directions to follow. First, I would like to expand my biographical narratives, offering readers more than just a glimpse into the lives of Kansas club women. In the beginning I did not believe I could uncover enough information to create individual life narratives, but I now understand that I do have ways to piece together biographical information. I will continue to develop a more critical analysis of the club movement, racial uplift and the leaders in the state and region.

In addition to revising my manuscript, I will develop an article about the activities of the Western Negro Press Association (WNPA), the organization of Black business people and journalist in the Central Plains. Members of the WNPA sought to establish Black colonies in Utah and Wyoming in order to escape the ever-present arm of Jim Crow. I will also publish an article about the Inter-State Literary Association (ISLA) founded in the late-nineteenth century.

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